

Chapter 5

The Nature of Light Infantry

The light infantry forces discussed in the preceding four case studies vary widely from each other in several ways: size, organization, assigned missions, nature of the threat, and area of employment. In spite of these differences, a large number of elements are shared by light infantry forces—elements that describe what may be termed “generic light infantry.” These distinguishing characteristics are not exclusive to light infantry; historically, other infantry units have displayed many of the same qualities. The separation line between conventional and light infantry is blurred; an overlap exists. Nonetheless, light infantry has exhibited these characteristics more uniformly and to a much greater degree than other infantry organizations.

General Characteristics

There are four primary characteristics that distinguish light infantry forces from regular (dismounted, motorized, or mechanized) infantry. The most important of these characteristics is an attitude of self-reliance. Self-reliance forms the essence of the light infantry ethic, the fountainhead from which all of its other characteristics flow. This attitude of self-reliance is exhibited by light infantry forces in a number of ways. For example, light infantrymen typically demonstrate strong confidence that they will survive and succeed in whatever situations they are found. They are undaunted by unfavorable conditions (such as being cut off or outnumbered). Their resourcefulness permits them to devise schemes to accomplish their missions, no matter how difficult the tasks. Furthermore, light infantrymen are accustomed to austerity. They have learned to do without comforts and benefits that other soldiers consider to be necessities. They are not psychologically tied to a logistic lifeline. Their attitude of self-reliance leads them to use any available resource to sustain themselves or to improve their combat capabilities. Moreover, light infantrymen do not give up. Even when outcomes seem inevitable, light infantrymen stay in the fight and attempt to turn situations to their advantage. Their self-reliance is typified by self-denial, fortitude, tenacity, and resourcefulness.

This attitude of self-reliance gives light infantrymen a psychological advantage over their enemies. Confident in their abilities, light infantrymen normally consider themselves to be tactically superior to their opponents. Once they have demonstrated this tactical superiority, their enemies often become fearful and wary. Light infantrymen use this psychological advantage to keep their enemies off-balance and tense. Unpredictable, invisible to view, employing methods not anticipated by their enemies, light infantry forces can often paralyze the minds and wills of their enemies before a battle begins.

This self-reliant attitude enables light infantry units to become the masters of their environment. Light infantrymen do not fight, fear, or resist the environment; they embrace it as shelter, protection, provider, and home. They learn to be comfortable and secure in any terrain and climate, be it jungle, mountain, desert, swamp, or arctic tundra. Exceptionally adaptable, light infantry units dominate the terrain in which they operate and use it to their advantage against their enemies.

As a result, light infantry forces exhibit a well-developed appreciation for the tactical aspects of ground. Because they understand and accept the terrain and climate as their natural environment, light infantry forces possess an unmatched tactical mobility on difficult ground. Moving with a speed and ease that astounds, light infantrymen routinely use routes and traverse areas deemed impassable by regular troops. Naturally, this terrain specialization takes time to develop.

Mastery of the environment and the attitude of self-reliance give the light infantry an unusual versatility. Light units adapt quickly from one environment to another or from one type of operation to another. Abrupt changes in plans find them still ready for action. Holding a jungle base one day, they may be ordered to conduct a deep raid, mount a long-term reconnaissance patrol, participate in a riverine operation, or attack a fortified position on the next. In addition, they can operate independently or in conjunction with larger forces. They can also function with or without significant combat support. Unexpected situations do not throw them off-balance. With additional specialized training (for example, airborne training), light forces can become even more versatile.

Their versatility is also reflected in a propensity for improvisation and innovation. Light infantrymen naturally derive new tactics, if necessary, because they are not tied dogmatically to a specific doctrine. They use their equipment in innovative fashion, and they do not hesitate to use the enemy's weapons and resources when they can. They also remain open to new ideas, new technology, and new weaponry. Light infantry forces maintain a flexible attitude toward the battlefield.

Given their dynamic characteristics, is it any wonder that light infantry forces typically possess high esprit. They know that they are different. They are proud of their ability to operate in the most difficult terrain, and they know that they are often assigned the most demanding missions. Confident and secure in the awareness of their unique tactical skills, light infantrymen consider themselves to be a cut above the average soldier. However, the general characteristics of light infantry do not appear automatically; they are developed through training, enlightened leadership, and actual operations.

Selection, Organization, and Training

Unlike highly specialized light infantry units like the Rangers, FSSF, and SAS, most light infantry forces are not composed of elite troops. Nonetheless, given excellent leadership and a demanding training program, light infantry units can develop an elite character. As they are pushed to standards of performance that seem out of their initial reach, light infantry soldiers can

acquire the sense that they are something special. The development of the Golani Brigade in the Israeli Defense Force is a perfect example of this process. Although that brigade is composed primarily of conscripted soldiers, it is considered, because of its high standards of performance, to be one of Israel's finest. The brigade's standards are based on difficult training, exacting leadership, and the expectation that it will be employed in close terrain on the toughest missions.¹ The Golani Brigade, as well as the Chindits and the CCF, illustrate that light infantry soldiers need not be selected through a special screening process.

Light infantry forces also need not conform to a standard organization. Light infantry units may even organize internally in different ways. Organizers of such units, above all, seek forces with tactical flexibility. In this regard, the 3x3 squad organization found in the CCF in Korea and the British forces in Malaya and Borneo bears close scrutiny. This organization provides squad leaders with three discrete elements that they can use for reconnaissance, security, maneuver, or fire support as they see fit. Certainly, it gives squad leaders more options than the standard two fire team organization. However, in a scenario where staying power and conventional tactics are likely to be employed (for example, as with the FSSF in Italy), a standard nine- to twelve-man squad of two fire teams may be preferred.

Light infantry forces typically possess little heavy equipment and transport. However, they often acquire such support temporarily when needed. The bulk of light infantry firepower at the battalion level and lower is self-generated with light and medium machine guns, 2-inch to 81-mm mortars, rocket launchers, automatic rifles, hand and rifle grenades, and individual weapons. At a higher level, it is not unusual for light infantry organizations to be supported by artillery, light armor, tank destroyers-assault guns, engineers, aviation, and air forces. In general, however, light infantrymen tend to focus on the effective use of their own organic infantry weapons (a manifestation of their self-reliance). If equipment cannot be man or mule packed, the light infantry often has no use for it.

A number of common themes dominate light infantry training. For one, light infantry forces train under austere conditions. Comfort and luxury are unknown to them. Misery and privation prevail. Light infantrymen are taught to be self-reliant by being denied the things that they think they need in training. Food, water, rest, shelter from the elements: all of these fundamental needs are cut to the bone during light infantry training. Light infantry soldiers are pushed to the limits that they think they can endure—and then beyond. If they do not break, they learn that they can do things they never imagined they could and that they can continue to perform even though they are miserable and exhausted. Their capabilities are thus stretched. This austere, demanding training ultimately produces high self-confidence, trust, and cohesion within light infantry units. Light infantrymen often find that combat conditions are actually less severe than the conditions they experienced in training.

In addition to austerity and rigor, light infantry training puts great emphasis on physical fitness. Light infantry operations almost always place

physical demands on soldiers far in excess of those endured by regular infantry. Conspicuous examples are the experiences of the FSSF paratroops at Difensa, Galahad at Myitkyina, the CCF in Korea, and British paratroops in the Falkland Islands. Thus, physical fitness training is integrated continuously into light infantry training. Troops do not ride to the rifle range; they march or run with weapons. Long marches with full rucksacks are commonplace. Twelve- to eighteen-hour training days develop endurance. Then, as competition grows, standards are raised. In the process, the old, the infirm, and the mentally weak are purged. The ultimate goal is to develop deep reservoirs of strength and stamina in the men. However, mere endurance is not enough; light infantrymen must also remain observant, alert, and ready for action while they are under physical stress.

Another theme of training is the development of initiative, particularly for NCOs and junior officers. Initiative and flexibility are developed by introducing unanticipated requirements into the training and requiring a response. A further technique is to place the burden of responsibility for some of the training on these junior leaders, requiring them, sometimes on short notice, to produce a plan and obtain the resources necessary for the training. Small-unit tactical exercises, such as patrolling and infiltration, also develop initiative. Like physical fitness, the development of initiative is integrated into the training program wherever possible. It is clear that these three training themes—austerity, physical endurance, and initiative—contribute directly to the development of the four primary characteristics of light infantry forces described earlier.

All light infantries seem to focus on several common skills in their training programs. Expert marksmanship, for example, is cited constantly as a fundamental skill. While all infantrymen—indeed all soldiers—must know how to shoot, light infantry units approach marksmanship as an art. Moreover, light infantrymen must have detailed knowledge of *all* the infantry weapons in their company, including crew-served machine guns. They spend hours on the range, day and night, refining accuracy and speed in all kinds of weather and simulated combat conditions. This training usually includes a heavy dose of maintenance training, actual practice on enemy weapons, and marksmanship competition internal to the unit. Familiarity with weapons has no relevance or meaning to light infantrymen: the achievement of expert-level skills is their goal. Light infantrymen are weapons masters.

Light infantry training emphasizes a variety of other skills and abilities: pioneer skills (to reinforce and exploit the terrain); the use of explosives; high standards of land navigation; hand-to-hand combat; field craft, small-unit tactics tailored to the operational environment; cross-training to spread expertise in a number of special skills (for example, artillery observation, communications, and mortar fire); and stealth. In addition, light infantries normally receive some form of specialized training to permit them to operate in unusual environments. Thus, all British infantry battalions passed through the Jungle Warfare School before their actual employment in Malaya and Borneo. The Chindits trained intensively in river-crossing operations, and the FSSF learned to ski because of the uniqueness of their intended employment. Light infantry forces also train extensively at night. In fact, light infantry views the nighttime as its natural period of activity.

Operations and Tactics

Light infantry forces are usually employed against other light forces at night and in close terrain, that is, terrain that restricts easy movement by heavy, mechanized forces. Light forces cannot survive in open terrain against heavy forces, although they may be used in open terrain against enemy light forces.

Light infantry forces tend to hide and rest during the day and to move and fight at night. The vulnerability of light infantrymen to enemy artillery and air compels them to use the cover of darkness for protection. The exception is jungle warfare. Thick jungle provides good protection from observation during daylight. At night, the jungle can sometimes be so dark that only limited movement is advisable. In the main, however, nighttime is preferred by light forces. Violations of this practice often lead to heavy casualties for light infantry in combat.

Light infantry forces are best suited for offensive operations. Indeed, the very character of the light infantry is to be offensively oriented, to retain the initiative in combat. Constantly probing, pushing, and challenging the enemy, light infantry forces cause the enemy to react to their activity, not vice versa. Even when employed in an overall defensive strategy (such as the FSSF at Anzio and Walker's forces in Borneo), light infantry constantly seeks opportunities to conduct offensive operations.

In the offensive role, light forces can be used at the operational level of war, as the Chindits were, although such historical examples are rare. Employing light forces at the operational level of war, however, usually requires a "break-in" capability, such as airborne training (for example, the German conquest of Crete) or amphibious training (for example, the FSSF at Kiska and in southern France).²

Although best suited for offensive tasks, light infantry forces have been used occasionally in essentially static defensive roles. But such missions fail to capitalize on the special capabilities of light infantry, particularly their superior tactical mobility, stealth, and offensive attitude. Tying light infantry units down in such a manner also increases their vulnerability to enemy fire. Whenever possible, commanders should seek to use light infantry units in offensive roles, even when the main conventional forces are on the defensive. In particular, commanders should be careful about using light infantry units as isolated strongpoints because of their lack of heavy weapons and their deficiency in staying power.

Brigade- and battalion-level operations are rarely conducted using light infantry forces, except in those instances where entire armies are organized on a light infantry basis (for example, the CCF and also the Japanese Army in World War II). Even when light infantry forces have been organized into divisions and brigades, their actual operations have tended to be extremely decentralized. The Chindits were organized into brigades and battalions, but the normal fighting organizations were the columns (i.e., half battalions). The FSSF, also organized as a brigade, most often conducted its attacks against company and battalion objectives, but subunits in the FSSF were small (companies numbered 100 men, battalions 300 men). British operations in

Malaya and Borneo rarely exceeded battalion level. While there were exceptions to this practice of employing relatively small units, most exceptions occurred when light infantry units were directed to conduct more conventional operations, such as the FSSF's breakout from the Anzio beachhead, the Chindits' permanent block on Japanese lines of communication in Burma, and the 77th Chindit Brigade's attack on Mogaung.

In general, companies, platoons, and squads of light infantry do the fighting—as a rule, in isolated actions. One reason for this circumstance is that close terrain tends to fragment battle into separate small-unit actions. Another is that light infantry forces often are required to operate in wide expanses of territory, leading commanders to divide their forces into small packets to cover the zone. (This phenomenon is a typical feature of economy-of-force roles.) A final reason for the use of small light infantry forces is that when the forces are used in a raiding or reconnaissance role, their objectives are usually company size and smaller. Because light infantry is most often used in decentralized, small-unit actions, light infantry trainers should devote the majority of their unit field training to company-level and lower tactics.

Light infantry forces also appear to operate frequently in conjunction with native irregulars (for example, the Kachins in Burma, and Ibans in Borneo) and with special operations forces (SOF), particularly in low-intensity conflicts. Interestingly, both the SOF and the native irregulars provide the same aid to the light infantry—intelligence, early warning, and security—even though they may not be working together. The light infantry, in turn, provides combat power when needed to the local forces and SOF.

Finally, light infantry operations are conducted at very close range. Light infantrymen normally do not seek to maximize the range of their weapons. Instead, they seek to get close enough to the enemy to smell and hear him.

The operational parameters described above dictate a unique tactical style for light infantry forces. The conventional tactics practiced by regular infantry forces and characterized by artillery preparations, significant combat support, massing of combat power, and large-unit maneuver do not work well for light infantry. Instead, light infantry tactics are characterized by three main features: surprise, shock, and speed.

Light infantry achieves surprise in both time and space through several means. Through superior field craft and domination of the terrain, light infantrymen approach enemy positions with animal-like stealth. Moving at night, using every fold in the ground, exploiting every bit of concealment, and making no noise, light infantrymen frequently reach hand-grenade range of the enemy positions before they are detected. Light infantry also attacks from unexpected directions and from more than one direction when feasible. Through preattack reconnaissance, light infantry leaders determine the weaknesses and gaps in enemy dispositions, which then become the objects of attacks. Finally, light infantry forces vary the time and style of their operations. Thus, the enemy is unable to predict their actions. (Consider, for example, how the British used rainstorms in Malaya to cover their approach for an attack against the Communist forces.)

Having achieved surprise, light infantry forces shock the enemy with the speed and power of their attack. Although lightly armed, light infantry can

deliver a heavy volume of fire for short periods of time by massing all its weapons forward in coordinated, accurate fire. The application of such heavy firepower (especially of light automatic weapons), combined with rapid maneuver to the flanks and rear of the enemy's positions, creates a violent shock effect that can lead to quick victory. Light infantrymen must avoid being pinned down in the attack. Once pinned down, they lose momentum, their shock dissipates, and the enemy can introduce his indirect-fire weapons or reinforce his positions to the great disadvantage of the light infantry. Since light infantry often experiences problems with its supply of ammunition, it favors a quick decision in battle. As a result, light infantry units will sometimes risk high casualties by storming a position, rather than allowing a lengthy battle to continue.

Light infantry units also exploit speed in their operations. To achieve speed, which is a function of superior individual and group tactical movement, light infantry relies on its intimate knowledge of the terrain, a high level of fitness, expert field craft, and the capability to negotiate difficult ground. By moving to an objective faster than its enemy thinks possible, light infantry can achieve surprise. To execute surprise successfully, however, requires stealth. While many units can only move rapidly if they make no attempt to conceal their movements, light infantry must accomplish stealth as well as speed if it is to be effective. Therefore, light infantry units keep to the wilds and seldom use roads or trails.

Decision making in the light infantry is also characterized by speed. Light infantry leaders must be prepared to react immediately to changes in tactical plans or to unforeseen situations. They seldom have the luxury of other forces coming to their rescue. They cannot afford to be pinned down mentally. For them, snap decisions often mean the difference between success or failure. Delaying a decision is usually dangerous.

The most frequently conducted tactical operation in the light infantry repertoire is patrolling. Patrolling requires high levels of discipline, patience, stamina, and field craft to be effective. Furthermore, patrolling techniques must be tailored to the specific tactical environment. True expertise is achieved only after constant practice in training and operations. Patrolling is probably the most mentally and physically stressful of all light infantry operations, because it involves extended exposure to the enemy, whose dispositions are not known, and it requires constant, all-around security. If a light infantry unit can master patrolling, its other operations will come much easier. Consequently, patrolling (particularly long-term patrolling) should be a staple in the light infantry training program.

During low-intensity operations, patrols may stay out for extended periods of time. Moreover, saturation of patrolling by light infantry forces has proven to be probably the most effective tactic of counterinsurgency. When the enemy is located through saturation patrolling, light infantry units typically conduct relentless pursuit to destroy him.

Another common feature of light infantry tactics is reliance on SOPs. These SOPs direct rapid, immediate actions under certain predictable situations, such as crossing a stream, entering an ambush, locating an enemy position, encountering a moving enemy unit, stopping for a rest halt, or

relieving another unit. Light infantry, in such instances, operates with a minimum of orders. SOPs are never doctrinaire. When the tactical situation changes, SOPs change too.

In addition to preattack reconnaissance, light infantry units also conduct rehearsals as a matter of course. Rehearsals are made as realistic as possible and are conducted over the same type of terrain and under the same conditions as the actual attack. Rehearsals for night operations take place at night.

When used for deep tactical operations, light infantry forces often infiltrate at night on foot. Infiltration is conducted by small parties, at staggered times, through several seams in the enemy lines. Such small groups reconsolidate in the enemy's rear to accomplish the assigned mission. The CCF excelled in this technique.

The Defense

When light infantry is employed in the defense, its tactical mobility is impaired; it is vulnerable to artillery and aircraft fires; and it lacks the necessary staying power and firepower often needed in the defense.

Light forces defend best in depth, where they have more room to maneuver. Such maneuver provides them protection (to avoid enemy fires) and permits them to engage in limited offensive actions, such as spoiling attacks or defensive attacks against the flanks of an enemy force in motion. Maneuver space also allows light infantry to avoid being fixed and destroyed in detail.

If light forces are employed in a positional (static) defense, they must have time to dig strong fortifications characterized by overhead cover, bunkers, deep trenches, and switch positions that use the natural strengths of the terrain. In addition, they must be augmented extensively with combat support and logistical support: artillery, heavy machine guns, antiarmor weapons, barrier materials, and ammunition stocks. Only then will light infantry have the staying power and the survivability to be effective. Failure to take these precautions may result in the loss of the force.

In a positional defense, light infantry forces often defend from the reverse slope, placing only observers and limited firepower on the forward slope (to force the enemy to deploy early). Indirect fires attack the enemy on the forward slope and crest. Then, light infantry's organic, direct-fire weapons engage the enemy as he reaches the crest and begins to descend. Here, the enemy no longer enjoys the support of his own indirect and heavy direct-fire weapons and becomes vulnerable to surprise fires coming from a multitude of camouflaged positions that he has not been able to locate beforehand. Reverse-slope positions are also less vulnerable to artillery and air attacks.³

Camouflage is very important in the defense: one might term it an imperative. Expert camouflage, using natural and man-made materials, permits the light infantry to avoid detection and attacks by artillery and air observers. Light infantry forces in the defense should be invisible in the daytime. Repositioning and resupply efforts should occur at night.

Light infantry units show special skill in the coordinated use of machine guns and mortars in the defense. This skill should not be dismissed lightly, because it requires a refined appreciation of the military aspects of terrain

and comprehensive experience in the siting of weapons, control of firing, and choice of targets.

Finally, light infantry typically conducts counterattacks as an integral part of its defensive scheme. Counterattacks take several forms. Light forces may attack to disrupt an enemy force forming for its own attack. They may attack the flanks or rear of an enemy force already deployed and in motion. Light infantry units also counterattack immediately to recover lost positions. Counterattacking forces may be held in sheltered positions to await specific opportunities, or they may be formed on the spot from available forces. Surprise and shock characterize such counterattacks.

Once attack objectives are secured, light infantrymen dig in rapidly to defend against the enemy's own counterattacks and to survive his artillery fires. In any temporary defense, light infantrymen dig quickly and deeply to provide themselves protection.

Combat Support

Although light infantry traditionally depends on its own organic fires, when placed in the defense or given conventional offensive missions, it must have additional combat support. Common sense and the factors of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time available) dictate the scale and nature of the support. The support given the FSSF in Italy serves as an example of a properly supported force, while the experiences of Galahad at Myitkyina and the Chindits at Mogaung illustrate the consequences of failing to provide needed support.

Strong artillery support is essential for light infantry in the defense to reduce the combat power of the enemy before he closes to rifle range. In an attack against fortified positions, artillery is essential for light infantry to reduce enemy strongpoints, to force him to keep his head down, and to enable the light infantry to get close enough to be effective. Close air support complements the artillery.

Engineer support also increases the strength of the light infantry's defense through survivability (the construction of fortifications) and through counter-mobility (the erection of barriers and obstacles). The more engineer support available, the less time the light infantry needs to prepare to defend.

In addition, light infantry forces can frequently benefit greatly through the use of light armor because of its mobility, antiarmor weaponry, and capability to destroy hard point targets, such as enemy bunkers. Even in close terrain, light armor has proven valuable. Several modern light infantries include light armor in their force structure.⁴

Lastly, the helicopter has had an almost revolutionary effect on certain aspects of light infantry operations, particularly tactical mobility and resupply. In Borneo, helicopters compensated for several severe tactical disadvantages suffered by the British infantry and enabled it to react immediately to Indonesian raids. Helicopters neutralized the enemy's freedom of movement. Resupply by helicopters also permitted the infantry patrols and base camps to remain deployed for long periods of time. (The light planes used in the Chindit campaign performed similar functions and can be viewed as precursors

to the helicopters.) In addition, the use of helicopters for deep insertion, casualty evacuation, and command and control should not be overlooked. No current light infantry force should be without helicopter support.

Leadership

Light infantry forces are often led at the highest level by bold-thinking, charismatic men. Wingate, Frederick, Templer, and Walker were extraordinary men of unusual talent, imagination, vision, and perseverance. Other examples outside the case studies examined here are David Stirling, founder of the SAS; General Karl Student, leader of the German airborne corps; T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"); and Colonel (posthumously Brigadier General) William O. Darby, leader of American Rangers. While these officers were unorthodox in varying degrees, many of them succeeded equally well as leaders of conventional units. The binding thread in their characters appears to be their willingness to implement (and indeed to produce) innovative and unorthodox ideas about combat. Light infantry operations, because of their frequently unconventional nature, need such leaders if they are to be conducted properly. If leaders are unable to adjust to the light infantry style, tactical success may elude them. Dogmatism, inflexibility, and lack of imagination will doom light infantry forces.

The leadership at the top sets the tone of light infantry training programs and develops the tactical style that characterizes units during actual operations. This process of leadership carries down to the lower-level light infantry leaders, who conform to a broad pattern. Light infantry leaders typically are innovative, imaginative, flexible, and tough minded. They endure the same hardships as their men, so they are equally fit and self-reliant. The confidence, trust, and closeness between the leaders and those led in light infantry units normally exceed that experienced in regular infantry units. Light infantry soldiers demand a lot from their leaders, and the leaders earn respect through their performance—not by virtue of their rank.

Because of the prevalence of decentralized operations by light infantry, the quality of leadership by NCOs and junior officers is critical to success. These leaders typically are given wider latitude and more responsibility than their counterparts in regular infantry units. They mature rapidly and practice a high degree of initiative.

Furthermore, light infantry leaders demonstrate advanced technical expertise in all infantry and some special skills. For example, they must be able to fire and maintain every unit weapon, navigate to Ranger standards, read trail signs, adjust artillery fire, emplace demolitions, coordinate resupply by air, camouflage themselves and their units, and direct their units tactically. The best light infantry leaders, like First Lieutenant Logan Weston of Galahad, are "infantry scientists."⁵

Light infantry leaders are generally of higher quality than their counterparts in conventional infantry and characteristically employ several significant techniques. First, light infantry NCOs and officers lead from the front. Consequently, light forces often suffer a higher ratio of casualties in the upper ranks than other units. Second, light infantry leaders also exhibit an obvious and sincere concern about the welfare of their men. While such concern is by

no means limited to the light infantry, light infantry leaders do seem to place a higher value on troop welfare than leaders in many other units. Occasionally, they go to great lengths to preserve the confidence and morale of their men. An example of this trait was Frederick's order for the delivery of a whiskey ration to his men on Difensa. Other examples are Calvert's insistence that NCOs account for every man in their squad whether living, wounded, or dead; the Chindit airgraph service; and the CCF emphasis on comradely relations and fair, equitable treatment.

The mistreatment of Galahad by Stilwell and his staff, on the other hand, illustrates the terrible consequences of paying insufficient attention to troop welfare. One can also go too far in the other direction, as the U.S. Army did in Vietnam, delivering cold beer and ice cream to units on active operations in the field. Light infantry leaders are sensitive to the needs of their men, but they do not pamper them. Thus, while they insist on immediate casualty evacuation, they do not hesitate to extend a patrol or ambush several days in time if it is tactically prudent to do so.

Light infantry leaders also typically make a point to keep their men well informed on tactical situations and the part that they will play in imminent operations. Such briefings increase the trust between the officers and the men, reduce feelings of uncertainty, and raise the level of commitment of the unit to the coming action. Furthermore, if command and control breaks down for some reason, soldiers understand the purpose of the operation and are able to carry on using their own initiative. Preoperation briefings have high value for light infantry operations.

Logistics

The central theme of the logistical philosophy of light infantry is simple: light infantry forces recognize the importance of logistics, but they refuse to be tied—either physically or mentally—to lines of communication. For light infantry, logistical planning influences, but it does not control, operational planning. Light infantrymen figure that in a pinch, they can always improvise; if necessary, they can do without.

To support themselves, light infantry forces often make maximum use of local resources. They employ the local population for certain kinds of labor, they eat the foods that nature (or natives) provide, they use natural materials for camouflage and protection, and they use the enemy's food, weapons, and ammunition against him. As masters of the environment, light infantrymen know how to exploit nature for their own sustainment.

Light infantry also improvises to simplify or solve its logistical requirements. It is always looking for lighter and better equipment or for natural substitutes. The use of elephants by the Chindits as pack animals and to clear landing zones is an example. The manner in which the 82d Airborne Division used civilian vehicles for transport in Grenada is a more modern example.

When light infantrymen transport items on their persons, specific loads are not prescribed. Individual loads vary widely based on the factors of METT-T. The Chindits had to carry about seventy pounds per man in Burma,

but the SAS in Borneo insisted that their rucksacks weigh no more than fifty pounds. In the 1982 Falkland Islands War, the situation demanded that soldiers carry an average of more than 100 pounds per man. Within a given theater, for a specific campaign, however, loads can be standardized. Several principles govern the establishment of such a standard soldier's load.

Light infantrymen must be trained to carry only what is essential; NCOs and junior officers must ruthlessly restrict what soldiers put in their rucksacks. Experience will help train the men, but leaders must constantly check and correct the loads. Also, every effort must be made to lighten the soldier's load through technology and ingenuity (such as lighter rations, weapons and ammunition, and radios). Leaders at high levels must make a point of responding to the ideas of their subordinates on this matter. In addition, when local situations change, SOPs need to change. Above all, light infantrymen must not be so loaded down that they are continuously exhausted, inattentive, and unready.

Light infantry logistics have been enhanced to a great extent by the development of the helicopter. The flexibility of the helicopter, its ability to fly almost anywhere carrying heavy loads, permits the light infantry to operate independently at distances well removed from supply bases. In certain scenarios, the low daily requirement for supplies of light infantry will enable it to be resupplied completely by air. But in the absence of helicopters, current light infantry forces may find themselves relying, once again, on pack animals.

Intelligence

Each case study in this report demonstrates that accurate, timely intelligence is vital to the success of light infantry operations. To be effective, light infantry forces must know what the enemy is about, while keeping the enemy in the dark about their own intentions. While light infantry cannot afford to be surprised, it must constantly attempt to achieve surprise. To further this goal, light infantry forces obtain intelligence from sources as high as the national level (for example, the case of U.S. light forces in Grenada and the Israeli forces at Entebbe) or at the local-citizen (Malaya) or aborigine level (Burma, Borneo).

Light infantry units obtain tactical intelligence from a variety of sources. Often, the majority of their intelligence comes through comprehensive patrolling. Each one of the light forces described in the previous chapters spent a great deal of time patrolling to meet their own needs for intelligence. Light infantry also taps into existing intelligence networks, rather than attempting to duplicate them. Therefore, smooth coordination with civil and police intelligence is absolutely essential in low-intensity conflicts, particularly in counter-insurgencies. If this meshing does not take place properly, military operations may well be futile.

Other local sources of information are also employed by the light infantry: light infantry leaders use local guides, when necessary, in unfamiliar terrain; they commission border crossers to collect information on enemy dispositions; they may even form irregular units for the specific purposes of early warning and the collection of information. Sensitivity to intelligence remains an imperative for light infantry operations.

Technology

Historically, advantages in technology have not normally been decisive in light infantry operations. However, in several instances, technology has compensated for weaknesses or permitted light infantry to perform on a scale or level not previously possible. As able and self-sufficient as the Chindits were, they could not have operated at the depths that they did, nor for as long as they did, without the technology embodied in the radio and the airplanes of the No. 1 Air Commando. Similarly, if Walker had not had his helicopters in Borneo, he would have needed at least twice as many troops as he was given. Lack of technology (few airplanes, scarce transport, and few radios) certainly contributed to the failure of the CCF to drive the UN Command out of Korea, but the enormous technological superiority of the UN Command did not permit it to achieve victory over its backward foe. Stalemate resulted instead.

Light infantry leaders are cautious about how they employ available technology. Just because a technology exists does not mean that it should be used, particularly in low-intensity conflict. For example, indirect fires often accomplish little in the jungle. Also, sophisticated equipment is of little use, unless it can be man packed and handled roughly. The guiding principle for the employment of advanced technology in light infantry combat is that the technology must conform to the light infantry style and not the reverse. Light infantry leaders know this well. Overreliance on technology may rob the light infantry of its strengths. Such a practice erodes the necessary light infantry attitude of self-reliance; furthermore, it alienates the soldier from his tactical environment by creating a distracting and surreal atmosphere. The FSSF's analysis of its operations in Italy specifically cautioned against overreliance on technology. A final comment on the dangers of overreliance on technology is offered by General Nguyen Xuan Hoang. Describing the Battle of Ia Drang in the central highlands of Vietnam, Hoang stated:

The 1st Cavalry came out to fight us with one day's food, a week's ammunition. They sent their clothes back to Saigon to be washed. They depended on water in cans, brought in by helicopter. . . . We tried to turn these advantages against you, to make you so dependent on them that you would never develop the ability to meet us on your own terms—on foot, lightly armed, in the jungle.⁶

In short, technology should be tailored to the needs of the light infantry. It should lighten the soldier's load, enhance his mobility, reduce his logistic problems, compensate for his weaknesses, nullify the enemy's advantages, but *never* alter the basic nature of the light infantry's attitude of self-reliance.

Low-Intensity Conflict

Clearly, light infantry operations in low-intensity conflicts are inherently more demanding and difficult than those in mid- to high-intensity wars. While politically derived restrictions on the use of force hinder all military operations to a significant degree, in low-intensity conflicts, they are especially constraining. In addition, light forces have the disadvantage that their enemy is hard to identify, while they, themselves, are always identifiable. In low-intensity conflicts, a higher degree of cooperation between civil, military, and police organizations is necessary for success, yet is more difficult to obtain.

Low-intensity conflicts require more patience—patience to wait for intelligence to mature, patience to accept frequent failure, patience to understand the peculiarities of the native population and government, and patience to take a long-term view on bringing a conflict to an end. The mental stress in low-intensity conflicts is also greater than that experienced in mid- to high-intensity conflicts: the enemy could be anywhere; there are no secure areas, no front and rear. This realization creates and maintains a high degree of tension.

To engage in low-intensity conflict, light infantrymen need a number of special skills and talents. Foremost among these is a sensitivity to the needs and values of the local population. “Winning hearts and minds” is more than a cliché, it embodies the essence of what the light infantryman’s attitude toward the local population must be. Developing such an attitude among the rank and file of a light force must rank high on any list of priorities.

Light infantrymen also need to possess a healthy range of language skills to prepare them for low-intensity conflicts. Soldiers in such conflicts typically have much more contact with civilians than soldiers do in other forms of war. The benefits of speaking the local language in the low-intensity environment for the purposes of gaining intelligence, winning confidence, and obtaining support are self-evident.

In low-intensity conflicts, light infantrymen may also be required to apprehend suspects, conduct searches, seize property, identify contraband, man roadblocks, and support police and security forces. These tasks require a wide range of knowledge (for example, of local regulations) and skills (such as search techniques), many of which are not routinely provided for in light infantry training. Light forces may even be involved in training local security forces.

Preparing light forces for action in low-intensity conflicts often takes more time and is more difficult than developing forces for mid-intensity war, because operations in low-intensity conflicts require a wider range of skills, require more flexibility, and generate more stress in soldiers. Although such conflicts produce fewer casualties than other forms of war, the demands placed on light forces are inherently greater. Nevertheless, the light infantry ethic and low-intensity conflict are quite compatible. Because of the versatility of light forces, they adapt well to such operations.

Problems

Light infantry forces are not general-purpose forces. They have only limited use in a mid- to high-intensity war. Light forces are vulnerable to enemy artillery and aircraft fires. Moreover, they are unsuitable for sustained defensive operations because they lack the logistical infrastructure necessary to survive such operations. In addition, they lack the firepower and sustainability to attack fortified positions, except when they have perfect surprise. Although light infantry has excellent tactical mobility in close terrain, in open terrain, light forces can be outmaneuvered and outgunned with ease. Light forces always require significant support in prolonged campaigns, in open terrain, in the defense, and whenever they are pitted against heavy forces.

Consequently, when light forces are employed in mid- to high-intensity wars that occur in areas of varied, but primarily open, terrain, opportunities for their prudent use will be quite limited. On the other hand, in areas of operations like Korea or northern Italy, commanders will find many more chances to use light forces. Even then, however, analysis of combat operations shows that light infantry units appear to be most useful when employed at brigade level and lower, although there are exceptions to this generalization (for example, the use of airborne divisions in a coup de main strategy).

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that higher commanders will know how to use light forces properly. Too often, higher commanders have misused light forces, even to the point of disaster. Stilwell, obviously, did not understand the capabilities and limitations of the Chindits. General Clark seemed to view the FSSF as just another brigade. Clark's corps commanders also repeatedly used the FSSF in unwise daylight assaults. SAS leaders continually resisted commanders who wished to use them in standard infantry roles.

As a result, whenever light infantry forces arrive in theater, a grave probability exists that they will be misused. Light forces are commonly misused as spearheads in ground attacks: both the FSSF and Ranger battalions served in this role during the Italian campaign. They were also misemployed in static defensive positions (as were airborne battalions and regiments). The Chindits suffered terrible casualties in daylight assaults when they were used without strong artillery support against the entrenched Japanese. The fact is higher commanders have been loath to permit high-quality forces to languish in rest areas waiting for a suitable mission to arise. So, they often order their light forces into the line or use them for other dubious ventures. If light forces are available, they will be used—rightly or wrongly. Although the misuse of light forces is deplorable, allowing the units to remain idle is expensive. In some cases, commanders have had no choice but to use light forces as conventional infantry, such as when General Bradley employed the XVIII Airborne Corps to plug the gap created by the Germans in the Ardennes counteroffensive in December 1944.

Thus, a balance must be struck in each theater of war in the use of conventional and light infantry forces. If there are too many light forces, their misuse is inevitable. If too few light forces are available, conventional forces will have to be employed in situations for which they are ill trained. During the last fifty years, whenever light and specialty forces have proliferated beyond necessary levels, it has contributed to their misuse in conventional roles.

The ultimate results of the misuse of light forces are high casualty rates and the loss of the light infantry arm. Because light forces are composed of highly trained soldiers and above-average leaders, it is difficult to obtain suitable replacements for them in combat. Unless a light infantry training base and replacement pool exist, this replacement problem cannot be solved. Eventually, disbandment may be the only alternative. The destruction of the Rangers at Cisterna is an example—although an extreme one—of the costs of misusing a light force.

The longer light forces remain in theater, the heavier they tend to become. During its history, the FSSF acquired its own airborne artillery battalion and

a Ranger cannon battery. The Rangers in North Africa and Italy assimilated a 4.2-inch chemical mortar battalion. In just a few months of combat, the 10th Light (Mountain) Division acquired a collection of American and German transport, heavy machine guns, and artillery. These kinds of organizational changes are not necessarily dangerous or undesirable. They may, in fact, simply reflect bona fide requirements for extra combat power and combat support as dictated by tactical situations.

Nonetheless, light infantry forces can remain "light" in employment even though they retain relatively heavy organizations. The German mountain divisions of World War II operated in accordance with light infantry principles, yet they were larger than the standard German infantry division. Similarly, British commando units today practice the light infantry ethic, yet their organization is 100 percent mobile in armored and wheeled vehicles. When deployed, they leave behind what they do not need.

Although most light infantry forces are organized light, it is not organization that determines their light nature. It is, instead, their characteristics and methods of operation. Thus, the historical tendency for light forces to become heavier should not automatically be criticized. The danger occurs only when the tendency is uncontrolled. Then light forces can become unwieldy and inflexible, unsuited for the purposes for which they were created.

Light infantry forces are unique. Although they share many of the same skills as regular infantry, they are especially distinguished by their attitude of self-reliance, their mastery of the environment, their versatility, and their high esprit. These characteristics produce a special tactical approach to the battlefield. Offensively oriented, flexible, adaptable, and innovative, light infantry capitalizes on stealth, surprise, speed, and shock. Not psychologically tied to a supply line or to the availability of combat support, light infantry operates at night, hitting the enemy hard when and where he does not expect it. Light infantry relies on its own resources and its own organic weapons to destroy the enemy at close range. Light infantry believes that the light infantryman is the decisive weapon.

However, light infantrymen are not supermen. They get tired, become sick, and lose their effectiveness like other soldiers. Improperly used, they will die at alarming rates. On the other hand, employed by enlightened commanders and imbued with the light infantry ethic, they can be a formidable arm in time of war. (For a distilled analysis of conventional and light infantry forces, see table 7.)

Table 7. Historical Norms for Conventional and Light Infantry Forces

This table provides the distinctive differences between conventional and light infantry. The comments are intentionally terse and brief. One could probably dispute each point by reference to some historical infantry operation or complain that the distinctions drawn are too sharp and somewhat artificial; nevertheless, taken as a whole, the table conveys a general impression of those features of light infantry that distinguish it from conventional infantry. In actual operations, the differences may be blurred, and an actual overlapping of qualities may exist. In citing the distinctions between the two types of infantry, no disparagement of conventional infantry is intended. Rather, both light and conventional infantry have their necessary places on the battlefield.

Conventional Infantry

Light Infantry

Training

Low attrition rate during training
Mild physical demands
Weapons familiarity

High attrition rate during training
Extremes of physical fitness required
Masters of weapons

Operations

General purpose force
Equally suited to the offense and defense
Operated in any terrain
Limited capability for unconventional operations
Views difficult terrain as an obstacle

Uncomfortable in extreme climates

Operates in large formations

Habitually conducts daytime operations
Possesses built-in protection
 against small-arms and indirect fires
 (mechanized infantry only)
Avoids contact with irregular forces

Usually avoids contact with civilians

Can reduce fortified positions
Produces its own intelligence or obtains it from
 higher headquarters
Adapts to low-intensity conflict with difficulty
Operates as part of a large combined arms
 formation

Utility is limited to specific conditions
Strong offensive orientation
Best suited for close terrain
Adapts well to unconventional operations
Dominates the terrain and uses it to its advantage

In harmony with the environment; adapts to nature

Most often operates at battalion level and lower

Operates most frequently at night
Achieves protection through camouflage, maneuver, and by digging in

Frequently operates with irregular forces and special operations forces

Makes frequent contacts with civilians for intelligence and support

Ill-suited for attacks against fortified positions
Taps into all existing intelligence networks

Naturally suited for low-intensity conflict
Usually operates in a pure infantry environment

Tactics

Employs conventional tactics per field manuals
Seeks 3:1 advantage in mass and firepower in the attack
Mass is the primary tactical principle
Achieves shock through mass

Relies on artillery preparations
Follows the path of least resistance
Uses roads and trails
Engages the enemy at maximum range
Defends on the forward slope
Normally emphasizes firepower over maneuver
Excellent mobility in open and mixed terrain
Low mobility in close terrain

Employs unusual tactics, usually adapted specifically to the environment
Often fights on equal terms, sometimes outnumbered
Surprise is the primary tactical principle
Achieves shock through surprise, speed, and violence

Frequently employs no artillery preparations
Chooses the path of least expectation
Avoids roads and trails
Engages the enemy at close range
Defends from the reverse slope
Emphasizes maneuver over firepower
Can be outnumbered in open terrain
Excellent mobility in close terrain

Frequently conducts frontal assaults	Infiltrates in order to attack the enemy's flank and rear
Employs camouflage to enhance survivability	Expert camouflage is a matter of life and death
Patrols to maintain contact	Patrols relentlessly in all situations
Tactics conform to a general pattern	Tactically unpredictable in form, time, and space
Weapons and equipment oriented	People and terrain oriented
Adjusts tactics to available technology	Adjusts available technology to tactics

Combat Support

Depends heavily on strong combat support	Relies primarily on its own organic weapons
Basic organization includes a balance of arms and services	Basic organization includes few combat-support elements. Acquires such support on a temporary basis.

Logistics

Physically and psychologically dependent on fixed lines of communication	Self-reliant; operates independently of fixed lines of communication
Basic organization includes a robust combat service support tail	Basic organization includes few combat service support elements
Depends on formal logistics structure	Improvises to meet needs; uses local and enemy resources
Can sustain itself in attrition warfare	Lacks sustainability for attrition warfare
Comfort conscious	Practices self denial
Has heavy daily logistics requirements	Routinely practices austerity
May not closely regulate the soldier's loads	Establishes strict SOPs on soldiers' loads
Cannot operate far from lines of communications and supply bases	Austerity and improvisation permit operations far removed from supply bases
Resupplied by air only with difficulty	Often resupplied by air because of low daily requirements

Leadership

Centralized tactical direction	Decentralized responsibility; wide latitude granted NCO's and junior officers
Tactical initiative employed within the limits of the overall operation	Practices innovation, imagination, and initiative to a high degree
Adequate technical expertise	Infantry scientists
Values troop welfare	High sensitivity to troop welfare
Infrequent troop briefings	Troops kept constantly informed

NOTES

Chapter 5

1. Edward N. Luttwak, et al., *Historical Analysis and Projection for Army 2000*, Pt. 1, Paper no. 16, *Notes on the Israeli 35th (Paratroop) Brigade and Derived Reserve Brigades, with Additional Notes on the 'Air-Landed Force' and the Golani Brigade* (Chevy Chase, MD: Edward N. Luttwak, 1 March 1983).
 2. The light divisions in the 1985 "army of excellence" force structure do *not* possess a "break-in" capability. Thus, they cannot be deployed unless a secure lodgment already exists or unless a lodgment is first secured by other forces.
 3. The Japanese employed formidable reverse-slope defense works in the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 in the Pacific war. U.S. divisions breached these defenses only after suffering very high casualties during days of dogged, close-in fighting. This campaign is described well in Roy E. Appleman, et al., *Okinawa: The Last Battle*, United States Army in World War II (1948; reprint, Washington, DC: Historical Division, Department of the Army, 1977). A good recent study on reverse-slope defenses is Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Galloway's "Light Infantry in the Defense: Exploiting the Reverse Slope from Wellington to the Falklands and Beyond," unpublished monograph for the School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2 December 1985.
 4. For example, the Israeli airborne brigade retains armored personnel carriers in its battalions, the British 3 Commando Brigade employs vehicles from the Spartan family of armored cars, as does the British 5 Infantry Brigade (Worldwide Tasks) (Airborne). U.S. separate light brigades also include an armored cavalry organization.
 5. Charlton Ogburn, *The Marauders* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 39—41.
 6. General Nguyen Xuan Hoang, "A Veteran Returns," *Army Times*, 6 May 1985.
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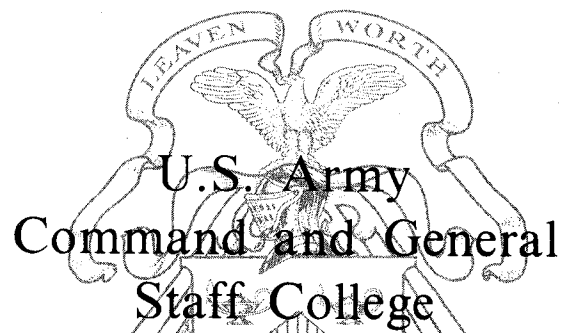
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