

54-99

MISSION VIET NAM  
Captain Michael D. Mierau  
AOAC-1B

## MISSION: VIET NAM

15 February 1966 - Mission: Organize and conduct POR/POM Training for the U.S. Army Armor Center, to prepare all replacements going to Viet Nam. Be prepared to begin instruction on or about 1 April. Be prepared to instruct all enlisted grades, and MOS's, and all officers at Fort Knox and within the tri-state area of Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky.

No easy job in any man's language, but one handed to the Fourth Battalion (Mechanized), 54th Infantry, over and above their normal Armor School support mission. This article has been written with the idea of making the job a little easier for someone who might have to do the same thing. In it, I have tried to point out the major problems we encountered, and how we solved each of them.

Our first problem was to determine the subjects we were to teach. Most of our guidance came initially from USCONARC Regulation 350-1. A requirement for 16 hours of orientation was contained in this regulation. We knew we could comply with this number of hours, as well as expand our program. We wanted to give more practical work, and provide a closer look at Viet Nam and the Viet Cong than were required. Basically we decided on a 20 hour course. Several of the USCONARC classes were dropped in name, but retained in form, by integrating them into other related instruction.

Expanding from the USCONARC requirement, we based our program on the following criteria. First, the training had to be realistic. All instruction had to be pointed directly at experience and conditions in Viet Nam. Second, we knew that our audience would be from very wide backgrounds. We had to make a single block of instruction appeal to everyone. Armor Center told us to expect soldiers in grade E-2 through Lt. Colonel, with job training extending from all technical services through the combat arms. We were also to plan on having enlisted personnel

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from Air Force Air Weather Service, because they were to be attached to U.S. Army units in Viet Nam. Our first class in April had about thirty-five of these people, but the requirement was later dropped.

We felt that we could very adequately orient anyone for what they would encounter in Viet Nam. I think that the word orientation takes on a very important connotation at this point. Our mission was not to train these individuals, as was being done at several Advanced Individual Training Centers, because we had only two and one half training days in which to accomplish this very large and important job. Our instruction was weighted toward the combat infantryman, even though we knew some of the students would never leave Saigon. However, we knew the habits and techniques of the Viet Cong, and felt that everyone would benefit if they received some ambush and booby trap training. When the final training program was written, we had included what we considered to be 20 hours of the most important material.

The completed training program looked like this:

- 1 hour - Course orientation and the film "Why Viet Nam." This covered our administrative requirements and met the USCONARC requirement of showing the film.
- 1 hour - Training film VTR-10 "I am a Soldier." This film was also required by USCONARC directive.
- 1 hour - Area orientation. A description of Viet Nam that included the people, geography, and climate.
- 1 hour - Area orientation. An orientation on the Vietnamese armed forces and the Viet Cong. This covered the organization, missions and basic tactics of the Vietnamese, and a history and organization of the Viet Cong.
- 1 hour - Jungle Operations. A general orientation on jungle operations, <sup>(men)</sup> and covering survival as well as woodsmanship. It was held outside where a demonstration area had been built.
- 1 hour - Field communication techniques. An orientation and review of the PRC-6, -10, -25 radios and field expedient

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- antennas. It also covered communications security, and some special radio nets used in Viet Nam.
- 2 hours - Techniques of the Viet Cong. This instruction was designed to orient on specific Viet Cong techniques, and covered terrorism, mines, and booby traps.
- 4 hours - Ambushes and immediate action. This class included instruction on Viet Cong ambushes and immediate action for mounted and dismounted units. It included instruction, demonstration, and practical work in preparation for convoys and patrols.
- 1 hour - Mechanical training, M-16 rifle. Instruction and practical work on assembly, disassembly, care and cleaning, and immediate action.
- 1 hour - Intelligence in Counterinsurgency. Intelligence collection and security as it particularly pertained to small unit operations in Viet Nam.
- 1 hour - First Aid. This covered first aid, and self aid for the individual soldier, as well as tips on how to stay clean and healthy in Southeast Asia.
- 1 hour - Panel Discussion. This was used to allow students to ask questions of a panel of veterans. Panel members were drawn from many units at Ft. Knox, with an attempt to have representation from most major units and commands in Viet Nam.
- 4 hours - Close Combat Course. This class permitted the student to fire the M-16 rifle under simulated combat conditions.

The next problem to be solved was to find instructors for the classes. It would have been ideal to have enough Viet Nam returnees. However, we found that there were only three in the battalion. Fortunately our experiences covered II, III, and IV Corps areas. So, we were well prepared to cover the many aspects of the varied terrain, and the different methods of the Viet Cong. We made up for the lack of experience by picking officers and noncommissioned officers, who were enthusiastic. Once their lesson plans were written, they were reviewed by the three returnees. The same process was used to prepare the classes. They

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were rehearsed by the returnees, until as many personal experiences and knowledge had been injected into them, as possible. The local First Army Training Aids Division gave us high priority to obtain the most realistic training aids. Their support was outstanding.

A great deal of effort was made to give true realism to the three outdoor classes (Techniques of the Viet Cong, Ambushes, and Close Combat Course).

The first, Techniques of the Viet Cong, was written to teach their methods of terrorism, booby traps, mines, and weapons. For this we built a small replica of a Viet Cong village, and filled it with tunnels, caches, and booby traps. We also built a special booby trap area, where we could show in detail the many methods the Viet Cong use for making mines and booby traps. The path that ran between the village and this second area was filled with grenade trips, and booby traps. Foot traps, man traps, punjii stakes, malayan gates, and many other devices were placed in all three locations. All were set to harmlessly trigger when the class traveled<sup>(over)</sup> between the areas. Although it is possible, that what we showed the students could have increased their anxieties, the purpose was to make them more aware of what the Viet Cong did. I am sure we have saved some lives by making some people more alert.

The second outdoor class, which taught ambushes and immediate action drills, received a great amount of preparation time and work. Vehicular and foot ambush sites were made in the same painstaking manner of the Viet Cong. Sites were well chosen and well camouflaged. Adequate aggressors were used to provide the tremendous shock and firepower, characteristic of a Viet Cong ambush. To add more realism, TNT and propane operated mortar simulators were used. The students were shown how an ambush was prepared, and how to organize for, and conduct immediate action. Students were then exposed to a vehicular and a foot ambush, and conducted immediate action in both. Further, they were given the opportunity to turn the tables on the aggressors.

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It was during this phase, when they were allowed to ambush the aggressors, that we made them believers in the need for control and immediate action. They were able to see how helpless the ambushed force was, and how prevention of the first few seconds of confusion made the difference between life and death.

Last, the firing of the M-16 rifle posed a real problem for us. USCONARC required the use of a Trainfire II course for qualification, however this course was not available at Fort Knox. We could not fire Trainfire I, because the ammunition allocation was too small. We decided that the close combat course was the best substitute, short of conducting the required Trainfire II course. We would be teaching fire and movement, and above all we would have a live fire exercise. Even with safety requirements, this was about the most realistic exercise we could provide. We satisfied the USCONARC requirement by scoring targets, and giving qualification scores for the number of hits. Fifty three rounds were fired. Thirteen were used to confirm the zero and to fire automatic fire. The remaining rounds were fired at eight silhouette targets. Two points were scored for each target hit. The scoring system allowed the following:

- 80 possible
- 70 - 80 expert
- 60 - 69 sharpshooter
- 50 - 59 marksman
- below 50 - unqualified

Another advantage gained, although it was not a controlling factor in our choice, was that we could fire the M-16 with automatic fire at the end of the course. We could give a complete familiarization of the weapon under live fire conditions, and come as close as possible to the realities of Viet Nam.

Overall, the course was designed to orient the students on Viet Nam, and the conditions they would soon encounter. We knew that there were more complete training programs, but all

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required much more time than what was available. We had to make assumptions and compromises to meet the criteria imposed by Armor Center. Given the time, facilities, personnel, and the students, this was our solution!

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Captain Michael D. Mierau, 090964, was commissioned in 1960 from the United States Military Academy. He graduated from the Infantry Officers' Orientation Course, Ranger Course, and Airborne Course in 1960. He was then assigned to USAREUR where he served with 1st Battle Group, 26th Infantry and 1st Airborne Battle Group, 505th Infantry. In 1964 he returned to CONUS to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, and further served with them in Viet Nam, when that unit was transferred in 1964. He returned to CONUS to serve with the 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 54th Infantry, 16th Armor Group at Fort Knox and to attend the Armored Officers' Career Course. He is currently assigned to \_\_\_\_\_.

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15 February 1967

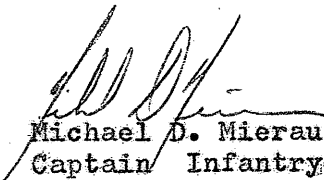
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Michael D. Mierau  
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