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THE VIET CONG TECHNIQUES

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(2500 words)

A. The article illustrates tactics and techniques utilized by the VC.

1. Goes into some detail on VC operations planning in general, however, much of the discussion applies to all enemy operations, not just anti-mech tactics.

2. Provides a good insight into specific reactions of the enemy to the M113 threat in the early days of the war, and how the enemy learned to cope with the M113.

3. Provides a good indication of the nature of the enemy's response, and his "education" in fighting mechanized forces, and the resultant counter measures used by ARVN.

B. Provides an illustration demonstrating VC offensive techniques in the attack.

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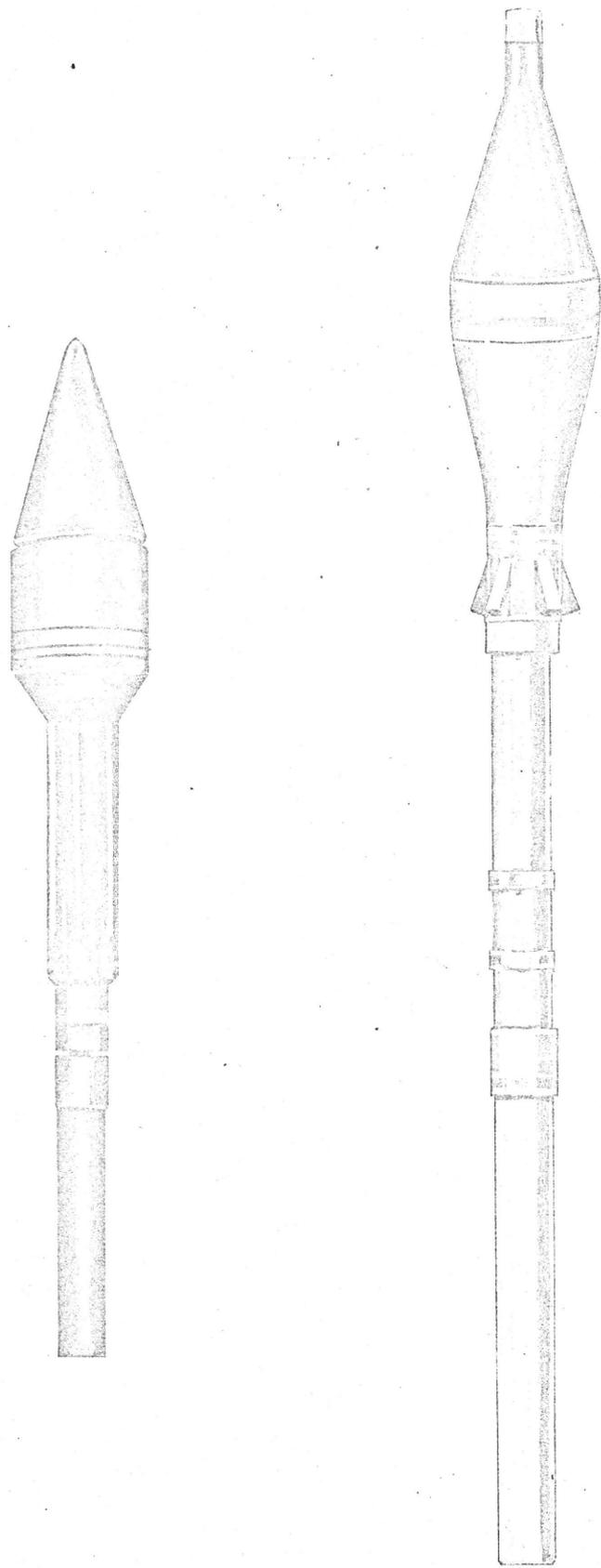
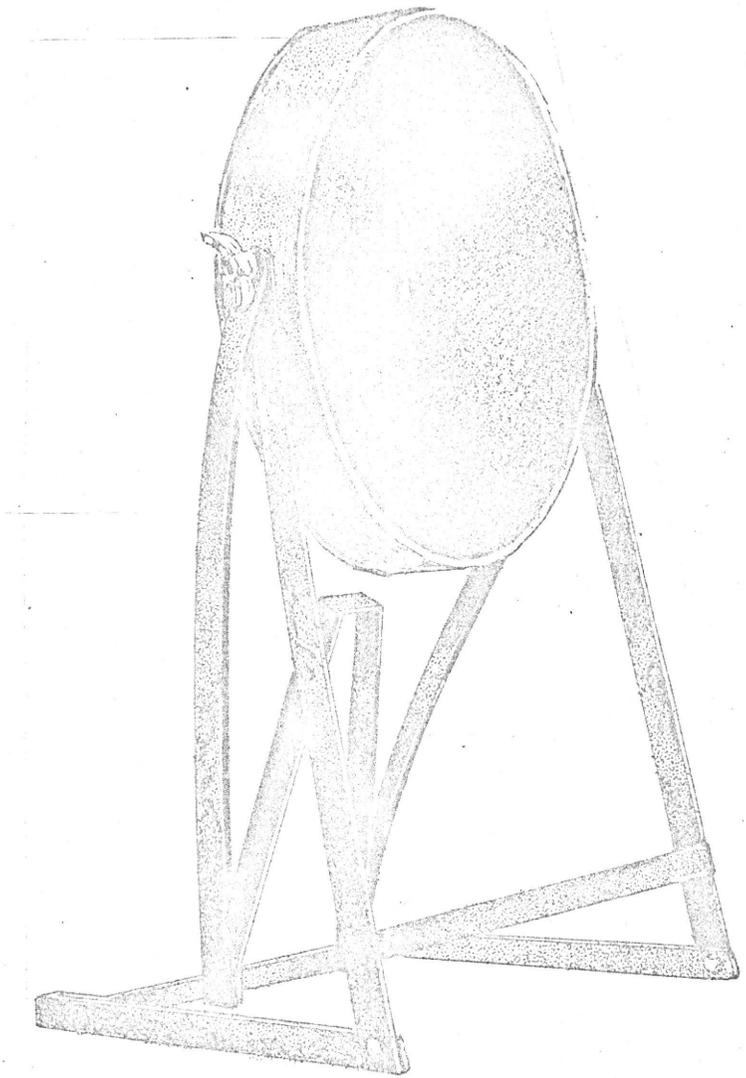


Figure 1. VC antitank grenades
RPG2 (left) and RPG7
(right)



* Figure 2. VC claymore mine.

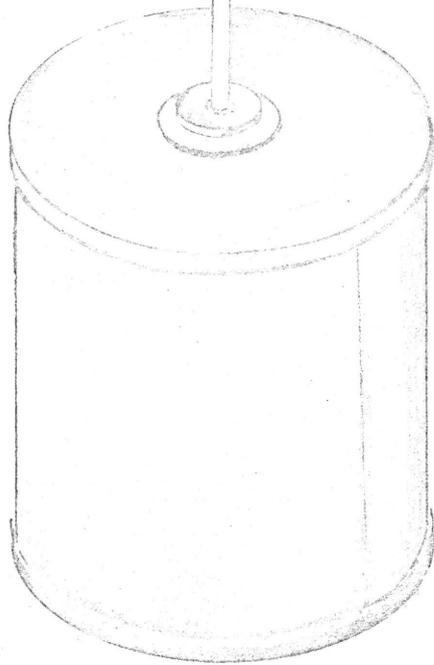


Figure 3. VC stick mine.

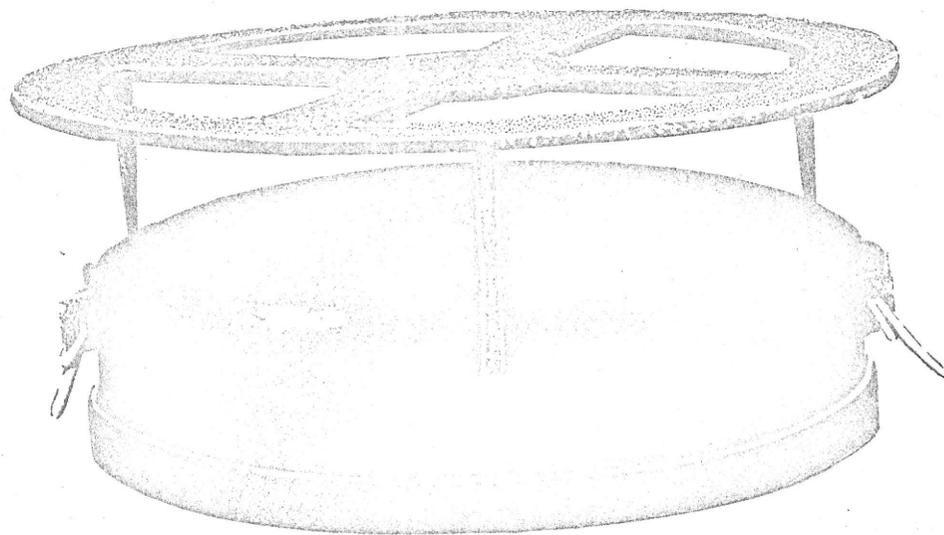


Figure 4. VC antitank mine of Chinese manufacture.

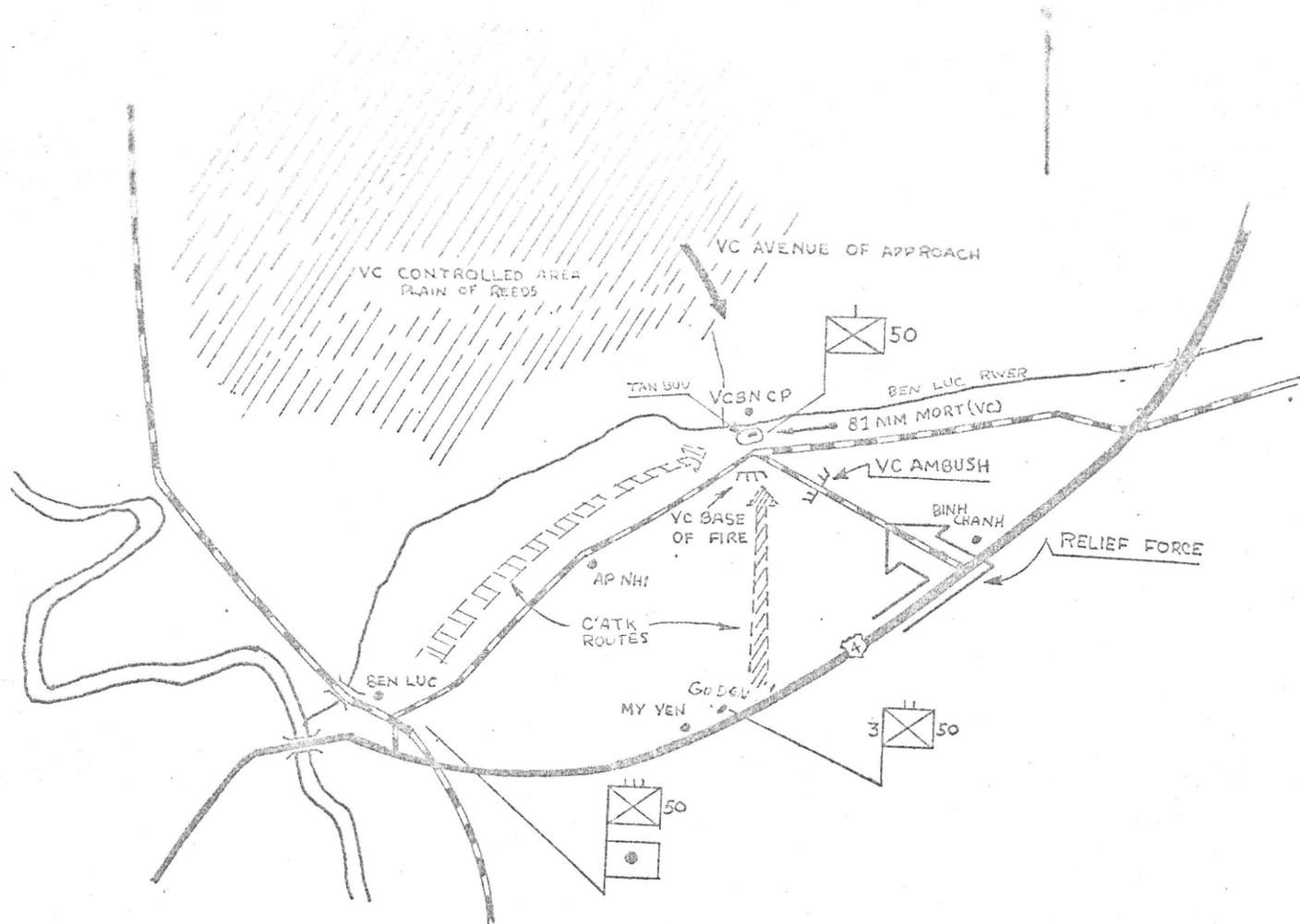


Figure 5.

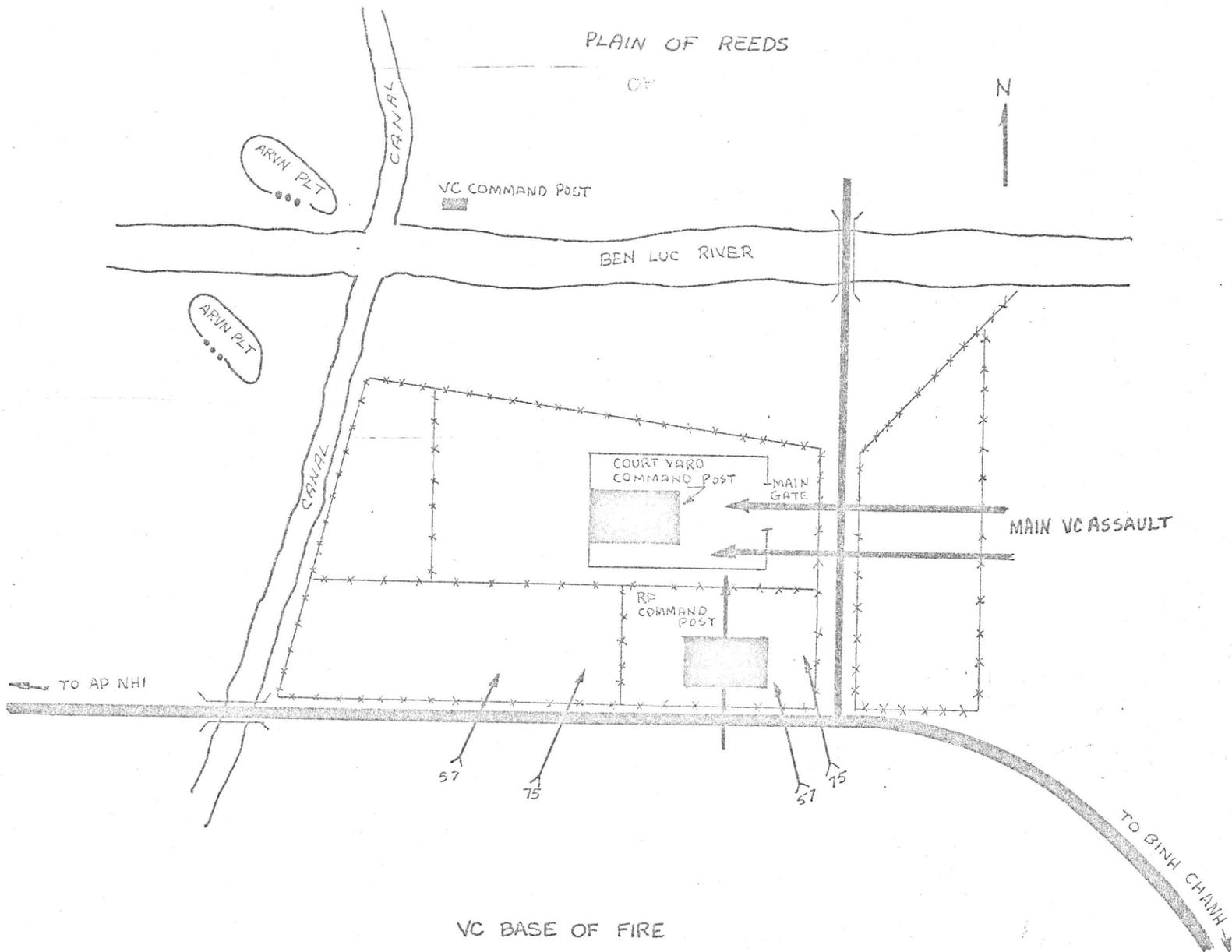


Figure 6.

VIET CONG TECHNIQUES

With regard to the broad range of techniques used by the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, the first impressions of US advisors to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in the early 1960's were that the VC conducted offensive operations in rather haphazard and random fashion. Apparently, the only common characteristic in and between the many VC military and quasi-military actions was the simple objective of dominating South Vietnam. Yet, how could the enemy make the specific gains he did without some coordination of effort being apparent in the way he operated? Since the VC were demonstrably successful with their patternless warfare, even in the face of the respectable firepower of ARVN in many cases, there had to be a method in their madness--and there was.

OFFENSIVE TECHNIQUES

Eventually, the essential technique used by the VC in every offensive action became clear and was summed up by the phrase, "One slow, four quick." This technique involved five clear steps or phases which the VC invariably followed in military actions. Application of these five steps was by no means the only technique used by the VC, but it was clearly one aspect of every VC action--for assault against built-up or fortified positions, for ambush of vehicle columns or dismounted troops, for raids, and for harassing operations.

Raids

In addition to ambushes, raids were another common offensive technique used by the VC to take as much advantage as possible of lax security. The surprise raid was usually short and aimed at a larger force. Larger raids employed overwhelming strength and maximum firepower and were designed to quickly overrun and annihilate the defenders. Maximum use was made of darkness and poor weather conditions to minimize the effects of artillery and air support.

Harassment

Harassment, whether for its own effect or as an aspect of ambushes and raids, was one of the tenets of VC guerrilla warfare practiced wherever conditions permitted. Sniper fire, mines, boobytraps, grenades, mortars, recoilless rifles, and even spiked traps and poisoned arrows were employed. The VC were adept at infiltration for the purpose of sabotage, assassination, demoralization, and collection of intelligence.

DEFENSIVE TECHNIQUES

Defensive techniques used by the VC were centered on methods of escaping from all forms of attack by stronger forces. In general, the defense was one of delay until a rapid withdrawal from contact could be made. Once contact was broken, the VC either went into hiding or exfiltrated to prearranged rallying points. Capture was evaded by

blending with the local population, by melting into dense jungle areas, or by literally going underground into elaborate and well-concealed tunnel systems. The VC prepared extensive defensive systems throughout his areas of operation, and these were characterized by defense in depth, mutual support, overhead cover, and maximum use of natural cover and concealment.

ANTIARMOR TECHNIQUES

The VC were reluctant early in the conflict in Vietnam to engage armor or mechanized forces because the guerrillas lacked an antiarmor and antitank capability. Mechanized rifle companies were compiling a fantastic record of successes against the Viet Cong, and more often than not, the enemy chose to flee rather than to fight. In the Ap Bac operation in January 1963, however, the VC did not flee; they fought for their lives and won over a numerically superior ARVN force which had air support, armor, and artillery.

The Ap Bac operation is well summarized in the Viet Cong after-action report of the fighting. Extracts from the document, captured on 27 February 1963, are given below:

* * * * *

Experiences in combat against M113 APC: Following characteristics and capabilities of the M113 should be known before taking action against these vehicles:

- (1) Advantages.
 - (a) Strong firepower.
 - (b) Its powerful engine permits movement on rugged terrain.
- (2) Disadvantages.
 - (a) The armor is thin in the lower part of the vehicle.
 - (b) The gunner must expose himself above the vehicle when firing.
 - (c) At a distance of 50 to 70 meters, the machinegun on the vehicle is no longer effective.
(Note: It is not known why this comment was made. It is not true.)
 - (d) The driver's windshield is thin, and he can easily be hit. (Note: Probably referring to vision blocks.)
- (3) In exploiting the above deficiencies, the platoon of C1/261, led by Comrade Dun, successfully used defensive grenades while Comrades Son and Chien employed grenade launchers. Individual soldiers can use small arms to shoot at the gunner or at the infantry troops on the vehicle.

(4) Comrade Dun used a defensive grenade to knock out an M113. He waited for the APC to approach and he threw a grenade into it. When the gunner and the troops are still on the vehicle, we should use firepower to make them get down before throwing the grenades.

(5) This method was based on the two following deficiencies of the M113 APC:

(a) At close distances (10-15 meters), its firepower is no longer effective.

(b) The APC has no top cover. The employment of grenade launcher by Comrade Son was also effective because a direct hit will kill all the troops on the vehicle. (Note: The M113 crewman have rarely closed the cargo hatch.)

(c) The method proposed by Comrade Chien is to fire a rifle grenade directly at the APC, aiming at the gunner in order to kill him and destroy the machinegun.

* * * * *

Although the VC cannot be said to have possessed a sophisticated antiarmor capability, after the Ap Bac operation they did make effective use of weapons and materials available to them. The primary antiarmor weapons consisted of the 57-mm and 75-mm recoilless rifles, antitank grenade launchers (RPG2 and RPG7), and at times the 12.7-mm machinegun. Antitank mines varied from pressure-detonated devices (similar to the US antitank mines) through various improvised mines, some as heavy as 250 pounds. They also used recovered unexploded artillery and mortar shells and aircraft bombs with pressure-detonated or command-detonated fuzes. Figures 1 through 4 illustrate typical VC antitank weapons and mines.

The most frequent offensive use of antitank weapons was in conjunction with ambushes. They were usually emplaced at each end of the ambush area where they could attack the first and last vehicles in the killing zone and also protect the flanks of the position. They were also placed at intervals throughout the killing zone. These weapons usually had designated alternate positions to which they could be moved to protect the rear of the ambushing force against encirclement by mobile forces. Command-detonated mines were also employed at the ends of the killing zone to knock out vehicles and block movement out of the zone. Claymore antipersonnel mines were

frequently placed in trees for the purpose of injuring personnel riding on top of vehicles and crewmen who were partially exposed. Enemy personnel sometimes positioned themselves in ditches along the road three to five meters from the passing armored vehicles. They attempted to take advantage of the dead space around APC and tanks where automatic weapons could not be sufficiently depressed to engage them. From this distance, the enemy attempted to throw hand grenades into the tracks of the vehicle and to throw grenades into the driver and fighting compartment hatches. They would also tie two or three grenades together and attempt to lodge them on top of the vehicles in the hope of penetrating the thinner armor. One defense against such tactics was the use of hand grenades dropped over the side of the vehicle. Care had to be taken, however, to throw the grenade far enough away from the enemy so that he could not pick it up and throw it back before it exploded. Another solution was mutual support by two or more vehicles in order that one vehicle could use its automatic weapons to protect the other.

Only when conditions were highly favorable would an attack be made against an armor unit unless the VC could find an isolated platoon or less which they could engage by hit-and-run tactics. For a short period, they would employ all possible means to destroy the armor

vehicles including recoilless rifles, antitank grenade launchers, hand grenades, and satchel charges. Once they lost the advantage of surprise and were in danger of being defeated, they withdrew.

Nuisance-type mining was the most frequent method of offensive antitank warfare. Mines were emplaced at night in roads that were well traveled during the day. Often, large command-detonated mines were emplaced during the hours of darkness. The VC also emplaced mines on trails that had not been used for some time. There were occasions when pressure-fused mines did not explode until after several vehicles had passed over them and so were thought to be command-detonated. Investigation of other mines found in the vicinity usually indicated that mud had become hardened under the spider of the mine and the vehicle which eventually exploded the mine (often a heavily loaded vehicle) was one having a higher ground pressure than those that had previously passed over the mine.

Antitank weapons could be expected in any defensive position. They were rapidly moved to that portion of the position being threatened by armored elements. No particular technique was discerned in their employment except that they were employed at close ranges, usually less than 50 meters. Mines were also employed in the vicinity of organized defensive positions and base camp complexes. They were not always placed on roads or trails but could be found randomly emplaced in fields and open areas of the jungle.

After the operation at Ap Bac, the Viet Cong continued training their units to combat mechanized rifle troops. They understood their serious antitank deficiency. Though they could capture 57-mm recoilless rifles from the ARVN, there was no ready supply of antitank rounds. The ARVN had recalled all HEAT rounds by this time. During the spring and summer, the Viet Cong received HEAT rounds from outside the country, undoubtedly of Chinese Communist manufacture. The number of 57-mm recoilless rifle attacks on M113's rose sharply in the fall of 1963.

In September, a VC 75-mm recoilless rifle was captured on an operation in the Ca Mau peninsula. Three months later, on 3 December 1963, the first M113 was disabled by a 75-mm recoilless rifle and then destroyed by a 57-mm recoilless rifle HEAT round.

The incidence of mined vehicles rose dramatically in the late summer and early fall. It was quite obvious that the Viet Cong were taking active measures to counter the M113 threat.

NIGHT ACTION AT TAN BUU

By 1965, the Viet Cong had all but perfected his long-practiced techniques for his kind of warfare. Employing the five-step offensive techniques, he can be said to have put it all together at Tan Buu in January of that year.

The village of Tan Buu is located about 20 miles south of Saigon in the Delta. As a part of the intensive pacification effort being

conducted in the area, a company of the 3d Battalion, 50th ARVN Infantry, had been assigned the mission of providing security for this village and the four hamlets that it comprised. The area involved was extensive in terms of squared kilometers to be secured and, despite the fact that the company was reinforced by a mortar section from headquarters company plus a Regional Forces (RF) platoon, still its total strength of 75 was not impressive. However, the 3d Battalion had consistently demonstrated a higher-than-average combat efficiency and, with increased artillery support amounting to a total of six guns, it was believed that if any unit could do the job, the 3d Battalion could.

Tan Buu, astride the border separating the inhabited Delta area from the Plain of Reeds, was a traditional base area for the 506th Main Force Viet Cong Battalion. Because it had been under the influence of the Viet Cong for over a year, it was assumed that efforts in 1965 to establish government control in the village would probably result in a violent enemy reaction. However, the 3d Battalion was outwardly confident. (A similar situation two months earlier had resulted in an important victory for the government forces when the Viet Cong, reacting to pacification activities by attacking one of the companies of the battalion, suffered serious losses in personnel and weapons.)

Nevertheless, every precaution that could be taken was directed. The position of the company command post, which occupied a two-story masonry building on the outskirts of town, was heavily wired in with barbed wire. Automatic weapons were emplaced where they could get clear fields of fire. Communications were established by radio through two channels, the battalion radio net, and the RF--District radio net. In addition, nightly ambush patrols were conducted throughout the area to give warning of the enemy's approach.

Because of the size of the village and its environs and the need to provide security, the company could not be consolidated in a single position; it had to be distributed by platoons to provide security for the hamlets. As a result, one platoon was located on the northern side of the canal, covering the likely avenue of approach of Viet Cong forces from the interior of the Plain of Reeds. Another platoon was employed across the canal, covering the canal from the west and in a position where it could support either the command post or the northern platoon by fire. The remaining platoon and the weapons platoon--some 25 men all together--were employed in and around the village and command post. The number of men in the command post is not certain, but probably about 20 men were in that area. The RF platoon also occupied a smaller building some 25 yards from the command post. Most of these men were employed on ambush patrols at night so that only five or six normally remained in the RF command post.

As a final measure of defense, a regimental counterattack plan was prepared to go to the relief of this force if the need should arise. The plan called for a two-company force from the 1st Battalion to advance from Ap Nhi across the rice paddies in conjunction with an advance by two companies from the 3d Battalion at Go Den, also across the rice paddies. Although there were roads leading to Tan Buu from both Ap Nhi and Go Den, it seemed probable that the Viet Cong would establish ambushes astride these routes, thus dictating they be avoided even though progress through the water and mud-filled paddies would, as a consequence, be slow (figure 5).

This plan was proposed by the American advisor and accepted by the Vietnamese; however, the advisor was soon to learn that what is agreed to when the situation is calm is not necessarily binding when the moment of execution comes.

Leading up to the night of 9 January 1965, considerable activity took place around Tan Buu. A series of regimental-size operations were conducted in the Plain of Reeds adjacent to the village, one of which resulted in a large number of Viet Cong being killed by armed helicopters. A VC prisoner claimed that his force had been planning to attack Tan Buu that night. It was obvious that the enemy's plans had been upset. Not so obvious was a relaxing of security on the part of the garrison at Tan Buu.

The night of 8-9 January was typical for that part of the Delta-- quiet, damp, and by midnight, cold with a breeze that blew across the paddies. The moonless night was completely black except for the light of Saigon-Cholon which lit the horizon to the north.

At approximately 0100 hours, the patrols and platoon located across the canal on the north observed a body of men, estimated to be some 300, moving quickly toward Tan Buu. Because of the size of the force, the platoon did not engage, hoping that the enemy force would pass out of the area. Whether or not they tried to alert the company command post is uncertain; in any event, the command post either received no warning or failed to act if it did.

At 0230 hours, the sound of mortars echoed across the rice paddies. Within seconds, rounds from four 81-mm mortars began landing in and on the building and courtyard housing the company command post. The accuracy and volume of fire was tremendous.

Concurrently with the explosion of the mortar shells, recoilless rifles and machineguns opened on the two buildings. Firing from a road 150 meters away, they perfectly enfiladed the CP area. The larger 75-mm recoilless weapons fired at the top of the two-story building while the 57-mm weapons concentrated on the ground level of the main structure and the nearby smaller building (figure 6).

According to reports of the survivors, of whom an American NCO was one, the effect of this fire on the defenders was devastating. Initial rounds destroyed the radio antenna of the South Vietnamese, effectively cutting them off from communicating with their battalion. In addition, the fire killed their recoilless rifle gunner before he could get a round off. The machinegun was also knocked out with a direct hit. To compound and add to the defenders' difficulties, the first round of the ARVN company's 81-mm mortar misfired. Before the mortar round could be removed from the tube, the enemy's assault party was already approaching the area. Thus, within a few minutes the firepower of the command post had been reduced to a lone 60-mm mortar which fired valiantly trying to counteract the enemy fire, plus a few Browning automatic rifles (BAR).

At the regimental command post, about six kilometers from Tan Buu, the initial explosions of the enemy's mortars were immediately heard. On the American side, contact was immediately established with the advisors at Tan Buu, who confirmed that they were under attack. However, due to loss of communications, the Vietnamese had no information. Lacking information, the Vietnamese hesitated to fire the artillery, thus denying the post artillery support at the critical moment. Further complicating the problem were reports from the garrison at Ap Nhi that it was under

attack, and so initial fire support was given to it. In an attempt to reduce the ARVN artillery fire, the enemy employed 81-mm mortars as counterbattery fire.

Realizing that the post at Tan Buu was under heavy attack, the American advisor recommended that the counterattack plan be implemented. Although the units were alerted, no further action was taken. Finally, after repeated prodding, the regimental commander stated he would launch a counterattack from the 3d Battalion area. Efforts to get him to adhere to the original plan were unavailing.

Close on the heels of the intense barrage that saturated the two command posts, small Viet Cong assault parties closed on the two buildings. As a professional soldier, one can only admire the close coordination and teamwork exhibited by the Viet Cong. In a procedure reminiscent of the constantly rehearsed problems at Fort Benning, the VC established a base of fire on a dike about 30 meters from the entrance of the courtyard surrounding the command post building. Under cover of this fire, bangalore torpedo teams breached the first series of barbed-wire fences in two places. Through the gap thus created, additional torpedo men and grenadiers closed the second and final barbed-wire fence. While the grenadiers pinned down the few defenders in the area with hand grenades, additional torpedoes were set and detonated by battery.

Once this had been accomplished, several assault teams passed through the gaps and placed a number of 20 kilo electric mines to breach the wall surrounding the courtyard.

While this was taking place, the American advisors, who by this time had abandoned the shattered building, had occupied a machinegun position in front of the gate which had been blown open, probably by a recoilless rifle round. There they engaged the enemy's base of fire with their carbines; however, the hail of hand grenades being thrown by the enemy's assault force made them duck back into their hole. The officer was apparently wounded or stunned by the blast of one of the grenades.

Following the blast of the mines used to breach the wall, a five-man VC assault team armed with grenades and Thompson submachineguns burst into the courtyard and ran into the building. By this time, the surviving defenders had withdrawn and the American advisors attempted to do likewise. The NCO succeeded in crawling to the corner of the wall surrounding the courtyard where he waited to cover the escape of his lieutenant. As this officer raised himself out of the hole, he was caught by a burst of automatic fire and died. The NCO, although wounded, succeeded in escaping to the river, where he managed to avoid detection and was later picked up.

From the start of the assault until the seizure by the Viet Cong of the building, no more than 20 minutes had elapsed. After rapidly searching the building and seizing anything of value, the Viet Cong quickly withdrew, but not before they had placed a number of 20 kilo mines in the building and exploded them, thus reducing the already shattered buildings to a heap of ruins.

As was the custom, the Main Force Viet Cong and heavy weapons began an immediate evacuation of the battlefield by preplanned routes including moving by sampan along the canals. Auxiliary Viet Cong in the form of local and regional guerrillas remained in the area to search for bodies and police the field; they then departed in small groups in every direction.

By dint of much persuasion and personal leadership by the advisor in the 3d Battalion, the ARVN headquarters unit moved out about 0330 hours toward Tan Buu; however, they moved by truck to Binh Chanh and then up the road. Knowing that the possibility of ambush by the Viet Cong was strong, the movement was therefore very cautious and slow. This fear was well founded because the enemy had indeed placed an ambush, complete with 20 kilo mines, along the route leading to Tan Buu.

Failure of the enemy to wait and spring the ambush can probably be attributed to the armed helicopters which arrived on the scene about 0400 hours and searched the area carefully, with the aid of flares

being dropped by an Air Force flare ship. Although unable to locate the enemy and engage him, the ARVN force undoubtedly convinced the Viet Cong that further action on their part would be prohibitively expensive.

In terms of casualties, the affair at Tan Buu was not particularly expensive. There were more costly ones later. ARVN losses were six dead and about 18 wounded. The Viet Cong left one dead upon the field, probably killed by the two Americans, and evidence that the 60-mm mortar men had hit at least one man. No doubt, other Viet Cong were injured but equally certain was the fact that it was a victory for the Viet Cong.

SUMMARY

As a rule, the Viet Cong were excellent soldiers with combat experience and a physical toughness. They were well-motivated and well-led by disciplined officers who thoroughly understood the tactics and techniques of guerrilla warfare, no matter how unconventional those tactics and techniques appeared to be. The VC did well with field-expedient methods and improvisations while paring down the combat requirements of their war of movement until they fixed on essentials that would serve their military actions throughout South Vietnam. For the most part lacking a sophisticated war machine, the VC used combat power, not like a blunt instrument created out of limitless resources, but more like a surgeon uses a scapel--always with precision and most often with highly successful results in his operations.

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3. MACOV Study Report, USARV, 28 March 1967.
4. Personal notes and comments provided by LTC Norman C. Godwin, former member, ACTIV.
5. Personal notes and comments provided by LTC Marcus C. Scheumann, former member ACTIV.
6. "The Battle of Tan Buu," unpublished, provided by COL Edwin W. Chamberlain, Jr.



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES ARMY INFANTRY SCHOOL
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA 31905

IN REPLY REFER TO

ATSH-I-V-D

6 JUN 1973

Lieutenant Colonel Norman C. Godwin (USA, Ret)
7317 North West Avalon
Kansas City, Missouri 64152

Dear Colonel Godwin:

The Chief of Staff of the Army has directed the writing of a series of monographs on various aspects of the Vietnam conflict. Among these is one entitled "Armor in Vietnam," which will include armor, armored cavalry, air cavalry, and mechanized infantry operations. The purpose of the monograph is to document those events in which we learned significant lessons or made major strides in the development of tactics and techniques. Equally important is telling the story of armor and mechanized infantry in Vietnam.

The Infantry School is responsible for preparing and submitting to the Armor School the mechanized infantry portion of the monograph. Among the articles being considered for inclusion in the monograph are "The Viet Cong Versus ARVN Mechanized Infantry" and "Evaluation and Modernization of the M113 to Meet Combat Operations in Vietnam."

The inclosed draft narratives were prepared using the study, "Mechanized and Armor Combat Operations in Vietnam," and the report, "Mechanized Rifle Troops M113," written by you and LTC Marcus C. Scheumann. Since we are attempting to develop as much detail as possible in order to tell the whole story, I ask you to read the draft narratives and make any additions or corrections you think necessary either directly on the inclosed pages and maps or on separate paper. Of particular interest to my researchers are the names of personnel involved and any sketch maps that you may be able to provide.

6 JUN 1973

ATSH-I-V-D

Lieutenant Colonel Norman C. Godwin (USA, Ret)

When you have completed your review, please return the material and your comments in the self-addressed envelope provided. If at all possible, we would like to have comments returned by 30 June 1973.

Your assistance in helping us tell the story of mechanized infantry operations in Vietnam will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



WILLIAM R. RICHARDSON
Brigadier General, USA
Assistant Commandant

2 Incl
as

7317 N. W. Avalon
Kansas City, Mo. 64152
June 30, 1973

Brigadier General William R. Richardson
United States Army Infantry School
Fort Benning, Georgia 31905
ATTN: ATSH-J-V-D

Dear General Richardson:

In reply to your letter of 6 June, 1973, I am afraid that I can add little to that which is included in the report. Any documents, sketch maps, or other information to which I had access became part of the ACTN records and were left behind when I departed Vietnam.

I have taken the liberty of making a few marginal notes based on memory and trust that these may be of some value. LTC Scheuman can probably give you more information as he was much closer to the actual operations than I.

If I may be permitted a few personal observations, the degree of success of any observed operation was a direct reflection of the leadership. This became more important as the Viet Cong gained access to more sophisticated weapons and developed tactics to combat mechanized units. Carefully planned and properly executed actions reflected a degree of success far above those actions which were less so. Reaction to enemy activity, in terms of time, cannot be emphasized too greatly as delay often allowed the enemy to escape. Even worse, excessive delay resulted in losses that could well have been avoided in immediate aggressive action.

I regret that I am unable to provide more information or assistance and trust that the above may be of some help.

Sincerely,

Norman A. Godwin
Lieutenant Colonel (USA, Ret)

contact with larger government units. Plans ^{were} ~~are~~ drawn up in great detail and ~~are~~ usually rehearsed. These plans often include an ambush of the relieving force.

Schooled in guerrilla tactics, the VC operate extensively at night, and at all times take the fullest advantage of favorable terrain and weather factors. They remain dispersed as small units until concentration is required. Attacks are carried out with dispatch and are usually accompanied by other terroristic and propaganda activities. Their objectives are not to hold terrain, but rather to inflict losses on the government forces, to capture weapons and material, and to convince the people that the lawful government cannot protect them and will eventually be defeated. Upon completing their mission, the VC withdraw rapidly, dispersing into small units, and even as individuals. Although many VC have uniforms, they frequently wear civilian clothes during operations to permit them to merge with the population as necessary.

5. (C) ENEMY REACTION TO THE M-113

The Viet Cong were not prepared for the M-113 when it appeared in the ARVN formations. The ARVN 7th and 21st Mechanized Rifle Companies compiled a fantastic record of success in the 5-month period from June to October 1962. The companies killed 517 VC and took 203 POW's while sustaining only 4 friendly dead and 13 wounded. The Viet Cong reaction to mechanized companies was normally one of fear and desire to flee rather than to fight. In most cases there was little, if any, attempt made to engage these mounted units in combat.

In one operation conducted in the delta during September 1962, the 7th Mechanized Company killed 142 VC and captured 38 others along with a quantity of material.

As could be expected, the Viet Cong had to change their tactics if they were to survive on the same battlefield with the ARVN M-113's. In January 1963 the VC did not flee at Ap Bac. With some automatic weapons, hand grenades, and small arms (some home-made) the VC defeated a numerically superior ARVN force that employed helicopters, artillery, strike aircraft, and armored personnel carriers. Six caliber .50 machine gunners of the 7th Mechanized Company were killed.

The following is extracted from the Viet Cong After-Action Report of the Ap Bac Operation. The document was captured on 27 February 1963:

Experiences in combat against M-113 APC: Following characteristics and capabilities of the M-113 should be known before taking action against these vehicles:

- (1) Advantages
 - (a) Strong fire power

Mechanized Rifle Coop M-113
APC Soldier - 7th Mechanized

APC

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(b) Its powerful engine permits movement on rugged terrain.

(2) Disadvantages

(a) The armor is thin in the lower part of the vehicle.

(b) The gunner must expose himself above the vehicle when firing.

(c) At a distance of 50 to 70 meters, the machine gun on the vehicle is no longer effective. (ACTIV Note: It is not known why this comment is made. It is not true.)

(d) The drivers windshield is thin, and he can easily be hit. (ACTIV Note: probably referring to vision blocks.)

(3) In exploiting the above deficiencies, the Platoon of C1/261, led by Comrade Dung, successfully used defensive grenades while Comrade Son and Chien employed grenade launchers. Individual soldiers can use small arms to shoot at the gunner or at the infantry troops on the vehicle.

(4) Comrade Dun used a defensive grenade to knock out an M-113. He waited for the APC to approach and he threw a grenade into it. When the gunner and the troop are still on the vehicle, we should use firepower to make them get down before throwing the grenades.

(5) This method was based on the two following deficiencies of the M-113 APC:

(a) At close distances, its firepower is no longer effective.

(b) The APC has no top cover. The employment of grenade launcher by Comrade Son was also effective because a direct hit will kill all the troops on the vehicle. (ACTIV Note: The M-113 crewman have rarely closed the cargo hatch.)

(c) The method proposed by Comrade Chien is to fire a rifle grenade directly at the APC, aiming at the gunner in order to kill him and destroy the machine gun.

The Viet Cong continued training their units to combat the mechanized rifle troops. They understood their serious antitank deficiency. Though they could capture 57mm recoilless rifles from the ARVN, there was no ready supply of antitank rounds. The ARVN had recalled all HEAT rounds by this time. During the spring and summer the Viet Cong received HEAT rounds from outside the country, undoubtedly of Chinese Communist manufacture. The number of 57mm recoilless rifle hits on M-113's rose sharply in the fall of 1963.

In September a VC 75mm recoilless rifle was captured on an operation in the Ca Mau peninsula. Three months later, on 3 December

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1963, the first M-113 was disabled by a 75mm recoilless rifle and then destroyed by a 57mm recoilless rifle HEAT round.

The incidence of mined vehicles rose dramatically in the late summer and early fall. It was quite obvious that the Viet Cong were taking active measures to counter the M-113 threat.

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which have demonstrated skill in employing air and artillery support.

a. OFFENSIVE TECHNIQUES. The ambush is a common VC offensive technique. Detailed planning and meticulous preparation are always in evidence; they have been known to let an opportunity slip by rather than act hastily. Command detonated mines are usually employed to fix the target in place. Then after a short and violent attack, the ambushing forces make a rapid withdrawal. The usual target is people, not supplies. Raids are another common offensive technique. The surprise raid takes as much advantage as possible of lax security. It is usually short and aimed at a larger force. Larger power raids employ overwhelming strength and maximum firepower and are designed to quickly overrun and annihilate the defenders. Maximum use is made of darkness and poor weather conditions to minimize the effects of artillery and air fire support. Harassment is one of the tenets of VC guerilla warfare and is practiced wherever conditions permit. Sniper fire, mines, booby traps, grenades, mortars, recoilless rifles and even spiked traps and poison arrows are employed. The VC are adept at infiltration for the purpose of sabotage, assassination, demoralization and the collection of intelligence. The following explanation of VC offensive techniques was furnished by the Ambush Academy, 25th Infantry Division:

The technique, "One Slow, Four Quick" is used by the Viet Cong in their battle planning for assault against built up defensive positions or for ambush of moving columns of vehicles or dismounted troops.

*Mechanized & Airborne Combat Operations
South Vietnam*

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Studies of these steps reveal that the Viet Cong in the first step, that of "PREPARE SLOWLY," believe in thorough and deliberate planning before undertaking any tactical operation. They do not usually undertake an operation that does not have a very good chance of succeeding. In this step the Tactical Commander formulates his plans, studies the strength and weakness of the enemy, evaluates the terrain, makes a ground and map reconnaissance of the area of tactical operation and plans his routes to and from his objective. Then the Viet Cong leader withdraws to the rear in a relative secure area. Here he organizes his tactical elements and chooses a rehearsal site. This must be as near like his planned objective as possible. Here he rehearses the operation until every leader and individual is familiar with the terrain, his specific job and only then, when the Viet Cong Commander is convinced that the rehearsal is perfect does he decide to execute his planned operation.

THE FOUR QUICK STEPS. This is the execution of the operation and in the first quick step "ADVANCE QUICKLY". The Viet Cong element moves from their relatively secure area and advances quickly without delay to minimize their desired objective. Then they immediately as planned go into the second quick step "ASSAULT QUICKLY". In this, the assault phase, they use to maximum advantage the element of surprise and mass a large volume of automatic rifle fire, recoilless rifle fire or rifle grenade fire on their objective or upon the lead element of a vehicular or dismounted column to halt and disorganize it. They then exploit their success and pursue the enemy killing or capturing him.

At this time the Viet Cong executes the third quick step and "CLEAR THE BATTLEFIELD QUICKLY". In this phase he collects and carries off for future use all of the weapons, ammunition and explosives he can carry and destroys anything of value left behind. He evacuates his wounded and religiously carries off his dead.

He then, with orderly precision, advances into the fourth quick step of "WITHDRAWS QUICKLY". He moves out over planned withdrawal routes ready to use alternate routes if necessary and his tactical elements quickly breakdown into smaller elements and lose themselves over as large an area as possible.

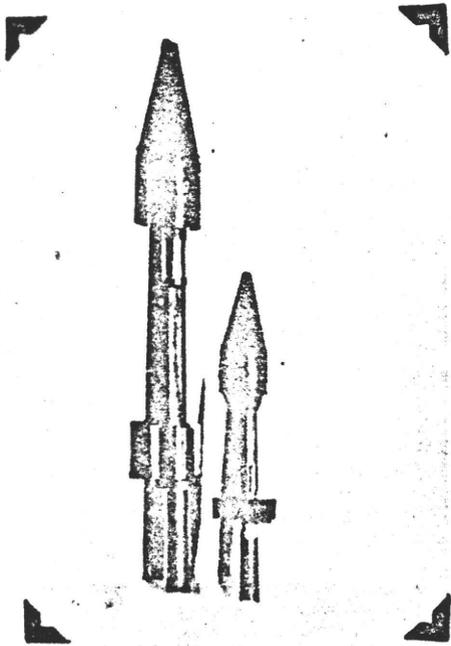


Figure 1. VC Antitank Grenades
RPG7, Left, RPG2, Right

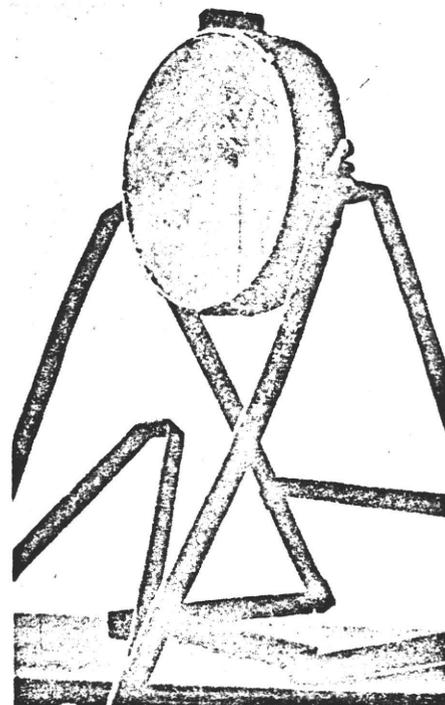


Figure 2. VC Claymore Mine

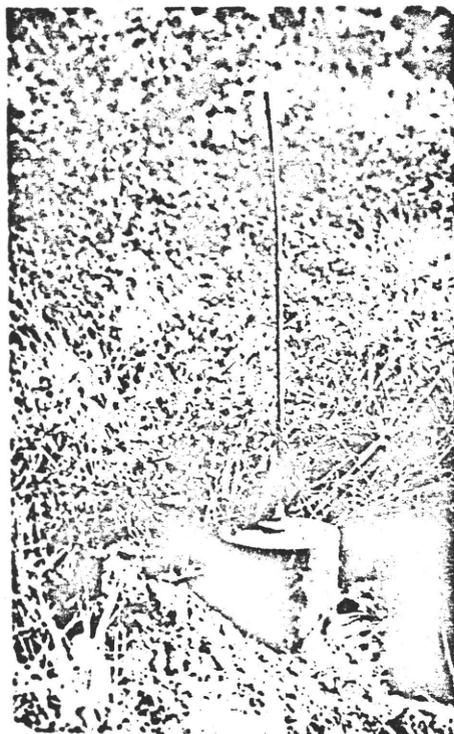


Figure 3. VC Stick Mine



Figure 4. VC Antitank Mine
Chinese Manufacture

b. DEFENSIVE TECHNIQUES. Defensive techniques are centered around methods of escaping from all forms of attack by stronger forces. In general, the defense is one of delay until a rapid withdrawal from contact can be made. Once contact is broken, the VC either go into hiding or exfiltrate to pre-arranged rallying points. Capture is evaded by blending with the local population, melting into dense jungle areas or by literally going underground into elaborate and well-concealed tunnel systems. The VC prepare extensive defensive systems throughout their areas of operation, and these are characterized by defense in depth, mutual support, overhead cover and maximum use of cover and concealment.

c. ANTITANK TECHNIQUES.

(1) General. Although the VC cannot be said to possess a sophisticated antitank capability, they make effective use of weapons and materials available to them. The primary antitank weapons consist of the 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifles, antitank grenade launchers (RPG2 and RPG7) and at times the 12.7mm machine gun. Antitank mines vary from pressure detonated devices similar to the U.S. antitank mines through various improvised mines which may be as much as 250 lbs in size. They also use recovered artillery and mortar shells and aircraft bombs with pressure or command detonated fuzes. Figures 1 through 4 illustrate typical VC antitank weapons and mines.

(2) Offensive Use. The most frequent offensive use of antitank weapons is in conjunction with ambushes. They are usually

emplaced at each end of the ambush area where they can attack the first and last vehicles in the killing zone and also protect the flanks of the position. They will also be placed at intervals throughout the killing zone. These weapons will have designated alternate positions to which they can be moved to protect the rear of the ambushing force against encirclement by mobile forces. Command detonated mines are also employed at the ends of the killing zone to knock out vehicles and block movement out of the zone. Claymore antipersonnel mines are frequently placed in trees for the purpose of injuring personnel riding on top of vehicles and crewmen who are partially exposed. Enemy personnel will also position themselves in ditches along side the road three to five meters from the passing armored vehicles. They attempt to take advantage of the dead space around APC's and tanks where automatic weapons cannot be sufficiently depressed to engage them. From this distance the enemy attempts to throw hand grenades into the tracks of the vehicle and to throw grenades into the driver and fighting compartment hatches. They will also tie two or three hand grenades together and attempt to lodge them on top of the vehicles in the hope of penetrating the thinner armor. One defense against such tactics is the use of hand grenades dropped over the side of the vehicle. Care must be taken, however, to throw the grenade far enough away from the enemy that he cannot pick it up and throw it back before it explodes. Another solution is mutual support by two or more vehicles in order that one

vehicle can use its automatic weapons to protect the other. Only when conditions are highly favorable will an attack be made against an armor unit unless they can find an isolated platoon or less which they can engage by hit and run tactics. For a short period they will employ all possible means to destroy the armor vehicles including recoilless rifles, antitank grenade launchers, hand grenades and satchel charges. Once they have lost the advantage of surprise and are in danger of being defeated, they withdraw. Nuisance type mining is the most frequent method of offensive antitank warfare. Mines will be emplaced at night in roads that are well traveled during the day. Often large command detonated mines will be emplaced during the hours of darkness. They will also emplace mines on trails which may not have been used for some time. There have been occasions when pressure fused mines did not explode until after several vehicles had passed over them and so were thought to be command detonated. Investigation of other mines found in the vicinity usually indicated that mud had become hardened under the spider of the mine and the vehicle which eventually exploded the mine was one having a higher ground pressure than those that had previously passed over the mine, often a heavily loaded vehicle.

(3) Defensive Employment. Antitank weapons can be expected in any defensive position. They are rapidly moved to that portion of the position being threatened by armored elements. No particular technique has been discerned in their employment except

that they are employed at close ranges, usually less than 50 meters. Mines are also employed in the vicinity of organized defensive positions and base camp complexes. They are not always placed on roads or trails but may be found randomly emplaced in fields and open areas of the jungle.

(4) Logistical Support. The VC relies on the local population for food, clothing and manpower. NVA provides weapons, ammunition and some manpower. Supplies are also received from out-of-country sources in contiguous areas and from Red China.

(5) Strengths and Weaknesses. VC strengths lie in his ideological dedication, his toughness and endurance, a thorough intelligence system and a high degree of foot mobility. His weaknesses stem from his lack of a sophisticated war machine. He is highly vulnerable to air, artillery and armor attack and has none of these capabilities at his own disposal. He lacks communications and has a limited logistical capability for the support of sustained operations.

4. FRIENDLY FORCES. Friendly forces in RVN consist of U.S. Forces, Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF), and the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF).

a. FREE WORLD MILITARY ASSISTANCE FORCES (FWMAF). FWMAF forces consist of representative units or contingents from Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Korea, The Republic of China and the Philippines. Tactical FWMAF, at the present time, are limited to the nations of Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea.

The VC were reluctant early in the conflict in Vietnam to engage armor or mechanized forces because of their lack of antiarmor and antitank capability. Mechanized rifle companies were compiling a fantastic record of successes against the Viet Cong. More often than not, the enemy chose to flee rather than to fight. In the AP Bac operation in January 1963, the VC did not flee; they fought for their lives and won over a numerically superior ARVN force which had air support, armor, and artillery.

The following is extracted from the Viet Cong after-action report of the Ap Bac operation. The document was captured on 27 February 1963:

Experiences in combat against M113 APC: Following characteristics and capabilities of the M113 should be known before taking action against these vehicles:

(1) Advantages.

(a) Strong firepower.

(b) Its powerful engine permits movement on rugged terrain.

(2) Disadvantages.

(a) The armor is thin in the lower part of the vehicle.

(b) The gunner must expose himself above the vehicle when firing.

*This possibly refers to
The angle of depression and is
to encourage the V.C. to get in
close to attack the vehicle. In
this case, it is a true statement.*

(c) At a distance of 50 to 70 meters, the machinegun on the vehicle is no longer effective. (Note: It is not known why this comment was made. It is not true.)

(d) The driver's windshield is thin, and he can easily be hit. (Note: Probably referring to vision blocks.)

(3) In exploiting the above deficiencies, the platoon of C1/261, led by Comrade Dun, successfully used defensive grenades while Comrades Son and Chien employed grenade launchers. Individual soldiers can use small arms to shoot at the gunner or at the infantry troops on the vehicle.

(4) Comrade Dun used a defensive grenade to knock out an M113. He waited for the APC to approach and he threw a grenade into it. When the gunner and the troop are still on the vehicle, we should use firepower to make them get down before throwing the grenades.

(5) This method was based on the two following deficiencies of the M113 APC:

(a) At close distances, its firepower is no longer effective.

(b) The APC has no top cover. The employment of grenade launcher by Comrade Son was also effective because a direct hit will kill all the troops on the vehicle. (Note: ~~The M113 crewman have rarely closed the cargo hatch.~~)

*Bears out the above
observation -*

(c) The method proposed by Comrade Chien is to fire a rifle grenade directly at the APC, aiming at the gunner in order to kill him and destroy the machinegun.

The Viet Cong continued training their units to combat the mechanized rifle troops. They understood their serious antitank deficiency. Though they could capture 57-mm recoilless rifles from the ARVN, there was no ready supply of antitank rounds. The ARVN had recalled all HEAT rounds by this time. During the spring and summer, the Viet Cong received HEAT rounds from outside the country, undoubtedly of Chinese Communist manufacture. The number of 57-mm recoilless rifle on M113's rose sharply in the fall of 1963.

In September, a VC 75-mm recoilless rifle was captured on an operation in the Ca Mau peninsula. Three months later, on 3 December 1963, the first M113 was disabled by a 75-mm recoilless rifle and then destroyed by a 57-mm recoilless rifle HEAT round.

The incidence of mined vehicles rose dramatically in the late summer and early fall. It was quite obvious that the Viet Cong were taking active measures to counter the M113 threat.

The ambush was a common VC offensive technique. Detailed planning and meticulous preparation were always in evidence; they were known to

let an opportunity slip by on occasion rather than act hastily. Command-detonated mines were usually employed to fix the target in place. Then after a short and violent attack, the ambushing forces made a rapid withdrawal. The usual target was people, not supplies. Raids were another common offensive technique, to take as much advantage as possible of lax security. The surprise raid was usually short and aimed at a larger force. Larger power raids employed overwhelming strength and maximum firepower and were designed to quickly overrun and annihilate the defenders. Maximum use was made of darkness and poor weather conditions to minimize the effects of artillery and air fire support. Harassment was one of the tenets of VC guerrilla warfare practiced wherever conditions permitted. Sniper fire, mines, booby-traps, grenades, mortars, recoilless rifles, and even spiked traps and poison arrows were employed. The VC were adept at infiltration for the purpose of sabotage, assassination, demoralization, and collection of intelligence. The following is an explanation of VC offensive techniques utilized in counterinsurgency operations.

The technique, "One Slow, Four Quick," is used by the Viet Cong, in their battle planning for assault against built-up defensive positions or for ambush of moving columns of vehicles or dismounted troops.

Studies of these steps reveal that the Viet Cong in the first step, that of "PREPARE SLOWLY," believe in thorough and deliberate planning before undertaking any tactical operation. They do not usually undertake an operation that does not have a very good chance of succeeding. In this step, the tactical commander formulates his plans, studies the strength and weakness of the enemy, evaluates the terrain, makes a ground and map reconnaissance of the area of tactical operation, and plans his routes to and from his objective. Then the Viet Cong leader withdraws to the rear in a relatively secure area. Here he organizes his tactical elements and chooses a rehearsal site. This must be as near like his planned objective as possible. Here he rehearses the operation until every leader and individual is familiar with the terrain, and his specific job, and only then, when the Viet Cong commander is convinced that the rehearsal is perfect does he decide to execute his planned operation.

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He then, with orderly precision, advances into the fourth quick step, "WITHDRAW QUICKLY." He moves out over planned withdrawal routes ready to use alternate routes if necessary and his tactical elements quickly breakdown into smaller elements and lose themselves over as large an area as possible.

Defensive techniques used by the VC were centered on methods of escaping from all forms of attack by stronger forces. In general, the defense was one of delay until a rapid withdrawal from contact could be made. Once contact was broken, the VC either went into hiding or exfiltrated to pre-arranged rallying points. Capture was evaded by blending with the local population, by melting into dense jungle areas, or by literally going underground into elaborate and well-concealed tunnel systems. The VC prepared extensive defensive systems throughout their areas of operation, and these were characterized by defense in depth, mutual support, overhead cover, and maximum use of cover and concealment.

Although the VC cannot be said to have possessed a sophisticated antiarmor capability, they did make effective use of weapons and materials available to them. The primary antiarmor weapons consisted of the 57-mm and 75-mm recoilless rifles, antitank grenade launchers (RPG2 and RPG7), and at times the 12.7-mm machinegun. Antitank mines varied from pressure-detonated devices similar to the US antitank mines through various improvised mines, some as heavy as 250 pounds. They also used recovered artillery and mortar shells and aircraft bombs with pressure- or command-detonated fuzes. Figures 1 through 4 illustrate typical VC antitank weapons and mines.

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The Viet Cong improved his antiarmor capabilities and developed new techniques to survive on the battlefield in South Vietnam. He avoided contact with large armor forces and fought when it was to his advantage

...over provided by darkness, and the weather to the
...dispersed until concentration was required, and
...he carried it out with dispatch.
...and extremely dedicated, the Viet Cong proved
...armor operations in South Vietnam.



Figure 1. VC Antitank Grenades
RPG7 (Left) & RPG2 (Right).

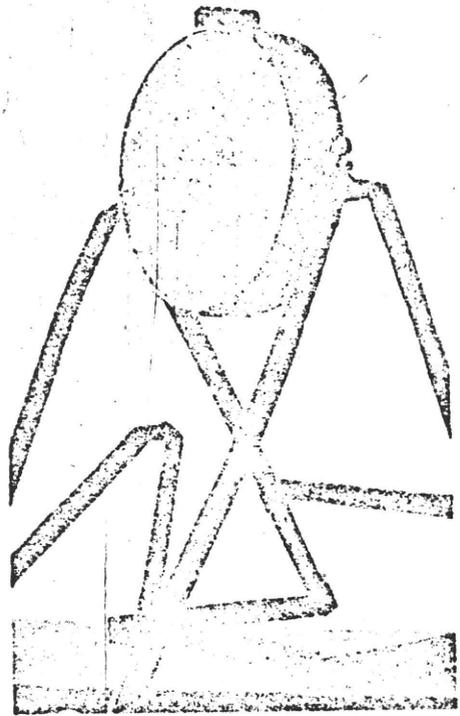


Figure 2. VC Claymore Mine.



Figure 3. VC Stick Mine.

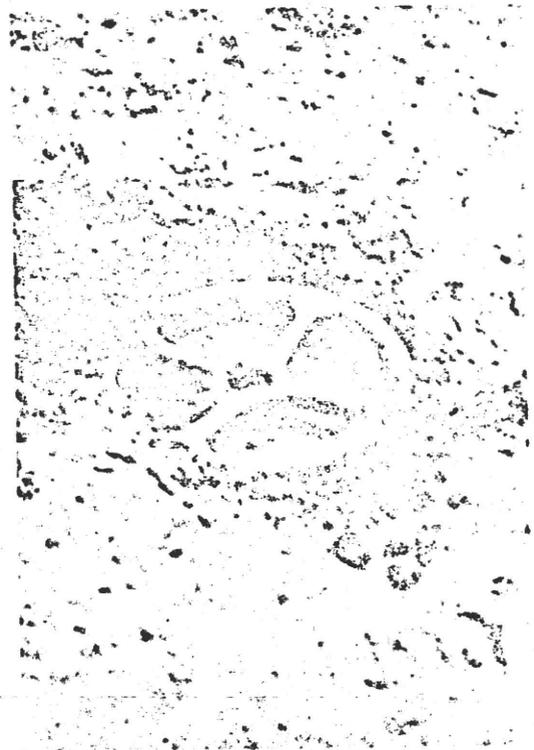


Figure 4. VC Antitank Mine of
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