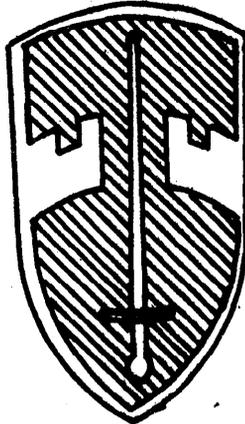


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LESSONS LEARNED

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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
APO 143, San Francisco, California

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Ser: 01361

7 October 1964

MACJ323

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 42: VC Employment of Land Mines.

TO: See Distribution

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1. (U) Attached as Inclosure 1 is 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.
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RICHARD B. STILWELL
Major General, USA
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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 42: VC Employment of Land Mines

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1. (U) INTRODUCTION: This issue of "Lessons Learned" is concerned with the VC use of land mines. It is published to:
 - a. Emphasize the fact that the employment of such weapons is increasing.
 - b. Provide information for the purpose of lessening the effects of mines.
 - c. Stimulate the thinking of all advisors on methods of countermine warfare which can be employed by US advisors and RVNAF units.

2. (CMHA) BACKGROUND:

a. The Viet Cong have long demonstrated that they are experts in the use of mines to attain terroristic or military goals. A recent study of VC mining incidents which have occurred since June 1962 has given some insight into the frequency and techniques of VC land mine employment. This study was the basis of actions which are now taking place in MACV in an attempt to lessen the impact which successful VC mine operations have on RVNAF military actions and on GVN attempts to gain the confidence of the population. Among the areas receiving additional emphasis are:

- (1) Countermine training at the ARVN Engineer School and National Training Centers.
- (2) The education of civilians in identification of VC mines.
- (3) The exploitation of civilian casualties from mines and the establishment of monetary incentives for civilians to report the presence of mines and mine fields.
- (4) Increased defoliation along principal roads to deter VC attempts to emplace mines on these roads.

b. The study indicated that the effects of VC mines have greatly increased. From an average of 21.7 reported incidents per month in 1962, the incident rate has increased to 92.4 reported incidents per month the first five months of 1964 with a corresponding increase in the casualty rate from 90 per month in 1962 to 206 per month in 1964.

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3. (CMHA) VC EMPLOYMENT TECHNIQUES: The VC employ mines with imagination and foresight. Instead of laying the usual type of mine field, the VC generally lay mines singly or in small numbers at strategic points. Mines are most often laid along routes of attack and at points suitable for ambush although some mines and boobytraps have been emplaced in a random manner with no apparent connection to a given action. Some examples of VC mine emplacement techniques are listed below:

a. Mines have been discovered in small tunnels under the road. The tunnel was dug from the side, the mine emplaced, and wires strung from the detonator on the mine to a hiding place 100-200 meters away in the underbrush. There was nothing on the road surface to indicate the presence of mines and they were only found through accidental discovery of the wires. These mines were obviously emplaced for future possible use when they would be detonated by electrical means.

b. The VC use mines in conjunction with ambushes. They are not only employed to stop a column but anti-personnel mines are placed in high grass along side the road to prevent the ambushed unit from leaving the road. These mines are positioned on the side of the road opposite the VC assault and support positions.

c. In some cases on dirt roads the VC have dug and left holes in the road surface. After ARVN has filled in the hole with fresh dirt the VC return, redig the hole, emplace a mine and refill. Since the ARVN themselves have recently filled in these holes, they are not suspicious of the fresh fill and the mine emplacement is effective.

d. In the 2d Division area the VC have reportedly mined abandoned ARVN posts. These posts which are vacated during the rainy season are reoccupied or used as storage in the dry season. The VC, knowing this, have mined and boobytrapped the structures and surrounding terrain.

e. Boobytraps are employed in many ingenious ways and there are no established patterns of employment. A pull device hooked to the inside of a door causes an anti-personnel mine to explode when the door is opened. One method is to cover a grenade placed in a hollowed-out portion of a tree with an insulting sign. When the sign is torn from the tree the grenade detonates. Another method is to boobytrap a poorly camouflaged dummy vehicle mine so that when the mine is picked up an anti-personnel mine concealed underneath explodes.

(D) TYPES OF VC MINES:

a. The arsenal of VC mines includes anti-vehicle, anti-tank, and anti-personnel mines. These weapons vary from the simple and sometimes crude device made of bamboo to the more sophisticated anti-tank mine constructed of metal parts milled to exact tolerances. Detonator methods vary from electric blasting fuzes to standard strike releases and pressure plates. Command type detonators actuated by touching attached wires to batteries are in common use. The VC make great use of captured mines, mortars and artillery shells.

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b. Illustrative examples of common VC mines are contained in the Headquarters MACV Identification Handbook of Weapons and Material in the Hands of the Viet Cong, January 1964, and in the MACV Identification Handbook of VC Mines and Explosives, First Edition.

5. (U) ACTIONS TO MINIMIZE THE MINE THREAT: There are several actions which can be taken to minimize the effects of VC mines. Some of them are well known but can bear repeating.

a. Sandbag Vehicles. The use of sandbags in the floors of vehicles can be an effective protection against blast and fragments from pressure activated mines. On 30 August 1964, a US officer and a US enlisted man traveling in a 1/4 ton truck detonated a land mine in Hau Nghia. Because the vehicle had been sand-bagged only minor injuries resulted, although the vehicle was destroyed.

b. Move in Dispersed Formation. On 23 August 1964, an RF Company detonated a mine which resulted in 4 KIA and 10 WIA. Had this unit been moving in a well dispersed formation the number of casualties from this one mine would undoubtedly have been less.

c. Enlist the Aid of Civilians. A campaign conducted in the 7th Division area in August to obtain civilian aid in discovering possible VC mine sites resulted in the recovery of several emplaced VC mines.

d. Thoroughly Reconnoiter Routes of March. There have been numerous reports of ambushes being initiated by command or mechanically detonated mines. Thorough reconnaissance of the route of march through the use of advance guards and helicopters would have resulted in the discovery of the mines and disruption of the VC ambush plan in many cases.

e. Stagger Convoy Schedules. When convoy movements are subject to mining, the agency arranging the move should coordinate with the local commander to determine the advisability of staggered schedules as a defense against mines. Patterned movements of either time or route invite the VC to effectively employ mines.

6. (U) LESSONS LEARNED:

a. The VC have increased their use of land mines to produce casualties and initiate ambushes.

b. Advisors and RVNAF personnel must be constantly on the alert to discover and avoid VC mines through the use of sound reconnaissance and tactical procedures.

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