

AVIC-DE

6 NOV 1970

SUBJECT: Edit Interview

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

1. The attached interview was conducted with CPT Ralph A. Miles, Armor, L Troop Commander from May to October 1970. The interview was conducted by SGT Richard J. House, 28th Military History Detachment, at the S-2 office in the TOC building.
2. The tape was recorded on both sides at a speed of 1 7/8 IPS on a Sony (National) TC-350 tape recorder.
3. There are Confidential restrictions on the interview.

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SUBJECT: Exit Interview

The following is a transcript of the interview:

Question:

What is your general evaluation of your assignment as a commander, including job requirements, tenure of command, and personal qualifications?

Answer:

My evaluation of my job as a commander as far as job requirements is very simple. There were no unexpected jobs that I had to do as an armor troop commander. I was first HHT, 3/11th ACR Commander for three months, and then moved to L Troop Commander for the next five months. The tenure of command varies directly with the amount of contact the Commander is engaged in. As you get into more contacts, you have a tendency to take more chances. I found I was doing things at the end of my command that I would not have done at the beginning. My personal qualifications are a little unique. I've been in three branches of the service - the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and the Army. I came to the Army in 1963, and I took OCS in 1964. I went to Fort Knox as a recon platoon leader. After there I went to Germany as a tank company commander which I performed for five months. From there I came to Vietnam. I was medevaced from the Ashau Valley back to the States. I came back to teach at the Armor School and to go to the Career Course. I returned to Vietnam in January of 1970. My total length of time and service is thirteen years. Prior to coming into the service, I attended Westminster College for two and a half years. I'm 34 years old.

Question:

During your command, what have your general missions been? How did you accomplish these missions?

Answer:

My mission was and has been since being a commander for the 11th Cav, to find the bastards so that someone could pile on! In accomplishing this mission, I have actually had my platoons set up in an NDP and recon on foot when the terrain did not permit armor surveillance. I have accomplished cordon and search, recon in force, and search and destroy. This was primarily in Cambodia where we wanted to destroy the enemy's supplies and troops. To wrap it all up, there is no set pattern to accomplish a mission. What you have to do is consider the time, place and situation. Then you make your evaluation and put the word out to the troops as to what will be expected of them. This is most important. The guys have to know what to expect.

Question:

What is your evaluation of your troop's performance of duty?

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Answers:

I may be a little prejudiced on this question, but I feel that L Troop did an outstanding job at all times. I just carried on a tradition of the commanders before me. I wanted to give them someone they could rely on at all times. The troops did it all. Every time I wanted to move they moved. You cannot maintain an aloof officer-EM relationship in a combat zone. I never had one trooper act disrespectful against me.

Question:

What has been some of the significant enemy action during your command and how did the troop react to each?

Answer:

I won't try to answer this question in any particular order. I think it was September 3rd I was moving along the edge of a swamp behind a vehicle that was being towed. I was trying to escort it back to the NDP. My track took 3 RPG rounds. I had told the front vehicle to move out because it was a bad area. So there I was with a dead track, and the rest of my platoons back up the road about a click and a half. The speed with which they reacted to help us out was personally significant to me at the time. Then in the Cambodian Campaign, I was escorting Rome Plows. The first day the enemy hit the Rome Plows with RSG's and then AK fire. The next day we put AA's in the cut and found 2 dead enemy. During the ten days we were there, we killed 13 enemy in our cuts. On our way back to RVN, we went through an area just southwest of War Zone D in the Tan Uyen Province. In that area we encountered heavy VC activity. Our contacts were always near a stream bed where food was readily available. One thing I've noticed about the enemy, he'll come back to where he was, once he thinks we're satisfied that it's safe. The biggest I was involved in was in Cambodia. About the 20th of June, A convoy coming down the road from FSB Susan to FSB Colorado (where I was), and was ambushed. I had one platoon sweeping south and two platoons in the FSB. I called my second platoon and had them meet me so we could break up the ambush. On our way out, enemy fire from between the two FSB's was so heavy that I ordered the second platoon into a left flank so that the enemy was cut off from reaching the road. I had planned to bring another platoon out of my NDP once I was settled. However, I decided to leave them at the FSB to protect the equipment. I remained in my flank and let the artillery work the area. Generally we had a good day.

Question:

Would you like to comment on the troop's FOE? Was it adequate to accomplish the mission? Would you recommend any changes?

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Answer:

We are presently undergoing a TOE modification in which I'm giving my recommendations in communications. I feel that the VRC-12 is not the best communication in a combat vehicle which will be out roughing it in rugged terrain. I as a Troop Commander prefer to have 2 VRC-46's. The VRC-12 is too sensitive to be bouncing around, whereas it is perfect for my CP track in the rear. The 577 should have one VRC-12, one VRC-6, and one OX Receiver. If the malfunctions of the 548 can be worked out, I think 2 should go to each platoon. They are a very valuable and worthwhile vehicle when they are functional. I prefer the regular M-79 and Car 15 to the new combined M-16 and M-79 weapon. They are more flexible as individual weapons. If there is one item to be added to the TOE, I strongly recommend the old-style headset. By wearing the headset, you are more comfortable and you blend in with the rest of the troop. This would add to longevity of life. You would need 2 per platoon to protect the platoon leader and sergeant.

Question:

Do you have any comments on maintenance and logistics? Would you recommend any changes?

Answer:

As far as maintenance goes, you don't need the maintenance you need the time and parts. We did have difficulty getting some parts. When we were in Cambodia and our supply lines were extended to the max, we received supplies in everything from a LOH to a Convoy. The policy of handing in old parts to get new ones is faulty especially where batteries are concerned. How can you run your tracks while the batteries are being replaced? I'm glad to see that high mortality items are finally able to be kept in stock. Sprockets for a Sheridan used to take 3 days to get, where now maintenance sergeants can keep spare sets on hand.

Question:

Did the training that your officers received prior to coming to Vietnam prepare them for leadership in Vietnam?

Answer:

Actually, any information you receive and take to heart will prepare you for leadership. Two of my officers were students of mine at Fort Monmouth. I told them that "you are the leader, you will make the decisions, but you will discount no one in making that decision. Someone may have only been here one day longer and knows more about the situation. The lieutenants I received were excellent. One is now a troop commander.

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Question:

It has been said that the Army lacks effective middle management personnel. Would you like to comment on this statement?

Answer:

I think E-6 to E-8 is too broad of a spread to consider. One of my platoon sergeants was granted a direct commission, and they called the other one "third Lieutenant". Where we are lacking and where we are taking up the slack is in the E-5 and E-6 range. The NCOC school has done a great deal to fill the void. The only weakness all of them have is their lack of self-confidence. After they realize they're running the track, then they're squared away. This is the only place in the Army where the EM are referred to as commanders. My First Sergeants have been great.

Question:

How would you evaluate the overall performance of your EM?

Answer:

I have had every race, creed, and color in my troop, and yet when the time came to do the job it was done perfectly. They do the job not mainly because they're showing their allegiance to America, but rather to the guy next to them who's in just as deep as they are.

Question:

What effects have weather and terrain had on the use of armor?

Answer:

Sometimes you can go, sometimes you can't. No matter what the terrain looks like, unless it's positively impossible, it's always best to give it a try. In soft terrain you have to be careful not to track the vehicle. In other words, don't follow the track in front of you. If a whole platoon or troop tries this, at least one of the vehicles will be bellied up in the mud. I have found that the Sheridan does a fair job of busting jungle even though it wasn't designed for it. The Sheridan changes gears many more times than the ACAV. I would like to see the ACAV equipped with the Sheridan-type track which has the double center guide. You have to really practice to throw a track on a Sheridan. Sometimes we move through high grass which is covering huge rocks that will cause a track to be thrown very easily. The Pink Teams come in handy in these situations. They can help guide us around swamps and bomb craters that a TC can't see. So the rain has not hindered my operations at all.

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Question:

How would you characterize the artillery and air support which you received?

Answer:

It was quick, efficient, and I had the greatest confidence in where it was going to land. I had air strikes where I could see the faces of the pilots as they banked to make another run. Also Vietnamese pilots made a run for us which was very effective. To sum it up, I have no qualms of calling on artillery or air support at any time.

Question:

What comments do you have on the ARVN units you have worked with?

Answer:

The ARVN units I have worked with have been Regional(RF) and Popular(PF) forces. In the Tan Uyen Province there is a company-size force of which one or two platoons are pretty good. You have to look at these men in the light in which they are trained and operate. They are common citizens who go out and soldier for a period of time. When it gets to be 3 or 4 o'clock they look to go home to protect their family. It is sometimes difficult to get them to do what you want. There is the language barrier to contend with and an ethnic barrier. I haven't had the chance to actually work with the regular ARVN soldier. From what I've seen, the RF's are extremely improving.

Question:

How would you evaluate the training, tactics, weapons, logistics, morale, and equipment of the VC/NVA soldier?

Answer:

First, the VC, I'd say his training is excellent. If he doesn't learn his lesson well, he gets killed. The tactics of the VC are stealth and subversion. Their weapons range from the AK-47 and the XCM7A mine all the way down to a cut up, modified M-1 rifle and the 30lb concrete home-made mine. His logistics are right at home. If he is going out to hit someone he eats before he leaves. I can't say anything about the morale because I haven't had that close enough of contact. Except, when they're out in the woods and can't get back to the village for chow their morale goes way down. Their equipment is varied. I'd like to point out that they get far too much American equipment. I have always found the training of the NVA soldier to be very good. The NVA soldier will stand and fight. He'll come after you in the rubber, whereas the VC will definitely will try to avoid you in the rubber. Their weapons consist

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mainly of the B-40 rocket, the AK-47, the 82mm mortar, 60mm mortar, and many types of mines. I don't know how they get all the logistics they get. There are people dedicated to resupply their cache sites. Their equipment is very good especially their medical kits which they have to carry on them.

Question:

To what use do the VC/NVA put terrain, weather, and our mistakes?

Answer:

They use terrain by traveling where we cannot travel. A lot of times they make their moves in inclement weather to wash away their trails and cover the noise. I don't believe the enemy is as quick to take advantage of our mistakes as an allied force is. If you go through an area the same way many times, Charlie will be waiting for you with a mine sooner or later. You definitely have to vary your "modus operandi."

Question:

How do you assess the enemy's anti-tank capability at this time? What is the trend of this capability?

Answer:

As I said before, the RPG and B-40 rocket launcher are good weapons. I believe their real ace in the hole is the mine. I only lost two men in my two tours, and both of those men were killed on the same track by the same mine. The RPG man has a pucker factor just like anyone, and the first thing he thinks of after pulling that trigger is getting away.

Question:

What were your personal reactions to the Cambodian Operation?

Answer:

My personal reactions to Cambodia are that it was a good show and I'm glad I was there. I've been lucky to be in most of the big ones. I was at Queson, I was in Hue for TET of 68, I was at the Aghau Valley in 68, and finally I was in Cambodia. Although we didn't find everything we wanted to, we did quite a bit of damage to their supply lines. I firmly believe that an operation like Cambodia should be kicked off again prior to our withdrawal from Vietnam. We hurt them so bad that it has taken them quite awhile to rebuild their forces to launch attacks against free-world forces. I think the price we paid to go into Cambodia was worth the results we got. The best defense is a good offense, so I think we should hit em then leave em.