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COUNTERINSURGENCY

LESSONS LEARNED NO. 61 (DJSM - 545 - 66)

SALIENT LESSONS LEARNED (U) ARMY

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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
APO San Francisco, 96222

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SUBJECT: Counterinsurgency Lessons Learned No. 61: Salient Lessons
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TO: SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. (U) INTRODUCTION: This issue of Lessons Learned is a compilation of many facets of military operations which field commanders have judged to be important. The salient lessons learned contained herein have been selected from after action reports and other documents. It is intended that this issue of lessons learned be a handy reference for those leaders who will have the task of confronting the enemy on the battlefield.

2. (CMHA) LESSONS LEARNED:

a. Ambush. The ambush has proved to be one of the most effective tactics of the small unit commander. Some of the salient lessons learned from the use of ambushes against the enemy are summarized below.

(1) Ambush patrols varying in size from fire team to company are employed to deny the VC free movement through an area of operations and to assist in securing friendly areas. Ambush operations make maximum use of the tremendous fire support available to allied forces.

(2) Any attempt to stereotype ambush techniques would detract from their effectiveness. However, there are some features of planning and execution which should be applied in the conduct of these operations.

(a) Detailed reconnaissance should be made to choose carefully the ambush site based on the enemy situation, terrain, mission and the disposition of available fire support and reaction forces.

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(b) The area should be entered secretly.

(c) Once the ambush site has been occupied strict light, noise and camouflage discipline should be practiced and OP/LP established as required.

(d) The actions of the ambush force should be controlled and coordinated closely. Detailed planning, rehearsals and training are mandatory.

(e) The ambush should be sprung by the ambush leader. It should rely on surprise and heavy firepower to disorganize and destroy the enemy. Mines, booby traps and preplanned indirect fires should be used to block likely escape routes. As the enemy attempts to withdraw, he should be pursued aggressively by fire and maneuver forces as appropriate.

b. Counterambush. Standard counterambush tactics have proven to be sound, whether used by friendly forces when ambushed or as a result of a meeting engagement so common during search and destroy operations. The degree of success obtained is a measure of the leadership and professional competence of the unit concerned. The following lessons have been confirmed as being the most effective way to counter ambushes:

(1) Once contact is established, the ambushed force immediately lays down a heavy volume of fire to neutralize the fire of the enemy force and to fix him.

(2) Fire support including tactical air, armed helicopters and all artillery within range are brought to bear on the enemy.

(3) Concurrent with these actions, the uncommitted portion of the ambushed force, and whatever reaction force is available, is maneuvered to block enemy escape routes and to destroy him. The reaction force is oriented on the enemy and is not a rescue force.

c. Fire Support Coordination.

(1) Friendly forces operating in RVN possess a tremendous fire support superiority over VC and NVA forces. The means to destroy the enemy are readily available. The problem associated with most tactical operations is to find the enemy and then fix him by aggressive

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combat and the use of blocking forces. The enemy can be destroyed then by attacking him with coordinated air strikes, artillery, naval gunfire (when available) and armed helicopters. The successful application of this fire support depends on close coordination.

(2) The keys to successful integration of multiple fire support means are effective radio communications and close personal contact.

(a) Radio Links:

1 The artillery liaison officer with the air observers, ground observers, artillery units and armed helicopters.

2 The forward air controller (FAC) and strike aircraft.

(b) Close personal contact is established between:

1 The battalion commander and his artillery liaison officer.

2 The FACs (and/or naval gunfire (NGF) spotters) and air observers.

3 Ground observers and maneuver elements.

(3) Most fire support planning and control is at maneuver battalion level. The procedure which has evolved insures timely, effective engagement of targets by all fire support means with a minimum of danger to friendly troops and civilians. One such system is described below for the purpose of illustrating its feasibility.

(a) Concept. Command and control of fire support is exercised by the battalion commander through his artillery liaison officer.

(b) Techniques. Most operations are controlled from a command and control helicopter in which the commander and the artillery liaison officer are located. All fire support (strike aircraft, artillery, naval gunfire and armed helicopters) is controlled through the

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artillery liaison officer. This procedure applied to artillery support is not unusual, but the method of coordinating air strikes with the other fire support means will serve to point up the technique which makes the system so effective. Air strikes are controlled through the battalion FAC who flies an O1-E and is in radio contact with high performance aircraft on UHF. With the FAC is an artillery air observer who is in radio contact with the artillery liaison officer, the ground forward observers, the battalion or battery FDC and the firing battery(s) on the artillery FM Fire Direction Net. This system allows the battalion commander, through his fire support coordinator (artillery liaison officer), to control the fires of the artillery and the use of close air support. A similar system with an air observer riding with a naval gunfire spotter would extend this system to include naval gunfire support.

(c) Example. Near simultaneous engagement of a target by multiple fire support means can be achieved by use of this or a similar system. Let us assume a typical landing zone preparation involving the use of artillery, air strikes and armed helicopters as a case in point (See Sketch 1). LZ HAWK is in a valley with high ground on either flank. The sequence of actions during the preparation of the LZ might be as follows.

1 Artillery fires are placed on the LZ, are coordinated by the artillery liaison officer and are under the control of the air observer riding with the FAC.

2 The artillery is shifted to possible VC escape routes off the LZ and the air strikes are brought in under the control of the FAC.

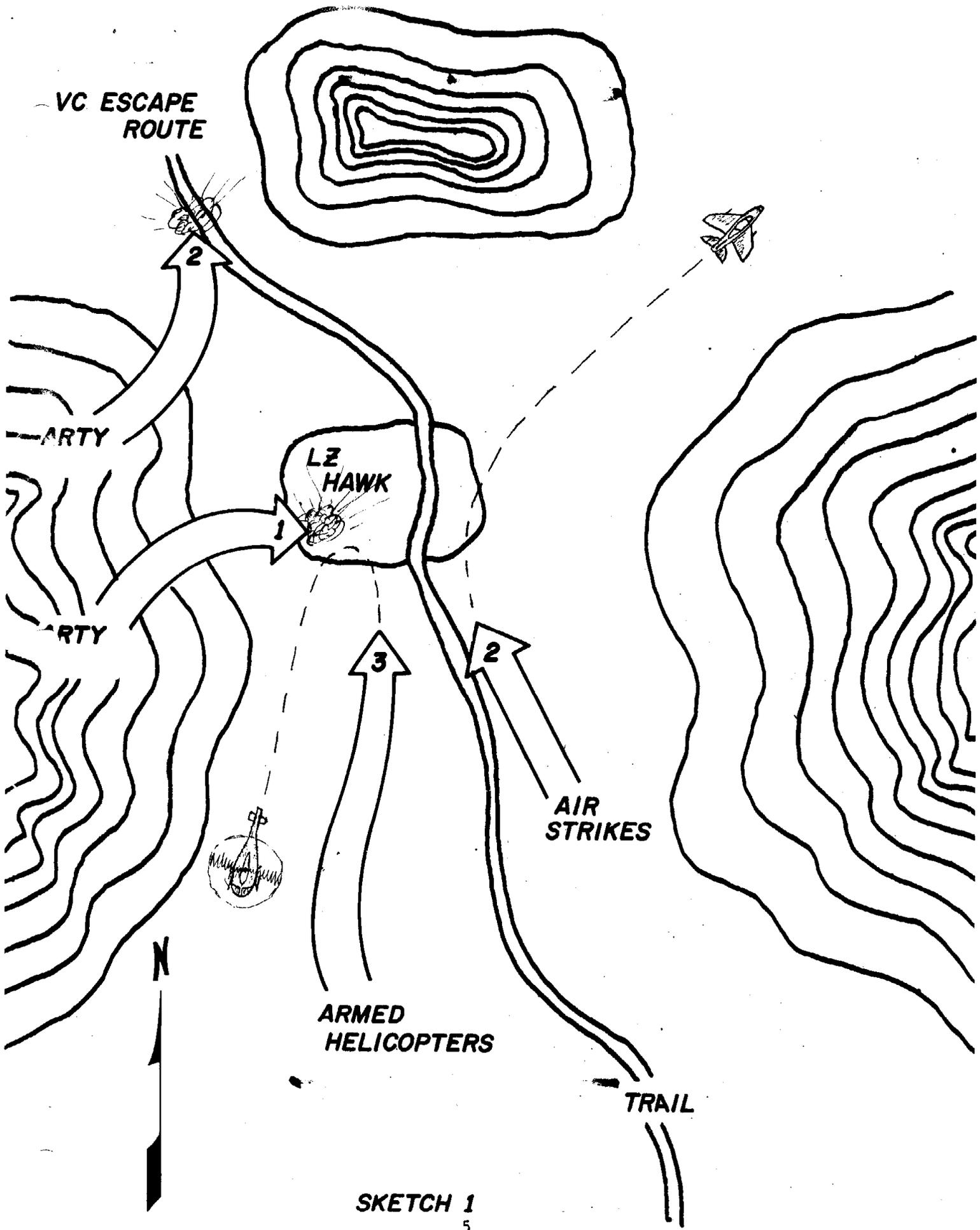
3 As the time approaches when the aircraft have expended nearly all their ordnance, the FAC notifies the artillery liaison officer through the air observer. The artillery liaison officer alerts the armed helicopters. As the strike aircraft make their last pass on the LZ, the gunships start their run up the valley. The gunships reconnoiter the LZ, fire suppressive fire and then escort the troop carrier helicopters into the LZ.

d. Patrolling. Among the important lessons learned are the following ones associated with day and night patrolling:

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(1) A combat patrol sent out on a jungle operation should consist of a minimum of ten men. The patrol should have the capability of sustaining itself for at least 24 hours and should possess the ability to request and adjust artillery fires and tactical air strikes.

(2) In jungle terrain reconnaissance from the air is no substitute for ground reconnaissance. Reconnaissance patrols normally should penetrate an area prior to an operation.

(3) To position patrols in an area undetected is very difficult. One method used is to dismount patrols at designated points from APCs while conducting mounted sweeps in an area of operations. The enemy cannot detect easily that a patrol has been left behind. Helicopters can be used in the same fashion, i.e., in the course of normal operations, patrols are dropped off secretly at designated points.

(4) Rear area patrolling is an essential part of counterinsurgency operations. In addition to providing immediate security, patrols can uncover evidence of VC activity and may determine changes in the sentiment of the local villagers. Coercion, terrorism and increased demands are indications of pressure on the villagers by the VC.

(5) Aggressive patrolling around a defensive perimeter is essential to preclude an enemy mortar attack or raid. Patrolling should be done at night because the enemy normally moves into position after dark.

(6) The nature of the enemy and terrain in RVN necessitates long range ground reconnaissance as a means of finding the enemy. US infantrymen, with limited additional training and using organic unit resources, have conducted long range patrols successfully.

(7) The VC usually will return to the "scene of the crime" after breaking contact. Stay behind patrols have been successful in inflicting further casualties on the VC when they return. In one instance, a rifle company was to be extracted from an area. A platoon of the company infiltrated to an assembly area about 500 meters from the position. The platoon remained in the assembly area for 18 hours and then returned to the company position. Three VC returned later and were killed.

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e. Night Operations. The VC are well trained, organized and equipped for night operations. They employ the tactics of a guerrilla because it suits their means. They move mostly at night and prefer to fight under cover of darkness. To counter the effectiveness of the VC's night operations, the night must be taken away from the guerrilla.

(1) Night airmobile assaults, ambushes, and movement must be routine. Recently, a friendly command post occupied the same position for over a week. The enemy had probed the position for four nights. On the fifth night when rain had reduced visibility, the enemy initiated a well coordinated attack from within 20 meters of friendly positions. The latter had been occupied before by other units, and the enemy appeared to know the location of each position. The friendly troops either were killed or forced to withdraw. The first enemy grenade hit the communications bunker knocking out all but one PRC-25 radio. The loss of communications precluded calling for reinforcements, artillery or air support. In only ten minutes the position was overrun; the company commander, the executive officer and one artillery FO were killed. Within 30 minutes, the attackers had looted friendly bodies and captured ten M-16 rifles, one radio and a sniper weapon with telescopic sight. The enemy conducted an orderly withdrawal. The enemy was master of the night. From this incident the following lessons were learned:

(a) Command posts should be displaced at least every 48 hours preferably at night.

(b) Units must formulate a night time emergency reinforcement plan entailing several alternate means.

(c) Maximum use must be made of trip flares, early warning devices, outposts and listening posts.

(d) When a unit is surprised and under hand grenade assault by a superior force, each man must fire his weapon initially in his designated sector until he gains fire superiority.

(e) Radios should be dispersed throughout the area.

(2) Enter the battlefield at night on foot to gain surprise. A recent 78 man combat patrol operation exemplifies a successful night

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operation wherein surprise was absolutely necessary. The patrol was ordered to conduct a combat raid on a VC prisoner of war camp. The unit moved at night without encountering the enemy. At first light the patrol assaulted the camp. The surprised Viet Cong abandoned the prisoners and withdrew.

f. Small Unit Operations. The war in Vietnam is a small unit leader's war. Because of the large number of semi-independent platoon and company missions performed by our units in Vietnam, the knowledge and skill of the small unit leader are more important than ever before. Some of the lessons learned by small unit commanders are discussed below.

(1) A major problem is locating the enemy. One solution to this problem is to patrol from company bases. Consistent with communications capabilities, squads operate in areas for three days without resupply. For example, one company operating by squads in designated zones, separated but mutually supporting, can cover a large area with thoroughness and stealth. The mission of squads under these circumstances is to ambush at night, observe during daylight, and engage small enemy groups. When a squad locates a significant enemy force, the platoon/company consolidates on the squad to fix the enemy. The battalion (-), standing by as an immediate reaction force, is brought to bear on the enemy to destroy him. Once contact is made, the unit reacts rapidly with all available firepower and reinforcements without further regard to deception, stealth or surprise. Following the engagement with the enemy, the squads revert to semi-guerrilla tactics in a designated zone until a subsequent contact is made.

(2) Another major problem of the commander in jungle terrain is control of his troops. The commander often is hindered by poor ground visibility and difficulty of communications. At times he can help his unit stay on course, spot targets and mark them, and in general have a much better feel for the operation if airborne by helicopter.

(3) The commander needs a method of locating maneuver elements. When companies are moving by bounds, smoke placed at the flanks of the lead companies becomes a valuable reference on which to base maneuver of the trail (reserve) company.

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(4) To locate small VC units the best results are obtained from separate company and platoon size operations as compared to larger organizations which are detected more easily by the enemy. The separate unit usually is successful in closing with the enemy. However, supporting fires must be planned in detail and a reserve reaction force must be available on short notice. Such operations require the highest caliber of leadership.

(5) Most enemy contacts are made at distances of 15 to 30 meters. Once contact is made with an enemy employing automatic weapons, the contacted force often is pinned down in its position and it is difficult to use heavy supporting fires on the enemy front lines.

(a) One technique used successfully by a brigade under these circumstances was to precede the main body by 100 to 200 meters during an approach march with approximately five fire teams of five men each. In this manner, the minimum force will be committed when contact is made, thus enabling maximum freedom for maneuver of the main body.

(b) Because the fire fight upon contact may be short and violent, some automatic weapons should be placed near the point.

(6) Certain lessons learned concerning contact with the enemy stand out in importance.

(a) Once contact has been made, pressure on the enemy must be maintained to keep him off balance. The VC are well versed in the use of delaying tactics. Excessive time must not be lost in developing the situation else it may allow the enemy main force to prepare an ambush, occupy a defensive position or escape.

(b) The VC may choose not to break contact immediately. In this case he employs the "close embrace" or "bear hug" tactic to prevent friendly use of supporting fires. Friendly units must keep the VC at arm's length in order to use supporting weapons. Once a unit is involved in a "close embrace" with the VC, any attempt to withdraw prompts the enemy to follow the withdrawing forces. Extensive use of hand grenades and intensive small arms fire will assist in defeating the "close embrace" tactics.

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g. Airmobile Operations. The capability to conduct airmobile operations is one of the major tactical advantages possessed by the allied forces. Airmobile operations allow the rapid movement of sizeable forces over considerable distances. They give the capability to mass forces and to move reinforcements in a minimum of time. One significant advantage of airmobile operations is that troops are delivered to the combat area fresh and ready to fight. The techniques of airmobile operations are undergoing continual refinement and new lessons are being learned as different environmental conditions or different enemy tactics and techniques are encountered. Some of the more recent salient lessons learned are:

(1) Air assault operations increase sharply in complexity with increase in the size of forces employed. Traffic control, air space control, altitude separation, flight corridors closely coordinated with artillery fire support planning, and refueling are a few of the areas receiving increased attention and study.

(2) Every effort must be made to keep from stereotyping operations. Although LZ preparations normally include either artillery, fighter strikes or both, this pattern should be shifted occasionally by using a short but devastating strike by armed helicopters immediately before the first assault element touches down.

(3) Attention must be paid to the type of ordnance used during preparatory fires. Although white phosphorous is highly effective against ground troops, the smoke on occasion has restricted severely the visibility of approaching helicopters. Additionally, during the dry season, WP may start fires which may deny completely the LZ.

(4) Increased attention is being paid to night airmobile operations. The following observations were made by one aviation group:

(a) Extensive unit training which emphasizes formation flying and navigation is required prior to night operations.

(b) Detailed planning and coordination with all combat elements is essential. All possible contingencies must be planned.

(c) Heliborne searchlights are effective in providing terminal navigation assistance as well as in providing LZ illumination.

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(d) Illumination must be continuous once started, due to disruption of the pilot's night adaptation by exposure to the light.

(5) Aircraft load limits must be respected. "Density altitude" imposes limits on the helicopter by reducing its performance from that rated at "standard sea-level". In the heat of combat or under the stress of long hours of flying, the pilot should not attempt take-offs or landings in an overloaded configuration for the existing density altitude. Strict attention to load limits and aircraft performance by reference to the "go-no go" card must be habitual. Planners must take aircraft limitations into consideration at all times.

(6) As airmobile operations increase in size and duration, aviator flight fatigue will become an increasingly important factor to be monitored by commanders and flight surgeons. A pilot whose reactions have been dulled and slowed by excessive fatigue is a hazard not only to himself, but also to the aircraft, crew and troops.

(7) Helicopter damage by enemy ground fire continues to contribute to excessive down time. Structural bullet damage is costly in dollars and loss of aircraft availability.

(a) Helicopter bullet damage is sustained normally on missions that fall into four categories:

1 Combat assaults in or near landing zones.

2 Logistical support missions, especially those following combat assaults.

3 Cross country flights.

4 Approaches to secure landing sites surrounded by hostile areas.

(b) Adherence to the following proven tactics and principles will result in a reduction of bullet damage and added aviator safety.

1 Combat Assaults:

a When preparatory fires are used, make them short and intense.

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b Use deception plans.

c Avoid formations in which successive helicopters follow the same flight path at the same altitude.

d Strive constantly to decrease time in the landing zone.

2 Logistical Support Missions: The frequent appearance of ~~gunship~~ fire teams over areas in which slicks are re-supplying discourages ground fire.

3 Cross Country Flights: Maintain adequate altitude (2500 feet absolute and above as a normal guide).

4 Approaches to Secure Landing Zones: Use tactical spiral approaches over secure landing zones.

h. Hamlet Clearing Operations.

(1) In recent months many variations of successful combined US/ARVN operations in support of Revolutionary Development have been conducted in Vietnam. Hamlet clearing operations variously named County Fair, Hamlet Search and Go Team are but a few of them. An operation of this type normally consists of sealing off a hamlet; searching the hamlet; screening the population for VC, VCS, RVNAF deserters and draft violators; and holding a hamlet festival wherein the population is entertained, questioned and provided with food and medical care. The purpose of the operation is to establish GVN presence, to destroy enemy infrastructure and guerrillas, to demonstrate the concern of the GVN for the people and to gain the support of the people.

(2) Some of the lessons learned from these types of operations are discussed below.

(a) Integrated planning for the operation should be conducted at division, brigade-province, and battalion-district levels. The planning should consider the availability of a military unit to maintain control on a permanent basis, the lines of communications to be secured, logistical support for the hamlet and capability of the people to provide for their own needs. The integration of US and ARVN intelligence efforts will provide coordinated information on which to base the operation.

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(b) If the operation involves US and Republic of Vietnam (RVN) forces, both US and RVN troops should participate in the search and destroy phases; the US elements should seal the hamlets, government teams should participate in activities within the hamlet and National Police should be used in all population control actions. Vietnamese soldiers should be integrated into US squads for ambushes.

i. Defense Against Mortar/Recoilless Rifle Attacks.

(1) VC successes in launching mortar and recoilless rifle attacks, though limited in total effect, have been sufficient to encourage similar efforts in the future. The ability of friendly elements to counter enemy attacks effectively will be enhanced by the application of sound tactics based on lessons learned from previous attacks.

(2) Although it is recognized that a 100% effective defense against mortar and recoilless rifle cannot be established, the following general guidelines based on the latest lessons learned can be used to minimize the effects of enemy attacks:

(a) Friendly elements must realize that the enemy is very methodical and plans his attacks with precision. Normally he employs mortars and recoilless rifles at night from positions that enable him to fire for effect along the long axis of an airfield at pre-selected targets.

(b) To spoil an attack, an effective internal passive defense plan and an external plan which includes aggressive patrol action beyond the range limits of enemy weapons are essential. The implementation of a sound intelligence reporting system which will provide indications of an impending attack will enhance the overall effort to reduce its chances of success.

(c) In one attack, an AN/MPQ-4A radar detected the incoming mortar rounds and friendly artillery engaged the mortars within minutes. Experience from other attacks has shown that the initiation of countermortar fire will silence the enemy mortar attack, even if the precise location of the enemy's mortar location is not known. When a friendly unit receives enemy mortar rounds, it is imperative that the

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direction from which the rounds are being fired be sent to the firing battery so that countermortar fire can begin immediately.

(d) The response by ground reaction troops to a recent attack of a major air base was most effective because a reaction force moved quickly to the area of VC infiltration and established blocking positions, thus cutting off the route of escape.

(e) In some instances, evidence indicates that application of lessons learned was disregarded. The enemy was allowed to employ the same route used in a previous attack, even though it was an obvious axis of advance from a suspected VC area. To approach the fence surrounding the installation, the enemy moved through a mine field along trails made by animals. At another installation, the enemy used the hours of darkness before 2200 hours to move into position and attack with mortars. The friendly element had established a pattern of mounting an airborne observer at 2200 hours each night because the enemy seldom attacked prior to that time. At one installation the fact that a search light covering a critical area had become inoperative about an hour before an attack was not reported. The use of dogs at this same spot alerted the handler of an attempt to infiltrate the area.

(f) Enemy mortar/recoilless rifle attacks seldom last more than 20 minutes. Therefore, time is of the essence in their detection. Constant surveillance by aerial and ground means and the use of electronic devices will enable defense elements to detect enemy fire immediately. Once it is detected, immediate deployment of armed aircraft, artillery and flareships will force the enemy to cease fire and withdraw. Immediate airmobile reaction by a ground force to preselected ambush positions along the likely route of withdrawal may result in elimination of the attacker. Each successful counteraction will reduce the frequency of enemy mortar and recoilless rifle attacks.

j. Viet Cong Mines and Booby Traps.

(1) The Viet Cong, after years of experience dating back to the French-Viet Minh conflict, are extremely efficient and cunning in the use of mines and booby traps. They use these devices to harass, slow down, inflict casualties on and demoralize friendly forces. During a recent operation 89.6 percent of the US casualties were caused by VC mines or

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booby traps. In contrast, an engineer company conducting mine clearing operations on the main supply route of a brigade area of operations suffered no personnel casualties and only one vehicle loss, although numerous antipersonnel and antivehicular mines were removed or destroyed.

(2) The VC are very resourceful and make maximum use of all explosive ordnance at their disposal. They police the battle area for unexploded ordnance (duds), and modify them for use as mines or booby traps, or use the explosive as a filler for locally manufactured munitions.

(3) Grenades, spike traps, poison arrows and a variety of other means are employed to harass, slow down, confuse or kill friendly forces.

(a) Grenades commonly are used as booby traps because they are light in weight, easy to carry and conceal, and readily adaptable. They frequently are put in trees, on gates, doors, barricades and fences; along trails and in areas frequented by friendly troops such as landing zones and water wells. Normally, monofilament (fishing line) trip wires across trails are used to detonate the explosives. Munitions, particularly artillery and mortar shells, have been rigged for detonation as booby traps.

(b) The enemy marks his mines and booby traps with various signs. Booby traps have been found marked by tufts of grass ten inches apart, perpendicular to the point of the trail where the trap is located; inverted rock "V" indicators and small bits of adhesive tape scattered around the devices have been noted. Since VC and NVA units are forced to move throughout the country, there must be some overall marking scheme. Any unusual markings or signs along a trail should be treated as a booby trap indicator. Some examples are shown in Figure 2.

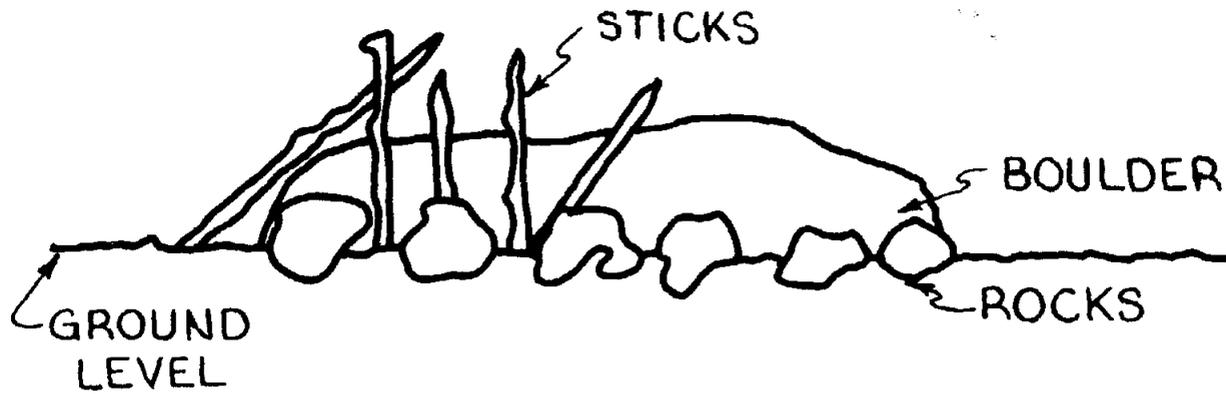
(4) Antipersonnel (AP) and antivehicular mines are used extensively in VC operations. They may be of the crude, homemade variety or similar to those in the US inventory. When antitank mines are employed they are placed exclusively on roads and trails capable of supporting vehicular traffic. AP mines are used on defensive terrain nearby so that troops moving to the high ground to protect a disabled vehicle are then exposed to the AP mines and booby traps. AP mines are used to defend entrances to VC areas or underground hiding places and for ambushes along trails.

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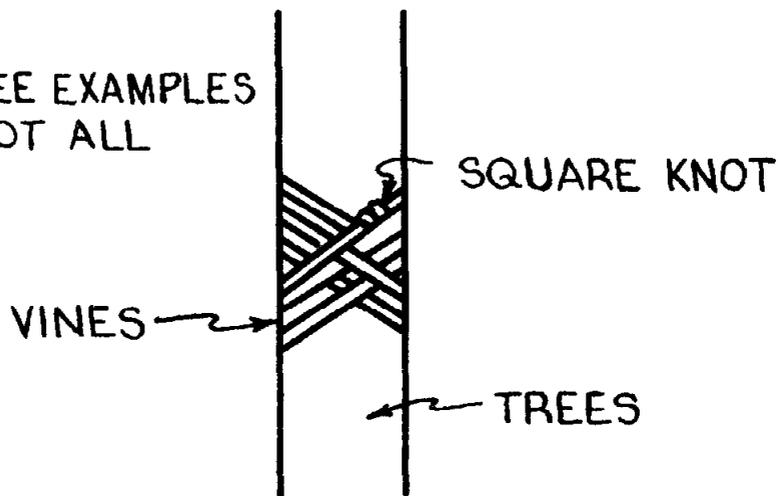
VC BOOBY TRAP MARKERS



TYPICAL BOOBY TRAP INDICATOR IN ROCKY TERRAIN

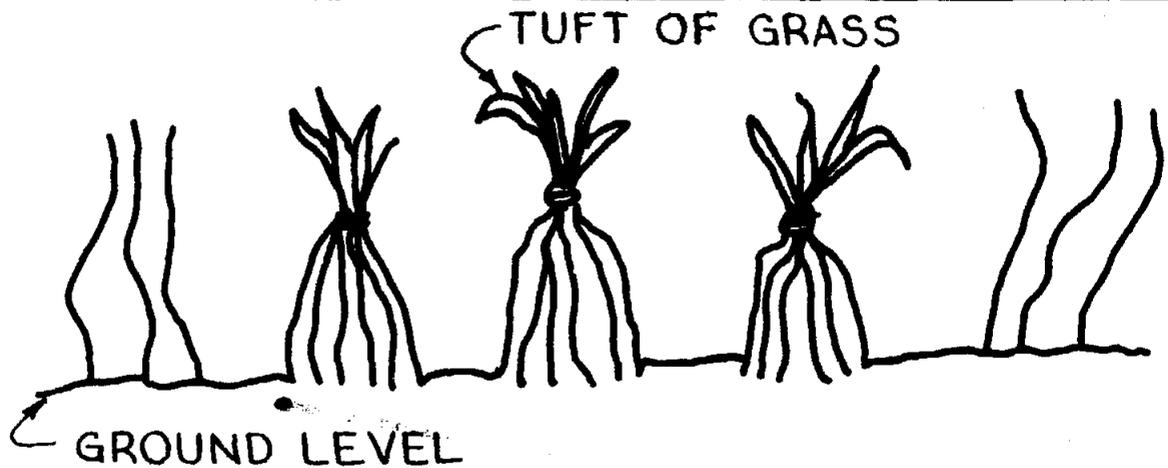
A

NOTE: THESE THREE EXAMPLES
ARE TYPICAL BUT NOT ALL
INCLUSIVE



TYPICAL BOOBY TRAP INDICATOR IN FORRESTED TERRAIN

B



TYPICAL BOOBY TRAP INDICATOR IN GRASSY TERRAIN

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(5) Although it is not possible to eliminate all casualties or property damage due to VC mines or booby traps, there are steps that can be taken by commanders to reduce these incidents to a minimum. An aggressive program to indoctrinate and train personnel in VC booby trap and mine warfare is an effective means of reducing casualties and loss of materiel. The commander of a unit must instill in each individual under his charge the self-discipline and constant alertness to detect booby traps and mines.

k. Use of Dogs in Base Defense. The use of sentry dogs inside a base perimeter is proving most effective. In the past, the VC have initiated their attacks on bases with a mortar barrage. While this barrage is in progress, sappers have been infiltrated. During a second mortar barrage the sappers withdraw. Since the introduction of large numbers of sentry dogs and handlers to patrol the perimeters, there have been few penetrations of bases by sappers. The handlers are in continuous radio contact with base security and their whereabouts are known continuously. The 4 December 1966 attack on Tan Son Nhut is an example of early detection and destruction of sappers through the use of sentry dogs.

1. Tunnel Warfare.

(1) Counterinsurgency forces operating in the RVN have encountered numerous and extensive tunnel complexes used by the VC as hiding places, caches, hospitals, headquarters and defensive fortifications. These installations represent not only dangerous obstacles to friendly forces but a source to be exploited for enemy documents and materiel. Experiences with these tunnel complexes have pointed up various techniques that must be considered in coping with them.

(2) Although VC tunnels vary in length and extent from simple cave-like underground structures to multi-level systems many kilometers long, there are several characteristics common to all.

(a) They are camouflaged superbly; entrances, bunkers and vents are very difficult to locate.

(b) They are constructed deceptively with many concealed trap doors, air and water locks, random changes in direction, false side tunnels and other devices to confuse search teams.

(c) They are built to withstand heavy air and artillery bombardment.

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(3) Tunnel operations include detection, isolation and security, searching and clearing, mapping and destruction or denial.

(a) Tunnel detection demands extreme care and thoroughness on the part of friendly troops to locate hidden entrances or other evidence of their existence.

(b) When the presence of tunnels has been determined, the area must be isolated and secured to protect friendly troops and prevent VC access to and egress from the tunnels.

(c) Thereafter, the area and the tunnel complex are cleared systematically of VC and searched for enemy materiel and items of intelligence value. Concurrent with this phase, the tunnel is mapped with emphasis on locating all entrances.

(d) The final phase of tunnel operations is the destruction or denial of the complex to prevent its future use by the enemy. Destruction is preferred and is accomplished either by demolition or by the use of earth moving equipment. If available time and resources do not permit destruction, denial will be accomplished. Current denial methods, though limited in effectiveness, include various means to "seed" the tunnel complex with CS riot control agent.

(e) Experience gained thus far indicates:

1 Specially trained and equipped teams are essential for tunnel search and clearance.

2 Dangers inherent in tunnel search are:

a Mines and booby traps throughout the tunnel system.

b Concentrations of carbon monoxide and areas short of oxygen throughout the complex.

3 Complete exploitation and search of tunnel complexes are necessary and very time consuming.

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m. Herbicide Operations.

(1) Herbicide operations, both defoliation and crop destruction, increased substantially during the past year. Earlier operations were directed at LOCs and base security in relatively secure areas. The past year saw a change of emphasis when the primary objective of herbicide operations became the removal of foliage from VC/NVA base areas, safe havens and infiltration routes. Defoliation permits direct observation. It also improves the capability of airborne sensors and FACs to locate targets and improves the overall effectiveness of the surveillance program. Ground forces operating in defoliated areas have greater freedom of movement.

(2) Crop destruction has been accomplished within the framework of the MACV resources control program. Crops in remote VC/NVA controlled areas which cannot be secured and harvested for Government of Vietnam (GVN) use should be nominated for destruction. Destruction of crops diminishes VC/NVA combat power by denying the enemy the ability to live off the land. Crop destruction targets are time dependent and take priority over other herbicide operations because the plants must be sprayed before the grain, roots or vegetables have matured.

n. Psychological Operations.

(1) Experience in Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) reveals that they are not effective when used alone. Rather, they have proved most productive when pre-planned for an operation and coordinated with artillery fire, tactical air strikes and ground operations. The VC have proved to be most vulnerable to PSYOPS when they have suffered casualties in an engagement and are tired and discouraged.

(2) There is an absolute need for timely, accurate PSYOPS information. This can be obtained best from recently returned ralliers or PWs. All PSYOPS material should be pre-tested on Vietnamese closely akin to the target audience to obtain a measure of credibility and accuracy. Chieu Hoi returnees have proved invaluable in this respect.

(3) The use of Psychological Operations Exploitation Teams (POETS) has proved successful. These highly mobile teams consist of an

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interpreter and PSYOPS specialist who proceed immediately to the scene of action to exploit PSYOPS opportunities.

o. Night Intensification Device (Starlight Scope).

(1) A new night combat operations capability in the form of the first generation of passive night vision devices was realized by US forces in Vietnam in December 1965. Unit commanders, troops and operators of these night vision instruments, particularly the small Starlight Scope, have been impressed by the outstanding results made possible by their use. This group of electro-optical instruments which are passive visual aids for night viewing, utilizes both natural illumination from the moon and stars, and artificially induced light such as flares and searchlights. Because of the large numbers available and the convenient size of the Starlight Scope, this instrument has been used extensively and successfully by all services both on the surface and from the air.

(2) Salient lessons learned from use of these devices are as follows:

(a) Employment has application to both offensive and defensive operations.

(b) The Starlight Scope has aided greatly in developing the individual soldier's confidence in his ability to conduct night operations effectively and aggressively.

(c) Some weather conditions tend to reduce the effectiveness of the scopes. Fog has a tendency to reduce the ambient light level and to decrease the range. Light haze and smoke have very little effect on the sharpness of images. If the objective lens face becomes streaked with water, during rain, it will distort the appearance of the area under observation.

(d) Prolonged use of night intensification devices tends to impair the night vision of the user. Therefore, the devices should not be used by a pilot who will land an aircraft, since in all probability his depth perception and night vision will have been impaired.

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(e) On nights without moon and stars, the night vision devices can be operated at peak efficiency with the assistance of properly employed artificial illumination.

(f) The night vision scopes are most suitable for linear air surveillance along highways, canals, rivers, coastlines and small areas familiar to the aerial observer.

p. Forward Air Controlling.

(1) The forward air controller (FAC) plays a very important role in the close air support of ground forces. Experience indicates that to accomplish his mission effectively, the FAC should observe many important procedures, some of which are as follows:

(a) Obtain a complete set of 1:50,000 and 1:250,000 maps of the area, and know how to read them and navigate from them.

(b) Talk to other FACs and pilots flying in the area and compare ideas on areas of probable enemy activity or ground fire.

(c) Through study and personal contact, learn the scope of friendly activity and plans for future ground operations.

(d) Know the air request system and maintain radio contact with the appropriate control agency.

(e) Know the availability of fighter support to include aircraft types and numbers, along with munitions and their effects. Be able to anticipate the fighter pilot's actions and reactions, realizing that a language barrier may exist if the pilots are foreign allies.

(f) Know the capabilities and limitations of available aircraft.

(g) Most important, know his area of operations and be able to recognize changes in terrain features or human activity.

(2) Successful close air support depends primarily on the FAC and his ability to locate the enemy and facilitate his destruction.

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The FAC always must use good common sense and fit his actions with the specific situation. A thorough knowledge of his area, friendly operations and available resources is mandatory, but the FAC's good judgment usually will ensure successful operations.

q. Improper Bunker Construction. A recent inspection of US advisors' defensive bunkers revealed that the majority of them are not constructed properly to provide maximum security, either in the bunker or for movement from one to another.

(1) Adequate escape routes from the bunkers generally are not available. In most cases only one entrance/exit is available.

(2) A connecting trench from the US advisor's bunker to the ARVN counter-part's bunker had been prepared in only one instance. This trench was constructed after an advisor was killed while leaving his bunker during an attack.

(3) The principal lesson learned is that without proper cover from enemy fire, the defender's flexibility in moving from one position to another is curtailed seriously. Proper bunkers and trenches can save lives.

r. Naval Operations. During the past year, Naval forces have increased the tempo of riverine operations. Some of the salient lessons learned from these operations are summarized below:

(1) River Patrolling.

(a) Boats should patrol in open column with an interval that will provide maximum radar coverage and at the same time afford mutual support.

(b) Boats must conduct a truly random patrol by using some of the following techniques:

1 Drifting with the tide or current.

2 Two boats proceeding down stream at low speed with two boats some distance astern drifting with the current.

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3 Patrolling to the left or right of the center of the river.

(c) Often patrol boats have encountered small arms sniper fire from the beach. In the case of small caliber non-automatic fire at night, the best tactic is to ignore the sniping or to answer only with non-automatic small arms until the source of the sniping is pinpointed. If the sniper is within range, the grenade launcher provides an effective response.

(d) Individuals in boats must be alert to the VC tactic of employing harassing fire from one bank in order to drive a patrol craft toward the opposite bank where an ambush has been set.

(e) When fired upon from the shore by heavy weapons, individuals occupying patrol boats must respond with all available fire power and proceed at maximum speed to leave the area. The attack must be reported and requests must be made for air or artillery support. The boats should stand by out of range to assist the supporting unit in pinpointing the ambush locations.

(f) When conducting search operations, boat occupants must be alert to VC decoy tactics. An example of such a tactic is to have one boat without contraband and proper documents positioned to be searched by the patrol in order to let other craft escape.

(g) When approaching a contact, close at an angle that permits the maximum number of weapons to bear on the target. At night, approach contacts darkened at high speeds and illuminate at close range. Make sure the spotlight is aimed well before it is turned on.

(2) Boarding and Search.

(a) Patrol boats should not come directly alongside a contact, but rather, when within optimum illumination range, call the boats alongside. This allows maximum attention to be paid to covering the boats and keeping its occupants in view at all times. Patrol boats should remain in mid-stream as much as possible. If it is necessary to close a contact, do it quickly, take the contact in tow and return to mid-stream before searching.

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(b) Avoid mooring to the boat being searched. Use boat hooks or engines to stay alongside to enable a fast getaway.

(c) When searching, close attention must be paid to the drift of the boats in order to avoid grounding or being set dangerously close to a hostile shore.

(d) Check all lines leading into the water as they may have contraband attached. Although it is too time consuming for all searches, passing a line down both sides and under the keel is a good procedure for checking particularly suspicious craft.

(e) A check for a false or double bottom must be made on all craft that are searched.

(3) Offensive River Ambushes.

(a) When conducting or planning offensive ambushes, make every effort to conduct coordinated ambushes with VNN ships and RAG craft, RF/PF boat companies, National Police units and ARVN forces ashore.

(b) Make prior arrangements for air, artillery and VNN support of the ambush force in case it is attacked by a superior force.

(c) Make use of tidal and river currents to reach ambush positions with engines shut down. Noise from the boats' engines carries a long way and warns the VC of approaching craft.

(4) River Assault Group (RAG) Operations.

(a) It is mandatory in pre-planning to indoctrinate the embarked troops in the following:

- 1 Actions to be taken when ambushed.
- 2 Requirements for the wearing of life jackets and flak jackets.
- 3 The conditions of readiness required when underway.

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(b) In most cases, existing maps of the area are not up to date. When planning and conducting operations in new areas, aerial reconnaissance of the areas should be made.

(c) Ensure that each boat in an operation is clearly marked for identification from the air.

(d) Decide early in the planning where the CP will be, i.e., ashore, afloat or airborne.

(e) Ensure early coordination with the district and province chiefs. It often happens that a canal or river marks the boundary between districts or provinces.

(5) Mines in River Warfare.

(a) The VC use both command detonated and time delay water mines.

(b) The VC will utilize small craft or swimmers to place mines in rivers and waterways. It is estimated that the majority of water mines are positioned and made ready to fire in a matter of 5 to 10 minutes.

(c) The VC delay placement of mines until patrol craft and minesweepers have passed a selected target area.

(d) The VC mark locations of mines by use of a small floating device such as a coconut or stick and utilize it as a ranging device to indicate when an intended target is within lethal range. Beware of stationary floating objects.

(e) The VC emplace their water mines in the narrows of a river to limit the length of the command detonating wire and to provide for greater accuracy due to the restricted maneuverability of the intended target.

(f) For the purpose of diversion, the VC will initiate an ambush against patrol craft and minesweepers at a location other than the area to be mined.

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(g) The use of a chain drag sweep appears to be the most effective countermeasure against command detonated mines. However, the slow speed at which it must be towed presents a hazard to the towing craft and precludes its use as a precursor sweep.

(6) PBR Operations During Delta Flood Conditions.

(a) If the VC remain in their stronghold for at least a short period after the flood waters start rising, River Patrol Boats (PBRs) should be moved into the area before the water reaches flood stages to catch the VC as they move out of their strongholds.

(b) Kedging, using a grapnel, is the only way of working PBRs through old canals overgrown with moss.

(c) The usual planning factors for moving PBRs are not adequate in this type of operation. The large amount of debris, and the need to use slow speeds to avoid washing out houses and swamping boats, necessitate an abnormally slow speed during transits.

(d) Snakes are a continuing problem during flood operations. Snakes are found not only in the trees and waters, but often clog pumps. Training in recognizing poisonous varieties is necessary.

(e) Each boat should have a swimmer aboard to go over the side and clear debris which accumulates in the pumps.

(f) Since adequate information is not always available to plan routes, helicopters can be used to reconnoiter the tract and recommend deep water passages unhampered by bridges.

s. Air Force Operations. The utilization of many types of aircraft and various missions performed have resulted in the following lessons learned:

(1) Reconnaissance.

(a) Side Looking Radar (SLR). Increased emphasis on detection of water traffic has resulted in more effective use of SLR

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sensors in the RF-4C. Daily SLR missions along the coast have proved invaluable during the period Nov-Jan when poor weather has prevented day and night surveillance by other sensors. Photo interpreters consistently have reported dozens of watercraft along certain areas of the coast and in large rivers, with direction of travel indicated by time lapse coverage.

(b) Strike Reconnaissance. A plan named "combat basis" has been published that outlines procedures for providing in-progress coverage of strikes on lucrative, perishable targets. To accomplish this, reconnaissance aircraft are cycled off of refueling tankers and remain in the target area photographing the sequence of events until the target is destroyed. Photographs are being analyzed to determine the sequence of events and to develop procedures that will provide increased effectiveness when important targets are discovered.

(2) Search and Air Rescue Operations.

(a) The URC radio beeper which is employed by pilots was known to be a design which could be duplicated easily and, if recovered by NVN ground personnel, used to lure aircraft engaged in rescue operations into a trap. This event has occurred. A radio transmitter with multiple frequencies is under development. This item is to replace the single frequency URC now used by air crew members. In the interim a rescue attempt seldom is attempted before each of these factors is evaluated: voice and beeper transmittal; valid proof that a crew member is in enemy territory, in the area from which radio transmission is being received; aircraft or crew member has been sighted.

(b) Rescue operations previously had been launched in daylight but seldom at night. Whereas the policy had been to launch at first light, a recent night rescue of an A-26 air crew offers solid evidence that night rescue missions which include a flare ship can be as successful as a daylight mission.

(c) Air rescue missions previously had been predicated on availability of air escort and RESCAP aircraft before helicopters were committed to a rescue operation. More flexible tactics have proven that the availability of RESCAP aircraft is not necessarily a prerequisite to mission launch. Two recent aircrew missions were successful when helicopters were launched without cover or escort fighters.

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Experience had shown that "pickups" in these areas would be unsuccessful if the rescue mission was delayed as little as 30 minutes. In sum, it is clear that tactics must remain flexible and varied to meet such a situation.

(3) Enemy Defenses in North Vietnam.

(a) A few of the theories relevant to aircraft losses in combat operations have not been proven through analysis of empirical data. For example, enemy defenses in NVN have increased appreciably during the past year but aircraft attrition has shown a significant decrease. The F-5, a relatively small aircraft, has had an attrition rate that is comparable to larger aircraft that fly similar combat missions.

(b) Enemy anti-aircraft defenses have been shifted a number of times during the past six months; in each instance these shifts have foretold the increased value of targets or have proved the validity of intelligence reports of buildups in material or troops in the area to which the weapons were moved.

(4) Tactical Airlift.

(a) The airlift requirements of the field commanders in SEA have increased at a rapid rate. This can be attributed directly to the substantial increase in the number of maneuver battalions that have arrived and to the increased tempo of ground operations. To insure the desired degree of responsiveness to meet the ground commander's rapidly increasing requirements for personnel and material, the tactical airlift program was called upon to expand and adjust accordingly.

(b) Increasing airlift requirements plus experience gained dictated an expansion and reorganization of the airlift organization to provide the management, responsiveness and flexibility required to realize the maximum potential of available airlift. The following key actions were required:

1 Closer control of all tactical airlift forces to insure better utilization of resources. The activation of an Airlift Air Division has provided this capability.

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2 The establishment of an alert posture at tactical airlift bases, whereby two aircraft and aircrews are placed nightly on 15 minute alert to be responsive to emergency requests. Additionally, two aircraft and aircrews are placed on a back-up two hour alert to meet follow-on requirements.

(c) It was learned that procedures for processing the routine airlift requests were adequate. Emergency airlift request procedures, however, were far too slow and cumbersome, resulting in excessive system delays in responding to tactical emergencies, emergency resupply and combat essential airlift requirements. A completely new Emergency Airlift Request System was devised and tested. The validity of the overall concept was proved by the greatly improved response of airlift forces to meet ground force requirements during actual operations.

(d) Experience has shown that an effective tactical airlift force requires the full cooperation of all airlift users. Careful planning is essential, and judicious use of the priority system must be made to enable the airlift forces to be assigned where the requirements are most urgent.

(5) Tactical Air Control System (TACS): The conflict in SEA has provided the first opportunity for the combat testing of the TACS in its present form, particularly that portion established to provide close air support to the ground forces. The organization, procedures and equipment have proven capable of processing and coordinating close air support requirements more rapidly than previous systems. The TACS has shown the flexibility to be fully adaptable to the unique requirements of combat operations in SEA.

FOR THE COMMANDER:



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Major, AGC
Asst AG

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5 - Each Chief, AF Adv Gp;
Chief, US Naval Adv Gp;
Railway Security Adv Det
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Corps (1 to each Sr Adv
down to and including Bn
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10 - Each, SA, GMR, Abn Div, RF/PF
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