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**LESSONS
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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
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MACJ 323

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 48, Combat Tips II

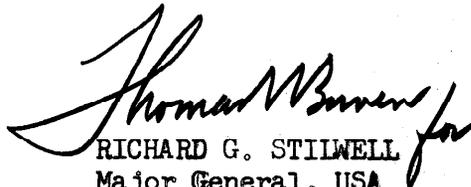
TO: See Distribution

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:


RICHARD G. STILWELL
Major General, USA
Chief of Staff

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APO San Francisco 96243

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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 48, Combat Tips II

TO: See Distribution

1. (U) INTRODUCTION: This issue of Lessons Learned is the second of a series entitled "Combat Tips". The items contained herein are gleaned from after action and similar reports. Although they are separate items and are limited in scope, each has a valuable lesson which will aid the advisor in the performance of his duty.

2. (CMHA) GROUND OPERATIONS:

a. This item stems from the activities of a company of the 37th Ranger Bn engaged in a road clearing operation in Phuoc Long Province. After the company had moved from its camp in the morning, the VC, evidently estimating that the unit would return over the same route later in the day, established an ambush in the edge of the jungle overlooking the road. The ranger company did, in fact, return over the same road. However, it was deployed with two platoons abreast each moving 150 yards off the sides of the road. The company headquarters and the other platoon followed in trace behind the right lead platoon. At 1400 hours, the lead platoon on the right discovered the left flank of the ambush. The platoon sergeant immediately deployed his platoon and began firing at the VC. The company commander ordered the trailing platoon to swing to the right and assault the ambush while the other two platoons and the mortar section supported by fire. After 30 minutes the VC retreated. A total of seven VC were killed and three carbines captured. There were no friendly casualties.

LESSON LEARNED: The company commander was prepared for an ambush and had dispersed his unit on the march and provided for an adequate reserve. His quick response and sound tactics turned a possible VC victory into a defeat. Units must be prepared for an ambush at any time, especially while moving. Some of the more common tactical errors committed by RVNAF units on the march and the type of corrective action which should be taken include:

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(1) Troops not alert and carrying weapons ready to fight.

Soldiers stroll along, unaware of anything taking place around them. Weapons are carried on the shoulder or slung. Sights are set at zero clicks elevation. A basket, a bag of rice, live chickens or some other item is frequently suspended from either or both ends of the weapon.

Corrective Action: Soldiers must be fully briefed on the operation and latest intelligence. They must be assigned a sector of observation and fire and frequent checks made to insure they are alert. Weapons must be carried at the ready, with sights properly set on their battlefield zero. Rations and other items should be placed in, or tied to, the combat pack. Inspections must be held to insure that only essential items are carried.

(2) Troops not maintaining proper intervals. Soldiers move along in bunches, one or two meters apart. Most cannot fire their weapon without hitting their own troops. A mine or grenade detonation causes several casualties. It is impossible to identify a platoon or a squad within a company as intervals are not maintained between sub-elements.

Corrective Action: During daylight, individual soldiers must maintain at least a 10 meter interval. They must have room to observe their assigned sector and be able to fire their weapon without endangering friendly troops. Twenty to 30 meters should be maintained between squads and at least 50 meters between platoons. During periods of reduced visibility and darkness the interval between individuals and units may be reduced.

(3) All around security not established on the move. A company or battalion frequently moves on a road without a security element to the front, rear and flanks. No warning of presence of VC is possible. When contact is made with the enemy, the main body is immediately brought under fire and usually pinned down.

Corrective Action: Companies and battalions must have elements posted to the front, rear and each flank. Security elements must check every area within small arms range of the main body which could conceal an enemy force. When VC are observed, the main body must be warned by radio, hand and arm signals or warning shots. Security elements must immediately place fire on the enemy, while elements of the main body maneuver to assault.

b. Frequently after action reports are received which indicate that the planning phase of operations is not conducted in a thorough manner. Typically this results in deficiencies such as those indicated below:

(1) Confusion results because all necessary personnel are not aware of the radio frequencies to be employed.

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(2) Although usually available, fire support means are not used because of lack of or improper coordination.

(3) Conflicts often occur between ARVN and local troops in the operational area because coordination was not performed with local sector headquarters as well as the superior unit headquarters.

LESSON LEARNED: Operational planning involves many aspects, all of which are important to success. The advisor is often extremely busy prior to an operation and it is not unusual for him to overlook one or more of the varied operational requirements. For this reason, advisors should prepare and utilize a simple operations checklist during the planning phase. An example of such a checklist is attached as inclosure 1. This checklist is not meant to be all-inclusive and advisors should add to or otherwise modify it as appropriate.

c. Information indicates that repeated reconnaissance of primary helicopter landing zones (LZs) is being conducted by some ARVN unit commanders. This practice may give the VC a premature advantage and allow time to plan, prepare and execute an ambush at the critical time and place (the LZ).

LESSON LEARNED: As a key security measure, several alternate LZs should be selected in the preliminary phase of a heliborne operation. Consideration for selection of the primary LZ should be delayed until as late as possible. As a general rule, the primary LZ should not be selected more than eight hours previous to L-hour.

3. (CMHA) NAVAL OPERATIONS:

a. On a recent operation, RAG 24 was assigned the mission of lifting one engineer company from Thu Dau Mot to Phu Hoa Dong and then returning with the 35th Ranger Battalion. The waterway between the two points is in heavily infested VC territory. During the initial transit to Phu Hoa Dong, harassing fire was directed at the column of RAG boats despite prearranged artillery fire and L-19 air observation. Although the convoy arrived at the landing site near Phu Hoa Dong at 0925, the rangers did not appear for embarkation until 1120. The boats were loaded by 1200, but an additional 15 minute delay ensued because members of the boat crews were foraging for fruit.

LESSONS LEARNED: Troop lift operations should be scheduled in such a manner so as to ensure the simultaneous arrival of boats and troops at the point of embarkation. In addition, boat crews should not be allowed to mill around on the beach or stray from the area. Periods of time spent by boats in insecure areas awaiting troops to arrive for embarkation or for

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boat crews to return to their stations affords the VC additional time to set up ambushes or lay mines.

b. Elements of the 22nd RAG participating in an operation in Long An Province were attacked by an estimated VC company. The RAG group counter-attacked and within five minutes the engagement was terminated. During the time of contact, one monitor was hit by a 57mm recoilless rifle shell on its starboard side. However, the craft reported no serious damage and the group continued on its assigned mission. Ten minutes later, the monitor that had been hit began sinking by the stern and within a minute had rolled over on its port side and sunk. Investigation revealed that the boat had been hit four feet from the stern at the water line producing a hole about eight inches in circumference and that the check for damage immediately following the VC attack failed to include below deck spaces.

LESSON LEARNED: Proper and timely damage control procedures would have prevented the monitor from sinking. VNN personnel should be imbued with importance of conducting a thorough survey for damage after receiving hits from enemy fire.

c. Two motor junks of Coastal Force Division 36 encountered a suspicious motor boat at the mouth of the Bassac River. In attempting to overtake the boat, both junks proceeded in close column formation. As the VNN junks drew close, the motor boat commenced firing with recoilless rifles. The leading junk immediately received multiple hits which threw the crew into complete confusion. The rear junk received near misses. The lead junk was unable to fire upon the fleeing motor boat because personnel were not manning the machine guns mounted on the bow and stern. A crewman from the second junk leaped aboard and commenced firing on the Viet Cong boat. Subsequently, this junk was sunk and a number of casualties were suffered.

LESSON LEARNED: Junks in company investigating possible VC craft should be well dispersed when approaching the suspected craft in order to provide mutual support and prevent incidents as described above. Crewmen must be at their guns prepared to deliver instantaneous fire.

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OPERATIONS CHECK LIST

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
1. VN units briefed by counterparts.			
2. US Advisor w/ea company size unit.			
3. US Advisors briefed.			
4. Arty. support available and laid on.			
5. FOs with units Maneuver Blocking			
6. L-19, US radio relay laid on.			
7. L-19, (VNAF) w/FAC laid on.			
8. Air cover (if convoy move) laid on.			
9. Reserve planned. Air lift to commit Convoy to commit			
10. Alternate plan prepared.			
11. Command channels understood by all.			
12. Air lift laid on. Leader briefed Pre strike Supression No. of aircraft _____ Flying time. _____			

	<u>Y ES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
Gassing point _____ coordination made w/refuel area.			
Re-arming point _____ coordination made w/re-arm area.			
Number of lifts _____			
TD time			
Lift 1. _____.			
2. _____.			
3. _____.			
4. _____.			
13. UTT support for airlift. Leader briefed. Observers available. Observers pick-up plan. Observer briefed by VN.			
14. UTT support for maneuver/ blocking units. Leader briefed. Observers available. Observers pick-up plan. Observers briefed by VN.			
15. Airborne C&C chopper laid on. Participants Commander (VN) Senior Advisor G-3 (VN) G-3 Advisor ALO (US)			
16. VNAF laid on. Airborne Ground Alert			
17. Release times programmed. UTT's _____. C&C - _____. L-19 (US) _____. VNAF _____.			

	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
18. Transportation from operational area laid on. Aircraft. Trucks Cover (Arty & Air).			
19. Maps issued to Advisors			
20. SOI issued to Advisors and supporting elements.			
21. Psywar activities included.			
22. Civil Action plan included.			
23. Coordinated effort with National Police			
24. Deception plan.			
25. Plan presented to Corps			
26. Plan coordinated with local SOIC.			