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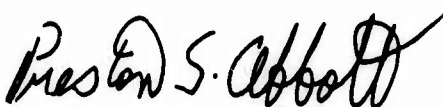
SOME FACTORS WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO
BOTH SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL
AMERICAN INFANTRY SMALL-UNIT ACTIONS

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SOME FACTORS WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO BOTH SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL AMERICAN INFANTRY SMALL-UNIT ACTIONS

INTRODUCTION

A war, a battle, a skirmish, a patrol action, or any activity connected with the deadly business of the ground soldier takes on different complexions depending upon personal relationship to the observer. An item on page two of the daily paper stating, "Action along the front was limited to patrol action," meant little to the reader and little more to the mass of the fighting men. But what of the individuals who were on these patrols? This "action" to them was as important as all the previous major battles of history because it was a life and death proposition. The individual rifleman feels as he faces an enemy that the most important part of the war is that narrow zone toward the enemy. This zone of importance becomes wider and wider as the scene is viewed through the eyes of the squad leader, platoon leader, company commander, and supreme commander, respectively.

The mission of PLATTRAIN was the experimental development of procedures and methods to improve the tactical proficiency of the rifle platoon. As a step in the development of premises to serve as a guideline for the research, three areas of relevant information have been studied: (1) tactical doctrine, (2) literature of previous research, and (3) combat literature relating to Infantry small-unit actions.

The research of the combat literature summarized by this paper included reading and abstracting (1) military periodicals, for example, Army, U.S. Army Combat Forces Journal, Infantry Journal, Marine Corps Gazette, etc., (2) military books, such as Pork Chop Hill, Men Against Fire, War As I Knew It, The Rommel Papers, etc., (3) various other publications including both classified and unclassified combat reports, and (4) student officer monographs written for the Advanced Infantry Officers Class at The Infantry School.

The opportunity to view combat through many pairs of eyes was afforded as the combat literature represented all theaters of World War II and included the various phases of the Korean Conflict.

This paper enumerates specific factors in American battlefield techniques which emerged as contributing to both successful and unsuccessful small-unit actions. Each factor is described and examples from selected bibliographic references are cited to illustrate its effects.

SUPPORTING FIRE

General Findings

Regardless of the level of the operation and its geographical locale, one of the most recurring references is made to the need for and proper utilization of supporting fires during ground operations.

Specific References

Captain Rivette (27), writing about a five-day defensive action against German SS troops in the "Bulge," stated that many of the difficulties arose from a lack of supporting fires. Captain Petruzel (25) emphasizes the important part that supporting fire played during the defensive phase at Anzio. Lieutenant Hunter (16) points out that the problem of adequate artillery fire was of paramount importance in the mountain warfare in Italy. Captain Glasgow (12) attributed the success of a daylight company attack, early in Korea, to proper utilization of supporting fires. Major General Troy Middleton (2a) in an analysis of deficiencies in a corps in Europe pointed out that the failure to follow up supporting fires closely enough was causing undue casualties. A rifle company commander (3b) in Europe stated, "The ability of our infantry officers and noncommissioned officers to adjust artillery fire was one of the biggest factors in helping us inflict heavy casualties on the Germans in the recent attack." Captain Davidson (9) points out that one of the lessons he learned during the fighting in Manila was, "Commanders should constantly keep in mind the supporting weapons available to them and use them." General Middleton

(2a), in discussing the availability and proper utilization of supporting fires, points out that there can be a tendency on the part of the Infantry to place too much reliance on artillery support. In several instances commanders speaking of artillery support, especially during night attacks, pointed out that by utilizing supporting fires prematurely the element of surprise was sacrificed.

Interesting comments from captured Japanese officers regarding the use of support include, "The basis of the tactics of the U.S. Army may be said to be a belief in the almighty power of materialistic fighting strength" and "He [the U.S. soldier] depends too much on his material power ..." (22).

CONTROL AND COMMUNICATIONS

General Findings

Two closely related problems that are common and vital to all ground operations are those of control and communications. The proper functioning of command net communications and person-to-person communications have both been found to be heavy contributors to small-unit success.

Specific References

Lieutenant Piercefield (26), telling of a platoon combat outpost action in Korea, states, "When the fighting began, I had no real control over the men in the perimeter holes, yet they did everything exactly right;...they kept alive a sense of being dependent on each other, so every man knew he could rely on the man in the next hole..." S. L. A. Marshall (19) states, "An army in which all ranks are indoctrinated from the beginning with the knowledge that fire and person-to-person communication are the twin essentials of successful minor tactics will generate spontaneity of action and reuniting of effort in the face of any battlefield emergency." Captain Robbins (28), in discussing the night operations of a rifle company on Okinawa, commented, "In defending at night, maintaining communication between individual emplacements becomes equally as important as between units, and proper facilities should be provided, as field expedients have not proved adequate."

Lieutenant Anders (4), in writing of a platoon action during the Po Valley Campaign in Italy, points out that most of the difficulty arose from lack of communication (radios failed and wire was not available). Captain Shellum (29) points out that during a platoon operation on Guadalcanal one of the most important lessons learned was that "Communications must be maintained, and alternate systems planned beforehand." Captain Ahern (1), in discussing a series of offensive actions in Korea, points out that the radios frequently failed during the assault and the link with the supporting fires was quite often lost.

It is interesting to note that, in most of the reports, the proper functioning of communications hardware is taken for granted. Most references are made to failure (1, 5, 9, 18), and very few to proper functioning (2i).

PREPARATION FOR CONDITIONS OF THE BATTLEFIELD

General Findings

If one were to pick the most important facet of the combat literature, certainly the lack of understanding of the true conditions of the battlefield on the part of the individual soldier would come into consideration. This includes both the physical and mental aspects.

Specific References

S. L. A. Marshall (19) somewhat justifies this lack of understanding by saying, "He [the American ground soldier] is what his home, his religion, his schooling, and the moral code and ideals of his society have made him.... The fear of aggression has been expressed to him so strongly and absorbed by him so deeply and pervadingly... that it is part of the normal man's

emotional make-up. This is his great handicap when he enters combat. It stays his trigger finger even though he is hardly conscious that it is a restraint upon him. Because it is an emotional and not an intellectual handicap, it is not removable by intellectual reasoning, such as: 'Kill or be killed.'" This may or may not be a justification of this lack of understanding on the American soldier's part, but we find many instances to indicate that it does exist. A young lieutenant (2e) who had just lost both his legs made the following comment, "Our soldiers must be endowed with a hatred and distrust of the enemy in order to successfully pursue the war." Marshall (19) points out the block to this solution, "Line commanders pay little attention to the true nature of this mental block. They take it more or less for granted that if the man is put on such easy terms with his weapon in training that he 'loves to fire,' this is the main step toward surmounting the general difficulty. But it isn't as easy as that. A revealing light is thrown on this subject through the studies by Medical Corps psychiatrists of combat fatigue cases in the European Theater. They found that the fear of killing, rather than fear of being killed, was the most common cause of battle failure in the individual, and that fear of failure ran a strong second." The soldier's introduction to the battlefield has been accomplished in one of two ways in past wars. Either he went into combat as a member of a unit or he went as a replacement (reinforcement). If he went through the "pipeline," he arrived in a state of dilemma due to the impersonal handling he had received during his journey. A squad leader of the 30th Infantry Division (2j) recognized this during combat in Europe when he said, "No matter how badly men are needed replacements should not be rushed into battle. They should be brought in during a rest period in order that they may learn their leaders. At one time we received replacements when we were engaged in heavy fighting. The new men became bewildered, froze in position and suffered heavy casualties." A platoon sergeant of the 30th Infantry (2h) emphasizes the need for proper battlefield orientation by pointing out, "The ability to identify and distinguish battle sounds is of supreme importance. The older [time in combat] men... can readily tell by the sound of an arty or mort shell or burst from a MG if it is time to hit the ground or continue to advance." A rifle company commander, 9th Division, E. T. O., (2c), comments on the soldier's attitude toward the battlefield situation, "The American soldier is too careless in unduly exposing himself when in view of the enemy. Individually he feels that some other 'Joe' will get shot and not he." The comments of captured German officers (23) seem to bear this out when they report that allied troops are very careless and negligent in the assault. When moving toward an objective, they travel in a straight line not bothering to zig-zag and, when they stop the forward movement, they assume the squatting position instead of a prone. A platoon leader with the 9th Infantry Division in Europe (2b), commenting on replacements, stated, "On one occasion, the failure of two new replacements to realize the value of constant watchfulness and alertness resulted in the loss of two of my noncommissioned officers. The men on the listening post moved back to report Germans using the Japanese trick of calling out in English. During their absence, two Germans slipped into our area and killed two of my noncommissioned officers before they were discovered." Captain Gugeler (13) in his account of a withdrawal action in Korea indicated that the men were not in proper physical condition for sustained action. Several officers (17d) emphasized the fact that men must be in top physical condition to engage in any combat operation. Lieutenant Barfoot (5) points out as one of the lessons derived from a platoon action in the Battle of Anzio, "Troops should be given some type of physical exercise when they are engaged in frontline defense for long periods of time."

S. L. A. Marshall (20, 21), writing of Korea, emphasized the fact that these conditions did not improve from World War II to Korea.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

General Findings

Poor information dissemination, particularly among adjacent units, was a frequent contributor to unsuccessful actions.

Specific References

S. L. A. Marshall (19), when discussing information flow, said, "It is true that we have worked marvels in furthering the rearward flow of information to higher headquarters. When a small and highly mobile force of men seized the bridge at Remagen the fact was known to the Supreme Commander, then at Rheims, within the hour. What happens in a line company is quite likely to become known to the staff at corps headquarters 20 miles to the rear within the space of a few minutes. The rub comes of this--that in all probability it will not become known to the other companies within that same battalion in the course of the same day, if at all. Yet these are the people to whom the information would be most useful." A technical sergeant of the 26th Infantry Regiment (3g) summed this up in the following manner, "It helps to be told what is on your right and left and in back of you and where the artillery is and where it's shooting. It makes the men feel they're part of a team and gives them confidence."

Marshall's analysis (19) of the reason for this lack of lateral flow is stated, "We can look briefly at a few of the reasons for this pervading contradiction:

"1. There is lacking a general recognition of the supreme importance of the lateral flow of information.

"2. Command at the lower levels is too often neglectful of the principle that it is not a channel of information only but a distribution point.

"3. Commanders at the lower levels tend to be the arbitrary judges of what information deriving from a source lower down would be highly useful to other elements lower down instead of abiding by the rule: when in doubt, pass it along.

"4. Inertia."

AVAILABILITY OF TIME FOR PLANNING

General Findings

The two problems of information dissemination and availability of planning time are certainly closely related. Over and over again it is indicated that information cannot be disseminated simply because time is insufficient.

Specific References

A company commander in Europe (2f) related the two in this manner, "Time for reconnaissance and issuing of orders is still not provided for by higher echelons. Thus, when the units in turn attempt to take it [time], the lower units have no opportunity either for proper planning or the orientation of the troops." Captain Hooper (17c) stated, "A commander in the attack must make many snap decisions." Captain Atkins (17a), commanding a company in Europe, commented on a daylight attack which failed, "The time element involved [for planning] was insufficient." Throughout the combat reports from all theaters the point is emphasized that all men should be briefed in order to ensure a better chance of success. A platoon sergeant in Company E, 377th Infantry Regiment in Europe (3h), best emphasized this by saying "Every man in the squad should listen to his squad leader's orders with the thought in mind that he may have to be the squad leader before the battle is over."

ACCURATE AND TIMELY REPORTING

General Findings

The problem of adequate dissemination of information cannot be considered independently of the need for accurate and timely reporting. Oftentimes when information is distributed, it is both delayed and inaccurate.

Specific References

S. L. A. Marshall (19) ties them together in this manner: "The all-too-frequent consequence of such pressure [demands from higher echelons] are lying, exaggeration, and distortion

of the situation at the lower levels, resulting in a false concept of the situation at the higher. The average company commander can stand only a limited amount of this heat and then he will knock over a couple of outhouses and report that he has captured a village, or give the location of three cut-off and hopelessly placed riflemen as the approximate position of his left flank, even though he knows his next move will be to withdraw them if possible. The effect is to make a wishful thinker of the most objective soldier. He reasons to himself: 'I'll have that position in another hour, so I'll tell them that I have it now and get them off my back.' Not infrequently this pseudo-optimism defeats its own purpose, for it gives the higher command a false idea of progress and keeps this commander from getting the help that otherwise he might have received."

Captain Baumgartner (6), in describing a platoon action in the Remagen bridgehead, pointed out that the unit of the flank reported that their objective had been taken. This was not true and caused Baumgartner's platoon to be in a "tight squeeze." Here is a case of inaccurate reporting. Combat experience indicates that there is another reason as well as that of the "breath on the back of neck." This reason is one of not really knowing where you are. Captain Shellum (29), in writing of action at Koli Point on Guadalcanal, emphasizes the need for informing platoon-sized units of movements in their areas. Captain Hoile (14), in his analysis of a company action in France, points out, "Small-unit leaders should be indoctrinated with the necessity of accurate and timely reports." Throughout the combat literature we find many instances of units being reported at a certain location and adjacent units, upon investigating these reports, finding that not only is the report untrue, but the enemy is firmly emplaced on that particular piece of real estate (4, 6, 8).

SECURITY AND SURPRISE

General Findings

Two of the principles of war that are closely related at the small-unit level are those of security and surprise. One is the complement of the other. Combat experience indicates an American tendency to be lax.

Specific References

Lieutenant Blum (7) tied the two together nicely when he stated, "The principle of security cannot be violated. The German forces on the edge of the Rothleible Woods had no security to their north. In consequence, they were surprised by two American platoons." Major Houser (15), in describing a defensive action north of Strasbourg, points out that adequate security was sacrificed for the comfort of the troops (the company was in houses instead of around them). Consequently, they were much more vulnerable to the enemy attacks. Captain Davidson (9), in his after-action analysis of street fighting in Manila, states, "The element of surprise... must be exploited to the utmost..." Colonel Fry (10), in describing action in Italy, points out that the command group of an Infantry battalion and several of the company commanders were captured due to a lack of local security. Comments of Japanese officers captured in the Pacific Theater (22) pointed out there were many flaws in the security measures adopted by the American frontline units. They emphasized this by stating that U.S. troops are not security conscious and the noisy (night) soldier is the rule.

COMBAT LOSSES OF KEY PERSONNEL

General Findings

Casualties not only can be expected, they must be anticipated and planned for. When units engage in sustained action, the efficiency of the unit is adversely affected by battlefield attrition.

Specific References

S. L. A. Marshall (20), speaking of the 2d Infantry Division's operations in November 1950 in Korea, reported the following statistics: B Company, 9th Infantry, went from 129 able-bodied men to 34, of whom 6 were wounded in 26 hours. The 23d Infantry was reduced from 28 officers and 750 EM to 9 officers and approximately 250 EM in less than 3 days. G Company, 38th Infantry, was depleted from 163 to 56 in less time. Lieutenant Anders (4), in relating his personal experiences as a platoon leader during a three-day period in the Po Valley, said that his platoon never did function properly after the first night when all the noncommissioned officers were hit, and that the men had reached the point of exhaustion. Captain Kimball (18), writing about a night withdrawal in Germany, stated that the loss of platoon leaders is normal, and that noncommissioned officers must be trained as immediate replacements for these officers. Captain Smith (30), speaking of a four-day action on Bamboo Ridge, Damulaan, Leyte, Philippine Islands, derived as one of the lessons from this action that the loss of key personnel must be anticipated and planned for. Captain Baumgartner (6) listed among the lessons learned in his experience as a platoon leader in the Remagen bridgehead, "No unit, no matter how small, can expect to operate at top efficiency if there are inadequate replacements for the leaders of its smallest elements." The Baumgartner platoon went from 1 officer and 26 EM to 1 officer and 7 EM in the course of three days' action.

CHOICE OF WEAPONS AND PERSONNEL FOR SPECIFIC MISSIONS

General Findings

A general once said that to ensure success, it was necessary to "get there the fustest with the mostest." This may have been true during the Civil War, but during modern conflicts there is some doubt as to its validity. Indications are that insufficient consideration has been given to the difficult task of choosing the proper people and the proper weapons for a given mission.

Specific References

The commanding officer of the 22d Infantry during fighting in Europe (2d) stated, "There is a tendency over here to employ too many people to do a job. Once I cut the number of men attacking a certain position from a platoon to a squad, and they went and captured it anyway." A company commander in Europe (2g) further emphasized this point by saying, "In the early operations there was a tendency to make patrols too large. Once a patrol of three squads was sent out to obtain information. It was too big for secrecy and too small for a raid. It suffered many casualties and obtained little information. It is believed this error will often occur with green troops and green commanders." Two commanders (9, 30) in the Pacific Theater pointed out that small-unit (squad, platoon) operations were successful where company-sized efforts had failed. We must also recognize the fact that many times smaller units were called upon to accomplish missions beyond their capabilities. Major Cook (8) derived as his first lesson from a company operation at Anzio, "That objectives should be assigned according to the strength and capabilities of the force employed." Lieutenant Anders (4) included in his statements that an unusual amount of withdrawing was done, probably because company missions had been assigned to platoons. The commanding officer, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry (2k), in Europe recognized a personnel-weapons problem when he stated, "If effective use is to be made of this weapon the sniper must be considered a specialist--not a frontline rifleman. Snipers should be carefully selected. . . ." The proper selection of weapons by individuals for specific targets is emphasized by the following individuals. A sergeant in the 2d Infantry Regiment (3e) stated, "Whenever possible at night we use hand grenades rather than small arms. Hand grenades don't give away the position." The commanding officer of the 3d Cavalry Battalion (3d) noted, "White phosphorus loses much of its effectiveness in snow--the particles are buried and the amount of smoke given off is greatly reduced." The commanding officer, Company B, 334th Infantry Regiment (3c), observed, "We have found the white phosphorus grenade much better than fragmentation grenade for house fighting." The commanding officer and the executive officer, 1st Battalion, 120th

Infantry (3a), pointed out that during night attacks, "Rifle grenades employed in mass can effectively cover areas known to contain enemy automatic weapons." A sergeant in Company I, 357th Infantry (3f), reflected, "In daytime when mist limits visibility, tracers don't help the firer but they do disclose his position." Gugeler (13) points out several instances in which the improper type of weapon was utilized.

DISPERSION AND TACTICAL UTILIZATION OF TERRAIN

General Findings

The problems of dispersion and proper utilization of terrain have faced combat commanders from the time of the phalanx to the atomic age. Too frequently American soldiers are found in large groups on tactically untenable terrain.

Specific References

General Middleton (2a) listed among the deficiencies noted in a corps in Europe that "bunching up" is one of our most prevalent problems. Another general officer who commanded troops in both the European and Pacific Theaters (11) commented that dispersion must be taught and practiced.

The proper utilization of terrain is emphasized in the lessons of the monographs (17e) of many platoon and company commanders. Captain Chin's comment (17b) is typical on the use of high ground. He stated, "Movement down a valley, without security on the high ground, invites ambush." Many references are made to reverse slope defense, cordon defense, attacking along ridge lines, the use of cross-corridor defense, compartment defense and other utilization of terrain. Lieutenant Colonel Murray (24), in writing of a Marine action on Okinawa, points out that after unsuccessfully attacking a plateau along the two logical avenues of approach, the objective was taken by scaling what had appeared to be an impassable cliff. Gugeler (13) points out that a company commander showed good judgment in attacking defendable terrain. In his analysis and criticism of his platoon's operations, Baumgartner (6) states that he should have used a draw approach instead of attacking through the woods at night.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A search of American Infantry small-unit combat literature of World War II and the Korean Conflict has yielded information concerning some of those factors in American employment of battlefield techniques that have figured in differentiating successful from unsuccessful small-unit actions. These factors, when operating properly (sometimes singly, but more often operating together in various combinations), played prominent roles in making small-unit combat actions successful. These same factors (again sometimes singly, but more often in combination) figured just as prominently in making small-unit combat actions unsuccessful when operating improperly or when circumstances prohibited their operation at all. Presented in this paper is an enumeration of these factors with the general findings and selected references from the literature.

As a result of this survey, it was concluded that ten of those factors are (1) supporting fires, (2) control and communications, (3) preparation for conditions on the battlefield, (4) information dissemination, (5) availability of time for planning, (6) accurate and timely reporting, (7) security and surprise, (8) combat losses of key personnel, (9) choice of weapons and personnel for specific missions, and (10) dispersion and tactical utilization of terrain. These ten factors are not presented as the only factors that have contributed to both successful and unsuccessful small-unit actions.

Premises for Task PLATTRAIN have been derived from the contents of this paper in conjunction with the contents of papers summarizing the activities which current doctrine sets forth as being required to accomplish the various tactical missions of the rifle platoon and the findings of prior military, industrial, and academic research in the areas of small-group

functioning and small-group leadership, relevant to the combat task of the rifle platoon. These premise statements, derived from combat, doctrine, and prior research, indicate the critical areas to be considered if difficulties experienced in past combat are to be overcome and new doctrine is to be implemented.

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