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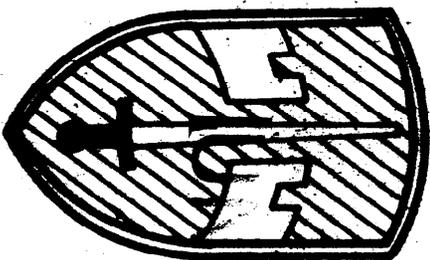
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*for  
Capt. Dodge*

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# LESSONS LEARNED

# 45

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HEADQUARTERS  
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM  
APO San Francisco 96243

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Serial #0178  
12 February 1965

MACJ 323

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 45: Viet Cong Tunnels

TO: See Distribution

1. (U) Attached is the latest "Lessons Learned" from counterinsurgency operations in the Republic of Vietnam. The information contained therein 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.

2. (CMHA) Portions of the attached document are 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 Directive 380-4, 11 Apr 64. 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, Navy or Air Force publications.

3. (U) Comments, questions and requests for changes in distribution should be addressed to this Headquarters, ATTN: J323.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

1 Incl  
as

  
RICHARD G. STILWELL  
Major General, USA  
Chief of Staff

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MACJ 323

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 45: Viet Cong Tunnels

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1. (U) INTRODUCTION: It has long been recognized that the VC make extensive use of tunnels to hide personnel and equipment. Often these tunnels are part of an elaborate underground system that took hundreds of man-hours to build and form the basis of the VC defense in an area. The purpose of this issue of "Lessons Learned" is to discuss:

- a. VC construction of tunnels.
- b. A successful operation to destroy a tunnel system in Binh Duong Province.

2. (CMHA) BACKGROUND: Tunnels have been used as caches and secret refuges for VC individuals and units since the beginning of the insurrection. Tunnels were used extensively by Viet Minh forces which opposed the French as early as 1945 and now almost all VC controlled areas have elaborate underground systems and it is estimated that such systems exist in contested and GVN controlled areas as well. Not only do these tunnels afford a safe haven to pursued forces, but they can be a means of severely wounding ARVN pursuers who are unfamiliar with the spike pits and booby traps installed inside the entrances.

3. (CMHA) TUNNEL CHARACTERISTICS: Most underground tunnels are not constructed for use as active defense installations but are normally used as hiding places. Others, however, contain concealed firing positions and provide effective defense against unwary aggressors. The following characteristics are common to all VC tunnel systems:

- a. All entrances to the tunnels are camouflaged so as to merge with the natural surroundings.
- b. Traps, spike pits and mines are placed near the tunnels in dense patterns to discourage attacking combat troops in their attempts to locate the tunnels.
- c. Booby traps are normally placed inside the tunnels near the entrance and false passages are excavated to deceive troops who successfully enter the tunnel.
- d. Wooden lids, strong enough to support the earth covering them and not fall in when accidentally stepped on, form the lids for tunnel entrances.

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e. Spoil earth removed from the tunnel is disposed of by spreading it evenly over the surrounding area and covering it with leaves, grass and twigs.

f. On the perimeter of areas where ground tunnels exist, VC units and guerrillas organize combat structures and trenches to prevent or impede ARVN troop movement into the area.

g. A typical tunnel is several hundred meters long and consists of a main shaft, connecting corridors, multiple entrances and several air vents. No lighting is installed. (See Appendix 1).

4. (CMHA) SUCCESSFUL TUNNEL DESTRUCTION OPERATION: The following is a report of an operation conducted by elements of the 5th Division in Binh Duong Province in late December 1964. The plan of operation was developed jointly by the regimental commander and his advisor.

a. Task Organization:

8th Regimental Headquarters  
1st Battalion, 8th Regiment  
5th Division Recon Company  
Engineer Company  
1 Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Regiment (Heliborne Reserve)

b. Supporting Forces:

L-19 (Observation and radio relay)  
Armed Helicopters  
Artillery (3 Platoons, 105mm Howitzers)  
Fighter Aircraft

c. Mission: Capture VC district committee members; search and destroy VC installations and tunnels in the area of operations.

d. Concept of Operations: 1st Battalion, 8th Regiment was to attack from the south, while the 5th Recon Company was to move by boat initially and then attack overland from the north. These units were reinforced by an engineer company which was to assist in destroying tunnels and installations in the area. One company of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Regiment was designated as a heliborne reserve. Artillery and armed helicopters were on-call.

e. Execution:

(1) 15 December 1964: Attack proceeded as planned. All elements converged on assigned objectives by 0730. Light resistance was encountered but

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by 0800 all objective areas were occupied. Upon search and disclosure, demolition parties detonated TNT charges (15-25 lbs) to seal off tunnel entrances that had been found. (A total of 200 lbs of TNT was expended on this task). These explosions revealed other entrances by puffs of smoke and dust. Guards were placed over these. The remainder of the day was devoted to searching for additional tunnels. Late that afternoon an additional 400 lbs of TNT was delivered to the objective area by UH-1B helicopters.

(2) 16 December 1964: Destruction of tunnels continued. Shafts were dug to undamaged portions of tunnels where dead Viet Cong and weapons were found. Security over known entrances was maintained.

(3) 17 December 1964: Early in the morning, security guards killed, wounded, or captured several Viet Cong attempting to escape from tunnels. Their escape attempt coincided with heavy Viet Cong small arms fire from outside the defensive perimeter. During the day destruction of tunnels continued. At 1200 hours a small bulldozer arrived and began demolishing Viet Cong fortifications in the area. Several more Viet Cong bodies and weapons were recovered from tunnels.

(4) 18-19 December 1964: Demolition of tunnels and fortifications continued. Late on 19 December all elements moved two kilometers south of the objective area and set up a perimeter defense in the vicinity of XT 760 152.

(5) 20 December 1964: Several tunnels were demolished at the new location. Units then returned to their home stations.

f. Results:

KILLED      WOUNDED      MISSING OR CAPTURED

(1) Personnel

(1) ARVN	1	3	0
(2) Viet Cong	21	2	5*

(\*Includes the 2 wounded)

(2) Weapons

(1) ARVN weapons lost:	None
(2) Viet Cong weapons captured:	8 Russian Type Rifles 1 Pistol

(3) Material

(1) Lost:	None
(2) Captured:	

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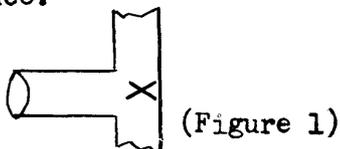
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300 lbs plastic explosive  
150 Hand grenades  
1 105 mine  
30 AP mines  
7 BAR magazines  
500 Kilo rice

5. (CMHA) LESSONS LEARNED: The following lessons were learned as a result of the above operation:

a. Most main tunnels in the area of operation had side tunnels about 8 to 10 feet from the main entrance:



The most effective method of destroying these tunnels is to place the explosive at the intersection of the tunnels (marked by X in figure 1 above). This allows the blast and shock waves to travel further.

b. After the tunnels have been demolished, new entrances should be dug in the vicinity of the blast in order to search the tunnels thoroughly for results.

c. Security guards should be maintained over tunnel entrances 24 hours a day while the unit remains in the area instead of only during blasting operations. This not only allows friendly units to capture or kill Viet Cong attempting to escape, but also lessens sniping and grenading incidents in the area of operations.

d. Perseverence pays off. Units conducting this type of operation should remain in the area long enough to search thoroughly and destroy all tunnels found.

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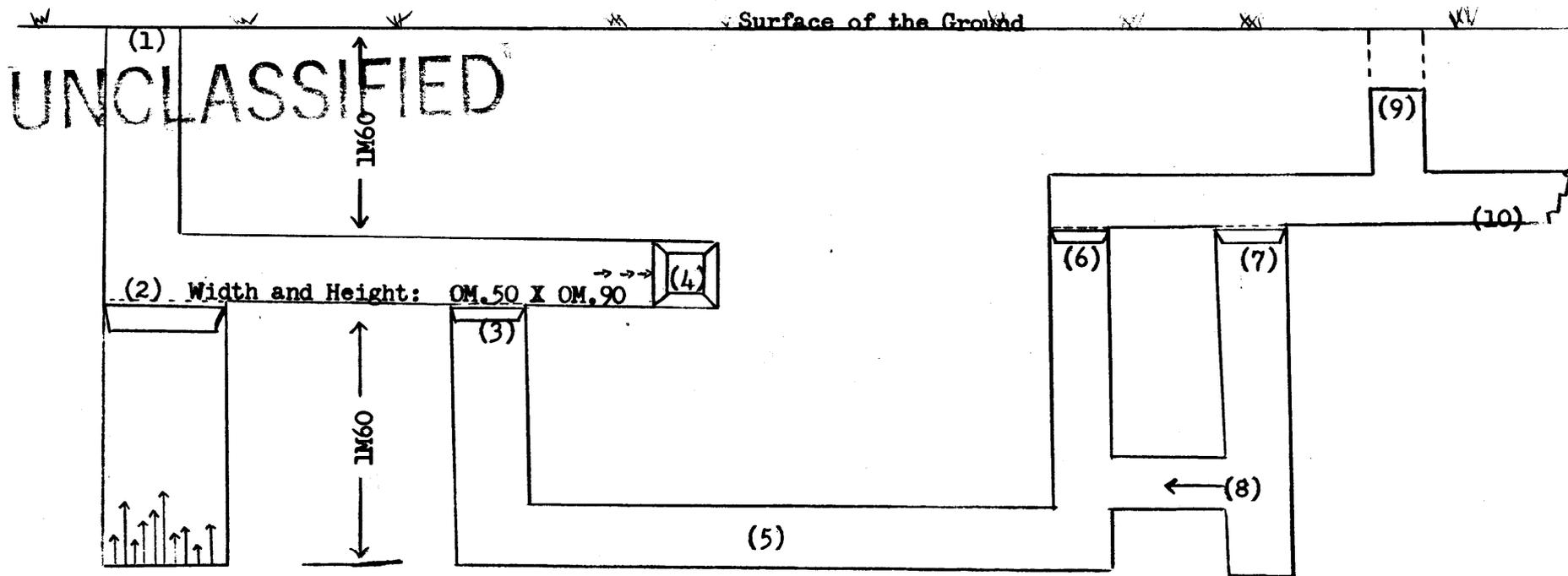
APPENDIX 1: Sketch showing connecting passages.  
(Cut view)

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1. Entrance of the underground tunnel.
2. Cover of the spike pit. Cover is removed after tunnel is occupied.
3. Cover of the "lower tunnel." When the cover was shut, RVN troops would only find the false tunnel (4).
5. "Lower Tunnel"
6. Entrance to escape to the upper tunnel in case the lower tunnel is discovered.
7. Cover of the tunnel where VC could throw out javelins when RVN troops came in range.
8. The javelin. These could be thrown out by man or ejected by a spring.
9. Exit, only dug out when necessary for escape.
10. Connection to main tunnel, only dug out when necessary for escape.

() Cover of passage, made of wood and earth.)

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*per Capt Hadger*  
*3/25/65*

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