24 October 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: AR 15-6 investigation re: COP Keating Overflight

1. On 24 Oct 09 I conducted an overflight of COP Keating and OP Fritsche in order to personally assess the terrain and view the COP and the surrounding terrain. Efforts to walk the ground of COP Keating were deemed too dangerous by the brigade and squadron chain of command, noting that any in-bound daylight flight since Jun 09 had taken enemy fire. Considering this threat assessment, I opted for overflight which I deemed appropriate to give me first-hand view of the terrain in the objective area.

2. Accompanying me on the overflight were the unit chain of command: LTC (b)(6) 3-61 Cavalry Cdr; CPT (b)(6) , B Trp Cdr; and 1LT (b)(6) 1st Plt Ldr and on-scene cdr during the 3 Oct 09 engagement. Also present were members of the investigating team, COL (b)(6) and LTC (b)(6)

3. Based on the opportunity to view COP Keating during daylight hours, I noted the following:

a. COP Keating was indeed located deep in a mountain valley along an unimproved road that ran along the Landay Sin River.
b. Remnants of the COP from the 6 Oct 09 post-evacuation bombing were easily seen, but the general layout of the COP was still identifiable.
c. The COP was located on the south side of the river and situated at the base of a steeply inclined hill mass.
d. The switchback road was visible on the side of the hill mass leading up to OP Fritsche.
e. The bridge across the river was intact and led to an even steeper incline facing the COP from the north approximately 200 meters from the COP.
f. Both the hill mass leading to OP Fritsche and the northern mountainside across the river were heavily vegetated with trees and scrub and covered with numerous rock outcroppings ideal for an overwatching force to cover and conceal itself.
g. The small village of Urml was clearly visible about 200 meters to the west.
h. The village was likewise ideally located to cover an overwatching force and well within small arms range.
i. Several small buildings could be seen east of the COP, about 300 meters down the road along the river bank.
j. The remnants of OP Fritsche were easily identified and its tactical significance was obvious.
k. Though isolated on a hilltop, the OP had a commanding view of the surrounding area.
l. There was a higher piece of terrain about 100 meter south of the OP upon which were some revetments which were reported to have been used by the ANP during the engagement.

4. Conclusion:

a. Not only was the high terrain surrounding the COP advantageous to an attacking force, the short distances from this terrain to the COP enabled all types of weapon systems to influence the COP.

b. Likewise, the vegetation on this terrain provides an attacking force numerous support by fire positions as well as readily available covered and concealed routes to these positions.
c. Even with reinforced fortifications, COP Keating was extremely vulnerable and at a complete tactical disadvantage where it was located.
d. OP Fritsche, on the other hand, was a clearly tactically superior position.
e. Because of its location on the peak of a hilltop, defenders could easily observe attacking forces from the north up the switchback road.
f. It was, however, vulnerable to plunging fire from the ANP further up the hill. Still, with proper fortifications, it could be defended.

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