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28th MHD, AARs
66-70
Box 2

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

AVIC-WE

9 Feb 70

SUBJECT: Exit Interview

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

1. The following interview with Lieutenant Colonel John M. Norton, First Squadron Commander, 11th ACR from 8 Sep 69 to 31 Jan 70. The interview was conducted by Captain Joel T. Matulys, Historian, at the First Squadron Rear in Quan Loi.
2. There are no restrictions on the tape. The tape covers lessons learned in Vietnam by LTC Norton.

Question:

Discuss the tactics currently used. Do you feel any changes are in order?

Answer:

"During my tour I found the best results were obtained in a contact if we stressed the offensive. Any time that my troops were fighting the enemy, they would "move out" and charge in the traditional armor fashion. By moving quickly forward and keeping up a heavy and accurate volume of fire, the enemy only was able to fire one volley. They initially fired their one round of RPG's, but with our quick charge we were able to move and pass over them before a second round could be fired. In this way we kept our casualties down.

"To do this type of action, I stressed a certain type of formation. My troops maintained a close formation - each track maintained eye ball contact with his adjacent vehicles. Then, with this closeness we combined our heavy fire to give us a "wall of fire" effect. With these methods we did well and had few casualties. For example, on the 21 December 1969 contact, the only tracks that were disabled by RPG's (two ACAVs) were hit after they developed mechanical trouble and fell behind the rest of the tracks. None of the charging vehicles were hit."

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Question:

Was your support adequate for contacts?

Answer:

"The use and control of fire support was a real problem. The scheduling and controlling of these resources is the main difficulty. For example, if you are using artillery, you can't bring in the gunships, and vice-versa. A second problem with this support is that all these resources cluster up the radio network. On 21 December 1969, I often had to leave the artillery out of the impact area. On 27 December 1969, at one point I had 12 aircraft on station and couldn't fire in artillery. I have tried two main methods of controlling this fire support. In both methods everything comes through the CO. The first method, which I used on 27 December, had the Arty LNO working on another frequency but monitoring my push. This was a little "loose", but in time this would probably work well. A second method is to just have all the support wait in line -- use one, when that is finished use another, and so on.

Another method of support is the organic mortars. I used them at troop level, primarily for illumination and protection of the NDP. Hopefully, with the .81mm instead of the 4.2", the mortars could be broken down to platoon size units."

Question:

How did you use your staff during contacts?

Answer:

"During all contacts, I use a two-man team -- the CO and S-3. One of us was in the air all the time, and we tried to overlap by 15 to 20 minutes. In this manner there is no sudden break in the continuity of control during a battle. Also, the 65 station back at the TOC is important. They must anticipate the support that will be needed, give the necessary reports, and generally relieve the commander of all worries except fighting the battle.

Question:

How did the terrain affect your operations?

Answer:

"Operations in the wet season are difficult as best. Tactically the idea

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of jungle busting is bad. The NVA will fight us when he wants and operating in the jungle for weeks on end won't help locate him unless he wants to fight. Also, it is very hard on the tracks to continue this type of operations for a long period. When operating in the jungle, you should keep two troops within close supporting distance. If possible these should be supplemented with a rifle company to actually beat the brush for the enemy. It would be nice if the regiment had a rifle battalion to use when needed for this purpose.

Question:

Discuss your training, and the problems.

Answer:

" The control of firepower is a real training problem. The machine-guns will be fired constantly with any aimed fire. The average soldier thinks that if the machinegun is going continually during a firefight he is safe, even though his fire may actually be off target. This idea can be erased with proper training. Every day my troops go through simulated battle practice in which they maneuver and shoot. This gives them the opportunity to move their elements and also see exactly where they are shooting. In our NDP's, we use the mad minute to not only keep alert but also exercise and practice with the weapons. "

Question:

How do you use the squadron's helicopters?

Answer:

" I need a good aviation leader who manages the section well. I have two LOH's and 2 UH-1's, and I only have one of each in the air at a time- the others are in maintenance. I keep a status board that reflects the hours flown to insure that I won't suddenly find that I have no ships available.

Question:

How did resupply affect your operations?

Answer:

" In Loc Ninh we used fixed wing aircraft and it hurt our operation. We had to secure the airstrip, guard the convoy to the FSB, and spend most of our day just getting supplies. When we used the Chinook the air LOC worked.

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