

# Enemy Officer Tells Of Daily Life

By CPT David R. Fabian

LIEUTENANT X had been extensively trained as a recon specialist in North Vietnam prior to his infiltration South. After serving four months in South Vietnam with the 320th Regiment Recon Company, as a Master Sergeant, he received a battlefield commission and became the executive officer of the 19th Recon Company, 320th Regiment, 1st NVA Battalion. He participated in the battles of Chu Do, Chu Ben, and Hill 800 in Kontum Province in 1968. In late summer his unit was moved further south toward Ban Me Thuot. While on a recon mission, he was found wounded by an alert 4th Division LRP team.

## Part IV

**DURING THE DAYS** when I am not on operations my life in the North Vietnamese Army is very easy. I wake at 6:00 a.m. daily, brush my teeth and bathe. At 7:00 I breakfast with my fellow officers, and then I join the men of my company and generally chat with them until 10:00. We talk of personal matters—home, family, and of course, sex. After lunch I nap until about 2:00 p.m.

"Our food is usually rice and canned meat. It is brought from China and prepared for us by the two cooks attached to my company. The canned meat is usually pork, and we tire of eating it so often.

"In the afternoon I go fishing with one or two members of my company. Never do we stray more than two kilometers from our base camp. We are very careful with members of our units who appear to be worried or whose morale is low. We watch them closely and accompany them continuously....

"At 6 p.m. I eat supper and then gather with the rest of the company for a meeting held by the political officer. This is a daily meeting during which the political officer praises NVA heroes and slanders the South Vietnamese government. He also rants about the numerous great victories we are achieving against the

US units. I do not think the political officer is very effective; the soldiers fail to listen attentively, and they become bored quite quickly with his speech.

I think their failure to heed his words can be attributed to the fact that he never accompanies us on our combat operations and he never sees us take casualties. Hence the soldiers do not put any stock in his stories.

**SOMETIMES I JOIN** my men after the political meetings and we sing songs and tell jokes and try to cheer each other up. We go to bed at 9:00 p.m. If we are located far enough away from the enemy, we sleep in hammocks; if we are close to the enemy, we sleep in trenches and foxholes.

"When we are in the mountains avoiding contact our most vulnerable elements are the combat patrols we send out and some of the companies we have guarding our outermost perimeter. Food is no problem when we are avoiding contact. The rest area itself is always around a source of running water.

"It is easy to distinguish our officers during battles because they will always attack with the headquarters element, which consists of the CO, XO, radioman, and runner. Officers wear neither pistols nor insignia of rank in battle.

"Prior to any attack we prepare a lengthy plan... All units involved must follow the plan faithfully, and an individual soldier must execute all orders even if many get killed. The attack must be launched at all costs. The plan always includes how to gain entrance to an objective, the location of key points to be destroyed, and the best routes to exfiltrate.

Artillery support is fired prior to the attack to confuse and pin down the enemy. Unfortunately, we sometimes fail to lift the fire and it kills our own men. If the enemy pins down our attacking force, we use artillery to aid in a retreat. Finally we employ artillery fire when we decide to break a major contact.

"When the battle subsides, we pull back to rest and bury the dead. It is NVA discipline that you always try to recover a comrade's body. We have no religious rites

for the dead; merely bury them unceremoniously. The victim's personal effects are kept by his friends. The same unit is rarely used to attack an objective a second time if they have suffered numerous casualties. Anytime heavy casualties are inflicted morale is very, very low.

**OFTEN WE MUST** resort to a control technique to help weak soldiers. That is, we will organize into three-man cells. Selection is not based upon friendship, but by picking two skillful men to support one weak one by offering advice and encouragement....

"My reconnaissance unit is usually briefed on our mission at least one day prior to moving out... For our movement we use maps and compasses to navigate. The maps are either 1:100,000 or 1:50,000 scale. They are French-made but contain Vietnamese writing. Our division supply element can provide these maps for any area very soon after request.... We conduct the recon in three-man groups, one compass to a group.

"The special equipment we usually carry consists of radios, binoculars, notebooks, and knives. I inspect every man as well as the condition of his weapon and gear. During movement to a recon objective we usually travel about three kilometers an hour, breaking for 10 or 15 minutes. Rarely will we travel more than a day and a half without sleeping....

At 3:00 p.m. we find a night campsite. Upon arrival at the recon site, we usually establish an OP approximately one or two hours away. We penetrate the objective, locating heavy weapons. If we are successful we withdraw using the same route; if we are discovered we return fire immediately and attempt to disengage and withdraw.

"In our reconnaissance of cities we are normally met by Local Force liaison people at prearranged locations within or close to the city. They escort us to the points of attack. If there are ARVN soldiers in the area we will disguise ourselves as ARVN; otherwise we wear civilian clothing. Normally challenge and passwords are utilized to recognize liaison people...."

**NEXT WEEK: MAKE-UP OF THE NVA**