PACAF
TACTICS & TECHNIQUES
bulletin

MORE ON
FORWARD AIR CONTROLLING
BULLETIN # 52
19 DEC 66

Prepared by:
6002 STAN/EVAL GP.
APO,SAN FRAN,96239

PACAF, KAB,OKINAWA

MORE ON FORWARD AIR CONTROLLING

1. In the present conflict in Vietnam, the FAC's primary concern is locating the enemy without exposing himself to destructive ground fire or causing the enemy to disperse and escape. This bulletin will present some FAC techniques which have been successfully employed in SEA and some tactics found to be effective in the event, ground fire is encountered.

2. Most visual reconnaissance (VR) missions have as a primary objective, finding and observing the enemy. Some important prerequisites to successful VR operations are as follows:

a. Obtain a complete set of 1:50,000 and 1:250,000 maps of the area, and know how to read them and navigate from them.

b. Talk to other FACs and pilots flying in the area and compare ideas on areas of probable enemy activity or ground fire.

c. Through study and personal contact, learn the scope of friendly activity and plans for future ground operations in the area.

d. Know the air request system and maintain radio contact with the appropriate control agency if possible.

e. Know the availability of fighter support to include aircraft types and numbers and munitions and their effects. Be able so anticipate the fighter pilot's actions and reactions, realizing that a language barrier may exist if the pilots are foreign allies.

f. Know the capabilities and limitations of your own aircraft.

g. Most important, know your area of operation and be able to recognize changes in terrain features or human activity.

3. The FAC should know the indicators that signify the enemy's presence or activity. Some of the indicators are as follows:

a. Ground fire—disciplined troops won't usually fire and give away their position unless they think they have been detected or are under attack. Stray guerillas may snipe at aircraft any time.

b. Tracks—human, animal and vehicle, indicating increased or recent travel. Water-soaked earth near a puddle or stream and tracks around new bomb craters indicate recent passage. Often direction of travel can be determined by noting the position of the damp ground in relation to the water.

c. Movement of supplies or farming in isolated areas -farming may be indicated by drying grain or clothes, harvesting, or increased cattle population.

d. Newly turned earth—indicates foxholes, caves, tunneling.

e. Camouflage—evidence of something being hidden. Well camouflaged items may be hard to detect.

f. Gun positions—-occupants may be hidden in the positions or nearby under foliage or in foxholes.

g. Sampans—unusual numbers, position or activity.

h. People—running and trying to hide or the complete lack of activity in an obviously occupied area.

4. What the enemy does when he thinks he has been spotted varies constantly and may be affected by terrain, training, situation, etc. The following are reactions to the presence of FACs in the past and some guidance on where to look for the enemy.

a. Usually the enemy will stop and try to hide by blending into the background, especially near bunkers or camouflaged items. He may hide under cattle or try to imitate a bush, tree or dike.

b. If he thinks he is exposed, he will scurry for cover like a rat, running in short bursts from cover to, cover. He moves when your aircraft is pointed away and freezes when you fly toward him. This necessitates watching to the rear as well as forward to spot enemy activity.

c. The enemy may change dress and hide his weapons to blend with the local population, or take off his hat and clothes, arrange them on the ground and escape the area while the FAC circles the decoy clothing.

d. Enemy base camps are often found near well-used trails and trail intersections, near cultivated areas along ridge lines or off of the main ridge line and near cleared areas under trees.

5. Ground fire is usually heard rather than seen especially if the rear windows of the O-1 are left open. The front windows may also he left open if the FAC is flying alone. Some FACs have tied one ear phone back to facilitate hearing ground fire better. If the source of ground fire is seen, the muzzle flash looks like a yellow strobe with a puff of smoke during the day and white strobe at night. Tracers leave a red streak but are usually used only by regular troops under attack. Snipers seldom use tracer unless they aren't worried about disclosing their position. The sound of ground fire has been described as follows:

a. Small arms—click; snap; pop; muffled, dry stick snapping; cigarette lighter snapping shut; a whip cracking; popcorn popping; or a muffled, sharp engine backfire.

b. 50 cal—a heavier, louder "woof.", more decisive crack.

c. 20 MM—deeper, louder "pom", distinct separated reports.

d. Rounds aimed at you crack more distinctly and a steady pattern indicate; an automatic or belt-fed weapon.

6. The O-1 is not designed or equipped to combat ground fire; therefore, areas of known or suspected enemy ground fire should be avoided whenever possible, especially at low altitude. 1,500 feet has been calculated as being above the effective range of most small arms and low enough to conduct reasonable VR; however, your altitude should vary to meet the situation as hits have been reported above 1,500 feet and some targets require closer scrutiny than is

possibility at 1,500 feet. The FAC should always vary his maneuvers and patterns and never repeat in an area of suspected or known ground fire. The O-1 is a good target for ground. fire, especially if the FAC is over open terrain. In areas of jungle cover, the trees tend to give some protection, unless the FAC flies directly over the enemy or across an open area. To best combat ground fire once encountered, have a plan and react quickly to get away from the area. Immediate climbing or uncoordinated flight will cost airspeed and thus increase the amount of time required to get out of range. If there are trees, a good plan might be to dive to the deck trying to get something between you and the gunner and picking up speed for getaway. A series of sharp turns will keep the gunner from getting tail shot and may disrupt his lead. It is advisable to fly out of range before climbing. If you are above the effective range of the weapons, try to pinpoint! their position for a strike, keeping to one side and out of range. Often dropping a smoke grenade may cause the enemy to cease fire it an effort to escape the airstrike which usually follows a FAC's mark. It is advisable to have armed fighters immediately available when marking a target, making a BDA or entering an area of suspected or known ground fire. To help decrease the effectiveness of ground fire, the FAC should fly into the area out of the sun and downwind. Attempt to stay over friendlies during strikes and avoid flying directly over the target or open areas, especially at low altitude.

7. The FAC must be alert at all times for other aircraft, realizing he is harder to see and has little chance for survival should a midair collision occur. It is the FAC's responsibility to insure he has the fighters in sight and the fighters have visual contact with him before he clears them to make an ordnanc[e] delivery pass. It is also the FAC's responsibility to keep the fighters informed of other known aircraft in the area

8. Successful close air support depends primarily on the FAC and his ability to locate the enemy and cause his destruction. The FAC must always use good common sense and fit his actions with the specific situation. A thorough know ledge of his area, friendly operations and available resources is mandatory, but the FAC's good judgment will usually mean the difference between successful operations with light casualties and mediocre operations.