

FROM HERE TO VICTORY

The Rifle Company ALPHA in Peacekeeping (Uruguayan Infantry Battalion - UNTAC - Cambodia)

On October 16, 1992, at the tremulous city of Tbeng Meanchey, a cloud of international journalist besieges the UNTAC Force Commander. "You keep trusting the Uruguayans to overcome the worst of the mission, and now you bring them to appease this city: how far do you want to go with them?". The question tightens an imaginary bow, which seems to crunch in the dense atmosphere of the tent. The seasoned General is not intimidated; he grabs his Australian arrow, crystal-headed, and shoots: "I came this far with the Uruguayans and from here to Victory". All fussed eyes, turn now to the Commander of the Rifle Company ALPHA from the Uruguayan Battalion. He stands sturdy and proud next to the General ... no need for words.

"From here to Victory" is the motto read in the flag of the Rifle Company (Coy) ALPHA; first Company of the first Uruguayan Battalion, which had the task of maintaining peace in the most conflictive areas of Cambodia, implementing the Uruguayan foreign policy, under the Peace-Mandate for UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia).

The Cambodian people was victim of million bombs and mines, as a collateral effect of the Vietnam War. Subsequently, it was brutalized by the cultural revolution of Khmer Rouge, who marked 1975 as its "year zero", exterminating all access to formal education; even killing those that wore glasses, to prevent the diffusion of foreign literature. Later, during the eighties, it was victim of several Soviet-style's socioeconomic experiments; getting impoverished and debased by the prevailing corruption.

Peace mandates (UN Security Council Resolutions) are carried in a certain territory but are focused on the population. By 1992 it was a common thought to consider peace mandates as a series of static operations. Even today, this perception continues, rooted maybe on the image given by the activities of the United Nations (UN) troops deployed in peacekeeping operations in Lebanon or Cyprus, or from our own contingents deployed in the MFO in Sinai. As matter of fact, a big chunk of the training of the Uruguayan Battalion for the deployment to Cambodia in 1992 was the settle and defense of operational bases.

Instead, upon deployment in Cambodia, the Rifle Company ALPHA found an extremely dynamic and unstable situation that demanded maneuvering to materialize the UN presence in conflictive areas and to prevent the factions to reassume the fighting.



Cambodian mother 1992

This clash of wills, in a dynamic “war of maneuver”, requested extraordinary energy and discipline; because we were under or in between frequent enemy fire. However, the minimum and indispensable shots were fired from our part.

At times, the operational demand was overwhelming. Fulfilling our mission imposed a great deal of tasks, having few number of troops to execute them along the enormous areas of responsibility assigned to us. Countless incidents drove our own leaders, at all level, under huge pressure to make the right decisions.

Naturally, the temptation arrived for unifying the running of main events from the Battalion level. But, in such uncertainty, it was crystal clear that the chain of command should not be replaced. The virtuous application of an attitude, which we call "sound thought" initiative, in conducting operations at all levels of the Rifle Company ALPHA managed to honor our decentralized action.

We know that the soldier goes to a peacekeeping mission bringing all he has as person: his character, his education, his beliefs, his strengths or weakness, his fears, his loves, and plans for his future. Above all, it counts his military skills and training. Up to their deployment in the Company area of responsibility, our soldiers had trained within the environment of peace time, unavoidably including artificial aspects. We risked reproducing such aspects if a mental transition from peace to a war zone was not done. To deal with own fears was a central aspect of that.

All peace operations are carried out in conflict area, obviously not peaceful ones; implying several group tasks where soldiers support each other, sometimes at risk of their lives, to face two main problems: to break down the will of those who want to continue the fighting and to prevent death of own group members, coming back home safe and sound. Therefore, besides the concrete realizations it is also important to note the organizational climate of the Rifle Company ALPHA during the mission; that is, the environment generated by the emotions of our personnel related to their genuine motivation, considering both the physical and the mental aspects.

In the framework of the Uruguayan Battalion, the Rifle Company ALPHA did its contribution to the professional military spirit which, reaffirmed in many other successive peacekeeping missions, has been materializing the Uruguayan foreign policy. A policy that brought international recognition to Uruguay for being not part of a world police, but a traveling partner for the peoples who summon it, sometimes with insistence, to travel together the road to peace.



Angkor monks, Cambodia

After 25 years, the old litany from the Cambodian monks serving at Angkor Wat: “learning is a gift, even if pain is your teacher”, still impulses us to review the contribution of our Company in search of practical knowledge yet to be strengthened.

Pre-deployment Activities

The pre-deployment activities took place during the month before the Company occupied its Area of Responsibility in Cambodia. Our performance was favored due to most of our rank and file troops were trained in pretty similar way about the military operations in small units at rural areas.

The personnel selection for the Uruguayan Battalion prioritized those who belonged to the Anti-Terrorist Platoons in their respective garrisons and who, through the corresponding courses, were enabled to bring in the right expertise to the peacekeeping operation. That, made it possible for us to quickly integrate troops belonging to the 3rd and 11th Infantry Battalions, along with those from the 4th Mechanized Cavalry Regiment and the 1st Air-Defense Artillery Group.

We added the rightful contribution of a Brazilian jungle warfare team, who gave us a profitable lesson on technical survivor and tactics: we learnt that in the jungle there is no front nor rearguard, that there are no static positions to protect because it is too easy to approach or to attack them with indirect fire. Furthermore, that in the jungle the will is imposed by a constant maneuvering to resemble ubiquity, and by displaying an attitude that wins the hearts and minds of the locals.

Exception made for own family and patriotism, we tried to privilege the spirit of the Rifle Company ALPHA placing it above the other very strong feelings of belonging nested in our personnel; like, for instance, the pride for their Army Branch and Unit of origin, or their voluntary adhesion to the first combat Battalion deployed abroad in almost 100 years, which would be operating in another continent thousands kilometers from home, would serve the noble cause of Peace, and others.

Initially, this spirit was materialized by the fact that all our troops carried the "Cambodian knife", a very sharp and black one bought from their own pockets, and by establishing an image of the Virgin Mary of Verdun (holly hill of Minas, Uruguay) as the patroness saint of our Campaign. On mission, we adopted the motto "From here to Victory", which was included in the Company Flag.

During the pre-deployment training for all members of the Rifle Company ALPHA, but mainly for Corporals and Sergeants, it was an especial emphasis on the internalization of a particular tactical concept, adopted by the Germans from the Latin Romantic influence, called *Auftragstaktik* (*other tactics*: in contraposition with the normal tactics of the Prussian disciplinary ritual).

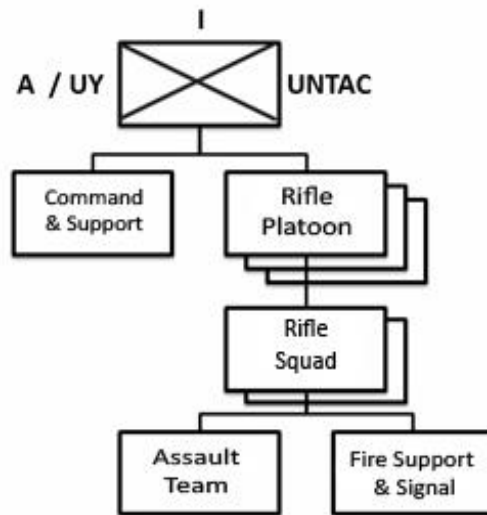
By applying this concept, it was sought to avoid a schematic interpretation of the living events of commanding; associating the creative activity with the risk, and encouraging the will to "take initiatives in a sound thought form", in the light of the intention of each Commander. It was labeled as an error to keep awaiting for orders, when orders couldn't be received or didn't arrive in time.

During this period, that included a week in Thailand, we carried out practical exercises to fine tuning technical procedures to be used during patrols, the checkpoints, actions in minefields, surveillance techniques, base camps, takeoff and landing sites for the aircrafts, medevac, etc.

The soldiers had to assimilate the operational rules and the high discipline needed to keep calm at hard times. The Corporals and Sergeants had to conciliate what they already knew about attacking to destroy the enemy with the new indications about preventing the use of force between the factions in conflict; coming to realize the impact and sensitivity of their own tactical decisions. That time in Thailand also helped to take in the cultural impact Orient-West, while obtaining more knowledge about the characteristics of our deployment and the factions in conflict at Cambodia.

When we came to realize the enormity of our Area of Responsibility we assumed that our Company and its Platoons would be forced to combine tasks; while some should be part of a static element, on security tasks, others would adopt a dynamic attitude, on intensive and aggressive patrolling.

We kept the classic ternary organization from Infantry, with one element in Command & Support of the Company and three Rifle Platoons as maneuver elements; but the organization of the Platoons and Squads was binary. The Squads composed of two Teams, one committed to the Assault and the other to conduct Fire Support & Signal.



Looking for more flexibility and initiative, we transferred Sergeants from our Company Command to the Platoons. Each Rifle Squad had 12 members under a Sergeant command. That way, each Rifle Platoon could be providing security for an installation or establishing checkpoints with a Squad, while the other Squad was, for instance, in a long range patrol.

The benefits of this organization were noticeable from the very beginning. Our Company was the first to deploy a Rifle Platoon in the Area of Responsibility of the Uruguayan Battalion in Cambodia; replacing the French Contingent at the access checkpoints to Stung Treng, city where the Battalion Command was located. While, at the same time, that Platoon contributed to provide the security of water purifiers and command facilities, sites then almost isolated by how far apart they were.

Area of Responsibility

Initially, we covered an area of 120 km front and 60 km deep to the interior of Cambodia, along the borders with Thailand and Laos, where hasty land mining was taking place along with frequent scaramouches between the main factions in conflict; and we did it with 60 men, covering a 3-mile radius around of dense jungle by soldier (about 15 square kilometers).

Simultaneously, we covered with 30 men a vast area of the jungle and rice fields along the Mekong River, about 60 kilometers long by 40 kilometers wide. Besides, we contributed along with the other Companies to provide security for the Headquarters (HQ) of the Uruguay Battalion, located in the city of Stung Treng, with another 30 men.

The relief troops for all the required tasks were only ourselves, changing places every three weeks after resting for a few days at the Battalion HQ.

After three-month action consolidating our Area of Responsibility, we saw it increased by including Tbeng Meanchey, the provincial capital, together with several main villages of the provincial districts; caring now for additional 5.000 square kilometers. At the very time, we had to act quickly to control a crisis of popular rebellion originated by the inadequate performance of a UN Battalion integrated by Pakistani troops previously deployed in that area. Fortunately, we managed to stabilize the situation just in time to prevent serious political deterioration.

Later on, and due to the manifest lack of cooperation of the belligerent factions, UNTAC changed its overall strategy; then, we had to deploy to Kratie. In this province, of 11,000 square km. transited by the Mekong river, we assumed the role of leaders and supervisors of the military forces of the mission and the Cambodian cooperative factions. There, we gain the necessary synergy with the international civilians and the local population to complete the electoral registration of the entire province, with voluntary participation of 95% electorate from its 250,000 inhabitants. To do so, we had to materialize the UNTAC presence in conflictive areas and to ensure freedom of movement for the safe recurrent access to the provincial civic centers, even the most remote ones.

Operational Environment

The rough meteorological conditions, imposed by the monsoon rains upon our arrival in Cambodia, made very difficult the use of aircrafts and vehicles. Our initial tactical mobility was reduced to man on foot. And this with huge difficulties, such as crossing overflowing watercourses, that raised from 3 to 5 meters above the level of their streams in the dry season. Such, also, as the transposition of minefields, randomly displaced by the course of water or relocated daily by the factions in conflict, as a common way of securing camps and covering their marches, or just to harass the civilian population or rival factions.

Our displacement to Kratie Province matched the ending of the long rainy season. Not only did we benefit from a better mobility both by land and air, but also, we had at convenience plenty fluvial means, including some UNTAC gunned navy boats.

Beyond the intense heat, the dark humidity of the jungle, abundance of insects and lethal animals, tropical diseases, dehydration, etc.; the main challenge was to communicate with the local population. From the non-



River crossing in Northern Cambodia

verbal language, the most common gestures and postures in Uruguay do not match in any way with the those of Southeast Asia. Cambodians use two types of smiles, very similar to each other, one to express joy or pleasure, the other to demonstrate guilt or embarrassing feelings.

Basically bisyllabic, the Khmer language, unlike the Chinese or Vietnamese, does not use pronunciation tones which simplifies its learning. It uses guttural sounds almost impossible to pronounce for us among its 33 consonants. With 26 vowels, short and long, plus the diphthongs, it reaches about 60 different vowel sounds to memorize.

The writing, based on Sanskrit, contains intrinsic vowels that are not written, but the costume indicates when they should be pronounced. Although his alphabet is one of the longest in the world, the order and structure of its sentences is similar to ours.

To complete the overview of the operational imprint, we must note the strong return to myths and superstitions brought in by the breakdown of formal education in Cambodia. That, added to the exacerbation of ethnic conflicts and the existence of several hundred thousand people among refugees at the borders or displaced from their places of origin within the Cambodian grounds. In that context, it is not surprising that the slightest outward show of anger or frustration caused alarm and anguish among Cambodians. The golden rule was to be patient and smile.

The Operational Impact

No doubt, the most significant operational contribution to the cause of UNTAC by the members of the Rifle Company ALPHA was their bold and irrevocable efforts to learn and manage the basics of Khmer language.

Deployed in an area of high unrest and fighting, where United Nations was not able to hire interpreters because they fear for their lives, our soldiers increased their knowledge of Khmer with at least a couple of sentences a day; sharing among themselves in improvised blackboards what they learn, usually in the afternoon during the traditional drink “mate” time.

In truth, the ability to communicate with the locals in an area of intense conflict was a matter of collective survival; but, it seemed a miracle to see how our soldiers approached with persistent to the people from the most remote villages, who passed on to them their hardships and deprivations; and even provided information of high tactical value that, after being compared with other reports upon their return to base, proved to be true and timely.

Many assigned this to the protective action of our Virgin Mary of Verdun because it really seemed that “they spoke in tongues”. I think that a moral genius like the Uruguayan ideologist José Enrique Rodó, if seen those scenes, would have said that our soldiers communicated that way because they knew by heart the language of the poor.

We soon find out that there was no substitute for our own local intelligence. While the Intelligence Officer from the Battalion and the reports from UNTAC provided trustful information about the position and intentions of the factions in conflict, nobody knew our Area of Responsibility better than us thanks to the help of the local population.

Gathering information came to be an essential task for all our staff. Once we understood the local realities at stake we managed to do what was useful to contribute to appease the area, multiplying that way our operational impact.

By gradually strengthening our connection with the population, during the six months of our participation in the peacekeeping operation in Cambodia we carried out extensive patrols, set up checkpoints, received and secured the weapons that the factions surrendered, while offering security for almost a hundred villages, dozens of small towns and a couple of medium-sized cities. We maintained an armed peace, fragile but effective among the various factions in conflict.

As we saw, at certain point on time, the disarmament and demobilization of the factions stopped being the strategy of the mission. Then, it shifted to focus on the elections, the swore of a constitution and the consolidation of democratic national authorities. We were well prepared and seasoned enough when took total control of the military action in the Province of Kratie. Our strong connection with the locals allowed us to help in completing the electoral registry of this strategic province, which brought a big political success for UNTAC.

Materialize operations of great impact, assuming own security in pretty small groups during nights in the jungle, demanded a big moral commitment from all members of the Rifle Company ALPHA. This commitment transferred to extraordinary actions, many of them heroics, and whose protagonists, humble and ignored, I'm sure will treasure them in their hearts until their last breath.



Village by the Mekong River, Province of Kratie

We could bring up, just to name a few, cases such as the crossing of watercourses, more than 50 meters wide, by demolished bridges except for its pillars and crossbeams, using a jeep and four planks 5 meters long. Another, as those who volunteered to continue operating a base camp of our Company located in the middle of an ongoing Artillery confrontation between warring factions.

Another one, as those who provided medical care, even veterinary, in the remotest villages to patients with severe infectious diseases. Or other, as those who crossed minefields walking by the riverbed, covered in nylon up to the chest to avoid leeches, and made it to that hill where they listened and recorded the ongoing military radio traffic of the belligerent factions. Many “others” keep awaiting for a mere recognition.

Platoon Leaders

The mission of the Rifle Coy ALPHA was not to fight an enemy but to force the fighting factions to desist from their warlike actions, threatening them with our own possible use of force in case of coming under their attack. Our unrestricted and unpredictable presence in the Area of Responsibility was a victory itself and showed the Cambodians that we were not afraid of going anywhere to support them, adding confidence to UNTAC. Bold maneuvers such as these, shaped through patrolling, required deep thinking from our Company Command while requiring the Patrol Chiefs to demonstrate their resolve and maintain firm control.

In this context, implementing the Company Commander's Intention required a strong leadership from the Platoon Leaders. Being from different Army branches – Infantry, Artillery, and Cavalry – these young Officers exercised, according to the idiosyncrasy of their respective branch, a marked influence on the disposition and behavior of the troops within their respective Platoons towards the accomplishment of that intention; going far beyond the hierarchical and disciplinary faculties they possessed by law.

Their leadership was the key to maintain the combat power of the Company. They knew well their profession technique and tactics, their rank and files, and the tools, such as the war material within their reach, to materialize our peacekeeping operations in dangerous and tense conditions. They were versatile, ensuring that their men carried only the equipment and supplies necessary to achieve their objectives; as well as keeping the soldiers physically and emotionally prepared to carry out the missions normally entrusted to them.

The Platoon Leaders often had to act as Camp Chiefs, responsible for their construction and improvement, faced with the possible shortage of food or drinkable water, as well as medical care and welfare of their personnel; all that without neglecting the operational rhythm set out by the Company in conducting patrols and several security tasks, or gathering of information.

The levels of trust from the Platoon Leaders in their subordinates could be high or low, based on their deep knowledge of their abilities, gained as result from their personal responsibility on the Platoon previous training and the actual one in Cambodia: to lead them during operations. They knew who the most capable were among them to fulfill a mission based in general orders and they knew the possible limitations each one had at the moment of action.



Commissioned Officers from the Rifle Coy ALPHA - Uruguayan Battalion

It became indispensable for us to understand the limits on the pressure we had to put in the opposing factions. Conducting offensive operations without resorting to the use of force was a major challenge at all levels of command, but particularly for the Platoon Leaders. These brave Officers were a constant unshakable model of self-denial and audacity for all their subordinates.

Sound thought Initiative

As own rule, the Rifle Company ALPHA reported daily from its different base camps only the essential information necessary so that at Battalion level they knew what we were up to. We had received a very detailed guide of the mission from the Battalion Staff and we knew without a doubt the Battalion Commander's Intention; above all, we knew that our Battalion Commander trusted in us and we felt indeed that he would support us before any adversity.

By increasing significantly our Area of Responsibility, gigantic from the very beginning, we reached a point of operational pressure in which for not losing the achievements of our presence in the villages and small towns, we conducted medium-range patrol and detachment with troops at Sub-Squad level. That was, a team of 6 men led by one Corporal had to operate isolated from 3 to 6 days, at the limit of our mobility for reinforcement, maintaining only the essential radio contact.

The confusion and inconstancy marked the relationship between the belligerent factions and the Cambodian population, thus becoming a permanent source of tactical opportunities for us. Those opportunities could only be seized with a decentralized decision-making process on our side. Carried by that logic, we faced and solved the problem of encouraging our soldiers to act quickly and independently during operations, without the need of specific orders or direct supervision.

At all levels of our command we assumed that there is more art than science in peacekeeping operations, characterized by ambiguity; so, we barter the security of having immediate control over our subordinates for the security of having their sound thought initiative.

The basic criteria to judge the performance of these young leaders in each activity was the opportunity of their choices and their own justification. If a subordinated made a mistake did not deserve more than a corrective comment. It was a constructive critique. To comment the outcome of his action and the reason why he did it, that was the important part.

By getting men to justify their decisions to themselves before carrying them out, prevented rash decision and thus hasty actions were less likely to be made. This way our men were able to act promptly – obviously within broad and well-understood concepts – to solve the numerous logistical and tactical problems that presented. Furthermore, they, implemented what was necessary at the moment in order to gain the good will of people and to assure their support for our peace cause.

The soldiers had the confidence that their leaders would support any action, materialized in good faith, to contribute to the global effort; so, they were always willing to exercise their own judgment during periods of great pressure, without receiving additional instructions once the action started.

In that environment devoid of formula, such attitude achieved innovative solutions, incorporating the collective creativity of the subordinates in the processes of making decisions and taking action. Our soldiers had a personal interest in the final result of each operation because they knew that they had contributed intellectually and independently to its outcome.

Judging by the radial traffic with the Battalion we were almost always in “normal situation”, while daily we exercised our own sound thought initiative with such audacity and determination that we almost climbed up the crests of daring.

Dealing with own Fears

The common dilemma of every human being is the uncertainty about the future. Around that revolve working, economizing, building, reproducing, improving one’s education, etc. In a normal situation, that future is always a bit far. In a peacekeeping operation, where the possible ambush or fortuitous combat with their aftermath of dead are within the horizon, that uncertainty is for the immediate future. So, the psychological mechanisms are put to maximum tension. When merely defensive and conservative attitudes are adopted, leaving the initiative in the hands of adversaries, that state of uncertainty is extreme; is this way that the sources of fear are opened.

Soldiers have to face fear personally and they do it in many ways. Several methods seem irrational from a vision of peace but they work indeed for the soldier in the field. The most common protection is to resort to the sources of courage through magical thinking "that cannot happen to me." Another method is not thinking about the future nor remembering the negative experiences lived in the operations, channeling the affections through the formula "eat, drink and enjoy" because perhaps tomorrow we will die.

Another way to confront fear is to act tough or think you are tough. You try to get two things: to impress others by being aggressive and "strong", while believing it, and also to drive away one's fear to not to feel vulnerable. We must be very careful to neutralize the effect of such unreasonably aggressive reactions from those who are afraid of accepting their vulnerability and who try not to

perceive it, by frightening others and looking strong.

A traditional source of courage resides on the rapport of the individuals with God. In a conflict zone, religion – no matter the creed – fulfills the function of giving spiritual strength, peace, and solace before the chaos generated by armed violence. To count in the main base camp of our Company with an image of the Virgin Mary of Verdun, venerated by our Catholic soldiers and respected like a national cultural symbol by the others, served as courage reference for the believers and even like a talisman for several more.

As a result, we channeled somehow that cultural phenomenon that is expressed as a mechanism of magical or supernatural defense, consisting of removing evil or protecting oneself from it; which obeys to the psychological necessity of finding some security before the unknown future, perceived as dangerous and possibly harmful.



**Virgin Mary of Verdun – Rifle Coy ALPHA
(Escorted by the Rifle Coy flag motto)**

But, while fear is the catalyst in the gradual disintegration of the soldier, the negative factors already mentioned in the operational environment affected our mission. These factors increased the fear effects, helping to destroy the defenses against the tribulations of the conflict. We learnt in Cambodia that the ability to build defenses against the devastating effects of fear marks the line between the courageous acts and the cowardly performances.

There, we also find that offensive actions, in which the Commander exerts his initiative to make peace prevail over the will to fight of the parties in conflict, help to clear the uncertainty repelling the sources of fear. The purposes of these actions in Cambodia included disarming and demobilizing factions in conflict, securing zones for their free use by the civilian population, knowing the battle order of the factions in conflict, and depriving them of the resources necessary to continue their warlike actions. That offensive attitude helped to strengthen the will to triumph in our soldiers, conjuring their logical fears.

The Organizational Climate

Reducing the presence of fear was an essential part of the Company's organizational climate considerations. But also, alleviating physical discomfort and giving time to rest helped to restore the moral. Prolonged service in the jungle, eating on the run or in unsafe areas, poor sleep and lack of time for physical training within the conflict zone, also made a big dent in Cambodia.

Sleeping 4 hours a day may result in an acceptable performance for weeks; but in prolonged operations soldiers need 6 to 8 hours a day for personal hygiene, proper nutrition, drinking water and sleeping. In addition, they should make short naps and have brief rest periods if possible; but above all, our Uruguayan soldiers need to enjoy their favorite beverage to raise morale and improve the organizational climate, an infusion drink taken with a pipe from a small calabash: the traditional "mate"!!!

During the operations in Cambodia, we empirically verified that the universe of our soldiers was reduced to their immediate surroundings; our Company and its most intimate comrades formed the limit of their horizon and within it, they found safety and tranquility. Everything beyond that limit was temporarily erased from memory, losing its value; including, at times, the very purpose of our operations, and even the most cherished relatives at home or the life in times of peace.

It contributed greatly to this feeling, the isolation that the poor international media existing at the time imposed on our personnel. Due to the lack of communications with Uruguay, our Company developed an internal mail system among its base camps. The noble, sincere and enthusiastic letters of our soldiers resisted the pass of times, surviving more than a hundred of them up today.

Our comradeship, in its basic form, was a defensive mechanism that made it feasible for soldiers to conjure their fears, alleviate loneliness and endure setbacks. In its uppermost, it was a challenge, for it was linked to the fear of the soldier not to live up to his responsibilities to the comrades.

Paradoxically, our soldiers obtained great strength from the friendship of their comrades, but they recognized that this must be reciprocal and they chose to consciously stay with them, even at the risk of their own lives if necessary. They perfectly knew that leaving their positions during the march or jumping out of the trench saving own life would expose their comrades to greater danger.

That loyalty to the own Company comrades was the essence of our morale throughout the peacekeeping operation and the key to success in our boldest maneuvers.

Our Company leaders shared the need to earn the respect and even the affection of their Team, Squad or Platoon, as much as the other soldiers did and also understood that they should command their comrades in operations, ordering tasks that could eventually lead to death.

Obviously, the humanity of the soldiers did not incline them to follow anyone that way. To achieve that, it was necessary for our leaders to show a deep affection for what the soldier is and the role he plays. Most of them succeeded. In the course of the prolonged operations demanded during our campaign in Cambodia it was impossible to fake that affection, there were plenty of opportunity for the soldiers to discover whether their leaders' interest was real or pretended.

Our soldiers were always ready to follow in the riskiest operations those leaders who really "took care of their lives" and demonstrated it by their presence and their actions. It is now appropriate to recognize that, fortunately, we had many of those leaders within the Rifle Company ALPHA.

The Company Command

All along the Company, it was impregnated the firm conviction that both the commander and the subordinate shared the duty to carry out the mission. But, it was clear the greater responsibility had by the higher rank, since he had to teach, support and trust his subordinates, in addition to correcting their well-intentioned actions but very possibly wrong at first.

It was absolutely essential that these soldiers and young leaders remain calm on action, as any wrong attitude could cause the rapid escalation of a confrontation. There, in Cambodia, the clear communication of the Commander's Intention, such a vital element in combat, proved to be equally vital in the maintenance of peace.

At the level of our Command, I was well aware of the need to make the Company Commander's presence dully felt; difficult task because of the great extent of our Area of Responsibility.

To achieve this, I took advantage of everything possible to visit the many places where we operated and to personally participate in the critical sites of the riskiest operations. I deliberately choose not to exert command through the radio or, even less, to attempt centralizing the low tactical decisions.

Once I reached any of our detachments, I did not speak of big plans or tried to bring along with me all the expected solutions; I just wanted to listen. I preferred to maintain a human conversation, in deep, with some of our men there; when leaving, of course, everyone would want to know what were we spoken about.



Rifle Coy Commander during "briefing" with the UNTAC Force Commander

It would not have been possible to implement my command in Cambodia without the courageous collaboration of my Executive Officer and the Company First Sergeant. They, much more than being my right and left arms, as it is commonly said, were my brothers in arms. In their respective spheres of influence, one the Lieutenant of Lieutenants and the other the Sergeant of Sergeants, they led to execute the intention of the Company Commander, frequently consulted with them, not just based on my words but in what they knew nested in my spirit.

Even still in their youth, these two leaders served as true Infantry veterans. There was no task that they could not do or teach, nor risk that they did not want to face. They contributed to forge the organizational climate of the Company, embodying with their never ending zeal the mood of the march on the Uruguayan Infantry *"We do not care how many are they/ the ones that are fighting here or there/ we do not count nor measure them/ because we shine when more are they."*



Rifle Coy First Sargent in a patrol - Province of Tbeng Meanchey.

Epilog

We should never ever allow that our troops go to peacekeeping operations with the expectations of finding peaceful circumstances on ground. Neither, we have to forget that every Infantry Unit assigned to peacekeeping has to be capable of fighting. The high tactical performance verified in Cambodia certainly avails the Latin romantics defenders of the Auftragstaktik, who proclaim a formation and training of quality, along with lucid planning and a sound thought execution; all of it in a context of decentralized leadership, responsible for its decisions and actions at all level.

Paradoxically, camaraderie is of such importance that it constitutes the essence of the soldier's existence, he is willing to die for his comrades at the same time that he depends on their support for his own survival. By glorifying the positive attributes of leadership, it is overlooked that leaders of a peacekeeping operation must confront in their men the fear, death, operational fatigue, and the particular tribulations of each mission. These factors are as integral to the military spirit as the tactical performance and the combat skills. Assuming it, it reconciles the human with the conflict and facilitates the maintenance of the peace.

By their integrity before the tribulations, their courageous performance and their compassion with the Cambodian people, the members of the Rifle Company ALPHA gained the affection of all of those who could watch them in action. Brutalized for decades by opprobrious regimes, the Cambodian population was evidently surprised to see that it was possible to pawn soldiers for the common good. The letters of our soldiers faithfully prove the facts and feelings of the moment. They are only waiting for the inspired pen, which would bring to the seat of public honor the chivalrous value of their total commitment to those, the most defenseless in Cambodia.

Seen in perspective, the words of General Sanderson, UNTAC Force Commander, were prophetic. From that initial uncertainty about our participation in peacekeeping operations, misunderstood and even branded as mercenaries by own and others, to the present public recognition from the highest national authorities in the headquarters of the General Command of the Army there has certainly been a victorious march of 25 years. We just came from marching the most recent meters with the veterans of the first Uruguayan Battalion, but in the certainty of being soon surpassed by our young comrades serving the noble cause of peace around the world.

Several other peacekeeping missions are fully accomplished, leaving the professionalism, altruism, and compassion of the men and women of the Uruguayan Army at the highest point. In addition to the recent recognition of the Uruguayan Parliament, the repeated and effective use of our Force in the materialization of our foreign policy is also evident. All that, in accordance with the national and regional security and defense principles of modern times, has led Uruguay to occupy a position of preference in the international arena, including the United Nations Security Council.

At the moment of my departure from Cambodia, I presented General Sanderson with a Company Flag, he placed it in his office, next to the one of his Australian Regiment. He then took the *vexillum* with him upon assuming his position as Governor of the Western Australian Territory. There, he had born and shared the exploration and artisanal hunting in the desert territories, using the bow and its famous crystal-headed arrows. I knew that even today he keeps our flag at his house. Soldier's habit!

As a Catholic, I assumed the Virgin Mary of Verdun as our supreme Captain and patroness saint during the peacekeeping operation in Cambodia. However, I expressly emphasize the gallantry of the comrades of other confessions and atheists, who respected this cultural symbol for the sake of granting the cohesion of the Rifle Company ALPHA. I always felt proud of being with all of them, no matter their creed or any other personal imprint. Their selfless commitment to the difficult tasks assigned to us, makes me consider all of them among the worthiest professionals in arms. My biggest reward is the permanent memory of them ...

First Coy Commander / Rifle Company ALPHA

Uruguayan Battalion / UNTAC Force

Done in August, MMXVII