

Mech Infantry Battalions

So I first was ordered to command the 2d Battalion, 11th Regiment, of the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division. The 2/11th.

General Gleszer wanted me to command, at least for 4-6 months a Mechanized Infantry Battalion so I could learn what made it tick. For I sure didn't know.

Now by the mid 1960s Mech Infantry Battalions were equipped with M113 Armored Personnel Carriers.





Now they were NOT Tanks. And they were NOT trucks. But they were Armored - against small arms, machine gun fire, and shrapnel from close by artillery or mortar fire explosions, and some of the effects of battlefield nuclear blasts - Personnel Carriers.

They were designed to hold exactly one 12 man squad of Riflemen, with one extra man as driver and the NCO (or officer) commander inside also the one who was up in the open hatch as Track Commander who told the driver what to do and where to go. They could be buttoned up

completely so that only the track commander and the driver could see out through periscopes.

AND they were amphibious! They could - within limits - swim across rivers and bodies of water on or near their battlefields.

EVERY 4th Mech Infantry Division's fighting man from every Infantry Battalion rode in M113s or like armored tracked vehicles. It was that characteristic that made those units so equipped to be designated as Mechanized Infantry Companies, Battalions, and Divisions.

Their military tactical essence were that Infantry soldiers so equipped RODE to battle - inside mechanized carriers, but FOUGHT ON FOOT. Mech-Infantry

BUT THE REST OF THE STORY

That also meant that those M113 APCs were organic to every rifle company - they 'owned' them, they had to maintain them, store them, train in them.

And it was the great amount of maintenance required and the different tactics required to use them at their maximum effectiveness that posed a real challenge to company and battalion commanders when they were assigned to units having them.

For the soldiers and officers who served in combat in Vietnam, with the exception of those in the few Mech Infantry Battalion units that were deployed also - such as the one battalion in the 2d Brigade of the 25th Division, along with the two Wolfound straight Infantry battalions, knew a lot about marching through jungles and rice paddies, and how to make combat assaults by helicopter. But very FEW soldiers in Vietnam had any real contact with tracked vehicles, much less how to fight from them.

And those who had served in the 4th Infantry Division in Vietnam, and who were assigned to it in the US, really weren't prepared to go to mechanized war against the Soviets in Europe.

I recognized quickly when I took command of the 2/11th just how little my officers, NCO's, or men knew about them. For the 5th, then 4th Mech was being filled up with Drafted soldiers who had gone through Infantry Basic training, then fought in Vietnam for a year - not in mech units - and came back to the US, for their remaining time in the Army on their first, obligatory 2 year enlistment, had to start training on this new mode of going to battle.

And even fewer men in each unit were mechanics, or natural aptitude mechanical whizzes, who were good at, or liked, to maintain their M113 vehicles.

In my brief time commanding that 2/11 Battalion before Gen Gleszer pulled me up to the G-3 position on the Division Staff, I saw what was needed in the way of Training, and how much reliance the Division would have on the 'Logistical' - maintenance and supply functions in every unit.

But I immediately became enmeshed in the

larger problems of guiding development of the Training areas and programs for this "Mech" division, and in dealing with the huge problem of specific standard 'combat readiness' that had to be reported to higher headquarters every month. Which was my responsibility to prepare.

On top of all this, the Division had a large Race problem, Drug problem, and anti-Vietnam war Political problem among the 18,000 men who would compose, not only the 4th Mech Division, but all the other type of units stationed at Carson.