

STUDENT ESSAY

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THOUGHTS ON SOF DEPLOYMENT FOR DEEP BATTLE HUMINT
OPERATIONS

BY

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All data was taken from unclassified material and limited personal observations of SF personnel, principally Special Forces engaged in military training team activities at First Special Forces Operations command at Fort Bragg, NC.

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM

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INDIVIDUAL ESSAY

by

Mr. Henry Booth
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ABSTRACT

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THOUGHTS ON SOF DEPLOYMENT FOR DEEP BATTLE HUMINT OPERATIONS

Special operations have been broken down into three categories in one recent study:

Special operations as aid to a friendly government faced with security problems.

Special operations as co-belligerent action on behalf of a friendly government engaged in revolutionary war/counterinsurgency.

Special operations as independent action involving extraordinary intervention or recourse to armed coercion.

All of the above require intelligence collection but only the latter situation will most likely result in the creation of a deep battle zone wherein the need for a strategic intelligence collection ability will become paramount. Of all of the SOF, the Special Forces (SF) are particularly trained and experienced in acquiring information from HUMINT sources such as agents, informants, and debriefed prisoners. It is this experience coupled with other unconventional capabilities, doctrine, and training which make the SF uniquely suited for deep battle area HUMINT collection. Ranger forces like the SF are highly trained, successful, and effective but are primarily a light infantry used in an unconventional manner against specific objectives over a short duration in support of an overall tactical plan for larger conventional units. As movers and shooters, the Rangers have few equals (Special Forces might consider this moot); however, the psychological makeup of the individual Ranger resulting from mission needs and training ill suit them for an intelligence collection role where passivity is required rather than violent aggression. Capabilities for the Rangers should

include selected aspects of counterterror operations, advance operations for any Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, short term combat and reconnaissance operations against selected priority targets facing the corps in the field, and other selected direct action missions.²

SF may be deployed for a wide range of missions. Of these, intelligence and guerrilla operations have recently been regarded as of high interest to echelons above corps, especially with regards to the deep battle zone. Relative to the former "no matter how advanced US technology becomes, there will always be a need for men to report on items of intelligence interest that cannot be collected through the electromagnetic spectrum or photo-intelligence."³ In the latter, guerrilla operations, SF has a proven record as a force multiplier in creating effective units from among an indigenous population. "At one time in Vietnam, Special Forces maintained 80 camps and controlled more than 60,000 indigenous troops."⁴ This incredible effort was not accomplished, however, in a situation that could be considered comparable to the deep battle zone of the future. Further, it has been indicated that within the higher levels of conflict the use of SF for interdiction and gathering of intelligence behind enemy lines is considered primarily as force multipliers to impede the mission of Soviet or Warsaw Pact follow-on forces.⁵ Yet since the deep battle zone has currently become corps responsibility as an area of interest rather than area of influence, echelons above corps commanders (EAC) should familiarize themselves with the limitations and problems involved in these types of missions. FM 100-5 states

A corps needs to know what enemy forces are in its area of interest, where they are going, and when they are expected to enter the corps area of influence. Echelons Above Corps, including national systems, provide this intelligence.

Finally the SF acknowledge a qualified acceptance of "information gathering tasks of a special nature . . . deep behind enemy lines . . . to contribute to the overall intelligence plan of the unified command."⁶

The deep battle zone is identified as more than 150 kilometers ahead of the Forward Line of Own Troops (FLOT). From the FLOT, the interdiction zone is from 50 to 150 kilometers and the battlefield control zone is up to 50 kilometers. The deep zone is of particular interest to the corps, and the latter two zones are of particular interest to the divisions. The corps commander has more aviation, a corps reconnaissance unit, and a Ranger unit in order to better locate and attack targets in its extended areas of interest and influence. With these additional resources, battlefield control and the interdiction zones should be within the operational capabilities of the corps.

It has been said that a lot of low grade information is of more use tactically than a small amount of high grade materiel with the corollary that, from the army's point of view, an intelligence organization which relies on a large number of low grade sources is more valuable than one which concentrates on a few high grade ones.⁷ Again turning to Vietnam, the SF were acutely aware of intelligence collection and tried to emphasize that aspect of their missions and to set up intelligence nets that would produce information. MACV J2 states "that over 50 percent of all their ground intelligence reports in the country come from Special Forces sources. . . ."⁸ Strategic information is not generally available to low grade sources although collation, analysis, and comparison of their reporting in juxtaposition to other sources can indicate strategic trends. The definition of a high grade source must be an agent with constant access to that type of information that is of strategic value to the theater commander. Army intelligence or other intelligence

collection institutions should have assets or be developing assets within potentially deep battle zones of various world-wide, critical theaters. These assets should be selected with emphasis on stability and capability to assess enemy operational maneuver preparation prior to and after initiation of hostilities. Judgments should be made now as to which of these sources will require an alternate means of contact such as a special team to facilitate the transmission of their information from an area isolated by an active war situation. Should open war break out in a given theater, normal contact may be cut off from such persons. Further, it is much more difficult to develop such assets after war is underway.

Unlike other collection assets, Special Forces can collect and send its intelligence regardless of terrain and weather considerations. Only Special Forces, with its long range AM/HF communications has this unique capability.⁹

The enemy is quite aware of certain technical collection vulnerabilities and will undoubtedly initiate actions at the appropriate moment to deceive or conceal their true military intentions. Also, in the areas of Soviet influence, the enemy has a significant capability to selectively destroy US national collection systems. Soviet doctrine for a sudden, massive conventional attack will involve an intensive air battle in the initial 72 hours to establish air superiority. This air battle will certainly debilitate US airborne theater level technical collection systems.

HUMINT control and communications systems in "peace time" include combinations of the classical agent meeting, dead or live drops, concealed writing, or clandestine electrical transmission. Shortly before or after hostilities occur, most if not all of these methods will also be

interrupted or rendered ineffective by enemy military activity and pre-attack preparations.

An alternative for re-establishment of contact with HUMINT sources in the deep battle zone after D-Day could be the clandestine insertion of SF teams assigned the specific mission of contacting in-place HUMINT assets. HUMINT as used in this discussion is not information resulting from personal observation by a member of the armed forces of the US. HUMINT is herewith defined as that information requested of and received from a non-US person fully cognizant that they are engaged in a clandestine relationship with the US. Such emergency contacts should quickly establish secure electronic channels for reporting perishable strategic and possibly tactical information. Intelligence requirements determined at the Theater Army (TA) level will also be levied by electronic means. The SF HUMINT source recontact teams should initially avoid direct observation reporting or directing target strikes. Certain exceptions to this dictum, such as enemy C³, long range nuclear delivery capability or other critical targets should be determined and rules of engagement issued at the TA level. Generally speaking, however, pure intelligence mission teams should avoid direct action type operations. If a particular SF team has not established contact with their designated source within a predetermined period, alternate missions can be undertaken as directed by the TA or exfiltration be commenced. As a final, additional cautionary note

. . . it is difficult to justify the use of Special Forces units in direct action missions in a wartime situation. Limited availability, coupled with limited survivability in 'throw-away' types of missions would be a tragic misuse of a valuable strategic asset.¹⁰

Proper management of intelligence collection activities in the deep battle zone (150-300 kilometers from the FLOT) requires considerable background information that may far exceed what is available for intelligence preparation of the battlefield or other TA level planning. In order to support SF HUMINT operations involving indigenous sources, this information base must include ethnic, geographical, political, economic, social, cultural, security, and military data for the target region. But this range of information is not available at the operational level and is probably only superficially available at the theater level. Given the global mission of the US Army a single CONUS entity must be available to provide support for all of the major commands, including in-depth data bases to provide for the acquisition, analysis, and dissemination of all-source information required to undertake SF HUMINT operations. The establishment of the US Army Intelligence Command (INSCOM) in 1978 should now provide this ability as well as service support to allow SF HUMINT operations to be conducted in various theaters where deep battle zones are expected to occur. INSCOM should develop effective inter-departmental working relationships with other US government agencies, particularly the State Department and the CIA. Historically, such cooperative efforts have developed after the outbreak of hostilities. It is much better to be organizationally prepared prior to the expected demand for this type of intelligence collection requirement. Despite extensive EAC resources, SF HUMINT operations should remain centralized as part of intelligence collection operations, along with the support of a doctrinal development agency (INSCOM).

Other recent reorganization developments will facilitate development of SF HUMINT collection. "The Army has brought all its Special Operations Forces (Special Forces, Rangers, psychological operations,

and civil affairs) under a single parent organization--the 1st Special Operations Command."¹¹ INSCOM must be directly involved with the 1st Special Operations Command for the planning and training for SF personnel who will be responsible as active collectors or handlers of HUMINT deep battle zone indigenous sources. An innovative suggestion in a recent study of SOF intelligence operations offered the concept of "an integration during peacetime of the operational and intelligence resources of the Army and CIA as they relate to special operations could be effected" adding

it would permit the development of common ground and genuine collaboration through training and shared experience over the long term. . . . It would give the military a solid boost toward developing its own intelligence collection capabilities . . . (and) it would facilitate realistic planning for conditions of wartime under which CIA's field operations would be transferred to Joint Chiefs of Staff and control.¹²

Bureaucratic problems may make implementation of this concept difficult. It would seem that the creation of a more direct chain of command and control of SF under the 1st Special Operations Command coupled with the organization of INSCOM would provide the opportunity for much cooperation, if it does not already exist.

Training for the conduct of SF HUMINT operations will also be a departure from normal perceptions and unit organization. Team mission dictates team size and training factors. Other considerations such as distance from friendly units, degree of hostility in the area of operation, need for operational security and so forth, alters or restricts team formation and population. Review of this particular mission implies need for relatively small (two to four members) specially trained teams which primarily will operate separately but can be combined to conduct other types of operations. Team personnel must be selected and trained

to be able to perform up to 300 kilometers from friendly bases. Finally, the sensitivity of HUMINT operations and the small size of the collection team indicates that reconnaissance--the observation and reporting of information--will initially probably be the only other alternate role of a team. Of course, should source contact not be established or precluded by other operational factors, the team can perform reconnaissance as a principal role if operationally capable and given a target rich environment.¹³

Operations conducted in the deep battle zone obviate the advantage of close tactical air support and helicopter gunships. Contact with any enemy unit, large or small, is not expected nor should the team be equipped with arms to perform an offensive combat role. A minimal listing of training subjects, not complete but certainly basic to a mission of this type, are: Land Navigation; Delivery of Indirect and Direct Fire Support; Human Maintenance; Use of Camouflage, Cover, Concealment, and Stealth; Tracking; and Communication.¹⁴ In keeping with training to enhance field skills in primarily avoiding enemy or casual local population contact, the weaponry provided to the team members should be such as to imbue confidence in self-defense and to provide a limited offensive capability. The weapons should be light, concealable, sub-sonic, optically sighted, and with pin-point accuracy to 75 meters. Technology currently exists to satisfy this type of requirement.

SF personnel must undergo frequent and repetitive field experience if SF HUMINT programs are to perform effectively. The current multi-mission roles for the SF will to a certain extent require some degradation of other mission skills for those personnel assigned to a HUMINT collection role. Area knowledge, language capability, and physical

appearance appropriate to given operational environments should be primary considerations in the selection process. Officers assigned to this activity should study the business of collecting background information in addition to specialization in a particular area of the world. Specialization would not be designed to preclude deployment in other parts of the world, but it would enable the parent SF HUMINT unit to build up an overall knowledge of priority areas.¹⁵ The above factors, although not all inclusive, are critical. Regarding SF officers, there have been continual problems affecting the special forces. "Personnel turbulence--particularly in the officer corps--is another factor which seriously degrades proficiency in the art of special warfare and mission readiness." Also, "little consideration is given to language capabilities or area orientation. Officers are discouraged from serving repetitive tours in Special Forces."¹⁶

To provide field experience, a field (theater) office or organization should support the SF HUMINT program. This activity in a preparatory stage may require involvement with the host government, at least in a liaison relationship with local military intelligence and possibly with special branches of the police. Development of a unilateral capability is more desirable than dependence on liaison; but in certain instances, especially NATO, time constraints may preclude this option. Liaison with a host government, on the other hand, can provide a verification ability, enhance counter-intelligence capability, and provide authentication on the veracity of the HUMINT information collected. Liaison can also provide assets to practice field operational techniques and refine procedures that will in some instances closely duplicate the actual operational environment.

Field offices can also provide management, information control, and exploitation of in-country rear area resources. Moreover, a dedicated field installation is required to fulfill the need for field experience for SF personnel and conduct most government liaison. INSCOM would be ideal for the role of support or establishment of the field installation. First Special Operations Command would be responsible for the selection, training, and assignment of personnel keeping in mind that forward deployment is essential for improving operational readiness of CONUS based SF HUMINT officers and soldiers. A dedicated field office should offset the tendency of CONUS based commands toward operational control and management. Just as the theater commands are responsible for military planning and operations, so should it be for sensitive, unconventional intelligence operations. As suggested from World War II experience with sensitive position operations, "only where a force is operating specifically in the tactical zone of an Army or lower ground headquarters should control of Special Forces be delegated below the highest level."¹⁷ This dictum should apply to deep battle zone HUMINT collection. The largest sized military intelligence unit (brigade or battalion) or INSCOM base in a given theater should be utilized as the operational control point or field office for SF HUMINT. Even if a Joint Unconventional Warfare Command or a Joint Unconventional Warfare Task Force is in being in the theater, HUMINT collection operations due to the sensitivity of the sources should be sequestered at the highest level organic military intelligence unit. An adequate SF liaison element for coordination with the 1st Special Operations Command, should also be included at the field installation.

Planning will be provided at this level and C³ will be especially critical to deployed teams. Electronic communications will be subject

to a comprehensive, systematic attack according to Soviet doctrine.¹⁸
The field office responsible for deep battle area HUMINT collection should be playing a major role in coordination with higher level intelligence staffs in C³ countermeasure planning. SF HUMINT team communication

equipment can present no unique electronic or visual signature. Use of transmission technique with low probability of detection is extremely desirable and will be essential to survival. Communications must be resistant to countermeasures to include electronic and electromagnetic pulse. In short, communications must serve the commander by permitting the timely provision of intelligence, the key to the Airland Battle now and in the future.¹⁹

Security considerations require that certain sections of the field base be compartmented or reorganized separately in order to carry out SF HUMINT operations. These sections should be task oriented, with specific responsibilities for host government liaison, operations, logistics, communications, and information processing. The latter activity is most important and should include responsibility for collation and preliminary evaluation of intelligence data. This section would be further charged with the responsibility for collation and preliminary evaluation of intelligence received from deployed teams. As a result of the Vietnam experience, the Special Forces had developed procedures necessary for rapid analysis and dissemination of information. "Regulations were written on source control, collection procedures, intelligence reporting, methods of recording, and dissemination."²⁰ This institutional knowledge and awareness of the need for proper handling of raw information will be of great advantage toward establishment of proper procedures for initial handling of SF HUMINT production.

The chain of command for the field office should be through the theater army G-2, the Chief of Staff, and to the CINC. Information

items considered suitable for area knowledge data base amplification can be forwarded from the CINC to INSCOM and 1st Special Operations Command through ACSI/JCS. A parallel channel for administrative support should run from the 1st Special Operations Command to the field base. As a general rule, the lowest centralized level of command and control in a theater for SF HUMINT operations should be at that lowest level where national systems collected data is maintained.

Sustainment of SF HUMINT teams in the deep battle area of mid-to-high-intensity conflict will be extremely difficult. Sustainment materials (food, water, medical, etc.) are team carried, locally acquired, and augmented by external support which would primarily be aerial resupply. As noted in a seminal work on SOF sustainment, historically self-sufficiency is limited to approximately five days.²¹ The relatively passive role of an SF HUMINT team could possibly extend self-sufficiency days more, possibly as long as two weeks. This will certainly be the limit without some sort of external support or subsistence developed through a clandestine contact within the operational area. If a superior enemy air defense capability exists which precludes even sophisticated air delivery technique, support agents will be required in addition to intelligence sources. The support network must be compartmented from the intelligence network for operational security. Certain theaters could be feasible for clandestine pre-positioning of sustainment materiel by cache prior to hostilities. This would be an extraordinary program and require continuous management based on the shelf-life of the materiel utilized in the pre-positioning. On the other hand, it is an activity that could be conducted totally separate from the exact location of an expected intelligence asset whose presence, not identification, would only become known when the decision has been made to deploy

a contact team. Air delivery or even SF HUMINT team insertion will be very difficult in a high threat area such as the Soviet Western Theater facing NATO. In Eastern Europe the Soviets

have developed a massive, layered air defense for their ground forces to provide air superiority over the battlefield . . . frontal aviation, radio electronic combat, SAMs and associated radios and anti-aircraft artillery into an unparalleled tactical air defense system.²²

The situation may not be all that bleak. There are items available specifically designed for unconventional supply such as the CTV-2A high-speed, aerial delivery container which appears to be adequate with some limitations. These limitations are described as the CTV-24 cannister is not in SF unit tables of organization and equipment, the design requires slower than normal speeds for delivery and the supply of this item is currently limited. The technology exists and if there is serious intent to deploy any SF teams in the deep battle zone, HUMINT collection or other types of mission, further development and adequate stockage is in order. The above referred sustainment study also noted

RPVs (Remote Piloted Vehicles) and drones appear to have great potential to provide SOF with a relatively cheap means to affect successful resupply on a sophisticated battlefield . . . new-generation helicopter and tilt-rotor aircraft proffer opportunities to circumvent the threats extensive air-defense system.²³

A major mission for SF is to assist potential guerrilla movements; to harass the rear area of an enemy, particularly lines of communications; to denigrate enemy capability; to support engaged conventional forces; and to hinder forward movement of follow-on forces. The SF has this mission as a primary task--Unconventional Warfare (UW) operations.²⁴ This mission is not incompatible with HUMINT collection operations. In fact, HUMINT collection may well be the proper preface to

initiation of a UW effort within the deep battle zone. The NATO area will unquestionably be the most difficult to establish a HUMINT collection capability. Despite the inordinate size of Warsaw Pact forces and the repressiveness of that society, there is some reason for optimism that guerrilla forces could be established in Eastern Europe as stated in a monograph from a recent symposium

Various satellite countries in the Warsaw Pact have demonstrated strong resistance to the Soviet Union's domination. Poland is only the most recent, but each of the bloc countries except Bulgaria, has given good indications of a desire for freedom from the Russians. What force of potential fighters in the Soviet rear area is so great as to demand attention. . . .²⁵

Whether a conventional war is of short or long duration, certain criteria must be met before SF should be considered for insertion into the enemy rear area. This criteria includes

(1) the selected area levels itself to guerrilla warfare; (2) the population is friendly; (3) the population is willing to fight as guerrillas under foreign leadership; (4) capable and reliable indigenous leadership with a potentially greater appeal to the population is not available; (5) existing guerrilla movements will not be roused into hostility . . . ; (6) the movement, once created, can be kept under control. . . .

Further

unless reliable contacts are available it therefore seems often warranted to investigate the situation in the field before a Special Force party is dispatched, and this investigation can as a rule be carried out by agents than by -uniformed- members of the Special Force.²⁶

The insertion of a SOF HUMINT team to contact an in-place asset could provide the answers to most of the above criteria. This action would not be uncharacteristic of a special operation as military, government, intelligence or civilian personnel may be employed on special operations . . . from the initiating country, a host or a hostile power and the personnel involved may be acting legally, extralegally or illegally.²⁷

The analysis of an operational area for HUMINT collection will also provide the information preparatory toward the planning requirements for UW guerrilla operations. Corollary missions to UW guerrilla operations are Evasion and Escape plus Subversion and Sabotage.²⁸ These tasks can also be performed effectively upon creation of a guerrilla network given a conventional war situation of sufficient duration. A resistance movement guided under the auspices of SF would be most useful on a continuing basis in the provision of intelligence. The Red Army during World War II quickly exploited partisan groups after the German invasion--"the most startling innovation was the systematic use of partisan for army intelligence and reconnaissance."²⁹ We must assume that Soviet controlled or Soviet influenced units concerned with rear area protection missions in the enemy rear will be exceptionally alert for this type of activity and will move quickly to neutralize it. Should an SF HUMINT team be working successfully in a given area, it may be necessary to forego assistance to a potential resistance movement for operational security of the intelligence collection effort. This decision should be made at the same level (TA) as recommended for the conduct of SF HUMINT collection operations. After World War II Heilbrunn noted on the subject of control of rear area forces that "most senior officers . . . have come to the conclusion that the Army or supreme commander should control and direct them [guerrilla forces]."³⁰

Are SF HUMINT operations in the deep battle zone feasible? Yes, but there is a need to build systems and organizations to refine existing capabilities. Insertion and sustainability of small teams over 150 kilometers from the FLOT are technically possible. Sources may already be in place or should be under development. Perhaps too, a potential

exists for creation of a resistance movement. Secure radio communications can be maintained, subject to some extent by enemy counter measure degradation. The chain of command and control for SF HUMINT operations should be direct, with as few organizational levels as possible. These operations should be run with maximal operational security and minimal bureaucratic interference, staffed by trained professionals. Finally, special attention and extraordinary effort will have to be made toward support of this effort, to include inter-agency cooperation and training of premium SF personnel selected for this type of mission. With such commitment and support, effective SF HUMINT operations are feasible. The payoff will be increased operational capability in the deep battle zone.

Spies will enable a General to learn more surely than by any other agency what is going on in the midst of the enemy's camps; for reconnaissances (SIC), however well made, can give no information of anything beyond the line of the advanced guard.³¹

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