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"ARMORED CAVALRY - ROME PLOW MARRIAGE"

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APPENDIX II

Colonel Hiep, fellow Armor soldiers. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to address the 1971 Armor Conference today. Your schedule for today shows a discussion of U.S. armor employment by the 1st Brigade, 5th Mech Div, but because of the stand-down of that unit, I have been asked to share with you some thoughts concerning armored cavalry in MR III -- specifically the armored cavalry role in land clearing operations.

What I intend to do is talk about two major phases of the Rome Plow operations of the 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, in Tay Ninh and Hau Nghia Provinces -- Rome Plow security and reconnaissances-in-force.

Reconnaissance-in-force (RIF) missions for Rome Plow operations are not unlike other RIF operations. Simply stated, the armored cavalry squadron is well suited by its mobility, firepower, and communications (the very essence of armor, as General Abrams just mentioned) to move into areas with the force required to exploit meeting engagements and to determine the size, composition, and disposition of the enemy. The basic fundamental of reconnaissance still applies -- we orient on the enemy or the area designated for reconnaissance.

The standard Rome Plow cutting cycle runs about forty-five days, then the plows stand down for extensive maintenance. It is during the plow stand-down that reconnaissance-in-force missions can be most effective. The RIF phase of Rome Plow operations is conducted for four principal reasons:

(1) To determine trafficability of the area in preparation for the return of the 37-ton plows. As General Abrams mentioned in his presentation this morning, it is wasteful to employ armor in swampy terrain where most of the effort must be expended to extricate downed vehicles rather than exploit armor's firepower against the enemy. I have seen too many operations stopped completely because the vehicles became stuck in the mud. Two recent trafficability analyses in the Boi Loi Woods pointed out the need for bridging to accomplish the mission. For example, in reconnoitering the area along Highway 19 between Khiem Hanh and Dau Tieng, it was determined that an armored vehicle launched bridge would be required. Similarly, reconnaissance efforts in the lower Boi Loi Woods area indicated a requirement for bridging to enable the plows to move into the cut area; this engineering task was accomplished quickly and efficiently by the 301st Engineers (ARVN);

(2) To determine enemy strengths, weaknesses, and dispositions;

(3) To keep the enemy on the move -- to harass him; and

(4) To help in planning Rome Plow operations, for example, the size and shape of the cut or which areas should receive priority for tactical reasons.

One may ask why the reconnaissance phase is needed, since the area is going to be plowed anyway. It must be remembered that Rome Plows are very vulnerable to enemy weapons, particularly RPGs. The reconnaissances-in-force tend to prevent the enemy from concentrating to counter land clearing efforts.

We seek contact during the RIF operations, but when the plows arrive to cut the wooded area, time spent fighting will reduce plow cutting time, resulting in less acreage cut. We may lessen the requirement for fighting during the cutting cycle by a thorough, aggressive reconnaissance-in-force.

Well, what forces should be used in the reconnaissance phase of land clearing operations? In our operations in Hau Nghia and Tay Ninh Provinces, we have used a variety of forces -- air force, army, and navy -- relying heavily upon a combined Vietnamese/US relationship. Our operations have used air strikes, naval screens along the Saigon River flank, multi-caliber artillery (both Vietnamese and US tubes), and task forces of Vietnamese infantry and US armored cavalry. We have also used "pink" teams (a Cobra gunship and light observation helicopter) for screening missions and aero-rifle elements in "snatch" missions along the fringes of the Boi Loi Woods. Population and resources control measures have been important; for this aspect of our RIF tasks we have used the National Police and armored cavalry elements to establish mobile control points. The major teaching point here is that planning for the employment of armored cavalry in reconnaissance-in-force operations should consider the use of all available support.

Why the infantry/armored cavalry combination? There are several very practical reasons, I think. While ACAVs (M113) and Sheridans (M551) are vulnerable to large mines, they do protect the infantry from antipersonnel mines and boobytraps. When working in heavily bunkered and forested areas, however, the infantry is essential for checking bunker and tunnel complexes.

It is not normally desirable to dismount armor crewmen to investigate bunkers because it takes them away from their crew-served weapons. A solution, of course, would be to insure that the armored cavalry has adequate infantry, either organic or attached.

Another practical matter with regard to our reconnaissance-in-force operations in MR III is the positioning of the infantry. Most often we have mounted the infantry on our track vehicles during approach marches and in mined and boobytrapped areas. But the infantry must dismount to look into tunnels, spider holes, bunkers, and clumps of trees which may contain cache sites. Infantry can operate appropriately between track vehicles and to their flanks, but the utmost care must be taken to avoid having infantry directly to the rear of track vehicles. Upon taking significant fire, a track vehicle can be expected to make adjustments in its position, for example, to back to the rear quickly to allow artillery support to be provided or to take advantage of available cover. Even in medium vegetation there is the possibility of vehicles backing over the infantry if the infantry is directly behind the ACAVs and Sheridans.

The key to harmonious infantry-armored cavalry operations is control -- control which comes from careful planning, good radio communications, proper use of pyrotechnics, and good attention to safety. Also, when armored cavalry and infantry work together with low-flying helicopters providing surveillance, particular care must be taken to insure that the light observation helicopter

is not struck by friendly fire during either a contact or when ground elements are conducting reconnaissance by fire.

Very close planning is required for the evacuation and maintenance of vehicles during the reconnaissance operations. Rarely is an adequate, secure axis available to permit speedy evacuation. When a vehicle breaks down during our operations, unit maintenance attempts to make repairs. If evacuation is required during the early stages of the reconnaissance, the maintenance element of the unit whose vehicle is down is escorted to the disabled vehicle and the vehicle is evacuated to a maintenance area. However, once a unit has proceeded beyond about one half its prescribed route, the unit normally must tow the vehicle with another combat vehicle -- not a wholly satisfactory solution because it decreases the capability of the towing vehicle to perform its combat mission and places additional stress on its transmission.

A final point with regard to RIF operations -- formations. There are many variations to standard Armor combat formations that can be adapted to RIF operations in jungle areas, but in practice the 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, has most often used the three shown here (Charts A, B, and C). Let's quickly examine the major merits of each formation.

Chart A shows the line formation. We use this formation in the more open areas. As you can see, it provides wide coverage with maximum firepower to the front. The formation is more difficult to control than others and,

of course, sacrifices some security to the flanks.

Next is the flying wedge, which we have used with excellent results in light scrub growth. This formation provides good firepower to both the front and the flanks -- good all-round security. In the dense growth, however, we have found this formation somewhat difficult to control.

The final formation I will mention here is the double bust which is really a variation of the column. This formation obviously provides less firepower to the front than the two I have just described, but firepower to the flanks is excellent as you can see. The double bust is the formation we most often use when operating in moderate-to-heavy jungle, since the lead vehicles bust through the heavy growth, thus easing the way for the remaining elements. Also, this formation provides excellent control and minimum exposure to enemy boobytraps and mines which, as you know, abound in the Boi Loi Woods where we have been operating. If mines are hit, less combat power is usually lost than when a minefield is hit along a broad front.

So much for reconnaissance-in-force operations -- next a few words on Rome Plow security.

As armored cavalry security forces we give close attention to both the area to be cleared and the night defensive position (NDP) occupied by the plows and security forces.

First, the cutting area (Chart D). Along the top of the chart you see the mobile security force. This force is normally led by a conventional bulldozer which cuts a security road around the area to be cleared that day; the dozer detonates boobytraps and mines that may be in the path of the mobile security forces -- usually an armored cavalry troop (-). The security elements operate about fifty meters to the outside of the internal cutting plows. As the Rome Plows continue their cutting, with the area to be cut getting smaller and smaller, the security element continues its parallel path around them. The armored cavalry forces screen the cutting plows and rapidly respond to enemy forces attempting to enter the screen or attack the plows from within. When infantry are available, they will ride on the security vehicles during the first trip around the cut -- the initial trace. Thereafter, the infantry sweep the cut area well behind the plows to search exposed bunkers carefully and sweep through small patches of vegetation around bomb craters or near streams where the heavy vehicles cannot travel.

Additional security is provided through the use of static blocking positions placed astride likely enemy avenues into and out of the cut area. The number of positions varies with the enemy situation and terrain, but normally a troop (-), or two platoons, performs these tasks.

Additionally, "pink" teams establish aerial screens and conduct reconnaissance, while artillery blocking fires are used to deny the enemy entry into the area. Another helpful security measure is the use of National Police to conduct population/resources control operations, as was done during the RIF phase.

To sum up the security aspect, both mobile and static security elements are used, supplemented with infantry and police assistance, artillery support, and "pink" team coverage.

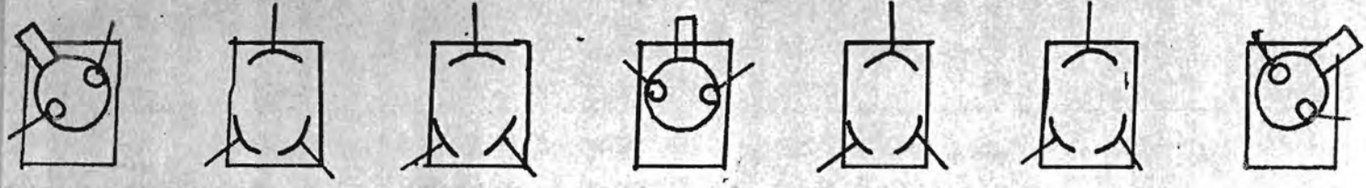
Operations within the screen are fairly simple as you can see on Chart D. The plows cut overlapping swaths of jungle in an ever-decreasing perimeter. Normally the plows will cut in a counter-clockwise direction since it affords the operators better visibility. Following behind the plows in the cut area will be a maintenance element (drag element) which aids downed plows and helps extract them from marshy areas and bomb craters and evacuate them to the NDP for repair.

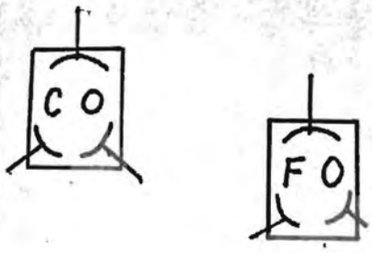
Night or day the near-by NDP is a hub of activity. The position houses both the armored cavalry and land clearing elements. Normally, two armored cavalry platoons remain in the NDP during the day to provide security as well as perform maintenance. The NDP also contains the heavy maintenance elements of the land clearing forces. Night defensive positions are moved frequently both as a deceptive measure and to place the plows closer to the cutting areas. Because of the frequent NDP moves, we do not make heavy use of protective wire. However, extensive use is made of defensive concentrations (mortar and artillery), claymore mines, and trip flares. Radar, organic weapons, and the berm constructed by the plows make the NDP a formidable outpost.

Well, I see my time is up. I would like to close by stressing again that armored cavalry forces are well suited for Rome Plow security operations and the important reconnaissance that must precede land clearing efforts. Together, Rome Plows and armored cavalry make a formidable team. The Rome Plow - armored cavalry "marriage" has proved to be an highly effective arrangement. I believe that our combined forces performing these land clearing operations are writing an important chapter in the history of Armor.

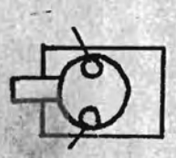
Thank you for sharing your time with me.

LINE FORMATION

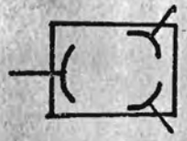




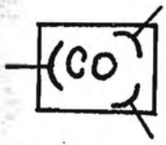
LEGEND



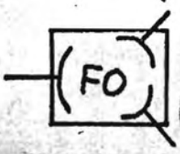
M551
SHERIDAN



M113
ACAV



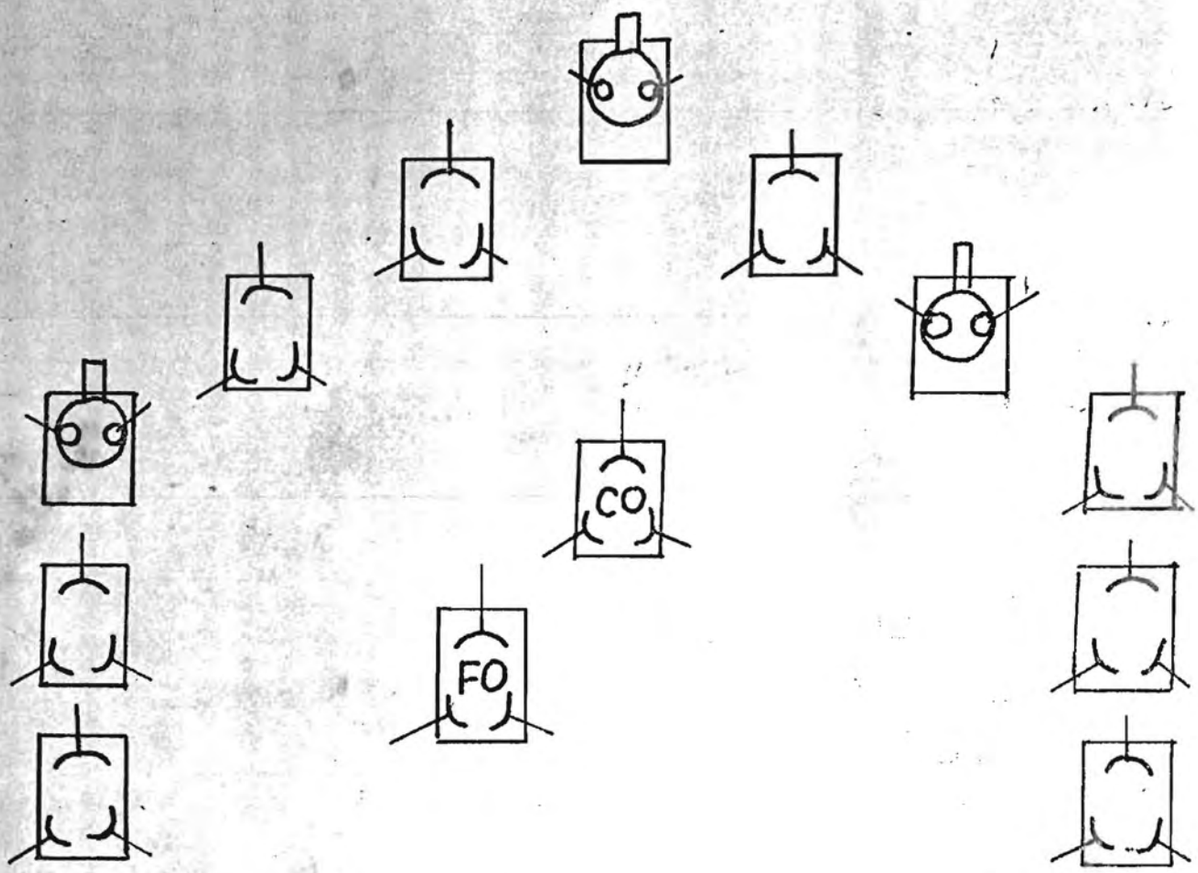
COMMANDER'S
TRACK



FORWARD
OBSERVER

CHART A

FLYING WEDGE FORMATION



LEGEND

M551 SHERIDAN

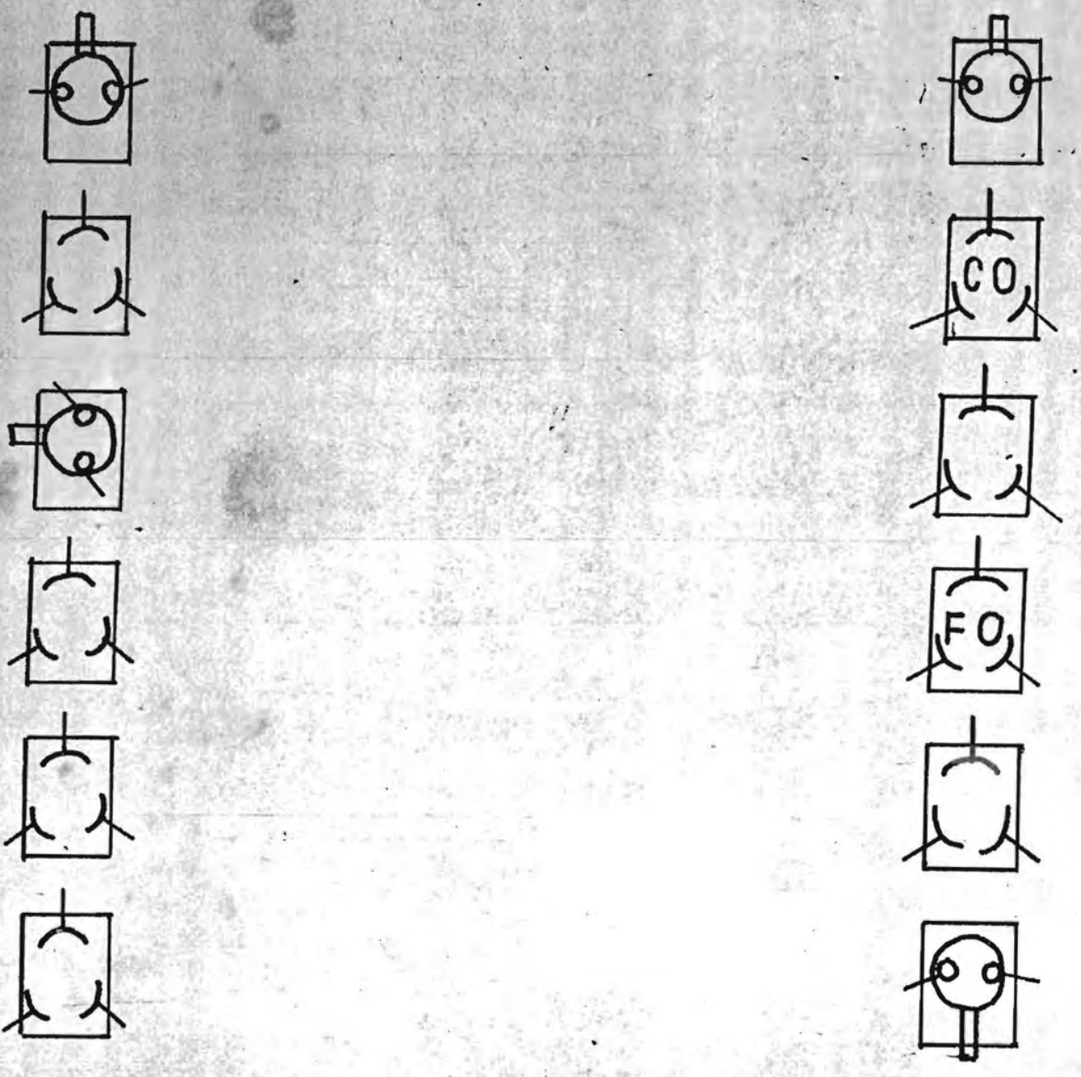
M113 ACAV

CO COMMANDER'S TRACK

FO FORWARD OBSERVER

CHART B

DOUBLE BUST FORMATION



LEGEND

M551 SHERIDAN

M113 ACAV

COMMANDER'S TRACK

FORWARD OBSERVER

CHART C