

Mech Commander Adds Detail About Suoi Tre Account

Dear Sir:

I enjoyed the article on "The Battle of Suoi Tre," written by First Sergeant Christopher P. Worick in your May-June 2000 issue of *ARMOR*. I know it is difficult to gather first-hand detailed information on an action after 30+ years. The author has done a fine job, all things considered. There are a few items I would like to furnish that might be of importance from my first-hand point of view as commander of the 2/22 Inf (Mech) during this operation.

The 2/22 Inf (Mech) joined up with the 2/34 Armor (-) on March 18 to cross the Bach Sohn Doi near its junction with the Soui Mat stream. The Armor battalion had 18 tanks and a tank retriever (M-88), plus their headquarters vehicles. To facilitate operations, we cross-attached elements to establish the task forces as follows:

- 2/22 Inf (M) (-)
 - Co B, 2/22 Inf (M)
 - Co C, 2/22 Inf (M)
 - Co A, 2/34 Armor
- 2/34 Armor (-)
 - Co C, 2/34 Armor
 - Co A, 2/22 Inf (M)

with further internal cross attachments.

The crossing site was just north of a fire support base at Xa Loc Ninh occupied by B Btry, 2/35th Arty (155 SP) and B Btry, 2/32 Arty (8 in. and 175 mm) that provided support for our operation and FSB Gold. After crossing the rivers, both task forces moved north on the west side of Soui Mat stream in column to ease passage through the dense trees with the 2/22 TF leading. We were looking for another crossing site to get on the east side of the Soui Mat as it generally ran to the northwest, away from FSB Gold. The lower end was very boggy and the AVLBs could not span this area after their initial employment. At the end of March 18, we had moved about 2,000 meters north, paralleling the Soui Mat without finding a suitable crossing site. The AVLBs used to cross the river and the lower part of Soui Mat were returned to their base as their size would pose many problems going through the heavy undergrowth in the jungle and there were no identifiable sites for their immediate use.

On March 19, we continued moving north parallel to the Soui Mat and again moved about 2,000 meters conducting operations in zone and seeking a crossing site to the east without success.

March 20th saw a continuation of the move north, approximately 2,000 meters, with some skirmishes, but no success with a crossing site. The recon platoon of the 2/22 Inf (M), which had been in the lead at this time, had stopped about 1,000 meters north

of our night laager and returned without finding a crossing on the Soui Mat. (Little did we know, but at that point the Soui Mat was a dry bed with firm, fairly level ground that could not be seen from the air and not readily identified on the ground due to the dense growth.) It was planned that after stand-to the next morning, to go east from where the recon element stopped the previous night and look for another crossing site. As the jungle was so dense we could not see the meandering of the stream nor any place to cross by following its path from the air.

When the attack on FSB Gold started on the morning of March 21, I established the order of march from the laager with TF 2/22 elements leading. They were to establish a trail from the recon platoon's northern penetration and go due east towards FSB Gold. In my command helicopter, I was able to orbit the lead vehicle and direct its travel through the least dense areas and shortest line (it was approximately 2,500 meters) to FSB Gold. All vehicles traveled in column, with the M113s widening the trail to facilitate the tanks' movement through the trees. At the same time we were moving east, the 2/12 Inf was recalled from an area northwest of FSB Gold where it had gone on an operation on March 20. On entering the clearing in the southwest corner of FSB Gold, the combined elements of 2/22 Inf (M) and 2/34 Armor TF moved in column in a counterclockwise direction around the base to secure the SW, SE & NE sectors with the 2/12 Inf the NW sector. Once the perimeter was closed and secured, close-in operations continued, to include the retrieval of the FAC team from the airplane, about 1,000 meters south of FSB Gold, by the 2/22 Inf (M) recon platoon.

Many people have written about this operation, and there have been many variations to sort out. I hope that my comments above will aid in visualizing the operation from my viewpoint. There were many problems using tanks in the heavy jungle, as stated by 1LT Danny Hollister in the article. It was bad enough for the M113s, but the terrain dictated where you could and could not go with heavy armored vehicles vs. the M113s.

COL RALPH W. JULIAN (Ret.)
Highlands Ranch, Colo.

More Detail Added By Another Suoi Tre Leader

Dear Sir:

As an author of an advanced course monograph on the battle of Suoi Tre and a platoon leader in A Company, 2-34 Armor (my platoon was OPCON to 2-22 INF) during the fight, I want to say that First Sergeant Christopher P. Worick has done a superb job on his account of the battle. I would add that the commander of the 2nd Bn, 77th Arty was LTC John W. Vessey, who distinguished himself in the four-hour battle.

In 1970, on my second tour, I flew over Suoi Tre. The rectangle where we buried the 647 Viet Cong could be clearly seen at 1,000 feet. The weather was clear with no clouds in the sky, unlike that day in March.

COLONEL A. J. FERREA
U.S. Army, Retired
via email

Clarifying British and Canadian Use Of Converted Armor as APCs

Dear Sir:

I just got the July-August *ARMOR*, a good issue with a wide range of articles. Something to please everyone, if that is ever possible.

One small point caught my eye. In CPT Leaf's article on "MOUT and the 1982 Lebanon Campaign," his note 14, describing the use of armored self-propelled gun carriers for troop transport in British service in Normandy, ends with the sentence, "The idea did not take hold, due mainly to a lack of desire by the artillery to ferry troops around." This may seem strange to some readers, and I hope the following will clear the matter up.

The vehicles used were at one time SP guns, in fact the U.S. M7 105mm HMC, known as "Priests" in British service. These were based on the M3-series medium tank, with the fighting compartment replaced with an open-topped, protected box with the standard M2A1 105mm howitzer mounted to fire with limited traverse through the front plate. First used at El Alamein in 1942, they equipped several British and Canadian artillery units in the assault waves on D Day, firing from landing craft during the landing approaches and then employed as mobile artillery. As the 105mm was not a standard caliber in Commonwealth service, their standard towed and SP field gun being the 25pdr, the vehicles were soon taken out of service. For use as troop carriers, Canadian mechanics removed the guns and plated over the aperture as a quick-fix measure, the conversion being designed to be reversible. Used during the Normandy bridgehead Operation TOTALISE, these vehicles, dubbed "Unfrocked Priests" but commonly known as "Kangaroos," were thought to have been sufficiently successful to lead to more permanent employment.

What resulted was another Canadian effort, but more so. The carrier vehicle used was the Canadian Ram, a medium tank — a "Cruiser" in Commonwealth parlance — with the turret removed. The Ram was also derived from the U.S. M3 series, but unlike that vehicle's trademark side-mounted 75mm main gun and small gun in the turret, the Ram was in many ways like the M4 Sherman in that it was a conventional design. Regarded in mid-1944 as obsolescent as a gun tank due to its small, 57mm 6pdr gun, and superseded in Canadian armored units by

Shermans, there were enough in England for conversions to be made, and a new unit, 1st Canadian Armoured Carrier Regiment, was formed to crew them. After more successful use, a British unit — 49th Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment — was formed from 49th Royal Tank Regiment. Both units were part of the British 79th Armoured Division, the home formation for specialist armor such as flail mine clearers, armored engineer vehicles, and flame throwers.

In Italy, the same idea was also employed in the later stages of the campaign using converted Priests and war-wary Sherman gun tanks with guns or turrets respectively removed. Postwar, the British army continued to use Ram Kangaroos for some years, while the Canadians went on to convert some of the late-model Sherman M4A2 tanks they purchased from the USA.

An account of the wartime Canadian unit, written and published by a veteran of the unit, "The Canadian Kangaroos in World War II — The Story of 1st Canadian Armoured Carrier Regiment, Canada's Foreign-born Secret Regiment" by Kenneth R Ramsden, was reviewed by this author for *ARMOR* in the March-April 1999 issue. An historical account of the unit and modeling details also appear in the British magazine *MILITARY MODELLING*, Vol. 30, No. 8, July-August 2000. Online, accounts can be seen linked from the "Maple Leaf Up" site <http://www.mapleleafup.org> and "Canadian Tracks" <http://www.magma.ca/~tracks/>.

I hope this will interest *ARMOR* readers and add a little more to the varied history of armor.

PETER BROWN
Poole, Dorset

Swallowing a Bitter Pill: Armor Must Lighten Up

Dear Sir:

In response to the letter "Armored Cars Squander Research Money" in the July-August issue, there is a problem. The Armor community must accept and swallow a bitter pill. The M1A1/A2 Abrams and the M2/3 Bradley vehicles are the weapons of choice in a major conflict should U.S. forces fight another heavy force, but they will not be the weapons used to fight small regional conflicts. These vehicles are, as stated, main battle vehicles. Not since Desert Storm has the United States been put up against a force that has massed armor capabilities. Nor have we been called on against a force that outnumbered us 15 or 20 to one, vehicle to vehicle.

Look at the last 20 years. Where have we deployed? Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo. Our heavy forces were only deployed to two of these small conflicts and that was after several months of prepar-

ing for transportation. For the most part, the Abrams and Bradley vehicles cannot operate in Third World countries due in part to inadequate roads, bridges, and railroads. Therefore, we need a light force that can be deployed by air and at a moment's notice. This force must be able to defend itself and our interests until — if needed — our heavy forces can arrive.

As stated in his letter, LTC Kojro is concerned about crew survivability. The U.S. did not field a crew-survivable tank until the M1 was developed. The Armor force that crusaded through Europe in WWII did not fight in crew-survivable tanks, let alone the fact that they were out-gunned, out-armored, and thin-skinned. The M48- and M60-series tanks were not crew-survivable, with exposed hydraulic lines and open ammunition storage. The M1 *is* crew-survivable and that is the main reason it is now too heavy for quick deployment. Why is the M1 70 tons of rolling steel? So that it can survive heavy tank-to-tank fighting with an enemy that has greater massed armor. Is crew survivability a risk we can afford? As bad as it sounds, YES! Is it something we have done before? YES.

Before the letters start to pour in, let me explain. Will this light force be facing a massed armor enemy? NO. The light force will not be designed to go against an enemy with a heavy tank capability. What can light forces be expected to go up against? Some of these countries have had some armor capabilities, but not all. There has been plenty of light armor and regular military vehicles, but there is a good chance [the enemy] will be militia in pick-up trucks with 20mm cannons mounted in the bed.

So, what are the light forces going to be defending themselves against? RPGs, mortars, mines, 20 and 30mm cannon, and maybe the occasional T-54/55 or T-62. Can the LAV and HMMWV survive engagements with the above mentioned? If so, then that is what we are looking for. What about firepower? If you look in the *Janes* book on armor vehicles, you will see many types of vehicles with many different firepower capabilities. The LAV has several, and several countries, including some of our Allies, field many variations.

The Army shouldn't have to spend money on research and development for light force vehicles when this has already been done by our allies. The Army should explore upgrades or improvements to our current fleet and the existing available light vehicles used by others around the world. Have we exhausted the realm of weapons that can be transported on the HMMWV? What about the punch a Javelin team can add to a light force? Is a sabot-capable 90mm gun available for the LAV? These are the kinds of questions that should be explored.

I think the Armor/Cavalry community must accept the fact that we may not be called

upon for every small conflict occurring in a Third World country, but we must be prepared for the next major conflict that breaks out. The light force will be the one that must fit its vehicles and crews into C-130 aircraft, fly in, close with and destroy the enemy, whenever and wherever it may be.

KARLEN P. MORRIS
SSG, 2/123 AR
KYARNG

Kudos, and Comments On Fort Knox's New MOUT City

Dear Sir:

I am consistently impressed with *ARMOR* Magazine. Please pass to your staff the great job they do. You guys bring more meaningful "stuff" to the field than any other pub. I appreciate the way you always include historical vignettes to reinforce learning points, the way you allow even the most junior Armor soldier to sound off in letters to the editor, the way you present tactical TTPs that will, I assure you, one day save lives. The highlight of Gen. Starry, and the article about armor defending the firebase, were super (May-June 2000). Seems like the rest of the Army wants to dump lessons learned from Vietnam. I'm glad you continue to highlight them.

One minor thing: In the May-June 2000 issue, you show a pic of the MOUT city at Knox. Whoever designed it did a super job, but I've yet to go to a European or Asian city that allowed such easy trafficability for armor. Suggest they add on someday, with a cluster of buildings that replicate such tight conditions.

Keep up the excellent work!

GEORGE W. WHELOCK
MAJ, Infantry
Battalion Commander, Army ROTC
Michigan Technological University

Book Review Was a Rare Critique Of a Sensitive Personnel Issue

Dear Sir:

I was surprised, but interested, to read the review of Stephanie Gutmann's book about women in the military. Surprised, as I believe there is a concentrated effort on the part of top generals to suppress any criticism of the feminization of the U.S. Army. I am still waiting for any top flag officer to tell the truth about what this is doing to morale, standards, discipline, and combat readiness. I have waited in vain to read a factual refutation with hard, pertinent evidence by any flag officer of Mitchell's book, *Women in the Military: Flirting With Disaster*. It is this refusal

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by the top to level with us that is the primary cause for young officers and NCOs leaving the service in record numbers. If you cannot trust the top, there is nothing left.

Good for you to publish this review. Now, what may come next? I expect the Navy is looking for good looking blondes to staff their submarines, the Air Force for more Kelly Flynns. The Marines seem to be the only service that is trying to deal with this issue with some honesty... Women as tank commanders? As long as the Navy is intent on putting women on their boats, how can Armor long resist women in tanks? Are they not, boats and tanks, both enclosed structures?...

GEORGE G. EDDY
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HistoryChannel.com Launches Veterans.com

Using the power of the Internet to bring together veterans, their friends and families, HistoryChannel.com has launched Veterans.com (<http://www.veterans.com>), an online portal for the veteran community dedicated to preserving the experiences of men and women who served in the military.

To celebrate the launch, HistoryChannel.com is donating computers and cable modem Internet access to Vet Centers around the country. The donations, which began on Memorial Day, will continue throughout the summer and are in partnership with local cable affiliates.

A hallmark feature of Veterans.com is the "veterans locator" database that allows visitors to search for veterans by name, nickname, hometown, or service background.

The not-for-profit site also boasts eyewitness service accounts and a profile of a "veteran of the month" nominated by site visitors.

Additionally, Veterans.com features war-related discussion forums, information on veterans-related topics, and links to a vast range of military services and veterans organizations.

"The veteran community is one of our nation's most crucial educational resources, and we wanted to ensure that veterans' individual memories and experiences were preserved in a forum accessible by everyone," said Todd Tarpley, Vice President of AETN Interactive.

"The active, dedicated veteran discussion group on HistoryChannel.com showed us that veterans and their friends and families needed a place online exclusively for them, where they can share resources and discuss issues. Veterans.com aims to live up to this demand," he added.

To mark the launch, Senator John McCain participated in a live online chat on May 25, 2000 on Veterans.com. McCain discussed his experiences as a Vietnam prisoner of war, and offered his thoughts on veterans' current concerns.