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28th MHD, AAC

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
28TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
11TH ARMORED CAVALRY REGIMENT
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96257

AVIC-WE

20 February 1969

SUBJECT: Exit Interview

Office, Chief of Military History
Washington, D.C. 20315

1. The attached exit interview was conducted with Captain Paul S. Renschen and First Sergeant Edmund L. Ellsworth. Captain Renschen was commanding officer of A Troop, 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, from 9 July to 1 December 1968. First Sergeant Ellsworth became first sergeant of A Troop in January of 1966, deployed to Vietnam with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and continued as first sergeant until December 1968. The interview was conducted by Captain William B. Overbay, Commanding Officer, 28th Military History Detachment, at the Detachment office on 1 February 1969.
2. The interview was recorded at a speed of 3 3/4 IPS on a Sony TC-530 tape recorder. Channel one was used for all recording. There is no security classification or restrictions on the tape. The interview covers significant events, accomplishments, problem areas, and lessons learned of a commander and his first sergeant.
3. The following is a general synopsis of the interview:
 - a. Introduction. (000-013)
 - b. What are your general evaluations of job requirements, tenure of command, and personal qualifications of a commanding officer? A first sergeant? (014-016)
 - (1) CO: Observed and approved the policy of proving an officer's ability in staff offices before his assumption of a command. He cited his prior command and staff time, but suggested that the prior experience really was not relevant to a command in Vietnam.

He found the tenure of command to be too short and recommended an increase from the present average of six months to three months staff time to allow higher commanders to evaluate the officer's ability, a eight month tour as

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commander, and one month deadspace for R&R's or leave. (016-037)

(2) 1SG: The first sergeant can insure smooth operations by supervising supply, promotions, administration, and general logistics and by assisting the commander on tactical missions. The first sergeant should know all aspects of the tactical mission and be in the right place at the right time, pinchhitting for both the CO and XO. There is a need for mutual trust between the CO/XO/1SG. (038-079)

b. During your command, what have your general missions been? How did you accomplish these missions? (080-081)

(1) CO: Description of two general missions. The first was reconnaissance in force missions against heavily armed enemy forces vicinity AN LOC; the second was the pacification of BINH CO Village and RIF's against fortifications and equipment. In the first, the key was to travel heavy against heavy enemy forces; and in the second, travel light and dispersed against dispersed enemy forces. (081-110)

(2) 1SG: Discussion of his role in Operation CEDAR FALLS, an extended sealing mission, JUNCTION CITY, and Operation PORTSEA, a road-clearing and RIF operation in conjunction with 1st ATF. His best operation was north of the DONG NAI River at VO DAT where A Troop participated in a rice denial mission in Dec 66. 1SG Ellsworth discussed the logistics problems involved in the operation.

(3) CO: Discussion on the problem of spreading companies thin, observing that a troop is the lowest level unit which should operate independently in isolated areas. (221-237)

(4) 1SG: Observation that the doctrine of sending a platoon to get an enemy squad, a company or troop to get a platoon, etc., is dangerously violated by piecemeal deployment of individual tracks on missions. (238-269)

c. What has been some of the significant enemy action during your command and how did the Troop react to each? (269-272)

(1) CO: The majority of CPT Renschen's tour was spent in the pacification of BINH CO. His only significant action was one with elements of the 7th NVA Division at LOC NINH. (272-306)

(2) 1SG: Description of the 2 Dec 66 ambush where elements of the 1st Squadron were ambushed and reacted to inflict heavy losses on the enemy. (309-354)

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(3) CO: Description of the May Offensive action in HAU NGHIA/DUC HOA Area. This campaign illustrated his contention that the key to armor tactics is to pile on with force against large enemy forces. CPT Renschen felt that the majority of his troop's missions were ones to which it was ill-suited. The proper role for armor is the offensive--going after the enemy no matter where he is--and not a defensive posture. (355-382)

(4) 1SG: Question and explanation of the Herringbone formation. (383-395)

d. Would you like to comment on the Troop's TOE? Was it adequate to accomplish the mission? Would you recommend any changes?

(1) CO: Recommendation for more heavy armor. More Sheridans, if they work out in Vietnam, or M41's are needed to handle the heavy bunker complexes encountered in Vietnam. (415-431)

CPT Renschen also encountered difficulty with the TOE reference his mortar tracks. The minimum range of the 4.2-inch mortar precludes its use at platoon level and must be employed as a battery. The TOE, however, provides no OIC, FDC, or experienced senior NCO to provide effective supervision. (415-431)

He also discussed the necessity in Vietnam for overstrength. As the present armor TOE does not allow for base camp deployments, CPT Renschen recommended either the initiation of house-keeping units or a 10% overstrength so that TOE needs in the field are not diverted. (431-444)

(2) 1SG: 1SG Ellsworth, in further elaborating on the mortar TOE problems, recommended a minimum of one E-7 with MOS 11C40 to handle the battery. He also recommended additional PRC-25's and mine detectors at the troop and platoon level. (447-496)

1SG Ellsworth also observed that ground radar was not practical in a jungle environment and should be dropped from TOE; starlight scopes permit identification of targets, are practical in a jungle environment, and TOE allowances are sufficient. He recommended, however, that starlight scope repair capabilities be at troop or squadron level. (496-521)

(3) CO: CPT Renschen concurred on the necessity for more PRC-25's at troop and platoon level for dismounted operations and recommended replacement of radar tracks with tracks equipped with the larger starlight scopes. (552-539)

e. Do you have any comments on maintenance and logistics? Would you recommend any changes? (548-549)

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(1) CO: Maintenance support has the line unit over a barrel. They provide support only when you do it their way and they support as little and as seldom as possible. (549-562)

(2) 1SG: 1SG Ellsworth commented on the stateside T.I. of equipment in Vietnam and the effects on field strength. (563-601)

f. Do you have any comments on the training of your officers? Your middle management personnel? The overall manner of performance of your EM? (603-614)

(1) CO: One difficulty encountered was poor training for the "nuts and bolts" phase of leadership. Junior officers should be trained on the equipment they are going to use, machineguns, starlight scopes, demolitions, etc. (615-639)

(2) CO: E-6 and E-7's are what you make them. The problem was quantity, not quality. (639-655)

(3) 1SG: The instant NCO trained at Fort Knox does not work out in Vietnam. He suggested that often the instant NCO has had little choice, and therefore little motivation--toward the program. (655-682)

(4) CO: The EM are good. They are brave; they work hard and fight hard. (682-690)

(5) 1SG: The men are knowledgeable, resourceful, and brave and are the best that he has encountered in the Army. (964-707)

g. What is your evaluation of the weapons and communications facilities used by the Troop? (708-710)

(1) CO: Although Commo was good, secure transmission is needed at troop level for the CP track with squadron. (711-721)

Significant difficulty, however, was encountered with the M-60 machinegun. The problem was attributed to the fact that it was designed for infantry use and not for the hard, fixed mount like an ACAV. CPT Renschen suggested that the Browning M1919 30-cal machinegun replace the M-60. (722-757)

The Army has nothing to match the RPG, both as an anti-tank and also as an anti-personnel weapon. (758-772)

h. What effects have weather and terrain had on the use of armor? (775-777)

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(1) CO: Armor is not limited by terrain and weather to any appreciable extent. (778-786)

(2) 1SG: The only real obstacle terrain-wise are river or creek banks. Rice paddies presented no problems. The AVLB was cited as a considerable aid to armor in Vietnam. (790-841)

i. How would you characterize the artillery and air support you received? (842-844)

(1) CO: Artillery support is non-existent in Vietnam due to heavy restrictions on its use. Only the troops' own 4.2-inch mortar section was usually free for use. (846-851)

Army air support is outstanding. They are available when you want them, where you want them, and they get your target. (852-864)

Air Force air is restricted by their equipment. Their turning radius makes too much dead time during a firefight unless four or more aircraft are running the mission. (864-884)

(2) 1SG: The clock method was described. This involves coordination of indirect mortar fire and air support to keep VC/NVA pinned down. (885-929)

(3) CO: Question directed to 1SG Ellsworth about artillery support. (930-937)

(4) 1SG: Description of difficulty of obtaining artillery support from adjacent units. (939-997)

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j. What comments do you have on the ARVN units you have worked for? (000-001)

(1) CO: Although CPT Renschen characterized the ARVN military forces as non-aggressive, he has encountered both extremes within the ARVN organization. (001-012)

k. How would you evaluate the training, tactics, weapons, logistics, morale, and equipment of the VC/NVA soldier? (016-017)

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(1) CO: CPT Renschen distinguished the VC from the NVA. He found the VC to be poorly trained; the NVA, on the other hand, are well-trained. Their tactics are costly in terms of losses, but they are well-ordered and can hurt us. (018-026)

Their weapons are superior to ours. CPT Renschen cited both the RPG and also the reliability of their other weapons. The enemy is severely hampered, however, by his lack of radio equipment. (027-033)

His logistics work. They are well supplied both with ammo and food. (034-038)

CPT Renschen had no comment on morale except for the observation that the enemy will attack under even the most adverse circumstances. (039-040)

Summary. (040-042)

(2) 1SG: The enemy's tactics have changed little. They dig in as close to their targets as possible and do not use the maximum capability of their weapons. 1SG Ellsworth observed, however, that armored firepower pre-empts these tactics. (044-053)

1SG Ellsworth suggested that the enemy infiltrates as civilians, using local transportation. (054-058)

The enemy puts visual observation to good use. The local villagers, because he fears the VC, will observe our forces for patterns. 1SG Ellsworth cited enemy exploitation of patterns and stiff-necked schedules as the primary cause for Allied losses. (059-076)

1. To what advantage do the VC/NVA put terrain, weather, and our mistakes? (077-078)

(1) CO: CPT Renschen observed no enemy exploitation of weather conditions for advantage. Terrain is used--particularly in ambushes. It is possible, however, to outthink the enemy on ambushes. If a good ambush site is encountered, he's probably there; if it is poor, he is not. (079-086)

He uses mistakes when you are already in contact or when you set a pattern. Over the long run, however, he does not react. He plans too far ahead to react. (087-093)

m. Is there any other relevant information, personal observations or lessons learned that you would like to add? (093-094)

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(1) CO:

(a) Emphasis on the RPG both as a AT and AP weapon. (095-099)

(b) Stress on understanding of mine warfare. (099-106)

(c) Stress on the need for large basic loads in the ACAV and replacement of the M-60. (108-118)

W. B. Overbay

WILLIAM B. OVERBAY
CPT, Armor
Historian

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