

able to do a Rommel in your light infantry company or your battalion, but you won't be able to do one unless you practice it a lot.

I would say that if you become professional at your job, whether you're in a mechanized company or in a Ranger company, whether you're going on a raid, whether you're fighting in Europe or in a light battalion in Central America, you're going to come up against all of the problems I've been discussing. They are eternal infantry problems.

In other words, you will find yourself having to attack an enemy position to accomplish a mission. Wherever it may be, you're going to find out that the defender has a lot of advantages that you will have to avoid or overcome. The time to think about all those things is now.

When I commanded the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam, we received hundreds of lieutenants from Fort Benning and OCS, and I have to tell you that almost without exception—this was in

1966 or 1967—these platoon leaders would, if not otherwise instructed, almost automatically proceed in a column and deploy into a line when the first shots were fired and assault into the enemy position as a sort of puberty rite, a test of manhood.

Instead, a platoon leader should always think of the leading element as being on a reconnaissance mission for the company commander and the battalion commander so he's out there to find out where the enemy is, try to figure out the enemy strength so that the company and battalion commanders can make decisions. That's the professional way to fight a war.

It just so happens that the Viet Cong very often did it right. Our companies or battalions would be probed a few times by their reconnaissance elements and then sometimes nothing more would happen. We had to conclude that they took a look at us and decided it was a bad show and they would wait until another day. The

U.S. Army seldom does that. There's some kind of an automatic exhilaration that takes place when the first rounds are fired. We have a very strong tendency then to charge.

I know that the lessons I have been talking about were primarily learned in World War I, learned again in World War II and Korea, and learned again the hard way in Vietnam, in Grenada, and probably in Panama. They have not gone away. They are classic infantry problems that you, too, will face. The thing to do now is to think them out ahead of time and practice ways to avoid repeating the U.S. Army's bloody initiation rites during almost all of its wars.

Good luck!



The Lancers Heroes Past and Present

CAPTAIN DAVID L. SONNIER

EDITOR'S NOTE: The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not represent those of the Department of the Defense or any element of it.

On 25 July 1819, Simon Bolivar's Liberation Army, while fighting the royalist Spaniards, was flanked at a site known as the *Pantano de Vargas* in what is now Boyaca, Colombia. Faced with a grim tactical situation, Bolivar did the right thing: He sent a Colonel Rondon with 14 Lancers—soldiers on horseback and armed with long spears (or lances)—

to halt the enemy's flanking attack. With his parting words of "Colonel, save the country," Bolivar unleashed the fury of the small band of Lancers on the advancing enemy columns.

The Lancers, through the audacity and aggressiveness of their attack, created panic among the enemy troops and foiled their flanking attack, thus saving the Liberation Army from destruction. This display of courage by Colonel Rondon and his Lancers turned the tide of the battle, disheartened the enemy, and led to the Spaniards' defeat and eventual withdrawal. A monument stands today at

the *Pantano de Vargas* in honor of the heroic Lancers.

Today, Colombia's Lancero School stands on a hot, arid plateau at the military base of Tolemaida. The school, which is similar to the U.S. Army Ranger School, was formed in 1955 for the purpose of training dedicated and capable leaders in counterinsurgency operations to fight the subversion in that country. It is no surprise that the school, and those who pass through it, bear the name of Simon Bolivar's heroic Lancers. (See also "Lancero," by Captain Ralph Puckett, Jr., and Lieutenant John R.

Galvin, INFANTRY, July-September 1959, pages 21-23; and "Lancero," by Captain David A. Morris, INFANTRY, May-June 1981, page 14-15.)

The modern Lanceros, although equipped with the more sophisticated weapons and communications equipment of the 1980s, still put a great deal of emphasis on maintaining the "*Espiritu de Lancero*," the fighting spirit of Bolivar's valiant Lanceros.

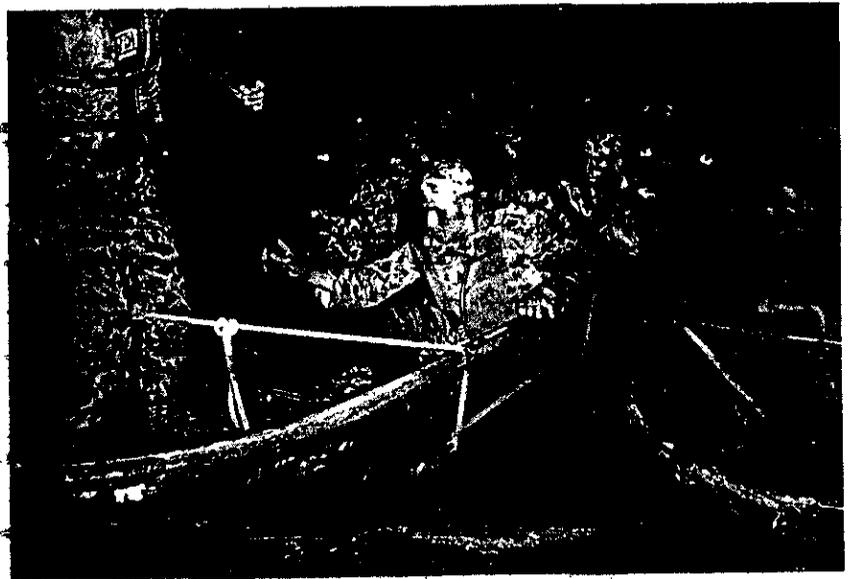
Each year between September and December, the Lancero School runs an International Lancero Course. Officers and occasionally NCOs from various Latin American countries, the United States, and Europe attend the grueling 10-week course. Those who finish the course leave with a better understanding of the way Latin American insurgents fight.

Little more than a year ago, 54 Colombian officers and 10 foreign officers reported to the school for the 26th International Lancero Course. Of the foreign officers, two were from El Salvador, two from Ecuador, two from Honduras, two from Panama, and two from the United States—a Special Forces captain and I.

When we reported, the commander, a lieutenant colonel and a veteran of some 20 years of fighting guerrillas, had some encouraging words for us: "The course is tough. The climate is tough. But we train to fight guerrillas, and they're dedicated. We have to turn out officers and NCOs who will be well trained and dedicated enough to take them on. Good luck in the course. I hope you both make it." We left to begin four days of moderate physical training and our adjustment to the climate.

During the next ten weeks, we underwent extremely difficult and challenging training. In the first three-week preparation phase, wake-up was generally around 0345, PT at 0400, breakfast at 0545, and training from 0600 to 1200, 1230-1800, and 1900-2200. Generally, there was more training from 2230 on, including penalty laps around the school for minor infractions during the day. Sometimes "lights out" was within an hour of reveille.

Much of the training during the first phase resembled that at our Ranger



Lancero students training in small boat operations.

School, such as hand-to-hand combat, demolitions, communications, bayonet drills, and an obstacle course. Additionally, the first phase included extensive weapons training, instruction in guerrilla warfare, counter-guerrilla tactics, and analyses of tactical cases in which the Lancero School commander discussed various battles that had taken place between the Colombians and the enemy. The instruction was oriented toward guerrilla warfare, specifically the way the guerrillas fight. This exposure to the enemy's tactics and methods proved most helpful to us in the weeks to come.

The third week ended with the entire class being captured and sent to a prisoner of war (POW) camp, from which we had to escape to a rally point. The treatment in the POW camp was brutal, but from what my Colombian classmates told me, it was a picnic compared to what a prisoner goes through at the hands of the real enemy. Once the "prisoners" were released and returned to the rally point, the patrolling instruction began.

For the next two weeks we underwent extensive, basic patrolling classes followed by several two-or-three-day patrols. The patrolling classes and training sessions were conducted in an area some six or seven miles from the garrison. The tactics were similar to those taught at the U.S. Army Infantry School. At least the principles were the same.

By the end of the two-week patrolling phase, the number of students in the class had dropped to 37 out of the original 64. We marched back to the garrison, cleaned equipment and weapons, and began preparing for a three-day patrol up into the mountains that would be followed by a two-week mountain phase.

That same night we left the garrison again, but we went only a short distance before setting up a patrol base. A platoon leader and squad leaders were selected in what appeared to be a random manner (in reality, the selection had been made earlier). The platoon leader issued an operations order and we began preparing to march at first light.

The squad leader designated me and several others to go pick up rations. Boxes of potatoes, bags of rice, sugar, salt, beans, bottles of cooking oil, and four large pots were then divided among the four squads. Each squad had a designated cook (called a "ranchero"), and we voted for the platoon's head cook in a very democratic fashion.

Those of us who were foreigners, and therefore unaccustomed to this ration system, were told that we were responsible for what we were given, down to the last potato, until it was called for. We were also told that students who repeatedly had rations mysteriously disappear from their rucksacks would be eliminated from the course for honor violations. I stood watching, aghast, as a classmate

poured potatoes out of the box and carefully divided them up. Having been indoctrinated with C-rations and MREs (meals, ready to eat), I had my doubts that this system of feeding would work. ~~My fellow U.S. officer, who didn't seem to suffer the same degree of culture shock, even volunteered to be one of the rancheros, claiming he could cook as well as any Colombian.~~

We left at first light, marched steadily upward first over rocky hillsides, then over hillsides covered with banana trees that gave shade to coffee plants weighted down with clumps of red coffee beans ready to be hand picked. As we approached our objective—an enemy safe house—the temperature steadily dropped until it was chilly at night. Both days, the patrol halted for three or four hours during the day and set up security on the high ground around a valley that had a creek in it.

The squads' rancheros built a fire, boiled some water from the stream, and cooked rice, potatoes, coffee, or whatever the head ranchero had planned for the one meal of the day. This took a lot of time, but the system worked.

Moving tactically, crossing danger areas correctly, stopping for three or four hours every day, and taking special care not to expose ourselves to the possibility of enemy detection, we arrived within sight of the objective at 0100 the day of the attack. Four and a half hours later we had positioned ourselves around the enemy safe house. The acting platoon leader, a 20-year-old Colombian second lieutenant, gave the inhabitants an opportunity to give themselves up, announcing that they were surrounded. (This was a technique that the Colombians used against their real enemies with some success. Often those inside would surrender voluntarily, making a firefight unnecessary and avoiding the risk of injuring friendly or innocent personnel.) But for this exercise those inside had been told to play tough, so we assaulted the objective capturing five "subversives" and "killing" two who tried to escape. (The "subversives" or, aggressors, were soldiers from the Lancero School.)

From there we continued uphill to our base camp, a flat, tree-covered mountain-

top. Within an hour of our arrival, with scarcely enough time to catch our breath, we were given a new chain of command, a patrol order, and more rations. We conducted repeated patrols over the next two weeks, the final one being a patrol of two and a half days back down from the mountains, hitting an enemy encampment near Tolernaida. After cleaning and accounting for our equipment, we were released for an overnight break in Bogota.

For the jungle phase of the course we were flown to one of the southernmost areas of Colombia, the *Intendencia de Putumayo*. Because the landing strip would not accommodate our C-130 aircraft, we landed in the nearby *Departamento de Caqueta* and flew the rest of the distance to the small jungle landing strip in a C-47 that had to make three trips to get us, the instructors, and some soldiers there.

18-MILE ROAD MARCH

Once the entire class was on the ground we road-marched 18 miles overnight, boarded a boat in the Caqueta River, and traveled another 30 minutes until we arrived at *Fuerte Amazonas*. Most of the structures on the tiny installation are built from bamboo, with bamboo walkways between them.

The first four days of instruction there included jungle land navigation, survival training, a jungle obstacle course, and an overnight patrol.

The survival training proved to be a lesson in exactly how harsh the jungles of South America can be. The classes in edible plants and animals included preparing and eating creatures that I had never known existed. (It could have been a zoology lesson instead.) We spent that night without the comfort of mosquito nets.

The survival training was followed by a two-day training patrol that included instruction in jungle tactics—such subjects as tracking, jungle base camp procedures, and passing "critical points," or danger areas. Danger areas in the jungle can be nothing more than a wide tree, a fallen tree, or a small creek.

The final patrol took us through the jungle for eight days. We received an operations order to locate and track down a band of "guerrillas" operating in the area. We moved to a pre-determined site, searched for tracks in a pattern, and once we had located them, began tracking the enemy through the jungle, taking security measures at the danger areas.

At 1630 every day we stopped moving and began securing and setting up the base camp for the night so that by 1800, when it was so dark that we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces, the base camp was secured. We ran strands of fishing line from the perimeter out to the listening posts so that a soldier could follow them in the dark when it was his shift.

Every morning the Lancero School commander, who accompanied us on the patrol, held a critique. He repeated constantly "Behind every wide tree, there's an enemy sentinel; behind every fallen tree, there's an enemy lying in ambush" until we actually began to believe it. Then after the critique we would move out, following enemy tracks, keeping pressure on them, knowing that they were getting tired of running from us and that eventually they wouldn't be able to go any farther and would be forced to fight on our terms. We moved cautiously, keeping in mind that they could be waiting in an ambush position, and sent out a reconnaissance team to search every danger area carefully.

We had daily contact with the aggressors, and they were good. Led by a former guerrilla who had fought with the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia, they managed to surprise us in about half of the contacts, while we spotted them first in the other half.

The trek through the jungle brought us into an area with millions of fire ants. Anywhere we stood, within minutes the ants would begin crawling up our legs. The only way to protect ourselves from them during the night was to squeeze three-inch lengths of mint green toothpaste on the lines at both ends of our hammocks and on the lines suspending the plastic shelter above them. The ants would climb over each other until there was a fist-size wad of them on the line,

but they wouldn't go past the toothpaste.

At the end of the eight-day patrol through the jungle, we arrived in Puerto Leguizamo Naval Base where we were given five minutes to change for the final PT test—push-ups, sit-ups, and ten-kilometer run. (This was the final test to see who would say "I can't.")

After the PT test, the 36 hungry and tired Lanceros in the officer's course, and another 25 in an NCO course, were finally given a big meal and a good night's sleep. The following day we returned to Toleraida for an overnight break and the graduation ceremony.

Thus ended what I consider the best lesson a U.S. Army officer or NCO can get in how Latin American insurgents fight. Going through the Lancero course provided us with valuable experience and also a variety of ideas.

The Colombians don't like to use jungle boots in the dense jungle terrain, for example. Instead, they use knee-high rubber "gaucho" boots, which protect their feet from the constant immersion in water. If the boots fill with water, they

can be removed and emptied, and they dry quickly. And because they're rubber, they last much longer than leather boots in the constant humidity.

At night the soldiers sleep in hammocks with specially adapted mosquito nets wrapped loosely underneath. Without the nets the mosquitos would bite through the cloth all night long. The plastic shelter—approximately twice the size of a poncho liner—is suspended above the hammock to protect a soldier from the never-ending torrential downpours so that he can at least be dry for a few hours during the night.

One of the interesting things I learned in the mountain phase was how to heat a canteen cup of water Colombian style. A candle, cut in half, with both halves lit and placed beneath the cup, can heat water as efficiently as a heat tab, and it's good for at least five more cups of water. It can get wet without being ruined, and it costs seven cents. This simple discovery was a good reminder that often in our high-tech Army we forget that there may be a simpler way of doing a

job just as effectively.

As the tactical officer called out the names of my Colombian classmates and the units to which they were being assigned, nobody smiled. Nearly all were going to units heavily engaged in the counter-insurgency and counter-drug effort. Most of them had taken part in that effort before going through the course. And because of the enormous amount of money in the drug business, they knew their enemies would often be better equipped than they were.

As each of them left Toleraida to continue the long and drawn out struggle to maintain order and confront their country's enemies, they carried with them something special—the fighting spirit of Bolivar's Lanceros. The other U.S. captain and I considered ourselves fortunate to be able to share in that spirit.

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COHORT Reenlistment

LIEUTENANT COLONEL COLE C. KINGSEED

A commander's efforts to retain high quality soldiers—our future NCO corps—require the enthusiastic involvement of all leaders in the unit, both officers and noncommissioned officers. Success is directly related to the quality of leadership they exhibit.

The single indispensable factor in all retention programs is a positive command climate that makes a soldier's first experience in the Army a generally favorable one. Commanders who conduct tough realistic training and demonstrate a genuine concern for the soldiers entrusted to their care rapidly develop

disciplined units. In turn, the soldiers take a great deal of pride in being members of the command. Bonds between the soldiers of disciplined organizations are uniformly stronger than of those in less disciplined units.

In addition, all commanders must be familiar with AR 601-280, the regulation that governs reenlistment. It succinctly outlines the duties and responsibilities of commanders and retention NCOs at all levels and discusses the reenlistment options available to the soldiers.

Nowhere, though, do battalion and company commanders face greater

reenlistment challenges than in traditional COHORT units where the soldiers all become eligible for reenlistment in an eight-month period at the end of the unit's life cycle. What can be done to prepare for this surge?

As a COHORT battalion commander, I made several key decisions early. Although some of these decisions are more controversial than others, I am convinced that they were important factors in the battalion's retention program, which succeeded in retaining 40 percent of the eligible first termers in the Active Army. Although this program focuses