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HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY SECTION  
MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP, VIETNAM  
Saigon, Vietnam

MAGAR-OT (OP)

11 April 1962

SUBJECT: "Lessons Learned" Number 4

TO: See Distribution

1. GENERAL: An operation, employing a Ranger Task Force and elements of a reconnaissance company supported by helicopters of the U.S. 57th Helicopter Company was conducted in Vinh Binh Sector on 2 March 1962. Air and artillery support was available but not used.

2. PARTICIPATING UNITS: The units taking part in this operation were: a regimental CP, a Ranger Task Force Headquarters, four Ranger Companies, a reconnaissance company, one platoon of 105mm Howitzers supported by eleven helicopters, two T-28 and two L-19 aircraft.

3. MISSION: The mission of the operation was to destroy VC and their installations in the area, to "show the flag" to loyal villagers, and to relieve pressure on SDC posts along a National Road in the operational area.

4. CONCEPT: The concept of the operation was essentially an airmobile assault to encircle the target village with a maneuvering force of 2 Ranger Companies and a blocking force of 1 Ranger Company. The Reconnaissance Company and one additional Ranger Company were in reserve at a nearby airstrip ready for committment by airmobile assault.

5. RESULTS: Though there were no friendly casualties, the operation cannot be considered to have been a success since only 1 VC was killed and 33 suspects were captured.

6. LESSONS LEARNED:

a. REQUESTS FOR USE OF HELICOPTERS BY RVNAF SHOULD BE MADE TO THE LEVEL WHICH WILL EMPLOY THEM. The Division Chief of Staff personally requested helicopters from III Corps in Saigon without informing advisors concerned. While operational control of the helicopters is retained at Corps, requests for use of the helicopters should follow US Advisory chain of command. A similiar request may be made through RVNAF channels to Corps but the US Advisory channels should also be used to ensure better cooperation and coordination.

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b. "SPARE" HELICOPTERS SHOULD BE PROVIDED WHENEVER POSSIBLE SO THAT IN THE EVENT OF ABORTS, PREVIOUSLY PLANNED NUMBERS OF HELICOPTERS MAY BE AVAILABLE. During this operation, one helicopter experienced engine trouble and landed with its "buddy" ship while enroute to the departure airfield. The result was two less helicopters than requested with resultant modifications to loading plans. The subsequent departure of two aircraft to search for the missing helicopters, depleted available lift by two more helicopters. Fortunately, all reappeared to take part in the operation but not until loading plans had changed several times. "Spare" aircraft would have precluded the changes and delays encountered in this operation.

c. LANDING ZONES MUST BE SELECTED TO PERMIT RAPID AND DECISIVE MANEUVER TO THE OBJECTIVE. In this instance LZ's ranged from 2000 meters to 500 meters from the objective. The unit which landed closest to the objective, though it was numerically the smallest participating unit, captured the greatest number of suspects. The unit which landed 2000 meters from the objective required about one and one-half hours to move to the objective area with no VC contact established. The helicopters provide the means to surpass the speed of the VC warning net; improper LZ selection can completely negate this advantage.

d. EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF AIR INTO OPERATIONS REQUIRES ALL ASPECTS OF JOINT PLANNING. In this operation, though air was available (T-28's for air strikes and L-19's to observe artillery and act as airborne FAC and relay stations) it was not used because of faulty planning. L-19 observers were flying about 2500 feet and could not keep the area under effective surveillance. No usual air-ground signals were included in the operation plan. Careful planning to include necessary radio communications and visual signals between ground and air to identify friendly and enemy elements must be completed in detail even when air participation is limited in scope.

7. Attached for your information as inclosure 1 is a MAT SECRET document which deals with available VNAF ordnance. It may be removed for ease in storing and later dissemination of the "Lessons Learned" file which is KIN CONFIDENTIAL.

8. The foregoing is for your information and guidance.

1 Incl  
Use of Airpower in C-I Opns

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Incl 1 to Lessons Learned Number 4

USE OF AIRPOWER IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATIONS

VNAF aircraft have available a wide variety of aircraft ordnance for immediate use in all CI operations. Included are 50 caliber machine guns, 20mm cannon, 2.75 inch rockets, napalm (fire bombs) and general purpose and frag bombs ranging from the 100 pound GP to the 1000 pound GP bomb. Bomb fuzing can be set to give air burst, contact burst or delay up to 72 hours in a variety of patterns. Exploitation of these weapons can increase RVNAF advantage over the Viet Cong.

Ground advisors should advise counterparts that trained VNAF and USAF personnel are available in the ASOC's to match proper air delivered weapons to various type targets. Requests for air support, are processed through Tactical Air Control System (TACS) as valid requirements so long as they meet reasonable tests of feasibility, suitability and acceptability.

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