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HEADQUARTERS  
U.S. ARMY SECTION  
MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP  
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MAGAR-OT (CB)

SUBJECT: <sup>(6)</sup> Lessons Learned Number 14 [u]-8

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1. (U) GENERAL: Operation SON CA was an airmobile assault conducted in CAI VON and SADEC Districts, VINH LONG Sector, 33rd DTA, III CTZ, on 1 May 1962.

2. (KC) PARTICIPATING UNITS: Three Ranger companies and one Civil Guard company supported by one Marine Helicopter Squadron, one platoon of artillery (105 mm), two T-28's, and one L-19. All units were under the operational control of the 21st Division Commander.

3. (KC) MISSION: To kill or capture VC and to destroy VC installations in the area.

4. (KC) CONCEPT: To airlift simultaneously two of the Ranger companies and the Civil Guard company to the objective area. The remaining Ranger company was held in reserve, available for commitment on order. The T-28's were to provide close air support under control of a forward airguide in the L-19.

5. (KC) RESULTS: The operation was partially successful resulting in 8 VC KIA, and the capture of 25 suspects plus miscellaneous documents. The friendly forces suffered no casualties.

6. LESSONS LEARNED:

a. (KC) OBJECTIVES ONCE CLEARED OF VC SHOULD BE OCCUPIED BY FORCES ADEQUATE TO RETAIN CONTROL FOR A PERIOD FROM 3-10 DAYS OR "STAY BEHIND PATROLS SHOULD REMAIN FOR SIMILAR PERIODS TO TRAP VC WHICH MAY ATTEMPT TO REOCCUPY THE AREA. There appears to be a growing tendency on the part of RVNAF to conduct an increasing number of short duration operations. For the most part, these shorter operations are based on inadequate intelligence and do not permit the complete destruction of VC in the objective area. The optimum solution is to have all assault forces retain control of the objective area until permanently assigned

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para-military forces can assume control. When this is not possible, at least a portion of the RVNAF clearing forces should remain in the area for varying periods of time. For example, "stay behind patrols" should remain for several days to trap any VC who attempt to re-enter the area after the departure of the main body of the friendly forces. The retention of larger forces in the objective area offers the opportunity to conduct effective military civic action, e.g., public works, sick call for civilians and the like. Psychological warfare operations to include lectures, movies, distribution of literature, etc., and measures to control civilians, e.g., registration, examination of documentation, etc., may also be conducted in longer operations. For these reasons, the longer duration operation should be used whenever feasible. This should not be construed as deemphasizing the importance of short duration raid type operations which must continue when intelligence and local situation indicates. (See Lessons Learned No. 11 and T&T Paper, Chapter VII F 1.)

b. (KC) IN AIRMOBILE ASSAULTS, LANDING ZONES MUST BE CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE OBJECTIVE TO PERMIT TROOPS TO ARRIVE ON THE OBJECTIVE BEFORE VC CAN REACT. The use of helicopters has provided a means of reducing the effectiveness of the VC warning and intelligence nets. LZ's selected long distances from the objective can completely negate this advantage because of the time required to move to the objective area. There is also a loss of combat effectiveness due to fatigue when units must move excessive distances to objectives. Army/Marine Aviation liaison officers must be encouraged to recommend LZ's which are compatible with the mission and aircraft security requirements.

c. (KC) USE OF DESIGNATED RESERVE TO BLOCK RETREATING VC IS A NECESSARY MISSION FOR RESERVE UNITS. Contact, once gained, must not be lost. The use of the reserve to block escape routes or to pursue fleeing VC units is required to achieve a higher degree of success. When the tactical situation indicates that the reserve should be used in this role it must be committed without delay. Temporary reconstitution of a reserve can be accomplished from other regular and/or para-military units in the area. Such action, especially when it will permit relentless pursuit or trapping fleeing VC, should be encouraged by all advisors.

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Use of the reserve in an airmobile role will permit them to overcome the mobility of VC units and help ensure their destruction. (See Lessons Learned Nos 7 and 10).

7. (U) The foregoing is for your information and guidance.

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