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RESEARCH REPORT

COMBINED CONTROL OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES
IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF ALLIED COMMAND EUROPE

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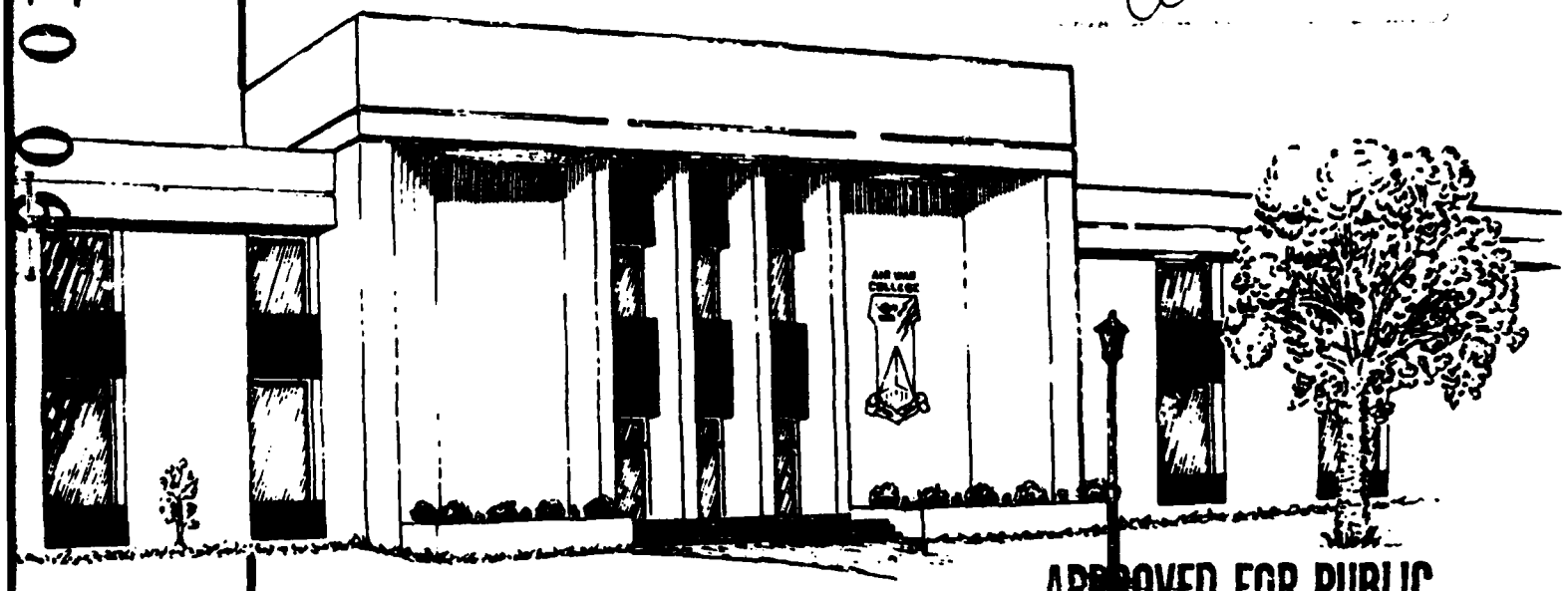

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COMBINED CONTROL OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF ALLIED COMMAND EUROPE

by
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Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

A DEFENSE ANALYTICAL STUDY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

REQUIREMENT

Advisor: Colonel Charles J. Jernigan, III

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

May 1989

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: Combined Control of Special Operations Forces in the Central Region of Allied Command Europe

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Remarks on the changing priorities facing the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization point out the growing importance of special operations forces. Based on the expected shift towards national development of these forces, a review of special operation employments sets the stage for an examination of appropriate control structures for them in the multinational, alliance environment. The central region of Allied Command Europe offers one of the more challenging environments and serves as the basis for an analysis of the constraining factors which define the control requirements. Control requirements change during the three principle phases of a special operation: planning, training, and execution. The final chapter, drawing on the analysis of mission requirements and control environment limitations, provides a proposed solution for ensuring appropriate control of special operations forces in a complex combined application.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel William R. Byars (B.B.A., Midwestern University) has been interested in special operations forces since serving southeast asian tours in search and rescue and in AC-130 gunships during the 1970s. He also served as a special plans staff officer in Allied Air Forces Central Europe. Following that assignment, he commanded an American squadron which was a tenant unit on a Belgian Air Force Base and supported a combined mission for the NATO alliance. He received three Air Medals for participation in combat rescue missions in North and South Vietnam. He was selected as the wing standardization pilot for the AC-130. He was awarded the Joint Meritorious Service Medal for his duty in the NATO staff position. His unit in Belgium was the only munitions support squadron in Europe to receive simultaneous excellent ratings on Management Effectiveness and Nuclear Surety Inspections during the 1980s. He is a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College, Class 75 in 1984. Lieutenant Colonel Byars is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1989.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

ST VIS PACEM, PARE BELLUM

If you wish for peace, prepare for war.[1]

Deterrence, realized through defensive preparations made by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization members, has insured peace for the past four decades. That deterrence is a product of perception. Our potential adversaries continue to believe that the cost of waging war against the alliance is higher than the benefits they could expect to accrue through such a war.[2] We must continue to reinforce that perception.

I believe the past success of our deterrence policies, combined with the recently more mellow rhetoric of the Soviet leadership, will result in changed priorities within the defense expenditures of the alliance members. These forces of defense, to reduce our costs and to reduce our risks must be judiciously organized and wisely led.[3]

At the same time the alliance is experiencing a change in the perceived threat, our nations are seeing more requirements to respond to contingencies at the opposite end of the spectrum of conflict. For example, the United States employed military special operations forces in Iran and in

Grenada and expended significant energies to correct deficiencies which were identified in those operations. The result of the increased focus on such low intensity conflict situations also has the potential to weaken national contributions to the NATO, European Theater. That can happen if those special operations forces are not properly integrated so they can be efficiently used at the general war level of the spectrum of conflict.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to review the lessons learned from past special operations forces employments and to apply those lessons to defining an appropriate integration of similar forces into the NATO military command structure.

OVERVIEW

To better understand the contributions that special operations forces can make to the war fighting capabilities of the NATO forces, the section of the paper following this introduction will provide a functional definition of special operations forces, a brief view of typical special force capabilities, and a discussion of the mission of the NATO military forces. That section will provide useful background information to judge the potential application of the special

operations forces capabilities to conflict in Allied Command Europe's Central Region.

With the background information as a baseline, the following sections will describe three operations in which American military special operations forces were principal combatants. The special significance of these operations are the influence that they exerted on the organization, command, and control of United States special operations forces. The structure of this review will be a look at the planning phase, the training phase, and the execution phase of each operation.

The formation of the United States Special Operations Command, a unified command, was directed by Congress following one of the operations that we will review.[4]. That direction apparently followed a congressional assessment of the special operations force capabilities. Perhaps the congressional solution is not appropriate for the NATO environment. The following section will draw on the lessons highlighted in the examples, examine the NATO command structure constraints, and assess methods for controlling special operations forces in that environment. The final section of the paper will address my conclusions based on those assessments.

CHAPTER II

NATO EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

To better understand the contributions that one should expect from special operations forces, specifically as they might be employed in NATO's Allied Command Europe, this section will provide information about the forces and about the military mission of the central region. The section will begin with a general definition of special operations forces, expand on capabilities that will be more realistically used in a general war scenario, and finally describe the peculiar mission requirements in the NATO context.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

The editors of a National Defense University publication provided the following definition which gives us a excellent point of departure for a discussion of special operations forces capabilities. Their definition of operations carried out by these special forces:

> "Small-scale, clandestine, covert or overt operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk nature, undertaken to achieve political or military objectives in support of foreign policy. Special Operations are characterized by either simplicity or complexity, by subtlety and imagination, by the discriminate use of violence, and by oversight at the highest levels. Military and nonmilitary resources, including intelligence assets, may be used in concert."[1]

If we disregard missions which are unlikely in the general war scenario there are still numerous applications which could assist NATO commanders in accomplishing their missions. Those special missions fall into broad categories such as unconventional warfare, interdiction, psychological warfare, subversion and sabotage, and strategic intelligence.[2]

Under the heading of unconventional warfare special operations include regular military forces leading local resistance units. Such operations were conducted in Laos during our war with North Vietnam and in Germany by the British Special Operations Executive during World War II.[3] The disruptive and destructive capabilities of an indigenous force will require significant enemy resources which might otherwise have been available at the forward line of troops in a general war. Since surprise is the principle of war most essential to the effectiveness of such an indigenous force, the enemy must protect numerous sites to mount a counter force and the synergistic effect of uncertainty makes even more enemy troops unavailable at the front.

Another group of special operations could be categorized as interdiction missions. Such missions can be carried out by either special operations forces or by local forces that are lead by special operations force members. Regardless of the force composition, the interdiction mission would be conducted well behind enemy lines to attack convoys, logistics centers, pipelines, or headquarters involved with maintaining the flow

of war supporting materials to the front. Effects of these interdiction missions would reduce the effectiveness of frontline forces due to reduced supplies as well as take enemy combatant forces away from the front to protect the logistics flow.

Psychological warfare is another aspect of special operations that can have a direct effect on the combat capability of the enemy forces. These activities are designed to demoralize enemy troops and to encourage desertion or defection. When one considers the tenuous nature of the relationship among Warsaw Pact nations, such as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1967 [4], then the value of aggressive acts to dissolve the unity of forces becomes more apparent.

Closely related to both psychological warfare and interdiction, the category of subversion and sabotage adds another dimension to special operations. Working behind enemy lines, special operations forces could attack high priority targets (such as communications centers), hit the political elite, or disrupt higher command echelons[2]. The effects of such actions could effect the will of the combatants, their commanders, and the political leadership that initiated the hostilities and hasten the cessation of the war. The highly centralized command and control structure that the Soviet leadership deem to be essential for effective military action[5], would seem to be a lucrative target for this type of special

operations.

The last general category of special operations that I will address is certainly not the least important. The acquisition of strategic intelligence was the primary mission of the British Office of Strategic Services until that special operations force transitioned to coordination of resistance forces just prior to Operation Overlord in 1944.[6] The Chinese General Sun Tzu, in writings that date from 500 B.C., recognized the importance of intelligence that was gathered by trusted agents who reported the location, strength, and movement of enemy forces. Similar information in a conflict involving limited friendly forces and a numerically superior enemy must be even more important today.

The foregoing review of special operations missions provides an appreciation of the capabilities of such forces. Again, one must appreciate not only the direct damage that can be accomplished by these forces operating behind the enemy lines, but also the concomitant effect on enemy forces, since they will not be available for offensive operations as they must provide protection of the rear area's vital resources, people, and facilities.

NATO MISSION

The following brief synopsis is provided to allow you to see where the special forces capabilities described above could

be used to support the NATO military commanders in accomplishing their mission.

"The North Atlantic Treaty is the framework for a military alliance designed to prevent aggression or to repel it, should it occur."[7] The military organization consists of three Major NATO Commands, of which Allied Command Europe (ACE) is responsible for three regions of the European continent, northern, central, and southern. The Major Subordinate Command responsible for the central region is Allied Forces Central Command (AFCENT).

The strategy adopted by the alliance and to be implemented by the military commanders, should deterrence fail, is "flexible response."[8] In the referenced article, the author explains that flexible defense will allow the alliance to defend itself by conventional means, at least in the early stages of an attack. The next option to be taken, only after careful deliberation, is escalation to theater nuclear weapons. The ultimate backup is the strategic nuclear force of the United States, which is pledged to the defense of NATO. With this insight, it is easy to understand the importance of effective conventional forces and therefore, effective special operations forces.

In closing, and in an effort to underscore the importance of effective use of declining defense resources for conventional forces, one needs to understand the current state

of affairs. As seen by the commander of Allied Command Europe, General Galvin says, "I can guarantee only that we can defend ourselves for two weeks against an all-out Warsaw Pact attack - then we will have to use nuclear weapons."[9] In another article, General Galvin says that the Soviet capability that worries the NATO commanders the most is their ability to put together massive firepower and keep it in continuous motion.[10] **I believe that we must use the special forces to increase the conventional effectiveness and that use must not fall victim to problems which have been documented in other special forces operations which have taken place in the past few years.** The following section will highlight some of those problems.

CHAPTER III

EXAMPLES OF SPECIAL FORCES OPERATIONS

In the previous chapter, we reviewed the capabilities that a special operations force should provide to the theater commander briefly looked at the current threat to NATO's central region. Before continuing an examination of the most appropriate ways to integrate national special operations forces into the NATO military hierarchy, a review some of past US special forces operations is appropriate. US examples are used because of their effect on the current US force structure and the organizational system recently imposed by the US Congress on the Department of Defense.

To provide continuity to the review of the following examples, I will use a common format. Due to sources which were available, the extent of relevant information for each portion for each example will not necessarily be proportional to the importance of that section on the formation of force structure. Each example will begin with a brief overview of the mission. Then I will present information about planning, training, and execution, in that order. Finally, problems that related to the use of special operations forces will be highlighted. To provide a balanced view of the experiences, I have selected an operation considered in most ways successful - the Son Tay Raid of 1970; an operation considered in most ways

unsuccessful - the Iran Rescue Attempt of 1980; and a combined regular and special forces operation - the invasion of Grenada in 1983.

SON TAY

MISSION OVERVIEW

US servicemen had been held in North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war (POW) camps since early in the Vietnam War. In 1970, as negotiations dragged on in Paris, the North Vietnamese were obviously avoiding a solution on the POW issue and were holding out for significant concessions by the United States.[1] Into this seemingly hopeless situation came information that several prisoners were being held at a provincial capitol, Son Tay, about 23 miles west of Hanoi. Following six months of in depth planning and training, the camp was attacked on 19 November 1970.[2] Even though the operation was well conducted and none of the attacking force was killed or wounded, no prisoners were rescued from the prison, because they weren't there.

PLANNING

The objective to rescue prisoners from North Vietnam had been originally formalized in 1967 with the formation of the Inter-Agency Prisoner-of-War Intelligence Committee. However, until 1970, no prisoner of war camps had been located outside Hanoi. During May 1970 that situation changed. Intelligence

officers of the 1127th Air Force Field Activities Group concluded that prisoners were being held twenty-three miles outside of Hanoi at a provincial capital, Son Tay.[3]

Planning to achieve the objective of prisoner repatriation began in the joint staff after a review of the initial intelligence information. Army Brigadier General Blackburn, Special Assistant to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for Special Activities and Counter-Insurgency, along with the chief of his Special Operations Division, Colonel Mayer prepared the initial plans for the raid and briefed them to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. With his approval of the preliminary plan, he specified use of the Defense Intelligence Agency as the source of intelligence for the raid.[4] The planners then chose the most experienced Army officer available to lead the operation and detailed planning of the objective area operation was initiated. It is especially noteworthy that the complicated infiltration/exfiltration planning was done after the objective area plan had been well established.

General Samuel Wilson, in discussing a paper presented to National Defense University, said that special operations involved getting there, doing it and getting back. He also observed that getting there and back are the more difficult problems.[5] I believe that working the force movement problem before the force employment problem can impose constraints that can detrimentally effect mission capabilities. Therefore this step in planning the Son Tay raid was most important. While

the selection of planners and mission commander was well done, the concentration on the objective to the exclusion of intelligence updates during the planning process ultimately kept the group from achieving their objective. Both areas will be covered in lessons learned. When the planning was complete, the force gathered to begin training for the demanding mission.

TRAINING

The team gathered in August 1970 at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, to initiate training. Col Simons, the mission commander left nothing to chance, by having the three elements of the assault team practice the attack on the compound at least one hundred seventy-five times before the raid.[6] In addition to practice, two other elements of the training appear to have been significant in achieving Col Simons' goals, operational security and unity of command.

Neither the ground assault force nor the air support force (which had also been chosen by General Blackburn[7]), had been informed of the location or purpose of their mission until they moved to Thailand just before the operation. To avoid satellite imagery of their training site in Florida, the exact replica of the Son Tay camp was dismantled and hidden from view before Soviet satellites passed over twice each day.[8] This keen attention to detail maintained security of the mission. The essential security was also maintained by the people involved in the planning and the people who would participate.

However, compartmentalization of the information was not carried to such an extreme as to degrade the ability of members of the force to work together.

EXECUTION

After approval by the National command authority, on 20 November 1970, elements departed two bases in Thailand, rendezvoused over Laos, and proceeded to Son Tay. Even though one of the assault groups was first landed at the wrong location, the ground operation was completed in twenty-seven minutes, accounted for the destruction of numerous enemy troops, and completed a multiunit ingress into one of the most hostile environments in the world at that time. All of this was accomplished without the loss of one American, but no prisoners were rescued. The mission had been conducted to extract prisoners from a camp which had been recognized to be empty by the intelligence service dedicated to support the mission. Three months before the raid was conducted the Defense Intelligence Agency had produced a report which indicated that the camp was "probably" empty.* The decision to limit reconnaissance to national technical means and to forgo possibly corroborating human intelligence had caused a focused planning/executing group to disregard the intelligence report. The formation of the group and the assignment of responsibilities certainly contributed to the successes and to the failures associated with the objective. We will review the

lessons which apply to the establishment of an appropriate control mechanism for these forces.

LESSONS

The most important aspect of the planning phase of this operation was the selection of knowledgeable, appropriately placed leaders. General Blackburn and Colonel Mayer worked in the joint staff with responsibilities and experience consistent with the mission objectives. This positive influence was complimented by their selection of an experienced field commander, who then was allowed to select the ground assault team members from people that he trusted. This cadre established a solid framework around which ingress and egress support teams could be built. The selection of properly qualified leaders is critical to successful mission planning.

Perhaps the most detrimental factor associated with the mission, was the lack of sufficient intelligence. If parochialism was evident in the planning phase it was in the selection of the defense department's intelligence staff to provide the sole inputs for planning. Even if human intelligence were not used, an assessment, by other intelligence agencies, of the camp's current status may have caused planners to properly consider the DIA assessment.

The training associated with this mission was exemplary. Again experienced leadership, cognizant of security and operational requirements provided a well trained force. The

incorporation of support units into the training and into the overall plan contributed directly to the successful execution of a most difficult mission.

Perhaps the most telling aspect of the execution phase was the ability of the ground forces to compensate for one of the three assault elements having been inserted into the wrong location. The element leader radioed another team leader, told him to take the higher priority mission, and then led his force in the destruction of an unexpected enemy force which outnumbered his group by almost ten to one. Execution such as this is possible only when planners have shared the mission with appropriate team members and team members have participated in training which has incorporated sufficient excursions to be prepared for such contingencies.

In my opinion, this operation would have been perfect if the leadership had not locked onto the method and started ignoring the environment.

IRAN RESCUE MISSION

MISSION OVERVIEW

Iranian revolutionaries occupied the US Embassy on 4 November 1979, taking 53 hostage along with an additional three Americans who were taken hostage at the Foreign Ministry. This action caused a sequence of events that led our nation to Operation Eagle Claw.[10] This special forces operations was

designed to enter Iran, take possession of the hostages from at least two locations in the Iranian capital, and fly them out of Iran aboard US military airlift aircraft from a captured Iranian airfield. Five months later, US military forces attempted to carry out the designed operation.

The mission was seen as a three phased operation. Phase one was the insertion of forces, under the cover of darkness to hiding locations near Teheran. Phase two was the movement of the assault forces into Teheran by truck and taking control of the hostages from armed guards in fortified positions within the city. Phase three was the collection of the hostages and assault forces, by helicopter from several locations in the city and moving everyone through a captured Iranian military airfield to board airplanes for the flight out of Iran.

The dismal failure of the operation brings to mind a quote from Philip Warner's book on Great Britain's special forces group, the Special Air Service, "Wildly improbable ideas win wars if they are worked out with sufficient detail; but if they are not tied to competent administration, they may lose battles."[11] As we did with the Son Tay operation, we will now examine the planning, training, and execution of this operation to determine lessons that are applicable to the NATO environment.

PLANNING

Where Son Tay enjoyed the effects of an established,

joint staff organization to form the planning nucleus, apparently a new staff was assembled in November 1979 to develop the Iranian rescue operation contingency plans.[12] After examining the Holloway Report (commissioned to conduct a post mission review), a National Defense University panelist commented, "There was much interservice accommodation, very apparent in a plan clearly designed by people without a clue as to the realities of war."[13] I believe this is too harsh, but it highlights the issue that the objective may have been obscured by attempts to maximize service contributions. Therefore a basic principle of war may have been lost at the outset, that is maintenance of the objective.

This diluted effort certainly did not insure success because it built a plan that was optimistically tied to a very tight schedule. Phase one required the helicopters to fly a sortie to a ground refueling point, refuel, fly the assault force on to a hiding location, and then fly to their own hiding location. The complete operation, if conducted as planned with no delays, would have taken eight hours. On the day of the raid, meteorologists predicted only nine hours and sixteen minutes of darkness. Therefore, the planners appear to have suffered from a lack of constructive criticism and constructive contingency planning which might have been provided by a more thorough review of their plan. Such was not possible due to operational security considerations which kept various elements of the planning and execution staffs from knowing the details

of supporting plans.[14] Another significant element of planning, the absence of establishing unity of command also detracted from mission capabilities. Rather than having a single person responsible for making inputs to the planners and also responsible for conducting the operation, three different colonels were at the refueling point for phase one, Desert One, and none of them were recognized by all of the troops as being in charge.[15] This problem also affected the adequacy of training.

The final element was also influenced by the need for operational security. While information was available about dust storms being common along the ingress route to Desert One[16], such phenomena were not briefed to the helicopter crews. The plan had not anticipated the dust cloud and minimum visibility requirements had not even been established for the mission.[17] This does not appear to have been a problem of not having sufficient information, but of not using available information. This was but one example that contributed directly to the inability of the forces to accomplish the mission.

TRAINING

Based on my experience in Air Training Command, the training cycle requires objectives, an understanding of the individuals capabilities as they relate to the task and a system designed to increase the individuals ability to

accomplish the assigned project. In view of the performance of the members of this special forces group, the leadership did not understand their training responsibilities.

The most glaring example of inadequate attention to providing appropriate skills for the mission was provided through a review of the helicopter pilots performance. As previously discussed, they were required to navigate, in the dark, for almost six hours to a refueling location, at low altitude, over hazardous terrain. These people were very accomplished pilots who had demonstrated required proficiency in other missions but did not develop the requisite skills for this mission. Since the planning staff had no experience in special operations[18], the helicopters chosen for the mission could not be refueled in flight, therefore the pilots could not train for this capability which had been used so well in the Son Tay raid. The need for a desert refueling stop, on a severely time-critical mission, could have been deleted if the proper equipment had been chosen and the proper training been provided.

The more demanding phase of the mission for the assault forces was never executed, so we cannot know the level of competence developed by that element of the force. However, we do know that communication and interoperability among the forces was lacking. Col Beckwith, the ground force commander, was able to communicate with the regional director in Egypt via satellite. He was not able to adequately communicate with

other forces at Desert One after he had received an order to abort the mission.[19] It is apparent that the inter-element communications were not exercised during training because the force did not train together. Operational security considerations had resulted in specialty training at separate locations and had precluded the exercise of the force elements at as single entity prior to execution.[20]

EXECUTION

Since only the first leg of the first phase was executed, we will not be able to judge the full capabilities of the force. In my opinion, the entire operation appears to have been put in a very bad light when a faulty plan and improperly chosen helicopters may have been the only proven problems.

The assault group was taken to Desert One along with a security force for that location and fuel for the helicopters. Their movement was completed well, but problems started upon their arrival. The landing strip was next to a major road and traffic had to be stopped almost immediately. The site security team blew up a fuel truck on the road and the driver escaped in another vehicle. This escape may have caused significant problems if the mission had continued; however, available sources did not address this factor. The principle concern became the arrival of the helicopters.[21]

The minimum number of helicopters had been established as six during the planning phase.[22] Eight had left the

aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean, and six arrived at Desert One. One had been left in the desert due to an indicated problem which more experience pilots would probably not have used as a reason for abort. Another had experienced the failure of flight instruments in a severe dust storm and had returned to the ship. However, when the six remaining aircraft arrived at Desert One, one of them had an irreparable hydraulic system and could not continue. Therefore, unexpected weather (which should have been expected had proper weather briefings been prepared), ill trained pilots, and ill chosen equipment left the group without adequate transportation to continue.

Following Col Beckwith's recommendation, Washington directed an abort and withdrawal. Even so, the helicopters had continued their refueling, expecting to continue the mission. During that operation, one of the helicopters struck one of the C-130 aircraft causing the loss of eight crewmembers and setting both aircraft on fire. "Amid ear-shattering noise, fire, and confusion, the site commander [not Col Beckwith] decided to abandon Desert One as rapidly as possible."[23] Thus the remaining people returned without destroying any of the other helicopters or the classified plans that were on board.

LESSONS

As we have seen repeatedly in the paragraphs above, a plan, developed without proper expertise and so closely held as to prevent review and critique by others, set the operation up

for potential disaster. When unforeseen delays, caused by unexpected problems, further complicated execution of the demanding plan, the mission failed.

The need for experienced planners and thorough critique is the primary lesson to be taken from this experience. The method to achieve such a planning system in the NATO environment will be dealt with in the next chapter.

The other, similar problem is to establish a proper training environment, which exercises all elements of the force together. The interoperability problems can then be brought to light and addressed by the people who must overcome them in the field.

A problem which will plague any complex mission, and one that could be identified in a good training program, is the need for clear command structure within the force. As we have seen before, the infiltration and exfiltration force must be tailored to support the execution force. The command elements of these different sections must be integrated so as to permit proper control and proper communication of decisions.

The publicity given to the failure of this mission led to the eventual establishment, at congressional direction, of the US joint command for special operations. This precedent may be appropriate for the NATO environment also, but we will look at an integrated special forces operation before we adopt the congressional solution for the central region.

GRENADA

MISSION OVERVIEW

Consensus does not exist about the effectiveness of the US operation that was conductec in Grenada in October 1983. Certainly the results [illegible] in concert with the objectives communicated to the United States from the organization of eastern Caribbean States. The noted the conditions of anarchy and the threat to peace and security created by the lack of authority in Grenada, and they requested military intervention to restore order and democracy.[24] Additionally, the US was concerned about the safety of American citizens on the island in the wake of a coup which involved communist factions and the murder of the prime minister. Therefore the objectives were established and they required military intervention.

We will limit the scope of this discussion to two of the five special operations that were conducted in support of the simultaneous amphibious and airborne assault of the island. The first of these was conducted by Delta Force, to reconnoiter the main airport at Point Salines the night before the invasion and to assault the airstrip just before dawn to remove construction equipment and neutralize any resistance that might come from the Cuban workers.[25] The other special operations mission that we will review is the attempt by a Navy SEAL team to capture the island radio station. These two operations are chosen to reflect the impact of proper integration and proper

application of special forces capabilities.

Both of the special forces failed to achieve their objective and required the intervention of other forces to complete the assigned missions. The Delta Force was discovered by a much stronger force than they expected and were unable to secure the airfield for an air-land insertion of the Rangers. Instead the Rangers had to parachute onto the airport and assist the Delta Force in securing it.[26] Having lost the element of surprise after Delta Force was discovered, the SEAL team met heavy resistance at the radio station and were forced to withdraw. The station was later destroyed by an air attack.[27]

We will now review the planning, training, and execution of these two missions to extract lessons which will help understand an appropriate control structure in the NATO environment.

PLANNING

Planning was started following the murder of the prime minister on 19 October, to extract the American students and other Americans from the island. However, with the request of the other Caribbean states to join them in intervening, the plan for extraction was expanded to a plan for a full scale combat assault.[28] The resulting plan has received criticism for being "navalized" from one author because it envisioned a phased move onto the island instead of a *coup de main*, which would have inserted overpowering forces simultaneously into all

primary objectives.[29] Planners were also criticized for including forces besides the marines who were already trained for island warfare.

The one common thread in the criticism has been the lack of sufficient intelligence information. Several sources point out the use of travel-agency road maps by some of the combatants while others used petroleum company road maps. Besides the problems associated with trying to coordinate assault actions from different maps, the lack of government-provided maps was probably the result of the unexpected nature of the operation and the haste in which the plan was formulated.

The more important result of the lack of sufficient intelligence was preparation for an administrative occupation and then being required to execute a more hostile assault than was expected. In response to a Congressional Reform Caucus critique of the operation, JCS had estimated the Cuban force on the island at approximately 700 with additional Grenadian forces including 1200 - 1500 army and 2000 - 5000 militia.[30] However, the Rangers were expected to land at the main airport after a force of about 40 Delta commandos secured it. Therefore, I believe that minimal resistance was expected by the planners in spite of the potential resistance that was available. The optimistic planning assumption is evident in this operation as it was in the Iran Rescue operation.

In view of the rapid execution following initial notification, the selection of a commander and the organization of forces appears to have been effective. Rather than create a new operational command, the mission was given to the joint task force commander who would normally have been responsible for operations in that area. His review of the plan was accomplished with the assistance of "experienced and knowledgeable people."[31] However, the SEAL team which is normally employed as an intelligence gathering unit, was tasked to take control of an objective. Under the original assumption of weak resistance, this portion of the operation may not have been unwarranted, but after the element of surprise was lost, the executing command should have reconsidered using the SEAL team to attempt that assault. That executing command was the Joint Special Operation Command (JSOC), which had been created following the Iran Rescue mission to improve coordination of multi-service operations. In view of the lack of success perhaps better training could have made on-scene adaptation of the plan more productive.

TRAINING

This section may not be practical when considered in light of the previous special operations covered in this chapter. Certainly months were not available for rehearsal. The problem identified above with adapting to real time problems could have been more successfully solved if the

elements of the force practiced together routinely and really understood capabilities and limitations of the other groups. Such practice could be done on generic targets to test abilities as well as communications requirements and limitations.

In addition to practice with other special operations forces, this operation highlights the need to be prepared to operate with other conventional forces. If such practice has not been accomplished, combining these forces may result in causing more harm to each other than to the enemy.

EXECUTION

Delta force was committed against a numerically superior force and was tasked to take control of an area in which defenders had prepared defensive fighting positions and also had access to armored personnel carriers. The assumption, that existing defenses would not be used, caused the loss of life and denied the objective to the initial force.

Use of a reconnaissance group, the SEAL team, to assault and hold the radio station resulted in the same thing. Therefore, execution of these two elements of the mission suffered from optimistic assumptions and an inadequate ability to adapt to a changing situation.

LESSONS

For the planning phase, intelligence was again proven to

be a critical factor in determining the success of a special operations force mission. The lesson to be learned from Grenada is that planners must quickly determine information requirements. They must also insure essential answers are obtained quickly. The essential elements for this operation should have included better on-scene assessment of the capabilities of the island defense forces. In view of the presence of American students and tourists on the island, the insertion of a an intelligence agent seems to have been possible. Another element that would have been very useful would have been a common map of the island to coordinate actions among the various forces.

Also for the planning phase, this operation appears to have been built from a minimal data base. Regional commanders have direct responsibility for the preparation for war fighting in their area of responsibility. At the same time, we have created more supporting commanders with responsibilities such as transportation and special operations. Therefore increased emphasis should be placed on coordination among the various planning staffs. Generic contingency packages should be developed by a staff agency that is assigned to the regional commander. That agency should be assisted by representatives from supporting headquarters. Critique of the generic plan by another, similar group would be very beneficial in building the mechanism for a quick response to regional problems.

Another lesson comes from the effect that training had on execution. The forces that were used to execute the Grenada mission had certainly demonstrated their ability to carry out military missions in the past. As crisis planners built their plan and executing commanders allocated responsibilities, they knew the unit capabilities of the various forces. However, the planners did not have information about the capabilities of the various units to work together. Therefore, combined training should precede assignment to a joint operational team so that planners will be able to understand the limitations that the executing commanders will face, rather than be forced to assume their interoperability.

The Grenada operation provides a microcosm of the type of operational environment that may be experienced in the future when special operations forces are used in concert with more conventional forces. The final lesson that a review of Grenada provides is that planners should avoid any propensity to assume that one unconventional element can carry out the same type of mission that any other unconventional element might be able to conduct. Based on the available intelligence, Delta Force should have been able to reconnoiter the airfield and to prepare the area for the arrival of follow-on forces. However, the SEAL team should not have been assigned responsibility for capturing the radio station. Even though both elements were special operations forces, they were not both equally trained and equipped to seize and hold an

objective.

This review of three special operations missions provided lessons and raised questions which should be considered as we review the NATO command structure in the next chapter. That review will be used to develop recommended control mechanisms for similar forces in the combined application.

CHAPTER IV

REQUIREMENTS AND CONTROL OPTIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the command structure of Allied Command Europe's Central Region in light of the problems highlighted in our review of the examples in chapter three. As we examine the various command levels available to control aspects of special operations forces employment, we will assess the ability of that level to compensate for the problems.

To organize the process, we will first look at an overview of the geographically organized, central region command structure. Based on that understanding of the command structure, we will evaluate the ability of the various levels of command to conduct the three phases of special operations: planning, training, and execution.

CENTRAL REGION COMMAND STRUCTURE

To understand the missions of the various command levels in the central region, let's review the mission priorities for those forces. The past Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Rogers reported the following to the US Senate:

> NATO's first priority is to destroy initial attacks from Warsaw Pact ground and air forces; if this is not accomplished, conventional

> defense against follow-on forces is fruitless. Second, to preclude being overwhelmed and to take advantage of Warsaw Pact weaknesses, we must also have the ability to delay, disrupt, and destroy their follow-on forces, as well as a concurrent capability to reduce the effectiveness of Soviet air and missile forces.[1]

To carry out the primary objective, five nations have assumed responsibility for the protection of eight corp areas along the inner German border. The four northern corps (provided by Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, and Great Britain) and the four southern corps (provided by Germany and United States) are the highest national commands in the force. Even though they are provided to NATO, their staffs are essentially national. The northern corps are assigned to the central region's Northern Army Group. This headquarters, along with their air force counter part, Second Allied Tactical Air Force are the combined headquarters for NATO. Their equal in the southern part of the central region is the Central Army Group with the Fourth Allied Tactical Air Force. These headquarters coordinate their respective forces to accomplish SACEUR's priorities and function as the lowest combined (multinational) level of NATO's chain of command. The command level above the army groups is Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT). It is within these headquarters (corp, army group, and region) that we will test the appropriate level of control for special operation forces planning, training, and execution.[2]

A basic assumption for this assessment is that each of the six nations, which provide forces for the central region and which currently have forces with special operations capabilities, will continue to develop the capabilities of those forces and will make them available to the NATO commanders at appropriate times. The formal commitment has been made by the British with their Special Air Service[7], and may have also been made by other nations in classified documents.

PLANNING

As we have seen in several sources, the mission in the central region certainly can use the capabilities of special operations forces. You may refer to the various types of missions described in chapter two and read the statement made by General Rogers in this chapter to see the direct opportunities for such applications. Therefore, we will assume that the general benefits of using special operations forces is recognized at the three command levels in the central region. In view of the value of the forces, each level of command could use them to achieve its objective. The corp commander, responsible for defense of his section of the front, could exploit intelligence gathered by the forces to concentrate his forces at the enemy's weak points for a counter attack. The army group commander could direct employment from his vantage point to interfere with enemy reinforcements to insure that

they were not employed against a weak corp area. The regional commander could orchestrate a series of special forces attacks against enemy communications nodes at a critical time to support a critical counter attack.

Therefore, each level would be able to establish an appropriate objective for the special operations forces.

As we have seen in the examples from chapter three, intelligence is critical to the success of the proper planning for special force employment. When this area is discussed, one must remember that NATO is an alliance of sovereign nations. One would assume that the sensitive intelligence assets of each one are designed to support national requirements. The thought of collective intelligence among equal, sovereign nations reminds me of the following story about a group of boys.

While planning a camping trip they realize that they will have to cross a wide ravine. Boy A, knowing that he will have to carry one end of the ladder to span the ravine and knowing that a girl's camp is on the other side, goes out to the ravine and measures it to ensure that the ladder will be neither too short nor too long. Boy B, who will sell the ladder to the group for the trip and the price is by-the-foot, looks at his inventory and suggests that the longest one will be required. Boy C, who will carry the other end and does not know the girl's camp is on the other side, weighs the available ladders and decides that the lightest one will be sufficient. Boy D, who has agreed to buy the ladder for the group looks at

his wallet and then at the prices of the various ladders and picks the longest one he can afford. Each made his recommendation based on fulfilling personal desires and limitations. I am not trying to say, by this example, that similar criteria drive the intelligence estimates of the various nation, but I do believe that each nation does have unique a viewpoint which may lend more credence to estimates that more closely fit within that point of view.

With that aside, let us remember that "intelligence is to special operations as water is to fish, the one is unthinkable without the other."[4] When we consider that each nation may have different sources of information and may develop different estimates based on unique view points, then we shouldn't be surprised if missions planned at the national level would be different than missions planned by international staffs using shared information. The quality of the planning is not in question but the assignment of planning responsibility must consider whether the executing force is national or combined and how much trust the executing force has in the critical support elements of the plan.

The final area which must be considered in assigning planning responsibility among the headquarters, is the qualification of the individual planners. As we saw in the Iran Rescue Mission planning, when the planners were not familiar with the range of available equipment, they picked helicopters which could not be refueled in flight. Therefore,

the planners should be familiar with equipment and with the other capabilities of the executing special operations force.

Each level of command will have unique viewpoints which will affect its planning effectiveness. Each national headquarters will have slightly different views of the information which must be considered during development of the details of the plan. Since friendly tactical air power ranges beyond corp boundaries, the additional element of information required to avoid fratricide may more appropriately come from the intermediate headquarters that has both ground and air elements. The higher headquarters will have a clearer understanding of the theater objective. The final issue to consider is the importance of having planners who are familiar with the capabilities of the forces to be employed.

TRAINING

The day to day situation for national forces of NATO nations is that they remain almost exclusively assigned to national commands. The Son Tay Raid went so smoothly because there was unity of command during the training period. The Iran Rescue Mission was poorly executed because the training was terribly disjointed and forces found themselves in the middle of a hostile environment without the ability to adequately communicate or operate with each other. One can conclude that a critical requirement to be considered when assigning training responsibilities among the various command

echelons, is to assure the opportunity for the forces to train together.

Another principle consideration for the preparation of the forces for their combat missions is to insure that they have been tested by variations on their planned operation. The ability to adapt to the unexpected situation made it possible for the Son Tay assault group to trade objectives and stay on schedule for the operation. The training for this general war scenario should also allow the special forces to operate in and with regular forces in attaining their objectives. This capability was demonstrated in the Grenada invasion and the problems encountered point out the need for improvements. While the international headquarters may be able to provide a less biased view of the adequacy of preparation, based on seeing similar scenarios exercised by the forces of other nations, the national headquarters may be able to provide better continuity and more opportunities for interoperability with regular forces. These training issues relate closely to the issues covered in the next section which deals with execution.

EXECUTION

Commanders at every level find themselves worrying about three different things: they are concerned about having sufficient information to understand factors that effect their operation; they are concerned about whether the available

information is correctly used to make timely decisions; finally, they worry about how to implement their decisions in time to effect the desired outcome.[5] This section will examine the control and the execution of special operations missions within the central region.

As we noted in a review of special operations forces capabilities in chapter three, infiltration and exfiltration are usually the most difficult portions of a mission. With the concentration of forces at the forward line of troops in a central region conflict, moving special operations forces to objectives behind enemy lines will be especially difficult. The scope of this paper precludes an examination of the political issues involved with moving the special forces before any formal declaration of hostilities. However, such considerations are certainly warranted.

One of the lessons learned from the examination of the examples in chapter three was the importance of communications to coordinate activities among the participants and supporters during a special forces operation. Again, the national commander has the advantage of communications media that are more routinely used together. Therefore, the assurance of being able to have a viable means of communication will be higher within national forces than among elements from more than one country. The problem of language is minimized when using a single nation's forces. Even english speakers have their problems. (Try telling an Englishman where the hood of

your car is.) However, coordination within the force is certainly not the only problem.

In view of the relatively small area assigned to each corp commander, and the blurred distinction of responsibility that is sure to happen behind enemy lines where the special forces will be conducting operations; one would assume that the higher levels of command could assure coordination of forces and objectives more appropriately than the corp commanders. Certainly, if executing authority is retained at the national headquarters, a close liaison must exist with the higher headquarters to deconflict other operations in the vicinity of the special forces objective. If the higher headquarters staff is consumed with dealing with their bosses immediate worries, they may not provide information to or take information from a liaison officer. Again exercises will establish the precedent for correct interaction among appropriate staff members.

The final element of execution that should be considered is the ability of the special operations force to receive and react to intelligence updates during the operational phase of the mission. The Son Tay raiders reacted quickly to a change in assignment because they could/and did talk to each other. So again communications within the force is seen to be important. The SEAL team assigned to take the radio station on Grenada demonstrates what happens when an assault element is not informed about the loss of the element of surprise. The flow of information must also be considered in determining the

ability of the force to receive timely inputs. Since the intelligence is expected to come from national sources and must then be interpreted and sent to the combined intelligence interpreters[4] for dissemination through the NATO staffs, one would assume that the information could be available in national systems before it might be available to the NATO commander. Since time is critical to the special operations force, national control of the execution phase would appear to be appropriate.

DECISIONS

The decisions on the allocations of responsibility made by the US Congress attempted, within the joint context, to organize a single headquarters which would control planning, training, and executing special operations missions. Based on the various advantages for different headquarters at different times during the mission development and execution phases, perhaps assigning all of the responsibilities to a single echelon of the central region hierarchy is not the correct solution. In the final chapter of this paper, I will recommend a division of responsibilities based on these varying capabilities.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The US Congress was faced with the evidence of decreasing combat capabilities, as demonstrated by several missions including those which we examined in chapter three. They passed legislation which the President signed into law to create an umbrella command structure for active and reserve special operations forces.[1] I do not believe similar action is warranted for the control of special operations forces in the NATO environment.

In this final chapter, I will provide a method of dividing control responsibilities among the various command levels that exist in the central region of Allied Command Europe. As was demonstrated in the assessment of planning, training, and execution requirements discussed in chapter four, the benefits and constraints available from the various options do not provide a clear picture of the perfect solution. However, the following recommendations will give commanders positive control over their force. Effective control becomes more important as those special operations forces consume an increasing percentage of national defense funding.[2]

PLANNING PHASE RESPONSIBILITIES

The planning priority is to select proper objectives. That selection is based on the theater commander's campaign plan and the ability of the force elements to contribute appropriately. The level of command which has the best appreciation of the theater perspective would be Allied Forces Central Europe. To assure the proper allocation of targets to appropriate forces, I believe each nation contributing special operations forces should assign a very experience staff element to AFCENT. Those people would form a staff which should select, from the total target set, those targets which should be attacked by special forces assets. With their knowledge of national capabilities, this group could also provide information in the objective assignment about which nations could carry out the mission. The objective allocation should then be passed to the appropriate army group to be coordinated with other objectives for their areas of responsibility.

The second consideration involves intelligence support. Planning for attacking the theater commander's high priority targets should be done during peacetime. Peacetime control of the great majority of the intelligence assets needed to support that planning remains within national channels. Since planning information is apparently more available within national forces, I recommend that specific mission planning be done at the corp level, within national channels.

NATO war plans should identify, during peacetime, targets which would be appropriate for special operations forces. AFCENT should task at least two corp commanders, who have been identified as mission capable, to plan to attack these targets. Each corp commander should be tasked to prepare a detailed plan and to brief their plan to the AFCENT special operations staff. If possible, the plans should be briefed to the AFCENT staff and to the other nation's staff that had been assigned planning responsibility for the same target. The briefings, and discussions by knowledgeable staffs, will help AFCENT understand the national plans and support future decisions to select one of the plans for implementation.

TRAINING PHASE RESPONSIBILITIES

Training requires two different levels to achieve the desired proficiency. First training must develop the basic skills and confidence needed in the risky arena of special operations. Secondly, the training must prepare the entire operations force to work efficiently together to accomplish the mission. I believe both of these levels can be enhanced in the multinational environment.

The first aspect, that of proficiency training, can be achieved through combined exercises and exchanges among the various national forces. Conventional forces have enjoyed similar benefits throughout the existence of NATO. Not only can the more expensive combined operational exercises be

conducted, but the planning and command-and-control elements can build on their exchanges at the AFCENT briefings to improve their skills and perhaps even initiate combined exercises for their functions.

The second aspect, that of preparing for a specific mission can also be enhanced by combined exercises. If two forces, having planned for the same objective, could alternate roles as attacker and defender during training then both could benefit from the experience and would be better prepared to execute the mission when tasked. As national forces become better equipped and trained to operate with there own conventional forces and then practice with the special operations forces from other nations, interoperability through out the central region will be enhanced.

EXECUTION PHASE RESPONSIBILITIES

During the planning phase, AFCENT will have provided the target. The army group will have established how attack of that specific target should be coordinated with other operations in his area. The national command level, the corp commander, will have specifically planned how the mission should be executed. Therefore, the corp commander should be given the responsibility for the execution phase. Coordination for the infiltration and exfiltration of the force appears to be enhanced by the level of communication and of training that can be conducted at the national level. Therefore, this

important aspect of the execution phase would be well served by the corp commander and his subordinates.

Another aspect that we have seen was very important during the examples from chapter three was the application of real time intelligence information. Again this critical flow of information would appear to be more appropriately done within national forces.

The final consideration for control during the execution phase also supports giving the corp commander this responsibility. The problem of deconflicting other resources that could put the special operations force at higher risk of fratricide would be easier for the level of command responsible for conventional execution of higher headquarters taskings. Since the army groups may have better information about operations within adjacent corp areas, the corp commander should certainly coordinate with the army group to keep them informed about the special operations force activities.

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For the past forty years our potential adversary in Europe has been deterred - convinced that we could make the cost of their military aggression too high. Recently our taxpayers have begun to believe that we have made the cost of their military too high. It is imperative that we demonstrate

to the taxpayers that we can wisely use their investment to continue to maintain peace with freedom. Should we fail their trust, we may find that the military weakness that will come from reduced investment will also result in a failure of deterrence.

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