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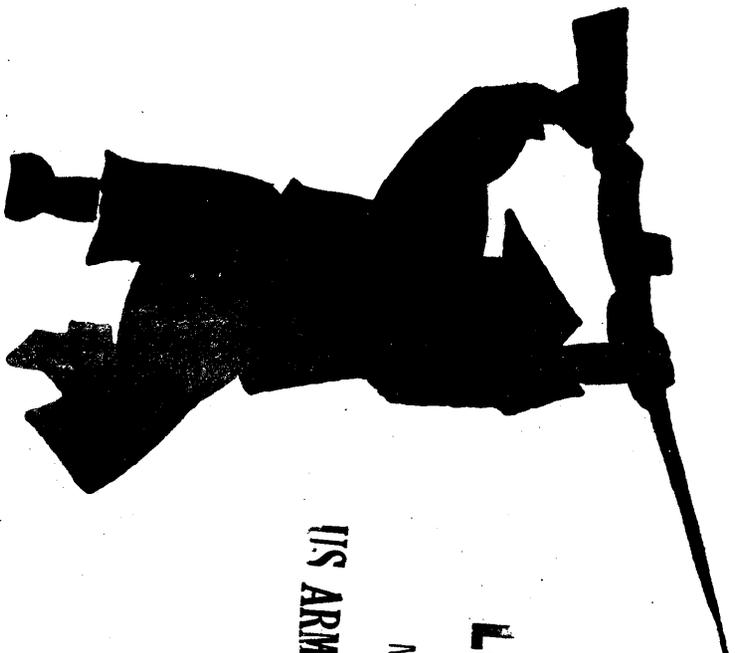
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# LESSONS LEARNED 50

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HEADQUARTERS  
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM  
APO US FORCES 96243

Serial No. 0510  
13 April 1965

MACJ 323

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 50, Naval Conduct of Amphibious Operations (U)

TO: See Distribution

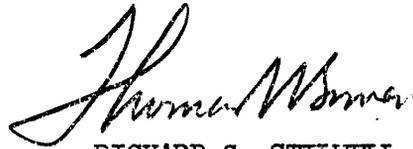
1. (U) Attached as Inclosure 1 is the latest "Lessons Learned" from counterinsurgency operations in the Republic of Vietnam.

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.

3. (CMHA) Attached 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 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.

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

FOR THE COMMANDER:



for RICHARD G. STILWELL  
Major General, USA  
Chief of Staff

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1. (CMHA) INTRODUCTION: Amphibious operations conducted in Vietnam bear little resemblance to the massive landings carried out by US Naval Forces in World War II, or, on occasion, in Korea. Although the opportunity to conduct waterborne operations is ever present, the orientation of RVNAF leaders toward ground warfare and lack of appreciation for Naval capabilities has precluded extensive use of the VNN's amphibious capability. Thus, training for amphibious operations has not been emphasized. Amphibious landings, for the most part, have been of the administrative variety, transporting troops from Point A to an unopposed landing at Point B. Offensive waterborne operations utilizing landing ships such as LSTs, LSMs, LSILs, LSSLs and the smaller LCMs and LCVPs have been conducted. Fortunately these landings were largely unopposed. Had opposition been encountered, the errors committed during the landing and debarkation phases of the operations might have produced disastrous results for friendly forces. This lesson describes two such offensive type amphibious landings. It will be noted that many basic principles which should have been considered were ignored. The lessons set forth provide solutions to basic problems which must be overcome if amphibious operations are to be properly conducted.

2. (CMHA) OPERATION THANG LONG 05: (Vietnamese Navy Participation) conducted 13-16 March 1964 at Loi Quan Is., Go Cong S.Z.

a. Units Participating in the Amphibious Phase.

(1) Naval

LST 501, Operation Command Post; RAG 22, Northern Blockade and Amphibious Landing Group; RAG 21, Southern Blockade and Amphibious Landing Group; PC 06, PGM 608 and Coastal Force Junks, Eastern Blockade Group and Amphibious Landing Group composed of LCMs 539 and 536 and LSMs 400 and 401.

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(2) Non-Naval

4th Marine Bn - embarked in LSM 400  
52d Ranger Bn - embarked in LSM 401  
1st Inf Bn, 3d Regt - embarked in RAG 21  
2d Troop, 6th Cav - 15 APC embarked in LCU 539 and 536  
Two fighter bombers and 3 L-19s

(3) Other Forces: Two marine companies, 7th Intelligence and Reconnaissance Co, 105 & 155 artillery, 10 helicopter transports assigned to lift the 1/52 Inf Bn and one airborne battalion in reserve at Tan Hiep.

b. Intelligence: Loi Quan Is. serves as an assembly and distribution point for weapons and equipment moving from Kien Hoa to central and eastern South Vietnam. The VC, because of the island's strategic location, have established training camps, supply depots and medical aid stations. The VC 514th Bn, consisting of 500 men, and the 150th Transportation Bn with a strength of 200 men, reportedly occupied the island.

c. Naval Mission: To provide amphibious lift to 3 infantry battalions and one APC company and to establish an effective blockade around the island. In carrying out the mission, the force was to conduct an amphibious assault, utilizing surprise, while naval units formed a blockade to capture or kill VC attempting to escape or resist capture.

d. Narrative of Action: (See sketch map, Inclosure 1)

(1) Planning: The operation was conceived 10 days prior to D day. USN advisors were not briefed until D-1 (13 May). Coordination between the VNN and 7th Division was quite involved, probably because of inexperience on the part of the planners. Some difficulties may have been precluded had USN assistance been obtained during the early stages of planning.

(2) Embarkation Phase: Loading commenced at 1900 D-1 and was completed at 0400 on D-Day. Embarkation went well with two exceptions.

(a) LSMs were side loaded at My Tho. Adequate preparations such as breaking life lines to facilitate orderly transfer from pier to ship, and portable ladders to permit safe and expeditious descent of troops into the well deck, should have been taken into account as LSMs are not designed to be side loaded.

(b) Difficulty was encountered during the transfer at My Tho of signal vehicles from the ferry landing by LCU to the LST anchored in the river. The transfer was extremely hazardous and time consuming due to darkness, rain and poor visibility.

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e. Landing Phase:

(1) Naval units arrived on station early in the morning of 14 May as shown on inclosure 1. Landings, which commenced at 0815, were preceded by naval shore bombardment. LST 501 anchored off Point E where it functioned as the operations command post. The APCs were off loaded at Point A without incident. LCMs landed the 1st Inf Bn, 3d Regt at Point C where a minor incident caused a 10 minute delay, but the 1/3 Bn was the first element to be completely debarked. Point D, three kilometers up a narrow river and inaccessible to normal landing craft because of a low bridge, was the landing area for the 52d Rangers. Swimmer assault boats (SSB) were utilized effectively to land the Rangers. Employment of SSBs would have been hazardous had the landing been opposed since the SSBs afford no protection to embarked personnel. Debarkation of the marines was considerably delayed. The site selected for beaching the LSM was located in a chest-high swamp approximately 750 meters from firm ground. The disembarking troops were vulnerable to the enemy during their arduous transit of the swamp. The original plan called for disembarking the Marines at a point inland along the Ba Tu River, however the low state of the tide prohibited movement of the LSM to that point.

f. Naval Activity Post Debarkation Phase:

(1) Naval units assumed assigned patrol and blocking positions upon completion of the landing phase. During the first day of operations the 21st RAG captured nine confirmed VC. The 22d RAG captured 18 sampans and 68 suspects, the majority proven to be VC. Operations during the night were hampered by severe weather. The next day junk units delivered eight suspects to the CP. At the close of the operation on 16 May, RAG 22 captured 27 suspects attempting to depart the area in sampans.

(2) LST 501 functioned quite well as the CP. It provided the embarked joint staff the opportunity to achieve immediate coordination. The afloat CP also eliminated the necessity of providing infantry troops for static security which would have been required had the CP been ashore. The requirement for static security ashore would have been completely negated, had the LST been used to receive helicopters. (VNN LSTs are capable of receiving helicopters unless a deck load is aboard.)

(3) SSBs were utilized to transfer captured suspects rapidly to the CP for immediate interrogation.

g. Final Results of Operation Thang Cong 05:

(1) Friendly - 1 WIA

(2) Enemy - 5 Killed

20 estimated killed by artillery and air strikes.

57 captured

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Large quantities of equipment and material captured or destroyed.

h. LESSONS LEARNED:

(1) Amphibious operations, whether large or small, require some detailed basic planning. Several basic errors, including correct choice of landing sites for the Rangers and Marines, and consideration of the state of the tide might have been avoided had USN advisors been allowed to participate in the early stages of the planning process. RVNAF should be encouraged to utilize USN assistance until such time as RVNAF is proficient in planning joint amphibious operations.

(2) Employment of an LST as a CP for amphibious operations is not only desirable but extremely practicable. LSTs are capable of receiving helicopters except when deck loaded.

(3) Adequate beach reconnaissance should be conducted in order to make satisfactory determinations of primary and secondary landing areas.

(4) Adequate preparations for loading must be made if side loading of troops aboard LSMs is required.

(5) Utilization of SSRs for administrative purposes between naval units affords rapid transfer to captives, personnel or other items.

(6) Amphibious training for VNN, VNMC and ARVN units should be emphasized and carried out.

3. (CMHA) OPERATION "NO NAME": Conducted 27 October 1964. Embarkation took place at Can Tho. Designated landing areas were located along the North bank of the Bassac River mouth. H-hour was set for 270745.

a. Participating Units: Naval amphibious forces consisted of LSMs 404 and 406 which embarked the 2nd Battalion, 14th Regiment and 12 M113s respectively and LSIL 329 which was the command and gunfire support ship.

b. Naval Mission: To embark the 2d Inf Bn, 14th Regt and 12 M113s in LSMs at Can Tho and debark these units at designated landing areas, providing gunfire support as required.

c. Embarkation Phase: Troops were loaded the evening of 26 October without incident. LSM 406 encountered some difficulty beaching at Can Tho due to a three and four knot current and the marginal facilities available for beaching. Over an hour was required for the 406 to retract from the beaching site. Had the M113s been able to wet load this delay could have been avoided.

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d. Planning Phase: Sea Force units received the operation order at a 30 minute briefing held the afternoon of 26 October just prior to loading. Several serious omissions were noted in the operation order. These included: exact location of beaching areas, beach gradient, current and tide at H-hour, composition of the beach, condition of exit routes and opposition expected. The U.S. Navy advisor questioned the lack of this basic information and the following information was illicit: no opposition was expected, the LSMs were to choose their own beach immediately prior to landing and the condition of exit routes was not known as a 2500 meter stretch of river bank was designated as the landing area. H-hour was  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours prior to maximum flood tide. The beach gradient, amount and type of vegetation and the precise location of the landing areas were not known. It is apparent that detailed planning was not conducted. As might have been expected, confusion and frustration resulted during the landing phase.

e. Movement to the Landing Area: LSM 406 was underway at 270400 followed by LSM 400 and LSIL 329 at 0430. At 0600 the ships position was fixed for the first time at the insistence of the USN advisor. It was determined that the force was less than three miles from the objective area with over an hour remaining until H-hour. The ships reduced speed and were abeam of the landing area at 0650. Individual beaching positions were discussed and determined as the ships proceeded past the beaching sites. At 0715 the three ships were continuing in an easterly direction away from the landing area, apparently unmindful of the 0730 H-hour. Fortunately a scheduled air strike was delayed 15 minutes which in turn slipped H-hour to 0745. The ships turned, but due to current, restricted waters, poor ship handling and an inoperative engine in LSM 404, they ended up in reverse order of their designated beaching and support positions. The signal was given to correct this deficiency and by 0730 the ships were in proper sequence. At this time pre-landing shore bombardment commenced with the 329 firing 3"/50 and the LSMs using their 40mm. The order to beach was given at 0738, after LSM 406 had passed her beach.

f. Landing Phase: (Beaching areas are shown in Inclosure 2)

(1) LSM 404 beached in brush and trees which covered virtually the entire area chosen for the landing (Beach #2). The larger trees were cleared when hit by the ships bow doors and ramp leaving the troops to face only light brush. However, at this location there was five feet of water under the bow ramp and the troops could not debark. The 404 then retracted and hit a beach 200 yards to the right. At this point there was three feet of water under the ramp and an eight foot high dike running the length of the beaching area which complicated matters. The troops did not debark in the classical manner, but straggled off in single file taking 30 minutes to complete off loading.

(2) At 0750, LSM 406 beached with a dry ramp after missing the beach on its first attempt and sliding into an adjacent creek (Beach #1). The M13 troop commander was not satisfied with the ship's position and

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requested that the ship be moved three meters to the right. At 0800 the ship was repositioned as requested. The ARVN commander was again hesitant about off loading. The USN advisor then consulted with him and a final commitment was made as to an exact location. The final approach was well executed, except for the ship's speed which was excessive. When the ship hit the beach with its doors open the port door was rendered inoperable. The final position of the 406 was within three yards of its initial beaching site. A combination of muddy terrain and a high dike blocked the exit routes from the beach. After numerous unsuccessful attempts by the M113s to leave the beach it was decided to reload the APCs and offload them at a more suitable site. At 1015 the 406 retracted and beached in the area where LSM 404 first attempted to offload troops. After spending an hour at that site the ARVN commander decided that the new location was also unsuitable. The ARVN CO then requested that the ship move to a third location (Beach #3). The first of six landings in the new beaching area commenced at 1345. The M113 commander was satisfied on the sixth landing and offloading began at 1415, continuing until 1620 at which time 406 retracted and proceeded to Can Tho.

g. VC Opposition: Interrogation of local residents revealed that the VC had moved south at 270400, approximately three hours prior to H-hour. It was apparent that the VC had received advanced word of the operation. It is interesting to note that the final beaching of the 406 was conducted in an area which the ARVN commander stated was secure. At 1635 an 81mm mortar round impacted 75 yards from the offloading area.

h. Conduct of Embarked Troops:

(1) The ARVN troops lacked discipline and disregarded basic safety and security precautions. Violations included excessive horse play on the tank deck during the loading process, smoking on the tank deck during and after the loading, leaning on the life lines and stringing hammocks on the life lines.

(2) During hours of darkness the troops used battle lanterns and flashlights indiscriminately on the main deck and the tank deck. White lights at night on the deck of a ship degrade the night vision of the ships conning officer making it difficult to maneuver the ship. In addition, while approaching the landing area at "darken ship" the troops again began using white lights.

(3) During the approach to the beach, the troops stood on the deck sightseeing thus presenting excellent targets.

(4) Offloading was conducted in a sluggish manner. Establishment of beach security was also very slow.

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Explanation of Symbols

-  Helicopter Landing Pad
-  LST
-  LSM (2)
-  LCM (7)
-  LSIL (1)
-  LCU (2)
-  Commandament (2)
-  Monitor (1)
-  PGM (1)
-  PC (1)
-  LCVP (4)
-  STCAN (6)
-  Junk Boats (6)
-  Swimmer Assault Boats (13)

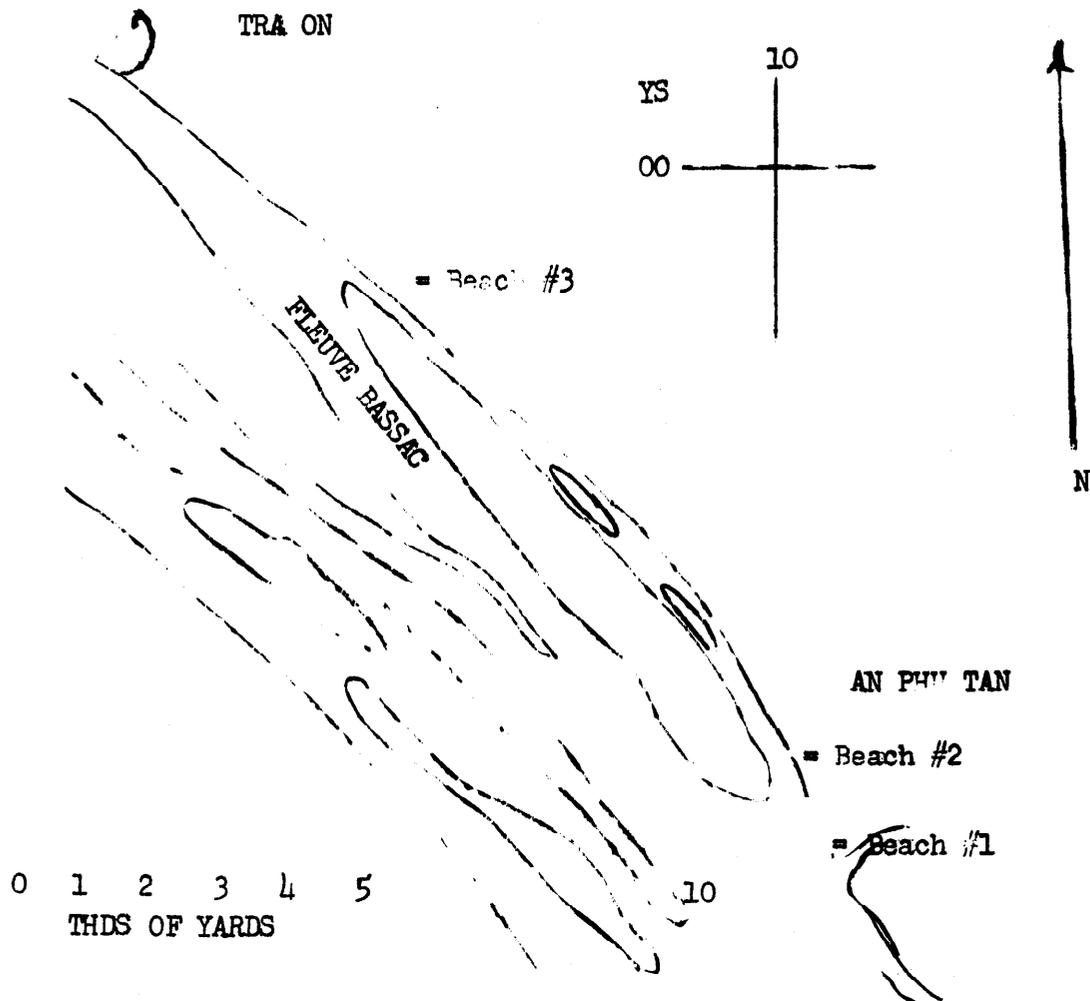
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AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION 27 OCTOBER 1964

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