

2-25-75

DC/S P&O comments:

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1. CJCS overcontrol;  
more emphasis.
  2. CH-53 transported  
by C-SA: difficulties  
should be pointed  
out.
  3. Doctrine reappraisal;  
no need for change.
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lt Gen Beckington's  
comments expressed  
at JCS/OPDET briefing

BRIEFING PRESENTED TO OPSDEPS  
ON 25 JULY 1975, 1000 HOURS

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG  
ISLAND OPERATION  
SLIDE 1 ON

AT 0512 HOURS EASTERN DAYLIGHT TIME ON 12 MAY 1975, THE  
AMERICAN EMBASSY, DJAKARTA REPORTED A RADIO INTERCEPT OF SIGNALS  
FROM THE SS MAYAGUEZ THAT THE SHIP WAS BEING SEIZED BY CAMBODIAN  
FORCES IN THE VICINITY OF POULO WAI ISLAND, GULF OF THAILAND.  
ABOUT 4 HOURS LATER A P-3 NAVY RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT WAS  
LAUNCHED FROM UTAPAO AND WITHIN 16 HOURS THE SS MAYAGUEZ WAS  
LOCATED IN THE VICINITY OF KAOH TANG ISLAND.

THE CHART LISTS THESE AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS RELATED  
TO THE MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG INCIDENT, SPANNING A TIMEFRAME OF  
APPROXIMATELY 76 HOURS FROM THE SHIP'S SEIZURE UNTIL THE FINAL  
EXTRACTION OF THE MARINE GROUND ASSAULT FORCES.

THE MAYAGUEZ AFFAIR WAS A SUCCESSFUL MILITARY OPERATION; BUT THERE WERE THINGS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN PERFORMED BETTER. THESE PROBLEMS MUST BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE UNIQUENESS OF THE MISSION, THE COMPRESSED TIMEFRAME OF APPROXIMATELY 16 HOURS FROM PLANNING TO EXECUTION, AND UNCERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH DECISIONS HAD TO BE MADE.

PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT LESSON LEARNED IS THAT THE CAPABILITY OF OUR FORCES TO RESPOND PERMITTED SUCCESSFUL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SO DEMANDING A MISSION. IT IS ESSENTIAL TO NOTE THAT THE PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING PROCESS CONTINUED THROUGH STAGES OF REFINEMENT, WHILE THE WIDELY SEPARATED MULTISERVICE FORCES WERE MOVING TOWARDS THEIR ATTACK POSITIONS. THE MORE FORMAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES HAD TO BE SHORT CIRCUITED.

OF THE CRITIQUE ITEMS DEVELOPED FOR THIS OPERATION, THE FOLLOWING ARE CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT IN LIGHT OF FUTURE JOINT OPERATIONS AND THEY ARE COVERED WITHIN THE GENERAL TOPICS SHOWN HERE.

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SLIDE 1 OFF

SLIDE 2 ON (PLANNING, COMMAND, CONTROL,  
COMMUNICATIONS, FORCES, DOCTRINE, RECON-  
NAISSANCE AND INTELLIGENCE)

SLIDE 2 OFF

SLIDE 3 ON (PLANNING)

FIRST THE AREA OF PLANNING.

NO ON-THE-SHELF CONTINGENCY PLAN EXISTED FOR THIS OPERATION.

EMERGENCY PLANNING CONDUCTED OVER THE SHORT PERIOD OF TIME  
BENEFITTED FROM THE IMMEDIATE AVAILABILITY OF STAFFS AND OPERATIONAL  
FORCES WHO HAD JUST RECENTLY PARTICIPATED IN NONCOMBATANT AND REFUGEE  
EVACUATION OPERATIONS FROM SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA. THE FINAL  
OPERATION PLAN PUBLISHED BY COMUSSAG/7AF ON THE 14TH, INCORPORATED THE  
ESSENCE OF THE REQUIREMENTS TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASKS. DUE TO THE RAPID  
EVOLVEMENT OF EVENTS, IT WAS NOT THE POLISHED PRODUCT FOUND WHEN THE  
"EAGLE PULL" PLAN WAS EXECUTED--NOR WAS IT EVEN AS DETAILED AS  
"FREQUENT WIND" WHICH HAD AT LEAST A FEW WEEKS AVAILABLE FOR REFINING

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MAJOR POINTS AND FACILITATING COORDINATION AMONG THE PRIMARY FORCES OF THE JOINT TASK FORCE. IT IS NOT FEASIBLE TO ATTEMPT TO DEVELOP FORMAL PLANS FOR THE MYRIAD OF CONTINGENCIES THAT COULD ARISE WORLDWIDE. NEVERTHELESS, THE MAYAGUEZ EXPERIENCE DOES DICTATE CONSTANT PREPAREDNESS OF OUR PLANNING STAFFS AND READY FORCES TO EXECUTE UNFORESEEABLE MISSIONS.

SLIDE 3 OFF

SLIDE 4 ON

SHORTCOMINGS IN THE OPERATION RECEIVING THE GREATEST NUMBER OF COMMENTS FALL TO THOSE DEALING WITH COMMAND, CONTROL AND COMMUNICATIONS. IN THIS OPERATION, WE HAD AIR FORCE HELICOPTERS EXECUTING A COMPLEX HELICOPTER COMBAT ASSAULT, LIFTING MARINE COMBAT FORCES INTO THE OBJECTIVE AREA. TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES USED IN SUCH AN ASSAULT ARE NORMALLY REFINED THROUGH EXTENSIVE TEAM TRAINING. IN THIS INSTANCE, THE TEAM MEMBERS MET ONLY BRIEFLY BEFORE MOVING ALMOST IMMEDIATELY INTO BATTLE. --

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RELIANCE ON HIGH FREQUENCY RADIO FOR TACTICAL COMMAND AND CONTROL PROVED TO BE UNSATISFACTORY DUE TO EQUIPMENT INCOMPATIBILITY -- ADDITIONALLY, THE LACK OF SECURITY ON TACTICAL VOICE NETS AND THE NECESSITY TO SHIFT FREQUENCIES TO ENSURE USABLE PATHS DURING CRITICAL OPERATIONS, WAS A PROBLEM. IT DEMANDS GREATER RELIANCE ON LINE-OF-SIGHT (SATELLITE/RELAY) COMMUNICATIONS. --

ON THE OTHER HAND, WIDEBAND, SATELLITE-BASED SECURE VOICE CONFERENCING BETWEEN THE JCS, CINCPAC, COMPONENTS, AND USSAG/7AF PROVED INVALUABLE, CONSIDERING THE VERY SENSITIVE POLITICAL-MILITARY RAMIFICATIONS OF EVERY ACTION. FEASIBILITY OF EXTENDING THIS LINK TO ON-SCENE/MOBILE COMMANDERS IS THE SUBJECT OF FURTHER INVESTIGATION.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT ESTABLISHMENT OF RESPONSIVE COMMUNICATIONS, WITH THEIR INHERENT CAPABILITIES FOR JUMPING COMMAND CHANNELS, TENDS TO EXPOSE THE FIELD COMMANDER TO EXCESSIVE DIRECTION, PARTICULARLY WHEN THE OPERATIONS ARE SO LIMITED IN FOCUS. CREATION OF A RELUCTANCE TO ACT WITHOUT SPECIFIC GUIDANCE WOULD BE DISASTROUS

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UNDER CONDITIONS OF REGIONAL OR GENERAL WAR. TO PRECLUDE THIS INADVERTENT MISUSE OF THE SECURE VOICE CONFERENCING, JOINT DOCTRINE GOVERNING ITS USE IS BEING CONSIDERED. ESTABLISHMENT OF A PARALLEL SECURE CONFERENCE NET CONFINED TO A REPORTING ROLE WOULD PREVENT OVERLOADING OF THE PRIMARY COMMAND NET, AND MAY EASE THE TENDENCY TOWARD OVER CONTROL.

USEFULNESS OF LINE OF SIGHT RADIO RELAY CAPABILITY/SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS WAS DEMONSTRATED BY THE EXPEDIENT USE OF THE U-2 OLYMPIC TORCH AS A MANUAL VOICE RELAY FACILITY. GREATER EFFICIENCY AND RESPONSIVENESS COULD BE MET WITH A HIGH ALTITUDE, AUTOMATIC RELAY CAPABILITY. --

FINALLY, GREATER EMPHASIS SHOULD BE PLACED ON ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT COMPATIBILITY TO ENSURE A REDUNDANT COMMUNICATIONS LINK BETWEEN THE GROUND FORCE AND ITS SUPPORTING TAC AIR. THE SINGLE UHF RADIO AVAILABLE TO THE GROUND ASSAULT FORCE AND CARRIED BY THE FORWARD AIR CONTROLLER WITH THAT FORCE WAS LOST WHEN A HELICOPTER WAS SHOT DOWN AND DESTROYED. THIS LOSS SHOWED THE NEED FOR THIS EQUIPMENT COMPATIBILITY. THE GROUND

ASSAULT FORCE PRIMARY COMMUNICATIONS WAS VHF/FM WHILE NAVY TAC AIR HAD UHF ONLY. USE OF AN AIRBORNE FORWARD AIR CONTROLLER IN THE LATTER STAGES OF THE OPERATION PROVED EFFECTIVE IN REESTABLISHING COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THESE TWO FORCES.

SLIDE 4 OFF

SLIDE 5 ON (FORCES)

NEXT ARE LESSONS PERTAINING TO FORCES.

THE REQUIREMENTS FELL INTO THREE CATEGORIES: AIR ELEMENTS TO PROVIDE AIR RECONNAISSANCE AND TACAIR OPERATIONS; NAVAL ELEMENTS THAT COULD QUICKLY RESPOND TO THE OBJECTIVE AREA; AND GROUND FORCES WITH A HELICOPTER LIFT CAPABILITY.



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WHILE SUFFICIENT AIR ASSETS WERE AVAILABLE IN A TIMELY MANNER, THE PROBLEM OF TRANSPORTING MARINE ASSAULT FORCES TO THE AREA WAS NOT SO DEFINED. TWO OPTIONS WERE AVAILABLE: WAIT UNTIL AN ARG/MAU COULD ARRIVE ON THE SCENE ON THE 16TH, OR RESPOND IMMEDIATELY BY MOVING MARINES TO UTAPAO BY FIXED WING AND THEN INTO THE ASSAULT BY AIR FORCE CH/HH-53 HELICOPTERS. WHEN THE DECISION WAS MADE THAT THE ASSAULT OF KAOH TANG ISLAND WOULD BE EXECUTED ON THE 15TH, THE COMPOSITION, SIZE AND RATE OF BUILDUP WAS IMMEDIATELY LIMITED BY THE RELATIVELY FEW HELICOPTERS AVAILABLE AND THE LONG TURNAROUND TIME FOR EACH LIFT. THE HELICOPTER LOSSES SUSTAINED IN THE INITIAL ASSAULT CUT TO ABOUT HALF THE CAPABILITY TO CONTINUE THE INSERTION FROM UTAPAO. ONCE THE CORAL SEA WAS WITHIN ABOUT 10 MILES OF KAOH TANG ISLAND, DRASTICALLY REDUCING THE HELO TURNAROUND TIME, ADEQUATE SUPPORT WAS AVAILABLE FOR THE EXTRACTION PHASE. THE CONTINUOUS DEPLOYMENT OF AN ARG/MAU TO THE SOUTH CHINA SEA/GULF OF THAILAND AREA WOULD HAVE PROVIDED A MORE APPROPRIATE, RAPID RESPONSE FORCE.

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SUCH DEPLOYMENT WOULD, AMONG OTHER THINGS, REQUIRE THE COLLECTION OF SUFFICIENT NAVAL ASSETS TO SUPPORT TWO ARG/MAUs IN WESTPAC AS DURING THE VIETNAM WAR.

THUS, PARTICULAR ATTENTION MUST BE PAID TO PROVIDING FORCE FLEXIBILITY, PARTICULARLY IN THE FIELD OF AIRMOBILE SUPPORT BY ALL SERVICES.

THIS FLEXIBILITY EXTENDS TO A NEED TO BE ABLE TO MOVE HEAVY LIFT. HELOS QUICKLY BY MAC AIRLIFT; POSSIBLY A DECIDING FACTOR FOR SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN SUCH SITUATIONS IN THE FUTURE. -- THE FEASIBILITY OF EQUIPPING ☐ HEAVY LIFT HELOS FOR AERIAL REFUELING, AND INSTALLING FIRE PREVENTION FOAM IN EXTERNAL FUEL TANKS, SHOULD ALSO BE EXAMINED.

TACAIR SUPPORT WAS READILY AVAILABLE WHEN REQUIRED THROUGHOUT THE OPERATION AND FLOW WAS CONTROLLED BY THE ABCCC.

THE ABCCC PROVED TO BE AN ESSENTIAL FORWARD EXTENSION TO THE

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TACTICAL AIR CONTROL SYSTEM.

THE OV-10s LOW SPEED, LOW ALTITUDE CAPABILITIES COMBINED WITH EXPERIENCED AND TRAINED OV-10 FORWARD AIR CONTROLLERS MAKE THESE AIRCRAFT WELL-SUITED TO THE SUPPORT OF AIR-GROUND OPERATIONS.

AC-130 SPECTRE AIRCRAFT WERE VERY USEFUL DUE TO THEIR SOPHISTICATED SENSORS, COMMUNICATION, AND ARMAMENT CAPABILITY. THE FORWARD-LOOKING INFRA-RED SYSTEM WAS PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE IN LOCATING ENEMY POSITIONS BY OBSERVATION OF MUZZLE FLASHES.

CINCPAC REPORTS THAT ACTION HAS BEEN INITIATED TO RETAIN IN-THEATER CERTAIN SPECIALIZED WEAPON SYSTEMS WHICH WERE EITHER EMPLOYED IN THE MAYAGUEZ OPERATION OR WHICH, IN RETROSPECT, COULD HAVE PROVED VALUABLE. THESE INCLUDE COMBAT TALON C-130 UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE AIRCRAFT WITH TERRAIN FOLLOWING RADAR AND FORWARD LOOKING INFRA-RED, ABCCC AIRCRAFT, AND THE BLU-82B 15000 POUND SPECIAL PURPOSE BOMB WHICH PRODUCES UNIQUE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BLAST EFFECTS. IT IS CINCPAC'S OPINION THAT LOSS OF THESE SYSTEMS WOULD MAKE PACOM LESS CAPABLE OF RESPONDING TO FUTURE HOSTILE CHALLENGES.

SLIDE 5 OFF (SLIDE 6 ON (DOCTRINE)

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ALTHOUGH EXISTING DOCTRINE WAS GENERALLY FOLLOWED AND FOUND TO BE SOUND, THERE IS A NEED TO GIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE FOR FIRE SUPPORT UNDER SIMILAR INCIDENTS IN THE FUTURE. TACTICAL DOCTRINE GOVERNING HELICOPTER ASSAULTS NORMALLY CALLS FOR EXTENSIVE LANDING ZONE PREPARATION BY TACAIR AND ARTILLERY OR NGF. WHEN THE MISSION IS TO RESCUE UNLOCATED FRIENDLIES, HOWEVER, NORMAL LZ PREPARATION MAY POSE AN UNACCEPTABLE THREAT TO THEIR LIVES, AND ALTERNATIVE INSERTION TECHNIQUES ARE REQUIRED. THE USE OF SMOKE SCREEN/RIOT CONTROL AGENTS OR HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS TO SCREEN/PROTECT HELO MOVEMENT OR THE EMPLOYMENT OF A SINGLE HELO OR FIXED WING AIRCRAFT TO TEST ENEMY RESISTANCE MAY HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE. HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS COULD HAVE BEEN AVAILABLE ONLY IF AN ARG/MAU HAD BEEN ON STATION OR IF ATTACK HELOS HAD BEEN ABOARD THE CORAL SEA.

SLIDE 6 OFF      SLIDE 7 ON

NEXT ARE THE CATEGORIES OF RECONNAISSANCE AND INTELLIGENCE.

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~~SECRET~~

WARNING PROVIDED BY INDICATIONS AND WARNING (I&W) WAS ADEQUATE AND TIMELY. BOTH NSA AND IPAC REPORTED ON THE FIRST KC ACTS AGAINST FOREIGN SHIPPING.

INTELLIGENCE DISSEMINATION WAS TIMELY., HOWEVER, SOME SMALL DELAYS WERE ENCOUNTERED BECAUSE RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT AND PHOTO INTERPRETATION FACILITIES WERE NOT COLOCATED WITH COMMAND ELEMENTS. COLOCATION OF ALL ELEMENTS WHENEVER POSSIBLE, WOULD ENSURE RAPID PHOTO INTERPRETATION IN SUPPORT OF FAST MOVING CONTINGENCIES.

PROCESSING OF PRODUCTS FROM STRATEGIC PHOTO RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT (U-2) WAS NOT TIMELY ENOUGH FOR USE IN SUCH A FAST-MOVING EVENT.

P-3 AIRCRAFT PROVED VALUABLE BUT DEMONSTRATED THE NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROCEDURES TO RAPIDLY INTRODUCE HAND HELD PHOTOGRAPHY INTO OTHER RECONNAISSANCE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS.

FINALLY, THE NEED FOR COMPASS LINK, OR A SIMILAR SYSTEM, IN EACH THEATER FOR RAPID TRANSMISSION OF HIGH INTEREST IMAGERY SHOULD BE EXAMINED.

SLIDE 7 OFF      SLIDE 8 ON

JOINT TRAINING EXERCISES APPEAR TO BE ONE OF THE KEYS TO SUCCESS IN FUTURE INCIPENTS. CINCPAC RECOMMENDS THAT THE NUMBER

OF JOINT INCIDENT EXERCISES BE INCREASED TO MAINTAIN THE EXPERTISE REQUIRED TO SUCCESSFULLY PLAN AND EXECUTE AN OPERATION OF THIS TYPE. CINCPAC INDICATED THAT SUCH TRAINING WILL COMMENCE WITH PACOM CPXs AND PLANS TO MOVE TO HIGHER LEVEL POLITICAL-MILITARY GAMES (POSSIBLY INTER-DEPARTMENTAL) AND THEN TO FREQUENT EXERCISES WITH JOINT FORCE PARTICIPATION.

SLIDE 8 OFF - SLIDE 9 ON  
CRISES, SUCH AS THE MAYAGUEZ, COULD EASILY DEVELOP AT ANY LOCATION WORLDWIDE. THE POTENTIAL WAS THERE DURING THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS OF 1973 AND DURING THE TURKISH INVASION OF CYPRUS IN 1974. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO PREDICT NOR MAINTAIN DETAILED OPERATIONS PLANS FOR EVERY CONTINGENCY. RATHER, WE SHOULD ENSURE THE AVAILABILITY OF TRAINED, EXPERIENCED STAFFS AT EACH REGIONAL COMMAND ECHELON CAPABLE OF REALISTIC, SHORT NOTICE PLANNING, AND TIED TOGETHER THROUGH AN EFFECTIVE WORLDWIDE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM. COUPLED TO THIS CAPABILITY MUST BE A MIX OF APPROPRIATELY BASED TACTICAL, STRATEGIC, AND SUPPORT FORCES MAINTAINED IN A HIGH STATE OF READINESS AND

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FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO BE RAPIDLY AND EFFECTIVELY ASSEMBLED INTO A SPECIAL PURPOSE TASK FORCE.

UNDERSCORING THE WHOLE EPISODE OF THE MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT IS A FINAL OBSERVATION---THE MISSION WAS SUCCESSFULLY ACCOMPLISHED BY IMMEDIATELY, RAPIDLY, AND FORCEFULLY RESPONDING TO A BLATANT CASE OF INTERNATIONAL PIRACY. SUCH RESPONSE, HOWEVER, EVOLVED UNDER SPECIFIC POLITICAL, DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS UNIQUE TO THE SITUATION AT THE TIME; AND THEREFORE, THE LESSONS LEARNED MUST BE CAREFULLY WEIGHED FOR APPLICABILITY IN FUTURE INCIDENTS IN WHICH THE POLITICAL, DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY FACTORS MAY BE SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT.

THIS COMPLETES MY BRIEFING.

REFINERY  
ATTACKED BY TACAIR

PORT FACILITY  
ATTACKED BY TACAIR

AIRFIELD  
ATTACKED BY TACAIR

MAYAGUEZ

USMC  
REGAINED  
CONTROL

USMC GSF INSERTED

0 10 20 30 Nautical Miles

Poulo Wai Island

MAYAGUEZ INTERCEPTED/RECORDED



LESSONS LEARNED  
POINTS COVERED

- PLANNING
- COMMAND, CONTROL, COMMUNICATIONS
- FORCES
- DOCTRINE
- RECONNAISSANCE AND INTELLIGENCE

## LESSONS LEARNED

-PLANNING-

- NO EXISTING PLAN
- SOUND EMERGENCY PLANNING
  - NO DETAILED OPORDS
  - FUTURE PLANNING FEASIBILITY
  - KEYS TO FUTURE SUCCESS

LESSONS LEARNED  
-COMMAND, CONTROL, COMMUNICATIONS-

- SHORTCOMINGS

- APPARENT NEEDS

- SECURE VOICE NET UPGRADE/EXTENSION
- HIGH ALTITUDE RELAY CAPABILITY
- EQUIPMENT COMPATIBILITY

# LESSONS LEARNED -FORCES-

## ● HELICOPTERS

- AVAILABILITY
- COMPATIBILITY WITH MAC AIRLIFT
- REFUEL CAPABILITY
- PROTECTED FUEL TANKS

## ● OTHER

- TACAIR
- ABCCC
- FAC AIRCRAFT
- AC-130's
- COMBAT TALON AIRCRAFT
- RH-53's

## LESSONS LEARNED DOCTRINE

- BASICALLY SOUND
- FIRE SUPPORT FOR HELICOPTER ASSAULT
  - TACAIR/ ARTILLERY/NGF
  - SMOKE SCREEN/RIOT CONTROL AGENTS
  - HELO/FIXED WING TEST LANDING ZONE
  - HELO GUNSHIPS
- FLEXIBILITY AND IMAGINATION
- RESULTS PROPORTIONAL TO PLANNING AND COORDINATION TIME

LESSONS LEARNED ,

-JOINT EXERCISES-

● MAINTAIN EXPERTISE

● CINCPAC PROPOSED PROGRAM

## LESSONS LEARNED

-RECONNAISSANCE AND INTELLIGENCE-

## ● WARNING

## ● DISSEMINATION

## ● PHOTO PROCESSING

## ● HAND-HELD PHOTOGRAPHY

## ● COMPASS LINK

## LESSONS LEARNED

SUMMARY

- SHORT NOTICE PLANNING/EFFECTIVE COMMO
- FORCE READINESS AND FLEXIBILITY
- COMMAND/CONTROL SYSTEM EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE
  - WEIGH LESSONS BEFORE APPLYING

IMMEDIATE, RAPID, FORCEFUL RESPONSE = MISSION SUCCESS