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DAIM-FAR-RR # 19-Imm DATE: 17 June 1987

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 1ST AVIATION BRIGADE
APO San Francisco 96307
"NGUY-HIEM"

AVBA-C

7 January 1967

SUBJECT: Tactical Lessons Learned Nr. 3

TO: SEE DISTRIBUTION

The items listed below have been extracted from brigade units' quarterly reports of lessons learned for the period 1 August - 31 October 1966, and are published as tactical lessons learned Nr. 3.

1. AIRMOBILE OPERATIONS IN PACIFICATION AREAS

Item: Aircraft receive excessive hits while supporting pacification missions.

Discussion: Aviation units participating in pacification missions attribute the high number of aircraft hits to the following conditions:

- a. Preparatory fires are not normally used.
- b. Suppressive fires are not normally authorized.
- c. Fire cannot be returned unless a clearly defined target is presented.

Observation: Commanders at all echelons must understand the increased degree of risk involved when firing restrictions are imposed. Smoke generators, smoke grenades and CS gas can be effectively used in some cases to screen landing zones and pick-up zones from enemy observation and fire.

2. AIR DELIVERED SMOKE GRENADES

Item: Delivery of smoke grenades using XM-3 dispenser.

Discussion: Smoke grenades have been dispensed to screen landing zones and pick-up zones from enemy observation.

Observation: Although this system has been very effective when operating on dry terrain, the grenade now in use has proven to be unsatisfactory for use in rice paddy or swampy areas. This problem may be

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alleviated by a smoke grenade with a floating capability that is now in-country. This smoke grenade will be tested by selected brigade units.

3. DISTRESS SIGNALS

Item: Light marker, distress S-DV-5/E

Discussion: The light marker, distress is a survival item issued to aviators. It is a pocket sized strobe light and emits flashes that can be seen during day and night. These flashes often resemble muzzle flashes from small arms weapons.

Observation: In order to alleviate this problem the distress markers now being issued are equipped with blue filters. Until the old distress markers are phased out of the system, they can be used successfully by painting the clear lens cover with blue "magic-marker".

4. INSTRUMENT FLIGHT TRAINING

Item: Aviator proficiency in instrument flying.

Discussion: Frequently combat support missions cannot be accomplished because rain, low cloud layers, darkness or blowing dust have made it impossible for pilots to maintain visual reference with the ground.

Observation: Aviation unit commanders must assure that all assigned aviators maintain instrument proficiency, so they can accomplish assigned missions under marginal weather conditions. Whenever possible at least one instrument qualified pilot should be assigned to each aircraft on any mission when marginal weather is expected.

5. USE OF SMOKE

Item: Use of base ejection smoke in conjunction with artillery preparation.

Discussion: Helicopters inbound to an LZ, or operating in the vicinity of a proposed landing zone, often experience difficulty in locating the gun target line and determining when the preparation is completed. A base ejection smoke round fired early in the preparation can assist aircraft operating in the area in locating and identifying the GT line. Smoke fired late in the preparation can denote that the preparation is about to cease.

Observation: Base ejection smoke rounds are effective, but units

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must vary their patterns and assure that identifying signals do not become stereotyped, to prevent the VC from using them to their advantage.

6. CS RIOT CONTROL AGENT EMPLOYMENT

Item: CS chemical agent

Discussion: There is a vital need for a rapid, responsive method to deliver chemical agent CS by Army aircraft. 12th Combat Aviation Group has conducted several tests and determined that when ground contamination is not desired, CS must be dispersed from a burning type munition. The munitions available for this purpose are the E 158/159 CS cluster bomb and various adapters for 2.75" rocket tubes using the M7A2 CS grenade. The powdered form CS-1 is not suitable to establish an airborne cloud of agent in airmobile operations.

Observation: The most effective method of employing chemical agent CS in support of airmobile operations is to disperse the agent as a burning type munition.

7. CHANGE OF TACTICS

Item: Changes in enemy tactics require appropriate aviation counter measures.

Discussion: Because of the continued success of US Forces against the enemy in III Corps area, it has become apparent that the Viet Cong now consider it tactically unsound to mass their troops. This is primarily due to the airmobility available to the ground forces and the capability to react and deploy rapidly with large numbers of forces to meet any threat of an organized attack. If the enemy chooses to maintain contact he will be subjected to intense artillery and TAC Air, followed by air assaults that will bring superior forces into strategic locations around his position. Therefore the VC seem to have chosen a regressive path back to guerilla type warfare.

Observation: A review of present airmobile tactics is in order to adapt new techniques that are tailored to the changing tactics of ground forces on both sides. Units should concentrate on developing more effective methods of accomplishing missions such as "Eagle Flights" and insertion and extraction of long range patrols.

8. DOWNED AIRCRAFT

Item: Downed aircraft crew procedures

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Discussion: Rapid turnover of aviation personnel in Vietnam tends to disrupt established SOP's. Infusion programs between companies often result in indecision among crew members as to specific duties.

Observation: Recent incidents involving downed aircraft indicated a need for reemphasizing duties of individual crew members with regard to removal of weapons and radios, and establishment of a perimeter defense.

9. PICK-UP ZONES

Item: Pick-up zone coordination and preparation

Discussion: Coordination prior to the conduct of airmobile operations is a recognized requirement, but very often sufficient time is not allotted for preparation of the pick-up zone and coordination with the unit to be airlifted out of the PZ. This normally results in pathfinders not being used, or if they are used, they do not have time to properly organize the troops on the ground. Unnecessary delays in the pick-up zones can be costly in men and equipment.

Observation: Sufficient time should be allotted to this extremely important phase of an airmobile operation. When the troops on the ground have not had time to properly organize, consideration should be given to delaying the pick-up times.

10. VISUAL RECONNAISSANCE TRAINING

Item: Low passes during visual reconnaissance missions

Discussion: Fire is seldom received during the first low-level visual reconnaissance pass over an area. This is obviously because the Viet Cong have not had sufficient time to react to the situation. Repeated low-level passes normally result in fire being received, and often results in hits being taken.

Observation: Low-level passes during visual reconnaissance missions should be made only when absolutely necessary, and should be thoroughly planned prior to execution. If more than one pass is required, alternate routes must be used.

11. NIGHT COMBAT ASSAULTS

Item: Night combat assaults

Discussion: During a three month period the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion conducted four battalion size night combat assaults. In addition, numerous company size and smaller night combat assault missions were planned and executed. These night missions were conducted

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under varying light and weather conditions and using several different techniques.

Observation: Night combat assaults can be successfully executed, but more thorough planning is required than for daylight operations. For battalion size operations a minimum of 24 hours should be made available to the aviation units for planning, coordination and preparation. Aviation units must continue to stress night training for air crews.

12. NIGHT LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

Item: Marking and identification of night landing zones and check points.

Discussion: Under minimum light conditions one of the most difficult problems encountered is navigation and identification of landing zones. The 10th Combat Aviation Battalion experimented with several methods to assist the flights in getting to and locating the landing zone. On one occasion the release point was in the vicinity of a Special Forces Camp. The camp commander upon request agreed to light the "flaming arrow" (an arrow with a series of number 10 cans filled with sand and gasoline) and pointed it in the direction of the LZ. Other units in field locations, either on or near the intended flight path, have provided similar assistance when the tactical situation permitted. Railroad flares, which burn for 20 minutes, were tested and proved to be very effective for marking landing zones, air control points and pick-up zones. They are especially useful in the landing zones, since they emit a red light that does not have the blinding effect of a parachute flare. Lightguns have been used by pathfinders to identify the landing zone location for the flight leaders.

Observation: There are many devices available to assist flight leaders in navigating from the pick-up zones to the landing zones, and the ultimate success of the entire operation may depend on the successful use of all aids available.

13. AIRMOBILE TRAINING

Item: Airmobile training for ground units

Discussion: Newly arrived units in-country are often unfamiliar with airmobile operations and techniques. Individual soldiers in one unit recently were noted removing their load-bearing equipment and packs while enroute to the landing zone. The result was confusion and excessive time spent in the LZ.

Observation: Aviation units should assure that newly arrived

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units are especially well-briefed prior to airmobile operations. Whenever possible, aircraft should be made available to newly arrived units for training prior to the conduct of actual combat assaults. Aviation unit commanders will provide qualified aviation personnel to assist ground units in training for airmobile operations.

14. LANGUAGE BARRIER

Item: Reducing the language barrier during combat assaults.

Discussion: Misunderstandings frequently occur between US aircraft crews and Free World Military Assistance Forces being transported. One method that has been successfully used to alleviate this problem is the preparation and use of bilingual phrase cards that are kept in each aircraft.

Observation: All units should continually seek successful methods of breaking down the language barrier. Any method that proves successful should be passed on to other aviation units.

15. HOSTILE FIRE

Item: Hostile ground fire

Discussion: Numerous transport aircraft receive hits from small arms while flying low level. Steps to be taken to prevent or minimize hostile fire damage are:

- a. Maintain current hostile fire NOTAMS and maps at each aviation unit operations.
- b. Avoid over-flying known or suspected hostile areas.
- c. When at low altitude, because of low overcast conditions, make all climbs over secure areas.
- d. Contact ground personnel for hostile fire advisories prior to attempting landings at all strips.
- e. When unable to fly above the range of small arms, contour fly to deny the enemy observation and to minimize exposure time.

Observation: Adherence to the above techniques will result in fewer hits by ground fire.

16. BUDDY SYSTEM OF FLIGHT FOLLOWING

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Item: Flight following procedures during area reconnaissance in mountainous regions, where following by Air Traffic Control elements is not feasible.

Discussion: In the visual reconnaissance program, all areas must be kept under constant surveillance. Therefore it is necessary to operate over extensive areas and often out of contact with ATC. Most of these mountainous areas are covered with dense jungle foliage, characterized by double or triple foliage canopies. This jungle cover precludes immediate detection of downed aircraft.

Observation: Dual aircraft missions in such "void" areas, employing one ship in an "over-watching" role while the other conducts reconnaissance at low level has proven effective in both accuracy of coverage, and in security of the aviator and observer in the event of forced landing.

17. COMMAND

Item: Assumption of command

Discussion: Briefings prior to an airmobile operation normally include the designation of an air mission commander and an alternate air mission commander. During a recent company sized operation, both the air mission commander and his alternate had their aircraft shot down simultaneously. The assistant operations officer took charge and the unit completed the mission successfully.

Observation: A chain of command should be established prior to each operation, that at least includes mission commander, alternate mission commander, gun platoon leader and transport flight leaders.

18. MEDICAL EVACUATION

Item: Evacuation of wounded personnel

Discussion: Wounded and injured personnel are continually being evacuated to inappropriate medical facilities. Hospitals will always treat seriously wounded individuals, but evacuation to the wrong facility causes administrative problems, and often results in the wounded or injured person having to be moved again as soon as his health permits.

Observation: Daily mission briefings should include information concerning locations for evacuation of US, RVN and Free World Military

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Assistance Forces casualties. The 1st Aviation Brigade Flight Surgeon is preparing a list of medical evacuation facilities. This list will be distributed to all brigade units.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

W L Vinette

W. L. VINETTE
Major, AGC
Adjutant General

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Plus Special