

TRAINING NOTES



Project SHARE 90 Grenada and Panama

EDITOR'S NOTE: In September 1966, the Infantry School launched its Project SHARE program, the final objective of which was to publish a book of small unit combat experiences from Vietnam. The intention was to model the new book after its famous predecessor, INFANTRY IN BATTLE, which was a collection of World War I combat experiences that had been published in the mid-1930s.

In reality, Project SHARE in 1966 was nothing more than a solicitation for publishable combat experiences from Infantrymen who had served in small units in Vietnam. The response was tremendous and, as a result, the School (using IN-

FANTRY magazine as its vehicle) published a hard-cover book titled INFANTRY IN VIETNAM in December 1967. A second collection of Vietnam combat experiences titled A DISTANT CHALLENGE was published in 1970.

Now, we at INFANTRY are starting Project SHARE 90, similar in purpose to the 1966-1967 project, but with the intention of procuring publishable small unit actions from the recent Grenada and Panama operations. We will print many of them in INFANTRY and, hopefully, will be able to publish all we receive in booklet form.

If you are interested in submitting a

combat experience, we ask that you use the standard format spelled out in the following article. (It was one of the early Project SHARE submissions and appeared in the March-April 1967 INFANTRY.) If an experience does not seem to fit this standard format, however, just write it the way you want and send it to us. Please double-space your submissions.

Additional information on Project SHARE 90 can be obtained either by writing to INFANTRY's editorial office, P.O. Box 2005, Fort Benning, GA 31905-0605, or by calling AUTOVON 835-2350, commercial 404/545-2350.

SURPRISE

Introduction

The 3d Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade, acting independently during a search and destroy mission in September

1965, was extremely effective in penetrating a Viet Cong outpost system and making a successful assault in the notorious War Zone D. In this instance, surprise was the ingredient essential to the success of the action.*

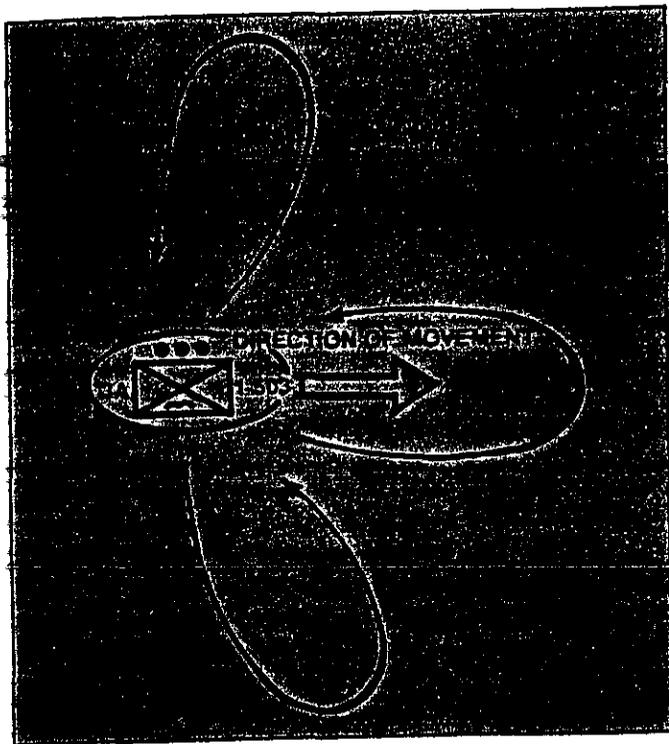
3d Platoon was ordered to move as a part of the company column to a battalion helicopter extraction zone several thousand meters away. At midday, the platoon leader, Lieutenant Robert Oakes, received an order to move on a separate axis enroute to the extraction zone and search an area where enemy activity had been reported.

**Combat experience related by Captain Walter Daniel to Captain Anthony E. Harle for use by Project SHARE. Captain Daniel commanded Company A, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade.*

Narrative

After participating in a successful air-mobile assault just north of Ben Cat, the

As his platoon moved through the thick jungle, spotted with small open rice paddies, Lieutenant Oakes concentrated on



the task of finding the enemy before his platoon was discovered. He would move approximately 300 meters in one of the usual platoon combat formations, employing a point element to his front and security to his flanks, and then halt and form a hasty perimeter. From this perimeter he would send out five-man fire teams to the front and flanks in a cloverleaf pattern; the fire teams would move out from 50 to 200 meters—depending upon the terrain and vegetation—to search for signs of the elusive enemy. If nothing was found, the platoon would move forward another 300 meters and repeat the process.

Lieutenant Oakes had found this method to be very effective on previous operations, because in the dense undergrowth, which limited command and control and encouraged ambush, the platoon could cover a considerably larger area during its movement than would have been the case had it employed only normal security measures and formations—the wedge, column, or vee.

At about 1400 hours, one of the fire teams, looping to the front, observed a Viet Cong in an outpost position; moving slowly and carefully, the fire team returned to the platoon command post to report the information. Lieutenant Oakes consolidated his platoon and sent a small

reconnaissance patrol forward, the members of which could see a number of camouflaged huts about 100 meters beyond the outpost. After receiving this report, Lieutenant Oakes swiftly dispatched two squads to work their way around to the opposite side of the camp to establish blocking positions.

At 1520 hours, Lieutenant Oakes received word by radio that the blocking squads were in place. He then led the remainder of his platoon forward, squads in column, moving quietly to avoid discovery by the enemy. As they neared the camp, the squads moved on line as much as possible in the thick vegetation and then quickly launched an assault, which succeeded in taking the enemy completely by surprise. Twelve of the fifteen Viet Cong occupying positions near the huts were killed during the assault; three escaped the initial assault but were killed as they tried to move through the squads occupying the blocking positions.

Analysis

Lieutenant Oakes and the members of his platoon had succeeded in surprising and annihilating an enemy unit in the latter's own base area.

His initial formation proved to be ef-

fective for achieving surprise—without being surprised—in a dense jungle area. Had a different formation been used, the 3d Platoon might well have been discovered by the VC outpost that had been established for that purpose, and the element of surprise would have passed to the enemy. In that situation, Lieutenant Oakes might have been faced with evacuating his dead and wounded and with the survival of the remnants of his command, rather than with assaulting and overrunning an enemy camp.

Realizing the futility of trying to encircle the camp with his small force, Lieutenant Oakes established blocking positions along the enemy's most likely avenues of withdrawal. By taking this action, he again achieved surprise and was totally successful in annihilating the enemy and destroying his base camp.

Lessons Learned

Surprise, as a principle of war, is not reserved for a particular level of command. Surprise must be employed in the planning and conduct of operations from Army level to squad level if decisive victory is to be achieved. At no time should we give the enemy the advantage of surprise, especially when we fight him in his

own backyard.

For the small unit commander, the principle of surprise is of paramount importance in all operations—the offense,

defense, patrols of all types, road and motor marches, ambushes. If he is to attain success in battle comparable to that achieved by this platoon of the 173d Air-

borne Brigade in War Zone D, he must deny the enemy the advantage of surprise while gaining and maintaining the ability to surprise the enemy.

Mortars Tactical Employment

COLONEL ROBERT D. SANDER

The tactical employment of mortars and the effects that mortars produce have been documented at our combat training centers (CTCs) and, in simple terms, ~~mortars are not producing the results that their potential promises.~~ Typical observations that support this statement include the following:

- Mortars make no contribution. They are not effective.
- Fire support teams (FISTs) and forward observers (FOs) send all fire missions to the field artillery.
- Mortars are not integrated into the fire support plan.
- The effects of mortars are not assessed realistically by the simulation systems used at the CTCs.
- Mortars do not stay within range and are not available when needed.
- Mortars are inaccurate; they seldom use surveyed positions and do not apply meteorological corrections.
- Staff responsibilities for mortars are not clearly established in doctrine and unit SOPs.

(These employment problems are the focus of a study being conducted by the Infantry School, the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), and the Rand Corporation. Although the results of the study are not yet available, the specific observations noted above reflect valid concerns. Because mortars involve both the fire support and the maneuver arms

communities, a combined effort is required if we are going to make substantial progress.)

The allegation that we are failing to use mortars to their full potential is absolutely true, and I believe the principal reasons for this failure lie outside the mortar platoon. We do not use mortars to their full potential because we fail to complete the detailed planning and preparation that is needed, and we fail to support planning with the required training.

PLANNING

There is a fundamental difference between the planning process for field artillery targets and the process for mortar targets. After a field artillery target is planned and approved in the fire support coordination and maneuver command channels, it is passed to the field artillery battalion headquarters where there is a staff available to continue the planning process and to determine such details as required positioning, most effective ammunition, the number of volleys required to achieve the desired effects, and logistical requirements.

The mortar platoon leader has no such subordinate staff or dedicated representative on the battalion staff. While the mortar platoon leader and his platoon sergeant are capable of performing this func-

tion, their primary duties are those of combat leaders, and the current operation normally requires their full attention.

The commander and his staff, therefore, must develop a concept that includes consideration of calls for fire or execution responsibilities, communication requirements, positioning and movement, and the terminal effects the mortars are expected to achieve on each target. The missions they assign to their mortars must be defined in terms of targets that are critical to the success of the battalion or task force mission, the effects required on those targets, and the specific time and circumstances in which these fires are required.

The platoon leader's role in the planning process is to take this detailed concept for employment and the accompanying fire plan (which together state *what* is to be done) and continue the planning process to determine *how* it will be done. The mortar platoon leader can then add the resolution required to convert this concept into a detailed plan.

Equally important is the concept of purpose. The platoon leader must understand not only how his fires will support the maneuver elements, but also the role of the other fire support systems so that he can implement any changes that may become necessary on a battlefield peopled with an uncooperative enemy.

Maneuver company commanders and