

# The Egyptian 130th Amphibious Brigade

*Egyptian employment of amphibious operations in the October 1973 War demonstrated the utility of amphibious assaults.*

by Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr.®

## Background

The October 1973 War, and the manner in which each participant fought it, has had a significant effect upon doctrine and tactics of many nations. Everything from the employment of tactical ballistic missiles, antitank guided missiles (ATGMs), and air defense assets, to assault river crossing operations to reasserting the importance of combined arms operations and more has been studied in great detail. Very little "open source" attention, however, has been devoted to Arab special operations. One such operation—the Egyptian amphibious assault across the Little Bitter Lake and Gulf of Suez to disrupt the Israeli rear area and to support the interdiction of the strategically important Sinai Passes—is of particular interest for several reasons. This was the first major amphibious assault operation conducted by any Middle Eastern nation and the first wartime amphibious assault operation since World War II based upon modern Soviet naval infantry doctrine, tactics, and equipment. The Egyptian experiences may be illustrative of how other Middle Eastern or Third World nations could adapt similar amphibious warfare doctrine, tactics, and equipment to meet their local requirements.

## Establishment and Prewar Training

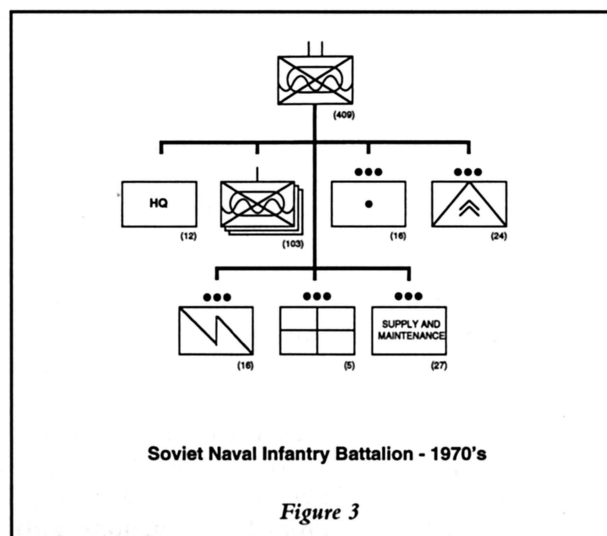
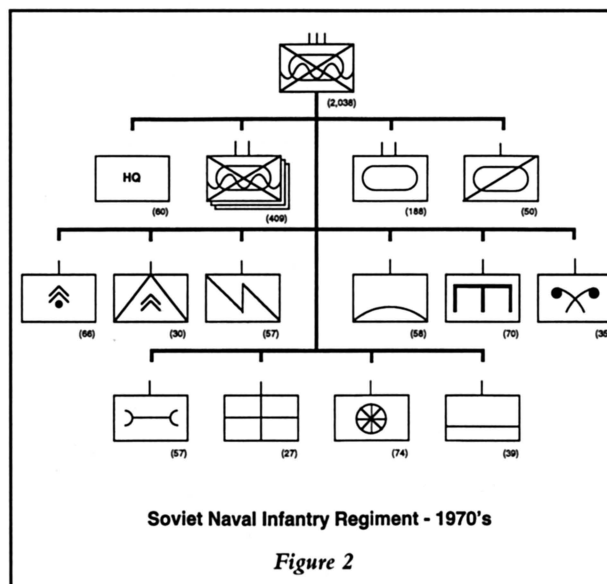
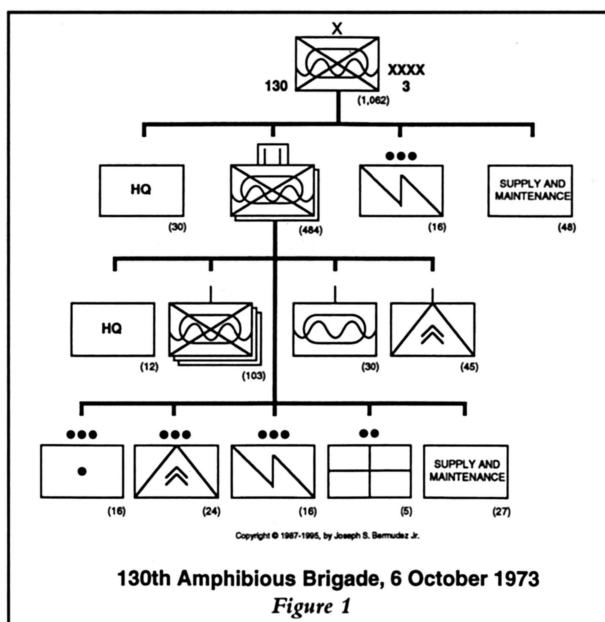
During the formulation of its plan for the 1973 War—eventually known as HIGH MINARETS, the Egyptian General Staff developed an integrated strategy for the interdiction of Israeli lines of communications, com-

mand, control, communications, and intelligence (C<sup>3</sup>I) assets, air bases and rear area installations. A key element of this strategy was the employment of large numbers of special operations units. This requirement resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of such units during the early 1970s. The majority of these new special operations units were organized into commando groups, however, several other more specialized types of formations were also established. One such unit was the 130th Amphibious Brigade—the sole unit of its type—which was to conduct an assault crossing of the Little Bitter Lake and Gulf of Suez.

Two distinct sets of factors contributed directly to the establishment of this unique unit—Israeli vulnerabilities and Egyptian capabilities.

Primary among the Israeli vulnerabilities was that the organization of their defensive zone was based upon a strong and aggressive, but thin, forward defense. These forces were designed to hold until reserves could be mobilized and brought forward. This force posture presented any Egyptian unit that could penetrate or bypass it with access to the target-rich Israeli administrative rear and a unique opportunity to delay the arrival of reinforcements. Additionally, the Israelis had constructed neither substantial fortifications nor obstacles along the eastern shores of the Bitter Lakes or Gulf of Suez, as they had done along the length of the Suez Canal itself. This was done in the belief that the Egyptians could not mount any significant threat across these bodies of water and that any forces likely to cross would be quickly identified and neutralized by a combination of air and ground force actions. Finally, the few Israeli

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units deployed within the III Army's area of operations, could be relatively easily isolated if the Mitla and Gidi Passes and the road to Ras Sudr could be blocked.

Factors on the Egyptian side centered upon their capabilities—or more correctly their lack of them. Primary among these was that although the commando units tasked with the interdiction of the Mitla and Gidi Passes were relatively well equipped, they were also quite vulnerable. These commando units were small, possessed few—if any—organic heavy weapons and were essentially leg mobile. If these units were to be effective in their assigned mission they would require timely reinforcement by armored and mechanized elements. There were, however, neither enough ferry assets to transfer the desired number of armored and mechanized elements across the Suez Canal before H+5 hours, nor would pontoon bridges be available for use before H+7-9 hours. Thus the earliest the commando battalions could expect reinforcement would be H+16-20. An amphibious unit, however, could cross with light armored and mechanized assets by approximately H+1-2 and link up with the commando battalions by H+6-9. Finally, there was a need for a small force to screen the northern flank of the III Army along the seam between itself and the II Army until the 7th Infantry Division could cross the canal and assume this responsibility.

The official establishment of the 130th Amphibious Brigade occurred during January 1972 in Alexandria. To expedite its establishment and to provide the highest possible morale, combat ability, and inter-operability with other special operations units, two commando battalions totaling approximately 800 personnel were reorganized. These troops were organized into two mechanized commando battalion-groups, equipped with a total of 20 PT-76B amphibious light tanks and 80 BTR-50PK/PU or OT-62B/D amphibious armor personnel carriers (APCs). The size of the brigade was limited to only two battalion-groups due to an overall shortage of amphibious APCs within the Egyptian Army. As an indication of the seriousness of this shortage and the importance of the 130th Amphibious Brigade's mission, Egyptian Chief of Staff LtGen Saad el-Shazly initiated negotiations during June 1972, with an unidentified European company to obtain a small number of hovercraft (reportedly 5). These craft were to be employed to transport medium tanks across the Little Bitter and Timsah Lakes in support of the lighter amphibious

	Soviet		Egyptian	
	Naval Infantry Regiment	Naval Infantry Battalion	130th Amphibious Brigade	Amphibious Battalion- Group
Personnel	2,038	409	1,062	484
T-54/55	10	—	—	—
PT-76B	34	—	20	10
BTRR-50 or OT-62 <sup>24</sup>	—	—	74	35
BTR-60PA/PB/PU	111	34	—	—
BRDM-2	9	—	—	—
BRDM-2/AT-3 <sup>25</sup>	6	—	18	9
BRDM-2RKh	3	—	—	—
BM-21 122mm	6	—	—	—
82/120mm Mortar	9	3	6	3
ZSU-23/4	4	—	—	—
SA-9	4	—	—	—
SA-7	27	9	18	9
RPG-7	90	27	54	27
B-11 107mm RcIR	—	—	6	3
SPG-9 RcIR	9	3	—	—
AT-3 ATGM	9	3	6	3

*Figure 4. Principle Items of Equipment Comparison*

forces. These negotiations were, however, canceled in September of the same year due to budgetary constraints.

Training for the brigade proceeded quickly, and on 15 June 1972, LtGen Shazly issued Directive #15, *An Amphibious Battalion Acting as a Spearhead Force Across a Water Barrier*. Two months later, on 28 August, an exercise was carried out under his personal supervision that demonstrated the feasibility of the directive. This was followed by the first full-scale field exercise during the night of 22/23 October 1972. The training increased in difficulty, with the brigade attempting sea voyages up to 6 hours long. This training culminated in one last major prewar exercise during the night of 18/19 July 1973, again under the direct supervision of LtGen Shazly. The objectives established for the exercise were as follows,

One: To embark with amphibious tanks and [APCs] from a concentration area near the sea.

Two: To complete a sea voyage of almost 20 miles by night.

Three: To land at a designated location and time.

Four: To proceed inland to attack against enemy positions and hold the advance of enemy reserves.

These objectives were essentially those with which the brigade would be tasked with during the upcoming war, although during

the war the seaborne leg would be considerably shorter. LtGen Shazly remained with the brigade throughout the exercise. One battalion-group successfully completed its mission and attained its objectives, while the other became lost, landing at the wrong location and in some trouble, having lost 2 vehicles and 10 men. Despite this minor setback, confidence in the brigade's personnel and equipment increased significantly, and important lessons were learned. In addition to its vigorous amphibious training, the brigade practiced assault tactics on mock-ups of Israeli "... Hqs [Headquarters], communications centers, administrative units and other similar soft ... targets"

It is important to note that in its establishment and throughout its prewar training the brigade trained to operate as two independent battalion-groups, and not as a single unit. All prewar exercises took place along Egypt's Mediterranean coast, with the brigade deploying out of its base in Alexandria.

### Organization

By October 1973, the 130th Amphibious Brigade, commanded by Col Mahmoud Shoeib, had been expanded by the receipt of additional support personnel and equipment. It now had a personnel strength of approximately 1,000 and was organized into a brigade headquarters, 2 reinforced mechanized commando battalion-groups, a signal

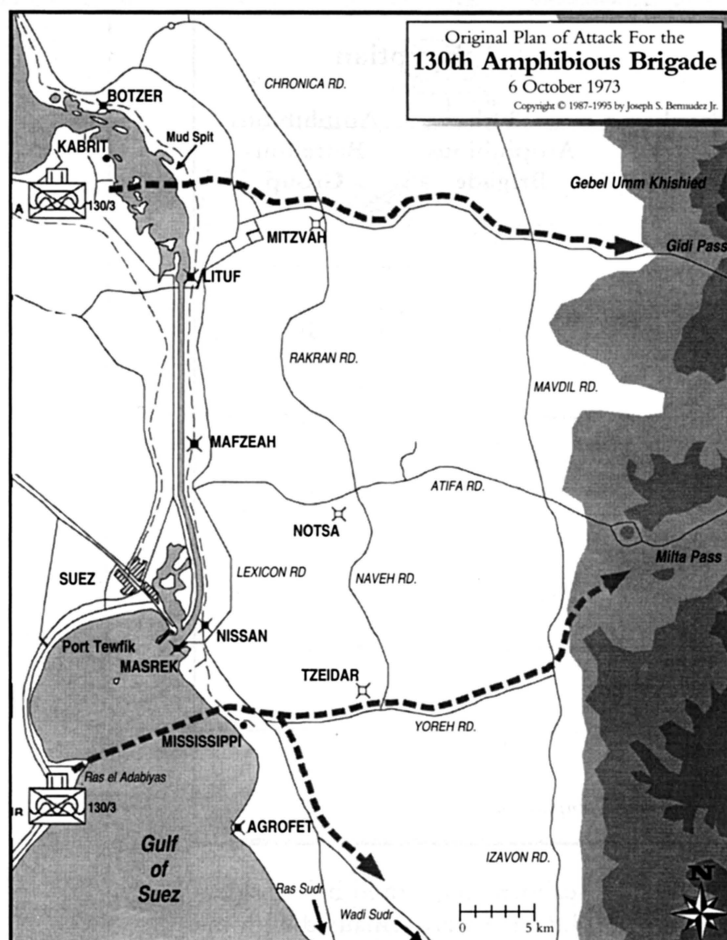


Figure 5

platoon, and rear service elements (Figure 1. Tables of Organization and Equipment) (T/O&E) 130th Amphibious Brigade). Each mechanized commando battalion-group consisted of "... a commando battalion reinforced with a company of ATGMs and a company of light tanks."

This organization clearly illustrates the strong influence of Soviet doctrine on the Egyptian Army and particularly how they modified the, then current, Soviet naval infantry regiment organization to meet their specific local requirements (Figure 2. T/O&E Soviet naval infantry regiment and Figure 3. T/O&E Soviet naval infantry battalion). The principal Egyptian modifications included:

- Brigade support and administrative units were reduced in size.
- Absence of certain organic units: multiple rocket launcher battery, air defense battery (with ZSU-23/4, or ZPU-4s), and chemical defense company.
- The medium tank battalion was replaced by a company of PT-76B light tanks in each battalion-group.
- The number of antitank companies was increased from one to two, with one attached to each battalion-group as a counter to Israeli armor superiority.

- The number of mechanized battalions was decreased from three to two, as a result of the high demand for special operation units, limited number of amphibious APCs, and the 130th's relatively limited objectives.

### Plan of Attack

The HIGH MINARETS plan provided for the 130th Amphibious Brigade to be subordinated directly to MajGen Mohammed Abd el Moneim Wassel's III Army and conduct two battalion-group assault crossings (Figure 5. Original Plan of Attack). Battalion-Group A would enter the water, with the commencement of the preparatory artillery barrage (H-15 minutes), 1.5 kilometers (km) south of Kabrit, swim 4.5 km across the lower Little Bitter Lake, landing at a point known as Mud Spit, approximately 5-7 km north of the Israeli LITUF fortification. It would then advance along the FORERET road in the direction of the Gidi Pass interdicting Israeli lines of communications and attacking C<sup>3</sup>I assets and other rear area installations. It would continue east and link up with a commando battalion that was to be inserted by helicopters at 1930 along the Gidi Pass, and near the Israeli Southern Command HQ. Additionally, it was to screen the boundary between the II and III Armies, until sufficient elements of the 7th Infantry Division had crossed. The second crossing would be conducted by Battalion-Group B at dusk on the first day of the war. This force would enter the water at Ras el Adabiyas, swim 11 km across the Gulf of Suez, landing at the old British Quarantine Station (identified on Israeli maps as MISSISSIPPI) 5.5 km south of the MASREK fortification. It would then split into two subgroups; one would advance northeast along the YOREH-IZANOV axis to the Mitla Pass, while the other would move south along the coast to the Sudr Pass and Ras el Jundi. Both subgroups would disrupt the Israeli rear and then attempt to link up with commando battalions that were to be inserted by helicopter at 1730 at the respective passes. Concurrent with the advance south to the Sudr Pass, Egyptian naval commandos would conduct raids along the western Sinai coast and a commando battalion (minus) would be inserted by helicopter at 1730 in the Abu Rodeis area.

Once the battalion-groups had linked up with the commando battalions, these combined forces would continue to raid the Israeli rear, interdict the passes and establish effective blocking positions before the Israelis could react. The interdiction of the passes would



isolate Israeli units opposite the III Army bridgehead and delay Israeli reinforcements by forcing them to fight for the passes. If Israeli pressure on the battalion-groups and commando battalions became too great they were to fight a delaying action and withdraw to the III Army bridgehead.

At approximately the same time another, but unrelated, amphibious assault crossing would take place along the central section of the canal, within the II Army area of operations. BGen Abd el Rab Nabi Hafiz, commander of the 16th Infantry Division, had created his own special mechanized infantry company task force, with 10 BTR-50PK APCs, from divisional assets. He tasked it with the limited objectives of conducting a 2.5 km assault crossing of Lake Timsah, to secure the east bank of the lake and interdict Israeli movement along the LEXICON road.

For HIGH MINARETS the 130th was placed under the operational control of the III Army, and in accordance with an elaborate disinformation and deception plan it deployed from its base in Alexandria to the III Army's area of responsibility as part of the yearly army-wide field training exercise. Battalion-Group A deployed in the Kabrit area, while Battalion-Group B moved south of Suez to the Ras el Adabiyas area. On the very eve of the war, due to political considerations, several significant modifications were made to the HIGH MINARETS plan that had a dramatic effect upon the operations of both the 130th and the commando battalions assigned to raid the Mitla and Gidi Passes. LtGen Shazly states that

Gen Ismail the Egyptian Minister of War flew to Syria on the third of October, to confirm with the Syrians D day, and H hour. As he later told me the Syrians wanted H hour to be first light 8 October, while we were insisting on last light 6 October. As a compromise President Hafez Al Asad of Syria agreed to 1400 6 October. When we in the Egyptian GHQ knew about that, we became very much concerned about our heliborne operations, which were supposed to start during the dusk hours at one hour before H [hour]. Consequently we canceled some of these planned operations, and postponed the timing of others for several hours after H hour, specifically in the areas where we [thought] the Israeli air force would be most active. This meant that under the new circumstances we were unable to block Mitla & Gidi passes by some surprise heliborne operations in the opening stage of our big offensive. Consequently, a much less ambitious mission was assigned to the 130 Amphibious Brigade by the Third Army Commander.

Of the seven originally planned heliborne commando operations (Romani, Tasa, Gidi Pass, Mitla Pass, Sudr Pass, Ra's Mal'ab, and Abu Rodeis), the two with the Gidi and Mitla Passes as objectives were canceled. While, the naval commando operations along the Gulf of Suez proceeded as planned. With the commando operations against the Mitla and Gidi Passes canceled, MajGen Wassel made the decision to cancel Battalion-Group B's southern crossing of the Gulf of Suez. On 4 October he issued orders calling for Battalion-Group B to join Battalion-Group A in the Kabrit area and to conduct a single assault crossing of the Little Bitter Lake. Once across each battalion-group would continue eastward, independently, on a "less ambitious mission" of raiding the Israeli rear area between the canal and the Mitla and Gidi Passes. Simply stated, "... [t]heir main objective was to create chaos in the enemy's rear."

In addition to the cancellation of the commando raids, command and control considerations played a significant part in MajGen Wassel's decision to modify the 130th's orders:

The decision of the Third Army Commander to cancel the south crossing does not imply that the brigade would operate as one unit. [One of the causes] which led the Third Army Commander to cancel the southern crossing as it was said then, was the problems of command and control. The GHQ did not veto Wassel's decision.

### Crossing the Canal, 6-8 October 1973

At 1355 on 6 October 1973, the 130th Amphibious Brigade commenced its assault crossing operation. The lead elements of the brigade swam the 4.5 km across the Little

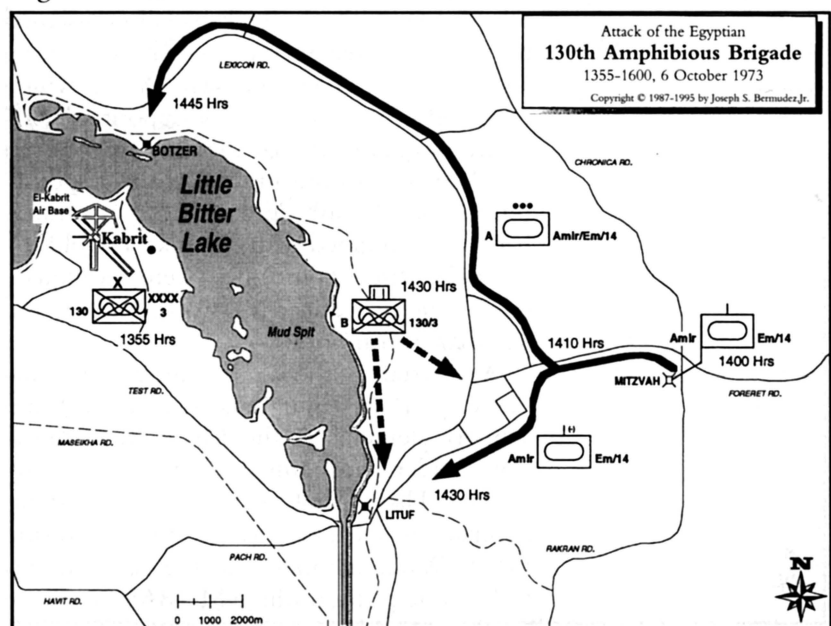


Figure 6

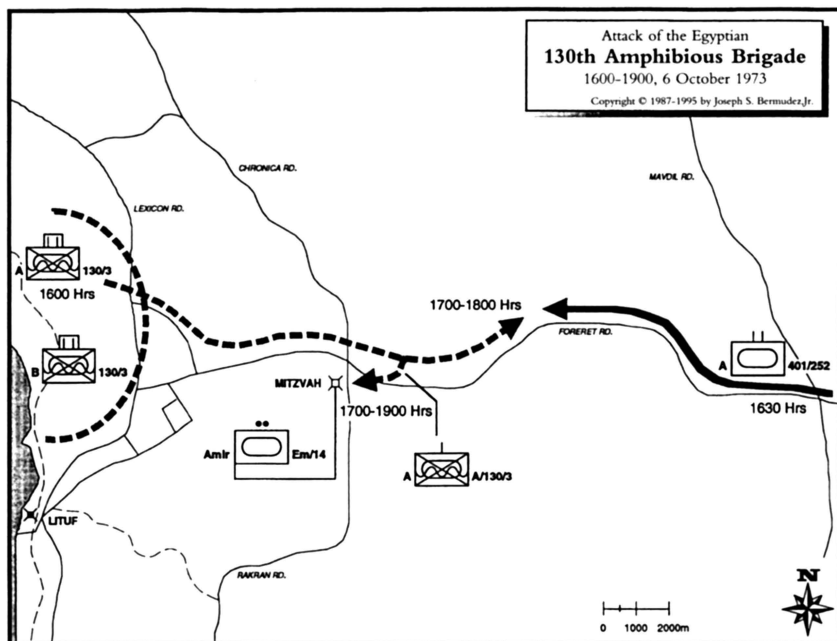


Figure 7

Bitter Lake in less than 30 minutes without any casualties, landing near Mud Spit approximately 5-7 km north of the Israeli LITUF fortification. As the 130th reached the east shore of the lake, Battalion-Group B quickly moved to secure the LEXICON-FORERET crossroads and advanced south towards LITUF. Meanwhile, Battalion-Group A consolidated and expanded the bridgehead (Figure 6. 1355-1600, 6 October 1973). As Battalion-Group B advanced south towards LITUF it was soon engaged and pinned by an Israeli tank company from Col Amnon Reshev's 14th Armored Brigade.

On 6 October the Israeli 14th Armored Brigade, equipped with 91 M-48A5 Pattons, was forward deployed along the length of the Suez Canal with one tank battalion assigned to each of three sectors—northern, central and southern. The southern sector, which consisted of the area directly opposite the III Army, from the BOTZER fortification south to the AGROFET fortification, was the responsibility of LtCol Emmanuel's armored battalion, equipped with 32 tanks. LtCol Emmanuel's three companies were headquartered, one each, at the MITZVAH, NOTSA, and TZÉIDAR fortifications.

At the start of the war, company commander Capt Boaz Amir detached his HQ and support elements at the MITZVAH fortification, under the command of his company SgtMaj, Haim Yudlevich, and advanced his company towards prepared positions covering LITUF. While advancing to the canal he detached one platoon (three M-48A5s) to move northwest and cover the BOTZER fortification. By approximately 1430, Capt Amir was

deployed in prepared positions overlooking LITUF with seven M-48A5s. Shortly thereafter Battalion-Group B's lead APCs approached within 100 meters (m) of Capt Amir's position before being observed. They weren't engaged, however, until they had approached to within 40 m because of Capt Amir's concern that they might be an Israeli unit operating captured equipment. In the ensuing battle, Capt Amir's company claims to have hit approximately 25 of the battalion-group's APCs and PT-76Bs at ranges between 40 m and 2,000 m, for the loss of two M-48A5s hit by Sagger ATGMs. Despite its losses Battalion-Group B was able to hold its positions near LITUF and the LEXICON-FORERET crossroads throughout the first day of the war, until being relieved by elements of Brigadier Ahmad Badawi's 8th Mechanized Infantry Brigade the next day.

At approximately 1600, while Battalion-Group B was engaged by Capt Amir's tank company north of LITUF, Battalion-Group A was able to bypass the battle and begin its advance upon the Mitla and Gidi Passes (Figure 7. 1600-1900, 6 October 1973). Battalion-Group A was to move east along the FORERET road to the FORERET-CHRONICA-RAKRAN crossroads, detach a company to secure the MITZVAH fortification and continue onto the FORERET-MAVDIL crossroads. Once here the battalion-group would either continue east along the FORERET road towards the Gidi Pass, and the Israeli Southern Command headquarters at Gebel Umm Khisheid; or split and also move south along the MAVDIL road towards the ATIFA road, and the Mitla Pass. By approximately 1630, Battalion-Group B had detached a mechanized company to secure MITZVAH, and then continued its advance. By 1700 hours Battalion-Group A had advanced to a point approximately 14 km from the canal when it ran headlong into elements of the Israeli 401st Armored Brigade.

When the Egyptian attack began, the Israeli 401st Armored Brigade, under the command of Col Dan Shomron, was deployed east of the Sinai passes at Bir el-Thamada. Shomron was ordered to advance to the canal and assume responsibility for the southern sector. Before commencing movement, Shomron split his brigade, ordering a battalion each through the Mitla and Gidi Passes and the third along a route between the two passes, in case either was blocked. By 1615 the battalions had completed their transit of the passes and began advancing towards the canal. The northern battalion advanced directly west along the FORERET road, towards LITUF and BOTZER;

the central battalion moved along the MAVDIL-ATIFA routes towards MAFZEAH; while Col Shomron, the brigade headquarters and the southern battalion, under the command of a LtCol Uzi, moved towards NISSAN and MASREK.

At approximately 1700 the lead elements of Shomron's northern battalion, rushing west, ran directly into Battalion-Group A advancing east, and by 1730 both units were heavily committed to a dusk meeting engagement. The exact details of this engagement are obscure. It appears, however, to have been a very confusing battle with elements of both sides bypassing or passing through each other before being engaged by other elements of the opposing side. This confusion was added to by the fading sunlight and the possible arrival of additional elements from Shomron's central battalion. In the end, the main body of Battalion-Group A suffered severe losses, with few Israeli losses.

As the main body of Battalion-Group A was being engaged, the detached mechanized company assigned to secure MITZVAH was also encountering resistance. At approximately 1700, the detached company began advancing on MITZVAH from the east. Capt Amir's headquarters and support element had by this time been augmented by two M-48A5 tanks (one damaged and one repaired). At a distance of approximately 1,500-2,000 m the commandos disembarked from their APCs and initiated a Soviet styled infantry assault. The commandos approached to approximately 200 m before SgtMaj Yudlevich opened up fire. He then took one of his tanks, moved to the fortification's approach road and engaged the Egyptian APCs at a distance of 1,000-1,500 m. After receiving hits on four APCs the Egyptians withdrew to a distance of 2,000 m and Yudlevich withdrew into the fortification. At approximately 1830, under the cover of darkness, several APCs approached to within 700 m of the fortification entrance before being observed. Yudlevich hastily engaged and destroyed all these APCs. Thirty minutes later, while searching the area of the battle, Yudlevich without warning came upon a platoon of commandos at a distance of 3-4 m. Not having a machinegun, Yudlevich engaged them with handgrenades and ran them down with his tank. Thus, completely neutralizing the threat to the fortification.

Sometime around 1800-1830, apparently realizing that Battalion-Group A could not proceed any further without incurring its complete destruction, Col Shoeib ordered its withdrawal to the brigade's lakeside prime-

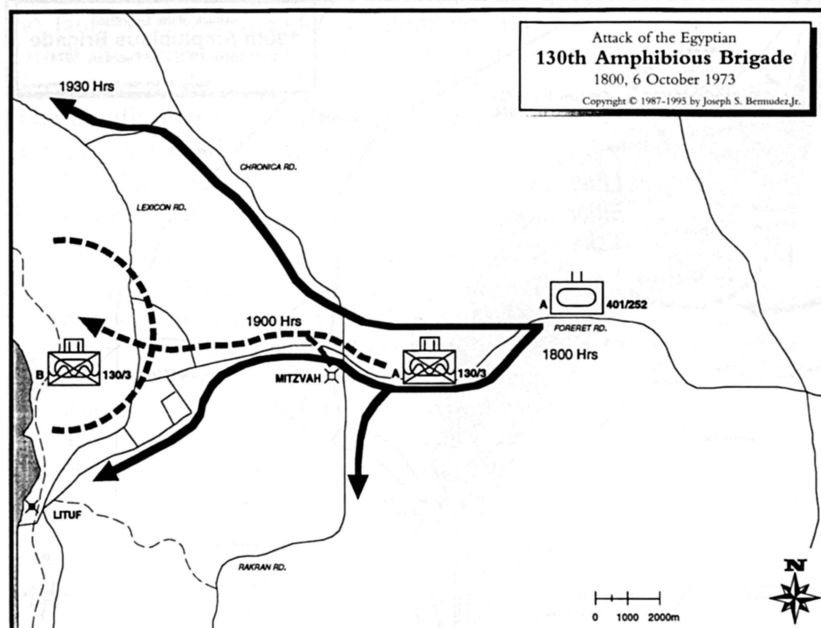


Figure 8

ter. In small groups the surviving elements returned to the bridgehead during the night (Figure 8. 1800 6 October-7 October 1973).

Egyptian sources claim that not all elements of Battalion-Group A withdrew to the Little Bitter Lake, stating that a mechanized commando company with a small number of PT-76B tanks continued to advance towards the Mitla Pass, while another company-size force advanced in the direction of the Gidi Pass. These sources further claim that these two units accomplished the following:

- One unit continued its advance in the direction of the Gidi Pass, attacking Israeli

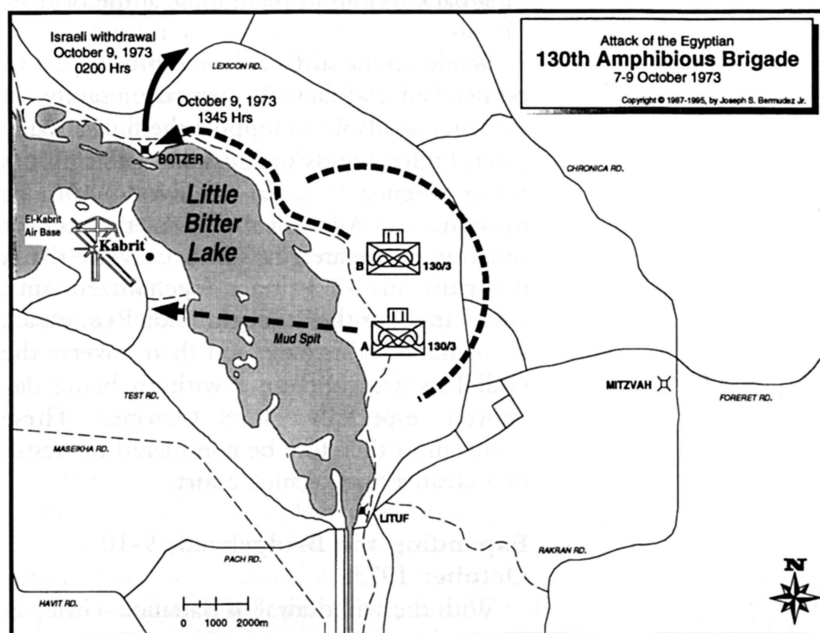


Figure 9

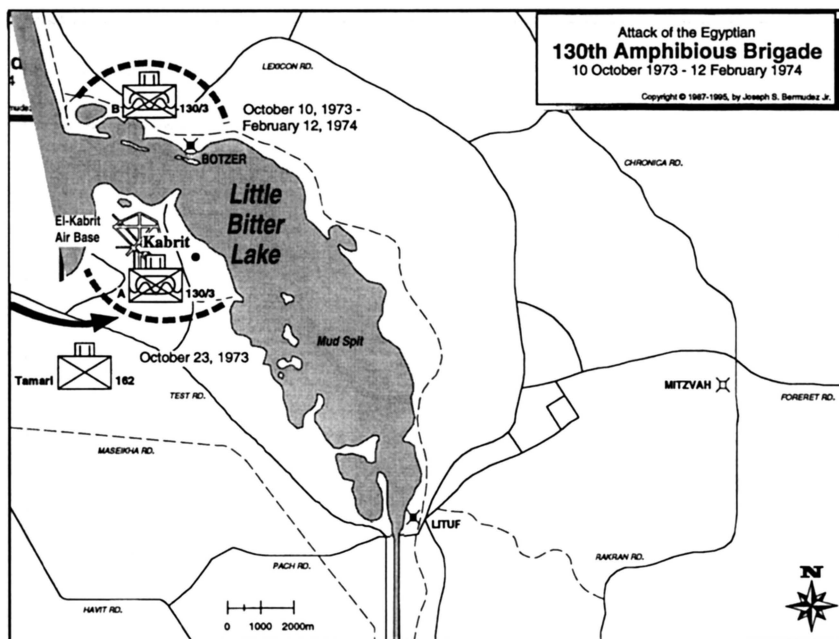


Figure 10

rear area installations, while avoiding extended combat and continuing its advance east. At 1010, on 8 October, this unit reached and attacked the Israeli air base at Bir el-Thamada. It then withdrew back to the west, eventually reaching the 7th Infantry Division in its bridgehead opposite Kabrit.

- At 0810 on 7 October, elements from the Mitla Pass unit "... attacked the southern sector command located near the entrance to the Mitla Pass ... and then continued its attack against objectives further to the rear ...". At 1350 the unit "... attacked a radar station in the Mitla Pass area, inflicting substantial losses upon the Israelis before going back to join its main force at the bridgeheads ...".

While on the surface these claims appear to be detailed and factual, there is presently no evidence available to support them, especially given LtGen Shazly's admission of the 130th's being assigned "... a much less ambitious mission ...". Additionally, given the combat situation in the area, it is inconceivable that a company-size Egyptian mechanized unit could traverse the strategic Gidi Pass, attack an operational air base, and then traverse the Gidi Pass a second time without being destroyed, especially on 8 October. These claims must therefore be considered the result of a creative propaganda effort.

### Expanding the Bridgehead, 9-10 October 1973

With the withdrawal of Battalion-Group A to the shore of the Little Bitter Lake during the evening of 6-7 October and the relief of

Battalion-Group B north of LITUF on 7 October, the 130th was concentrated in the area between the Little Bitter Lake and LEXICON-FORERET crossroads. Here the brigade spent the next 2 days reorganizing, reequipping, and providing protection for the 7th Infantry Division's northern flank. On 9 October, as the III Army continued to expand its bridgehead, the 130th was ordered to seize the Israeli BOTZER fortification at the junction of the Great and Little Bitter Lakes. From here it was to deny the Israelis access to the fortification itself and to act as a screen for the III Army's northern flank, warning of any Israeli attacks from the north along the shore of the lake. At approximately 1230-1300 Battalion-Group B advanced north and by 1345 had successfully accomplished this mission (Figure 9. 7-9 October 1973). Sometime afterwards Battalion-Group A was relieved by elements of the 8th Mechanized Infantry Brigade and was transferred back across the canal to the Kabrit area, where it was to reorganize and reequip.

### The Defensive Battle, 11-24 October 1973

On the afternoon of 17 October, in an attempt to destroy the Israeli crossing site at Deversoir, the T-62M equipped 25th [Independent] Armored Brigade attacked north from the III Army's beachhead. The brigade moved north along the shore of the Little and Great Bitter Lakes following the LEXICON road, staging through Battalion-Group B's positions around BOTZER. When the lead elements of the 25th had advanced to a point approximately 13 km north of BOTZER it was ambushed and destroyed by elements of the 217th and 600th Armored Brigades from MajGen Avraham "Bren" Adan's 162d Armored Division. The survivors of the ambush withdrew to the Battalion-Group B's positions around BOTZER and remained there until 22 October.

On 22 October the 25th Brigade commander and 130 troops were transferred back across the canal in an amphibious crossing of the Little Bitter Lake in 7 amphibious APCs. Once on the west side of the canal, these survivors of the 25th [Independent] Armored Brigade along with the 130th's Battalion-Group A, which had previously been transferred across the canal, were tasked with the defense of the Kabrit air base and peninsula. These developments were in response to the expanding Israeli bridgehead on the west side of the canal. More specifically, to the menace poised by Adan's 162d Armored Division



which was threatening large areas of the III Army's rear area, including the bridging sites within the 7th Infantry Division.

During 23 October this ad hoc unit, along with a number of other miscellaneous rear area units, conducted an unsuccessful defense of the Kabrit Peninsula against an Israeli provisional infantry force, under the command of BGen Dov "Dovik" Tamari, deputy commander of MajGen Adan's 162d Armored Division. During the battle BGen Tamari's forces captured some 15 PT-76Bs from the 130th. Following its unsuccessful defense, Battalion-Group A ceased to exist.

During the same period, Battalion-Group B continued to defend its BOTZER positions, and on 22 October was completely encircled by Israeli forces. It was still deployed here at the end of the war—when U.N. Resolution 339 went into effect at 1700 on 24 October.

### Cease-Fire to Disengagement

U.N. Resolution 339, however, did not result in the complete cessation of hostilities. Both sides continued to launch limited attacks in attempts to improve their positions. Throughout this post-cessation fighting Battalion-Group B continued to defend its BOTZER positions, losing its commanding officer on 17 January 1974 during an Israeli artillery attack. Despite numerous Israeli attacks, the battalion-group held its positions until 12 February 1974 when a disengagement was finally agreed upon (Figure 10. 10 October 1973–12 February 1974). The fate of Battalion-Group B (which was now in effect the entire 130th Amphibious Brigade) after this date is unknown, although its defensive operations as well as those of the III Army during this time were, and remain today, a source of Egyptian pride.

### Summary

The expansion of the Egyptian special operation forces in the early 1970s and the subsequent establishment of the 130th Amphibious Brigade illustrate the excellent understanding of Israeli tactical and strategic vulnerabilities achieved by the Egyptian General Staff and their efforts to exploit them. The General Staff's recognition of the fact that a commando unit's strength lies within surprise and speed, and not "staying power," is also notable. As is their task organizing of the 130th Amphibious Brigade to meet the anticipated Israeli armor threat, by reinforcing it with two BRDM-2/AT-3 Sagger companies.

The 130th Amphibious Brigade's failure to more fully achieve its assigned objectives was

no fault of its commander or members, but rather the indirect result of the political decision to set H-hour at 1400 on 6 October. The significance of this change in timing cannot be overstated, as all Egyptian planning was keyed to a dusk H-hour, due to Israeli Air Force superiority.

The fact that our Air Force was no match to the Israeli Air Force, had always influenced our way of thinking. Our plans since the HIGH MINARET Plan—and even during the strategic exercises—was based on the concept that we should launch our offensive by night. This would save our heliborne operations from enemy air attacks during their flight and during their approach to their targets.

Because of the political decision, and the Israeli Air Force superiority, the heliborne commando operations against the Gidi and Mitla Passes were canceled and MajGen Wassel canceled Battalion-Group B's southern crossing. Despite these precautions the Israeli Air Force still succeeded in destroying approximately 20 of the 50 helicopters deploying commandos on 6 October. This chain of events doomed the 130th.

Had these commando operations against the Gidi and Mitla Passes been conducted and these units been in place before the arrival of the Israeli 401st Armored Brigade, it is probable that they would have been able to temporarily block or, at a minimum, interdict the passes. This would have allowed the 130th sufficient time to either reach the passes and reinforce the commandos or to dispense throughout the Israeli rear area. This feasibility of the commando units being able to accomplish such a mission is made evident by the fact that the Israeli 600th Armored Brigade, commanded by Col Nathan "Natke" Nir, was delayed "... a full three hours ..." by an Egyptian commando company ambush on the morning of 7 October in the rolling dunes east of Romani. A similar "three hours" could have saved Battalion-Group A. As a result of the 401st not being interdicted, one of its tank battalions charged out of the Gidi Pass and directly into the advancing Battalion-Group A. The PT-76B light tanks and APCs were no match, in the rolling desert, for Col Shomron's M-48A5 main battle tanks.

MajGen Wassel's decision to order the 130th to conduct a single assault crossing instead of the two originally planned, in retrospect, was also a contributing factor in the 130th's failure. Had the 130th conducted both of the originally planned assault crossings, it is quite possible that Battalion-Group



	M-48A5	PT-76B	BTR-50PK/PU OT-62B/D	BRDM-2
Turret Front (mm)	110	17	—	—
Hull Bow (mm)	101/120	14	10	14
Hull Sides (mm)	76	14	9	7
Hull Rear (mm)	44	7	7	7

*Figure 11. Armor Protection Comparison.*

B's southern advance toward the Mitla Pass would have been successful, since its route of advance would have resulted in a southern flanking movement around Col Shomron's 401st Armored Brigade. Moreover, the subelement moving south towards the Sudr Pass would likewise have had a good chance of reaching its objective since Israeli forces in the area possessed little, or no, armor. Additionally, since each element of the brigade had been rigorously trained to perform its own specific mission, this late change of plans must have resulted in considerable confusion within Battalion-Group B.

The above events placed the 130th in a position where two other factors worked against it—the inherent limitations of light tanks and APCs and the lack of direct support artillery fires. The 130th's battalion-groups were never intended to unilaterally operate directly against Israeli armor units of greater than company size, especially in open terrain. They could, in Gen Shazly's own words, "... only engage and stop the advance of enemy reserves under certain favorable conditions."

As a result, when Col Shomron's northern armored battalion encountered Battalion-Group A in the rolling dunes, the Egyptians were at a distinct disadvantage. At 1,500 m the M-48A5's 105 millimeters (mm) main gun has 61-percent probability of hitting a stationary target versus 39 percent for the 76mm gun of the PT-76B, while kinetic round armor penetration at this range is 200 mm and 61 mm respectively. Additionally, the M-48A5 is capable of depressing its main gun -9° versus -4° for the PT-76B, thus allowing the M-48A5 to assume a more effective defiladed position.

While, the Egyptian BRDM-2/AT-3 Sagger could have potentially wrecked havoc with the M-48A5, having an 82-percent probability of hitting a stationary target at 1,500 m and a penetration of 400 mm; these vehicles were priority targets of Israeli tankers and were apparently quickly destroyed. Armor protection for the 130th's vehicles was also considerably inferior to the 401st's M-48A5s, as is indicated by the following chart:

Finally, there is no evidence of the 130th receiving any direct support artillery fires, having instead to rely upon preplanned artillery fires. Direct support artillery fires would have been extremely useful not only in neutralizing Capt Amir's tank company north of LITUF, but in suppressing the Israeli defenders in the MITZVAH fortification. Had the MITZVAH defenders been suppressed, it is probable that the Battalion-Groups A's detached mechanized company would have been able to secure the position. With this accomplished, Col Shomron would have had significantly greater difficulty in defending his northern flank.

The wartime experiences and personnel of the 130th Amphibious Brigade played an important part in the postwar development of Egyptian amphibious doctrine and capabilities. These capabilities include a small "Marine Brigade" and the amphibious training of some 25,000 Army troops, most notably the 129th Infantry (Landing) Brigade.

USMC

>Individuals interested in obtaining a copy of the article's documentation and footnotes should contact the editor.



>Mr. Bermudez is a recognized expert on Middle Eastern military affairs. He has written extensively in *Janes' Defense Weekly* and *Janes' Intelligence Review*.

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