

TOW-Equipped Attack 'Copters Can Stop Armor

The Aviation Director's Comments at an OSD Press Briefing

DURING the period 15-25 May I visited the Republic of Vietnam and observed armed combat in all four military regions. As Director of Army Aviation, my prime interest was in the employment of Army aircraft and our aviators in support of our Vietnamese allies. As a former Senior Advisor to a Vietnamese infantry division, I was also particularly interested in the progress of Vietnamese forces in protecting their own country from outside interference.

During the visit I spoke with most Corps commanders and their senior advisors as well as several of the division commanders in the highly contested areas at Hue and Kontum. Additionally, I discussed military operations and tactics with Army Aviators most closely associated with the fighting, and with maintenance personnel on the problems of keeping our helicopters in the air.

The cutting edge is small

I came away strongly impressed with two major lessons. First of all, the Army attack helicopter has played a key role in the current campaign, which began 30 March with the penetration of South Vietnam across the DMZ.

As you well know, the bulk of our Army Aviation effort already has been redeployed from Vietnam. From a high of 144 aviation companies deployed in South Vietnam in 1969, our current unit strength is about one-sixth of that number. Because the remaining elements primarily are oriented on support, the cutting edge that engages in direct combat is a small portion of our remaining strength.

In terms of attack helicopters, the AH-1G *Cobra*, only a few aircraft remain operational. These are supplemented by a few old *Huey* gunships which perform specialized fire support duties.

The value of attack helicopters in the current

fighting is out of all proportion to their strength. Organizationally, the attack helicopters are the main weapon in the single attack helicopter company and the lone aerial artillery battery that remain in Vietnam. The *Cobras* also are integrated into helicopter lift companies to provide protective fires during airmobile assaults. They also form part of the reconnaissance teams of the air cavalry troops. The reconnaissance team is made up of two scout helicopters which operate low and fast over enemy-held areas to gain information. These are covered by the gunships which follow and provide protective fires for the thin-skinned scouts.

Discreet close-in fires

You know, of course, that attack helicopters work on an habitual basis with ground units. They, thus, form a close relationship and a high degree of teamwork with the supported ground unit. The attack helicopters provide sustained round-the-clock fires, inhibited very little by weather because of the unique features of the helicopter. The helicopter can fly slow or fast, can hover, and can dart about the battlefield as required by the situation.

The attack helicopter provides discreet close-in fires which for years have been highly appreciated by the Vietnamese and American infantrymen. The attack helicopter in Vietnam today is doing all of these things; and performing to the high satisfaction of the supported ground units. In most areas teams of two or three attack helicopters work together in front of ground units and are spelled off by similar teams when they must set down to re-arm and refuel.

Because there are so few attack helicopters remaining in Vietnam, they always are at the point of decision, i.e., they work where the threat is

BY BRIGADIER GEN. WILLIAM J. MADDUX, JR.

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Coverage of the battlefield is full time during daylight hours. The attack helicopters jump up at night to do battle when called upon by the ground troops.

As examples of the contribution of armed helicopters, I will cite one major action in each of the three main contested areas. At An Loc on 12 April the attack helicopters of F Battery, 79th Aerial Field Artillery met the initial onslaught of enemy tanks into the city. Utilizing only standard aerial rockets and automatic weapons, the attack helicopters killed the first six tanks to enter the city. The remaining tanks backed up into the surrounding rubber plantations and did not reappear in strength for about one month.

Surgery!

At Kontum on 26 May helicopter gunships were scrambled at 6:15 in the morning at Pleiku to fly against an enemy tank formation which was penetrating the eastern portion of the city. In the ensuing battle, 10 of 12 enemy tanks and track vehicles were destroyed by helicopter fire. This action undoubtedly contributed to stopping a strong enemy thrust. They demonstrated the surgical nature with which attack helicopters can eradicate specific enemy targets.

At Hue attack helicopters have engaged each



1LT Steve Shields (left), F Battery, 79th AFA, who flew left wing for CW2 Battery F. McIntyre (seated in the Cobra), talk over a tactical point. CW2 McIntyre was credited with the "Blue Max's" first tank kill at An Loc on 13 April.

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In this action, large numbers of enemy troops were sighted in the target area. The scout helicopters surveyed the strength and dispositions of the enemy and targeted the area for B-52 strikes the same evening. During the action, two scout helicopters were shot down. The gunships covered the aircraft while both the crews and the scouts were evacuated back to friendly held areas.

Incidentally, one scout pilot, *CPT Ronald Radcliffe*, was wounded when his scout was shot down. He is the officer who is credited with destroying a North Vietnamese tank in Quang Tri province on 28 April 1972 by hovering over the tank and dropping a white phosphorus grenade down its hatch.

On the current battlefield in Vietnam, the enemy is utilizing sophisticated equipment and new tactics. He has employed heat-seeking SA-7 *Grail* missiles for the first time. He is using large numbers of tanks. The attack helicopters have adjusted their tactics accordingly. While some helicopters may have been downed by the heat-seeking missiles, they do not appear to be particularly vulnerable.

Down on the deck

One *Cobra* pilot at An Loc told me that he saw a *Grail* launched and immediately took evasive action. The missile passed him and self-destructed at a higher altitude. Where it once was fashionable to operate at altitude for target acquisition and engagement, the helicopters now generally fly low level, i.e., under 300 feet, to do their jobs.

Aircraft losses are up. The fighting is intense. The antiaircraft, whether gun type or missiles, is sophisticated. As noted earlier, the attack helicopters usually are at the point of decision. This is where the enemy is the strongest, and, thus, more apt to inflict damage.

It is no lame excuse to say that losses must be measured against the results. The attack helicopters have performed magnificently. They may well have made the difference in success or failure of friendly forces on many occasions. Attack helicopters have been particularly effective delivering close-in fires in many close combat situations and during many long hours when weather and visibility conditions were poor.

This is not to say that the attack helicopter is the champion of the battlefield. While Army Aviators are proud of the part they play in daily ground combat, they are the first to admit that they could not perform if the ground soldier were not below them face to face with the hostile forces. In the current fighting, most Vietnamese units are fighting

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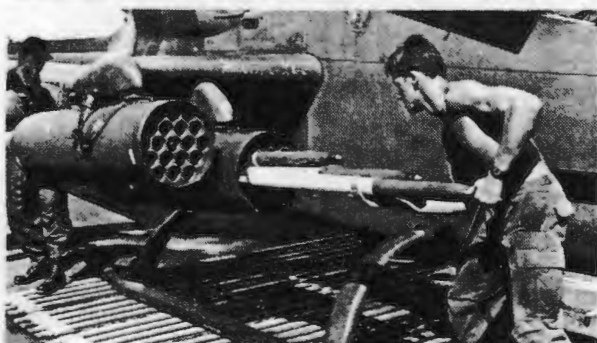
tenaciously on close terms with the enemy and giving as much as they are taking.

It is also clear that the tactical air support provided by the VNAF and by our Air Force, Navy, and Marine aviators has been magnificent and of major significance. The sum of all these efforts, each complementing the other, has resulted in the much more favorable situation which exists in Kontum today.

TOW accuracy is high

The second major lesson of my Vietnam trip is that the U.S. Army has fielded for the first time a highly effective Army aerial antitank weapon. This is the TOW missile, which is a command-guided missile launched from a UH-1 Huey gunship. "TOW" is an acronym for Tube Launched, Optically Tracked, Wire Guided.

The missile has sufficient thin steel wire to permit it to be employed at standoff ranges of several thousand meters. The pilot-gunner in the helicopter merely has to lay his sights on the target and hold it there while the missile streaks to a target hit. This occurs in a few seconds with the helicopter able to maneuver rather freely during the missile time of flight.



TOP: CPT Billy H. Causey, one of the first Cobra "Aces" credited with five tank kills during the recent NVA invasion, monitors a Blue Max fire mission. He's OpnsO of F Battery of the 79th ARA. BOTTOM: A member of Blue Max rearms a gunship, a common sight with the Company's Cobras expending 23,056 rockets in April alone. (USA photos)

Only a small number of helicopters equipped with the TOW missile — presently the old Huey gunship — are available in the Army. Some of these were shipped to Vietnam on 24 April. They are manned by Combat Developments Command pilots under MAJ Patrick L. Feore of CDCEC, Fort Ord, Calif. These aviators had been performing operational testing and had not fired the TOW missile prior to arrival in Vietnam.

After a short training period where each pilot gunner fired one missile, these few were committed at Kontum to meet an expected armor threat. To date, in 77 combat launches, they have scored 62 hits on point targets and have destroyed 39 armored vehicles, trucks, and howitzers. Other targets include a bridge, POL and ammunition dumps, bunkers, and antiaircraft weapons.

Both reliability and accuracy are very high and the TOW-mounted helicopters have not been hit by hostile fire. Some ground-mounted TOW launchers also have been deployed in limited numbers from the U.S. to Vietnam and have scored three tank kills. The helicopter, being more mobile, has had an advantage in being able to move quickly to where tanks have been first sighted and have made more kills.

SS-11/2.75 Aerial Rocket

The Army has deployed two other antitank weapons to Vietnam. First, a limited number of older SS-11 wire guided missiles have been employed against enemy armor, and have scored four kills. The SS-11 is a French missile which entered the Army inventory in the 1950s and is considerably less effective than the TOW. The SS-11 requires a high degree of gunner skill because it must be flown to a target in the same manner as a remote-controlled airplane.

The second is a dual purpose warhead for the standard 2.75" aerial rocket. The new warhead, which has been developed in the past year, has both an armor penetrating capability, with a shaped charge, and an antipersonnel fragmentation capability similar to standard rocket warheads. This warhead has been used with good effect against tanks, bunkers, and buildings. It was particularly effective in recent battles in the An Loc area where missile-equipped aircraft were not available.

In sum, Army Aviators and their attack helicopters — although now relatively few in numbers — have performed with very high effectiveness supporting our Vietnamese allies in resisting the recent North Vietnamese aggression. A major new combat dimension has been added by their now-proven effectiveness using the TOW missile against modern tanks as well as against other important point targets. With so few having proven so effective in Vietnam, it is now possible to visualize more clearly the great antitank potential which far larger numbers of modern attack helicopters and TOW missiles would bring to a modern American division.



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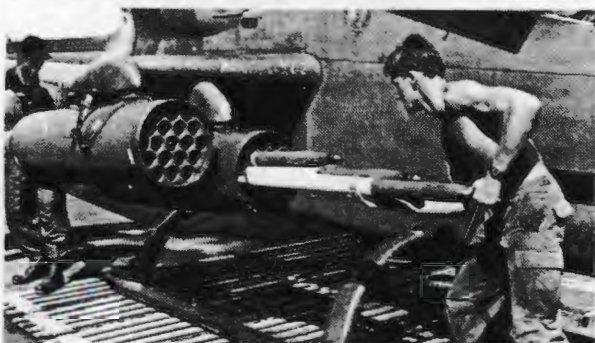
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