

MECHANDO

Mechando Training would start at the individual soldier level. Aimed at mastery by every soldier and officer in handling that M113 tracked vehicle on the battlefield. Detroit had done a marvelous job producing such a machine that was easy to drive - it did not require specialized training as pilots do. It just had an accelerator pedal and two laterals. Pull on the right one, the track would turn to the right, on the left it would turn left, press on the gas pedal and it would lurch forward up to 40 miles per hour. Pull on both laterals to brake.

But how steep a hill could it climb? How wide a trench could it span? How good are the brakes - pulling back both laterals - going downhill? What water can it cross? Yeah, the driver and track commander could close their hatches and see through their thick gladd periscopes, but what was the armor protection good for?

You have to test it, and your, limits by trying it.

And the other key point was that unless the officer or NCO sitting in the commanders seat looking ahead, either with the hatch open or closed - through the glass periscope, and acting as the track commander - knows EXACTLY what that track is capable of, he is in no position to order, under stress of combat and terrain, the Driver what to do. In an aircraft the 'commander' is the pilot. But in a tracked vehicle, the man in the commanders seat is in charge - and the driver must go where the commander commands.

I did not want to have M113s of my Brigade coming up on the banks of the River Elbe in Germany against the Russian defenses on the other side, and the Driver balking at entering the water to cross because he is 'unsure' of the angle he can enter the water at, or is scared. That's what NCOs are for. And they must know all their 'tools' better than those lower in rank and with less experience.

The Mechando Gauntlet

So relying on NCO's who had served in Europe in Mechanized units to help, we designed a course - the Gauntlet - that every soldier must drive over, with the steepest slope the track could climb, and go downhill still under control, the widest ditch it could cross. And a small lake it could swim. But how steep a slope could it go into, or out of the water? We had to experiment - and I drove myself with an experienced M113 NCO in the commander's hatch, linked to me by the Intercom.

And because an M113 was armored, it could take fire - up to a point. So one portion of the course was set up so the buttoned up track, the soldier-driver looking through the closed-hatch periscope would drive while live small arms fire was hitting the track from the front and side. I had them use frangible .30 caliber ammunition which could not penetrate but would strike and fragment noisely so the soldier would get the experience of being 'under fire' while driving across the battlefield. And knew

that if he opened the hatch he might be a dead man.

There was great excitement in the Brigade when soldiers, NCO's, and officers on my staff knew that 'the old man' (me) was testing and designing that Gauntlet course myself. So much so when we got to firing at the track while it was going through, I had to invite about 8 of them - including the Brigade Chaplain who begged to go too - to get inside, button up, while I drove the course while it was being fired at. And to make it even more realistic, I had a firing team, fire a dummy warhead on a 3.5 inch rocket launcher right at my track from 100 yards dead ahead. For I wanted to know whether I could yank a lateral just as I saw that rocket backblast flash and cause it to miss or hit at an angle and not cleanly penetrate.

Needless to say, that was exiting for them. And as the story went through the ranks what we had just done, my point was made that I was

serious about my soldiers training realistically and aggressively with their M113 APC's as a 'weapon.' For I had noted when I commanded the 5th Mech Battalion a year earlier, that many officers and NCOs handled their M113s 'gingerly' - as if they were a nice car - and not aggressively - as combat demands. And I knew that my reputation as a combat commander was going up, as they realized I would face the same fire they did when the time came.

General Bennett was game to require every 4th Mech Division soldier and officer to drive through the Mechando course. Below is a picture of him in the drivers hatch of an M113, ready to put on his helmet, lower his seat, close the hatch and drive over the Course, while an NCO acts as the track commander.

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The only ones who were pained by my charging around the Fort Carson Hills in an M113, were the maintenance crews who had to repair any

damages. Expecially when we 'rolled' a few tracks when they tilted too far on side hills - misjudging their tipping point.

When the Testing and Trial Runs were done, we had the first part of the Gauntlet done. We christened it the "**Fire Run**"

Two more to go.