

MACV Army "A" Films LRRP

During our photo Teams three week stay in Pleiku, the Lt. came up with the story on LRRPs (Long Range Recon Patrol). This highly trained small group of junior and senior sergeants conducted functions against the enemy. They included insurgency activities, counter-insurgency operations, guerilla activities, espionage, counter-espionage, intelligence gathering and confuse the enemy were all part of their mission; all done hopefully being undetected by the NVA. On special missions sabotage and sniper activities might be part of the operation.

The five to six man LRRP Team was so well honed, they acted as one. Instincts told each other what the others were thinking or about to do, allowing the rest of the team to react accordingly. This was essential for their survival while conducting their clandestine activities. Secrecy, stealthy and surreptitious procedure was not only very valueable intelligence information, but upon being debriefed, back at headquarters, the written documents would be stamped as classified information. The nature of their work forced the LRRPs to be tight lipped about their activities and movements and therefore isolated themselves amongst other LRRP Team members.

From Pleiku they were mostly inserted either by a helo landing momentarily or by rappelling down from ropes from a hovering helo, into an area along the Ho Chi Minh infiltration routes in the Central Highland of Vietnam. Once on the ground, the LRRP Team would be in enemy territory for a week or longer; attempting to identify NVA units, their unit's manpower, arms they were carrying and direction of movement. When possible the LRRP Team would confuse the enemy, by changing trail markers, and mis-directing the NVA away from their intended destination.

The LRRPs had a big laugh when their commander informed the men that a photo team was there to film their activities. No way were the LRRPs going to risk their lives so we could get pictures. Across the driveway from the LRRP compound was a tall grassy area, that would substitute for an insertion area, where a chopper could land.

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Once we sat up the camera in the grassy area, the LRRP team began administering their camouflage paint of green and black. They applied the oitment like stuff to their face, neck, arms and other exposed skin areas. The team members applied the paint to each other, ensuring every spot was covered. When they finished only their eyeballs and lips weren't coated.

Technically there were some problems. On one side there were high tension electrical lines, that wouldn't be along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. While the grass hid the (MSR) Main Supply Route, we had to be careful not to film trucks passing in the background. The soundman had it a lot worse. The microphone picked up vehicles for two blocks in either direction of our position. Plus aerial traffic of helos and planes flying near by ruin the quiet of the jungle.

Adding to the soundman's frustration, on assignment in the jungle the LRRP Team never spoke above a whisper. The LRRPs used hand signals for virtually all movements and direction between the LRRP Team members. Maintaining silence helped them from being detected while in enemy territory. Filming close-ups of the team NCOIC giving these signals was vital for the story. The hand signals were a language in themselves. A fist meant hold tight or stop. A thumb meant something else and two fingers was a totally different set of instructions, to the team. This lack of verbal commands added to our soundmans problems of getting audio for the film. We finally sent him off on his own to get birds singing, cricket noise and other bugs along with wind and some background noise native to the area but not associated with civilization.

The regular combat troops slept in any direction he found fit. The LRRPs demonstrated their sleeping technique. That was to form a circle with everyones feet in the center of the circle. The head and rifle were facing outward to cover a field of fire, without much movement or noise. The LRRPs were ready for action and still protect other team members.

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Then came lunch. The LRRPs had special food, far different than C-Rations. They couldn't contaminate the enemy territory with cardboard boxes, empty tin cans, plastic silverware, cellophane wrappings, empty sugar, coffee and cream packets. The LRRPs had their own specially designed meals. The LRRP ration was a re-sealable pouch of dehydrated food. They opened the pouch and added water. The LRRP Team told us usually in the field they stuck the re-sealed pouch in their shirt. The body heat would warm the food., telling us normally it wasn't advisable to start a fire. After 30 minutes the food was re-hydrated and ready to eat. They told us one LRRP Ration lasted them all day. It was so fortified with vitamins and minerals that one pouch was all they could eat in a day.

Since this was make believe, not the real LRRP field condition they built a fire to heat the pouch and allowed us photo team members to try their food. The food was tasty. It reminded me of eating raw coconut, a little went a long long way. Three mouthfuls of coconut and I thought I had eaten a complete meal. The LRRP Ration was the same. Three spoonfuls and my stomach said its filled. It was so fortified a little went a long way. I could see why one pouch lasted all day.

During the filming and eating, the LRRPs told us of some of their experiences. One Sgt told of being on the Ho Chi Minh Trail unobserved. He said a NVA unit set up camp for the night at the LRRP position. He said one NVA soldier was less than five feet away. The LRRP couldn't move a muscle all night. After the NVA unit packed up and moved out the next morning, he was so stiff and sore he could hardly walk.

Another incident the LRRP Team shared with us was, the team was discovered by a NVA unit. A fire fight broke out. The LRRPs called command center for help. It took skyraiders, crbra gunships and a Air Force AC-130 gunship to suppress the NVA until the LRRP Team could be extracted from the area by helo.

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