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TITLE  
THE UTILIZATION OF DIFFICULT TERRAIN  
IN THE  
UNIT TRAINING PHASE

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PREFACE

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1. In order to provide a strategic background for this monograph the following concepts are assumed:

(a) The United States and its allies are vulnerable to land attack by hostile forces at the places and time of their choosing.

(b) Such attacks will result in the immediate deployment to overseas areas of the maximum amount of United States-stationed general reserve organizations.

(c) Organizations so deployed will be unable to receive any additional or specialized training prior to being committed to combat.

(d) The likelihood of these organizations being committed initially in areas with difficult terrain and weather conditions on the periphery of the Soviet sphere of influence is good.

2. The word "unit" as used in this monograph refers to battalion size organizations or smaller.

3. The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author - not necessarily that of The Infantry School or the Department of the Army.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to show that the United States Army should train in rugged and varied terrain in order to prepare for the hardships of combat and to offer some possible solutions to this problem. Research has been limited to actions of small units, of battalion size and smaller, during the second World War and the Korean War. However, in order to show more urgently the need for departing from conventional terrain for the training of battalions, examples and consequent conclusions are drawn from many theaters. They are all similar in that they illustrate what happened to various units upon being committed to action in their first campaign and/or battle. The reader should keep in mind, however, that because of a narrowness of scope and the limitations arising therefrom, no effort is made to prove or disprove that a lack of equipment, a need for better maintenance of equipment, or reasons other than training were the cause for failure. Basically, the purpose for this study is to relate initial failure in combat to a failure by units to train realistically for combat.

Clausewitz, in his book "On War", stated: "When in Russia and Poland a very large tract of country is nearly everywhere covered with forest, and the assailant has not the power of getting beyond it, his situation will be a very difficult one. We have only to think of the many difficulties of supply with which he has to contend and how little he can do in the obscurity of the forest to make his ubiquitous adversary feel his superiority in numbers. Certainly this is one of the worst situations in which the offensive can be placed".

Up to World War I, Clausewitz's statement was recognized universally as being correct. However, since then the situation has changed

and now armies no longer attempt to avoid trackless and impossible terrain. They regard neither terrain nor climate as barriers to military operations. And what is even more striking today is that such extraordinary terrain can be used to an advantage by the Infantryman and by the tank as well. (16:78)

While this is accepted by most military men today, still we are neglecting the most vital lessons which have been passed on to us by those who fought in similarly extraordinary terrain both in World War II and in Korea. An enlightening but nevertheless tragic fact became evident early in the Korean War, namely that some of the lessons being "learned" by troops then in Korea were in effect lessons "learned" from World War II. Among these "lessons" was that our units had not been trained in sufficiently rough terrain in peacetime to make possible the rapid acclimation to such conditions of terrain and weather in combat. (9:1) They had learned the fundamentals, true enough, but only how to apply them under ideal conditions; they had experienced great difficulty in applying them under rugged conditions. While our units were satisfying the requirements for small unit training as set forth in the Army Training Program not enough of this training was conducted in difficult and varied terrain. Units judged to be combat ready by virtue of their having passed the required Army Training Tests were later found to be unready for actual combat in areas where less conventional terrain was encountered. (4:4)

One might ask the cause for such a condition, particularly in units of an army which devotes so much of its time to training for combat. Perhaps the fault lies not so much in the amount of time devoted to training but more in where and how it is conducted. En-

tire blocks of the unit training phase are being spent under conditions which do not portray the realistic facts concerning combat at its toughest to the unit concerned. In order to prevent catastrophes in the future, we must profit from the mistakes of the past.

## DISCUSSION

Observers who returned from Korea soon after the outbreak of that war, as well as those who reported to their headquarters during a similar period of combat in World War II were universal in their opinion that the principles upon which our training is based are sound. Perhaps one of the more comprehensive of these reports was submitted early in September, 1943, by Major General William H. Simpson, Office of the Chief of Army Ground Forces (later CG, Ninth US Army, Europe). He stated in part that all commanders were agreed that the principles upon which our training was being conducted were sound but that the application of this training in combat caused difficulty at times. (14:1)

Coincidentally, Army observers in Korea in 1951 reiterated General Simpson's views and surprisingly enough attributed failures to many of the same causes as did the earlier report. They found generally that in order to prepare properly the units of general reserve organizations and those with specific combat missions it should have been mandatory to guard against complacency in training. (9:1) This complacency allowed a unit to believe itself combat ready when in actuality the criteria for the establishment of this conclusion were in themselves erroneous. True enough the fundamentals were being stressed, but the opinion was held by many that in the final analysis there was no substitute for combat; that units not tested in combat were of necessity to be considered a liability. Nothing could be farther from the truth and historical examples back this up. The cause for each failure of a unit in combat for the first time may be traced to a deficiency somewhere in its training prior to combat. The utter disregard for training in troublesome terrain creates for the enemy a valuable unrecruited ally.

An excellent illustration of this hypothesis can be found in the attack by the 1st Battalion, 57th Infantry (PS) against a Japanese beachhead at Anyasan Point on the West Coast of Bataan Peninsula, Luzon, Phillipine Islands early in 1942. Prior to its entry into combat, the valuable training aid of difficult terrain, although available, was not used by this unit - it is deduced that improper supervision of training was at fault. Such is the record prior to the landing of the Japanese on the island of Luzon in the Phillipines. When the 1st Battalion was committed against the Japanese the unit had to gain its first knowledge of operations in jungles in the face of the enemy. This was necessary in spite of the fact that jungle covers a large portion of Luzon Island. The Battalion in question was given the mission of reducing a small Japanese beachhead on the west coast of the Bataan Peninsula at Anyasan Point. During the attack on the beachhead, which lasted from 2 February to 13 February 1942, it took this unit eleven days to conduct an attack over a distance of less than five thousand yards. Of that period of time the unit spent four days traversing the relatively short distance of three thousand yards in the jungle. During these four days the situation was vague, control was difficult and communications were seriously hampered by the thick growth. (13:27)

The main obstacle to the American forces, initially, was not the Japanese but the jungle itself. No enemy contact was made until the fourth day and finally on the seventh day after a bitter fight Anyasan Point was cleared of the enemy. Major Cecil M. Sanders, a member of the Regimental Staff of the 57th Infantry, made the following statement concerning this action: "I was in the Phillipine Islands for approximately fourteen months prior to the war. During this time our training was of the type you would expect to find in the States. I believe our troops were not sufficiently trained in the techniques of jungle fighting.



During my tour of duty, no particular stress was placed on this method of fighting. Yet, if war should come, we knew that we would be fighting on a tropical island, a large portion of which was covered by jungle. When war found us in the jungle, it was a question of each unit fighting to evolve its own method of combat". (13:38)

Since terrain was the paramount factor in the battle for Anyasan Point, attention may be called to the fact that the confusion and inefficiency which were encountered stemmed directly from a lack of realistic training in the jungles, ordinary terrain on Luzon. Major Sanders gives another interesting sidelight on this, "Our troops were not sufficiently trained in the techniques of jungle fighting..." (13:27) Later he concluded that, "our troop leaders must be thoroughly indoctrinated in proper techniques of terrain analysis. They must learn to appreciate the advantages and limitations imposed by various types of terrain. The necessity of training our troops to fight in all types of terrain to meet any and all eventualities cannot be overemphasized". (13:38)

To require a unit to gain facility with unfamiliar terrain and weather conditions in the face of an armed enemy without previous training is negligence of the highest order, particularly when this terrain is available for the conduct of the training. In order to prevent this from occurring on any army wide scale in the future, it is essential our training keep pace with our plans. For the future we cannot rely on our ability to train units for specific use in a particular theater of operations after hostilities have commenced. Nor can we foresee, in the light of our global commitments, the particular type of terrain and weather conditions in which each unit will fight. We could not do this even after our entry into World War II.

Company A of the 34th Infantry from Pyongyang, Korea to the Nakdong River commencing 5 July 1950. This unit had been in training at Sasebo, Japan, as a part of the Eighth United States Army before the outbreak of war in Korea. It had completed successfully all the required Army Training Tests and had met all other training requirements. Accordingly, it was declared to be combat ready. That its training was poor can be shown by the following example.

The 5th of July was wet and cold but this did not dampen the spirit of the men of Company "A" who were in a near holiday mood when contemplating the task ahead. As they had moved northward from Pusan by train they conjectured as to what the North Koreans would do when first confronted by American Army units in the field. Most agreed the North Koreans would turn tail and run. Once at their destination foxholes were begun but they were quickly filling with water. Few men expected to use the holes, however, That night no patrols and no listening posts were sent out; ordinary guard duty was performed by members of the company, organized as a typical interior guard in camp.

Early on the 6th, the unit was confronted by a column of North Korean tanks but recognized them as unfriendly only after the first round of the lead tank exploded on the position. Reluctantly, the men swam into their foxholes, standing in water up to their waists. The unit returned fire, but it was noticed by the leaders that only half the men were firing their weapons. As the volume of fire of the North Koreans increased small groups of men, on their own initiative, began to infiltrate to the rear causing an appreciable decrease in the covering fire which A Company was supposedly laying down while B Company, in position on its right flank withdrew. A short time later, after its own withdrawal to the north edge of Pyongyang, A Company began its trek southward to another delaying

position. The exact location of this new position was not known by the Company Commander as by now there was no communication in operation between A Company and the remainder of the 24th Division. As the Company continued its fast pace down the road to the south, hot sultry weather replaced the rain of the past few days. Men became thirsty. Some men however, had no water to ease their thirst for they had failed to bring their canteens with them when they left Sasebo or had lost them on the way to Korea. Men were seen to be drinking water out of ditches beside the road as the column moved along. Others, whose feet began to swell, threw away their shoes and trudged along barefooted because they felt this was more comfortable; it seemed to soothe their aching feet. Other items of equipment such as ponchos, steel helmets, ammunition belts and even rifles were discarded by some men in the hope of lightening their burden. Morale went down to rock bottom, a contrast to the high spirits of forty eight hours previously.

On 12 July, A Company again met the North Koreans in force. As a part of the 1st Battalion's perimeter behind the Kum River, a position had been selected on the lower portion of a steep high hill. North Korean soldiers soon over-ran the 1st Platoon, which now consisted of only ten men. This placed the communists in the rear of the second platoon and higher up the slope than that unit. Consequently, the second platoon was quickly engaged both in flank and rear. Fortunately, the third platoon of the Company held its ground when attacked, increasing its volume of fire. Thus the second platoon was allowed to join the third before the full weight of the attack from front and rear was felt. To say the least, the position had been poorly selected and was almost lost. The casualty rate in the company was high.

Its position, now untenable, the battalion was forced to continue its withdrawal to the Naktong River line. When A Company arrived behind

the relative safety of the Pusan perimeter it was at a drastically lower percentage of its previous effective strength. Many of the men still were barefooted at this time. Communications with other units of the 24th Division were re-established for the first time since the North Koreans first attack the company. (6:3-19)

Although the company succeeded in reaching the Pusan perimeter its conduct of the withdrawal was far from exemplary or even acceptable. Evidence of A Company's unpreparedness for combat is offered as the following: (1) lack of orientation prior to combat, (2) unsatisfactory physical condition of individuals, (3) faulty terrain appreciation and estimate of the situation. Had this unit been prepared realistically for combat the foregoing failures could have been averted, for all were preventable. All conditions which existed in the foregoing situation, except the actual firing of live ammunition by an aggressor, could have been foreseen and consequently reproduced in training. If this had been done in sufficiently rugged terrain in order to create adequately the pressure and strain of combat, Company A would have had an opportunity to perform in a much more creditable manner.

However, hard-pressed A Company was by the conditions of weather and terrain in Korea it was not alone in this experience. Shortly afterward, the 1st and 2nd Battalion of the 9th Infantry, which had recently arrived from Fort Lewis, Washington, were placed in line beside the 34th Infantry on the Naktong River. At 1500 on 8 August, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 9th Infantry made a coordinated attack, their first in Korea, to restore the United Nations line. Soon the men were engulfed by a lip-cracking thirst; their canteens were soon emptied. As the oppressive sun beat down exhausting the men, water became a critical item, the unavailability of which could cause the attack to bog down.

Consequently, during the attack water to refill canteens had to be sent forward with the ammunition, one becoming almost as important as the other. (11:9) Water discipline failed when the going got toughest.

One can conjecture correctly that the reason for the failure was caused by inadequate training in water discipline by the unit before being sent to Korea. Since the minimum amount of water required by an individual varies, water discipline must be practiced in training before it can become instinctive. Men and units must be placed under the stress of hard physical military labor before they learn to get along with the minimum amount of water. The more rugged the terrain being negotiated, the more laborious the task and hence the more valid and profitable the condition under which the unit learns its lesson - in this case, water discipline. Many more examples of this kind are available to point out inadequacies of training in peacetime. Failures or near failures boil down simply to a unit's being improperly trained. Physical training alone does not get a unit into shape, for often this type of training does not succeed in developing stamina, the will to fight. This must be ingrained in combat ready units by overcoming hardships. These "hardships" are rarely created during a lecture in the dayroom, on the parade ground, or in lush rolling terrain of the conventional type. They are created in the field under the most severe conditions.

Because so many unit commanders, their staffs, and the members of their units had not worked out before in such crude terrain as Korea offered, needless debacles occurred. Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall in his book The River and the Gauntlet summarized this condition while describing the action of the 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry near Changchon, North Korea, 25 November 1950. He wrote "Compartmented by hills, operations were critically deprived of the techniques which promote

combat unity. If the guns were not too close to companies in the assault, then the wire wouldn't stretch or the radios wouldn't work. Within the main valley, installations were often jammed close together, and even some infantry was short of elbowroom. But proximity did not in itself lessen their sense of isolation. The uneven ground foreshortened vision and redistributed the varied sounds of battle so that nothing could be measured in its true significance.

"Much that happened to the 9th Regiment - the successive shattering of some of its components and the survival of others must remain all but inexplicable to those who have not labored in the same terrain". (10:79) General Marshall continued, "Though the ubiquitous hills and ridges were not of formidable height, the area was uniquely devoid of flat spaces, suitable for guns, command posts, aid stations or supply points". (10:80) It is important to note that the eminent military chronicler, S.L.A. Marshall, did not consider the terrain of Korea formidable or special. But consider for a moment, for example, that units in training at Fort Benning rarely are afforded the opportunity to maneuver in terrain half so formidable; hence they are denied the opportunity to get ready for a Korean type operation which General Marshall, for one, considered to be ordinary for the U. S. Army. This difficult terrain, not specialized, required the need for employment of new techniques as he pointed out.

Now let us leave the theaters of combat of World War II and Korea and turn our attention to our present day training, keeping in mind that such an examination here can be general at best. When we look at our own training program, we find that there is insufficient time

devoted to the training of units in combat in mountainous terrain or in the jungle, the combination which offers the extremes of altitude and ruggedness. The closest current training programs come to such training is the infinitesimal amount of time, comparatively speaking, which is given to conduct of attack in woods. (1:12) This is conducted once at platoon, company and battalion level for four hours each time. (1:12; 2:12). The exercise usually consists of seizure of the near edge of the woods followed by a quick advance through the woods, and an exit from the far edge. (5:246) In actuality this is no different from any other method of clearing a wooded area as a part of a conventional attack. How to attack through the extensive woods of a jungle, or of a mountainous area is not mentioned in Army Training Programs.

On the bright side of the picture, however, is the training prescribed for certain units presently in overseas areas. Battalion sized units of the 4th Infantry Division are required to place special emphasis on the project of training in their assigned readiness positions. Their normal supporting elements, whenever possible, join these battalions in the field. This activity is required at least once every sixty days in order that units may gain familiarity with existing terrain and weather conditions. The terrain in which this training takes place, however, may or may not be classified as difficult, depending on local conditions. Nevertheless it is somewhat realistic and constitutes an example worthy of emulation. (6:3)

Also on the credit side of the page is the training given to candidates in the Ranger Course located at Fort Benning with branches at Eglin Field, Florida and in the austere mountains of North Georgia near Dahlonega. Ranger candidates are required to compete with jungle

and mountain terrain for nature's favors. (12:23-36) On graduation the Ranger is an extremely well trained individual and is usually well equipped, at the time, to cope with any type terrain in which he as an individual may find himself. But what about the remainder of his unit? They are not so trained and therefore create the risk of unit combat ineffectiveness.

Similarly, individuals as well as the smattering of small units which receive specialized training at numerous training centers operated by the Army (The Mountain Training Center at Fort Carson, Colorado to name one) are aimed primarily at developing doctrine and disseminating it on a large scale by specially chosen and trained cadres. Unit proficiency in this field continues to be the responsibility of the commander concerned.

To sum up our training then we find that:

1. We give our units limited opportunities to effectively train in the unconventional conditions presented by difficult terrain.
2. Units stationed in some areas overseas are directed to train in localities where they may logically fight in the future. The terrain in which this training takes place may or may not be difficult however, depending on local conditions.
3. We have a specialists school for Ranger training which provides an individual with a knowledge of combat in mountains and jungles and other types of difficult terrain. He does not, however, join a unit with a similar amount of know-how.

What then can be done with our present training to save us from the initial embarrassment we will suffer when forced to fight in more rugged terrain than that used generally for training. As a point of departure, we should take the Ranger Course as a model and adapt it to unit training, placing stress on a unit's ability to cope with a combination of jungle and mountain, and their resultant climatic



changes. As a concurrent feature, this can be accomplished during the advanced unit phase of training with no interruption to progressive training.

The next logical question to be asked is where can so much terrain be acquired for such training as proposed? The answer is fairly obvious. Our National Parks are the perfect places for the situation of battalion-size exercises. They could be procured for this purpose on a permanent or temporary basis - perhaps one to an Army Area with battalions being rotated in and out of them. They could be called "National Maneuver Areas".

The application of ideas in combat depends on variable features of terrain, climatic conditions, and enemy actions. Our development of minor infantry tactics is incomplete if it is based on the terrain of the Fort Benning reservation only. Past defeats have proven that any conclusions based entirely on one theater of operations are unproved. (15:14) Principles of war and training upon which field manuals are based do not change, but the application of these principles does change. In order for our units to be prepared for any unexpected war in any part of the world, infantry units must be ready to apply the basic principles to the unconventional as well as the conventional situation. This can be done only by making it possible for each unit to train in rough terrain at least during a part of its training year.

The warning has been sounded by the record of the past. The Army - and particularly the Infantry - must get off conventional ground and learn to fight effectively in the worst terrain and climatic conditions existing on the face of the earth. Russia, itself, presents us with such an enigma of variable types of difficult terrain. (7:1)

CONCLUSION

1. Infantry battalion exercises should be conducted in difficult and varied terrain during the advanced unit training phase.
2. More realistic combat training should be conducted.
3. Units of our Army must be prepared to fight in all types of terrain and in all conditions of weather.
4. Exercises should be designed to develop the physical condition and stamina of individuals and instill in the unit a will to fight.

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