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11 19 January 1968

SUBJECT: Trip Report - 4th Infantry Division, 15-16 Jan 68.

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125 p.

1. Undersigned visited ^{THE} 4th Infantry Division ^{WAS VISITED} 15-16 January 1968 to secure information on infantry mortar employment. Principal persons contacted were:

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| MAJ Edmonds, | Asst G3, formerly S3, 1st Bde |
| MAJ Lozier | S3, 2d Bde |
| MAJ Stiner | S3, 1st Bde, formerly S3, 3/12 Inf |
| MAJ Edwards | S3, 3/8 Inf |

2. Two different methods of employing infantry mortars are used by infantry battalions in the division. In the mechanized battalion (2/8) and the two infantry battalions in 2d Bde (1/12, 1/22) 81mm mortars remain under company control and 4.2 inch mortars under battalion. In the battalions of the 1st Bde (1/8, 3/8, 3/12) 81mm and 4.2 inch mortars are centralized in a mortar platoon under battalion control.

3. Self propelled mortars in the mechanized battalion are organized and employed according to normal TOE and doctrine during mechanized operations. Dismounted employment of 81mm mortars is generally as described in para 4.

4. Although other 2d Bde 81mm mortars remain with rifle companies, per TOE, there are significant modifications in weapons platoon organization and employment. 106mm recoilless rifles are not used on operations and the weapons platoon is used as a nucleus for a fourth rifle platoon in the company. A portion of the mortar section is used to operate 81mm mortars as described below.

a. During ground movement on search and destroy missions mortars do not usually accompany the company. Sometimes one tube with 18-20 rounds of ammunition (all HE except 2 WP) may be back-packed with

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the company. More usually, 81mm mortars, together with 4.2's and artillery, support from Fire Support Bases (FSB). When operations are out of mortar range from the artillery FSB, a mortar base may be established further forward. This is normally a company patrol base reinforced with 4.2 inch and 81mm mortars.

b. When companies organize night positions in an area of high enemy threat, one or two 81mm mortars may be helilifted into the position with 50-100 rounds of HE and illuminating ammunition. The weapons and ammunition are extracted during the day to preclude having to leave security or slow down movement by carrying mortars. For this reason, mortars may not be inserted in bad weather when the difficulty of extracting them later may hamper further operations.

c. Mortars with the company are under company control. Artillery FO's adjust fire, as company weapons platoon FO's are not used. The mortar squad or section organizes a FDC. Communication is by radio. All mortars in the FSB are under control of the fire base commander, usually the CO of the rifle company providing security. Fire is coordinated by the artillery liaison officer with the battalion. 81mm mortars are used mainly for defensive fires close to FSB's or company patrol bases and for illumination.

d. Mortars in an FSB have more ammunition available (300 HE and 50 illuminating per tube) and fire 8 to 10 times as much ammunition as those in company positions. This may amount to 50-100 rounds per day per battalion (Average 70 HE, 10 illuminating).

5. Battalion 4.2 inch mortar platoons in 2d Bde normally have three tubes, the fourth being stationed in the division base camp.

a. These platoons are normally used in the FSB under battalion control. On occasions, one battalion mortar platoon has been used under brigade control to establish an FSB at brigade headquarters. A mortar platoon may also be used as the basis for a mortar FSB (para 4a above).

b. The mortar platoon operates an FDC. Its fire is coordinated by the artillery liaison officer with the battalion and usually adjusted by artillery FO's. Mortar FO's are used to augment fire direction personnel and sometimes for special missions such as providing a liaison and FO party for an indigenous unit working with the brigade.

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c. The 4.2 inch mortars are almost always moved by helicopter. Usually no vehicles are moved with the platoon, though a 1/4 ton or 3/4 ton truck is occasionally inserted with the platoon. Average ammunition on hand in FSB is 400 HE and 90 illuminating per tube.

d. Missions for 4.2 inch mortars are mainly defensive fires. Some mortar fire is used in preparations. Recently, 4.2 inch CS ammunition has been received in limited quantity. One preparation mission has been fired but effectiveness is unknown because the position turned out to be unoccupied. Ammunition expenditure averages 50 HE and 12 illuminating per day.

6. In the 1st Bde, 81mm and 4.2mm mortars are combined in a battalion mortar platoon. Organization and employment of 3/8 and 3/12 mortars are similar, with differences noted below, and are understood to be basically the same in 1/8 although time precluded interviewing 1/8 personnel.

a. The mortar platoon has five or six 81mm mortars and two to four 4.2 inch mortars, depending on the situation and deadline status. Mortars are rarely employed with a moving rifle company. Sometimes one or two 81mm mortars may be brought into a company night position when there is a high threat. When possible, mortars support companies from the battalion FSB. 81mm mortars accompany 4.2 inch mortars in the mortar base to provide close-in defensive fires. In some cases, coverage of the battalion area requires more than one FSB, and 4.2 inch mortars are used in one, with artillery in the other.

b. In 3/12 Inf, the FDC at the battalion mortar platoon has been augmented with one computer and is considered capable of operating two FDC's. 3/8 Inf considers the platoon capable of operating three FDC's. A mortar FDC controls both 81mm and 4.2 inch mortars at its location. When a single 81mm is employed with a company, the squad is augmented with a computer.

c. The 3/12 mortar platoon does not have FO's; fires are adjusted by artillery FO's. Fires of 3/8 mortars are also usually adjusted by artillery FO's, but the platoon has trained four FO's for use to augment artillerymen when a company is split in two locations, when patrols require FO's, etc. In both cases fires are coordinated by the artillery liaison officer with the battalion.

d. Mortars are usually moved by helicopter (4.2's preferably by CH47). No vehicles are moved with the platoon. Stockage

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Objectives for FSB's are 1,000 - 81mm HE (500 in 3/8), 100 - 81mm WP, 150-81mm illuminating (50 in 3/8), 1,000 - 4.2 inch HE, 100 - 4.2 inch WP (200 in 3/8), and 50 illuminating (200 in 3/8), depending on the threat and anticipated operation. Stock levels are lowered when displacement is expected.

c. Mortar fires are used extensively for defensive concentrations, pre-computed counter-mortar missions, and illumination. 81mm mortars are particularly useful for close-in defensive fires. 4.2 inch mortars are used for preparation and suppressive fires. 3/12 has used 4.2 inch HE with delay fuze for bunker destruction. 3/8, however, considers 4.2 inch mortars insufficiently accurate for close support at ranges beyond about 2,000 meters; at the longer ranges which are more common they prefer to use mortars for blocking fires and artillery for close support. Mortar fire is advantageous in mountains and jungle canopy because of its high angle characteristics. Ammunition expenditures during the height of Dak To battle reached 2,000 rounds of mortar per battalion per day. Now expenditures of 400 to 600 or 700 per day, mostly 4.2 inch because of an 81mm ASR, are more usual.

d. Mortar crews are about 5 men. Although two men can operate a mortar in emergencies, 3/8 considers a 4 man squad of a squad leader, computer, gunner and assistant as the minimum for a single 81mm mortar and about a 6-man squad necessary for sustained operations. The 6-man squad may have a second mortar, normally operating one, but with the second for emergency contact or defensive missions.

7. Problems commented on were:

a. Bad lots of 81mm mortar ammunition. Some ammunition containers have water in them and others are damp. One battalion places 81's on the perimeter of FSB's to avoid firing over the heads of troops.

b. One unit commented on problems with shock absorbers on the 81mm when firing heavy ammunition. Also the new base plate is not rugged enough and the older type is preferred.

c. Shock absorbers also are a problem on the 4.2 inch mortar and parts are hard to get. One unit considers that its platoon normally has only two of four mortars available, one being in base camp defense and one other deadlined at any given time.

d. The 81mm mortar and its ammunition are too heavy to accompany rifle companies in jungle and mountainous terrain. The M79 grenade

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launcher is a good weapon but not a substitute for mortar fire. Two of those interviewed expressed a requirement for one or two 60mm mortars in the rifle company.



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