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OPERATIONS REPORT LESSONS LEARNED

REPORT 1-67





DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310

IN REPLY REFER TO

AGAM-P (M) (24 Jan 67) FOR OT RD

30 January 1967

SUBJECT: Operations Report - Lessons Learned 1-67 - "Observations of a Platoon Leader"

TO: SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. This is the eleventh of a series of reports from operations being conducted by US Forces in Vietnam.

2. Information contained in this report is provided to insure appropriate benefits in the future from lessons learned during the current combat operations. The lessons cited in this report may be adapted for use in developing training material.

3. Observations of a Platoon Leader is an account by 1st Lieutenant Patrick H. Graves, Jr. of the lessons that he learned as a platoon leader while serving with the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam. The opinions stated herein do not necessarily reflect official Department of the Army approved doctrine.

4. The war in Vietnam has been characterized as a small unit leaders war. This report addresses the small unit leader and should be of particular value to all junior officers and senior non-commissioned officers. It is anticipated that portions of this report will appear in a future publication of the Infantry Magazine.

5. Previously published reports of the Operations Report - Lessons Learned series were:

a. Summary of Lessons Learned, Vietnam, 2 November 1965, UNCLASSIFIED.

b. Operations Report - Lessons Learned, Report 1-66, Operation CRIMP, 22 March 1966, marked FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.

c. Operations Report - Lessons Learned, Report 2-66, The Battle of Annihilation and the BONG SON Campaign, 1 April 1966, CLASSIFIED.

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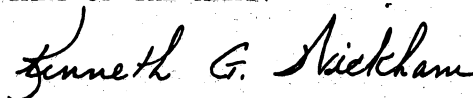
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Lessons Learned 1-67 -

"Observations of a Platoon Leader" The Adjutant General

KENNETH G. WICKHAM
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FOREWORD

The material contained herein has been prepared in the hope it will be of value to junior officers, especially those subject to duty in Vietnam. I believe this text offers a fresh approach to the subject material since I, a platoon leader, address platoon leaders.

The various topics of particular importance are titled and subtitled for special consideration.

Information has been compiled largely through personal experience, and through conversation with fellow officers. In addition, I was fortunate to have observed the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, for one month, two weeks of which were on operations against the enemy. One of these operations was the important Operation Crimp, during which the Australian forces discovered a complex tunnel system near Ben Cat.

The experience within these pages has been derived from a tour in Vietnam with the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. This material does not necessarily reflect the policy of the unit.

Many points herein may be controversial. I qualify Observations of A Platoon Leader only by the fact that I was a rifle platoon leader in a Platoon Leader's War.

Patrick H. Graves, Jr.
PATRICK H. GRAVES, JR.
1ST LT, INF

OBSERVATIONS OF A PLATOON LEADER

In any situation presented in combat, the leader is the control center. He makes an estimate of the situation, decides on a course of action, and directs his unit to completion of the mission. Whether these actions take place in a few minutes under the roar of a fire fight or in hours of deliberate planning, the leader is the center of control.

In counter-insurgency operations, small unit actions are prevalent. For this reason, the small unit leader frequently functions alone, thus this type of warfare becomes the small unit leader's war. Now, because this is true, the squad and platoon leader can expect to share a greater burden of combat activity. The small unit leader is the control center and the units' actions are his responsibility.

Many other aspects of the war in Vietnam are unique in that they have not been experienced by the American Army during recent wars. New lessons are being learned and new techniques are being developed each day of the war.

Based on my personal experience as a platoon leader, I have accumulated the following information to aid the small unit leader. It should provide a guide for those who are destined to be small unit leaders in Vietnam.

TERRAIN:

Four distinct classes of terrain exist in Vietnam; the Central Highlands, the flat coastal areas, the Delta Region, and the jungle. Each area has its peculiar advantages and disadvantages to the infantry unit.

Central Highlands. The Central Highlands as found around An Khe requires extensive use of the file formation since undergrowth is thick. Here the terrain is dominated by mountains providing excellent navigational aids. Mountains break into hills and deep stream beds which contain the densest vegetation in the area. Movement is limited to a crawl. Occasional open areas consist of cultivated land or fields of elephant grass. Numerous mountain passes provide excellent ambush sites.

Control is difficult in this thick vegetation. During movement the point team of a unit provides frontal security and performs trail-blazer duties. Flank security of the column poses unmanageable problems because such elements are difficult to control. Also this requires cutting three paths as opposed

to one, thus impeding rapid movement. Noise is a factor here also. Observation is often limited to several meters and fields of fire are non-existent. These factors do not favor the enemy ambush on other than well defined routes.

Flat Coastal Areas. Here completely different terrain is encountered, therefore, tactics and formations must be altered. These areas are entirely flat between mountain ranges and occasional lone mountains. Only slight changes in elevation exist otherwise. Rivers, streams, and canals, often unfordable, are plentiful, and cut the large fields where otherwise unhampered vision may exist for thousands of meters. Although they are comparatively narrow, canals present a great obstacle due to their depth and foliage along the banks. Fords are frequent in the area and may be used with caution. Such crossings are easily located along paths. Bridges of bamboo poles laced together with vine are more common than concrete or wood structures.

Many villages built-up above the rice paddies dot the entire area. Access to the larger villages is by well defined roads and trails, and to the smaller villages by foot paths along dikes bordering the paddies.

The flat coastal areas are not entirely made up of rice paddies as described above. In some areas such as that around Phan Thiet, Phan Rang, and Cam Ranh Bay, the flat land consists of sparse shrub and few trees. This resembles to a great degree the western United States. Vegetation density increases closer to the bordering mountain ranges, but observation in the area is generally excellent.

The rice regions of Southeast Asia are not confined to any particular area. They exist inland and on the coast. Rice paddies are danger areas by virtue of the excellent observation and fields of fire afforded the enemy. During the cycle of each rice crop, the paddy is flooded much of the time. Due to the muddy bottom and water level, movement through the paddies is slow, noisy, and during the rainy season, very dangerous.

During the dry season when the paddies have been plowed, movement is again hampered by the roughness of the ground. This condition is almost as bad as the wet rice paddy.

To add speed to movement, dikes may be used provided the route is not restricted to one dike. Dikes are often very narrow requiring constant attention to where one walks. Observation of the surrounding terrain is thus neglected. Well traversed dikes which provide a high speed approach may often be mined.



IN THICKLY VEGETATED AREAS, THE FILE FORMATION IS FREQUENTLY USED.

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In the open terrain, the wedge and echelon formations have proven to be very useful. When using the file or column, flank and point security should be pushed well out. Unless movement is conducted at night, troops must be trained to disperse in such open areas.

The Delta Region. This region most closely resembles the rice paddy areas previously described. Here, however, water is more abundant and canals, streams, and rivers are influenced by tidal changes. Many march areas exist and present a formidable obstacle to foot and vehicular movement. Sugar cane brakes and pineapple crops are more abundant here than in the coastal regions.

The Jungle. In and around War Zones C and D west of Ben Cat and north of Bien Hoa, respectively, much of the jungle terrain in Vietnam is encountered. The jungle may further be classified into distinct type of growth, primary and secondary growth. Primary jungle - the canopy, consists of towering trees often 250 feet high, which block out the light of day. A heavy rain becomes a steady trickle on the jungle floor below lasting long after the rain has subsided.

The absence of this canopy gives way to dense undergrowth or secondary jungle. Movement is rapid where the primary jungle or canopy exists as compared to movement through secondary jungle. Secondary jungle growth is perhaps the thickest vegetation in Southeast Asia.

Frequent use is made of the file formation in the jungle since control is a major concern. Problems of movement in the jungle resembles those in the dense vegetation of the Central Highlands.

Because clear areas are scarce in the jungle and other densely vegetated terrain, landing zones are marked in the same manner as rallying points. The preparation of LZs is difficult and time consuming and requires a large effort.

NAVIGATION:

Thorough understanding and professional use of map reading and navigation are essential to the accomplishment of the mission. The importance of map reading ability is often not meaningful, nor appreciated, through the long hours of tedious classroom instruction. Practical exercise in the field is where professional ability is founded. Believe me, you must be able to put your classroom knowledge of map reading to practical application in Vietnam.

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The junior officer proficient in map reading and navigation is a most notable asset to his unit whether it be an American or Vietnamese unit. In counter-insurgency operations in Vietnam where movement is critical, this is especially valid.

The platoon leader who fails to use and trust his non-commissioned officers with the map is creating a problem for himself. Most senior NCOs have had many years of experience in map reading and navigation. They can offer much assistance. This does not, of course, relieve the leader of the responsibility for the actions of his unit. The platoon leader is a supervisor at all times and must be aware of, and check, the actions of his subordinates.

Maps. Units have been fortunate to have excellent maps of operational areas of Vietnam. Maps are scaled 1:50,000. Aerial photographs are often of a larger scale. Large terrain features as a rule, are accurate for navigational purposes as are villages and rice paddies to a lesser degree. Map errors do exist, however, and this should be considered, especially when using fire support. In plotting a course of movement, the G-M angle for Vietnam is not so large to require consideration. A good map reconnaissance is invaluable to any mission and should be included as an integral part of the planning phase. Such a reconnaissance does not stop at squad leader level but is conducted with each member of the unit.

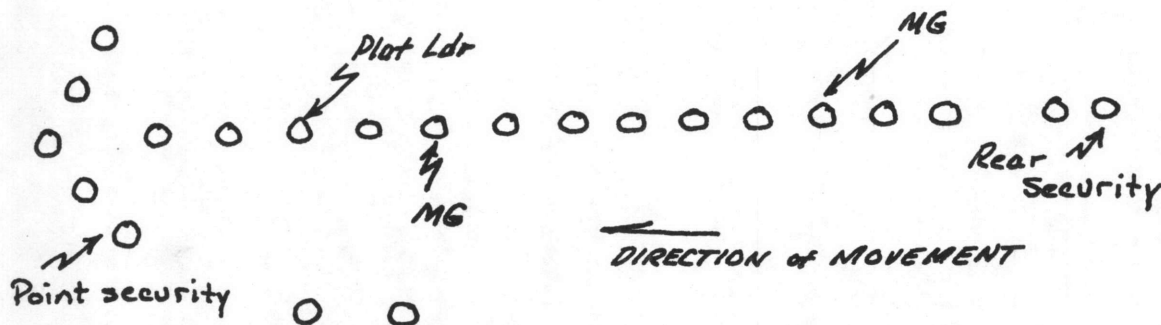
Compass and Pace. The compass is used extensively everywhere in Vietnam. In the jungle and other densely vegetated areas where noticeable landmarks do not exist or are not observable, one must rely solely on the compass and pace for navigation. A compass issued down to each fire team leader is desirable. Once in a semi-permanent or permanent base area, a unit should set up a compass check and pace course.

FORMATIONS AND TACTICS:

In discussing the tactics used by the American forces in Vietnam, I must note that our small unit tactics are for the most part conventional. Most officers have the idea that duty in Vietnam means divorcing oneself from former tactics instruction. This is not true. Although the peculiarities of the war in Vietnam have resulted in the revision of certain tactics and the formulation of new techniques, basic infantry tactics form a foundation for any operation or action. Further, this conflict gives the Army the opportunity to test and perfect old and new tactical concepts in a counter-insurgency environment.

Movement. Let me first discuss movement. In a guerrilla infested area, the leader must keep one principle in mind above all else - SECURITY. It is mandatory to move with all around security when terrain permits. This is executed by providing point, flank, and rear security teams. A platoon file may look like this:

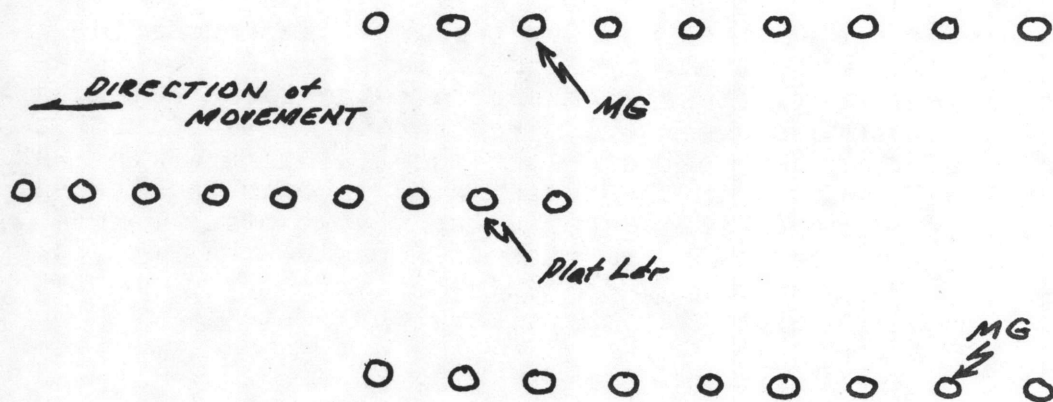
○ ○ ○ Flank security



An explanation of the duties of each element and team would be repetitious of selected manuals and training. Some points, however, are worthy of comment. The machine gun positioned behind the platoon leader gives him control of a forward gun while the weapons squad leader or platoon sergeant controls the rear gun.

Notice the security provided on all sides. The rear security element drops away from the column periodically to detect and destroy a trailing enemy. Such security is essential for the commonly used file and column formations.

The wedge formation is used for relatively open areas where danger exists on both flanks and to the front. It may look like this:

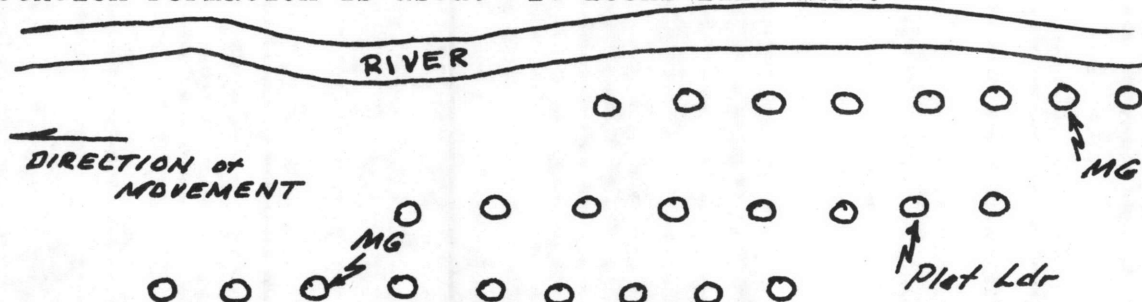




SECURITY - STAY ALERT.

Notice here too the placement of weapons and the firepower to front and flanks. Security is provided where needed, to the front and flanks, by virtue of the formation.

When a danger area such as a river exists on the flank, the echelon formation is used. It looks like this:



Again security is provided to a particular flank.

The Vee formation is used also. None of these formations are new. I demonstrate here the use of conventional formations against an unconventional enemy and emphasizes the important principle, SECURITY. (See WEAPONS: M-60, Light Machine Gun, for a discussion on the placement of this weapon in the above illustrations.)

The difficulty of movement in the terrain common to the Central Highlands and jungle is lessened greatly by the proper selection of routes prior to a mission. As stated in the FMs, avoid crossing compartments because such a practice is time consuming and tiring. Instead plan routes along ridge lines and other arteries. Stream beds and river banks provide high speed avenues of advance. Time limitations often make the use of such routes mandatory in order to accomplish the mission.

The old proverb derived from past experiences in counter-insurgency situations - "Never use roads and trails" - has a sequel that applies here. "Never use roads and trails unless the route can be secured."

Enemy Sniper. More often than not the enemy will be encountered in small numbers. The sniper is a good example of the type of small unit action frequently encountered. The mission of the sniper varies. Most often he is employed to harrass. The sniper, however, is used in areas where enemy strength is nominal. Here he is used to demonstrate to the inhabitants of the area that the Viet Cong can resist a larger government or American force. Primarily, such light resistance is for propaganda purposes.

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In a delaying mission the sniper is very effective. A single sniper can hold up a greatly superior force while his comrades effect withdrawal. Very often too, the sniper is utilized to bait an ambush by withdrawing into the prepared trap.

The effectiveness of the sniper depends on the type of enemy and the terrain. When the enemy is greatly outnumbered or when his experience and equipment make him other than a regular, he will usually engage at ranges which will allow immediate retreat after initiating the action. Main force Viet Cong and NVA snipers are bolder and possess better weapons, often complete with sniperscope. This type of sniper will allow forces to closely approach his position before engaging them. Obviously the latter sniper is more effective and casualties are higher for opposing forces.

Terrain plays a role here too. The open areas predominately found in the flat rice regions are critical danger areas. Here, well emplaced small forces and snipers taking advantage of terrain obstacles such as rivers and canals can effectively delay a greatly superior unit. On the other hand, densely vegetated areas cause engagement to be at much closer ranges.

The sniper presents a particular problem. In closing with and destroying the sniper a problem arises in the range involved. Closure must be executed with speed and aggressiveness by virtue of the sniper's ability to escape on preplanned avenues. This is where fire and maneuver comes into play. Utilize grenade launchers to the utmost, concentrating on trees and other suspected sniper locations. Aggressiveness is often the key to success or failure in destroying a sniper. A unit adept in rapidly neutralizing snipers will discourage further use of snipers in their area of operations.

Artillery and mortar support may be employed. Such support, however, requires valuable time in obtaining and adjusting the fire, time which slows rapid closure. Heavy support can be used effectively to close off suspected avenues of withdrawal. This support, however, is most often neither needed nor desired in engagements with the sniper unless fire and maneuver cannot be executed.

Avoid over-reaction to the situation involving the sniper. Be cautious of the baited ambush.

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Fire and Maneuver/Movement. Fire and maneuver/movement demand special consideration here. These are the most basic of tactical lessons, the first learned in training but often the first forgotten in combat. The common communication, "My unit is pinned down by fire," is an impossibility unless the enemy enjoys superiority in number or a superior position. In almost any combat situation involving an engagement with the enemy, fire and maneuver is the immediate solution. This lesson is so often violated by the small unit leader that it is rapidly becoming absurd.

Search and Clear/Destroy. The basic difference between a search mission and the movement to contact mission is the time allotted. Proper execution of the search mission requires adequate time, while the latter is concerned with contact and pursuit and, therefore, is conducted quite rapidly.

A common example presents itself many times. A unit receives fire from a village or inhabited area. Upon closing on the village, it is found that the enemy has fled. Now the question confronts the leader whether to pursue or to search the village. In a counter-insurgency environment to gain and maintain contact is the goal and thus the unit should pursue. If there is reason to suspect that the village may contain supplies, weapons, or intelligence data, a unit may elect to leave a group in the village to deny it to the enemy while the remainder offers pursuit. Any such separation of forces should not be made over a great distance unless each group is strong enough to sustain itself. Remember here too that over-reaction is dangerous.

The systematic and thorough search of a village is rarely conducted. Time limitations or a situation requiring pursuit is often the cause. If the mission dictates a search, time must be allocated to make the search thorough.

The mine detector is excellent in village searching to locate caches and hidden weapons in addition to its primary role. The sniper or harasser will often hide his weapon in a nearby rice paddy, a well, or a dung heap after initiating the action. He then carries on normal activity in the presence of troops. Unless located the weapon will be cleaned and used again.

During village clearing operations, use villagers to precede point elements through the village. They will avoid booby traps and concealed enemy.

In villages, huts may contain bunkers for protection against artillery. These bunkers may be inside or close to the hut. If a bunker is to be destroyed, insure that no civilians are hiding inside. Smoke or tear gas are good means to drive persons from a bunker. The same results are obtained by indicating in the presence of villagers that a grenade will be thrown into the bunker. This will encourage villagers into talking friends and perhaps the enemy from underground shelters.

The absence of children in an area frequently is a good indication of enemy activity. This situation should trigger caution, observation, and alertness.

The mission may call for the search and destruction of an enemy controlled area. Civilians will be encountered. Never make the mistake of believing everything found belongs to the enemy. For example, if rice is located in a large amount, estimate the amount required to feed the family present until the next rice harvest. The remainder may be extracted or destroyed as orders dictate. Viet Cong rice taxes are heavy, but villagers are usually allowed to retain enough to sustain themselves.

Suppose a large rice cache is found during the search and it is decided that it must be destroyed! What is the most effective method to destroy the rice? This is often a difficult problem. Burning or dumping it in a stream have proven to be effective means of disposal. Burning rice, however, is difficult without fuel. A white phosphorus grenade will not suffice since only the surface grain is charred. When burning or dumping is not feasible, the rice can be scattered over the ground, as a last resort.

Ambush. The night ambush is used frequently outside the defensive perimeter. Good ambush habits must be established early in a unit's training in order for the ambush to be effective. Light and noise discipline is a major problem area. The frequency of ambush missions and the infrequency of contact tends to increase the natural impatience of the American soldier and to cause a breakdown in light and noise discipline.

Each ambush mission must be initiated with the belief that each mission will net a kill. Planning must be thorough and precise since poor preparation serves to increase the soldier's indifference to the mission. The most common pitfalls for conventional forces in a counter-insurgency role are the bad habits and indifference formed by the infrequency of contact with the enemy.



OPEN AREAS ARE DANGER AREAS BECAUSE OF THE EXCELLENT OBSERVATION AND FIELDS OF FIRE AVAILABLE TO THE ENEMY.

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The planning phase of the ambush, however, is often shortened greatly by time limitations imposed by last-minute missions. Therefore, SOPs must be formed to eliminate some of the time consuming steps in preparing a unit for a mission. These procedures are explained to all new personnel soon after arrival in the unit. The SOP is reviewed and revised periodically. A reconnaissance by the platoon leader is essential to the successful accomplishment of the ambush mission. Lack of knowledge of the terrain will cause confusion at the ambush site and often will lead to the selection of a poor location. In the event a leader's reconnaissance is not possible during the planning phase due to time limitation or inaccessibility of the proposed location, it may be conducted as the unit moves into the area. This technique is especially useful when danger of enemy or native observation of movement into the ambush site exists. The entire unit is able to observe the proposed location as the patrol moves through the area. The patrol then moves to a location preferably at some distance away to plan the layout of the ambush. Count on all movements being observed by the inhabitants or the enemy thus lessening the chance of surprise.

The ambush must be conducted with aggressiveness and speed. Here explosives and automatic weapons play a decisive role. Special care is taken in placement of the automatic weapons and explosives. Claymores are ideal for the ambush and are used by both security and killer elements. Detonating cord is effective when laid linearly over suspected routes of escape from the killing zone.

Fire support is an important part of a successful ambush and must be included in the planning phase. It can be used to protect flanks and to secure the withdrawal. Concentrations registered on the proposed ambush location compromise its intended use.

Most frequently the ambush mission will be assigned to the squad or platoon. Supporting distance is of prime consideration and is determined from the intelligence analysis of the enemy's capability.

Open Areas. Rice paddies and other flat terrain present the problem of crossing large open areas. First, such areas are always considered danger areas. Second, movement across danger areas is conducted only as a last resort and then with utmost caution. Movement is conducted making use of available cover and concealment. Very large open areas may be crossed with little danger if the route is out of effective range of possible enemy locations.

If a danger area must be crossed, cover the move with available supporting fires. Concentrate machine guns and grenade launchers. Move by bounds.

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Open areas present a formidable problem when attempting to close with the enemy. Regular enemy forces such as main force Viet Cong and NVA units will allow troops to gain close proximity to the enemy defenses before engaging. Again, move in open areas exercising great caution.

Do not close with a well entrenched enemy, commanding excellent fields of fire, without first utilizing artillery and air support. After or in conjunction with this support, close with and destroy the enemy. Avoid practicing routine in any tactical situation. Routine and repetition lead to indifference and careflessness. The enemy takes advantage of such a situation. Rely heavily on former tactical instruction to form a base for any operation. Fire and maneuver/movement must be conditioned responses in each soldier.

Breaching Minefields. Unmarked minefields exist in Vietnam. In some instances these minefields were left by the French over a decade ago. More recently unmarked minefields have been laid by the Vietnamese. In breaching these obstacles, utilize existing trails or cattle paths if present. Keep in mind that such avenues may be covered by enemy fire.

CONDUCT OF THE NIGHT DEFENSE:

Units will find themselves confronted with the night perimeter defense more often than any other single situation. It is imperative, therefore, that the night defense provide the greatest possible security for the unit.

The successful conduct of the night defense depends on a strong and thorough planning phase. Precise initial planning allows creation of unit SOPs which simplify and hasten the preparation of the defensive posture. The following are important points to consider.

Selection of Terrain. Terrain plays a decisive role in the success of any defense. The limitations on observation imposed by darkness and dense undergrowth often allows the selection of terrain other than is suitable to the daylight defense.

Except for moonlit nights, the defense relies to a large extent on a listening post type of defense. The dense jungle undergrowth, for example, has few clear areas making movement easily audible. To allow grenades to be utilized, overhead frontal clearance, and fields of fire must be prepared.

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In clear areas, the defense will take different form. Positions will be further apart because visual observation is a greater consideration than in dense vegetation. In open areas bounded by a woodline, the perimeter should be entrenched out of grenade range from the woodline. Plan on booby trapping with trip flares and noise making devices.

In the flat rice paddy areas, the best defendable position may be a small village. Villages are built on mounds above the surrounding paddies and command excellent fields of fire in all directions. Visual observation is excellent. Sounds of movement in the wet rice paddies are easy to detect. Grazing fires make this position a machine gunner's dream. In the rice paddies, use the dikes to provide protection for the prone position.

It is not difficult to understand why the enemy very frequently chooses such locations for the defense.

Clear the area in and around the proposed defensive position. This is especially important when the perimeter includes huts and tunnels. If inhabitants are within the perimeter, they are guarded. (See ENEMY DEFENSES AND DEVICES: Tunnels.)

The Perimeter. The next step in the conduct of the night defense is the preparation of the perimeter. Maximum advantage of the terrain is utilized.

Select the distance between positions by considering the terrain, observation, the size of the unit, and the enemy's capability. The tendency is to make the perimeter too large thus decreasing security.

Each position is manned with a minimum of two personnel and 50% alertness is maintained. If the situation allows, three and four man positions are desirable to permit each soldier to get more rest. Alertness is also increased.

Foxholes are dug and all personnel sleep below the level of the ground. A poncho or tent for sleeping compromises the fighting position if erected nearby and not camouflaged. One method to eliminate sleeping in or near the fighting position is to prepare the sleeping positions at a near distance from the fighting positions. A piece of communication wire, WD1, or string is tied to the sleeping man. A tug on the wire from the fighting position alerts the off duty soldier of his turn for duty. The individual on duty

thus does not leave the fighting position.

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Do not neglect observation and listening posts. These early warning systems apply in Vietnam as in former wars.

Maximum use is made of explosives and early warning devices in the night defense. Claymores, trip flares, and noise makers are positioned at dusk or after dark if possible. Remember here that trip flares are very difficult to rig utilizing the pressure-tension device. Squad leaders should supervise the use of this device. Most commonly the pressure device, activated by tripping the safety release, is used. Never under-emphasize the use of explosives and early warning devices.

During the positioning of the perimeter, a unit is extremely vulnerable. Therefore, proper security must be established during occupation of the defensive position. At each position a minimum of one man on alert is maintained, one individual on guard, the other working to improve the position. All automatic weapons are always manned. Remember, unless you supervise, the troops will drop their equipment and sit down with little regard for security.

Proper communications are vital to the success of the defense. Visual or noise signals are used if radios or telephones are not available in sufficient amount. Communications must be established with parent and subordinate units, with any outposts, and with each fighting position. Thus, when a position becomes engaged, the leader can rapidly determine the situation. This also eliminates the necessity to examine the perimeter after darkness, a dangerous practice which may compromise the positions. No movement should exist inside the perimeter once darkness falls, except in an emergency.

Plan fires to secure avenues of approach into the perimeter and safeguard dangerous flanks. Illumination fires must also be planned.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to tell small unit leaders to check each position before and after the perimeter is formed. However, be aware of the fact that failure to do so may mean the difference between success and failure. The individual soldier will find little interest in his position or fields of fire if the leader shows no interest in them. A leader's presence does much to influence the situation by adding a sense of urgency to an otherwise routine mission.

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Engagement. The perimeter has been established and the conduct of the night defense begins. The mission of the defense is to repel and destroy the enemy. In order to execute this mission successfully the individual soldier must know what, when, and how to engage.

First, what does he engage? The soldier must overcome any fear of darkness and gain confidence in his advantages as a defender. He must learn that darkness can be his friend, if properly used, or an enemy if improperly used. For example, the soldier who engages a noise at other than close range rarely destroys the enemy. He does, however, compromise his own fighting position. Instead, the defender should identify the sound as an enemy and not a "night noise." When does he engage? The proper time is when he is sure that he can destroy his target. The appropriate trait here is self-confidence.

How is the target to be engaged? What are the best weapons with which to engage the enemy at night? Explosives play a decisive role in the night defense. The large killing radius of the claymore and grenade, for example, overcome the difficulty of pinpointing a target. In addition, the friendly perimeter is not compromised.

The effectiveness of the rifle is greatly decreased by poor visibility caused by darkness. Automatic rifles such as the M-16 should be fired in three round bursts under such conditions. Machine guns and M-79's prove very effective.

Illumination is planned in advance in the fire support plan. Illumination, however, is often misused. Leaders tend to call for this support before the situation is developed. For example, if an enemy is believed moving toward a unit's perimeter or location, illuminating the area will alert the enemy to the fact that he has been observed. He will know that a unit is in the immediate area. Develop the situation. Make contact and then illuminate and destroy.

Stand To. Stand to is the condition of having 100% alertness during critical hours of the day. For example, in some areas the enemy has repeatedly attacked between 0001 and 0200 hours. In other areas attacks may be likely at dusk or dawn.

During stand to troops are required to be at their fighting positions with weapons and equipment at the ready. Light and noise discipline is enforced and no movement exists inside the perimeter. Stand down is gradual and disciplined to avoid

alerting the enemy to this condition by excessive talk, movement, or fires.

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Before and after stand to, the Australian Army sends clearing patrols out and around their defensive perimeter to locate hiding enemy and to check on possible movement during the night. Some units practice the procedure of spraying the entire area around the perimeter with all weapons. This, however, is very ineffective since a prone enemy can avoid detection. In addition, valuable ammunition is expended and the extent of the defensive perimeter is compromised.

ENEMY DEFENSES AND DEVICES:

Usually only main force and NVA units in Vietnam are supplied with good equipment and weapons. What the enemy lacks in weapons, he makes up in the use of certain tactics and devices.

Villages. An enemy controlled village usually differs in its defense system from that of a government controlled or loyal village. The defenses of the former are constructed to avoid aerial detection as much as possible. A camouflaged trench system usually ties together prepared foxholes, gun emplacements, bunkers, and an avenue of escape around the village perimeter.

Entrances into the village are blocked by felled trees and thorny brush and barbed wire. Roads and trails are pocked with holes and trenches or poles buried upright to waist height. Bridges may be completely demolished or may have a single span missing with the approaches blocked by large pits. To provide protection for an enemy column caught by artillery or aerial bombardment, trails inside the villages contain staggered one man holes every five meters with overhead cover. Roads and trails may also be mined or may contain mantraps. Punji sticks are used to deny entrance to an enemy controlled area by means other than obvious avenues.

Tunnels. Just west of the infamous Iron Triangle near Ben Cat while operating with the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, I observed what has been described as one of the most elaborate tunnel and trench systems yet encountered in the war to that date. This occurred during Operation Crimp in January 1966. The extent of these defenses demonstrates the high degree of patience of the enemy and his workers, and the large human reservoir of labor at the enemy's disposal.

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Villages in the area are less built up than the tunnels beneath them. Each hut contains an underground bunker able to accommodate all occupants of the hut. The entrance may be inside under the bed, for example, or on the outside near the hut. Such bunkers also hide arms, ammunition, and equipment caches on occasion. More often, however, such caches are entered through other concealed entrances. Each system of tunnels contains an escape exit at a distance from the entrance and in a concealed position, such as in the surrounding jungle. Exits have been found with a concrete slab neatly concealed away from any access route.

The surrounding jungle may contain large underground rooms which may be located by finding the ventilation holes on the surface. One such hole consisted of a large diameter, hollow bamboo pole, driven perpendicular to and level with the ground.

Tunnels have accommodations to allow the enemy to live underground if it becomes necessary. Tables, beds, and even wells were discovered in underground passageways three levels deep.

An example will give a more accurate picture of the enemy's ability to tunnel. In the area mentioned above, two machine gun bunkers were found dug into well concealed positions, commanding excellent fields of fire across an open field. A gully cut the side of the otherwise flat area near the woodline leaving a small mound, 15 feet by 4 feet and shoulder height, exposed where the gully divided.

One bunker was concealed at the edge of the woodline and was connected by a tunnel to a second position five meters away. This second position had been constructed in the small mound by a connecting tunnel under the gully. Firing slits too small to allow a grenade were cut into three sides of the mound.

Effective? The platoon did not discover the positions until the enemy fired on individuals walking between the two positions. Light friendly casualties resulted but the advance of the company was delayed for over an hour. The enemy was able to escape through their tunnel network.

During a search and clear operation, tunnels and bunkers should be searched if possible. Great caution must be exercised, however, since booby traps, hiding enemy, and narrow passages can make the tunnel a death trap. The use of smoke and tear gas is one method to locate tunnel exits and to drive the enemy from underground hideouts. Gas masks

are needed here. Dogs have also been found effective in locating enemy in the tunnels. When the tunnel search is concluded, all entrances and junctions are blown by a demolition team. 24

Tunnels can be located in jungle terrain near excessive piles of dirt. This indicates an entrance nearby. Such refuse dirt heaps are distinguishable from large ant hills, also found in some areas. Since ant hills have been in existence much longer, trees and bushes usually grow from their surfaces. Refuse soil taken from tunnels partially buries the tree trunks.

Probing is another method of locating tunnel entrances and caches. A pole or bayonet sounds out covered entrances and buried cache barrels which have been dispersed throughout the undergrowth around a built up area. This procedure is a must if such an area is to be used for a friendly base of operations for any length of stay. Failure to locate tunnels and spider holes inside or near the friendly perimeter leads to enemy infiltration.

Landing Zones. In terrain where open areas are scarce, the enemy makes it practice to deny that area for use as landing zones. In rice paddy areas large mounds containing graves are at times the only dry landing areas. Large punji stakes up to three feet in length are utilized. Other open areas cleared for crops contain tree stumps cut at chest level for anti-helicopter poles. Such devices are capable of piercing the hull of a helicopter.

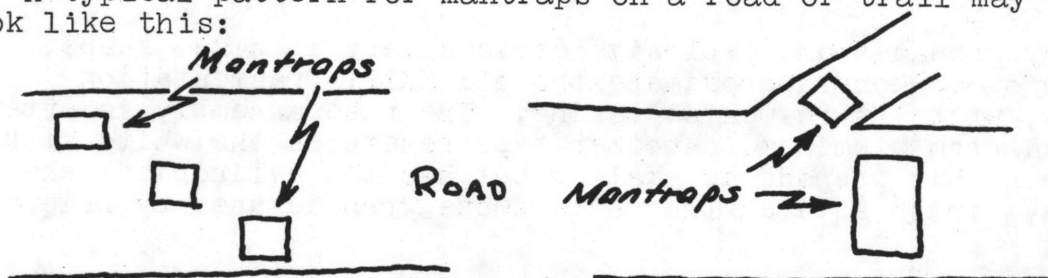
In areas where enemy activity is greater, probable LZs are protected in a more sophisticated manner. Here the entire clear area may be encircled by a trench with frequent holes in the trench walls to provide overhead cover. Another sophisticated defense consists of scattered foxholes and in some areas concrete bunkers. LZ perimeters have been found cut by a small four inch deep trench for laying wire for claymore type device. In addition, any woodline is usually well booby trapped with trip wire grenades and mines.

Caution is most important in dismounting on all LZs. Bunkers and foxholes provide excellent cover that cannot be neutralized by anything less than a direct or near hit by explosives. Even preparation with air strikes leaves much to be desired. Napalm is the best LZ preparatory means and will usually demoralize the enemy and drive him from the area. Experience has proved that the first lift of an airmobile assault must secure the adjacent terrain before the second lift touches down.

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Mantraps. Mantraps are very difficult to detect and are effective casualty producers. A variety of these devices exists but the pit is more frequently encountered.

These pits, often a cubic yard in size, contain two foot punji sticks protruding from the bottom. Along the sides are shorter sticks canted toward the bottom of the pit. Over the hole is placed a loosely woven mat of thin bamboo strips. On this mat large leaves provide a base for dirt covering. This dirt top will sometimes show foot prints to add concealment. A heavy woven mat of thumb-sized poles is placed over the trap to allow villagers and cattle to walk over it. This mat is removed when dangerto the village exists.

A typical pattern for mantraps on a road or trail may look like this:



It is extraordinary how well concealed these mantraps are. The most expert observation often cannot detect their presence. One clue here is dirt taken from the hole. It may have been thrown to the roadside nearby or scattered over the road. When such danger exists, stay off roads and trails. Otherwise, the point man should use a probing stick or movement should be made to the side of the road with each man walking in the same path.

Punji Sticks. The punji stick is a very simple but dangerous device. The punji stick is made from bamboo cut down to the desired length, sharpened, and burned on the tip for hardness. Often it is dipped in dung or human waste to accelerate infection. Compared to the little time and effort required to prepare this weapon, its casualty producing rate makes it most effective.

Punji sticks are placed so as to defend approaches to a village or camp. Stuck in the ground pointing away from the village or wedged into a cut in a tree at waist or head height, punji sticks are difficult to see. Night movement in such an area is especially hazardous. Normal walking speed will create sufficient force to run a punji stick through the leg. Shin guards used in softball and soccer have proven effective countermeasures.

Booby Traps. Booby traps are used to a great extent. The unsophisticated enemy uses spears and other pointed objects given velocity by a bent tree or a counterweight. The more sophisticated enemy uses explosives. Explosive booby traps are commonly found along trails and roads, on a door, or around a gun emplacement. 26

A common explosive booby trap is the grenade with trip wire activation. A vine, transparent fishing line, or wire may be used to trip the grenade. The trip wire may be routed across the mouth of a small concealed hole. The wire is drawn tight and detonates the grenade when an intruder steps into the hole. Such devices can be located if care in movement and observation is utilized.

Enemy grenades and explosive devices vary in size, shape, and purpose. Many approximate the old MK11, fragmentation grenade, with its segmented casing. The fuse assembly is often machined from aluminum. Another type resembles the white smoke grenade. This grenade is smaller but has the cylindrical shape and gray finish as does the white smoke grenade used by friendly forces.

Two types of explosives exist with a heavy tar paper cover. Both are cylindrical, one approximately three inches in diameter and eight inches long, the other five by twelve inches. The former explosive contains wires protruding from the top for electrical detonation.

The varying purposes for which enemy grenades and explosives are employed make them dangerous to handle once set. On occasion friendly troops have activated unfamiliar grenades in preparation for throwing. Such a grenade could very well have an instantaneous fuse. For safety purposes, such devices should be left untouched for a demolition team.

Mortar and artillery rounds either dug out of the ground after failing to detonate or procured from raids and ambushes are hung from trees. Detonation approximates an airburst. Overhead observation, therefore, is required to detect these devices.

Concussion booby traps are plentiful in certain areas. A C-ration or beverage can, filled with an explosive, may be activated in any number of ways. Such a device may be hidden in tall grass or buried near the surface of the ground.

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Because the enemy makes use of refuse, care is taken to destroy any items of use to him. C-ration cans, for example, should be opened at both ends and flattened or pierced with a bayonet.

When detonating explosive devices left by the enemy care must be utilized. Trip wire explosives may be activated by use of a long cord. A grenade laid beside an enemy device does not insure sympathetic detonation. Instead, the explosive is made more sensitive. C-4 composition wrapped around the enemy device works well.

Mines. Bombs and artillery and mortar rounds are used as electrically detonated mines. Such a mine is detonated by means of a battery or other electricity producing device, activated from a concealed position nearby. The mines are buried under a road, on the shoulder, or in a filled crater.

A means of sighting is required in order for the explosive to occur precisely at the right point under a vehicle. A paddy dike or trail running perpendicular to the main roadway, or a tree by the roadside, are typical sites.

Proper interval of 50-100 meters between vehicles in convoy is mandatory. Drivers should be further instructed to increase speed when passing any probable sighting instrument along a dangerous route. Sand bagging the truck bed and requiring troops to sit in the center of the bed, facing out, reduces casualties.

In the event a vehicle is hit by an explosive, every effort should be made to keep the remainder of the convoy moving. A small group is left to secure the vehicle and to effect evacuation of casualties. The area on both sides of the road is well covered with fire, concentrating on likely and suspected enemy locations. Wires, if not buried, will pinpoint a hiding enemy. Such an enemy position will often be covered by automatic weapons to secure withdrawal.

FIRE SUPPORT:

The excellent fire support available to the infantry commander finds varied use from unit to unit. Because such valuable support is available it should be used to a maximum in almost any type of situation.

The following comments pertain to weapons organic to infantry units and their supporting units.



Mortars. Personal experience has shown that many small unit leaders consider the accuracy of the 81mm mortar erratic. This holds true also for the 4.2 inch mortars which are organic to the rifle battalion. Erratic firing and short rounds have caused friendly casualties and endangered friendly troops on too many occasions. In most cases, the fault cannot be placed on forward observers. On the contrary, old ammunition appears to be one problem area. The major problem, however, is the lack of training of the mortar crews. The weapon platoon usually receives the brunt of administrative details in areas other than Vietnam. Mortar crews are thus denied adequate training, training which should rely heavily on live fire exercises.

Despite this shortcoming and to correct the problem, small unit leaders must place reliance on the use of organic fire support. Often the tendency is to call for artillery fire support in lieu of organic mortars. The mortar crews cannot be expected to respect the capability and value of this weapon if seldom use is made of the mortar. The frequency of use is usually proportional to the capability of the mortar crews.

The 81mm mortar may be displaced over long distances by foot with moderate difficulty. On operations this makes organic fire support available to the leader. Usually one mortar per company-sized unit is sufficient during foot marches.

It is most desirable for the weapons platoon to carry the ammunition, so it will be readily available for use. It is difficult for the rifleman to carry an 81mm mortar round and its bulk weight decreases his effectiveness. The number of rounds carried varies with the number of mortars carried.

The 60mm mortar is an even better weapon in providing organic fire support for the moving unit. This weapon is lighter, thus allowing more mortars and rounds to be transported greater distances with less effort.

When transported by foot the mortar is covered with some type of material to prevent noise and glare. This is essential for night moves.

Mortar crews should be capable of placing a round on target within two minutes from a moving posture. Squad leaders must commit charge numbers and elevations to memory for ranges less than 600 meters to allow rapid action.

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Units may choose to use the 81mm mortar forward observer's radio as a second radio within each rifle platoon. Fire missions, therefore, are given over the company command net, either by the platoon leader or the forward observer traveling with the platoon leader. Of course, it is desirable for the forward observers to be utilized since it frees the platoon leader of an additional responsibility. The platoon leader that learns to use the mortar effectively, has his own hip pocket artillery.

Artillery. No better fire support exists than that provided by artillery. Occasions do arise where the mortar is more useful but these are infrequent.

A variety of artillery rounds and fuzes exist, each finding special use. The HE round with PD fuze naturally finds the greatest use. Its burst on impact will give an air burst in primary jungle areas. To penetrate this canopy, delay fuze is employed. The latter is especially useful in destroying a bunker or trench system.

The VT fuze should be used sparingly. The flat, open terrain common to rice paddies is excellent for use of this fuze. For safety purposes VT fuze is never used in support closer than 200 meters to friendly troops, except in emergencies.

The White Phosphorus round is good for starting fires. Its demoralizing effect is excellent too. The round is used for laying a smoke screen and for observing fire support in heavily vegetated areas.

Illumination rounds are adjusted vertically as well as in range and deflection. This serves to give maximum illumination at the proper altitude. The correction is given in 50 meter increments by UP and DOWN displacements. Wind direction is taken into consideration to compensate for drift. (See CONDUCT OF THE NIGHT DEFENSE: Engagement.)

The inaccuracy of maps requires a safety margin in using mortars and artillery. Giving coordinates several hundred meters behind the target on the initial round provides this margin. Another method utilizing SMOKE for the initial round provides this margin. Anything other than a direct hit will not injure personnel. Remember here, however, that an HE round will travel farther than the SMOKE round for a given target. Personal experience has been that this compensation has not always been made by the Fire Direction Center.

A "marking" round may be called for at a point on the map to check location of ground personnel. The round will

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explode in the air, high above the point desired on the ground.

Calling and adjusting fire support properly and rapidly is a must in any situation. Therefore, the individual soldier as well as the leaders must know how to execute a fire mission.

Helicopters. The use of the various types of aerial fire support available to ground units demands good communications. This is especially true for helicopter fire support since no forward air controller is provided. However, good communications alone is not the key. An understanding between ground and air personnel is the necessary achievement.

Helicopter fire support is a most valuable and necessary arm but frequent lack of understanding results in friendly casualties or useless sorties. Utilizing radio, terrain features, magnetic directions, smoke, and panel markers the ground soldier must make the target known with reference to his own position. It remains the task of the air soldier to determine these relative positions and to deliver accurate fire in support of ground operations. As with artillery fire support, allow a margin of error in aerial support. Unless an emergency situation exists, do not rely on helicopters for close in support.

This in no way should discourage the use of helicopter fire support. On the contrary, respect the versatile capacity of the helicopter but realize too its limitations. Understanding is the ingredient to proper employment and accuracy of aerial fire support.

WEAPONS:

The United States Army is equipped with the finest firearms in the world's arsenal of weapons. It is one thing to make this statement and another to see it qualified.

M-16 Rifle. Much publicity has been given the M-16 rifle. Certainly, it is a very outstanding weapon. There are, however, some misconceptions and faults about the weapon.

First, its good points. For airmobile and counter-insurgency use, the M-16 can not be topped. Its combined light weight and firepower give the soldier what he needs in situations peculiar to the war in Vietnam. The 460 meter maximum effective range is sufficient for any situation, except sniping. The maximum rate of fire on automatic gives firepower never before available to the rifle platoon. This firepower is especially useful in the ambush or counter-ambush posture.

To touch on the misinformation and bad points of the weapon in no way overrides its excellence. Many troops, for instance, believe the weapon to be rustproof. Southeast Asia contains an accumulation of the worst conditions to which any weapon or equipment can be subjected. The barrel, muzzle, dust cover, modified bolt closer, and front and rear sight assemblies all are rust catchers.

The protruding gas tube in the upper receiver catches much carbon as does the bolt carrier key. The latter must be freed of deposits after extensive firing. Built up carbon deposits here will cause the weapon to malfunction.

The chamber catches much trash also and cleaning is somewhat difficult. To correct many of these areas of difficulty, practice good cleaning habits frequently. Oil the bolt and all moving parts of the weapon thoroughly.

On occasion the M-16 experiences a ruptured cartridge or a like malfunction, which results in an unextracted shell casing. Immediate action for this situation requires the use of the rifle rod to dislodge the round. A pointed object such as a bayonet will not suffice since the shell rim is soft. Preventative maintenance calls for a copious amount of oil down the barrel several times a day when the weapon is in constant use.

The above malfunction is so frequent in very dusty and sandy areas that it presents a critical problem. Suppose, for instance, this problem occurs during an engagement with the enemy, as it has on occasion. The soldier must piece his rifle rod together and push the spent round from the chamber. The solution to this problem would be a special device that may be used through the receiver to free the casing. Another solution, but less effective, visualizes mounting the rifle rod in one piece on the weapon.

The method of carrying the M-16 depends on the enemy situation and not on the weapon itself. The time involved to swing the rifle into action may be vital. This is especially true in the counter-ambush. To provide flank security for the file formation, for instance, those individuals assigned to right flank security hold their weapons pointing to that flank. This requires holding the pistol grip in the left hand with the thumb controlling the selector. Since the M-16 rifle is usually held pistol grip in the right hand, practice must be exercised to increase proficiency in this carrying technique.

Another technique allows freedom of movement of one hand.

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The rifle is carried vertically with the rifle butt resting on the right ammunition pouch. This method is useful in dense vegetation with little overhang, or in rugged terrain.

The General Purpose (GP) strap may be used as a sling for the M-16. This sling is routed over the left or right shoulder which supports the weight of the weapon. The rifle is carried in the horizontal position. Again, one hand is left free.

In conjunction with the various carrying techniques, practice in using the selector on the M-16 is imperative. Personnel must be able to switch from SAFE to SEMI automatic and from SAFE to AUTOMATIC with ease and speed since only those individuals on point security should be allowed to carry their weapons with the selector off SAFE.

A major problem, which results from the use of the M-16, is the tendency to disregard use of semi-automatic fire. Although the selector provides each soldier with maximum firepower for emergency situations, control and supervision must be exercised by leaders in its use. The unit which expends a basic load in a brief insignificant encounter is ineffective.

Magazines for the M-16 are never taped together to provide speed in changing magazines. In this position, the spare magazine is easily clogged with foreign matter.

The 5.56mm round is a very lethal projectile due to its velocity. The round causes a very large hole leaving the body if it strikes a bone. At great ranges, this effect also occurs to some degree when the round strikes a fleshy portion of the body. However, the round does not cut through undergrowth as effectively as does the 7.62mm round.

M-79 Grenade Launcher. The most effective weapon produced in recent years for use by infantry units is the M-79, grenade launcher. I refer to it as the platoon leader's "artillery battery" and in many respects it is just that. The six M-79's organic to the rifle platoon deliver an explosive accurately up to 375 meters. This is especially valuable in the many situations peculiar to counter-guerrilla warfare. If you ever have a situation where the squad is understrengthened, make sure you fill the position of grenadier.

This weapon has proven to be useful against snipers which cannot be pinpointed for the rifleman. Grenadiers fire into the surrounding trees and effectively destroy the sniper.

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The grenade launcher is ineffective in dense undergrowth due to the lack of fields of fire. Here it is wise also for the weapon to be carried round-in-chamber and breech open to avoid accidental discharge. The thumb holds the round in the chamber.

The grenade launcher can provide indirect fire support in dense undergrowth for ranges less than 100 meters by marking foot positions on the sling as with the rifle grenade launcher. A new shot round has recently been issued for the M-79. This is excellent for use in close contact situations and overcomes the weapon's inability to be used effectively in dense vegetation.

Very often grenadiers are not convinced of the effectiveness of their weapon and will, therefore, show little confidence in its ability. In units which allow the grenadier to carry the rifle as a secondary weapon, the grenade launcher is often not used effectively.

As with the M-16 rifle, the basic load for the M-79 is usually doubled by many units. The grenadier may, therefore, carry a 36 round basic load.

M-72 LAW. The M-72, Light Anti-Tank Weapon (LAW), is a major improvement over its predecessor, the 3.5 inch rocket launcher, due to its light weight and the fact it can be discarded after firing. This allows more men to carry the weapon, thus eliminating the two rocket crews in the weapons squad, if so desired.

The M-72 is useful against lightly fortified positions. Heavy bunkers and entrenchments will, however, withstand the explosive projectile.

The rubber protective covers of the trigger and other parts are easily torn away after repeated exposure to dense undergrowth.

M-60 Light Machine Gun. The M-60, light machine gun, is an excellent weapon. Much of the trouble experienced in blank firing does not occur in live firing. In units armed with the M-16, M-60 is the only weapon which will cut through the dense undergrowth effectively.

Placement of the machine guns during movement is critical. In the illustrations in FORMATIONS AND TACTICS the placement of guns may be controversial. This, of course, may vary among leaders. For example, two lines of reasoning are generally

used in the deployment of the machine guns.

First, keep the guns together in a platoon to provide maximum fire support for the maneuvering element. This is the role for which the weapon was designed. The guns are used in pair most advantageously in open terrain, terrain which allows supporting fires. Fields of fire are prevalent in these open areas and grazing fire is excellent.

On the other hand, a leader may elect to disperse the machine guns in the platoon. He does so to lessen the possibility of the destruction of both guns in a surprise engagement. An environment in which ambush or sniper activity is expected or encountered makes dispersion of the machine guns necessary. Also fire support is distributed throughout the unit and firepower is brought to bear on the enemy more quickly. This method finds use in densely vegetated terrain where the fire support role is virtually impossible.

Ammunition belts are not carried "Poncho Villa" style with bandoleers draped over the shoulders. Except for the belt carried in the gun, ammunition is left in the waterproof can to prevent foreign matter and corrosion from collecting on exposed ammunition.

.45 cal Pistol. Due to carelessness, the .45 cal pistol has proved to be a very dangerous weapon in that it has accounted for a great percentage of accidents involving weapons. Rigid control must be exercised by leaders in the loading of this weapon. Unit SOPs should state that a round will be chambered in the pistol only as a last resort in action with the enemy.

EXPLOSIVES:

M-26, Fragmentation Hand Grenade. The new model of the hand grenade, the M-26, makes no snap and hissing noise as did its predecessor, the MK 11, which is also used in Vietnam. Use an explosive such as the grenade whenever possible in lieu of small arms fire. In the night ambush, for instance, the grenade is very effective since it has a large killing radius and does not compromise the friendly position.

The primary weapon is not standard but rather depends on the situation.

Repeated carrying of the M-26 causes the safety release to break, exposing the striker. The grenade is not dangerous in this state but is difficult to carry. Proper securing of the grenade to the LBE prevents exposing a dangerous dangling blasting cap. The grenade should be checked periodically to insure a tight fit of body and fuze assembly. Guard against the tendency to rely on the rifle, rather let the situation determine the weapon.

White Phosphorus Grenade. This grenade is not often used in training but it finds varied use in Vietnam. It is often utilized to start fires and to signal in addition to the demoralizing effect caused when used against personnel. As a signal, it gives a large volume of white smoke in a very short time. This proves effective in overcoming the jungle canopy.

Claymore Mine. The Claymore mine is another relatively new weapon in our arsenal. Its use in the ambush and defense demands no explanation here. A piece of luminous tape affixed to the back of the mine will provide a visible guard against the enemy's ability to turn the Claymore around or to take it.

The Claymore is a special purpose explosive. Troops must be cautioned and supervised in its employment. This is one of those not-always-available items and thus should be used only against massed enemy personnel.

EQUIPMENT:

No one can discount the fact that the American is the best equipped fighting man in the world although such equipment may not be best suited for the area in which he must fight. The American soldier, however, relies heavily on reissue and resupply. Supervision here is a must to prevent unserviceability and loss of equipment. Proper accountability and requiring good maintenance habits in the field is the key.

Load Bearing Equipment. The LBE withstands the Vietnam climate and terrain exceptionally well. Major rust catching items are the entrenching tool and bayonet. The snap on the grenade retaining straps on each side of the ammunition pouch will also rust and prevent opening. These should be cleaned and oiled periodically.

To allow rapid retrieving of magazines from the ammunition pouch raise the center magazine slightly above the others.

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This is done by placing a bottle of water purification tablets or a rock at the bottom of the pouch.

The combat pack is a poor means for the soldier to carry his supplies. First, it cannot hold enough supplies to sustain operations over a long period of time, a condition desired in a counter-insurgency environment. Second, the pack cannot be detached from the soldier with ease. This means he must take the pack with him when he maneuvers against the enemy. Such action reduces agility and increases fatigue. Third, when a soldier uses the prone position, the combat pack presents a high silhouette as evidenced by the many hits it has sustained in hostile action.

The problem is remedied by the use of the ruck sack, either the older model or better still, the new type adopted by Special Forces. The ruck sack is large and can be detached or dropped easily. Supervision is required here, however, to dissuade individuals from utilizing unnecessary carrying capacity.

Clothing. Jungle fatigues as the name implies are designed to wear in tropical terrain. The light weight material dries rapidly by body heat and controls heat casualties caused by high humidity. The material is easily torn in dense vegetation and constant mending is required.

For field use fatigues should be stripped of conspicuous rank and insignia. Darken all name tapes if any are to be worn. This procedure denies the sniper a select target.

The jungle boot again as the name implies is designed especially for terrain common to Southeast Asia and other like climates. Canvas sidings and drainage holes at the arch allow fast drying. Some argue that this boot causes the feet to get wet in shallow water while the standard combat boot remains dry inside until boot-top water is encountered. Only on rare occasions is shallow water encountered where deeper water is not a step away.

The canvas siding will tear over the inside ankle bone after extensive use. A small leather patch sewn over this area eliminates the problem. In addition, the sole cracks in the center exposing a metal plate. This, however, does not render the boot useless. Another bad point is that the boot is not well adapted to mountain operations because the ankle does not receive adequate support.

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The jungle boot is not always readily available through supply channels. Its substitute, the standard combat boot, does not hold up well and dries slowly. After repeated use the leather becomes hard and cracks.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Control is essential for the success of any mission. Good communications is a necessary aid to good control. Do not, however, over-estimate the range of communications equipment. For each type of terrain, the range of equipment may be more or less than that listed in the manuals.

AN/PRC-25. The new AN/PRC-25 radio features the new squelch in the SQUELCH position, eliminating the constant annoying noise experienced in the ON position at slight cost in range. This is beneficial when silence is of paramount importance as in as in the conduct of ambushes and night moves.

The handset is new also and cuts out much background noise. The thin plastic membranes over the mouth and ear pieces are easily broken. Moisture here leads to transmitting and receiving difficulties. The cellophane or plastic protecting the C-ration spoon is a field expedient. The plastic protective bag of the BA 386, battery, provides a better means of protection. The bag is placed over the entire handset and taped at the open end.

The handset is the most delicate part of the radio. Repair is often slow and replacements are difficult to obtain. The handset deserves primary care and maintenance.

The radio-telephone operator (RTO) is an important target to the enemy. By directing fire at and around the radio operator, the enemy expects to kill leaders as well as to destroy the unit's communications.

A leader may choose to move with several personnel between his RTO and himself. This does not eliminate the problem since valuable men are still exposed. The solution is to conceal the radio as much as possible. This may be done by fitting the radio in the combat pack and routing the antenna through the webbing. The ruck sack may also be used in the same manner.

AN/PRC-6. The AN/PRC-6 radio provides control needed at platoon level. This radio experiences many difficulties and is often non-operational. When the action is fast and heavy, the PRC-6 proves the importance of radio communications at platoon level. In the roar of a firefight, proper and effective control of a unit, utilizing voice and hand and arm

signals, is virtually impossible.

In the event PRC-6s are non-operative, a solution is to use two PRC-25s, at platoon level, with the extra radio being controlled by the Platoon Sergeant. Additional PRC-25s are made available from the weapons platoon at a cost of forward observers.

Develop and maintain proper radio procedure and security. Use brevity. This proves its worth when communication is critical.

Antennas. Counterinsurgency operations frequently require dispersion of units over a large area, often in rugged terrain. Thus, communications becomes a major problem.

At small unit level, the field expedient antenna is helpful. A 50 foot length of WDL, telephone wire, serves as a directional line-of-sight antenna. Coupled with a 600 ohm resistor, this antenna will give even greater selectivity.

The RC 292 antenna provides greater range for the platoon and company. It is good practice for an RC 292 to be used at company level during operations. To lessen the load, the mast sections may be taken out of the kit and the remaining parts of the kit distributed among several individuals. The antenna head is mounted in a tree for use.

Smoke. Smoke grenades are used primarily in ground to air signaling. For example, in directing an air strike, red smoke may be used to identify the enemy and yellow smoke, the location of friendly forces. For helicopter resupply, airmobile missions, and medical evacuation, smoke identifies the landing zone and gives wind direction to the pilot. In this situation, the pilot tells the ground personnel the color of the smoke he identifies. This serves to avoid the possibility of a helicopter landing for an enemy using smoke. The color of smoke used must be changed often to avoid routine.

Because of the wide use of the smoke grenade, leaders should always carry them on any mission.

Smoke from the grenades will not easily penetrate the jungle canopy. To overcome this obstacle, the grenade is attached to a tree top or to a sapling bent over and allowed to spring to its upright position.

The White Phosphorus grenade is excellent in penetrating the jungle canopy. The large volume of dense white smoke rises quickly in comparison to the slow burning smoke grenade.

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Hand and Arm Signals. Use of hand and arm signals is essential if proper noise discipline is to be practiced. The Australian Army uses this type of signaling to a maximum during movement. Consequently, their patrols are conducted with minimum noise as compared to American units. This is not to say that the US Army does not have adequate signals. Rather the situation is present because hand and arm signals taught in basic training are not practiced in subsequent training and consequently are not present on the field of battle.

Platoon leaders should emphasize the use of hand and arm signals as an integral part of control and stealth. Additional signals can be developed to meet requirements.

ANIMALS, INSECTS, REPTILES, AND DISEASES:

The hot, humid climate of Southeast Asia fosters perfect conditions for a teeming insect population and diseases. Basic preventative measures must be exercised and supervised at small unit level to reduce non-battle casualties.

Water Buffalo. The water buffalo is encountered often in the rice lands. This animal is very tempermental and should be avoided if possible. With no apparent reason, it may charge personnel and inflict serious injury.

Mosquito. Malaria is perhaps the greatest non-battle casualty producer in Vietnam. Certain areas of the country are termed "malaria regions" due to the high casualty rate in these areas.

Mosquito bites are easily infected by conditions present. Sores often develop on the legs and feet causing the temporary loss of personnel. Medical treatment is required as a preventative measure. In rear areas, troops with foot problems are allowed to wear shower shoes in order for sores and foot infection to dry and heal readily.

Ants. Ants exist everywhere in country and are a nuisance. The red ant is vicious although not poisonous. This insect is usually found in dense brush and falls on the intruder causing much discomfort.

Leeches. Two types of leech exist in Vietnam. The water leech is found in standing water and to a lesser extent in streams and rivers. The rice paddy is a common location for the water leech which may grow to be six inches in length.

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The land or jungle leech presents a greater problem than the water leech. It is so named because it is found in the thick jungle undergrowth. Its movement and size resemble the inch worm.

The leech and more especially the jungle leech is capable of finding and entering the smallest opening. Once on the skin, it leaves a hole which bleeds freely due to the leeches' anti-coagulant saliva. These holes, if left unattended, will infect easily.

The solution to this problem is to prevent the leech from gaining access to the skin. For this reason, the proper blousing of trousers in the boots is important. The draw string provided on the jungle fatigues proves inadequate unless a tight union of trousers and boots is made.

The Australians have developed an effective method. The boots are laced and the excess boot string is routed through a hole out in the trousers at boot top level. The string is then wrapped around the leg securing the trousers leg to the top of the boot.

Scorpions. Scorpions are found in most areas of the country but most frequently on dry high ground. The sting of this insect is very painful but is not considered dangerous enough to warrant extensive medical treatment.

Snakes. Snakes are numerous in Southeast Asia. Snakes as a rule, however, will not often be encountered. The noise of movement will usually drive them away. The light green bamboo viper is encountered most frequently in the flatlands. Other dangerous snakes include the krait and cobra.

Diseases. The platoon leader must be concerned with the many diseases contracted in Vietnam. Diseases are capable of rendering a unit inoperative. Supervision in personal hygiene is the solution. Require medical aid men to perform frequent checks on unit personnel to prevent and arrest diseases. Insure that all personnel practice proper sanitation.

SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED:

I would like to re-emphasize those points that I think best illustrate the lessons that I learned as a platoon leader in Vietnam. It has been said that the effectiveness of a unit is measured by the quality of its leaders, and



DON'T BUNCH UP.

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the aggressiveness of its men. I would like to think that the quality of the leaders and the aggressiveness of the men are interrelated and that both will be enhanced by the proper application of lessons learned in actual combat operations. One measure of leadership is the display of professionalism. The reader may well note that much of this material is a review of infantry fundamentals. If, however, the information has served to stimulate thought and to confirm that past tactics instruction are applicable in Vietnam, then my purpose has been accomplished. Each conflict of arms has had its peculiarities. One of these peculiarities of the war in Vietnam is that it is a small unit leaders war. Certainly, in such a war, the role of the infantry leader is complex and demanding. The leader, however, will never realize a comparable satisfaction as that which is derived from commanding Americans in combat at the small unit level. This is a summation of my lessons learned:

1. TERRAIN.

- a. Learn to use the terrain to your advantage.
- b. In densely vegetated terrain, make use of the excellent concealment. Use the compass and pace for maintaining direction.
- c. In the Central Highlands, use terrain features for cross country navigation. Remember control is difficult in thick vegetation. Use the file and column formation. This may often mean emphasizing point and rear security.
- d. In the flat coastal areas and river valleys, open areas such as rice paddies are danger areas because of the excellent observation and fields of fire available to the enemy. The dry plowed rice paddy is as difficult to move in as the wet rice paddy. Movement along dikes speeds the advance, but the advance must not be confined to one trail. Look for mines, for it is here the enemy most frequently uses them. In the open areas, the wedge and echelon formations are most frequently used because they provide dispersion and fire power to vulnerable flanks.

2. NAVIGATION.

- a. Be a professional when it comes to map reading.
- b. You will need a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of techniques of cross country navigation and map and aerial photograph reading.

3. FORMATIONS AND TACTICS.

- a. Don't forget basic tactics. Apply former instructions as a base for all action.

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b. Secure movement. Never move without providing for all around security. You must be ready for immediate action if you use roads and trails. Disperse critical weapons to spread the fire power out in the unit. Avoid the herd instinct. Carry weapons ever ready. Avoid over-reaction to the situation involving the sniper, but be aggressive.

c. Fire and maneuver is the immediate solution to almost any combat situation.

d. During the search and clear/destroy mission, be thorough but maintain contact and pursue when possible. The use of the mine detector is an excellent way to locate caches and hidden weapons during village search. Remember the point that the absence of children in the village area is a good indication of the presence of the enemy.

e. The difference between success and failure of the ambush mission is often dependent upon the leader's attitude and his thorough preparation and planning. Some of the common errors that have been made during the ambush are poor noise discipline, springing the ambush prematurely, poor selection of the ambush site, and indifference to the mission.

f. Always plan and use fire support when closing with the enemy across an open area.

g. Avoid establishing patterns and practicing routine in any tactical situation. Do the unexpected.

4. CONDUCT OF THE NIGHT DEFENSE.

a. Keep fighting positions close together at night and in areas of limited visibility.

b. Dig deep. Check each hole verifying the assigned sectors of fire and the correctness of positions.

c. Sleeping positions should be below the level of the ground. Keep in mind that the more men at one single position, the more rest each man will receive.

d. At night the enemy can be engaged effectively only at close range.

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e. Plan to use grenades and claymore mines to avoid compromising your position.

f. Clear the area around the defensive perimeter at dusk and first light.

5. ENEMY DEFENSES AND DEVICES.

a. Booby traps are the favorite devices of the enemy. They are often found along trails, in moats, and entrances to villages, in gaps and fences or thick bush, at fording sites, and at bypasses to obstacles.

b. A camouflage trench system tieing together prepared fox holes, gun emplacements, bunkers, and an avenue of escape will normally be found in the enemy controlled villages.

c. In terrain suitable for landing zones, the enemy frequently will utilize punji stakes up to three feet in length and spike foot and man traps. The spike devices are generally placed in camouflaged holes along routes of movement from the LZ.

d. Don't attempt to defuze enemy explosive devices - leave it to the experts.

6. FIRE SUPPORT.

a. Plan on it and use it. Never before has an infantry platoon had so much fire support at its disposal.

b. Master the use of a mortar, and use it frequently. The platoon leader that learns to use mortars effectively has his own organic artillery.

c. A variety of artillery rounds and fuzes exist, each designed for its own special use. Learn how to identify the type of artillery needed and how to call for it. The VT fuze should be used sparingly. For safety purposes, do not call for VT fuze in situations where support is closer than 200 meters to friendly troops.

d. The key to success in the use of aerial fire support is a mastery of communication and understanding of procedures to be followed in requesting and directing fire support.

7. WEAPONS.

a. The combined light weight and fire power of the M-16 rifle makes this weapon desirable for airmobile and counterinsurgency use. The bore and magazine of the rifle must be kept free of grit and mud. Weapons and magazines must be checked frequently to prevent jamming and misfiring. To allow freedom of movement of one hand, the rifle is carried vertically with the rifle butt resting on the right ammunition pouch. This method is particularly useful in dense vegetation and in rugged terrain.

b. In my opinion, the most effective weapon produced in recent years, for the infantryman, is the M-79, grenade launcher. If you ever have a situation where a squad is understrengthened, make sure that you fill the position of grenadier.

c. The M-72, LAW, has proven to be useful against lightly fortified positions. Heavy bunkers and entrenchments however, will withstand the explosive projectile.

d. The M-60 machine gun is an excellent weapon and is the only weapon which will cut through undergrowth effectively. Keep the guns together in the platoon to provide maximum fire support for the maneuvering element but disperse during movement. Ammunition belts should not be carried "poncho villa" style with bandoleers draped over the shoulders.

8. EXPLOSIVES.

a. M-26 fragmentation hand grenade, makes no snap and hissing noise and is excellent for use in the night ambush since it has a large killing radius and does not compromise the friendly position.

b. The white phosphorus grenade is often utilized to start fires and as a signaling device as well as for the demoralizing effect caused when used against personnel.

c. The claymore mine is a special purpose explosive. A piece of luminous tape affixed to the back of the mine will provide a visible guard against the enemies ability to turn the claymore around or to take it.

9. EQUIPMENT:

a. Exercise strong supervision to prevent unserviceability and loss of equipment.

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b. Insist upon proper accountability in the formation of good maintenance habits.

10. COMMUNICATIONS.

a. All members of the platoon must know the company radio frequency, call signs, and must be familiar with the AN/PRC-25 and its operation.

b. The radio telephone operator is an important target to the enemy. Learn to conceal the radio as much as possible.

c. Use of hand and arm signals or a system to attract attention is essential if proper noise discipline is to be practiced. There is a tendency for the leader to yell, while moving through areas of limited visibility, in an effort to control his command.

11. ANIMALS, REPTILES, INSECTS, AND DISEASES.

a. The hot humid climate of the jungle fosters perfect conditions for a teeming insect population and diseases.

b. Preventative measures and maintenance of personal health requires good habits of personal hygiene and strict adherence to rules and regulations.

c. Avoid the water buffalo, it is very temperamental and will charge personnel for no apparent reason.

d. Malaria caused by the bite of the mosquito is perhaps the greatest non battle producer in VN. The anti-malaria pill must be taken faithfully.

e. Ants exist everywhere and are a nuisance.

f. The water leech and the jungle leech are common. Bites from the leeches if left unattended will become infected.

g. The platoon leader must insist on preventative measures being employed to avoid diseases which are capable of rendering his unit inoperative.