

MILITARY AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC SECURITY

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FILE  
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SUBJECT

UNITS' COMBAT FAILURE LINKED TO FAILURE TO CARRY OUT ORDERS

[ Excerpts from installment article on carrying out and not carrying out orders by Nguyen Duc and Anh Linh: "Orders Absolutely Must Be Carried Out Whether the Reason for Them Is Fully Understood or Not"; Hanoi, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Vietnamese, 26 June 1973, p 3 ]

After the commanders of the 2nd Infantry Regiment attended a conference to celebrate the regiment's successes, we held a discussion with them concerning the matter of "carrying out and not carrying out orders." The stories told us about the outstanding examples set by cadres and soldiers in the execution of their orders who lived through violent, urgent situations in combat inspired us very much and made us feel very proud. As a result of this information, the discussion flowed more smoothly. We immediately started talking about the circumstances under which the spirit of executing orders has been most severely challenged. The regimental political officer said: "There are times when the upper and lower echelons do not know exactly why an order is being issued. In combat, due to the need for secrecy and the different levels of understanding of the situation, it frequently occurs that the lower echelons do not have a clear understanding of the intentions of their superiors as expressed in their orders. But, they must still fully execute these orders with all of their energy and intelligence." The political officer said this not only as a person who has experience as a cadre in a position to give orders, but also as a person with experience in executing orders.

What he said brought to our minds the difficult and particularly urgent circumstances of the regiment at that time.

After fighting in three campaigns in a row, the regiment was ordered to return to the rear to regroup. As soon as it arrived in the rear and before it was issued uniforms and equipment, before it had been supplied with ammunition and weapons, and before its troops could regain their health, it was ordered on an operation. Where were they going? The guesses made by a number of cadres and soldiers differed from the requirements of the order. The entire regiment had to move to a new battlefield. The time was controlled, the position was controlled. The regiment had to travel down a long road along which many of the key points were being attacked and blocked by the enemy.

The regiment faced countless difficulties: the troops had not been motivated, there was not a full supply of equipment and materials, and the regiment's health was not good.

When it was time to leave, the regiment's lead detachment had still not received its uniforms, equipment, and weapons as stipulated in the plan. A convoy of 25 vehicles from the upper echelon rear service agency was encountering difficulties along the road and had not arrived on time.

Determined to carry out the order, everyone overcame his difficulties. The regiment's cadres and soldiers adopted the slogan: "If we don't have hats, we won't wear any; if we don't have boots, we will walk barefoot; we will fight well with whatever weapons we have."

In order to provide the lead contingent with some equipment, the regiment collected the good equipment and weapons it had and gave them to the 6th Battalion. However, when it was time to depart, the 11th Company of the 6th Battalion still had not received its rain gear which is the very least troops must have in order to protect their health during an operation. But, the unit left on schedule. The following day at a rest stop, the cadres and soldiers of the 11th Company received their rain gear from a rear service cadre who was led over a shortcut by a number of youths and guerrilla troops in order to catch up with the unit and issue the gear on time.

It was not until the march was more than half over that the regiment received its hammocks. And, it was not until the march was more than two-thirds over that its replacement troops arrived. The final stage of the operation, the regiment marched, trained, and consolidated itself.

The entire regiment made it through the road sections blocked by enemy bombs and arrived at its destination on schedule. When the 6th Battalion had occupied its combat position, it was ordered to organize a surprise attack to win back a battleground in N.L. As it was preparing for combat, a unit of enemy commandoes penetrated the rear of the battalion's formation. Although it had suffered casualties and lost some of its material and equipment, the battalion was determined to carry out the order without hesitation. The surprise attack order was executed as fully and actively as possible. The 6th Battalion killed more than 100 enemy troops, won back the N.L. battleground, and held off the insane counter-attack launched by the enemy until it was time to turn over the battleground to a friendly unit.

In the report on the successes recorded by Infantry Division C., the glorious victory won by the 6th Battalion -- the lead battalion of the 2nd Regiment -- was very highly evaluated and had the effect of strongly inspiring the entire division. With respect to discipline, this was a feat of arms of the spirit to very fully carry out orders.

When we left Infantry Division C., and went to assess the situation in Artillery Regiment B., we found that the implementation of orders by a number of basic units in the regiment was rather similar to that within the basic units of Infantry Group C.

The assistant political officer of the 2nd Battalion told us about the 12th Battery -- a heroic unit -- during the time he was its assistant political officer.

The battery frequently received orders which were outside its plans and of particular difficulty, such as the time when it had to move from the west (where it had made all necessary preparations and was about to launch a coordinated attack with a friendly unit) to occupy a position in the east. Why did the unit have to abandon its combat mission for which it had already made preparations? For a mobilized heavy artillery unit, this operation had to be done in a very short amount of time and there was no time to investigate the route it was to travel.

In the face of a number of such concerns and worries, Nguyen Van Thanh, the battery commander, explained: "We must fully carry out the contents of the order and arrive at our destination on schedule even though we do not know the intentions of our superiors."

The urgent operation encountered difficulties at the very outset. The vehicle pulling artillery which was at the end of the formation was damaged. The battery commander decided to put the three other vehicles in the front of the formation. After traveling only 3 kilometers, the formation was attacked by enemy aircraft. The second vehicle was set afire; the political officer was killed and a number of soldiers were wounded. Should they stop or keep going? Should he send a report to headquarters requesting that the time be changed? The commanders and cadres held a meeting and decided to fully carry out the order. After rapidly repairing the damages, the battery's vehicles continued on their way at a faster speed.

We visited the 12th Battery and met with its political officer, Dao Hong Phu, who, at the time of the operation mentioned above, was the leader of the 3rd Platoon, and a number of other cadres and soldiers who participated in this very complex and difficult operation and the battle which followed it. This was a feat of arms which was over and above the plans of the cadres and soldiers of the 12th Battery. As a result of arriving at their destination on schedule, the battery promptly directed strong fire power against and hit the enemy's formation at a time when they were deploying their forces rather thickly. Dao Hong Phu said: "If we were not determined to fully carry out the operation's order in a spirit of making the highest possible effort, we could not have created the opportunity for winning such a resounding victory."

To some extent, Phu's opinion shows the relationship between an "unexpected order" and the opportunity such an order creates for a unit. When we review the achievements recorded by the units of Infantry Division C. and Artillery Division B. as well as the feats of arms "over and above their plans" recorded by the 1st Infantry Company and the 12th Artillery Battery, we more clearly see that as a result of accurately implementing the orders of their superiors (even though these orders were not planned or thoroughly understood by them) these units operated under more favorable conditions in combat as a result of the opportunity and element of surprise created by their attacks.

The above lessons in complying with orders can be compared with a number of cases in which orders were not fully carried out because the intentions of superiors were not fully understood, as a result of which people created more difficulties for themselves and lost the opportunity to record feats of arms.

Why were the commander of the 3rd Infantry Company of the 3rd Infantry Regiment and the commander of the 3rd Artillery Battery of Artillery Regiment B. disciplined?

At the time in question, the 3rd Infantry Company was ordered to attack Hill 1 at the same time the 1st Infantry Company of the 3rd Infantry Regiment was opening a surprise attack against Hill 2 at the B.Q. Base. When the 3rd Company entered combat, it encountered the same difficulties the 1st Company did: the ends of the formation were cut off from the rest of the formation when a large detachment from a friendly infantry unit passed in front of them and, as a result, they lost their way. This first difficulty caused the thoughts about not understanding the orders when they were received to be more clearly expressed. A number of detachment cadres complained that their superiors had evaluated the enemy incorrectly(?). When they entered combat, the demolition team encountered difficulties and the cadre in charge of the company wavered and hesitated. In the face of this situation, headquarters sent in the 2nd Company to replace the 1st. With its tenacious fighting ability and its spirit of fully carrying out orders, the 2nd Company organized a continuous attack, annihilated the majority of the enemy's forces, and, together with the 1st Company, took control of the entire battlefield.

The 3rd Company's failure to complete its combat mission is a lesson in the failure to fully implement orders. A number of cadres in charge of the company have been disciplined. This was a particularly deep lesson for the company commander. He voluntarily accepted his discipline and requested that he be allowed to remain in the 3rd Company in order to continue to carry out its combat mission. A short time later, he led the 3rd Company in recording an outstanding feat of arms; both he and the unit have been awarded a medal by their superiors.

For the 3rd Artillery Battery, not understanding an order resulted in a number of harmful consequences.

Headquarters ordered the battery to deploy its artillery, fire in support of the infantry, and, at the same time, be ready to use its infantry weapons to protect its position.

A number of the battery's key cadres did not fully understand the contents of the order. Their attitude toward carrying out this order was one of reluctance and half-heartedness.

The result was that the defense of the artillery position was not thorough and this resulted in regrettable losses. And, while moving the artillery to another location, one of the vehicles was hit and set afire by enemy aircraft and the artillery piece was heavily damaged. Headquarters ordered that they retrieve the equipment which was not damaged but this order was not fully carried out and the battery left behind a pistol and an artillery sight.

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MILITARY AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC SECURITY

RESPECT FOR MILITARY INSPECTION PATROL UNITS ENCOURAGED

[Talk About Discipline Column: "When You Meet a Military Inspection Patrol Unit"; Hanoi, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Vietnamese, 7 July 1973, p 3]

Every day, in crowded places, there are military inspection patrol units going about their business, promptly reminding our cadres and soldiers to maintain military bearing, and contributing to maintaining overall public order. Whether or not military personnel have a proper attitude toward the patrol units accurately reflects their organizational consciousness and discipline.

Pham Thanh, unit leader of military inspection patrol No 19, observes that units which garrison troops in the city of H. have carefully indoctrinated their troops so when they are out on the streets, there are few discipline infractions, they have proper attitudes, and they go all-out to help the patrol units do their job. Lieutenant Nguyen Minh alighted from the train, was straightening his uniform, and when a patrol soldier came by, the lieutenant suggested that the soldier see whether his uniform was neat and regulation before he went into town. Captain Doan Tin wore no insignia, the patrol unit questioned him, and he happily took out proof that he was recently discharged from the military hospital and that his unit had not yet issued insignia. Tin warmly encouraged the patrol soldier and offered some ideas on his paper-checking experience. Ty, tactical adjutant of group B, walked nearly half a kilometer in the noon sun to find a patrol unit in order to expose someone he suspected was impersonating a soldier. The suspect was a hoodlum impersonating a soldier who had just come in from province X. and was discovered lounging in a refreshment bar by Ty.