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THE TRAINING, INFILTRATION, AND OPERATIONS OF A NORTH
VIETNAMESE SOLDIER FROM 12 APRIL 1963 TO 11 JUNE 1966
IN NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM AND LAOS.. (BASED ON A PER-
SONAL INTERVIEW BY A BATTALION CIVIL AFFAIRS OFFICER.)

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THE TRAINING, INFILTRATION, AND OPERATIONS OF A NORTH VIETNAMESE SOLDIER FROM 12 APRIL 1963 TO 11 JUNE 1966 IN NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM AND LAOS. (BASED ON A PERSONAL INTERVIEW BY A BATTALION CIVIL AFFAIRS OFFICER.)

INTRODUCTION

Late one afternoon in mid-June 1966, a North Vietnamese Sergeant by the name of Chien surrendered himself to a mixed unit of Americans and South Vietnamese. This event occurred during Operation Hawthorne, a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese effort to relieve a besieged Regional Force garrison at Toumorong. Toumorong is located in the western Central Highlands, about fifteen miles northeast of the district capital of Dak To.

Immediately after surrendering, the North Vietnamese Sergeant was taken to Dak To where he was questioned by an American Captain from the First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division. The next day the Sergeant was taken by truck to the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Center for deserters at Kontum. A month later he arrived in Saigon by airplane where he stayed until 8 November 1966. While in Saigon he underwent political indoctrination and wrote about working and living conditions in North Vietnam for the South Vietnamese National Intelligence Force.

After his return to Kontum, Sergeant Chien became an assistant platoon leader at the Kontum Chieu Hoi Center. I first met Chien on 3 January 1967. He was armed with an American carbine and was responsible for giving political instructions to new arrivals at the Chieu Hoi Center. As an employee of the South Vietnamese government his monthly wage was 3,500 piasters.

When I discovered that Chien had fought against my unit,

the First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, I became extremely interested in his career as a North Vietnamese soldier. What follows is the result of a personal interview conducted by myself over an elapsed time of fourteen hours.

NARRATION

When Private Chien entered the North Vietnamese Army he was issued just two sets of uniforms: two khaki shirts and two khaki trousers. By use of needle and thread his two sets of uniforms must do for the next five years. At the end of that period of time he would receive a third set of khaki's.

Born in 1939 in the provincial city of Hanan (1 on map A), he had moved with his family at the age of eight to Hanoi (2 on map A). In Hanoi his mother and father worked together selling tobacco in a small family-run store. As a youngster, he worked for his parents in their tobacco shop and also helped one of his four brothers who owned a bicycle repair shop.

In 1954, at the age of fourteen, he enrolled for five years of compulsory elementary schooling, which is the standard education received by most North Vietnamese. After finishing school he had been quite content working in a Hanoi fruit canning factory for the past four years.

Training In The North Vietnamese Army

It was on 12 April 1963, that Chien reported to the basic training center at Van Diem (3 on map A). There, at Van Diem, just three miles southeast of Hanoi, he was assigned to the First Company of the Third Battalion, 304th Infantry Division for thirteen weeks of basic infantry training.

Private Chien was not a volunteer. He had been drafted into the North Vietnamese Army for three years. When drafted, at the age of twenty-three, Chien stood five feet tall and carried his weight of one hundred pounds on a slender bone structure. His black unruly hair contrasted sharply with his clean, even white teeth. Though dark complexed, his skin was free of blemishes.

As a recruit Chien had much to learn. Accordingly, his days

at Van Diem were busy ones.

The one hundred and sixty men in Chien's training company were quartered in a long, single story barracks constructed of orange-colored bricks.. Exactly at 0600 hours everyone was awoken by a whistle for the start of the training day which consisted of the following schedule.

0600 to 0630	.....	Four sets of physical exercises and a mile run.
0630 to 7000	.....	Clean barracks and aline bunks..
0700 to 0730	.....	Breakfast of corn cake and a cup of water.
0730 to 1100	.....	Classroom work.
1100 to 1130	.....	Weapons cleaning.
1130 to 1200	.....	Lunch of rice, fish, vegetables, and sometimes meat, with water or tea to drink.
1200 to 1400	.....	Rest (sleep) period.
1400 to 1600	.....	Classroom work.
1600 to 1700	.....	Sports hour (swimming, running, etc).
1700 to 1730	.....	Weapons cleaning.
1730 to 1800	.....	Dinner (same as lunch).
1800 to 2100	.....	Group discussion concerning day's classwork.
2100 to 2115	.....	Company formation to insure everyone is present.
2130	.....	Lights out.

(Note: Sunday was a rest day with one-third of the Company on pass).

During the first two weeks, classroom work was devoted entirely to political indoctrination courses. At the start of the third week political classes were reduced to two hours per week and emphasis was shifted to such subjects as weapons firing, close-order drill, first aid, and elementary military tactics.

On the first day of the tenth week of training Private Chien shouldered his rucksack and marched all day with his company. For the next four weeks he lived outdoors putting in practice all that he had learned in the classroom. He fired a SKS-carbine and an ^{AK-47} automatic assault rifle; dug entrenchments; participated in patrols; and conducted ambush, attack, and defensive drills.

On 14 July 1963, Chien boarded a train for Son Tay (4 on map A). Son Tay, which lies near the Red River about twenty-five miles northwest of Hanoi, was the sole officer candidate school for the entire North Vietnamese Army in 1963.

A North Vietnamese Army colonel was in charge of the 4,000 officer students at Son Tay. The three year course was geared to equip each student to be a leader of men. Though officer candidates they wore no special uniform nor received any extra pay; and were considered and treated as privates. Most of Chien's classmates were from North Vietnam; however, a few of the students were from Laos and Cambodia. The majority of the instructors at Son Tay had been schooled in either Russia or China. So it was not surprising that Russian military tactics were taught.

Officer Candidate Chien had been at Son Tay for hardly a month when he was stricken with severe stomach aches coupled with diarrhea. On 13 August 1963, he was admitted to the Son Tay City hospital.

Despite his complete medical recovery by 3 September 1963, Chien had been dropped from the officer candidate course.

It was a disappointed Private Chien that reported on 4 September 1963 to the 42nd North Vietnam Army Regiment. The 2,000 man strong 42nd Regiment was garrisoned in French built barracks overlooking the fishing village of Kien An (5 on map A), just two and a half miles east of the port city of Haiphong. Situated on a hilltop, the post was surrounded by two six-foot high barb-wire fences spaced three feet apart. Between the fences rolls of concertina-wire had

been placed on the ground.

Life with the 42nd Regiment was pleasant for Private Chien. Though still a private, he was an assistant squad leader of ten men-----which meant he supervised work-details rather than do the actual work himself. Now that he was assigned to a non-training unit, for the first time, he was able to go into town during the evenings and on Sundays when he was free of duties.

Time passed quickly at Kien An for Private Chien. There was of course the unavoidable three and a half hours of political classes each week. And each day one hour was spend cleaning his weapon-----an AK-47 automatic assault rifle. But often Private Chien and his fellow soldiers would get an opportunity to fire live ammunition on a nearby range. Firing was conducted during both daytime and nighttime. At night the target was a swaying, lighted lamp attached to a rope which was fired at from three ranges: 100, 150, and 200 meters.

Private Chien excelled at weapons firing. Therefore, it only seemed natural to him that he should be promoted to Corporal. The very next day, 16 February 1964, Corporal Chien and 157 other soldiers from the 42nd Regiment were ordered to report to the non-commissioned officer's school at Thuy Nguyen (6 on map A), located six miles west of Kien An.

During the six-month long non-commissioned officer's course, Chien's training days were very similar to those he had spend as a private at Van Diem. The major difference was that more advanced and varied subjects were taught.

The first three weeks consisted of classroom work devoted to the political history of the North Vietnamese Army. After this political indoctrination period was completed, Chien received advanced instruction on how to maintain and fire such weapons as the RPD machinegun, the AK-47 automatic assault rifle, the SKS-carbine, and the 40mm anti-tank recoilless rifle. The techniques

of using hand grenades, plastic explosives, and mines were also thoroughly covered. Ambush tactics, artillery fire adjustment, patrolling, reconnaissance techniques, and numerous other military arts were taught outdoors during both the day and night. During the last three weeks Corporal Chien spend his entire time in the field practicing all that he had learned during the past twenty-three weeks.

On 20 August 1964, Corporal Chien graduated with honors. As a result, he was selected to remain at Thuy Nguyen as a small-arms, bayonet, and tactics instructor.

As an instructor, Chien spend four happy and enjoyable months at Thuy Nguyen. There were thirty instructors, all of whom were corporals, for a student body of 270 students. The commander of the school was a captain. Working just eight hours aday for six days, with Sundays off, Chien was able to enjoy himself in the relaxed atmosphere. Though he received no special pay, Corporal Chien was entitled to an extra food ration as an instructor. This supplemently, monthly ration consisted of five pounds of sugar, two or three pounds of meat, and sometimes a can of milk.

Chien's blissful life at Thuy Nguyen came to a suddent end on 22 December 1964; when he was promoted to Sergeant and out of his job as an instructor. The next day he returned to Kien An and re-joined the 42nd Regiment as a squad leader of eleven men. He taught his ~~eleven~~ squad members everything that he had learned at the non-commissioned officer's school.

While at Kien An, he was directed to take his squad each Sunday afternoon and help the local villagers gather the rice and potatoes in the surrounding fields near the camp.

On 23 February 1965, the entire 2,000 man 42nd Regiment departed Kien An for Thanh Hoa. Sergeant Chien and the 42nd Regiment conducted the movement by foot for the whole trip from Kien An southward to Thanh Hoa, which is located 140 miles south of Hanoi. However, the entire

trip involved 210 miles; and the regiment had to carried everything on it's back.. Marching for ten hours each day, the regiment stopped for a three-day rest and a resupply of ~~rice~~ at the half-way point ----- at Hung Yen (7 on map A) on 7 March 1965.

Thirteen days later, on 20 March 1965, Sergeant Chien and the 42nd Regiment reached Thanh Hoa (8 on map A). Each company of the regiment was quartered in one of the many hamlets that surrounded Thanh Hoa.. In return for their civilian quarters, the soldiers of ~~regiment~~ the ^{regiment} assisted each Sunday afternoon with the harvesting of the rice crop..

Immediately the regiment started intensified jungle training in the mountainous terrain that was strikingly similar to the central highland region of South Vietnam..

A sense of urgency permeated the regiment. Yet, no one had explained why the regiment had moved to Thanh Hoa for jungle training. That is, as far as Sergeant Chien knew, no one could tell him the reason for the new state of affairs.

To increase their physical conditioning, Sergeant Chien and his squad members each carried sixty pounds of stones in their rucksacks. Weighted down with this weight they climbed the numerous steep hills that dotted the surrounding country-side.

New subjects were taught to the regiment.. How to move in the jungle without making a noise.. How to silently observe the battle-field. How to dig trenches while under enemy fire. How to fight against enemy artillery positions. How to shoot down airplanes and descending parachutists.. Night training was emphasized and so were ambush techniques.

The training was conducted at all levels. At the platoon and lower levels Sergeant Chien and his fellow non-commissioned officers conducted the training. At company, battalion, and regiment level

the instruction was conducted by officers.

In Sergeant Chien's company there were three men who were either Russian or Chinese-trained instructors. These were a platoon sergeant, the company first sergeant, and a platoon leader.

Though the training was intense and rigorous, morale was generally high. Occasionally, a few of the men would fake sickness by not eating so that they could miss a couple of days of training..

Near the end of October 1965, the regiment completed its training.. Then one-third of the men at a time were sent home on leave for one week.

Sergeant Chien spent his week's leave in Hanoi with his family.. While in Hanoi he saw American airplanes for the first time.. Each time they appeared over Hanoi, he and his family would take shelter in their backyard log-and-earth eight-foot deep bunker.

By 18 November 1965, all members of the regiment had returned from leave.. It was at this time that Sergeant Chien learned that his regiment was going to South Vietnam.. So that was why the food ration had been recently increased and leave granted.

Well, so be it. He was happy to go. Hadn't he been told that four-fifths of South Vietnam was controlled by the Viet Cong, their allies. Their job would be to liberate the remaining one-fifth of the country from the Americans. It would be an easy task since they would be welcomed as liberators by the South Vietnamese, against whom the Americans had committed numerous atrocities. And besides, the Americans, who were an impatient race of people, would never be able to fight a protracted war; thus it was reasonable to assume that the Americans would soon leave South Vietnam when they encountered the determined North Vietnamese soldier. Yes, Sergeant Chien was happy to go to South Vietnam: after all, everything was in his favor.

Infiltration Into Laos

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On November 1965, Sergeant Chien headed south by foot for South Vietnam. Using the Ho Chi Minh trail, the entire 42nd Regiment was moving southward by battalion. Each battalion was a three-day walk apart-----this was accomplished by staggering the departure of each battalion by three days.

Walking under the jungle canopy and following well-used foot-trails, the battalion was able to remain hidden from aerial observation. Whenever an airplane approached the entire column would stop as one body and each man would lie motionless until the aircraft had passed overhead. Though many times airplanes flew over the column the battalion was neither detected nor bombed.

All along the trail network Sergeant Chien encountered groups of young people (mostly girls), age eighteen to twenty, who were repairing and improving the pathways. Campsites, consisting of three raised bamboo huts, had been hacked out of the jungle. Each campsite was large enough to accommodate an eleven man squad. Thus, each company in Sergeant Chien's battalion was spread-out over an area 800 meters long. Everything possible was done to make just as small a target as possible for the American airplanes.

Each campsite was one day's march apart-----about nine miles. When the jungle canopy hid them the battalion marched from sun-up to sun-down. When the terrain was open and afforded little or no concealment the battalion moved only during the night.

The days were comfortable, but the evenings were very cold. Every fourth day the battalion would spend the day resting.

Each man carried seven days supply of rice. Every seventh day Sergeant Chien received four pounds of rice. In addition to the rice, Sergeant Chien was given four pounds of salted pork meat, two pounds of wheat flour, and two pounds of salt; which had to last for

the complete trip. Water was easily obtainable from the numerous streams that were adjacent to the trail. Before drinking it, it was boiled to purify it.

Fifty malaria tablets were carried by Sergeant Chien and each man in his company. The tablets were to be consumed at the rate of two per week to ward off malaria. However, they were ineffective. For everyone in Sergeant Chien's company contracted malaria and before the trip was completed four members of the company would die from malaria. It would take a full two months after the trip was completed for most of the men to fully recover their strength.

To combat general fatigue each man was issued one hundred tablets of vitamin B-1. These were to be taken whenever a man felt weak; usually at the rate of three to five per week.

Sergeant Chien's men carried gasmasks in case the Americans dropped gas from their airplanes. During the long march southward there was no need to use the masks.

Sometime around 1 January 1966, Sergeant Chien crossed into South Vietnam. Following a southwestern route and utilizing a bridge built by the North Vietnamese, he crossed the Ben Hai River (9 on map A) from South Vietnam into Laos two days later.

Malaria and general fatigue had now reduce the daily travel distance from nine to six miles aday. In anticipation of this, the campsites in Laos were closer together than they had been in North Vietnam. All the campsites in Laos were manned and maintained by North Vietnamese.

The month of January 1966 passed, and still Sergeant Chien pressed southward under the thick Loian jungle canopy. Overhead, many American airplanes flew bye. One day, one of the regiment staff officers lingered too long in a small clearing. He was fired at, but not hit, by a rocket-firing airplane.

On 20 February 1966, Sergeant Chien's regiment arrived at it's

destination-----Buom Tasseing, Laos, which is located about ten miles west of the Loian--South Vietnam^{ese} boundary in a northwestern line opposite Kontum.

Again dispersion was the rule. Each battalion established their own separate base camp in a radius of six miles from Buom Tasseing. Sergeant Chien's battalion set up near the hamlet of Buom Het (10 on map A).

Sergeant Chien's squad, and the other squads in the battalion, each constructed three huts under the thick, dense jungle roof. Large enough to house four men each, they were well concealed by the jungle growth. A log-and-earth bunker was constructed next to each hut for protection against aerial bombing.

The local natives supplied Sergeant Chien's squad with a starchy, tubular and potatoe-like food substance that only required boiling in water before it was edible. This was used to supplement their meager supply of rice which had to be transported by manpower from Cambodia. Salt, and a small quantity of dried fish, sometimes reached them from North Vietnam.

Operations In South Vietnam

Sergeant Chien and his men were still suffering from Malaria. Yet, on 1 March 1966, he was told to prepare for his first combat operation. On this same day, Sergeant Chien was promoted to platoon sergeant and placed in charge of a platoon that was commanded by a second lieutenant.

On 2 March 1966, Sergeant Chien's platoon fell into formation and moved with the entire battalion eastward. For seven days they moved. At the beginning of the second day they crossed unnoticed into South Vietnam.

The thick jungle permitted day movement. During the seven day trip they neither seen or heard any enemy airplanes or soldiers.

Their first combat operation was to be an ambush along National Route 14. The site selected was six miles south of Dak Sut (11 on map A). Dak Sut was the site of a U S Special Forces camp that now was abandoned after it had been overwhelmed by the Viet Cong in 1965. Dak Sut lay in the middle of a narrow valley through which flowed a narrow and twisting river. National Route 14 followed the western bank of the river off at a distance of 400 meters.

The ambush site had been selected with great care. The complete battalion was stretched out along a mile track near the western shoulder of the road. Positioned on the high ground to the west of Route 14 they would be able to look down upon their surprised victims.

For three days Sergeant Chien waited with the rest of his battalion. Then on 14 March 1966, at 1100, a convoy was spotted moving toward the ambush site.

The convoy never had a chance. In a matter of just four minutes it was wiped-out. Sergeant Chien was unable to see just how many South Vietnamese soldiers were killed or captured.

His twenty-four man platoon captured two South Vietnamese soldiers and three U S manufactured carbines. All twelve trucks and the rice that were in the convoy were destroyed by burning. Clothes, cigarettes, ammunition, weapons, and all prisoners were taken back to Loas. The civilians who had been with the convoy were allowed to continue on their way.

Sergeant Chien and his battalion returned to their base camp in Loas without a mishap on 17 March 1966. Their first operation had been a complete success and had been accomplished without one North Vietnamese casualty.

Sometime during the last of March 1966, Sergeant Chien saw a tall American pilot that had been taken prisoner in South

Vietnam in late 1965 near Plei Me. He was wearing a blue flight suit with the gold leaves of a major on his shoulders. Hatless, his hair was long and shaggy. Underweight, the captured major had lost the two fingers next to his little finger ^{on one hand.} He was moved from camp to camp, never staying more than two days in one location.

After arriving back at Buon Het, Sergeant Chien's platoon underwent both political and military training for the next seven weeks. Sergeant Chien conducted a number of classes himself during this time on hand-to-hand combat, bayonet fighting, and ambush techniques.

It was during this period of time that Sergeant Chien began to doubt the North Vietnamese cause. First of all, he was almost positive that the ambush he took part in near Dak Sut had killed innocent civilians. From what he had been able to see and hear most of the population centers in South Vietnam were controlled by the South Vietnamese government; not by the Viet Cong as he had been told. As a matter of fact, Sergeant Chien was forced to live in the hills and jungle away from the people.

As a platoon sergeant he was entitled to receive 1,500 piasters a month. However, after he left North Vietnam last year he had not received any pay. Instead he got paid-in-kind every three months at the rate of twenty piasters per month. He received soap, toothpaste, needles, thread, etc every three months. The remainder of his pay would be due him when he returned to North Vietnam. When that would be no one knew.

Worst of all, was the possibility of being killed and placed in an unmarked grave without his family knowing about it. Life was indeed very unpleasant for Sergeant Chien and his fellow North Vietnamese soldiers.

On 8 May 1966, Sergeant Chien and his platoon headed by foot

for a second time toward South Vietnam. The battalion reconnaissance platoon had preceded the battalion and was selecting and marking their route. For nineteen days they moved unmolested through the mountainous jungle terrain. Several times they had to detour around American units; but they remained undetected.

Sergeant Chien and his platoon arrived at their destination on 27 May 1966-----four miles southwest of an isolated South Vietnamese outpost by the name of Toumorong (12 on map A). A narrow dirt road connected Toumorong with the district capital of Dak To (13 on map A), which was located fifteen miles to the south.

The plan was simple. Two battalions of North Vietnamese soldiers would attack the government outpost of Toumorong from the northwest. A third battalion, Sergeant Chien's battalion, would ambush the relief forces that were sure to use the road that ran between Toumorong and Dak To.

Two thousand meters west of the dirt road that connected Toumorong and Dak To, Sergeant Chien's battalion dug in. They stayed that far from the road in order to avoid detection and the airstrikes and artillery fire that would follow their detection. Several squad-size units were posted closer to the road for observational purposes.

During the nineteen day trip to Toumorong each man had carried twenty pounds of rice in a sausage-like sack slung over the shoulder. After arriving in position each man kept only four pounds of rice for himself. The remaining rice was left with the battalion kitchen, located two miles behind the battalion dug-in positions.

Early each morning, two bowls of rice were cooked for each man by the battalion's kitchen. Underground tunnels were used to carry away and hide the smoke so it would not be spotted by the

American airplanes. The cooked rice was then carried forward to the battalion and consumed during the mid-morning and mid-afternoon meals. It was sparse but sufficient for Sergeant Chien and his men.

Quietly, Sergeant Chien and his platoon waited. A week passed. Nothing happened. Surveillance was maintained continuously. Overhead, American airplanes could be heard.

Then, on 7 June 1966, Americans and South Vietnamese soldiers in trucks with towed artillery were reported moving northward on the road to Toumorong.

On 8 June 1966, Sergeant Chien was just two hundred meters west of the road with ten of his men. Still no sign of the enemy.

Suddenly, at 1400 on the afternoon of 8 June 1966, Sergeant Chien saw a squad of South Vietnamese soldiers moving parallel to the road in a northward direction and only fifty meters to his front.

At the same time both sides saw each other. Under orders not to disclose his position by firing, Sergeant Chien quickly dispatched two of his men to the rear to inform his commanding officer what he was faced with.

At first, Sergeant Chien attempted to evade the South Vietnamese. He told his own men not to fire so that they would not draw return fire. He shouted to the South Vietnamese not to fire. He told them that Vietnamese should not fight each other.

The South Vietnamese did not fire, but attempted to encircle Sergeant Chien and his men.

The South Vietnamese pressed inward. Something had to be done quickly or they would be taken prisoner. Sergeant Chien reached for a hand grenade and threw it toward the encircling enemy. The force of the blast momentarily stunned the South Vietnamese into inactivity and allow Sergeant Chien and his men

to slip away.

As he hurried toward the west, he spotted nine American helicopters strafing his battalion with rocket and machinegun fire. Arriving shortly after the helicopters had left, he discovered that no one in his company had been hit. However, everyone was preparing to leave their present area, which by now was judged to be unsafe.

The complete battalion moved eastward toward the road. They forced-marched at a rapid pace toward a hill that dominated the dirt road. Sergeant Chien's battalion was greeted by a heavy volume of small-arms fire from the hill. Atop the hill, a company-size force of South Vietnamese were dug-in.

When the firing started, Sergeant Chien's battalion had been advancing from the west. Now the battalion was pinned down and taking casualties-----one of which was Sergeant Chien's platoon leader..

Now, as acting platoon leader, he was ordered to move southward with his company and attack the hill from the south. After shifting southward, Chien's platoon managed to work their way up half of the southern slope before they ran into trouble.

Heavy volumes of enemy fire reduced the strength of Sergeant Chien's platoon very rapidly. Next to Sergeant Chien an RPD machinegunner fell forward on to his face. Sergeant Chien stopped momentarily, picked up the fallen gunner's machinegun, and continued on; firing his newly found weapon from the hip. They got to within one hundred meters of the hilltop before a curtain of fire brought them to a ground-hugging halt. Sergeant Chien's platoon dug in as they fought.

It was 1700 hours. Without radio or other communication the North Vietnamese had lost contact with their commanders. The last order had been to take the hill. Without new orders Sergeant Chien

had no choice but to continue the fight.

Artillery shells were falling just to the west and south of the hill; cutting off escape in those directions. Actually, they would be safer from the artillery firing by getting closer to the South Vietnamese.

The battle raged on. Slowly, and at great cost, the North Vietnamese pressed home the attack. By 2015 they had fought to within fifteen meters of the hilltop. However, they had reached the limits of their endurance. Nearly out of ammunition, Sergeant Chien's company had lost one-third of its strength so far. And all the other companies of the battalion had left the battle area by this time-----only Sergeant Chien's company fought on alone.

At 2300 a runner from battalion appeared and told them to rejoin the battalion as soon as possible.

By 0400 on 9 June 1966, the last of the dead and wounded were removed from the slope of the hill. On the hilltop the South Vietnamese would fire an occasional searching burst of fire at the North Vietnamese as they policed the battlefield.

Using hammocks, the wounded were taken three miles westward to the regimental collection point, given temporary medical treatment, and then taken to Loas for recovery.

The dead were buried in individual graves about two miles west from where they had fallen. A single stick was stuck in the ground at the foot of each grave. On the stick was painted each man's name and rank.

Sergeant Chien's company had fifty-seven men when it left Loas. Now only thirty-seven men were present. Eleven, to include two platoon leaders, had been killed and nine had been wounded, to include the company executive officer.

By 0530 on 9 June 1966, the remnants of Sergeant Chien's company had rejoined the battalion. The battered battalion then headed northwestward away from the battle area. Travel was

difficult. The artillery firing had saturated the area and had knocked down all the trees. So thick was the downed vegetation that a trail had to be cut before the battalion could move forward.

At 1600 Sergeant Chien and his battalion reached a large tropical forest. Over head an American airplane flew broadcasting surrender appeals to the North Vietnamese. As soon as the airplane passed overhead, the battalion political officer, a first lieutenant, spoke to each company of the battalion. He informed the assembled North Vietnamese that what they had just heard were lies calculated to induce them to surrender. Only by sticking together could they reach Laos and safety.

After traveling all day they stopped for the night at 1800. They had traveled some nine miles northwestward from the scene of yesterday's battle. However, they dug trenches that night in case they had been followed and had to fight.

That night (9-10 June), Sergeant Chien slept in a trench under a sky that was constantly lighted by flares dropped from American airplanes to the south along the dirt road.

On the morning of 10 June 1966, Sergeant Chien ate a bowl of boiled rice and drank a cup of water for breakfast. Then he moved westward with his battalion toward Laos.

At 0900 many American helicopters flew low over the battalion. The helicopters were filled with American soldiers.

Figuring that they were now surrounded, the battalion turned back toward the trenches in which they had spend the night. By 1400 they had returned to the trenches which they had left that morning.

Orders were given to improve the trenches by installing overhead cover. Once this was done ammunition and weapons were checked. It was during the check that Sergeant Chien's company

commander discovered that some of Chien's men had thrown away about a third of their ammunition during their long march from Loas to Toumorong.

The company commander was furious. Sergeant Chien was told that he would be court-martialed for failure to exercise proper control over his men. The more he talked, the more enraged the company commander became. Finally, he pointed his pistol at Sergeant Chien's head and threatened to shoot him on the spot. Reacting quickly to this sudden danger, Sergeant Chien pointed his automatic rifle at the company commander.

It was a stand-off. As if in silent agreement and understanding, both men backed away from each other and went back to the work at hand----- preparing for a battle with the Americans.

Three slow hours were spent in the trenches. When no Americans appeared, the battalion was ordered to continue marching toward Loas. They marched westward from 1700 that afternoon to 0100 the next day, 11 June. By that time they had reached National Route 14. They were ready to cross the road at 0130 when to the south, and not too far off, they heard the clatter of small arms firing and the booming sound of artillery.

Hastily they backed off from the road and started to dig trenches on a nearby ridgeline that paralleled the eastern side of the road. They dug silently for an hour. It was quiet all around them now. So the order was given again to prepare to cross the road in one rushing movement.

Sergeant Chien, who happened to be near the political officer, told him that he was sick with malaria and could not move forward without a short rest. It was true. On the go constantly for a month, Sergeant Chien's health had deteriorated rapidly.

The political officer did not say anything. He just nodded his head and asked for Sergeant Chien's weapon.

Left alone by himself, Sergeant Chien rested briefly and then followed his battalion across Route 14. Once across the road Sergeant Chien realized that he was lost. In the darkness he could not determine ⁱⁿ what direction his battalion had gone. Without his weapon he was armed with only four hand grenades. So he walked south on the shoulder of the road. Flares were going off and lighting the night sky.

At 0430 Sergeant Chien came to a destroyed "new life" hamlet, where he found and ate some bananas that were growing on a tree. Then he dug a trench-shelter and went to sleep. The sun was on a downward slope when he awoke at 1400, 11 June 1966.

He was very depressed mentally. Using the black carbon of a flashlight battery that he found in the hamlet and a needle, he drew a dagger on his chest and wrote a short message to the effect that he was "worrying about life". It was at this time that Sergeant Chien decided to surrender. In his mind's eye the fighting was senseless and certainly would not benefit the innocent civilians. He shouldered his rucksack and headed south.

At 1700 he stopped and hung his hammock between two trees. Just before he was about to fall asleep he smelt smoking tobacco. Perhaps he was dreaming. Glancing toward the road he saw a company-size unit of Americans and Vietnamese.

He took off his hat, waved it at them, and walked forward.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. During Sergeant Chien's basic combat training one hour daily was scheduled for the care and maintenance of individual weapons.. Additionally, the advanced training that Chien received also emphasized maintenance of weapons. Viewed in general terms this would appear to be highly commendable. (See pages 6 and 8.)

2. Considerable amount of training time was spent outdoors in order to familiarize Chien with field-conditions. Again, viewed in general terms this appears to be highly commendable. (See pages 7, 9, and 10.)

3. Political training also occupied a large portion of Sergeant Chien's military training schedule. This is undesirable because political training does not contribute directly to military effectiveness as a soldier. (See pages 8 and 16.)

4. Sergeant Chien received a distorted version of the actual conditions in South Vietnam. As later events revealed, such a distorted picture proved militarily harmful-----particularly for morale. (See pages 11 and 16.)

5. Despite a constant threat of discovery by American aerial observation, Sergeant Chien moved about without being detected. Apparently, Chien was very adapt at using the jungle terrain for concealment. (See pages 12, 14, and 17.)

6. Malaria pills and other health measures were taken by members of Sergeant Chien's unit to avoid sickness and disease during their trip to Laos. However, these measures were ineffective-----four men died from malaria and most of the other men were sick. (See page 13 and 22.)

7. Laos, a neutral country, was used by Sergeant Chien as a rest area and a sanctuary from enemy military operations. Militarily, this was a good technique because it provided a safe area for training, resting, and recuperating for future combat. (See pages 15 and 22.)

8. Sergeant Chien found that lack of communications hindered his ability to fight effectively. Lack of communications appeared to be most critical when Chien was faced with a fluid situation that required a decisive and immediate decision. (See pages 18, 19, and 20.)

9. On several occasions Sergeant Chien related incidents that disclosed weak discipline within the North Vietnamese Army -----faking of sickness and discarding of useful ammunition. According to our standards, this would indicate that discipline in the North Vietnamese Army is substandard. (See pages 11 and 21.)

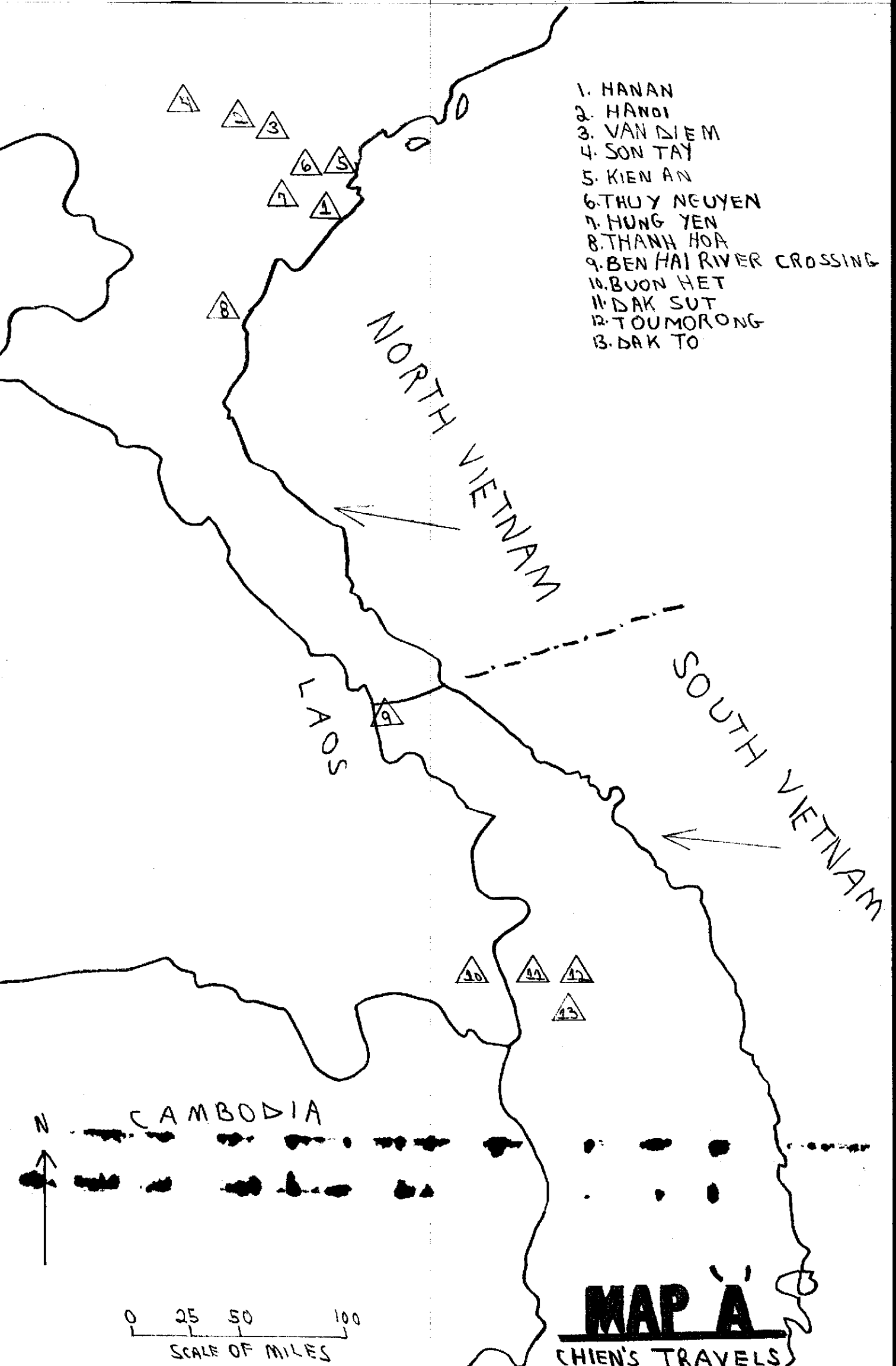
10. Digging-in was the one most used technique of defense used by Sergeant Chien. All things considered, this was a highly desirable tactic. (See pages 7, 10, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 23.)

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The North Vietnamese soldier can be expected to be proficient in the maintenance of individual weapons.
2. The North Vietnamese soldier can be expected to be hardened to field-conditions by the time he reaches South Vietnam.
3. The North Vietnamese soldier is exposed to extensive political indoctrination.
4. After arriving in Laos and experiencing combat, the morale of the North Vietnamese soldier is often very low.
5. U. S. aircraft are unable to detect and/or seriously hinder ground movement by the North Vietnamese.
6. Disease and sickness greatly reduce the fighting strength of the North Vietnamese by the time they arrive in Laos.
7. Laos is being used effectively as a sanctuary by the North Vietnamese.
8. Lack of communications is one of the most serious and critical weaknesses within the North Vietnamese army.
9. Discipline, in certain areas within the North Vietnamese army, is low by our standards.
10. Usually, the North Vietnamese soldier will fight from a dug-in position.

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1. HANAN
2. HANOI
3. VAN DIEM
4. SON TAY
5. KIEN AN
6. THUY NGUYEN
7. HUNG YEN
8. THANH HOA
9. BEN HAI RIVER CROSSING
10. BUON HET
11. DAK SUT
12. TOUMORONG
13. DAK TO

NORTH VIETNAM

SOUTH VIETNAM

LAOS

CAMBODIA

0 25 50 100
SCALE OF MILES

MAP A
CHIEN'S TRAVELS

