



Lieutenant Colonel Michael A. Thompson

Light Infantry In Stay-Behind Operations

The usefulness of light infantry on the battlefield stems from its inherent flexibility, its offensive orientation, its mastery of night operations, and its ability to dominate restrictive terrain. One role on the battlefield requires just such characteristics, that of a stay-behind force.

During Exercise TEAM SPIRIT 90, a combined U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) field training exercise held annually in Korea, one battalion of the 25th Infantry Division had a unique opportunity to conduct a stay-behind operation under simulated combat conditions. The planning, preparation, and execution of the operation, and the lessons learned from the experience may prove helpful to other light units and to the Army as a whole.

TEAM SPIRIT is substantially free-play, decidedly fast-paced, and controlled by an extensive umpire-controller organization that reaches down to company level. The 1990 exercise involved two field armies—Field Army Blue and Field Army Orange, both consisting of U.S. and ROK forces. These armies went at each other for 12 days using about all of the conventional assets of both countries.

Field Army Blue—composed of a notional Field Army Blue North, a Field Army Blue Central, and a notional Field Army Blue South—was initially on the defensive. Field Army Orange—consisting of a notional Field Army Orange North, a Field Army Orange Central, and a notional Field Army Orange South—took the offensive on D-Day after

a two-day reconnaissance battle between the two armies.

Narrowing the focus on the Blue forces, FABC was organized with I Corps (ROK) on the north and I Corps (U.S.) on the south. The 25th Infantry Division, assigned to the U.S. I Corps, deployed to Korea with its 3d Brigade (with the brigade base and one of its infantry battalions); the 29th Separate Infantry Brigade, Hawaii Army National Guard (with the brigade base and one of its infantry battalions); and a substantial portion of the division's support units. Once in Korea, two ROK infantry battalions joined each of the two brigades.

Opposing the U.S. I Corps was the ROK VII Corps. Opposing the 25th Division's units were elements of the 2d U.S. Infantry Division, the 1st ROK Marine Division, the 66th ROK Mobilization Reserve Division, and the 2d ROK Armored Brigade (Figure 1).

(As mentioned above, the Blue forces started the exercise in a defensive posture and continued their defensive operations until D+4. At this time the Blue forces went over to the offensive, and continued offensive operations until the end of the exercise. This prearranged allocation of the available exercise days is traditional for the TEAM SPIRIT exercises.)

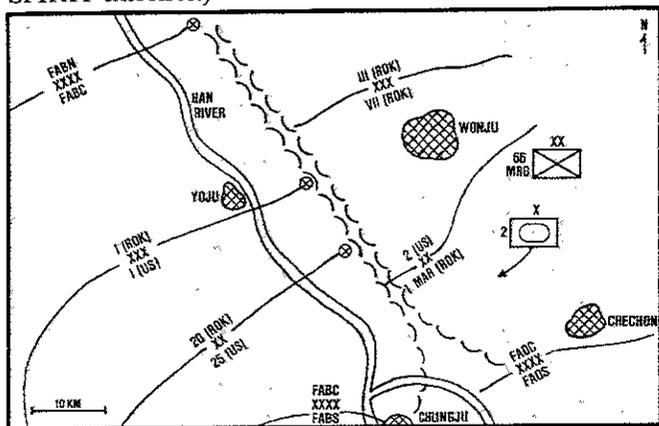


Figure 1

A detailed intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) during the defensive phase of the exercise revealed that the array of Orange forces along the division front outnumbered the Blue forces by about 4:1. The 25th Division was therefore compelled to look for a concept of operation and a scheme of maneuver that could respond to the threat and give the division a reasonable chance of succeeding. It was the search for just such a scheme of maneuver, along with considerations of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time), that led the division commander to use a stay-behind force.

The division commander wanted the stay-behind force to act boldly and aggressively to disrupt and confuse the Orange force elements that were positioned behind the Orange assault echelon. He believed that the high-risk, high-payoff nature of the stay-behind force might be a good way to counterbalance the unfavorable combat ratios he faced, and that it might provide a catalyst for a division advance once it went over to the offensive.

Defending with the division's two brigades forward (the 29th Brigade in the north and the 3d Brigade in the south)

the division commander directed the commander of the 3d Brigade to position a stay-behind force in a hide position (AO Wolf) to the rear of the U.S. I Corps covering force but well forward of the expected main battle area (Figure 2). The brigade commander selected his own light infantry battalion—the 4th Battalion, 27th Infantry—for the stay-behind mission and planned to use his two ROK battalions to anchor the main defense in his assigned sector.

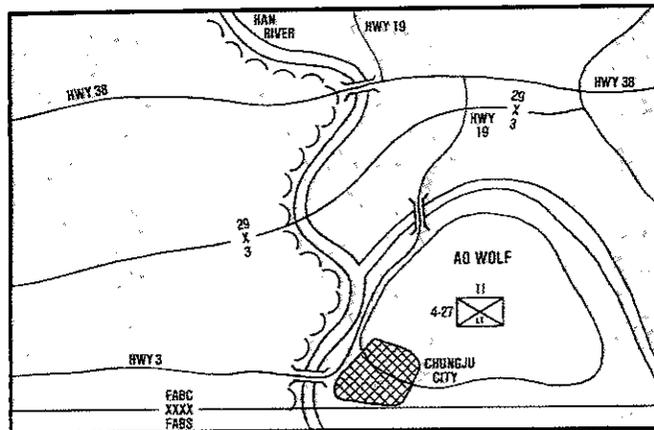


Figure 2

It was during a division-wide command post exercise (CPX) in Hawaii that the division commander's concept and the 3d Brigade commander's implementing instructions were first tested, albeit on a map board. The results solidified the commanders' conclusions that a stay-behind mission stood a reasonable chance of succeeding and that the potential gains were worth the risk involved in it.

The battalion itself used the same CPX as an opportunity to brainstorm the requirements and considerations necessary to conduct such a mission. Since the maps used for the CPX were of the same ground that would be used during TEAM SPIRIT, the battalion was also able to conduct a detailed map study.

Following the CPX, the commanders of the 3d Brigade and the 4th Battalion and their staffs held several sessions in which they discussed with their key leaders down to platoon level the challenges inherent in a stay-behind operation. Representatives from the supporting units of the combined arms team also attended these sessions and provided expert advice on technical matters.

From this initial planning, the brigade and the battalion reached several broad conclusions:

- The battalion's ability to hide and remain undetected would be vital to the success of the operation; if discovered, it would soon be rendered ineffective.
- Detection would most likely be from the air or through the interception of communication signals, and extraordinary defensive security measures would be needed in these areas.
- The dispersion of the battalion was important to preventing detection, but this dispersion would need to be balanced against the requirement to assemble the force rapidly for offensive strikes if and when enemy targets presented themselves.

- Logistical planning and preparation would have to be detailed and well understood by all members of the stay-behind force.

During the weeks after the CPX and before its deployment to Korea, the battalion trained on several specific tasks that would help the unit accomplish its mission—the construction of hide positions, individual and unit camouflage techniques, infiltration attacks, raids, link-up operations, river crossing operations using RB-15 assault boats, night aerial resupply, field expedient and directional antennas, and automatic remote keying for KY-57 secure communications equipment.

In preparing its operational concept when it arrived in Korea, the battalion divided the assigned area of operations (AO Wolf) into company AOs and selected locations for other elements on the basis of a map study (Figure 3). The

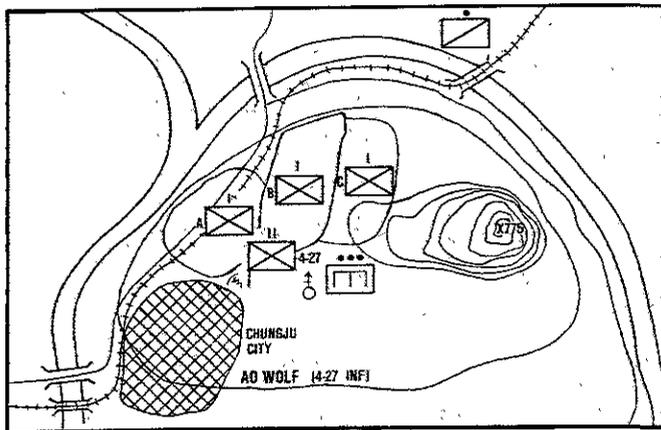


Figure 3

companies could position their forces anywhere within their assigned AOs and were given areas in which to conduct reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance security operations. Most of the offensive strikes were expected to be conducted at platoon level, with a few at company level.

The battalion would have a light engineer platoon (equipped with RB-15s), a ground surveillance radar (GSR) section, a U.S. Air Force air liaison officer (ALO), and its habitual light infantry fire support element (FSE) and company fire support teams (FISTs). The battalion's antitank TOW platoon would be detached and attached to one of the brigade's other battalions to thicken the main battle defenses.

Operations in the enemy rear were expected to be decentralized down to platoon level. The battalion commander established attack criteria (or a set of rules) to guide every small unit commander concerning appropriate targets, timing, and circumstances of an attack, and prevent the disclosure of a sizable force in the enemy rear.

In a contingency annex, the battalion commander provided detailed guidance as to the actions to be taken in the event of an early detection of all or part of the force, and this guidance was disseminated to every soldier.

To prevent premature detection through the communication signatures of friendly forces, FM radio silence would be maintained in the hide position, except for a report once

a day at a scheduled time. Wire would be laid between positions and command posts, but runners would be the principal means of communication within the hide position. Communications with the 3d Brigade headquarters would be maintained through a single channel TACSAT (tactical satellite) radio. The battalion CP would also passively monitor the brigade's FM nets to track the battle and receive prearranged burst messages. Once offensive operations began, the battalion's units using FM communications would use low power settings and directional antennas.

A careful study of the assigned AO revealed that less than one-fourth of the area could be used for positions that provided protection from aerial detection. All hide positions, therefore, were located in that area. In addition, all positions were to be dug-in with extensive overhead concealment to blend in with the surroundings. The 4th Battalion also planned to use any abandoned buildings in the area. All movement (vehicle and foot) would be limited to the hours of darkness. Friendly overflights would check the effectiveness of the camouflage.

SUPPLY CACHES

The battalion put considerable effort into deciding upon the composition and positioning of supply caches to sustain the force and to use in conducting offensive operations. Some obvious items to be cached were Class I (MREs only), water (in cans, blivets, and 400-gallon trailers), Class III (diesel fuel in five-gallon cans and package items), a small amount of Class IV, Class V, Class VIII, some Class IX, batteries, and other selected items.

Water posed a real challenge because the local sources were not considered safe; whatever was to be used had to be located at a cache site under friendly control. The RB-15s would also be cached to provide a means of crossing the Han River when and if they were needed. Caches would be positioned within the hide positions, elsewhere within the AO, and even beyond the AO to provide redundancy and to support future operations. All caches were to be manned and guarded.

For medical care, the battalion planned to set up the entire battalion aid station in an abandoned building within AO Wolf. All available medical supplies would be needed within the hide positions, because the battalion would try to evacuate only the soldiers with the gravest medical needs; all others would be treated by the battalion physician's assistant and a specially detailed medical doctor. Any necessary medical evacuation would be done at night by a single helicopter. Medical personnel cached Class VIII supplies in larger than normal quantities.

When the soldiers made their initial move by truck to AO Wolf, they would be overloaded with all types of equipment and supplies. They would drop most of the equipment in a central cache area as soon as they arrived in the AO, or stockpile it themselves in their own positions.

Once in AO Wolf, the soldiers would reconfigure their

fighting loads and prepare for combat. Only ten of the unit's vehicles would be located within the hide area to provide limited carrying capability. (If civilian vehicles had been available, they would have been used instead to reduce the possibility of discovery.)

The elements of the battalion that would not be located in AO Wolf (mostly the rest of the vehicles and drivers and the trains personnel) would be positioned in an assembly area to the rear of the expected main battle area. A key role for these elements would be to simulate the battalion's normal radio traffic in an attempt to convince the opposing forces that the entire battalion was occupying the assembly area. In addition, the actual location of AO Wolf was reflected on only a few overlays within the division.

EXERCISE BEGINS

D-Day for the exercise was set. The advance party of the 4th Battalion, 27th Infantry, left its designated base camp on the night of D-3 and completed its movement to AO Wolf in time to position water trailers and establish cache sites and wire communications before daylight. During daylight hours, the advance party stopped all activity.

During the night of D-2, the main body of the battalion made the four-hour truck movement to the AO. The work of the advance party streamlined the occupation of positions. Individual fighting and hide positions were dug, and caches were dug in. Meanwhile, the advance party shifted some of its effort during the evening to digging in, manning, and establishing communications with the cache sites beyond the limits of AO Wolf.

The scout platoon was positioned beyond AO Wolf in an area that allowed it to maintain surveillance over the Han River and a key valley. The battalion's 81mm mortars were centrally located so they could support the entire force. Again, to lower the probability of detection, the mortars and the available supporting artillery units were instructed to fire only with the approval of the battalion headquarters. And as was done the previous night, all activity stopped at daylight.

The units spent the evening of D-1 in the same manner—refining fighting and hide positions and caches. They also sent out local patrols to familiarize the units with their new surroundings. The reconnaissance and security patrolling continued throughout the next two evenings. Severe limits were placed on the companies concerning size, activity, scope, and time limits for all patrols in recognition of the fact that the battalion's number one priority during this phase remained the preservation of its hide posture.

Elsewhere in the battle, the Orange and Blue forces had begun their reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance efforts in the corps security area. The battle began in earnest on D-Day with the corps covering force firing on the forward Orange force elements. The handover of the battle occurred early on D-1, and in the 25th Division's sector the Orange forces were delayed forward of the main battle area.

Later that day, key bridges over the Han were blown to slow the enemy advance. Additional obstacles, attack helicopters, close air support aircraft, and long-range antitank fires were synchronized with the ground maneuver to further damage enemy forces. Nevertheless, on the morning of D+2, Orange forces began to cross the river using a combination of RB-15s, fording operations, and Marine Corps LVTs (landing vehicles, tracked). The Orange force's river crossing meant that the stay-behind force was indeed completely cut off from other friendly units. Soon the field artillery was too far away to provide supporting fires.

On the evening of D+2, the battalion infiltrated Companies A and C and a battalion CP out of their hide positions and conducted a crossing of the Han River using the RB-15s that had been previously cached. The crossing was not detected by any of the Orange forces, and the two companies were able to establish patrol bases on the north side of the river before daylight on D+3 (Figure 4). As darkness fell on D+3 the two companies began active patrolling to acquire soft enemy targets that fell within the guidelines of the attack criteria. Company A discovered a Marine regimental CP in its area and began to formulate an attack plan. The attack was conducted at 0200 hours on D+4. The battalion's 81mm mortars supported with limited preparatory fire from a forward firing position and then immediately returned to their hide position.

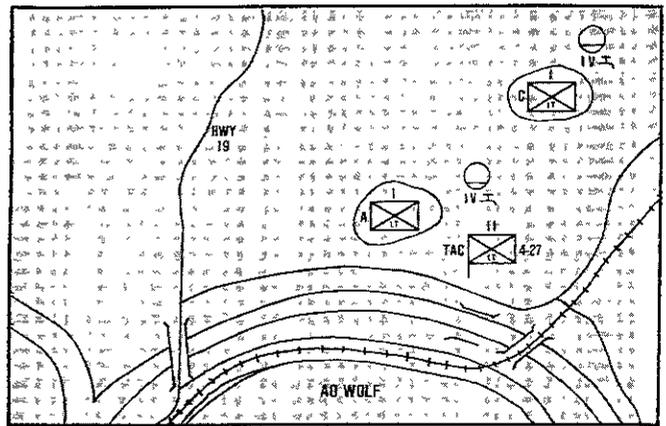


Figure 4

The attack achieved total surprise and the controllers assessed the CP and its guard contingent of 75 soldiers as "completely destroyed." Meanwhile, Company C was scouting for suitable targets. While Orange forces were sighted, targets in accordance with the attack criteria were not. Later on D+4, Company C did discover a division CP, but an administrative halt in the exercise precluded an attack.

In the main battle area, the brigades of the 25th Division continued to delay the Orange forces. By the time the first half of the exercise was concluded on D+4, the stay-behind force was some 25 kilometers behind enemy lines.

When the Blue forces counterattacked and assumed the offensive, the 4th Battalion, 27th Infantry received a mission to seize two critical crossing sites over the Han River for

linking up with elements of an advancing armored task force that would turn the flank of the Orange forces and drive deep into the Orange rear areas, unhinging their defense. Companies B and C were infiltrated to seize a fording site over the river; Company A and a composite company consisting of the scout platoon, engineer platoon, headquarters personnel, and commanded by the S-3 Air were infiltrated to seize a key highway bridge (Figure 5). Up to this time, none of the companies had been detected by the Orange forces, and the original battalion and company hide positions remained undiscovered. The time for the seizure of both objectives was set for 0400 hours on D+6.

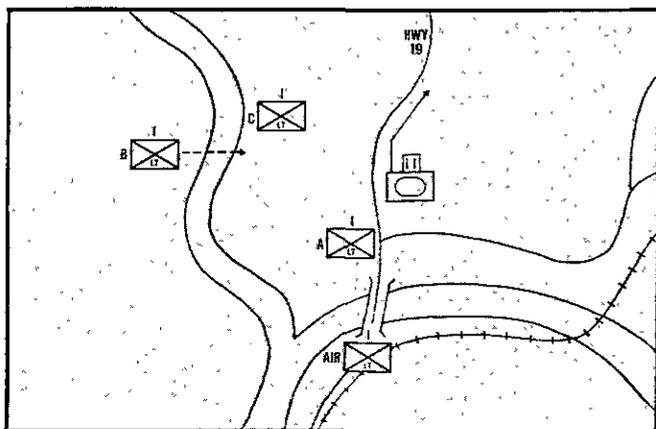


Figure 5

Throughout the hours of darkness on D+5 and D+6, an extensive reconnaissance of the objectives was conducted. Requirements for seizure were defined, demolitions on the bridge were pinpointed, and actions for taking out the demolition guard unit and units in the areas of the bridge and the ford site were rehearsed. The battalion mortars were also infiltrated forward to provide fire support for both objectives.

Both objectives were seized as planned, and Orange units at both locations were neutralized within 20 minutes. In addition, Company C attacked and destroyed an Orange Marine LVT company that was in an assembly area near the fording site.

In the main battle area, the division's attack started on time with two brigades abreast. The 3d Brigade in the south conducted a night infiltration to seize key objectives along the route of an advancing armored task force. The brigade's objectives fell as planned, and the division commander poured the armored spearhead through the corridor that resulted.

Four hours after the 4th Battalion units seized the fording site and the bridge, the Blue armored spearhead reached the bridge, crossed in stride, and continued the attack. As a result, the vast majority of the Orange forces to the west of the Han River were encircled, and the U.S. I Corps and 25th Division commanders had their forces in position to drive deep into the rear of the Orange zone.

After linkup with the armored force at the bridge, the battalion participated in more conventional operations

(battalion air assault, movement to contact, deliberate attack) until the exercise concluded on the ninth day.

LESSONS LEARNED

The stay-behind operation contributed significantly to the 25th Division's mission and the triumph of the friendly forces. The real value of the operation, though, lay in the lessons that were learned concerning the light infantry's ability to perform this kind of mission.

The following lessons are presented in the format of the battlefield operating systems:

Intelligence:

- A thorough analysis of the assigned terrain to select locations for the hide positions is vital in a stay-behind unit's IPB process. Areas must be available that keep the unit from being detected from the air. While in control of friendly forces, the hide positions should be checked by friendly aircraft.

- Stay-behind forces should plan to use all available military intelligence assets such as REMBASS, GSR, unit scouts, and PEWS (platoon early warning system).

- Stay-behind forces will find that passively monitoring the brigade intelligence net is a valuable way to receive enemy situation updates, and it can serve as a way to track the main battle.

- Leaders in a stay-behind operation must have a greater understanding of the enemy's order of battle and organization for combat. Individual soldiers must be more proficient at recognizing enemy vehicles and equipment, and should have some knowledge of enemy CP set-ups and antenna configurations.

Maneuver:

- As in any other mission, a combined arms task organization is desirable for stay-behind operations.

- Much of the success or failure of a stay-behind operation can be laid to the selection of the stay-behind area of operation. In the case of AO Wolf, the 3d Brigade commander selected an ideal location, situated along an army boundary. Any Orange force that intended to find or pursue the stay-behind force would have to scale steep hills and be prepared to search for days. AO Wolf was off the natural lines of enemy advance or retrograde; if an Orange force passed through AO Wolf, it would have to cross the Han River or a major tributary twice, thus requiring two deliberate crossings.

- The precise positioning for a stay-behind force should reflect a trade-off between the need to disperse the force to keep it hidden and the need to assemble it rapidly and strike at appropriate targets. A good way to find this balance is to assign company AOs. The AOs should have enough space for the company hide positions but those positions should still be close enough to each other to reinforce or to allow rapid assembly. The trade-off, of course, depends upon the factors of METT-T.

- The establishment of attack criteria eliminated unnecessary radio traffic between commanders and gave



the battalion commander a good way to convey to the company commanders the type of targets in the enemy rear that they were to hit. To ensure that his attack criteria fit his higher commander's intent, the commander of the stay-behind force had them approved by the brigade commander.

- Key training for the stay-behind operation proved to be that used for training for raids, assault boat river crossings, infiltration attacks, and linkup operations, and in hiding and camouflage techniques.

- A global positioning system (GPS) is an excellent tool for stay-behind units to use to emplace and locate well hidden cache points and to conduct linkup operations.

- Deception operations (in the form of making the enemy think the stay-behind force is in the main battle area) are a necessary part of a stay-behind operation. Dummy radio traffic and vehicle movement may reinforce an enemy expectation that will protect the stay-behind force.

Fire Support:

- One of the biggest challenges the battalion faced was maintaining a means of fire support other than its organic mortars. One of the more challenging times for the battalion was holding the bridge over the Han River for the four hours that it took for the armored task force to advance for linkup. During most of those four hours, the battalion was out of range of its supporting artillery, and the indirect fire means were limited to the battalion and company mortars. The division commander decided to accept the risk involved because of the advantages to be gained. Close air support and attack helicopters are a possible alternative, as are artillery raids in conjunction with maneuver operations.

- Mortars should be used from the hide position only

in self defense. Mortar fire in support of offensive operations should be conducted outside the hide area; the mortars should then move back to their own hide locations.

Air Defense Artillery:

- Because of higher priorities elsewhere, the battalion did not have any air defense artillery systems attached for the operation. Passive air defense was stressed instead.

Mobility, Countermobility, and Survivability:

- The assault boats that were in AO Wolf proved essential for movement across the Han River. The attachment of an engineer platoon was also most helpful. Its soldiers surveyed an appropriate river crossing site and helped prepare the boats.

- All activity must be at night, both inside and outside the hide position. Vehicles should move only at night and only under strict control.

- Within the hide area, individual positions must be dug in and well camouflaged. For large pieces of equipment and activities (such as vehicles, water trailers, command posts, and the like), abandoned buildings, awnings, haystacks, and other indigenous structures can be put to good use.

- While the hide area is still within friendly control, friendly aircraft overflights should be scheduled to check the camouflage.

- Only essential vehicles should be planned for the hide position. All ten vehicles the battalion used within the area of operations were used for multiple purposes (communications, cache positioning, casualty evacuation, movement of mortars). Civilian vehicles that blend in with the surrounding area are a better alternative, when they are available.

Combat Service Support:

- The "pack mule" concept made sense for this operation for several reasons: The soldiers were transported to the hide position and were not required to walk any great distance before unloading the equipment and supplies they had to carry; this reduced the need for additional vehicles in the hide position, simplified the distribution of supplies, and reduced logistical movement to a minimum.

- All resupply activity must take place at night. This means that drivers, aidmen, mechanics, and other support personnel must be proficient in using night vision goggles.

- The location and exact composition of each cache site must be planned carefully in accordance with METT-T and the commander's intent. The commander of the stay-behind force must be personally involved; he must choose the location of any caches outside the hide area, for example, because they will affect the unit's ability to accomplish its mission. Caches should be redundant (both inside and outside the hide area); the loss of a cache site cannot be allowed to jeopardize the mission. The battalion's S-4 kept a running total of the supplies in each cache and recommended the shifting of supplies when appropriate. To provide this redundancy, the battalion planned for and cached twice as many supplies as it would normally require.

- The caches positioned outside AO Wolf (Figure 4) allowed the companies on the north side of the Han River to resupply during the first and second phases without having to return to the AO. Each cache site, inside and outside the AO, was guarded by either a squad or a fire team; the guards had radios to use in linking up with friendly units and in reporting enemy activity.

- Caches must be either dug in below ground level or placed in existing buildings to prevent enemy forces from discovering them. Guards must be assigned to all cache points and must be provided with communications equipment, with the battalion assigning call signs and frequencies.

- In the hide position, commanders at all levels must carefully monitor supply levels, and rationing may be required. The 4th Battalion, 27th Infantry knew going into the exercise that water would have to be rationed. One of the measures used to control water use was to limit shaving to every third day.

- Redundant equipment should be located in the hide position. There will probably be no opportunity to evacuate any equipment for repair, and the maintenance capability within the hide area will be strictly limited to operator and organizational levels.

- Trash control can become a big problem in the hide position. Trash must be reverse cached, dug in, and concealed.

- Although the battalion did not use them, single helicopter resupply operations at night can be used in emergencies. The resupply point should be located outside the hide position.

Command and Control:

- The commander of the stay-behind force must decide

early how to position his key personnel, because their positioning may be different from that used in normal operations. The composition of the quartering party must also be carefully considered.

- The commander's intent must be fleshed out with clear-cut contingencies. For instance, what if one of the caches is discovered? What if a firebreak breaks out? What happens if indirect fire is received? Does a patrol try to return to the hide position if it is discovered and fired upon? These are only a few of the types of questions that should be covered in detail in a contingency annex for the stay-behind force. All members of the stay-behind force must be familiar with the contents of the annex and must rehearse the operations.

- In the hide position, runners should be the principal means of communication, with wire the secondary means, and wire must always be dug in.

- The emission of radio waves from the hide position must be reduced in every way possible. Planners must consider using TACSAT (and TACFAX), directional antennas, low power, and even the local telephone system. The citizen band radios used by local taxicabs are another means of local, unsecure communication.

- The use of long range AM radios should be considered, because they are less susceptible to direction-finding equipment. Scouts and the guard elements with the cache sites outside the hide area can certainly use them.

- Radio operators must be proficient in the automatic remote keying of secure radio equipment, because it is impractical to change secure variables by hand.

- Soldiers and leaders must be mentally prepared for stay-behind operations and must plan for the inactivity, isolation, and boredom inherent in such operations, and for the effects of reverse cycle operations. Dispersion, minimized communications, and the need to stay hidden will all require leaders to adjust their methods of supervision. As in no other kind of operation, leaders at all levels must be prepared to decentralize operations.

- The passive monitoring of the brigade command and intelligence FM nets gives the stay-behind force a good idea of the flow of the main battle. It allows the stay-behind force to gauge accurately when and where it will execute any offensive activity.

- Individual unit tactical SOPs should address stay-behind operations and methods of applying the lessons noted here.

TEAM SPIRIT 90 gave the 4th Battalion, 27th Infantry a unique opportunity to perform a stay-behind mission as part of a large-scale exercise under simulated combat conditions. This stay-behind mission proved to be an effective method of using a heavy-light team.

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