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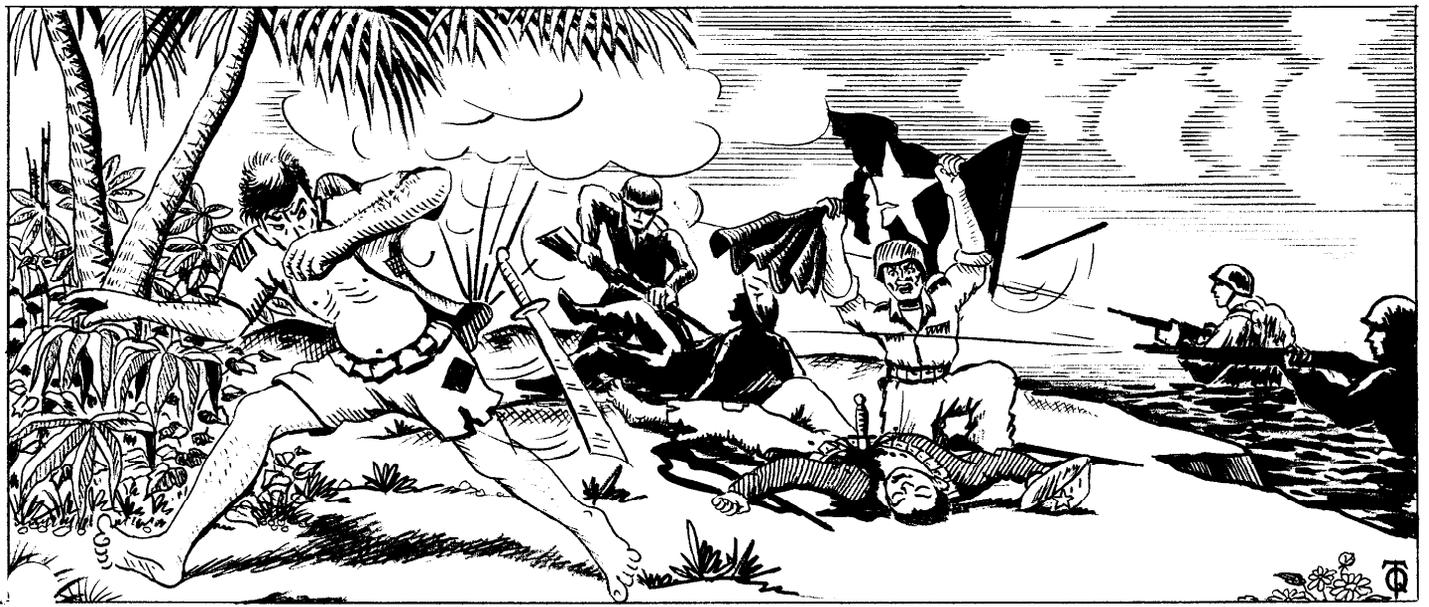
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HEADQUARTERS
U.S. ARMY SECTION
MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP, VIETNAM
APO 143, San Francisco, California

MAGR-OT (S&A)

11 March 1964

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 39: Ambush Operations (U)

TO: See Distribution

1. (U) Attached as Inclosure 1 are the latest "Lessons Learned" from counterinsurgency operations in the Republic of Vietnam.
2. (U) The information contained in "Lessons Learned" is primarily intended for use by US Advisors in Vietnam. Lessons may be of value for direct application, or they may simply reinforce existing tactics, techniques, or doctrine.
3. (C/MHA) This document is classified CONFIDENTIAL to permit freedom of expression and careful analysis of operational methods and tactics of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, to protect US advisor-counterpart relations and to deny any possible use by insurgent forces. Special handling is required under the applicable provisions of DA-DCMI(A) when released to friendly nations. Release to personnel of the Republic of Vietnam will be governed by the provisions of MACV Memo 6, 13 Oct 62 and MAAG Memo 380-4, 14 Nov 63. Sanitized versions of this information omitting dates, names of locations and participating personnel and units may be prepared for instructional purposes and/or official US Army publications.
4. (U) Comments, questions and requests for changes in distribution should be addressed to this headquarters, ATTN: O&M Division, USASAC.

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ROBERT R. PALDA
Lt Col, AGC
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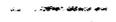
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3. (CMHA) AMBUSH OPERATIONS.

a. General. Ambush operations are dependent on current information of the VC location, movement pattern, and size of his forces. Since the bulk of VC movement is at night, most of the ambush operations are executed at night. Units patrol during the day and set ambushes at night. The size of the ambush force to be employed and method of execution depend primarily on its purpose; i.e., whether the ambush is to harass or destroy the enemy by use of a deliberate ambush or an ambush of opportunity.

b. Missions performed by ambush forces.

(1) Capturing or destroying VC attack or raid forces in the vicinity of populated areas.

(2) Ambushes utilized as a defensive measure in protecting hamlets and villages.

(3) Capturing or destroying groups of VC as they attempt to leave or re-enter their war zones.

(4) Ambushes executed in order to capture or kill VC leaders.

(5) Ambushes set by stay-behind forces in conjunction with tactical operations.

(6) In search and clear operations ambushes are set to intercept the enemy being driven into the ambush position by the searching element. This ambush mission can be used in conjunction with the "fire flush" and "rabbit hunt" techniques of searching an area.

(7) Ambushes conducted against targets of opportunity.

c. Types of ambushes. The two general types of ambushes employed are deliberate ambushes and ambushes of opportunity. They can be employed against both vehicular and personnel targets.

(1) A deliberate ambush is one in which the ambush unit is assigned a specific mission. It is normally based on detailed intelligence, to include size, composition and organization of the enemy force, and the time the force will reach certain points or areas. When this information is not available an area ambush may be established with several deliberate point ambushes located along the probable avenues of approach. Also, stay-behind patrols can establish an area ambush by placing deliberate ambush positions on several objectives that have been previously cleared. Deliberate ambushes also are employed outside strategic hamlets for defense of the hamlet and to warn of an attack.

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TO: See Distribution

1. (U) INTRODUCTION: This edition of "Lessons Learned" is concerned with ambush operations employed in counterinsurgency operations by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Previously published Lessons Learned on this subject (Numbers 10, 15 and 21) are still considered valid; the lessons covered herein should be considered as augmenting previous coverage.

2. (CMA) BACKGROUND:

a. Definition. An ambush is a surprise attack upon a moving or temporarily halted enemy with the mission of destroying or capturing the enemy force.

b. General.

(1) Based on the frequency of use by ARVN forces, the ambush can be considered as a basic technique in counter guerrilla warfare. The ambush was also a primary technique used by the British in fighting guerrillas in Malaya.

(2) The use of ambushes should not be considered as a defensive tactic. When properly planned and aggressively employed they represent an effective offensive operational means of defeating enemy forces and limiting his freedom of movement. In Vietnam, where Viet Cong (VC) movement is frequently under the cover of darkness, use of night ambushes is of great importance.

(3) The effect of a successful ambush program is not measured merely by numbers of VC casualties. Denial or restriction of freedom of movement, both during the day and the night, is a most important benefit from an ambush program because the guerrilla must be able to move in order to live. The continuous harassment, restriction of movement and inability to acquire supplies resulting from such a program have an adverse effect on guerrilla morale and efficiency.

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(2) An ambush of opportunity is one in which available information of enemy activity does not permit planning or establishing an ambush at a specific time, point or in a particular area. This type ambush is normally employed when friendly forces see the enemy first and quickly establish an ambush to surprise and destroy him. The course of action to follow is determined at the time the opportunity for ambush arises. Units must be thoroughly trained in the techniques of rapidly establishing ambush positions. Also, patrols may be directed to move to an area, establish an ambush, and ambush the first profitable target that appears. An example of an ambush of opportunity is shown at Inclosure 1.

d. Composition of the ambush force. The ambush force is normally composed of an assault element, support element and a security element.

(1) The assault element captures or destroys the enemy. It consists of the ambush commander, a killing group and a search party. The mission of the killing group is to kill or capture the VC. The mission of the search party, is to search the dead and wounded for documents, and pick up weapons and ammunition and equipment.

(2) The support element provides fire support for the assault element. This element is armed with a machine gun(s) and/or mortars and minns. The support element prevents the enemy from escaping through the front or rear of the killing zone. If a demolition team is to be employed it is a part of the support element.

(3) The security element protects the assault and support elements and covers the avenues of approach into the ambush site that the VC may use to reinforce the ambushed force. This element also covers the withdrawal of the assault and support elements and secures the rally point.

e. Appropriate ambush areas and sites.

(1) Areas. Numerous night ambushes should be laid along railroads, roads, trails and waterways which the VC must use to approach hamlets and villages. These likely approaches can be deduced if required intelligence is not known. Sites for ambushes can be found in remote areas by a close study of those locations where the VC contact the population while they are working in the fields. These ambushes should be set before dawn and prior to the arrival of the workers in the field. Since the VC leaves his safe areas to enter populated areas, ambushes also should be laid along roads and trails and approximately 15-20 kilometers out from the perimeter of the populated areas.

(2) Sites. Once the area for ambush operations has been determined the actual sites are selected. Ambushes are most effective when the site selected confines the VC to an area where he can be des-

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troyed. Natural obstacles are numerous in Vietnam for ambush positions, such as cliffs, streams, embankments, and narrow trails and roads with canals on either side. An indirect approach should be used to enter the ambush site, otherwise the VC will detect the friendly movement and employ an ambush against GVN forces. At times use of circuitous route may require three to four days to reach the ambush site. A patrol may be forced to occupy an ambush site well ahead of the arrival of the target. Patience is essential if secrecy is to be maintained. Therefore, units must be prepared to remain in ambush areas for a minimum of a week and often as long as a month.

f. Ambush formations. Typical ambush formations being employed in VN are linear, "L" shape, "V" shape, and "Pinwheel" formations. These formations can be employed effectively as deliberate ambushes or ambushes of opportunity. An explanation with sketches of these formations is at Inclosures 2 through 5.

g. Ambushes employed in defense of a hamlet. Small size ambushes are established outside a hamlet to warn of the direction of a VC attack. These ambushes are located 500 to 1000 meters from each corner or side of the hamlet and on likely VC avenues of approach. These positions are varied and moved one or more times to preclude setting a pattern. In addition to these ambush positions, ambushes are planned inside the hamlet with a planned and rehearsed course of action for each possible situation. Employment of an ambush inside a hamlet is shown at Inclosure 6 and 7.

h. Ambushes set by stay-behind forces. In search and clear operations, search forces establish ambushes in areas where the VC will most likely return. These may be ambushes of opportunity or deliberate ambushes. Inclosure 8 describes ambushes set by stay-behind forces.

i. Demolition Ambushes. Point or area ambushes may be demolition ambushes, deliberate ambushes or ambushes of opportunity using mines in conjunction with assault and security elements. Demolition personnel are a part of the support element. An example of a deliberate point ambush with mines is shown at Inclosure 9. Also an example of an ambush of opportunity with the use of mines is described at Inclosures 10 and 11. The following are considerations in planning for a demolition ambush:

(1) In selecting terrain: Choose terrain along a path, trail or road bordered by woods, brush, swamp, cuts or water. Place ambush on a hill or curve if possible. When negotiating hills or curves, VC moving elements are slowed down, therefore becoming more vulnerable to fire.

(2) Necessary information of the VC prior to selecting the site is time, terrain and movement of target.

(3) Construction of mines, fragmentation charges and demolitions (main and branch lines).

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(4) Placement of mines and/or charges. (Number of mines to employ is dependent upon size of target.)

j. Night ambush. The principles of ambush operations discussed above apply to night ambushes as well as day ambushes. However, at night some modifications may be required. Concealment is plentiful at night, but observation is limited and fire is less accurate. Therefore, weapons must be properly sited to ensure complete coverage of the killing zone with fire. Weapon fields of fire should be fixed by stakes. Positions should be closer together for better control. Ambush positions should be occupied at night but after a day light reconnaissance if feasible. Flares should be used when available to support the ambush force. Infrared weapon sights may be used by ambush forces to view personnel and objects in the dark; make it possible to fire on appropriate targets at night; and send and receive pre-determined code signals by using the light source to transmit and the telescope to receive. If required and available, luminous tape or paint markings may be used for identification.

k. Small boats used in ambushes.

(1) In partially inundated areas such as in the Delta, small boats can be used to position the ambush force and conduct rapid pursuits or withdrawals from ambush sites. Boat-transported forces are not limited to laying waterway ambushes; they can operate in any area reasonably accessible by water.

(2) Stealth in movement to position can be achieved by using paddles or poles to propel the boats, instead of motors. Boats can drift to position with the current or tidal flow. However, while paddling or drifting to position, motors should be affixed to the boats (in the up position) so that they can be used upon enemy contact. Small ambush parties can be left behind when patrols stop and dismount to observe or reconnoiter. This technique is useful only if boat forces commonly operate with frequent halts and debarkations, and if the stay-behind ambush party is small in comparison to the total force.

(3) Whether the ambush is employed to cover a road, trail, or waterway, the force normally debarks and takes up concealed positions. Boat crewmen remain in or near their craft, which are carefully concealed. The ambush security team leader is made responsible for security of the boats; boat crewmen are under his control during occupation of the ambush site.

(4) Because several hours of waiting are usually required at the ambush site, changes in level and direction of stream flow often occur. The ambush commander must anticipate these changes and plan his ambush around them. Changes in the level of the water due to tides may require

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relaying weapons in a waterway ambush. At ebb tide, boats may be stranded, or some withdrawal routes may become too shallow for use. The direction of approach of enemy boats may be based on the direction of current flow. These factors must all be considered in choosing the location, time, and method of ambush.

1. For a detailed discussion of ambush doctrine and tactics, see FM 31-16, "Counter guerrilla operations", FM 21-75 and the "Tactics and Techniques of Counterinsurgent Operations" manual.

4. (CMA) LESSONS LEARNED. The following significant lessons learned in ambush operations, although implied in the foregoing discussions, warrant restating:

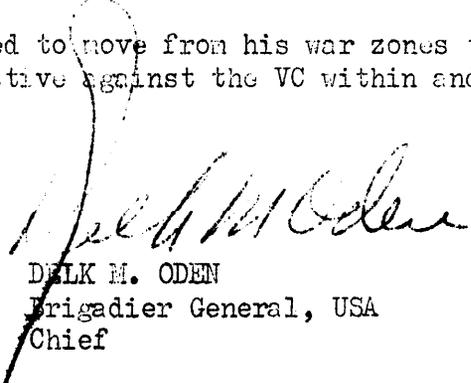
a. The ambush is the basic tactical technique in counter guerrilla warfare.

b. As ARVN regains control of areas and establishes hamlets, the VC will have to remain mobile in order to contact the local population. Therefore the VC will become more vulnerable to ARVN ambush operations. Since the VC is forced to move in small groups at night, it is necessary to employ night ambushes.

c. Night ambushes employed outside and planned inside hamlets are effective measures in defense of hamlets.

d. When the VC is required to move from his war zones to contact the people, ARVN ambushes are effective against the VC within and without the periphery of the war zone.

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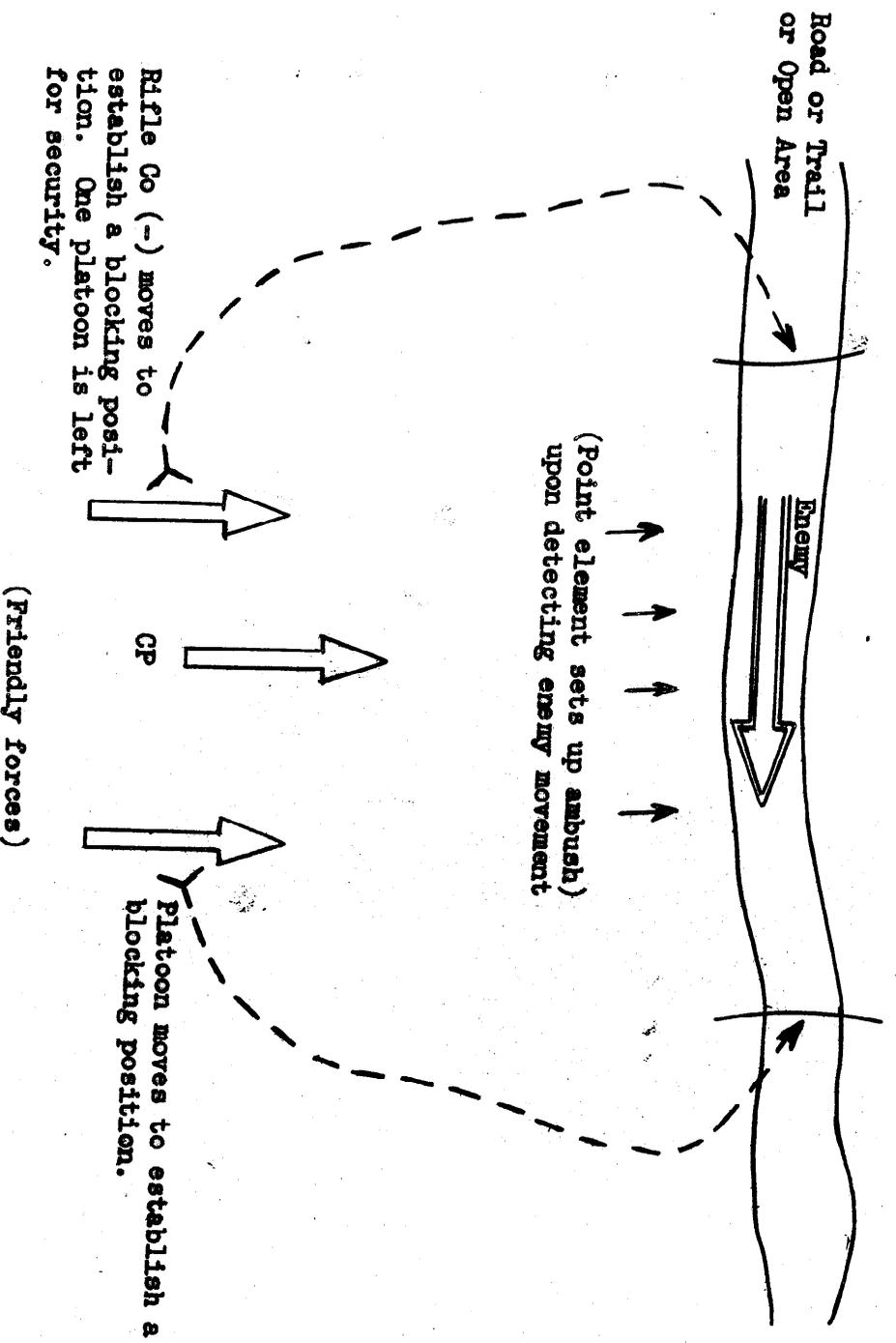

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AMBUSH OF OPPORTUNITY



Incl 1

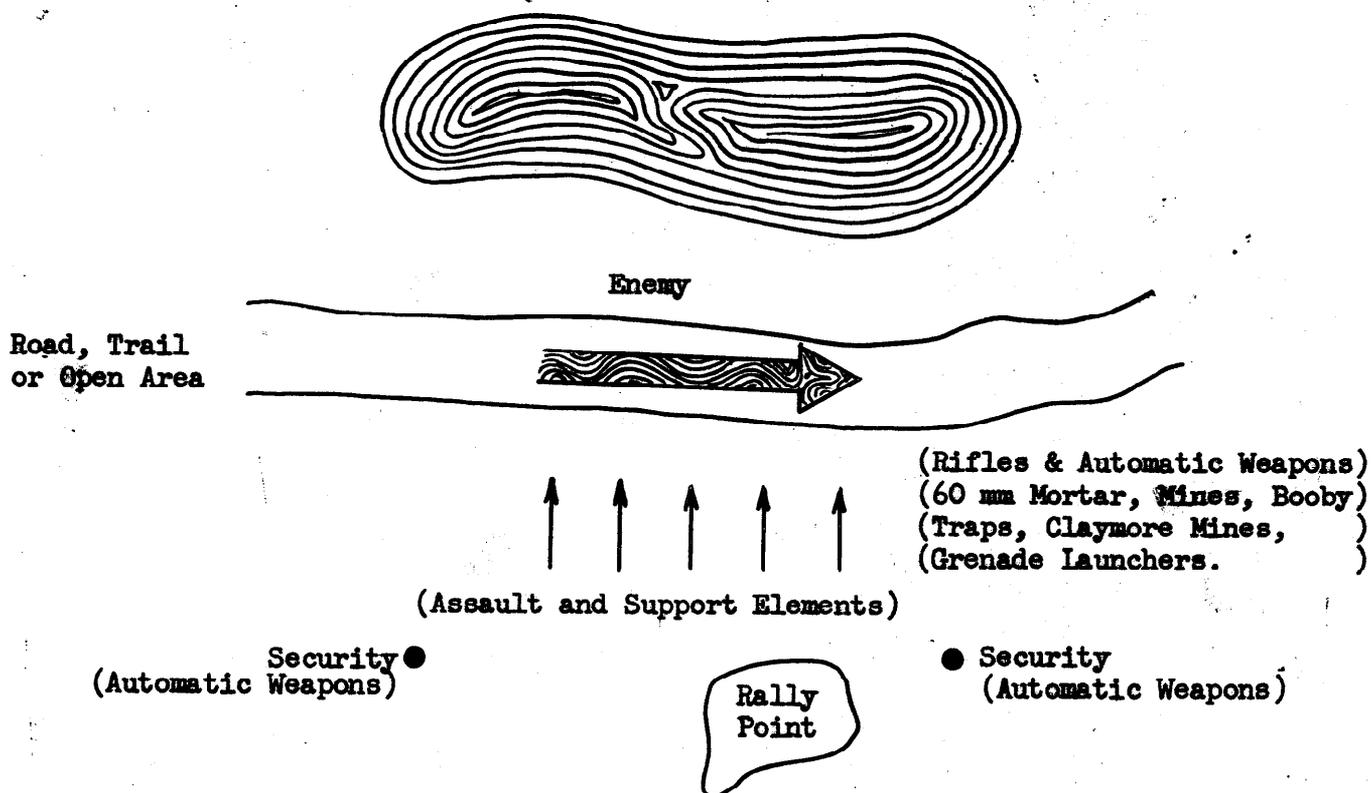
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LINEAR FORMATION



Incl 2

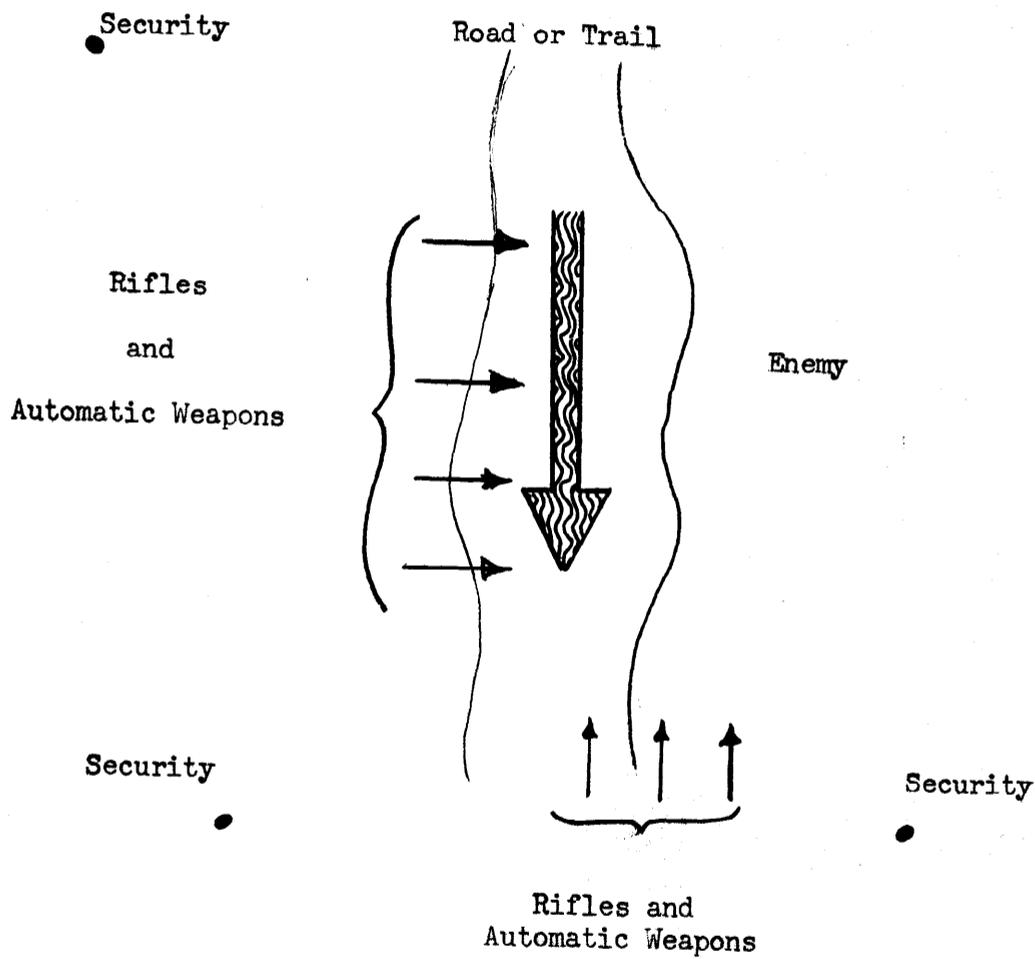
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"L" SHAPE FORMATION



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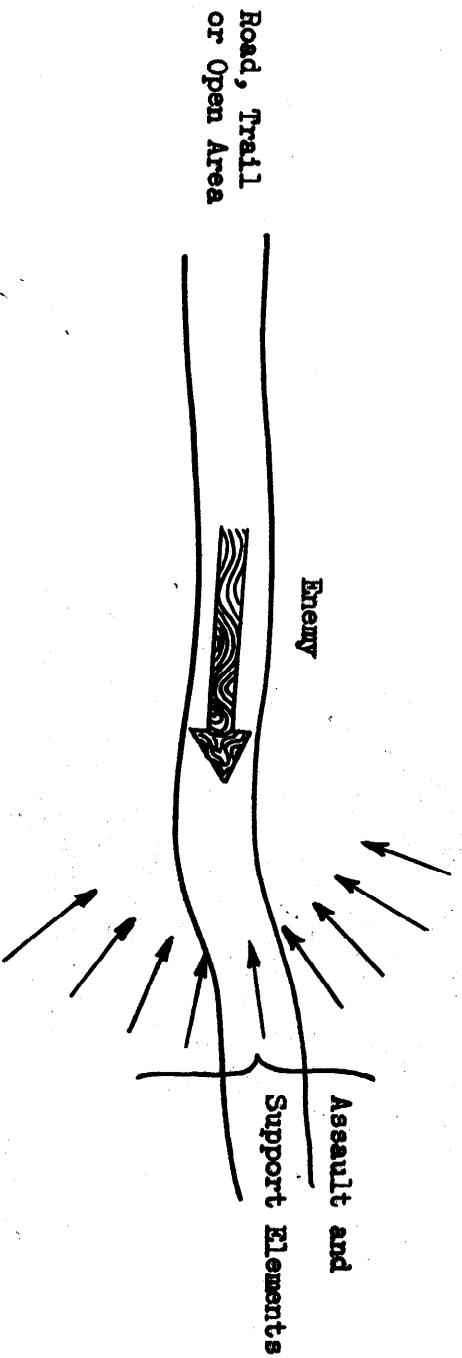
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"V" SHAPE FORMATION

● Security



● Security

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Incl 4

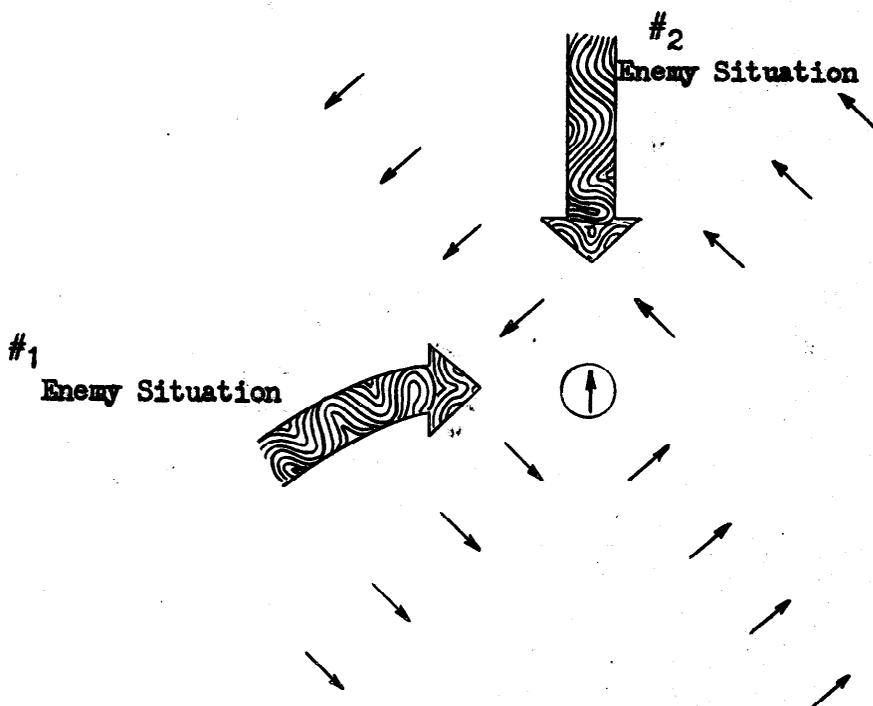
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PINWHEEL FORMATION

(COMBINATION OF "V" FORMATIONS)

May be employed at road or trail junctions, or in jungle areas.
Enemy can be ambushed from any direction.



Ambush leader

In these situations #1 and #2 assault elements switch to preselected alternate positions to engage the enemy.

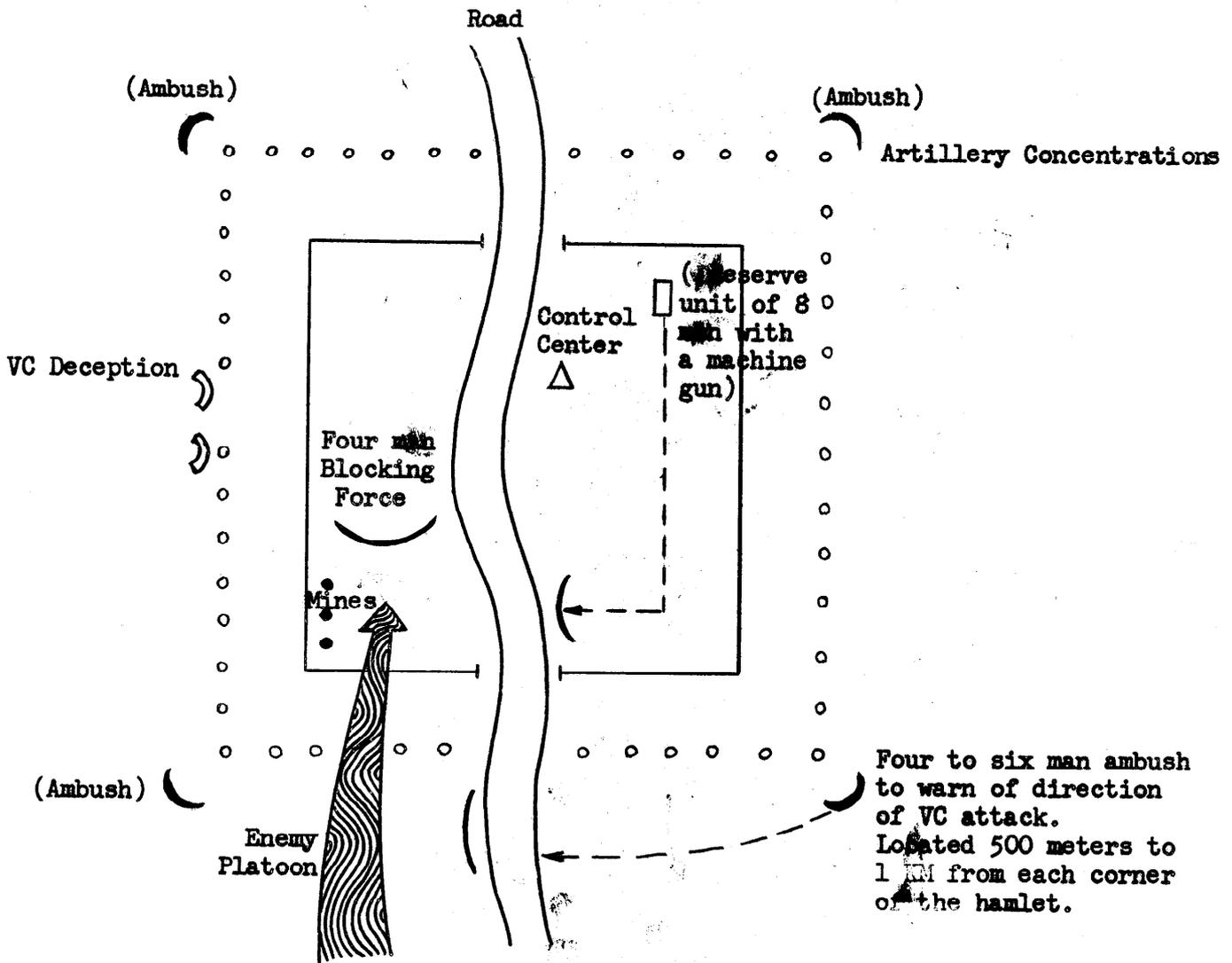
In order to provide support in all directions the support element is deployed in center of the ambush position.

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AMBUSH INSIDE HAMLET



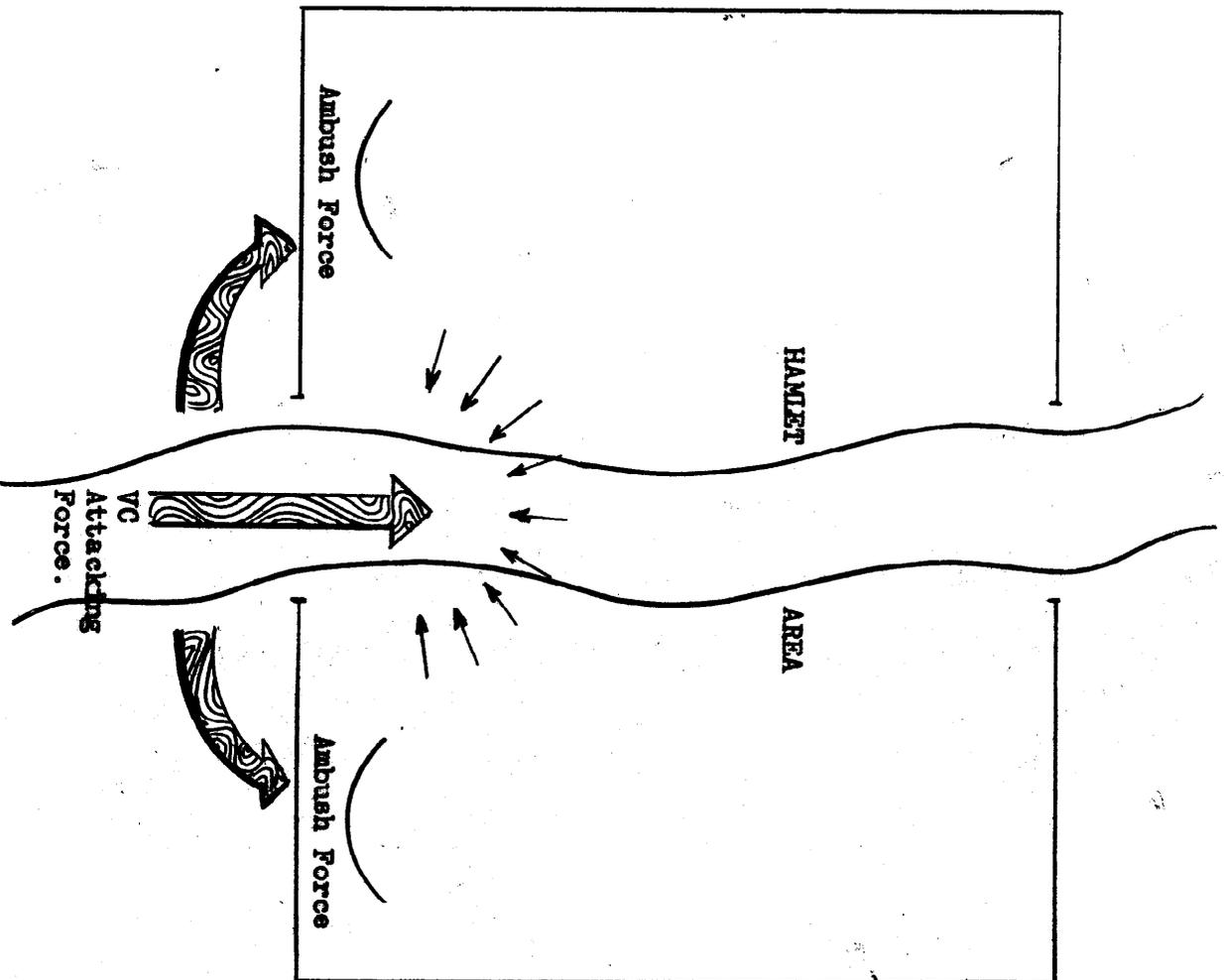
The concept of the plan is to force the VC into attempting a hasty withdrawal through the front gate. If the VC attacking force attempts to withdraw through the gate the ambush element by the gate with artillery support will destroy them. If the enemy chooses to breakout to their left the mines will stop them and they will be in a cross fire from the blocking and ambush force. If the VC tries to back-out by returning through the breach in the wall he will be stopped by artillery and the outside ambush force. This type ambush can be planned for any position or corner of the hamlet. A 12 man squad can combat a VC platoon with this effective plan.

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"V" SHAPED AMBUSH SET INSIDE HAMLET

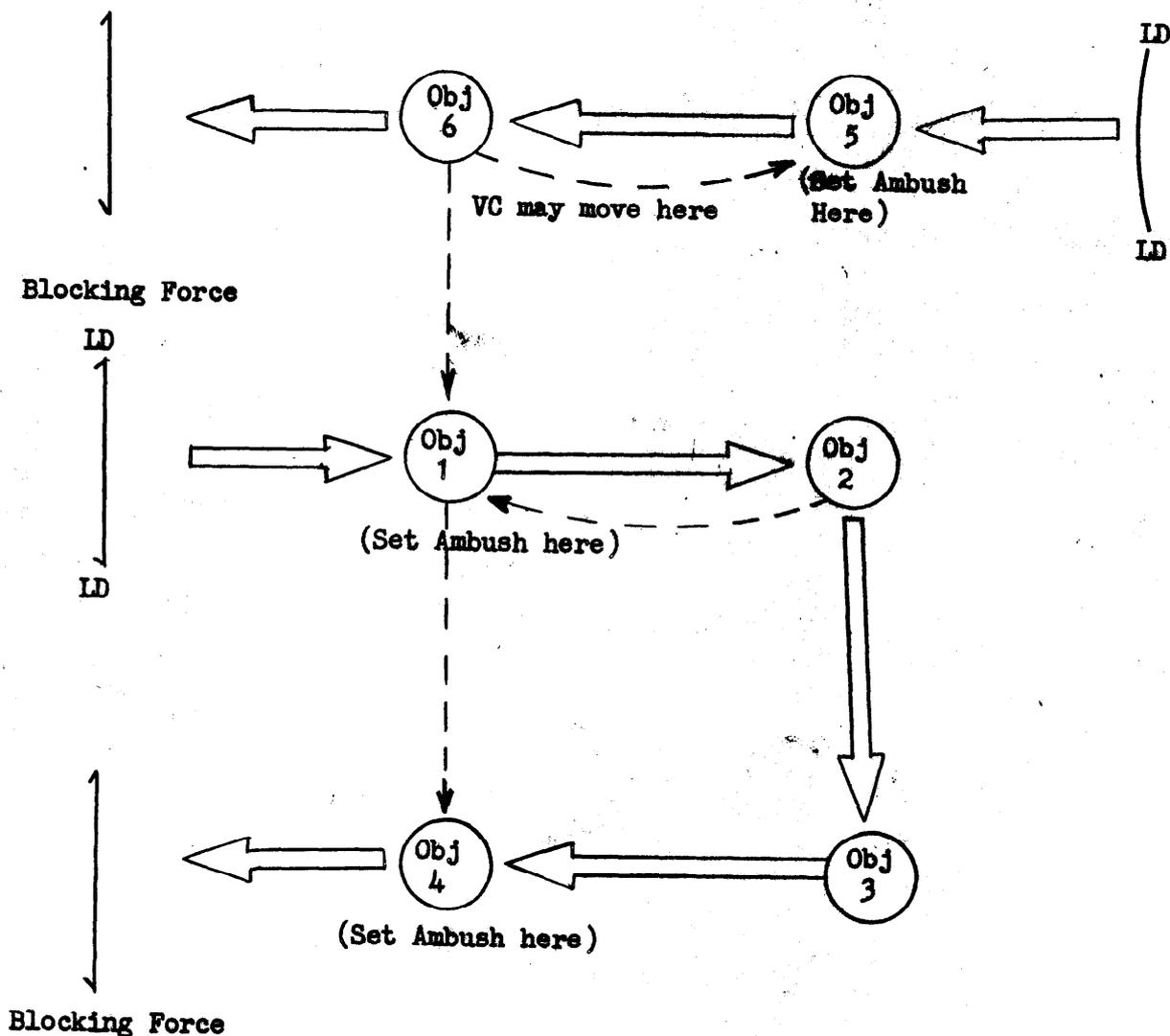


If the VC attempt to change direction the ambush forces on either side of the entrance can block and take them under fire.

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AMBUSH SET BY
STAY BEHIND FORCES



Area search forces leave small sized stay behind force to establish an ambush on various objectives or on all objectives.

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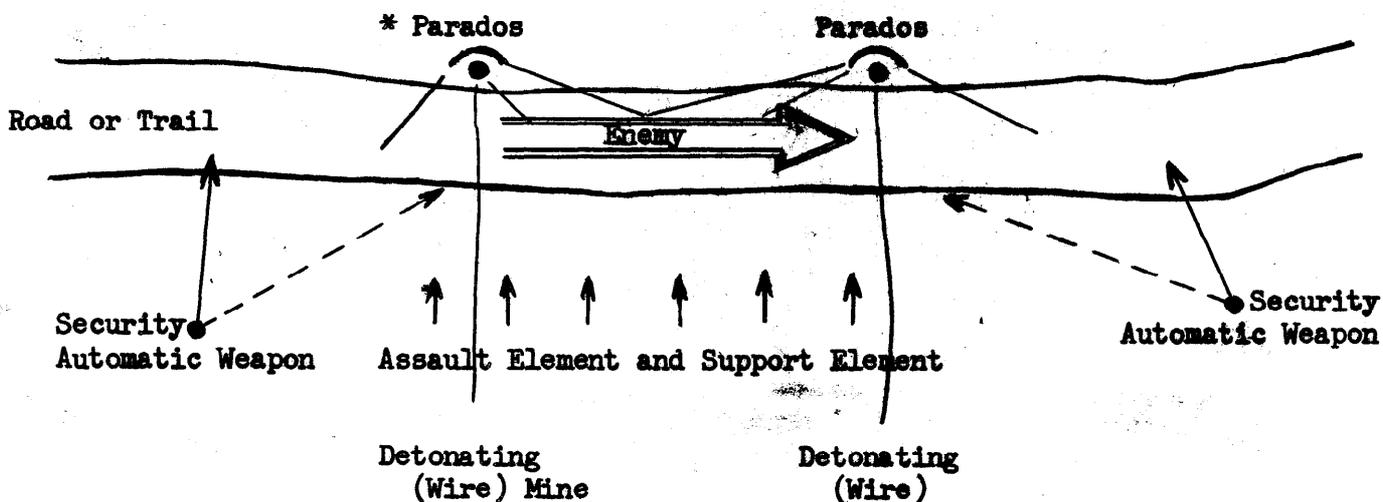
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POINT AMBUSH WITH MINES

(2-60 or 81mm Mortar shells as mines electrically detonated)



Positions of the ambush elements are flexible since they can be placed behind the mines or on the flank of the mines. The parados deflects the mines explosive power in the desired direction, into the killing zone.

* Parados. The excavated spoil or bank behind a trench or fox hole that protects personnel from fire and from being seen against the skyline. In conjunction with mines the spoil is packed behind the mine to control the direction of the explosion as it occurs

NOTE: The M-18, Claymore mine is ideal for this type ambush.

Incl 9

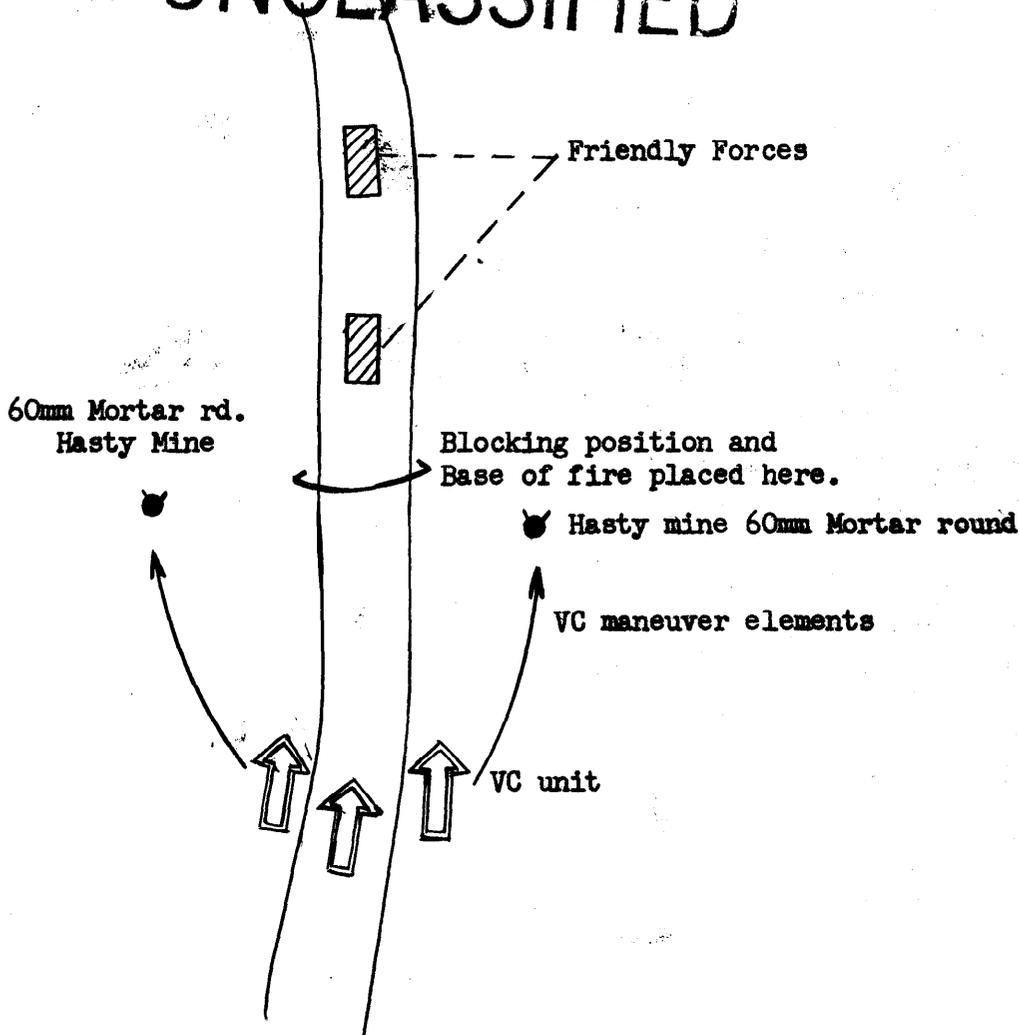
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AMBUSH OF OPPORTUNITY WITH USE OF MINES

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Ambush of opportunity executed with use of 60mm mortar rounds as mines. These mines are hastily placed as the VC maneuvers to both or either flank upon being fired on by the friendly base of fire. See Enclosure 11.

The M-18, Claymore mine can be used effectively in ambushes of opportunity.

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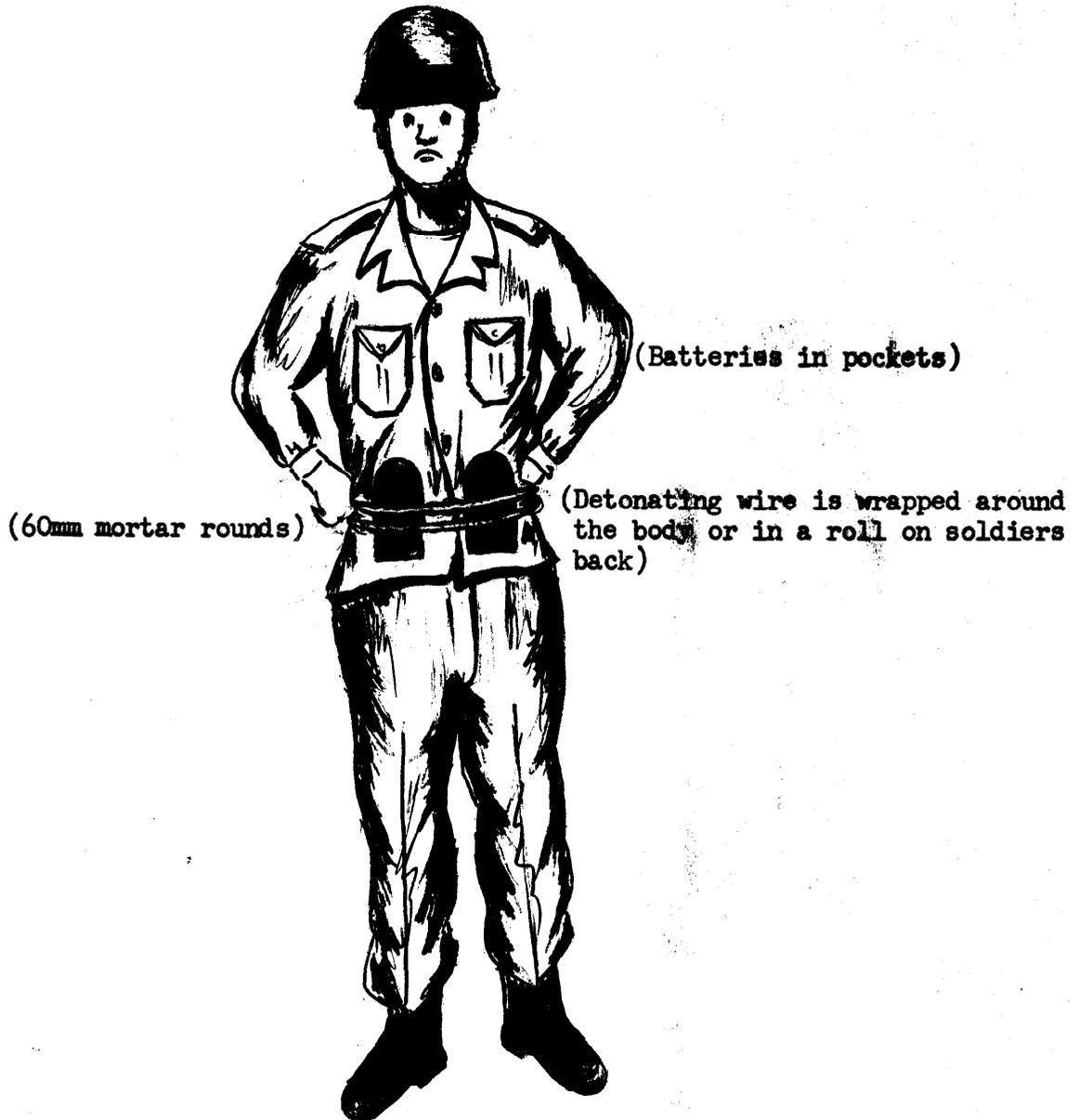
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HASTY MINE LAYING TECHNIQUE

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Mines are pre-wired except for attachment to the batteries and can be employed immediately. Mine is set and as the soldier moves to the rear the wire is unwound and prepared for firing.

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