

13. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

a. General. The defeat administered to the enemy forces in the PLEIKU campaign was the direct result of combat power, precisely and overwhelmingly applied. Behind that combat power, however, lay administrative and logistical planning that began three years ago when this airmobile concept began its testing. It was culminated with the successful support of combat forces in the campaign.

In fact, were it not that the logistical plans were so well developed and prepared for any contingency, the magnitude of supplying the division solely by means of air lines of communication could have slowed or halted the offensive machine. That this division not only could transport its combat elements over distances of more than 65 kilometers at times, but could supply them with food, water, fuel and ammunition, indicates the adequacy of the logistical organization and planning.

(1) Adverse situations and solutions.

(a) The bulk of supplies delivered by Air Force aircraft during the early periods of the A-L-O-C were received on large pallets with which organic mechanical handling equipment was unable to cope. Logistic bases were notified that all supplies must be placed on 4-by-4 pallets prior to loading on Air Force 463L pallets. However, this procedure was not effective until the late stages of the A-L-O-C.

(b) Since the A-L-O-C terminus was at NEW PLEIKU Airfield, supplies had to be off-loaded, palletized and hauled by road to CAMP HOLLOWAY where the division's combat service support units were located, a distance of approximately 7 miles (by road). This meant double handling of all supplies received by air---6.5 million pounds total. A-R-V-N and Navy-leased trucks were requested to assist in transporting supplies from one field to the other. They responded and, without their cooperation, the division would have been hard pressed to move this massive amount of supplies.

(c) Special coordination effected. Coordination was made with II Corps Headquarters on use of A-R-V-N trucks to move supplies. Coordination was made with the 315th Air Division on Air Force aircraft landing at forward landing zones such as at CATECKA PLANTATION and at DUC CO. The Commanding Officer of NEW PLEIKU Airfield was contacted for permission to use that site for sling-loading of 500-gallon fuel bags. Permission from the Commanding Officer, CAMP HOLLOWAY, was obtained to use his facilities for the division's forward support element operations, as well as for use by the combat elements as a staging area. The amount of coordination required to support the campaign points up the need for divisional personnel to relieve the brigade commander of all but tactical duties.

(2) Maintenance. The maintenance of aircraft during the PLEIKU Campaign merits comment, not only because of the superb job that was performed, but because the successful accomplishment of the maintenance mission during that campaign proved, as much as anything, that the concept of air mobility was a success. Aircraft that sit on the ground because of maintenance problems do not provide mobility. It is noteworthy then that division maintenance personnel were actually putting into the air more mission-ready aircraft than were being dead-lined for combat, operational or maintenance reasons. During the peak operational period of 14-19 November, when the division was severely pushing its aviation resources in providing logistical resupply, maintenance was proving that it could meet the challenge.

But one point should be made at this juncture. This maintenance was performed with existing stocks of P-L-L and A-S-L repair parts, and the rate of fill of repair parts did not keep up with demands during this period. Had the operations continued on for any appreciable period of time with the same degree of intensity, both ground and aircraft maintenance could not have met unit demands.

(3) Combat loads appeared to be adequate, but unit commanders are persistent in their recommendation for a pre-filled, disposable M-16 magazine. Small unit after-action reports are replete with references to the potential danger that is courted when rifle-men attempt to re-charge magazines during heated engagements. Insofar as aerial resupply of disposable magazine in lieu of loose rounds is concerned, there would be a slight increase in bulk, but not enough to be a significant logistical factor.

(4) Medical services as planned by the division were more than adequate, as were medical evacuation facilities. During sharp engagements when friendly casualties were heavier, helicopters from the division's lift battalions were utilized extensively for evacuation. This, however, is a planned adjunct to the evacuation capability. The division's tactical S-O-P, indeed, the airmobile concept requires extensive use of lift aircraft for evacuation as well as logistical back-haul. The reaction time for medical evacuation by the air ambulance platoon was sometimes increased during the initial stages of airmobile assaults due to lack of familiarity by medical evacuation pilots with the pick-up and landing zones being used by specific units. It was found by having air ambulance ships follow major troop lift formations during initial assaults, pilots were quickly oriented and able to provide speedy evacuation to the initial assault elements during that critical period.

(5) Casualty reporting as a whole was excellent, but difficulties were met when the division operated at extended distances and when the lines of communication were overburdened. This problem was overcome by the use of air couriers and by placing personnel from the AG Casualty Reporting Section directly with the brigades. The problem since has been more fully resolved by establishing a secure Radio-Teletype station at division rear casualty reporting. The station operates on the D-7 Administrative/Logistics net. The forward casualty reporting teams, located with the forward support element at brigade, have ready access to this secure communications system.

14. SPECIAL EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES: Because of the uniqueness of the initial contact between a US airmobile force and North Vietnamese regular army units, virtually every phase of the campaign and every facet of combat movement, combat support and administrative support represented a new technique in this particular environment. Following are the ones that would seem most significant.

a. Throughout the campaign, aerial fire support was used to repulse enemy attacks at night. In most instances no prominent terrain feature existed that could be used as a reference to mark the friendly positions. The use of C-ration cans, ammo boxes or artillery cannisters filled with sand and saturated with fuel provided a simple method of marking the trace of friendly positions. The containers were emplaced around the perimeter and ignited on order by using a wire to ignite a trip flare positioned over the container. The necessary fuel was delivered to the unit when it was resupplied at its night location.

b. The technique of vectoring of aerial rocket artillery was refined during the campaign. The most effective procedure developed was to select a distinct terrain feature and give the pilot an azimuth and direction from that location. In the absence of distinct terrain features, smoke grenades were used. Similarly, the night marking techniques used for tactical air also were employed in vectoring aerial artillery ships.

c. The use of airmobile techniques in providing close, continuous artillery support in mass to widely separated infantry units, and without regard to conventional terrain considerations, received and passed the combat test. In connection with the use of artillery, a number of techniques were developed that merit discussion.

(1) Simultaneous ground and aerial observation. In rugged or heavily wooded terrain ground observers frequently encounter difficulty in locating and adjusting the initial rounds. The aerial observer cannot always see the target. If both observers are monitoring the same radio frequency, desired results are most efficiently obtained by combining the capabilities of both observers. The aerial observer "walks in" the adjusting fires until the ground observer can assume control for the close-in-adjustment.

(2) Adjustment of illumination. Frequently close-in defensive fires must be adjusted under illuminating rounds. A technique was developed to greatly reduce the expenditure of illuminating and HE marking rounds. The observer requests and adjusts the illumination in the normal manner except that he announces "best light" to the Fire Direction Center when the round best illuminates the target. The F-D-C controls the firing so the adjusting rounds impact at the time previously determined to be the "best light".

(3) Artillery in support of ground movement. During this campaign this technique was re-discovered. Operations revealed the potential of artillery in dispersing or preventing possible ambushes and assisting personnel to maintain direction while moving through dense terrain. The use of artillery fires to probe suspected enemy positions permits friendly forces to gain definite intelligence with minimum exposure to personnel. For units moving through dense jungle the use of air bursts was helpful in maintaining a "fix" on location and direction.

(4) The importance of having mutually supporting artillery positions became evident during this campaign when two artillery emplacements were attached simultaneously. When an emplacement is surrounded by dense vegetation the 105mm howitzer cannot be used in the direct fire role without causing casualties to troops on the perimeter. On several occasions in order to attain proper mutual support, it was necessary to organize an artillery battalion into four "skinny" batteries instead of the customary three.

d. Deceptive air reconnaissance. Excessive reconnaissance of a proposed landing zone is a sure signal to the enemy. One technique used with apparent success was to fly past the area of interest on a high pass, to a distance of 5-to-10 kilometers and then return past the area at a low altitude, from a different direction.

e. Reconnaissance by fire. Particularly during the pursuit of the 33d N-V-A Regiment from PLEI ME to CHU PONG it was found that reconnaissance-by-fire in open or semi-vegetated areas is a valuable air cavalry technique. Scout helicopters, during one period, initiated recon-by-fire in 105 instances, and received return fire from the ground 37 times. These areas were then fixed and provided lucrative targets for aerial artillery and tactical air strikes, if not for infantry maneuver elements operating in the area. The ability to flush out hidden enemy elements was a large factor in the fragmentation and destruction of the 33d Regiment. A refinement of this technique put the cavalry squadron's riflemen aloft in an "Eagle Flight" or airborne reaction force able to respond at once when the scouts found a target. The capture of the N-V-A hospital on 1 November was a prime example of this technique.

f. Reconnaissance in force. This technique, employed by the division's sky cavalry squadron, was particularly effective on several occasions during the campaign. Most noteworthy was the action on 3 November on the Cambodian border. When combined with an instantly-responsive airmobile infantry reaction force, the technique demonstrated its worth beyond question. During the action of 3 November, it was also proved that a perimeter under fire at night could be reinforced by helicopters. This was done by means of violent fire from the perimeter itself, along with close-in (50 meters) rocket fires from aerial rocket ships just prior to the setting down of lift ships. The violence of the fires prevented the enemy from reacting, not only when the lift ships were unloading troops, but while they were loading wounded for a medical evacuation back-haul.

g. Counter-sniper action. Pre-planned, systematic small-arms fires by personnel on the F-E-B-A, with emphasis on saturation of trees in bushes in the fire zone had the salutary effect of killing tree-climbing snipers and discouraging infiltrators, particularly when the fires were delivered at first light. Additionally, a "mad minute" can aid in prematurely triggering enemy assaults, thus rendering them more vulnerable to defensive fires.

h. Target detection and destruction. Operations by the division in the PLEIKU area refined a previously tested technique of detecting and reacting to enemy targets of opportunity. The D-T-O-C received direct S-L-A-R and infra-red (I-R) reports from the aerial surveillance and target acquisition platoon (OV-1 Mohawk) and U-S-A-F sources, plus reports from the Radio Research Unit. These reports were evaluated immediately and were reacted to as follows:

(1) Information on any target confirmed in the vicinity of maneuver elements was passed on to the controlling brigade headquarters. The brigade reacted by maneuvering forces to engage the target, by firing artillery, by directing supporting tactical air strikes, or by any combination of these actions.

(2) If a target was of no immediate threat to maneuver elements, the D-T-O-C recorded the target for strike by close air support aircraft which had run out of stay-time over the tactical zone. If within range, it also was scheduled for H&I artillery fires. During the period 18-22 November, for example, 22 targets were recorded. Thirteen of these were engaged by T-A-C air resulting in four secondary explosions in addition to the destruction of military structures. On four occasions the aircraft drew return ground fire. This technique is ideal for use in sparsely populated areas, which allow freedom in the use of tactical air and artillery.

i. Tree climbing techniques. During the campaign many units placed infantry and artillery observers in trees to improve observation. Although tree climbers work fine, few are available in a tactical zone, and so an expedient was devised. Two short lengths of rope were used. One section was passed around the tree and held in each hand. The second length was tied to each boot after being passed around the trunk, leaving about 12-20 inches between the boots. By using the two ropes in conjunction with the knees, even inexperienced climbers could easily negotiate a tall tree.