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COMBAT LESSONS BULLETIN

1969

NUMBER 14

1c1 TAKING THE NIGHT AWAY FROM CHARLIE 1u1

1u1 INTRODUCCION 1u1

The control of the air by free world military forces in Vietnam has effectively prevented the enemy from moving in the daytime. In response, the enemy has developed effective methods of infiltrating, maintaining communications, effecting liaison, and moving his units during the hours of darkness. Flares and heliborne searchlights providing illumination for gunships and tactical air have enjoyed some success in interrupting the enemy's night movement. They have been particularly effective along waterways where pilots can follow identifiable terrain features and evasion by the enemy is difficult. The 25th Infantry Division has further developed this concept, employing a covert means of detecting enemy night movement, and engaging him with fire from helicopters. The 1st Infantry Division is successfully employing a similar system. Both systems are known as the NIGHT HAWK.

1c1 NIGHT HAWK CONFIGURATION 1u1

The 25th Division employs the UH-1H helicopter in the NIGHT HAWK system. An AN/VSS-3 searchlight is mounted in the same frame and aligned with an AN/TVS-4 night observation device (NOD) in the doorgunner's compartment on the left side of the helicopter. A 7.62mm minigun is mounted in the cargo compartment just forward of the gunner's well. To give a right-side capability, an observer with an M-14 and starlight scope is positioned on the right side of the cargo compartment. The observer can spot targets and mark them with tracer ammunition for the doorgunner on the right side to engage with his M-60 machinegun. A sketch of the 25th Division's NIGHT HAWK configuration is shown at Figure 1. A similar system is employed by the 1st Infantry Division. Shown in the 1st Inf Div sketch at Figure 2 is the system with an ENSURE 260 S/L mounted where an AN/VSS-3 S/L is mounted in the 25th Div NIGHT HAWK. The 25th Division NIGHT HAWK team consists of a pilot, copilot, an observer and gunner for the left side, a sniper and gunner for the right side, and a representative from the unit in whose area the NIGHT HAWK is operating. The unit representative coordinates all targets before they are engaged. The 1st Division's NIGHT HAWK team consists of a pilot, copilot, two observers and two gunners.

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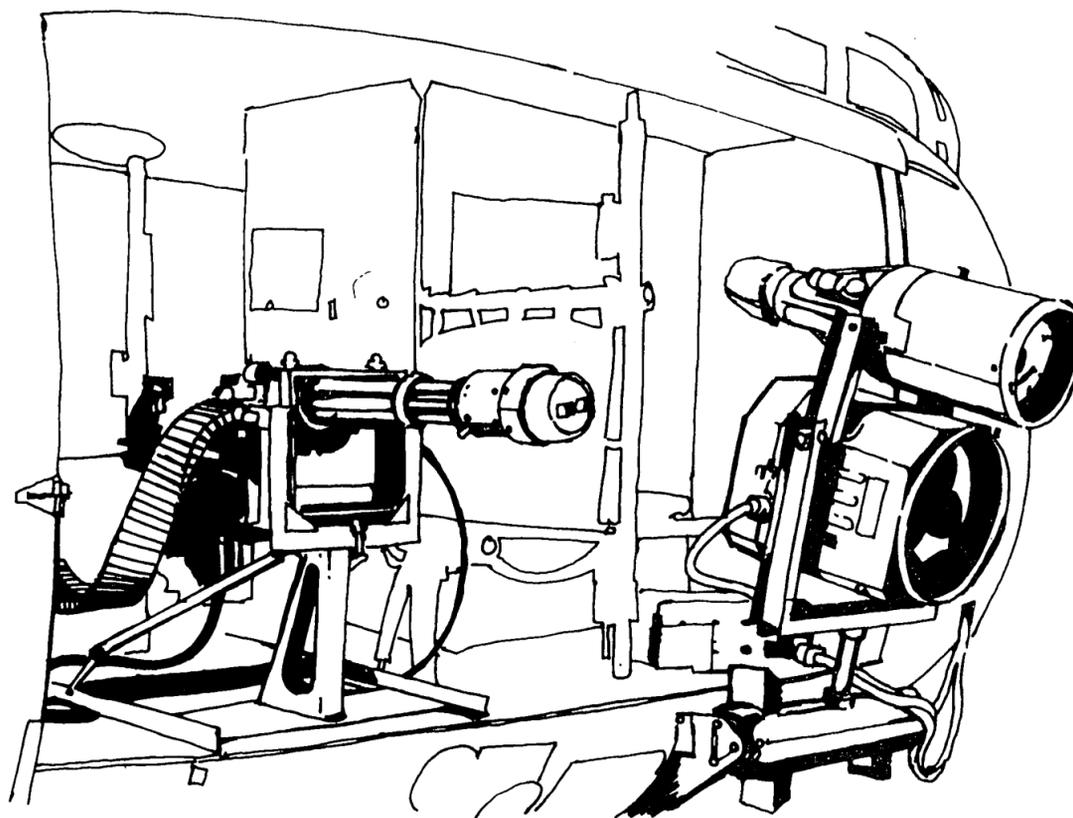


Figure 1: NIGHT HAWK Configuration (25th Inf Div)

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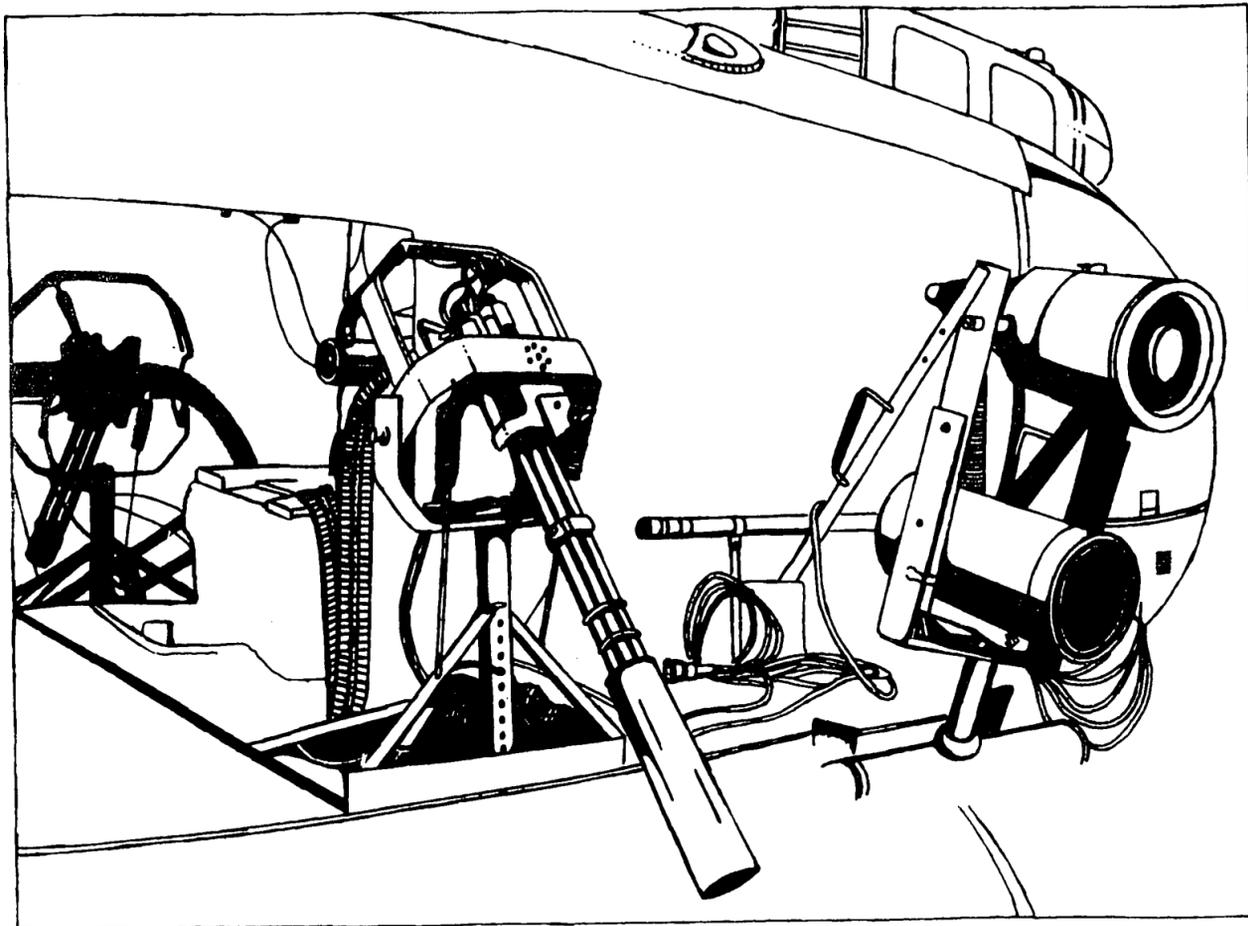


Figure 2: NIGHT HAWK Configuration (1st Inf Div)

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EMPLOYMENT

NIGHT HAWK aircraft are employed along waterways, known VC infiltration routes, communication and liaison routes and other areas where intelligence indicates that the VC/NVA are moving at night. NIGHT HAWK aircraft fly at absolute altitudes of from 500 to 700 feet and at speeds no greater than 60 knots. Suspected areas are illuminated by the near infrared ("pink") light mode on the AN/VSS-3 while the observer uses the NOD to detect targets. When a target is detected, coordination is immediately effected with ground units in the area if the area has not been precleared. In the 25th Division's system, the unit representative coordinates all targets that need to be cleared. When clearance is received, the observer changes the searchlight to the visible light mode and the gunner engages the illuminated area with the minigun. The altitude and speed combinations described above have proved to be the most effective because 60 knots keeps the relative ground speed at a minimum consistent with safe aircraft operating airspeeds so that it is possible to identify targets through the NOD. At speeds in excess of 60 knots the image rushes by so quickly the observer cannot interpret the sighting. Additionally at speeds in excess of 60 knots the observers tend to become nauseated. Linear patterns flown along rivers and infiltration routes have yielded the best results. Areas where flares or other illumination are being employed are avoided as the element of surprise is lost. NIGHT HAWK aircraft can normally fly three to four missions each night. Team work is the key to success in NIGHT HAWK operations. As a team continues to work, team members become more efficient and automatically respond to each other's actions. For instance, when a target is detected in the 25th Division the pilot automatically goes into a left orbit permitting the observer, the key man of the team, to fix the target while clearance is being obtained. Similarly, a right orbit is adopted when a target is marked by the sniper from the right side.

RESULTS

NIGHT HAWK operations in the 25th and 1st Divisions are interdicting liaison and resupply activities during the hours of darkness. VC movement along the waterways at night has also been significantly reduced. It is significant to note that the first indication of the enemy attack of FSB CROOK came from a NIGHT HAWK mission (Combat Lessons Bulletin Number 10, dated 12 July 1969). Much of the success of NIGHT HAWK operations is attributed to the element of surprise. NIGHT HAWK helicopters, operating in areas where there is normal night helicopter traffic, using the pink light mode for the observer, may observe and detect the enemy who thinks he is safe from detection. The ability of the AN/VSS-3 searchlight to switch rapidly from the pink light to visible light assures accurate target engagement and achievement of surprise. To attest to the effectiveness of the NIGHT HAWK system, during the period 15 April to 18 June 1969, the six NIGHT HAWK aircraft of the 25th Infantry Division killed 106 VC/NVA and destroyed 22 sampans in 62 separate contacts. There were no U.S. casualties. Only one helicopter sustained light damage from enemy fire. The majority of engagements were with small groups of enemy (2-3) moving by sampan or along communication/liaison routes. NIGHT HAWK operations are restricting the enemy's ability to control and coordinate his military/political efforts and to move his supplies. NIGHT HAWK operations integrate readily with other night intelligence gathering means and help to maintain surveillance and control of the battlefield at night as well as by day.

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~~(U)~~ CONCLUSION ~~(U)~~

The NIGHT HAWK systems employ standard equipment, American ingenuity, and a soldier's approach to finding a better way of getting the job done. Together they comprise a system which effectively takes the night away from Charlie.

FOR THE COMMANDER:


GEORGE L. MABRY, JR
Major General, U. S. Army
Chief of Staff

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