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LESSON TEN—FIELD INTELLIGENCE

In the battle of Bu Gia Map fought in May 1966, a reinforced battalion from the 101st Airborne Division engaged for two days against a large enemy force one day's march from the Cambodian border. By making the wisest possible use of supporting artillery and air power, the commander destroyed the greater part of an NVA battalion. It was a resounding victory.

Yet it pivoted altogether on a persistent questing for intelligence by men in the unit at the time of the operation. To begin, the battalion had no target of real promise, and after the first few days of searching the mission seemed futile. On a hunch, the commander made a personal reconnaissance by Huey to an abandoned airstrip 30 minutes flight distance from his base.

There he drew fire. He quickly redeployed his battalion into this area by airmobile assault. Then all companies, save the security force at the new base, began "checkerboarding," or combing out the general area in all directions. The commander stressed one thing above all else: "We must get prisoners." The first night ambushes succeeded in taking one NVA private alive, but he was emotionally overwrought and his information proved of no great value. An ambush patrol on the second night struck pay dirt and captured another NVA soldier. This POW was sick from malaria. The battalion commander's philosophy was "treat POW's as nicely as possible." For this "gentle" treatment of prisoners had paid off before. After the prisoner had received medication, warm blankets, and food, he sang like a canary, located his unit on the map, and volunteered to lead a force there. Through no fault of his, when the friendly forces surrounded his unit's camp, they found it abandoned. The bird had escaped the cage minutes before. On the fourth day, with the commander still pressing his men to "take them alive," a patrol wounded and captured an NVA sergeant. He described the enemy force that lay in ambush directly to the westward and gave the location of the fortified hill as being one

kilometer away—a position until then unsuspected. The capture had occurred on a new trail leading to the defended hill. The success of the expedition turned on this one small event.

In the Tou Morong campaign of June 1966, four battalions made a great sweep for three days over a far spread of difficult country and converged, toward closing out the operation, still empty-handed. Nowhere had they encountered enemy in force. On the afternoon of the third day, with full withdrawal imminent, the commander of the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry, on reaching the Tou Morong outpost (the purpose of the sweep was to relieve the garrison there) talked to a sublieutenant of Popular Forces who had been long in the area. The American asked him: "Where do you think the enemy is?" The map was brought out. The Vietnamese put his finger on a village and said: "Whenever we patrol, we find NVA around there." The American believed him, or at least felt the information warranted a second try. So the plan was altered. The battalion of the 101st Airborne Division stayed in the area and began grinding away. The battle of Tou Morong—a highlight of U.S. campaigning in 1966—developed from this one incident.

Operation Thayer-Irving, mounted in the 1966 autumn, was in its early stages underproductive. During the first weeks, troops beat out much country, spent much energy, and took light losses for little gain. A feeling of futility developed. In the second phase the search turned toward the coast line of Binh Dinh east of Highway No. 1. In early morning a troop commander of cavalry making a reconnaissance by gunship saw three khaki-clad figures standing in the street of a fishing village. Too late, they ducked for cover. Capitalizing on this seemingly insignificant scrap of intelligence, Operation Irving became a shining battle success. And not only in terms of enemy losses: more prisoners were taken than in any show of that year. The abrupt change in fortune came of one piece of fresh intelligence collected by one man.

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From the data basis could be lifted numerous other encouraging examples of the same kind, though on a smaller scale. However, there are also negative aspects to several of the operations which we have already considered in a favorable and positive light.

In one campaign, on the evening before the conversation that turned a futile exercise into a productive battle, fighting developed "off the map," along the low ground of the flat and treeless valley south of the mountain area being worked over by the maneuvering battalions. One U.S. artillery battery had been deployed there by helicopter to provide covering fire for a rifle battalion. A rifle company was sent along to guard its base. At the same time an ARVN battalion was marching up the main road, over flat ground, toward its objective. Less than 700 meters from the U.S. position, the ARVN battalion became heavily engaged when it turned aside to bivouac on the finger of a low-lying ridge. Several U.S. advisers were along. Men of the two U.S. units deploying into the LZ could not hear the sounds of the fight over the noise of Hueys and Chinooks landing and leaving. Within a few minutes, the U.S. rifle company also became engaged with an NVA force on the wooded nose of the nearest finger of the same low-lying ridge, not more than 300 meters from the American battery. The artillery weapons were never turned around and they took no part in the fight. The U.S. advisers with the ARVN battalion and the command at the artillery base were on the radio telephone, talking to one another. But only fragmentary information was exchanged between them. Neither force got an understanding of the other's immediate problem and situation, though one was not more than a 10-minute walk from the other and the broad valley was clear of enemy forces. Had either been more perceptive, more disposed to talk things out fully, an NVA platoon might have been taken whole or destroyed and the significance of the attack on the ARVN battalion by at least two NVA companies would have come clear.

In Operation Thayer, which became largely a dry well, a 12-man patrol from the cavalry division moved along with an interpreter from the National Police. While it paused by a stream to wash feet and break out rations, an aged Vietna-

mese woman came along the trail next to it. She was asked: "Have you seen any VC?" She replied: "There are three right now in my village down this trail." The cavalymen followed along, engaged and killed an enemy outguard of several men, took losses themselves in the exchange of fire, then learned there were outguards posted generally around the village. They concluded that the place was held by an enemy force in at least company strength. The time was late afternoon. Because other problems pressed the brigade, the opening was not taken. The patrol was withdrawn before there was any real testing of enemy strength, and by next day the bird had flown. The point is only that what had at first seemed an unlikely source of information about enemy presence proved to be wholly valid.

The besetting problem in Vietnam is to find the enemy. It is like hunting for the needle in the haystack only if the unit commander views it as a task primarily for higher levels and does not have all of his senses and all of his people directed toward systematizing the search so that it will pay off. His scout elements are only a first hold on the undertaking; they probe over a limited area of a large countryside prolific with cover and natural camouflage. Out of their truly productive contacts resulting directly from maneuver emerges only a small fraction of the hard information leading to our most successful finds and strikes. The greater part of it derives from careful interrogation of people met along the way, interrogation that neither overlooks nor discounts any possible source. One new unit, operating in Paul Revere IV, took over a village in late afternoon. Finding the people gone and the livestock fresh, it concluded that an NVA force was probably close at hand. So the men killed the pigs and left the chickens, figuring that if the enemy returned by night, the fowl might sound the alarm. The gambit failed; the enemy, attacking the American perimeter next to the village in early evening, avoided the chickens by moving in from the other side. The men had a good idea nevertheless; even animals can be used as early warning in Vietnam.

These things are said in Vietnam about intelligence flow by commanders and men who fight there:

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(1) It comes in greater volume than in any other war.

(2) Not more than 10 to 15 percent of it leads to anything worthwhile—though each lead must be followed through to hit pay dirt.

(3) Where there is a payoff, in nine cases out of ten, the information which led to the introduction of tactical forces into a certain area proves to be wrong in whole or in part, and something quite else, but still worth the effort, develops from the deployment.

(4) Development and exploitation therefore depend chiefly on what the tactical unit learns and does.

(5) Most of the intelligence which leads to worthwhile results in battle is collected by tactical units after they have deployed.

These are broad propositions. They call to mind the epigram of the late Justice Holmes: "I always say that no generalization is worth a damn, including this one." But if it is granted that statements (4) and (5) are only partially true, they put the unit commander at dead center of our combat intelligence collecting apparatus. It is a task that he cannot shrug off; there is only the question of whether he will be thorough or slipshod in his work. Working closely and continuously with his interpreters while in the field is one prerequisite of success.

Nothing will be said here about the collecting and use of enemy documents. The unit commander gets full instruction on this subject from higher authority within Vietnam, and to add anything would be superfluous.

Our primary concern is with his attitude toward all people who may be sources of information that will help him to make contact. They are of many kinds. These things are to be said of them:

(1) Captured NVA soldiers, more so than hardcore Viet Cong, and not unlike the Japanese in World War II, are constrained to cooperate and tell most of what they know. When they have the inclination, they give without being manhandled. There is no example in the record of an NVA captive who, in responding readily to interrogation, gave false information that set up a U.S. unit in front of a trap. The initially sullen enemy soldier is not apt to change and respond with worthwhile information.

(2) The people of the countryside, be they Vietnamese, Montagnards, Chinese, or any other, friendly or hostile, often know more about enemy presence or movement that they will voluntarily tell. They must be sought out and questioned, or obviously there will be no answers. The questioning is best done in a friendly and initially indirect manner. Paying some attention to the children sometimes wins cooperation. Without an interpreter, the exchange is made extraordinarily difficult, though there are several examples in the record of large results achieved through sign language. The characteristics vary from tribe to tribe, but most Montagnard villagers have no understanding of numbers, time according to the clock, distances when computed in terms of miles or kilometers, and other basic units of measurement as we know them.

(3) All CIDG companies and their Special Force advisers doing regular duty and patrolling daily within any region naturally know more about enemy presence within it and the problem of fixing it than any field force likely to be committed there suddenly on such a mission. Acquiring such knowledge is their specialty, their reason for being. Any tactical commander who bypasses the opportunity to learn all he can from them when he is in their vicinity is not doing his best for his people or himself.

(4) The same thing is to be said of ARVN, Nationalist Police, ROK, and other allied forces, officers and men, who have served in any area being entered for the first time by a U.S. tactical unit. Not to profit from their experience by seeking them out and asking what they know is a mistake. It has happened many times that they had a good fix on an enemy force but withheld from moving to contact because their strength was insufficient. Experience has also shown that, if requested, these veteran allies will readily provide personnel to act as scouts and guides for U.S. units deploying in their area of operation.

The record indicates that the Special Force teams in Vietnam have developed sophisticated search and surveillance systems now uniquely their own. These could be made of more general application by the field army to the benefit of all. Any tactical unit commander is well advised to make contact with Special Force field personnel when

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opportunity affords to learn more about such things. Some of these operations are of a classified nature though the methodology and the working rules are not a highly sensitive subject. The soldier troubling to make such a visit might learn some useful new tricks besides sharing good company, usually supplied with cold beer, for a spell.

In the tall bush, jungle, or tropical forest, the NVA and VC make effective, though irregular, tactical use of tree roosts, as did the Japanese in World War II. The upper branches serve for observation; in the lower limbs are concealed platforms for sniping. The enemy sets these forward of main positions, placing them to the flank or rear of our lines when we close. In Operation Attleboro our people learned of this technique a little late and several men were killed by fire from overhead until a gunner sensed what was happening,

dusted the trees with automatic fire, and brought several of the snipers down. Tied to the trunk by long ropes, the bodies dangled in mid-air. In a campaign fought near the Cambodian border, a brigade commander complained about this enemy practice, as if it were unfair. His general asked him: "Well, did you think to do it, also?" It's a good question. According to the record, Americans as individuals sometimes make tactical use of trees, as when an inspired battalion commander directed his fighting line from the upper crotch of a banyan during Operation Geronimo II because he was trying to take prisoners and the voice on the bullhorn would carry farther that way. But trees are not used for sniping and superior observation on any organized basis, though the opportunity is there. Why? Too many commanders simply fail to think of it.

LESSON ELEVEN—THE DEFENSIVE PERIMETER

Procedures used in forming the defensive perimeter vary greatly along with their effectiveness from unit to unit. There is uniformity within a brigade or a battalion when command at these levels continues to insist upon it and inspects to see that the work is properly done in the field. Left to his own devices, the young company commander, most of the time, is careless about perimeter organization. That the unit repeatedly deploys without contact tends to lull the unit into a state of indifference. Thus the attitude prevails, "If we got by last night without digging, why dig tonight?"

To some extent, all infantry units try to follow the tested and proved principles and techniques of defense taught at the service schools. But too many do not try very hard; if they did, there would be fewer losses due to failure to dig in deep, or to dig at all, when there was time for digging and the men were not physically exhausted.

The record shows conclusively that the unit disciplined to follow the rules has never suffered a serious tactical disarrangement and invariably sustains relatively light losses when considered against the volume of enemy fire and the intensity of the attack. Its production of fire is steadier and better controlled than that of the unit that has failed to make the best use of ground. The movement of weapons and ammunition from the less-threatened sectors of the perimeter to the foxholes under direct pressure, when ammo runs low and weapons are being knocked out, is systematic, not haphazard.

We have cases in the book in which the rifle company was so lax about elementary precautions in organizing for defense that there appears no other explanation of how it escaped destruction in the fight that ensued except that the average enemy soldier has no real skill with the rifle and other hand weapons.

There are far more examples on the bright side. Representative of them are company actions out of the 4th Infantry Division's experience in

Operation Paul Revere IV in late 1966. Yet these units were having their baptism of fire. The NVA attacks ranged from company-size to assault by the reinforced battalion. Some of the attacks were supported by heavily concentrated mortar fire, so accurately placed as to suggest that the weapons had been preregistered on the position. One mortar barrage on a single position in a fight of less than one hour was reported as hurling between 500 and 700 rounds; through group interview of the unit, the figure was subsequently scaled down to 300-350 rounds. Yes, the unit under this fire took heavy losses. But in view of the powerful barrage that struck, it came through splendidly. "We had dug in right up to our chins," one sergeant said. Close questioning of the men established that this was no exaggeration.

The mortar barrage had been set to disorganize the defense preparatory to a battalion-size assault that under cover of dark had already closed to within approximately 200 meters of the position. Its repulse was total. Not only did it fail to break the perimeter; it did not get close enough to trade volume rifle fire with the defenders. There can be no doubt that deep digging, and one other tactical precaution to be discussed later, saved this rifle unit and the supporting artillery battery. A general rule now being followed in Vietnam is to stop moving early enough to allow for sufficient daylight in which to establish a solidly organized, well-dug defensive perimeter.

The ROK forces have had similar success on the defense since their first major encounter with NVA troops in the rice paddies of south Tuy Hoa (Hill 50) in January 1966. Two battalions of NVA tried to overrun two ROK marine companies. The fight went three hours; when it ended, more than 400 enemy dead lay outside the ROK perimeter, while inside it the losses were light. ROK units have never taken a reverse while on defense in Vietnam. They employ no

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defensive tactics that are peculiarly their own; there is no secret to their success. What they do has been taught them by U.S. Army advisers and can be found in our manuals. The Korean soldier works at his position like a mole. The holes are dug deep and reinforced with protective overhead cover. Tactical wire is placed to the front and interlaced with trip flares, mines, and other anti-intrusion devices. Outposts are set along likely avenues of approach, far enough from the perimeter to provide a sufficient warning interval. Patrols are dispatched to scout possible sites for enemy supporting weapons. (The enemy normally prepares such positions well before the infantry attack comes on.) The position prepared, it is then manned by an alert and well-supervised soldier. Usually, one-third of the defenders are at the ready, listening for noise of the enemy. Noise, light, and fire disciplines are sternly enforced. "Stand-to" is conducted at dusk, dawn, and, when keyed to intelligence, in the middle of the night.

With the average U.S. rifle company in night defense, nominally every third man is on the alert, and the watch is two hours. Because of the high mobility of operations, tactical wire is not used, though the unit stays in the same position two days or more. It would seem prudent to harden the base whenever any prolonged stay is in prospect, but the practice is not generally applied. Such a rule should be in order, most particularly when the perimeter encloses artillery, which is high on the list of enemy targets. In the fight on LZ Bird, 26 December 1966, already praised here as a highly valiant and successful defense, American losses would have been less and the enemy attack could not have impacted with such pronounced initial violence, had this precaution been taken.

The average U.S. rifle company on defense uses the buddy system, or two men to a foxhole. The record fully sustains this practice as having, in this mode of warfare, an added value beyond those of affording companionship, steadying the individual nerve, and contributing to unit alertness. We are dealing with a fanatic enemy, capable of acts of seeming madness and utter desperation. Often, the lone fighter is not prepared to cope with the frenzy of an attacker thus possessed. Two

men can; one man's courage rubs off on the other. From Paul Revere IV and earlier operations, the record has numerous entries of foxhole buddies, working together, manhandling, and at last vanquishing a demonic adversary, where one man would have failed. Example: The NVA soldier charges directly in and jumps into the foxhole. One man, tackling him around the knees, wrestles him down, works on him with a machete, and cuts through the shoulder to the bone so that the arm dangles by flesh. The American by then is atop the still-struggling enemy. His buddy, trying to help, but having no clear shot at the target, puts three bullets from his M-16 into the enemy's legs. The figure goes limp. The two Americans toss the body out of the perimeter, thinking the man dead. It lands on the back of a company aid man who grabs the nigh-severed arm and is astonished to see it spin a complete circle. The corpse comes alive and struggles with the aid man. He is killed at last, beaten to death with an entrenching tool.

Some companies use the three-man foxhole; there are sound arguments for it and the results seem more satisfactory, insuring maximum rest combined with the required degree of alertness. Terrain—the possession of high ground for the defensive position—has little value in Vietnam compared with former wars. What is important is that the position be compact; weakness, vulnerability come rather from overextension, trying to cover too much ground, thereby shortening the field of fire, and lessening mutual support, foxhole to foxhole.

Trip flares and other alarm or anti-intrusion devices, including the Claymore, are not employed regularly and consistently by all units on the defense, though they are invariably carried along. There is no general explanation other than lack of command insistence. The Claymore is employed more than any other fixture outward from the perimeter. Lately the NVA enemy has acquired the nasty habit of sneaking forward a few hands in the early stages of a fight who wriggle in on their bellies to where they can cut the Claymore wires. The Viet Cong enemy frequently improves on that trick. In January 1967, for example a platoon from 25th Infantry Division conducted a small night operation on the outskirts of Vinh Cu and was attacked while in defensive position.

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Foxhole line along defense perimeter.

Reports the witness: "I went out to get my Claymore only to find that the mine had been turned around. Faced as it was, it could have wiped out the people in four of our positions had we fired it during the fight." (The battery-powered, trip wire-type anti-intrusion device has little appeal and goes almost unused. In all operations, we found only one lieutenant who thought it worthwhile and strung the wire regularly.)

Outposts, giving way to listening posts after dark, are set generally and routinely by platoons and rifle companies on defense along each likely avenue of approach, with about this one exception: a unit rigging ambushes on trails adjacent to the perimeter rarely sets up outposts as well. Two or three men usually compose an OP or LP.

They do not dig in as a rule. One man is supposed to stay alert; the others sleep. Though frowned upon, smoking on OP and LP, and within the perimeter, is common. (An exception is in Special Force detachments on patrol where smoking is prohibited. The rule is respected because, among other effects, "smoking makes the sense of smell less acute.") Sometimes the LP is connected with the perimeter, and sometimes not; this variation is arbitrary and in no way related to the distance between the post and the main body. Where there are four platoons on perimeter, there will usually be four OP's or LP's. Generally each platoon sets out one LP to cover the main approach into its sector. When the RT is used on LP duty, a prearranged signal (so many clicks on

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the push-to-talk button) warns of the approach of enemy force and gives its size.

LP's located at real distance from the defensive perimeter are not only of vital service to security but invariably safer for their occupants. At least half the time in Vietnam, according to the record, the defense is established on ground that permits siting LP's for maximum effectiveness. Yet rare indeed is an LP posted more than 50 meters from the foxhole line; far more frequently, where the terrain and vegetation outward from the perimeter are clear enough for the men on LP to run back to the main body, the posting is too close to be of much use or there is none whatever.

In the 4th Infantry Division's fight near the Cambodian border in late November 1966, three men were on LP duty 350 meters west of the perimeter. They heard an NVA rifleman as he crawled over a pile of logs not more than 10 meters away. Certain they had not been seen, they slipped backward a few feet to get a clearer view of him and have more freedom of action. All three then blasted him with the greater part of three magazines of M-16 fire. Their volleying tripped off the enemy mortar attack before the NVA line had advanced to more than even with the LP. The mortars started, fired a few rounds, then broke off when the enemy realized that something had gone wrong. (It is assumed that small arms fire was the prearranged signal for the enemy mortarmen to begin their supporting fires.) The NVA line was still far short of closing distance. Thus the attack became unhinged. The three Americans, going on a dead run for the perimeter, made it in time to alert the defenders to what was coming.

In another perimeter defense in Paul Revere IV one LP, equipped with a radio though it was only 30 meters from the foxhole line, was dead in the way of the enemy line of advance. One soldier got off the warning; it helped not at all because by then the attack had broken against the main

body, and within seconds the soldier was down and dying and crying for an aid man. Initial confusion in a sector of the perimeter arose out of distress over the man and the desire to rescue him. Temporarily, it inhibited fire in decisive volume from the one platoon that was under the heaviest and most direct pressure, though it shortly got going, semireconciled to the loss of the lone man on the LP.

According to the record, this is a not uncommon incident. Something of the sort happens often enough to warrant raising the question: do LP's placed at only 20 to 35 meters from the perimeter have sufficient warning value in this form of warfare to justify their use? The extra danger to men so placed is hardly debatable. The brief time interval is not enough to allow the alerting of the armed circle. Time after time, because the LP's have been overrun, greater jeopardy is visited on the main body. The command places a certain amount of reliance on them though they have little chance to do the work for which they are intended.

There is no evidence on record in Vietnam that any U.S. rifle company, having set up for night defense by perimeter, has been wholly overrun, though the story was too frequently otherwise in Korea. Many such positions in Vietnam have been cracked, and others have taken hard punishment, but the ground has always been held until the enemy withdrew or the command decision was made that it was no longer worth the fight. The unit sometimes gets out; none has ever been driven out. The same cannot be said of platoon perimeters, the reason being they do not have enough fire power to withstand a hard-pressed attack. They are as insecure as was the company perimeter atop a Korean ridge. The comparison rather clearly bespeaks the scale of the war and the relative ineffectiveness of the enemy, NVA or VC, in the attack. Use of the company perimeter as the basic defensive element, careful tying-in of weapons, and alertness will beat him every time.

*20 Nov -
only 2 short; 1 watches*

Verifying

*See maps on attack
position - lots of pre-sets
2-3 meters, 50-100 meters
enough better for
warning/sets. Too
close - a waste.*

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LESSON TWELVE—POLICING THE BATTLEFIELD

Policing of the battlefield, or tidying-up as the British say, is an ancient custom in armies, and more of a necessity in Vietnam than in wars of our past. The reasons are already well known to troops before they arrive in Vietnam. Not only is the debris of war so repulsive and unwholesome that having as little of it about as possible is just another part of good housekeeping, but denying to the enemy anything and everything that may be of use to him is the interest of self-preservation.

So there is nothing novel or unreasonable about the requirement put upon troops that they strip the scenes of action and the routes over which they move of everything that the enemy might turn to a fighting purpose or use to help his forces in any other way. Every dud grenade or unexploded artillery shell left behind is a gift to the Viet Cong. Any discarded C-ration tin can be transformed into a booby trap. The enemy is good at such tricks, and nine times out of ten he will return to the field to look for free items he can add to his bag soon after we depart it.

A fundamental consideration in any discussion about policing the field is the soldier's load, for it goes to the heart of the problem. Why does the field get littered? Even though the soldier's load has been discussed and analyzed by experts perhaps more than any other subject in warfare, the record in Vietnam still shows that the average infantry soldier crashes through the jungle weighted down like a pack mule. When he finds the enemy, he must always unload the rucksack or the heavy pack in order to move more quickly about the battlefield. It is not uncommon to find soldiers saddled with five days' C-rations, which weigh about 15 pounds. Their commanders proudly report, "Five days' rations give my men freedom from resupply; they can move with the speed and stealth of a guerrilla." In actual fact, mobility is decreased because of these heavy loads and the soldier is physically worn down by midday. Fa-

tigue affects alertness, making him vulnerable to the enemy's designs.

The good commander takes a hard look at every item that his soldiers carry. What they do not absolutely require he eliminates. At all times it should be a main aim to lighten the load of his men. For the soldier in Vietnam like the soldier of World War II and Korea will throw away or lose anything he does not need, or thinks he may not need tomorrow—and before another day has passed the enemy will have picked it up.

These lines from a book published by the Department of Defense should be read again by unit commanders in the light of our Vietnam experience: "Extravagance and wastefulness are somewhat rooted in the American character because of our mode of life. When our men enter military service, there is a strong holdover of their prodigal civilian habits. Even under fighting conditions, they tend to be wasteful of water, food, munitions, and other vital supply. When such things are too accessible they tend to throw them away rather than conserve them in the general interest."

Because of this fault in our makeup, combat leaders in Vietnam have to keep prodding their men to police the premises before quitting the perimeter and moving on. The distinguishing feature of this discipline is the heavy accent that has to be given it because we are fighting a guerrilla enemy and no piece of open country is likely to be held by our people for very long.

What is new and different about the war in Vietnam is the emphasis put upon the tallying of enemy dead at the same time that the field is being policed. Where circumstances permit and members of the unit are not subjected to additional jeopardy, they are required to tally the manpower losses of the enemy as conscientiously as they are required to set about possessing the weapons that he leaves on a field from which his forces have withdrawn.

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These two requirements need to be discussed and understood in one context. The heavier burden put upon troops adds up to a somewhat onerous task and not one they would undertake of their own volition. Like so much of war's drudgery, however, it is still acceptable, so long as doing the job does not subject the men to extremes of risk.

None but a foolhardy soldier would voluntarily charge forward against fire from an enemy rifle line so that he might wrest an AK47 or SKS from Viet Cong hands to claim it as a souvenir, though he would be denying the enemy that one weapon. Body count is governed by the same principle that underlies this negative example. It should not be ordered when there is clearly present the prospect of increased risk for the unit or the likelihood of more casualties; nor should it be ordered when there is a more pressing military object immediately to be served.

Time and tactical opportunity wait on no man. Take one example. A U.S. unit in perimeter defense clearly witnesses the temporary withdrawal from the immediate vicinity of the enemy force that has been pressing the attack. Given the choice in the breathing space of one or the other, only an unthinking commander would put the counting of bodies outside his lines ahead of possessing the weapons scattered there. The enemy may swarm back and, by pressing home the attack again, manage to extract the bodies. But if the weapons are left there and he recovers them, they could help him overrun the position. The bodies do him no good; they merely burden his withdrawal. And all we lose by letting him get away with them is a comforting statistic.

We are pointing out only that body counting at the wrong time, or at the sacrifice of real tactical opportunity, can be both dangerous and time-wasting. It is not a task or object of such transcendent importance as to warrant taking additional casualties, though any small-unit commander may make it such by getting confused about his priorities. Emphasizing body count until it obscures the more legitimate interests of security and mobility is ever a mistake on his part. In its possible consequences it differs in degree from the requirement to police the combat field. When the young commander, having won his

fight, pushes out his tidying-up patrols before he has done a proper job of reconnoitering for enemy presence just beyond the foreground, he is wrong, dead wrong.

Examples that make the point dot the record. *Item.* A fight is not even halfway along. Pressure on the unit leader is mounting by the minute. But already higher command is putting additional pressure on him to police the field and get the bodies counted in the proper time. It is his duty to bear with it: he is still the judge of the right time and circumstance. *Item.* A U.S. rifle company in a good defensive position atop a ridge is taking steady toll of an NVA force attacking up hill. The skipper sends a four-man patrol to police weapons and count bodies. Three men return bearing the fourth, who was wounded before the job was well started. Another patrol is sent. The same thing happens. The skipper says, "Oh, to hell with it!" *Item.* In Operation Nathan Hale three men working through a banana grove were hit by sniper fire. They were counting bodies. *Item.* In Operation Paul Revere IV a much-admired line sergeant was killed, two other enlisted men were wounded, and a lieutenant barely escaped ambush, when the four together were "tidying up" the field. They ran into a stay-behind party planted in a thicket on the morning after the fight.

Small-unit leaders have to understand that the requirement, though urgent, is not *that* urgent. Body-counting is of lesser moment than the chance to kill and capture still more of the enemy in the hour when effective pursuit is possible. As Marshal Foch said, "If you reach the stop one minute after the bus is gone you miss it." One of the comments often made by Americans fighting in Vietnam is that the enemy has greater skill at breaking contact than any soldier ever engaged by our forces. A unit commander only adds to the enemy's reputation when he rates keeping contact and maintaining pursuit as secondary to counting bodies simply because such tallying is a duty on his checklist.

No solution to fit every possible variation of this problem can be recommended. A few suggestions are put forward to assist the small-unit commander in arriving at his own solution. He is the man on the spot and the best judge of the situ-

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ation, and it is his decision that will cure or kill. To him belong the options involving the immediate safety and best interest of his command, in the light of what he knows about the situation. If he believes that a present, but unmeasured, danger forbids body counting or that a more urgent military object should come first, he need only have the courage of his own convictions in coming to that decision. No one may rightly press him to trade lives for bodies.

Out of data based on more than 100 actions by rifle companies and platoons, it can be fairly esti-

mated that the physical and tactical difficulties besetting a unit in the hour when the fight ended precluded the possibility of a body count at least 60 percent of the time. Still more significantly, and with very rare exceptions, where a body count had been reported and was therefore entered into the record, analysis of what really happened in the fight leads to the conclusion that the enemy actually lost more dead than the number reported. Overall, what was claimed and reported, on the basis of the data afforded by the fight itself, appeared to be an understatement of the casualties inflicted on the enemy.

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LESSON THIRTEEN—TRAINING

Our mistakes in Vietnam are neither new nor startling. They are not something we can blame on the mysteries of the warfare. They are the same problems that have been haunting small-unit commanders since before Gideon. The mistakes we are talking about will not likely cause a unit to take a beating. But they will inflict on it needless casualties. In peace or war these errors spell the difference between professionalism and mediocrity.

Many young leaders, enchanted by the Hollywood image of war, approach combat with the good-guy-versus-the-bad-guy attitude. But there is no similarity between what John Wayne gets away with on the screen and the hot, hard facts of the fire fight. A small-unit leader in combat cannot afford to have a film hero's devil-may-care attitude toward training, discipline, and basic soldiering.

In the recipe for battle victory, well-led and disciplined soldiers are the main ingredient, soldiers who have been conditioned by thorough training to react by habit when confronted with the searing realities of engagement. The habits learned in training—good or bad—are the same habits that move the soldier in combat. A leader, then, must insure that each of his soldiers is well trained and has developed good habits—habits so deeply ingrained through correct teaching and intensive practice that even under the pressure of fear and sudden danger each soldier, automatically, will do the right thing.

There is no magic formula or sweatless solution by which one can achieve this goal. Leaders may approach training for combat only with intense dedication, accepting as gospel the timeless truth that better-trained men live longer on the battlefield.

No military unit is ever completely trained. There will always be a weak area that requires additional time and effort. The wise commander uses all available time to train his unit; he never says, "Good enough." In Vietnam he can con-

tinue to train constantly—in the assembly area, in the reserve position, and during the execution of the mission. Leaders must accept the old but absolute maxim: "The more sweat on the training field, the less blood on the battlefield."

An alert leader constantly stresses essential battlefield arts and skills: fire and maneuver; marksmanship; camouflage and concealment; communication; maintenance; noise, light, and fire discipline; scouting and patrolling; woodcraft; mines and boobytraps; and field sanitation. And he makes on-the-spot corrections with the same precision as he does in dismounted drill.

If a soldier is firing from the wrong side of a tree, the leader tells him what he is doing wrong, and why. If the soldier is wandering around without his weapon during an exercise, the leader tells him that he is being fired on by an enemy sniper and that he should take cover and return the fire. When the soldier looks at him dumbfounded and says, "I can't because my rifle is over there," then the leader tells him he is "dead" and makes him lie where he was "killed" for a couple of hours.

The good leader forms a checklist habit. Combat is too serious a business to permit easy excuse of even one mistake. If a unit is going on a patrol, setting up an ambush, establishing a defensive position, or conducting an airmobile assault, he should pull out his checklist and insure that every point is checked off. Many checklists are available throughout the Army and in Vietnam, but in the main they are far too complicated and tend to fog up the issue with unnecessary details.

A simple checklist which underscores the salient points of the operation at hand will stimulate recall. Battle experience has conclusively proven that fatigue, fright, and preoccupation with the routine tend to cloud and distort the memory.

The good leader practices giving a five-paragraph operations order. He is never so much of an "old pro" that he can do without the tried and proven form. He makes sure his people use it too, and he listens to subordinates issuing their

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orders. If he knows his business, he will know whether they are following correct troop leading procedures and whether they have heeded their lessons. To plan his operation and issue his orders in the same detail and with the same precision as if he were taking his first ATT (Army Training Test) and an umpire were breathing down his neck—that should be the object. The voice of experience might well say to him: “Never quit checking. Check everything all the time—weapons for cleanliness, aidmen for supplies, sentries for alertness, and the camp for field sanitation.”

Many young leaders in Vietnam think that if they will it, the thing will be done. Seldom did we find one who adequately checked to see if his orders were being carried out. The order-giving process has three main elements: (1) formulation; (2) issuance; and (3) supervision. All are inter-related and act upon one another. The successful leader will look to all three elements and make sure they are in balance before he concludes that his unit has been readied to the best of his ability for the impending action.

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LESSON FOURTEEN—THE STRANGE ENEMY

A more bizarre, eccentric foe than the one in Vietnam is not to be met, and it is best that troops be told of his peculiar ways lest they be unnerved by learning of them for the first time during combat. He may blow whistles or sound bugles to initiate the assault; or he may trip the fight with a flare or the beating of a bongo drum. But he does not come on in a "banzai charge." That description of him, for example in stories about Operation Attleboro, is a bit of press fiction. The "banzai charges" in reality amounted to about 50 men walking forward in line against a two-platoon front. They did not yell; they screamed only when they were hit. Then meters from where they started they were mowed down or turned back. In the second "banzai charge" only 30 men so acted; the third time there were 12.

It is in many small ways that the enemy in Vietnam deviates from what we consider normal, sometimes to the stupefaction of our people. Nerves get jangled when in a fire fight joined at close range men hear maniacal laughter from the pack out there in the darkness just a few feet beyond the foxhole. Catcalls, the group yelling of phrases and curses in English, the calling out of the full name of several men in the unit—such psychological tricks are likely to be trotted out at any time.

In one of the company fights in Paul Revere IV, a voice from a bamboo clump not more than 10 meters from the foxhole line shouted, "Hey, how's your company commander?"

One American, not at all jumpy, yelled back, "Mine's great; how's yours?"

The voice replied, "No good; you just killed him."

During the hottest part of the defense on LZ Bird, with the NVA in large numbers inside the perimeter, the Americans still in the fight were astonished to see enemy skirmishers break into their tents, emerge arms laden with fruit cakes, boxes of cookies, and sacks of candy, then squat on the fire-swept field and eat the goodies.

In that same fight one U.S. rifleman, not in any way hurt, feigned death when an enemy party came upon him. The NVA took none of his possessions and did not try to roll him. The soldier lying next to him, already wounded, was shot dead and his pockets were picked clean.

In Operation Paul Revere, an NVA soldier walked into a U.S. outpost of two men after dark, sat beside one of them who was half asleep, and started talking to him in perfect English. The interloper even leaned on the American, who in his stupor thought this was his buddy who was sprawled out sleeping several feet away. The monologue went on several minutes. By the time our man finally became aware of what was happening, the North Vietnamese was strolling away. He made it clean without a shot being fired.

In Operation Cedar Falls, enemy soldiers hid in water holes along the creek banks like so many muskrats. The entrances were below the surface. Our skirmishers could hear their voices a few feet away but could not find them. In the same fight, within the Iron Triangle, a party on ambush at night sensed a particularly pungent smell in the air which only one man could identify. "I know it," he said. "That's pot [marihuana]." It was a first warning of enemy presence.

In one of the mad scenes in Operation Irving, more than a platoon of enemy vanished into subsurface water holes along a river bank. Bamboo, bored through to form a pipe, serves as louvers for these chambers. U.S. cavalrymen spotted the tell-tale signs, stripped naked, got down into the stream, and fished the NVA out of the holes.

On a long patrol in January 1967, a Mike Force led by Special Force personnel, was shadowed for 10 days by one Viet Cong. He kept a copious diary, relating that he could not understand what the column was trying to do or where it was heading because of its zigzag movement. But along with his diary entries he had carefully written down the plan and maneuver to be used by several enemy battalions gathering to envelop the Mike Force. On the eleventh day, making one false

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move, he was shot dead. The diary was found on him, and the column walked away from the trap.

Another snapshot from Operation Cedar Falls. Nine Americans were in an ambush position. One group of 14 Viet Cong kept circling the ground for two hours. Then one of their number walked to within five feet of the muzzle of the machinegun, knelt down, and lit a candle to look at a wounded man struck down by the same gun a few minutes before.

An ambush patrol from 1st Infantry Division, based at Di An, was in a night operation near War Zone D. The men had already made a killing, and because their leader had an intuition that the Viet Cong were out in force that night they rapidly shifted position to stronger ground. The leader asked for illumination and Smokey the Bear (a flare ship) came over. When the lights popped on, instead of having a view of the river banks 250 meters to their fore, the men were "dazzled by an array of shining objects that seemed to be moving" between them and the stream. This dazzling band was about 100 meters wide and six

feet tall. Feeling themselves threatened, for want of anything better to do the troops opened fire with M-16's and machineguns. The shining objects began falling. Then fire came against the Americans. At last they understood. These were Viet Cong—several platoons of them. The VC had been advancing, each one carrying in front of him a sheet of roofing tin that screened his body wholly. Why? No one ever found out. It was just another mystery, wholly baffling to the Americans. One of them said, "It was screwier than Macbeth."

There are these tales and many more about our odd foe. The full measure of his strange nature is yet to be taken. We will continue to endure it in its military manifestations so long as the fighting goes on. To accustom the American soldier to expect the unexpected may be too much to expect, but he can be braced to the probability that when he engages the VC or NVA the most unlikely things will happen. Getting to know them better is a large part of the game.

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