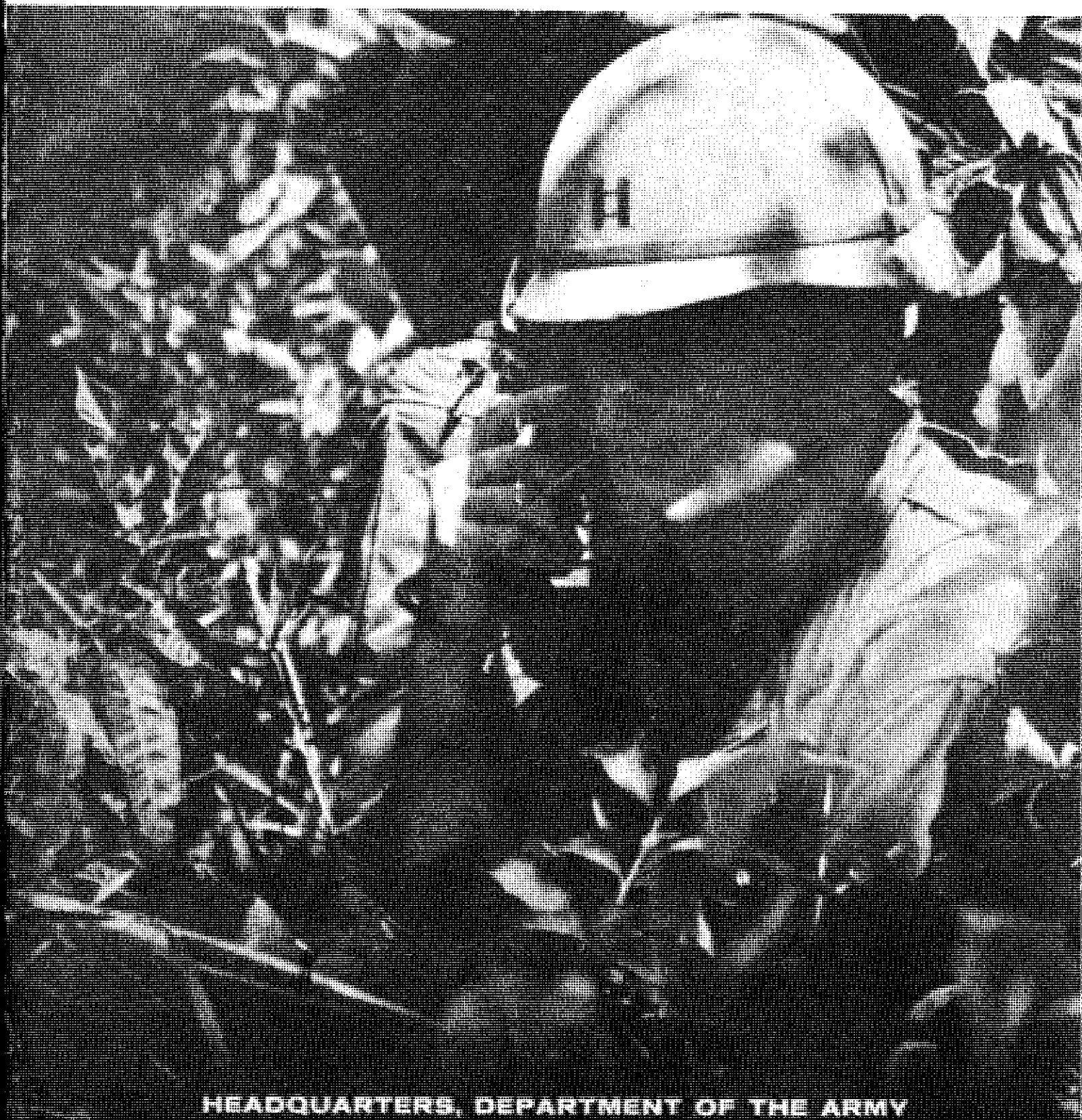
VIETNAM PRIMER

BY S. L. A. MARSHALL

LESSONS LEARNED

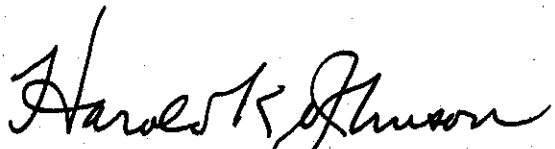


HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

FOREWORD

The two authors of this study went to Vietnam in early December 1966 on a 90-day mission, one as a private citizen with vast experience in analyzing combat operations, the other, a Regular Army officer representing the Army's Chief of Military History. Their collaborative task was to train combat historians in the technique of the postcombat interview. In the course of conducting six schools for officers selected for this duty in Vietnam, they put into practice the principles they advocated, and from their group interrogation of the men who had done the fighting, they were able to reconstruct most of the combat actions of the preceding six months, including all but one of the major operations. The present work emerged from this material.

Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall, Retired, longtime friend of the Army, and Lieutenant Colonel David Hackworth, veteran of a year's combat in Vietnam as a brigade executive and infantry battalion commander, have pooled their experience and observations to produce an operational analysis that may help American soldiers live longer and perform better in combat. Their study is presented not as the official solution to all the ills that beset combat troops in Vietnam but as the authors' own considered corrective and guide for the effective conduct of small unit operations. Although it does not necessarily reflect Department of the Army doctrine, it can be read with profit by all soldiers.



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LESSONS LEARNED

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A critique of U.S. Army tactics and command practices in the small combat unit digested from historical research of main fighting operations from May 1966 to February 1967.

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The material presented in this pamphlet was prepared by Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall, U.S. Army, Retired, and Lieutenant Colonel David H. Hackworth, Infantry; and the opinions contained herein do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the Department of the Army.

LESSONS LEARNED

VIETNAM PRIMER

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SKETCHES

THE POST-ACTION CRITIQUE

All of the lessons and discussion presented in this brief document are the distillate of after action group interviews with upwards of a hundred rifle companies and many patrols and platoons that have engaged independently in Vietnam.

Every action was reconstructed in the fullest possible detail, including the logistical and intelligence data, employment of weapons, timing and placement of battle losses in the unit, location of wounds, etc. What is said herein of the enemy derives in whole from what officers and men who have fought him in battle learned and reported out of their experience. Nothing has been taken from any intelligence document circulated to the United States Army. The document therefore is in itself evidence of the great store of information about the Viet Cong that can be tapped by talking with men of our combat line, all of which knowledge lies waste unless someone makes the effort.

The briefer company actions went less than one hour. The longest lasted two days and more. The average ran about three and one-half hours. To reconstruct a fight over that span of time required from seven to eight hours of steady interrogation.

Soon after engagement, any combat unit commander can do this same thing—group interview his men until he knows all that happened to them during the fire fight. In their interest, in his own interest, and for the good of the Army he cannot afford to do less. There is no particular art to the work; so long as exact chronology is maintained in developing the story of the action, and so long as his men feel confident that he seeks nothing from them but the truth, the whole truth, the results will come. Every division and every independent brigade in Vietnam has at least one combat historian. He is charged with conducting this kind of research; he can also assist and advise any unit commander who would like to know how to do it on his own.

Special rewards come to the unit commander who will make the try. Nothing else will give him a closer bond with his men. Not until he does it will he truly know what they did under fire. Just as the critique is a powerful stimulant of unit morale, having all the warming effect of a good cocktail on an empty stomach, and even as it strengthens each soldier's appreciation of his fellows, it enables troops to understand for the first time the multitudinous problems and pressures devolving on the commander. They will go all the better for him the next time out and he will have a much clearer view of his human resources. Combat does have a way of separating the men from the boys; but on the other hand the boys want to be classed with the men, and influence of a number of shining examples in their midst does accelerate the maturing process. The seasoning of a combat outfit comes fundamentally from men working together under stress growing in knowledge of one another.

Mistakes will be brought out during the critique. Their revelation cannot hurt the unit or the man. Getting it out in the clear is one way—probably the only way—to relieve feelings and clear the atmosphere, provided the dignity of all present is maintained during the critique. Should the need for a personal admonishment or advice become indicated, that can be reserved until later.

Far more important, deeds of heroism and high merit, unknown to the leader until that hour, become known to all hands. From this knowledge will come an improved awards system based on a standard of justice that will be commonly acknowledged. Men not previously recognized as possessing the qualities for squad and platoon leading will be viewed in a new light and moved toward promotion that all will know is deserved.

No richer opportunity than this may be put before the commander of a combat company or battery or the sergeant who leads a patrol into a

fight. He who hesitates to take advantage of it handicaps himself more than all others. If he does not know where he has been, he can never be certain where he is going.

That is to say, in the end, that something is lacking in his military character—a "zeal to close the circuit," which is the mark of the good combat leader.

THE CORE OF THE PROBLEM

Though it may sound like a contradiction to speak first of the tactics of engaging fortifications in a war where the enemy of the United States is a hit-and-run guerrilla, seeking more at the present time to avoid open battle than to give it except when he imagines that the terms are more than moderately favorable to his side, a moment's reflection will sustain the logic of the approach.

His fortified areas almost invariably present the greatest difficulty to U.S. tactical forces, and it is when we voluntarily engage them that our loss rates are most immoderate. At no other technique is he more skilled than in the deceptive camouflaging of his fortified base camps and semifortified villages. There, even nature is made to work in his favor; trees, shrubs, and earth itself are reshaped to conceal bunker locations and trench lines. Many of these locations are found temporarily abandoned, thus presenting only the problem of how to wreck them beyond possibility of further use. On the other hand, when he chooses to fight out of any one of them, the choice is seldom if ever made because he is trapped beyond chance of withdrawal, but because he expects to inflict more than enough hurt on Americans in the attack to warrant making a stand.

And there is more to it than that. The fortified base camps and villages are the pivots of the Communist aggression. Denied their use, the movement would wither. The primary problem of defeating the North Vietnam Army (NVA) south of 17th Parallel and the ultimate problem of destroying the Viet Cong (VC) between that line and the southern extremity of the Delta are joined in the tactical task of eliminating their fortified areas with maximum economy of force.

Years of labor and mountains of irreplaceable material have gone into building this network of strong camps over the country. It is the framework that sustains irregular operations, and a semiguerrilla army can no more get along without it than a conventional army can hold the field when cut off from its main bases. Yet there is no such camp or armed village in Vietnam today that is beyond the reach of U.S. forces. However remote and concealed, none can be moved or indefinitely kept hidden. To find and smash each, one by one, is an essential task, a prime object in conclusively successful campaigning. The Viet Cong movement cannot survive as a horde of fugitives, unidentified as they mingle with the village crowd and bury their arms in the surrounding paddies. When the fortified bases go, the infrastructure withers, and thus weakened, finally dies.

The fortified base camp is roughly circular in form with an outer rim of bunkers and foxholes enclosing a total system of living quarters—usually frame structures above ground—command bunkers, kitchens, and sleeping platforms (figs. 1 and 2). But as with the U.S. defensive perimeter, the shape will vary according to the terrain, the rise and fall of ground, and the use of natural features to restrict attack on the camp to one or two avenues. Some of the bases, and in particular those used only for training or way stations, have minimum defensive works. In all cases, however, the enemy is prepared to defend from a ground attack.

The semifortified village is usually an attenuated or stretched-out set of hamlets, having length rather than breadth, a restricted approach, bunkers (usually at the corners of the huts), lateral trenches, and sometimes a perpendicular trench fitted with fighting bunkers running the length of the defended area along one flank. There will be at least one exit or escape route rearward, though the position is often otherwise something of a cul-de-sac, made so by natural features. Tunnels connect the bunkers and earthworks, enabling the defenders to pop up, disappear, then fire again from another angle, a jack-in-the-box kind of maneuvering that doubles the effect of their numbers. An unfordable river may run along one flank while wide open paddy land bounds the other. The apparent lack of escape

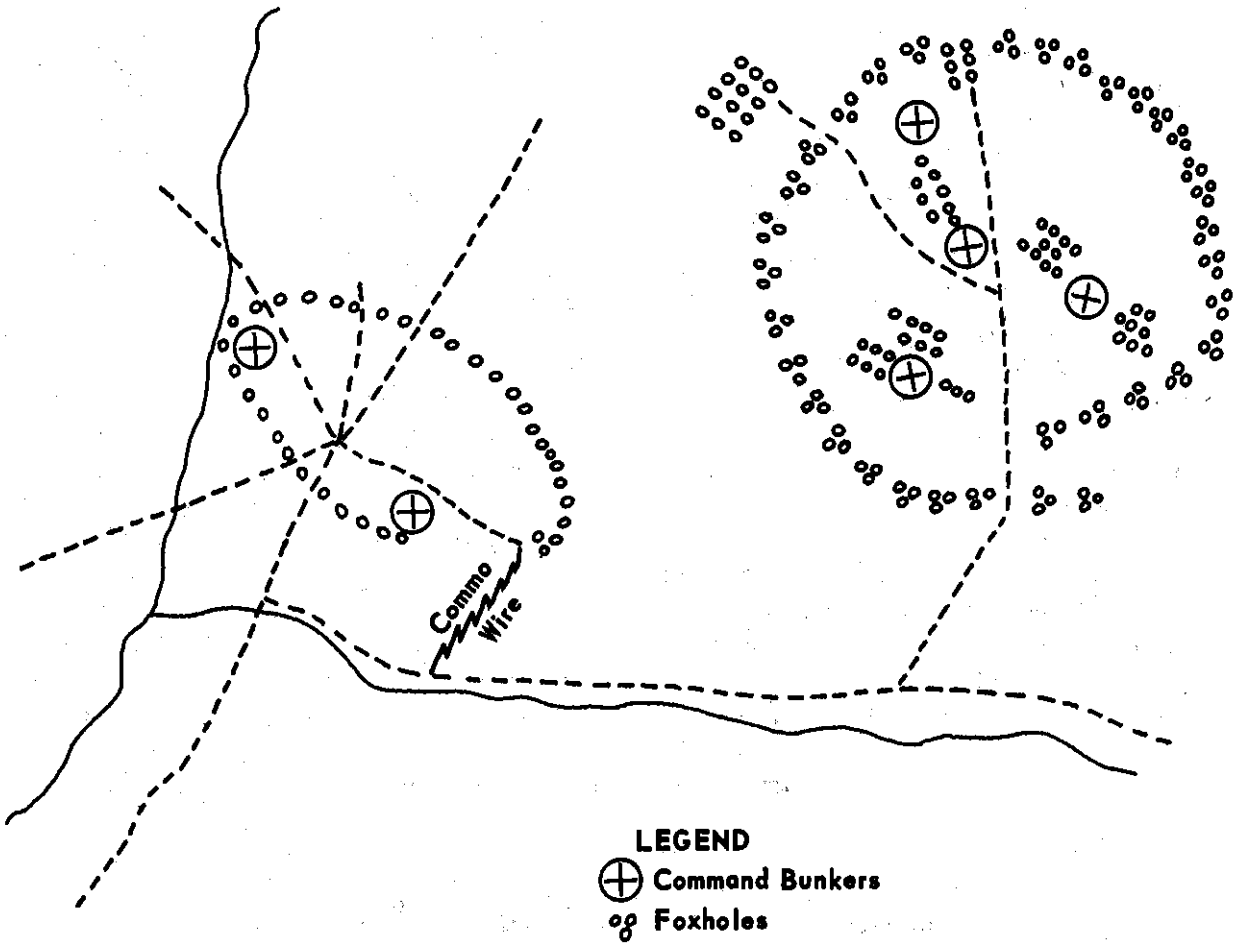


Figure 1. Battalion complex.

routes makes the position look like an ideal target for our side, with our large advantage in air power and artillery. But until bombardment has blown down most of the foliage any maneuver into the complex by infantry skirmishers is a deepening puzzle.

When the attempt is made to seal in the enemy troops, one small opening left in the chain of force, such as a ditch, the palm-grown slope of a canal bank, or a drainage pipe too small for an American to venture, will be more than enough to suit their purpose. They will somehow find it; there is nothing that they do better by day or night. It is as if they have a sixth sense for finding the way out and for taking it soundlessly. They are never encircled so long as one hole remains. Beaten, they will lose themselves in shrubbery and tree tops while the daylight lasts, get together when night closes, and make for the one exit.

Three ground units of the 1st Air Cavalry Division fought through an action of this kind in early December 1966, and took heavy losses. By dark the fight was won and resistance ended. The natural boundaries of the combat area permitted no chance for escape over 95 percent of the distance. Through a misunderstanding, the two rifle units covering the one land bridge left a 30-meter gap of flat land between their flanks. Though it was a moonlit night, the enemy remnants, estimated at two platoons or more, got away without a fight.

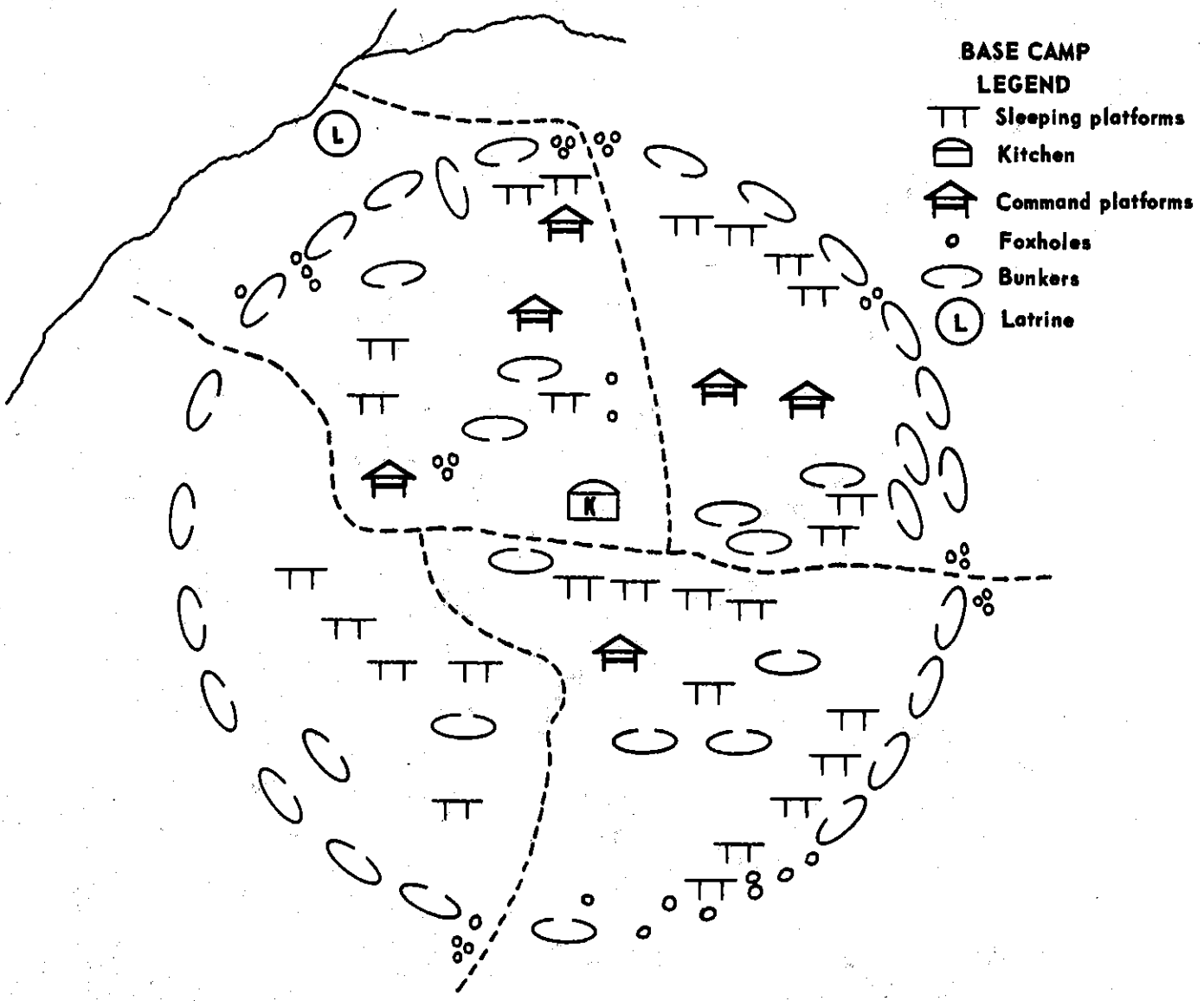


Figure 2. Enemy base camp.

LESSON ONE—THE DISTRICT ASSAULT

The record of U.S. Army operations in South Vietnam demonstrates one hard fact: a company-size attack upon an enemy fortified base camp or semifortified village, held in equal strength by NVA or VC Main Force with a determination to defend, and not subjected to intense artillery and/or air strikes beforehand, means payment of a high price by the attacker. The result of such an attempt is either ultimate withdrawal by the attacking force, too often after excessive loss, or a belated reinforcement and a more prolonged involvement than was anticipated or is judicious.

Yet the tactic seems to have a fatal allure for the average young U.S. rifle company commander. It has been many times tried and, just as often, failed. The enemy deliberately tries to make the position look weak, and hence attractive. One ruse is to leave frontal bunkers unmanned, though the approach of the attacker is known. Initial resistance will be offered by a squad minus, while within the complex a company plus is preparing to maneuver. The effort is subtly directed toward getting the attack snarled in a maze of fortifications not visible to the eye, whence extrication grows ever more difficult and advance becomes extremely costly.

The direct consequence for the rifle company that impulsively engages a position well beyond its strength, at least 50 percent of the time, will be as follows: (1) its battle order, or fighting formations, are weakened through immediate losses in its frontal element; (2) it must concentrate on the problem of extracting its casualties under fire; (3) its direct pressure against the enemy is diminished and disorganized. In short, overimpulsiveness runs counter to effective aggressiveness.

Upon contacting any such fortified position, where direct enemy fire by automatic weapons supplies proof of the intention to defend, the rifle platoon or company should thereafter immediately dispose to keep its strength and numbers (weapon power and men) latent and under cover to the full limit permitted by the environment. It may even simulate a withdrawal, continue desultory fire from its forward weapons, or seek the enemy rear when favored by terrain, weather, and light. The full-length assault is to be avoided while the heavy fires of supporting arms are brought in. The careful, fire-covered probe is the called-for expedient. The headlong rush, like the attempt at envelopment before any attempt has been made to feel out resistance, should be avoided absolutely (fig. 3).

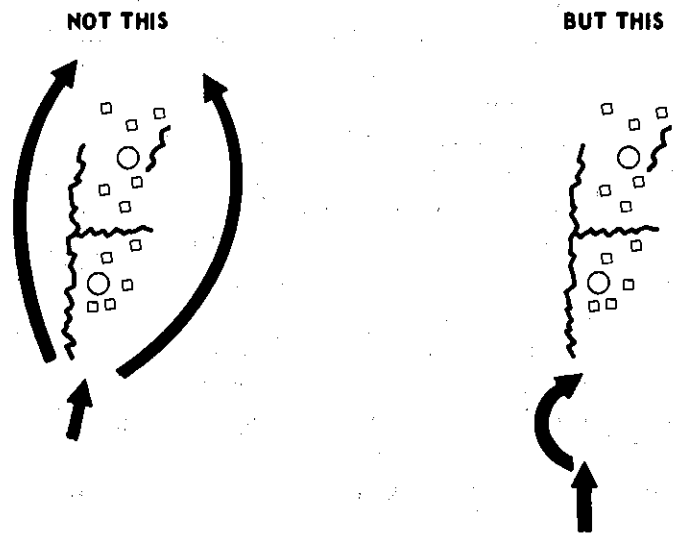


Figure 3. Attack on village.

Where environment and weather permit such intervention, artillery fires should concentrate on the rear, while tactical air targets on the enemy camp. Otherwise the effect of bombardment is likely to be the premature aborting of the position. Following bombardment, the direct frontal assault by the single rifle company should not be pressed unless reinforcement is already on its way, within 20–30 minutes of closing, in strength sufficient to engage at least one flank of the enemy position.

The attack should then proceed by the echeloning of fire teams, taking advantage of natural cover and concealed avenues of approach. Gradual advance is the one safeguard against full exposure and undue loss, as in the taking of a city. Holding at least one platoon in reserve is so much insurance against enemy attack on the flank or rear.

When casualties occur in the initial stage of encounter with the enemy in fixed positions, the extraction of WIA's by forward skirmishers should not be more than the distance required to give them the nearest protection from enemy fire. This stricture should include a relatively secure approach for the aid man. Extraction of the dead is to be delayed until the development of the action makes it unnecessary to be done under fire. Unless these rules are followed during engagement, unit action stalls around the attempt to extricate casualties, thereby yielding fire-and-movement initiative to the enemy. This effect was observed in approximately one-third of the company actions researched.

The data basis clearly indicates that the one most effective way to deal with the enemy fighting out of the fortified camp or village is to zap him with the heaviest artillery and tactical air ordnance, not to maneuver against him with infantry only. The "finding" infantry must also carry on as the "fixing" force, leaving the "finishing" to the heavy weapons that can both kill men and batter down protective works. If overextension is to be avoided, the sealing-in of the position may hardly be assigned to the unit that has initiated the action. The sealing-in is higher command's problem. Additional maneuver elements are dropped to the rear of the position, and if need be the flanks, to block likely escape routes, strike the withdrawing columns, and continue the mop-up once the enemy, realizing that our infantry in the assault will not fall victim to his subtle trap, wearies of the punishment. How far these reaction deployments are spread should depend on the topography, availability of natural cover, and all else connected with the enemy's ability to vanish into the landscape and our chance of cornering him before he does so.

LESSON TWO—WARNING AND MOVEMENT

For the rifle platoon or company to attempt envelopment of *any* village where there is some reason to suspect that it is fortified and will be defended is tactically as foolhardy as to assault directly any enemy position in a non-build-up area not subject to ground level or overhead surveillance. Reports from air observers that when seen from directly above at not more than 100 feet the village looks unguarded and unfortified are not to be considered conclusive, since it has been repeatedly shown that the enemy's skill with natural camouflage may wholly conceal at such distance a truly formidable position.

A "position" is defined for this purpose as that ground from which, on initial contact, volley or approximately synchronized fire from a number of automatic weapons is directed against the friendly unit in movement. Particularly, when the enemy opens with a mix of rifle and machine-gun fire, there is positive indication that he has not been surprised and rates himself strong enough to invite the attack. Even when he opens with random and unaimed rifle fire from somewhere in the background, this is no sure sign that he is getting away and that therefore prompt pursuit is in order. Here is a much-used VC–NVA ruse to draw the attack pell-mell into a well-concealed, defended position.

An attempt to envelop a village with light forces, when its possession of defended works or lack thereof is unknown, can only lead to dispersion of force and a regrouping at unnecessary cost when the village is defended. A careful probe on a narrow front with a fire base in readiness is the proper method. If fired upon, the unit then has two options: (a) house-by-house and bunker-by-bunker movement into the complex as in attack on any built-up area; or (b) the calling in of heavy support weapons, according to the volume and intensity of the enemy fire. Any attempt to close escape routes by surrounding a succession of hamlets prior to developing the situation by limited probing is either prohibitively hazardous or time wasting. Any direct fire out of a village serves warning. And, as previously said, so does erratic and distant fire from beyond the hamlet when it is time to the American forward movement and is roughly counter to the direction of the attack. This familiar enemy come-on is an incitement to rush into a well-laid ambush.

A sudden volley fire out of the hamlet, wood patch, or any location must prompt caution and reconsideration rather than prompt immediate forward extension in the assault. The enemy does not volley to cut and run; almost never does he do so even when his sole object is to delay and disrupt pursuit, after breaking off engagement. Furthermore, the enemy does not employ ground as we do, with emphasis on fields of fire and a superior height. He may do so some of the time; his surprises are staged most often by his choosing a position that we would rate impractical or untenable. He will fortify a ridge saddle to fire therefrom in four directions, ignoring the higher ground. Thus he can block advance via the draws or engage the attackers at close quarters when they move via the trail which often follows the spine of the ridge. Or he may rig a deadfall in front of a seeming dead-end where slopes to front and rear seem to cut off all possibilities of escape. In village defense, he will leave empty his best-situated forward bunkers covering the one track that leads into the first hamlet to create the illusion of abandonment. As a result the assault is enticed into an interior jungle of foliage-covered works and underground passages that in combination will facilitate the enemy's rapid movement from point to point. To thwart his design, the following measures are indicated:

(1) In the approach march, except when it is over terrain where observation to front and flanks removes any possibility of his immediate presence in strength, *all ground should be approached as if he were present in force.* Seldom in Vietnam are there marches over such an obviously secure area.

(2) Defended built-up areas, whether of purely military character or a native hamlet, when clearly supplied with surface works and amplified by underground passages, are not to be reckoned as proper targets for the rifle company or smaller unit operating unassisted. One or two "snipers," or riflemen operating from cover, spending a few rounds in token resistance and then fleeing, do not constitute "defense of a village" or of a wood line. Four or five enemy continuing to fire together at close range from any such location after being taken under fire should be accepted as warning that larger forces are immediately present. If the enemy force is no larger than a platoon minus, its advantage in position still warrants the prompt calling in of maximum supporting fires.

LESSON THREE—DOUBLING SECURITY

The record of more than 100 U.S. rifle companies and as many platoons that have been heavily engaged since 1 May 1966 shows unmistakably that the most frequent cause of surprise, disorganization of the unit under fire, and heavy initial losses has been excessive haste in the advance overland and outright carelessness about security.

A great part of our shock killing losses occur in the first stage of engagement. The enemy, fortunately, is not skilled at following up a first advantage in surprise fire. His musketry, when large numbers of his people engage at close range, is highly inaccurate compared to our own. Our losses in the rifle line once the fight is joined are rarely extravagant. The great wasting of lives comes of too much rushing in the movement to contact or of tactical carelessness in the first stages of engagement. A column that indulges in all-out chase of the enemy can be caught by him if it has not taken pains to make sure that it is not being followed. Or the column on departing its night location may expose its intent to continue in widely separated fractions disregarding whether its every move is under enemy observation. Or it may march blindly onto ground such as a jungle clearing when common sense dictates extreme caution.

In every incident that has involved the destruction of a platoon-size unit, the misfortune was due less to enemy guile than to our own lack of judgment. The enemy is fairly well skilled at laying ambushes and using lures and ruses to draw forces in the right direction. But he is not superhumanly clever. Applied common sense will beat his every design. It is not common sense to run chances by making haste when one is rushing straight to an entrapment. Consider two recent examples of sudden shock loss due to impetuous advance:

(1) The platoon on patrol moved out over the same route—a straight running trail—taken by a patrol the previous day. There was no periodic halt to scout enemy presence in any or all four directions. No stay-behind party was peeled off to see whether the patrol was being followed. The platoon in single file continued on the same azimuth for two hours. That line, projected, led to two large clearings in the jungle separated by less than 200 meters. The column advanced across the center of the first clearing, 125 meters wide, and on the far side of the wood line walked directly into a well-prepared ambush.

(2) The company had passed the night in defensive perimeter adjacent to much higher ground where observation was unrestricted by vegetation. The Cambodian border lay directly to the west. Although the men on LP (listening post) duty could hear enemy moving through the grass nearby during the night, when the company moved out shortly after first light it did not reconnoiter the high ground to the south along its line of march. The lead platoon advanced directly past it, and was soon 1,000 meters forward of the main body, which was also in motion. The rear platoon was kept tied to the ground of the night position, 600 meters behind the main body. While one group of enemy engaged and immobilized the main body, after luring it into an ambush, another closed on the rear platoon from two sides and in two minutes of action annihilated it with automatic weapons.

The "lessons learned" from these two experiences are so glaringly apparent that it is not necessary to spell them out. There remains but to examine the main reasons why the practice of "pushing on" persists at the expense of conservation of force. They are, in order of importance and cost:

(1) The greenness of commanders of the smaller tactical units and the emotional confusion deriving from the momentum with which they are projected afield via the helicopter lift followed by the dash to form a defensive circle around the LZ (landing zone). This sprint-start blocks understanding that the pace thereafter as the unit deploys must be altered radically. The jolt comes of the abrupt shift from high gear to low. It is

not enough to "slow down to a fast trot." Prudence requires nothing more or less than a tight reining-in for a fully observant and fully secured advance.

(2) Pressure from higher commands to "get on with it." There is rarely any such urgency except when some other unit has become heavily engaged and is gravely endangered. Even then, making sure of the degree of urgency to avoid making a bad situation worse is the primary obligation of higher command. Too often the unit sent post-haste on a rescue act has emerged having taken far greater punishment en route than the unit to be rescued. Last, it should be noted that such pressures from above are exerted much less frequently in Vietnam than in Korea or in World War II.

(3) The assignment of a predetermined "objective" that while hardly warranting the name implies that Unit Alpha must either link with Unit Bravo at Point Niner by 1100 or prove itself remiss. Often no situational urgency exists, and the obstacles on the march may be greatly unlike for the two units and not have been tactically plotted or analyzed. There is nothing wrong with the designation of the rendezvous point. The error is made in the assignment of a definite hour. Each unit must be allowed to cope properly with its own march problems. The first arriving simply take up a defensive posture until the second closes.

(4) Selecting in advance the location of the night perimeter when too little thought has been given to the stress and unavoidable delay which may be imposed upon the unit by natural obstacles or minor and harassing enemy elements. Forced marches in these conditions are usually attributable to the designation of what the map or prior reconnaissance has indicated would be a viable LZ. Even if it so turns out, it may not be worth the striving, if the marching force arrives in a state of exhaustion. A unit closing on its night position, and having to go at its defensive preparation piecemeal just as darkness descends, is in an acutely vulnerable position. There are some marked examples from Paul Revere IV, fought in December 1966, that deserve careful regard. The troops were put under a heavy and possibly unnecessary handicap by an extended march and late arrival at the ground to be defended. Their lack of time in which to organize properly gave the enemy an opening advantage. Nonetheless, there was no panic. The NVA surprise achieved only limited success. The salient feature of these actions was the counter-surprising ability of the average U.S. rifleman to react quickly, move voluntarily and without awaiting an order to the threatened quarter, and get weapons going while the position was becoming rounded-out piecemeal under the pressure of direct fire.

LESSON FOUR—CONTENDING WITH JUNGLE

The word "jungle" is too loosely used by U.S. Army combat troops in Vietnam to permit of broad generalizations about what tactical formation best serves security during movement and conservation of force should significant contact ensue. The term is misapplied every day. Men fresh from a fight say something like this, "We engaged them in impossibly dense jungle." Then a detailed description, or a firsthand visit to the premises, reveals it was nothing of the kind; it was merely the thickest bush or heaviest tropical forest that they had yet seen.

So for the purpose at hand some definition is thought necessary, rough though it may be. If troops deployed in line can proceed at a slow walk, with one man being able to see three or four others without bunching, and each having a view around him somewhere between 20 and 30 meters in depth, this is not jungle, though it may be triple-canopied forest. The encumbrance to movement out of tangled vegetation and the extreme limiting of personal horizon due to the obstruction of matted vines, clumped bamboo, or banyan forest with dense undergrowth such as the "wait-a-minute" thorn entanglement are evidence of the real thing irrespective of how much sunlight permeates the forest top. The impediment to movement and the foreshortening of view are the essential military criteria. When we speak of jungle we therefore mean the condition of the forest in which forward movement is limited to 300–500 meters per hour, and to make this limited progress troops must in part hack their way through.

When any troop body—our own or the enemy's—is thus confronted, it cannot in any real sense maneuver; and the use of that verb is a self-contradiction. The troop body can only imperfectly respond to immediate pressures which bring one man closer to another in the interests of mutual survival and the organic will to resist. The unit so proceeding and not yet engaged is best advised to advance single file for lack of any more reasonable alternative. Its point—the cutting edge—

Troops moving through brush single file.

should be not more than 200 meters to the fore, to conserve energy and insure the promptest possible collection in emergency. Serving as both the alarm element and the trail-breaker, the point needs to be rotated at not more than one-hour intervals, for work sharing. To broaden the front and advance in platoon columns doubles the risk and the work without accelerating the rate of advance. Should both fronts become engaged simultaneously, being equally compromised, the existence of two fronts compounds the problem of over-all control and unified response. The

column in file, hit at its front, may more readily withdraw over the route already broken or reform forward and align on the foremost active element, which rarely may extend over more than a two-squad front.

The data basis on such encounters makes clear that U.S. infantry in Vietnam can withstand the shock of combat under these supremely testing conditions. A number of the sharpest company-size actions in the 1966 campaigning were fought and won in dense jungle, and several of these encounters have become celebrated. On the other hand, the same data basis indicates that this is not a productive field for our arms, and for the following reasons:

(1) The fight on average becomes joined at ranges between 12 and 20 meters, which is too close to afford any real advantage to our man-carried weapons.

(2) Should the top canopy of the jungle be upwards of 40–50 feet high our smokes other than WP (white phosphorus) cannot put up a high enough plume for the effective marking of a position.

(3) Supporting fires, to avoid striking into friendly forces, must allow too wide an error margin to influence the outcome decisively.

(4) Mortars are of no use unless they can be based where overhead clearance is available. (A highly workable technique being employed by units in Vietnam is to fly the mortars into the defensive perimeter, LZ permitting, each night and lifting them out prior to movement.)

(5) The advance of reinforcement is often erratic, always ponderous, and usually exhausting.

(6) Medevac, where not impossible, is almost invariably fraught with nigh unacceptable risk.

In the true jungle the enemy has more working for him than in any other place where we fight him. But the added difficulties imposed by nature cannot exclude the necessity for engaging him there from time to time. It is enough here to spell out the special hazards of operating in an environment that, more than any other, penalizes unsupported engagement by the U.S. rifle unit and calls for maximum utilization of heavy support fires at the earliest possible moment. All-important to the unit commander is timely anticipation of the problem and the exercise of great caution when operating in dense jungle.

On the more positive side, according to the record, the jungle as to its natural dangers is not the fearsome environment that the imagination tends to make it. In all of the fighting operations analyzed, not a single U.S. soldier was reported as having been fatally bitten by a snake or mauled by a wild animal. In Operation Paul Revere IV, one man was killed by a falling tree during a clearing operation, the only such casualty recorded. Leeches are an affliction to be suffered occasionally; troops endure them and even jest about them, knowing that the discomfort will be eased shortly. The same is true of "jungle rot," a passing ailment of the skin that usually affects the hands and forearm; it comes of abrasions caused by pushing through thorny jungle growth. A few days under the sun will dry it up. Most of the fighters who get it do not even bother to take leave; they bandage the sores while they are afield, then take the time-and-sun cure on their return to base camp. Losses due to malaria can be kept minimal by strict adherence to the prescribed discipline. One major additional safeguard, within control by the unit leader, is that he refrains from marching and working his men to the point of full exhaustion, a common sense command practice in all circumstances.

LESSON FIVE—RATES OF FIRE

According to the data basis, the U.S. infantry line in Vietnam requires no stimulation whatever to its employment of organic weapons when engaged. The fire rate among patrols in heavy, if brief, contact is not infrequently 100 percent. Within the rifle company, during engagement prolonged for several hours, the rate will run 80 percent or more and the only nonfirers will be the rearward administrative element or the more critical cases among the early wounded. It is not unusual for one man to engage with three or more weapons during the course of a two-hour fight.

Except during the first five minutes of unexpected engagement, which almost impels an automatic rate, fire control is generally good. The men themselves, even in unseasoned units, quickly raise the cry: "Hold your ammo! Fire semiautomatic!" No U.S. infantry unit, operating in independence, has been forced to withdraw or extract, or made to suffer a critical tactical embarrassment, as a result of ammunition shortage. Gunners on the M–60 go lighter than in other wars; the average carry is 1,000 rounds, with 1,200 being about the outside limit. But in no single instance have the machineguns ceased fire during a fight because the position had run out of machinegun ammunition.

When suddenly confronted by small numbers of the enemy, the Americans firing their M–16's will in the overwhelming majority of cases miss a target fully in view and not yet turning. Whether the firing is done by a moving point or by a rifleman sitting steady in an ambush, the results are about the same—five total misses out of six tries—and the data basis includes several hundred such incidents. The inaccuracy prevails though the usual such meeting is at 15 meters or less, and some of the firing is at less than 10 feet. An outright kill is most unusual. Most of the waste comes from unaimed fire, done hurriedly. The fault much of the time is that out of excitement the firer points high, rather than that the M–16 bullet lacks knockdown power, a criticism of it often heard from combat-experienced NCO's. The VC winged but only wounded by an M–16 bullet, then diving into the bush, makes a getaway three times out of four, leaving only his pack and a blood trail.

As to effectiveness over distance, until recently the data basis deriving from 6 major and approximately 50 minor operations contained not one episode of VC or NVA being killed by aimed fire from one or more M–16's at ranges in excess of 60 meters. Then, out of Operation Cedar Falls in January 1967, there developed 6 examples of such killings at ranges upwards of 200 meters. The difference can be explained by the nature of the terrain. Most of the kills during this operation were made in the open rice paddy.

The M–16 has proved itself an ideal weapon for jungle warfare. Its high rate of fire, lightweight, and easy-to-pack ammunition have made it popular with its carrier. But it cannot take the abuse or receive the neglect its older brother, the M–1, could sustain. It must be cleaned and checked out whenever the opportunity affords. Commanders need assign top billing to the maintenance of the weapon to prevent inordinate battlefield stoppages. The new field cleaning kit assists the purpose.

The fragmentation hand grenade, a workhorse in the infantryman's arsenal of weapons in Korea, is of limited value in jungle fighting. The record shows that all infantry fights in the jungle are characterized by close in-fighting at ranges from 12 to 20 meters and that the fragmentation grenade cannot be accurately delivered because of the dense, thickly intertwined and knotted jungle undergrowth that blocks its unrestricted flight. In numerous cases it was reported that the grenade striking a vine and being deflected would then rebound on its thrower, causing friendly casualties.

The soldier enters battle with the average of four hand grenades strapped to his already overloaded equipment. He has been taught in training that the grenade is the weapon for close infighting. He learns empirically about the difficulty attendant on using a grenade in the

bush. Many times the record shows that he had to learn his lesson the hard way. The data basis shows that fewer than 10 percent—6 percent being the usage factor of World War II—of the grenades carried into battle are ever used. The configuration of the grenade itself makes it cumbersome and therefore dangerous, as it is carried on the outside of the soldier's equipment and is susceptible to any vine and snag that tugs at the safety pin.

Out of this research then it may be reckoned that the soldier's load could be lightened by two hand grenades and that all commanders should closely analyze their unit's techniques for the employment of this weapon. Procedures must be developed and then practiced by troops on specially prepared jungle hand grenade courses. The trainer should bear in mind during this instruction that post-operation analysis of World War II and Korea showed that the soldier who had training in sports always excelled with the grenade. The information collected in Vietnam fully supports this conclusion. The old byword that was once synonymous with the art of grenade throwing, "Fire in the Hole," should be brought back in use to warn all that a grenade has been dispatched and cover must be sought.

LESSON SIX—COMMUNICATIONS

Not one example has been unearthed of a critical tactical disarrangement or defeat suffered by a U.S. infantry unit of any size or by an artillery battery because of radio failure or a break in communications. Many RT's (radio operators) get shot up and their conspicuous equipment invariably attracts the enemy fire. (Units are avoiding this hazard by concealing the PRC–25 in standard rucksacks.) But no less invariably, the shift to another frequency or the improvising of a relay saves the day. In the defense of LZ Bird on 26 December 1966, all radios went out for one reason or another during the high tide of action. Nonetheless, there resulted no serious impairment to the action of the small infantry and artillery fractions generating counterattack within the perimeter, though heavy interdiction of enemy escape routes might have been brought in a few minutes earlier had not radios failed. That failure only slightly blurred the aftermath to one of the more spectacular U.S. victories of the year.

Despite the technological gain in our field communications since the Korean War, and it has been truly noteworthy, a serious gap exists in the flow of critical information during the time of combat. The pinch is most acute at platoon and company level. Some of it is due to the far greater mobility of operations in Vietnam, compared to anything we have experienced in the past, and it may also be in part attributed to the peculiar nature of the war. There are no "little fights" in Vietnam; platoon-size and company-size engagements compel the direct attention of top command. It is not unusual for the company commander, at the time of engaging the enemy, to have his battalion, brigade, and division commanders all directly overhead, trying to view the action. Each has some reason for being there. But their presence does put an unprecedented strain on the leader at the fighting level, and also on his radios, as everyone "comes up" on the engaged unit's "freq" to give advice. There are frequently too many individuals trying to use the same frequency to permit of any one message running to length. So brevity is a rule worked overtime, too often to the exclusion of fullness of necessary information. A rule that must be followed is that except for rare and unusual circumstances all commanders should follow established radio procedures and not "come up" on the radio of the next subordinate unit.

One further glaring gap is to be noted. When the unit, having had a hard go in combat, is relieved or reinforced by another which must continue the fight, very rarely does the commander going out tell the full story, giving the detail of situation, to the incoming commander. Just as rarely does the latter insist on having it. This is an understandable human reaction, since both men are under the pressure of the problem immediately facing their units in a moment of high tension, the one withdrawing and worrying about extricating casualties, the other bent on deploying under fire without loss of time. But the danger of not having a full and free exchange as the relief begins is that the second unit, left uninformed, will at unnecessary cost attack on the same line and repeat the mistakes made by the first unit. The record shows unmistakably that lessons bought by blood too frequently have to be repurchased.

Another weakness common among junior leaders is the inaccurate reporting of the estimate of the situation. Estimates are many times either so greatly exaggerated or so watered-down that they are not meaningful to the next higher commander who must make critical decisions as to troop employment and allocation of combat power. The confusion and noise of the battlefield are two reasons why faulty estimates are made; overemotionalism and the sense of the drama are others. These factors, coupled with the judgment of an impulsive commander who feels that he must say something on the radio—even if it is wrong—are the crux of the problem. Commanders must report the facts as they see them on the battlefield. If they don't know the situation, they must say just that!

LESSON SEVEN—SECURITY ON THE TRAIL

Strictures against the use of trails by U.S. forces during the approach may be uttered ad nauseum, with emphasis upon the increased danger of surprise and ambush. The utterance does not, and will not, alter the reality that more than half of the time the U.S. rifle platoon or company is moving it will go by trail the full distance or during some stage of the journey. In such an area as the Iron Triangle, trails are unavoidable if one is to move overland at all; the alternative is to move around by sampan and stream. The bush and forest-covered flats flanking Highway No. 13 have a network of crisscrossing trails, with as many as five intersections in one acre of ground. It is humanly impossible to move across such a tract without getting onto a trail.

"What's wrong with it? That's where we find the VC," is an argument with a certain elementary logic in its favor. That is, provided that maximum security measures in moving by trail are punctiliously observed. What measures are most effective under varying conditions is a moot subject, awaiting statement and standardization before hardening into a doctrine. As matters stand, the young infantry commander gropes his way and makes his decisions empirically, according to the various pressures bearing upon him.

For the rifle company not in file column but formed more broadly for movement toward the likelihood of contact, the commander again has no firm doctrinal guide. The formations adopted vary widely, and the reasoning that supports some of the patterns is quite obscure. Within one battalion there will be as many designs as there are companies for traversing exactly the same piece of terrain. If it is reasonable to believe that there must be one optimum formation that best safeguards the security of the body in movement, then letting it be done six different ways is hardly reasonable.

"Main trails" or "speed trails" in the Vietnam bush average not more than 3½ feet in width except at intersections. When a unit goes by trail through the heavy bush, it has no alternative to single file. Practical working distance between the point and the front of the main body should vary according to the roughness of the terrain and how far one can see ahead. In Vietnam, as almost anywhere else, the flatter the ground the straighter the trail; and if the ground is cut up, then trails are tortuous. The scouts should be at 20 and 10 meters beyond the van of the point squad, observation permitting. The point squad ought to be relieved every hour to assure continued vigilance. At each relief it buttonhooks into the bush until the main body comes up, though this is not the practice if the column is approaching an intersecting trail or streambed or coming to any built-up area. Once in sight of a stream crossing or trail mouth, the scout element (including the point squad) proceeds to check it out, after reporting the sighting to the main body. Its surest maneuver is a hook forward through the bush over both flanks that should close beyond the intersection in sufficient depth to abort any ambush (fig. 4).

If the main body closes to within sight of the point while it is so moving no real additional jeopardy will result, provided the column marks time and maintains interval. During such a halt, any attempt by the main body to form a partial perimeter will merely cause bunching. Depending on conditions of terrain, visibility, and like

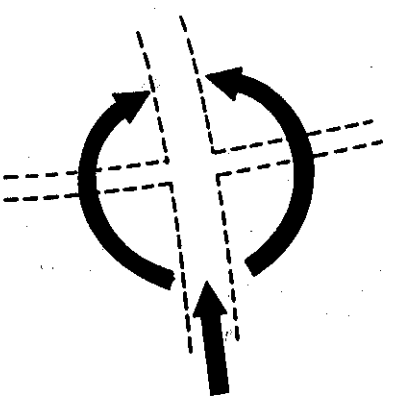


Figure 4. Forward hook.

factors, the rear of the point may be anywhere from 200 to 50 meters ahead of the lead platoon's front man. At lesser distance than 50 meters its security value dwindles. The VC will let scouts pass an ambush to get at the point, or will pass up the point to hit the main body, thereby doubling confusion to the column. The double hook forward by the point cuts the danger for all concerned.

Nature itself limits the threat of lateral ambush against a column going by jungle trail as opposed to one going through tall elephant grass or over a path where banks or bushes on either side offer concealment for the enemy. The bush is too thick; to put fire on the trail, the field of fire from Claymore or machinegun would be too short; too few targets would be within reach of any one weapon. A 5- to 10-meter break between squads—which does not retard movement—enhances march security.

Where making its circular deployment to check out any suspected ambush site, the scout element should be supported by the machinegun, which is best placed with No. 2 man of the point. An alternative to this move is to have the gunner reconnoiter the bush forward with fire; if the bush is extra thick, the M-79 may do better. The RT is with the point's last man, who serves as breakaway, running the word back should there be instrument failure.

When a stay-behind party is dropped from the column to check on whether it is being trailed, it should peel off from the front of the main body and enter the bush without halting the latter's advance. Its maneuver is S-shaped so that it takes up automatically a full ambush posture instead of being a simple fire block (fig. 5).

The column moves on and through the stay-behind group (2 fire teams, with a machinegun in the down-trail team). The forward team springs the trap as the enemy party comes even. The rear team fires only if the enemy doubles back or is too numerous for the forward weapons.

Other than in attack on road columns, the enemy does not appear to use front-and-rear ambushes, i.e., the delivery of surprise fire from cover by a block up front, quickly followed by an attack on rear or midway of the column. Except along the wood line of a clearing the "impenetrable" jungle does not lend itself to such tactics in assault

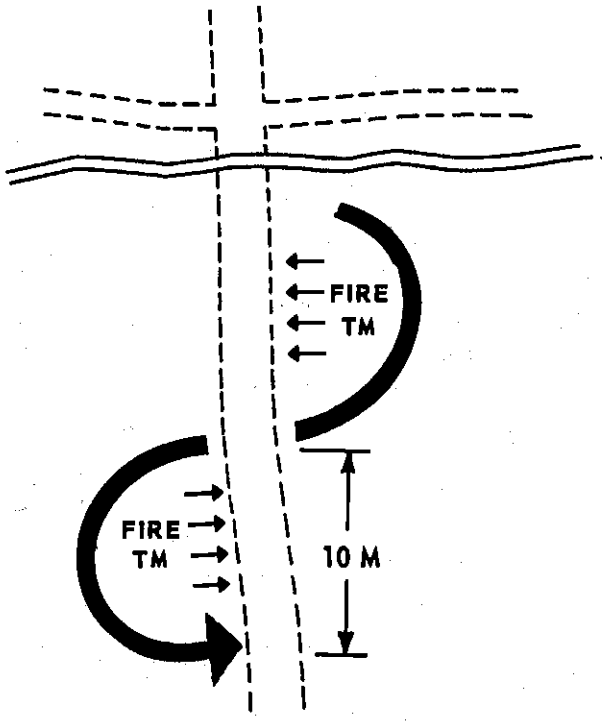


Figure 5. Double hook.

against a column moving by trail. More favorable to the design of the VC and NVA is their use of a killing fire from out of concealment against the head of the column from a wide spot in the trail. This may be automatic fire or a command-detonated mine. Their Chicom-Claymore is a potent weapon when so employed. It may be hidden within a hollow tree or fixed with camouflage in a clump of foliage. The mine is set to command a long stretch of trail and is one of the hazards of moving along it (fig. 6).

There is no warning and no follow-through; it is a one-weapon affair. During Operation Attleboro, a single command-detonated Claymore set in a tree killed or wounded 26 men strung out over 40 meters of trail. It was fired from 5 meters forward of the front man. The column was rushing from battle urgency and the scout element did not take enough time to look over the ground thoroughly. The first scout alone had been permitted to pass uptrail beyond the weapon. *Obviously the formation—point and the front of the main body—had become closed too tightly.* On the wide trail the advance was moving in a fashion that served only to put more people at the mercy of the weapon (fig. 7). Had they been following ex-

Machinegun team.

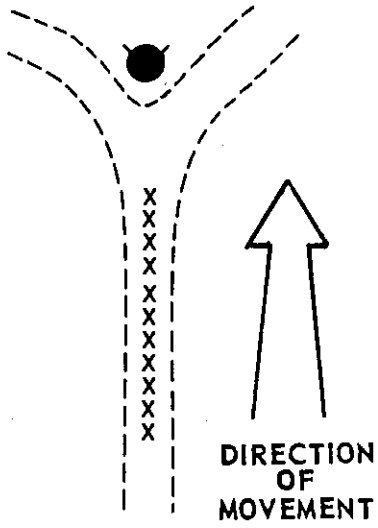


Figure 6. Claymore site.

Figure 7. Claymore toll.

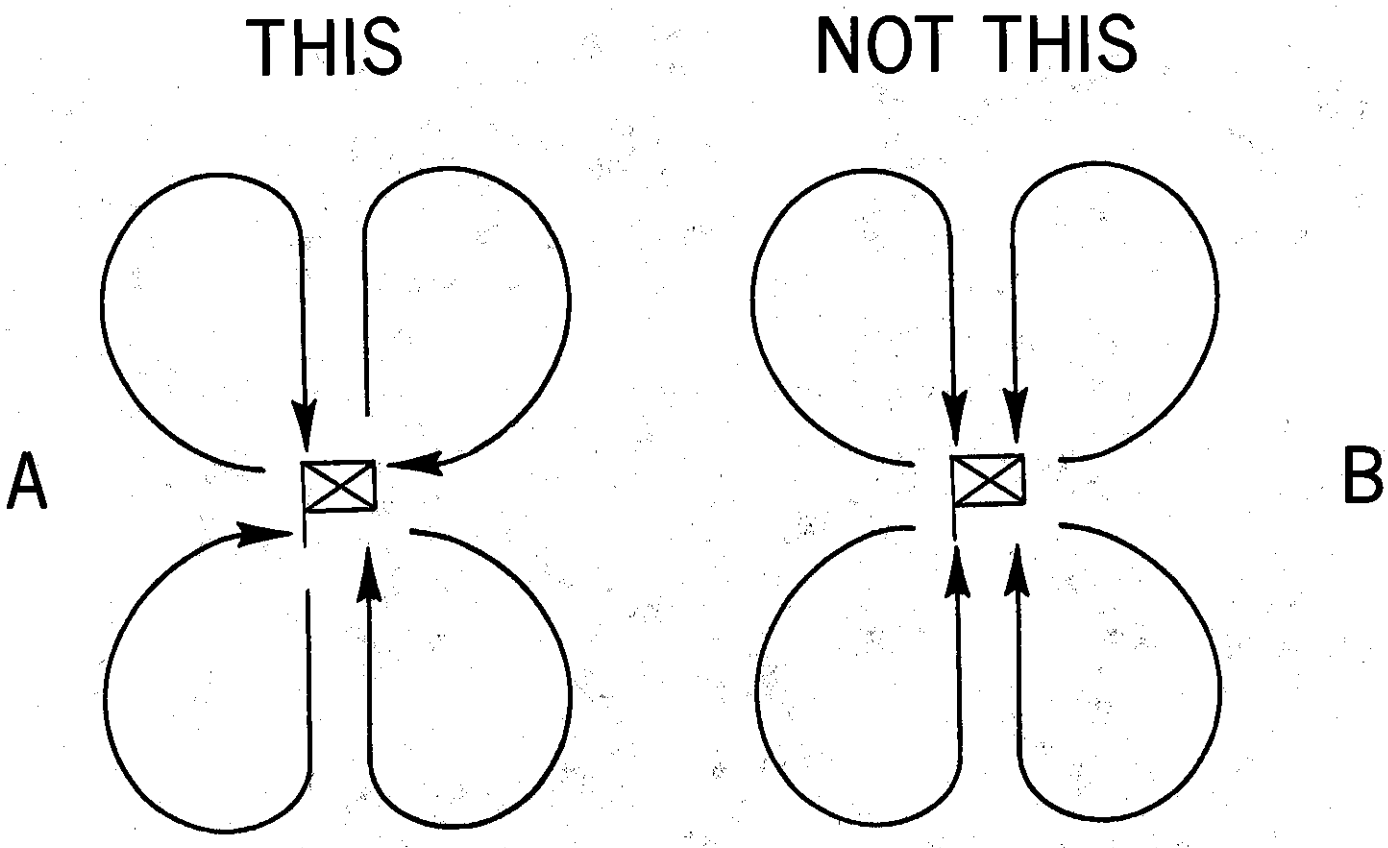


Figure 8. Cloverleaf.

actly in single file, each body would have given more protection to the men that followed.

Periodic "cloverleafing" or some variation of that movement by the column in movement is supposed to be SOP for field operations in Vietnam. The object is to beat out a limited area around the base of the command during a security halt or rest halt or before the troops set up the night defense. Four patrols may be sent out anywhere from 100 to 500 meters for this all-around sweep.

Among the cloverleaf variations possible, one has clearly obvious advantages (fig. 8). The preferred option, "A," affords a double check timewise both forward and rearward of the column's route of advance and makes maximum use of the deployment. At all stages of the sweep it also exposes a smaller element to the danger of surprise and ambush. The "buttonhook," used extensively by the Australians for ambushing an enemy force that is following one of their columns, is in essence the covering of one quadrant of the four-circle cloverleaf. It is executed usually over a much smaller radius.

When a company- or platoon-size patrol conducts sweeps of the vicinity before setting up for night defense, the priorities are: (1) the arc covering its line of advance into the ground, (2) the intervening ground between the perimeter and the LZ, and (3) the sector judged least defensible. Particularly if darkness is imminent, organization of the position (meaning the assignment of sectors and placing of men and weapons, but not necessarily digging in) precedes the dispatch of watering parties and the placement of LP's.

Division and brigade commanders afield stoutly contend that the cloverleaf kind of precaution is always taken by patrols, or by a company moving cross country in search of the enemy. The same story is told at battalion. Analysis of more than 100 company operations at the fighting level reveals that the story very rarely stands up. The average junior leader simply gives lip service to the principle. Just as trails are used despite all taboos, most of the time little scouting takes place outward from the U.S. column traversing them, despite all admonition. Contributing to the almost habitual carelessness of junior leaders is a be-

setting vagueness on the part of many superiors in stating the mission and making it specific as to its several essentials. The unit should not be told to "check out" a certain area, or to "run a patrol through the jungle patch ahead and return," as if it were the simple problem of putting a policeman on a beat. Each patrol should have a stated purpose. It risks hazard to gain something; it must therefore be told what it is after. Prisoners? Ambushing of the enemy? Destruction of a bridge? Caches? Location of a suspected base camp? Observe signs of enemy movement but not engage? Seek a trail entrance? The list of possibilities is long. But if the average leader is given only a general instruction he will comply in the easiest way, and nine times out of ten that means taking the trail, probably the same trail going and coming. If he is told at the start, "Be at LZ Lazy Zebra by 1800 for extraction," and he discovers that too little time has been allowed to do anything well, the door is open for him to go forth and do all things badly. Command *must* keep itself informed of where its patrols have moved recently and *must* safeguard its upcoming patrol against the danger of becoming trapped from having beaten over the same old route.

LESSON EIGHT—THE COMPANY IN MOVEMENT

One large unresolved question is what formation is best for the rifle company in movement under the conditions of the Vietnam war where the enemy is highly elusive, seeks contact only when he expects to stage a surprise, is adept at breaking contact and slipping away, and operates in a countryside that well serves these tactics.

The VC and NVA are not everywhere, though they are apt to be met anywhere, and hence all movement should be regulated accordingly. No deployment is militarily sound which assumes that the enemy is not close by. If that axiom were not true, there would be no rush to form the defensive perimeter when the unit is dropped on the landing zone. Yet it is too often disregarded in jungle movement by leaders who refuse to believe that the enemy can strike without warning from out of nowhere.

There is a great variety to the countryside. The less-dense jungle has more the nature of a tropical forest in the matted thorn bush, clumped bamboo, bamboo thicket, creepers, and lianas do not greatly impede movement. There are vast stretches of still more open country, almost treeless, flats covered only with elephant grass standing higher than any living thing, barren volcanic hills, paddy lands uninterrupted save by their own banks, and dikes that stretch on for miles.

Some areas are densely populated. Others are wholly abandoned, even by the enemy. In January 1967 a Special Forces patrol, which had been on its own for 32 days, marched 230 kilometers in 22 days without seeing one human being, domesticated animal, or habitation.

Vietnam is not "mostly untamed jungle." Large and decisively important parts of it are cultivated flat land denuded of forest and bush except along the stream banks. Almost as much of it is fertile, relatively flat, not heavily forested or overgrown, but still undeveloped and almost deserted. In the central plateau there are broad lava flows where no grass grows. Some of the volcanic hills are boulder- and slab-strewn and almost barren of vegetation.

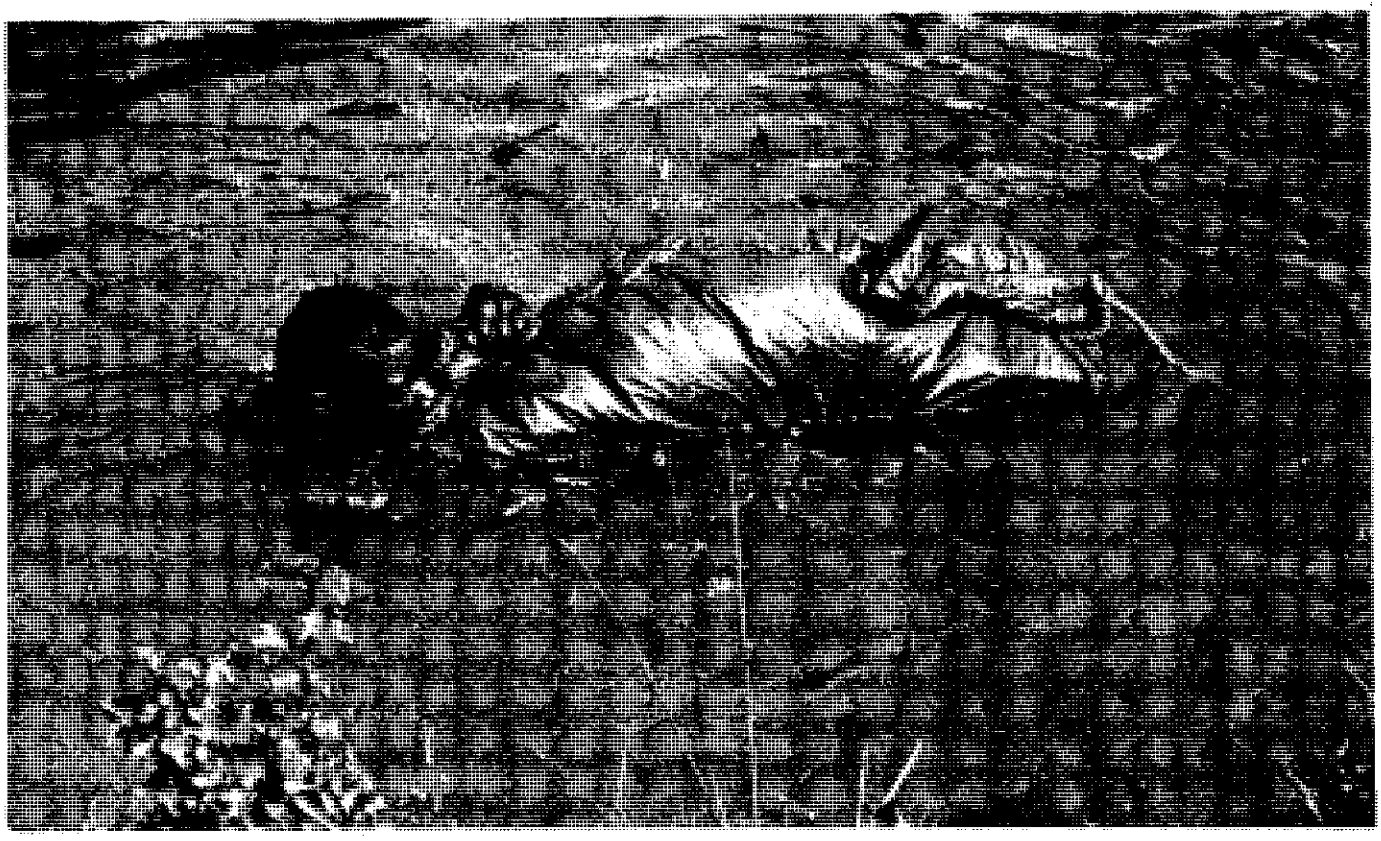
Any of these landscapes is likely to become battleground, and several of them in combination may be crossed by a rifle company in a single day's march.

The question of what formation best serves military movement over such a greatly diversified land may be answered only by thinking of what is being sought: (1) security, (2) control, and (3) concentration of fire power without undue loss of time and personnel. These are not in any way separate aims; each reacts upon the others. Security and control are desired so that fire concentration can be achieved when nothing else counts more.

So the precept must follow: the more complicated a formation and the more numerous its parts, the greater the danger that control will be lost in a moment of emergency, especially when the unit is moving over countryside the nature of which prohibits visual contact between the various elements.

Yet "the wedge," which has numerous variations, is the formation that the average U.S. rifle company commander prefers to use during advance into enemy country. It is extremely difficult to control during marches over cut-up ground and possesses no inherent advantage in bringing fire power to bear quickly against the threatened quarter (fig. 9). In fact, it has several built-in handicaps.

The forward platoon in center and the two platoons right and left each use a point, with scouts out. So there are never less than seven elements to control. That is several too many, should the body have to re-form suddenly to meet an assault from an unexpected direction. Thus formed, the company extends over a wider area than if the columns were more compact, though the advantage is decidedly marginal. Nothing else is to be said in favor of the wedge, for its design neither strengthens security on the move nor favors rapid and practical deployment for combat. If the



Soldier crossing stream.

formation should be hit from either flank, greater confusion will ensue than with a simpler pattern. Should the enemy be set up and ready to fight on a concealed broad front directly to the fore, all three columns are likely to become engaged before the commander has a chance to weigh whether full-scale involvement is desirable.

On the other hand, suppose that the company is making its approach march in 2-column formation (fig. 10). The width between columns should be approximately equal to their length when the terrain permits. If either column is hit from the flank and faces toward the fire, the other is automatically in place to serve as a reserve and protect against a turning maneuver. Further, if the advance guard (scouts and point) draws fire in volume signifying enemy determination to stand, the force is in position either to be committed whole at once (fig. 11) or to fight on a narrower front with half of its strength while keeping a 50 percent reserve. (fig. 12).

When the enemy fire and the condition of the advance element permit, the scouts and point should displace to rearward as the company shifts to line of skirmishers, lest the whole organization be drawn willy-nilly into a full-scale commitment. In the Vietnam fighting, according to the data basis, the latter initial disarrangement occurs approximately half the time in attacks on a fortified position. The scouts or the men in the point become engaged and take losses; the lead platoon becomes scattered and disorganized in the effort to extricate them; the fire line thereafter gradually becomes reknit on ground too far forward, greatly to its disadvantage and harshly limiting the supporting air and artillery fires.

Much is heard in Vietnam about VC and NVA employment of the inverted ι ambush. This tactic gets its effects from an intensifying concentration of fire. The enemy normally fights out of timber or other natural cover, and the flanking side usually runs parallel to a trail. The twin-column company formation is far more properly disposed to cope with the ι than is the wedge or any eccentric formation, particularly if it is moving with a few flankers out, a practice it should

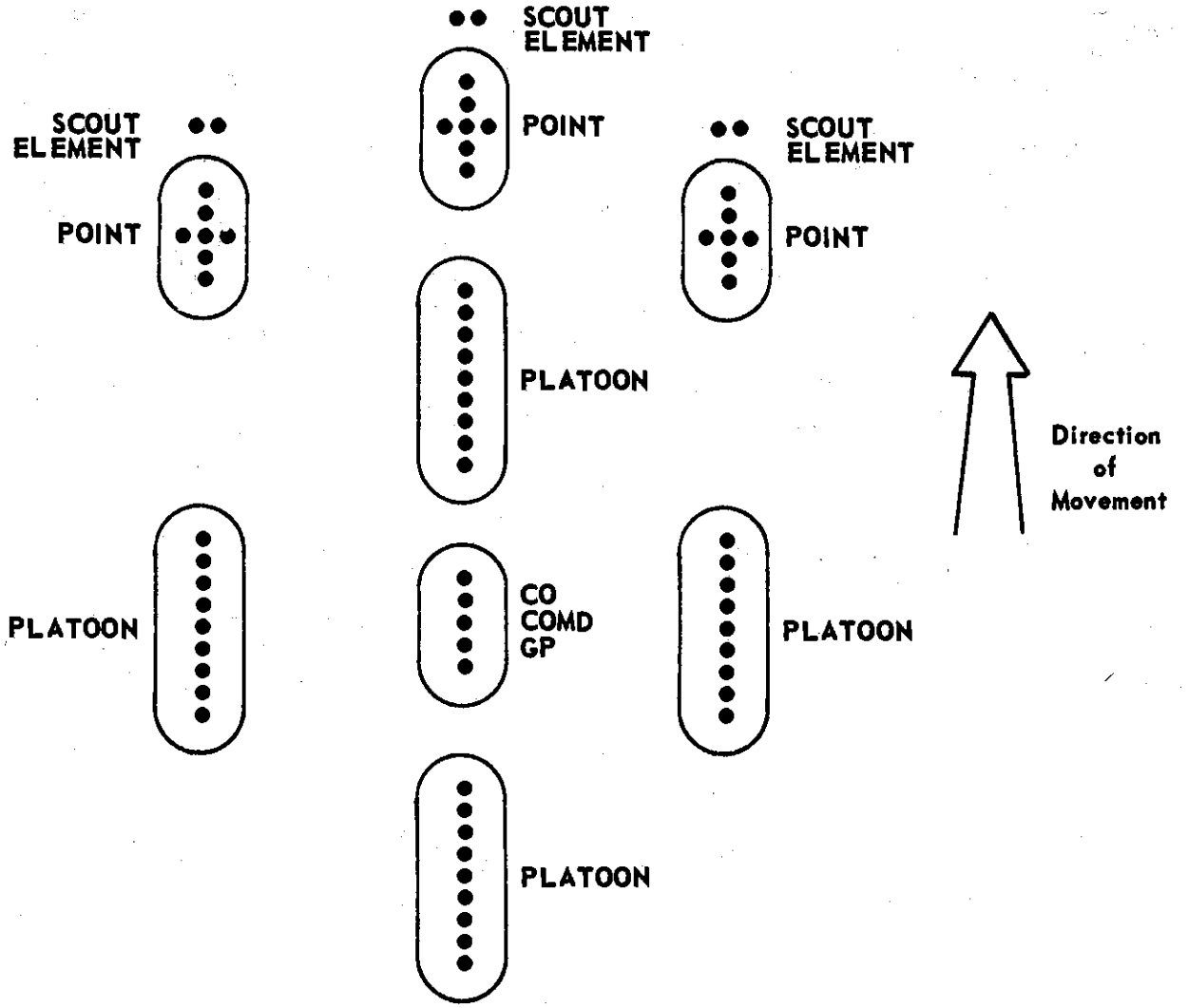


Figure 9. Wedge formation.

adopt wherever natural conditions permit (fig. 13). In fact, almost anywhere that the enemy can use the L ambush practically, our people can use flankers to serve as a buffer.

The righthand column, in the correct position, needs only face right to engage. The lefthand column moves into line against the enemy force blocking the line of movement. The company CP is located according to the intensity of fire and availability of cover (fig. 14).

So confronted, the enemy loses any initial advantage in fire or maneuver, and his problem of collecting forces to alter the terms of the contest is probably more complex, since he had planned to execute a set piece. The data basis is too limited to warrant generalizing about VC–NVA tactical arrangements for exploiting the L ambush. But in the few examples when the fight went to a finish, the enemy reserves were placed to support the vertical bar of the L. This is the logical way to employ them if an ultimate envelopment is the object (fig. 15).

Whether to accept line-against-line engagement on these terms, however equal, is the prime question for the U.S. force commander from the start of action. He may not have any option initially because his position may have been weakened by early losses before he was able to get the feel of his problem. At any stage it is preferable that, maintaining loose contact in the interim, he backs away with the main body as promptly as he can. At the same time he should call for maximum striking power against the enemy positions. The L ambush, by reason of its configuration, is an ideal

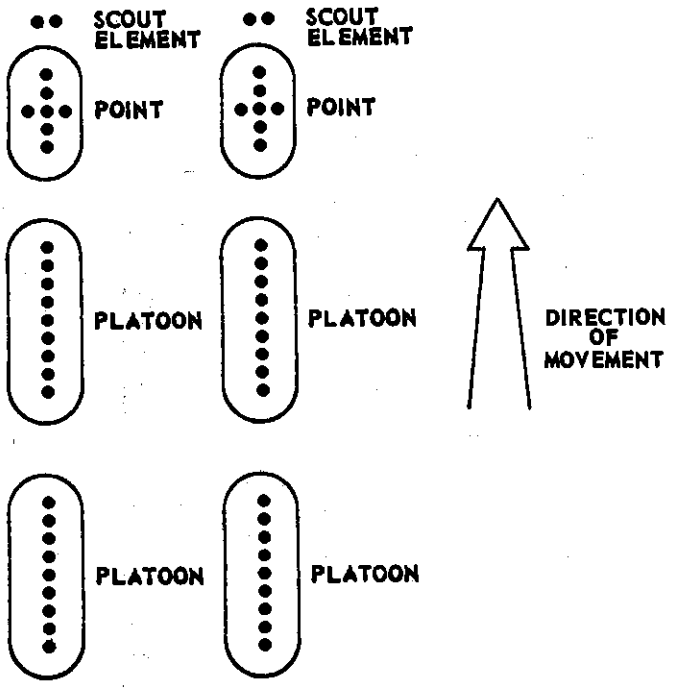


Figure. 10. 2-Column formation on the march.

target for field artillery and tactical air operating in combination. The vertical bar is the prime target for the artillery—gun-target line permitting—because it can be worked over with maximum economy and minimum shifting of the guns. The horizontal bar is the proper mark for TAC Air because the boundaries of the run may be more readily marked manually when a withdrawal is perpendicular to the line of advance than when the strike parallels the line of advance and withdrawal (fig. 16).

There is one postscript dealing with the enemy use of the L ambush. The examples of record indicate that the enemy reserve will maneuver in an attempt to block our line of withdrawal. The effort normally takes the form of setting the ambush along the first stream or trail crossing on the immediate rear. Withdrawal over the same route used in the advance is therefore to be avoided. The movement should be an oblique from the open flank where the enemy has not engaged (fig. 17).

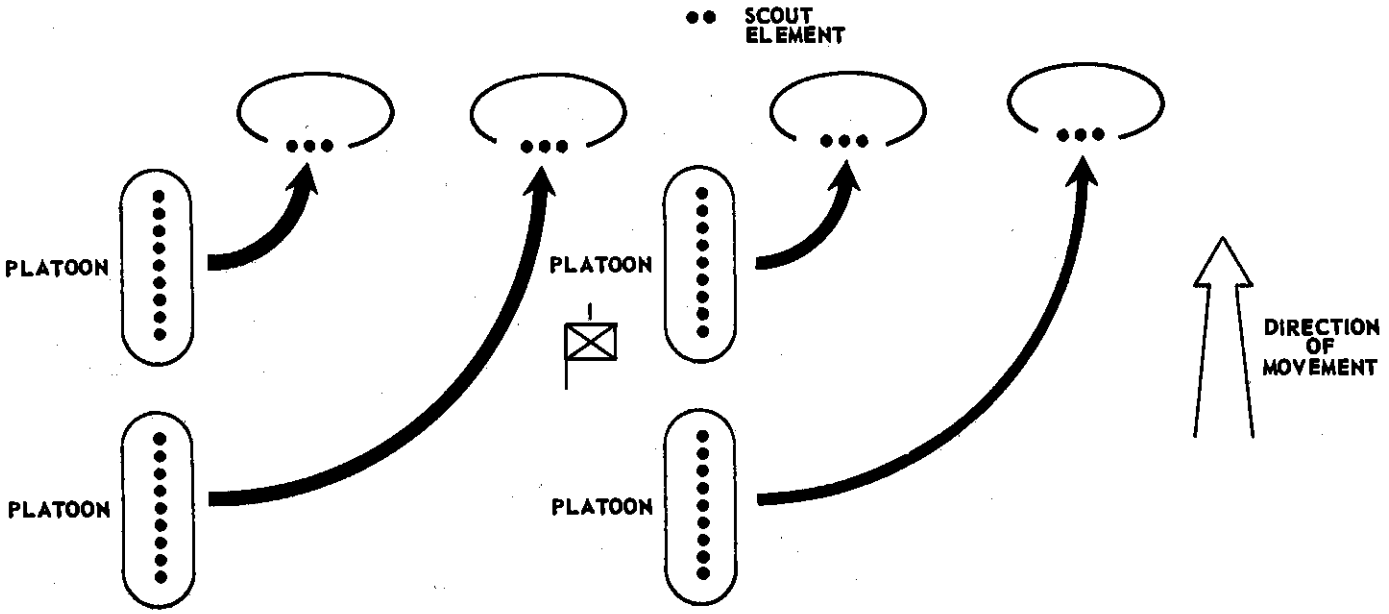


Figure 11. 2-Column formation fully committed.

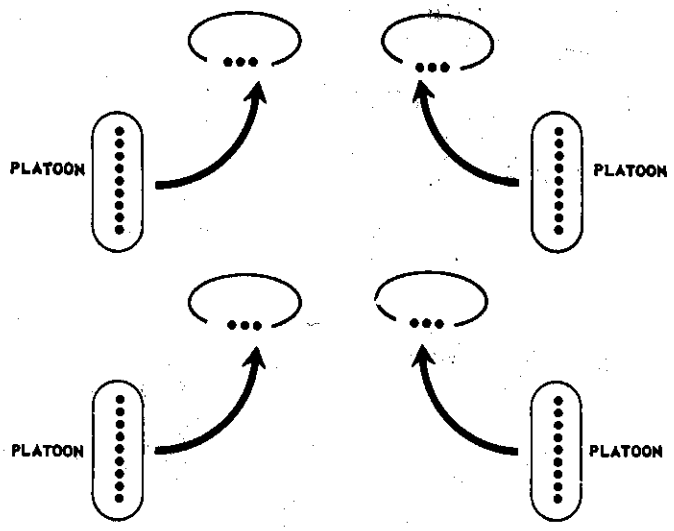


Figure 12. 2-Column formation partially committed.

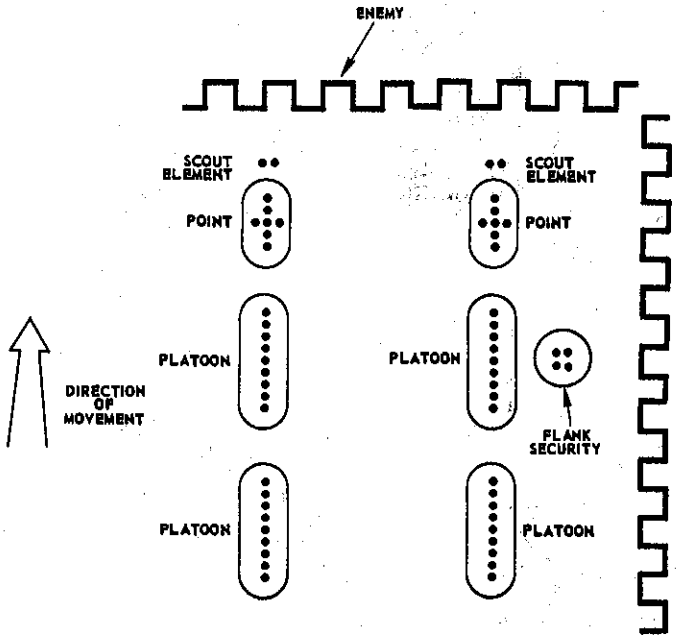


Figure 13. "L" ambush.

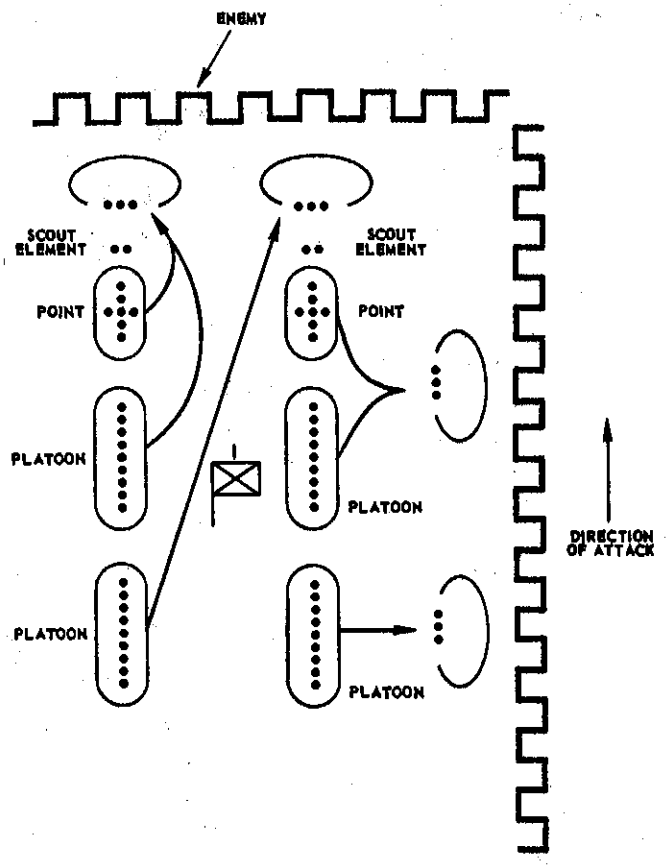


Figure 14. Maneuver against "L" ambush.

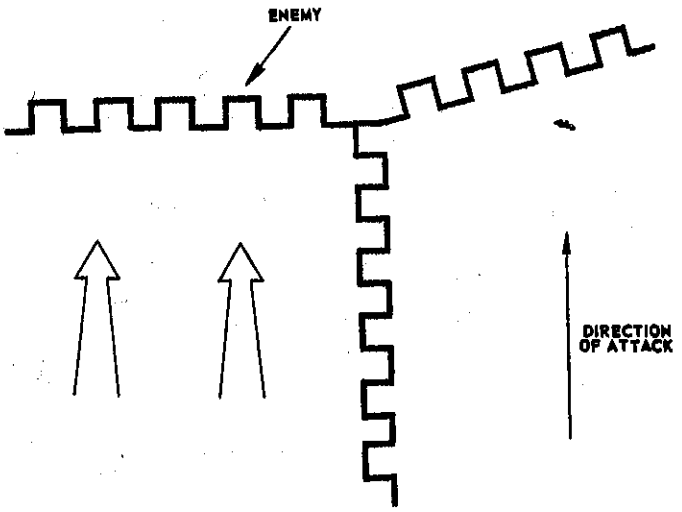


Figure 15. Enemy reserves in "L" ambush.

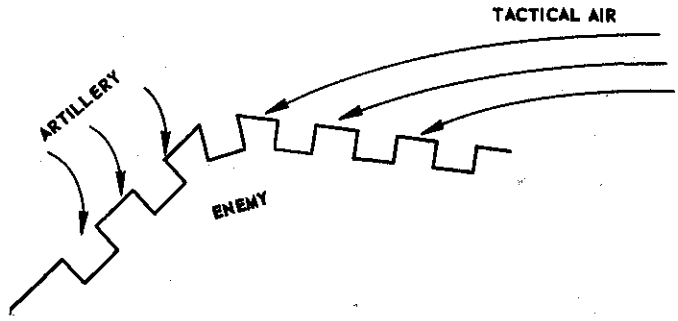


Figure 16. Fire coordination against "L" ambush.

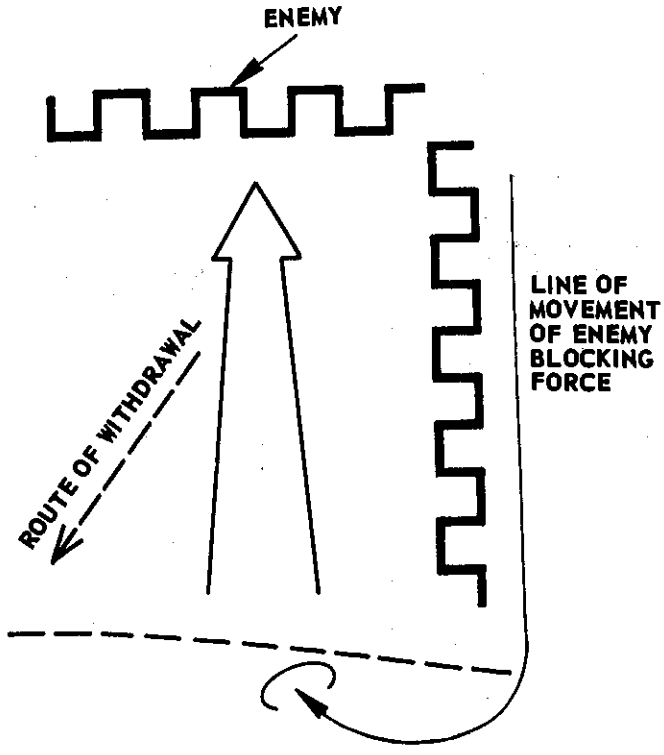


Figure 17. Withdrawal from "L" ambush.

LESSON NINE—RUSES, DECOYS, AND AMBUSHES

To begin, at least one generalization is permissible. The enemy—VC or NVA—has a full bag of tricks, a fair number of which we now understand. Practically without exception they are not intricate. Most of them depend for effectiveness on creating one of two illusions: either (1), our side has caught the enemy off guard; or (2), he is ready, waiting, and weak, and we have only to make the most of the opportunity.

One other generalization might well follow. The U.S. unit commander, if he is to keep his guard up against ruses and ambushes, must be receptive to the counsel of his subordinates and draw on the total of information concerning the immediate presence of the enemy that has been collected by his people. Nothing more greatly distinguishes U.S. generalship in Vietnam than the ready communion between our higher commanders and their subordinates at all levels in the interest of making operations more efficient. If a general sets the example, why should any junior leader hold back? For his own purposes, the best and the most reliable intelligence that a small unit commander can go on is that which his own men gather through movement and observation in the field.

On the bright side, the record shows unmistakably, with numerous cases in point out of the 1966–67 period of fighting operations, that the average U.S. soldier today in Vietnam has a sharper scouting sense and is more alert to signs of the enemy than the man of Korea or World War II. The environment has whetted that keenness and quickened his appreciation of any indication that people other than his own are somewhere close by, either in a wilderness or in an apparently deserted string of hamlets. He feels it almost instinctively when the unit is on a cold trail. The heat of ashes that look long dead to the eye, a few grains of moist rice still clinging to the bowl, the freshness of footprints where wind and weather have not had time to blur the pattern in the dust, fresh blood on a castoff bandage, the sound of brush crackling in a way not suggesting other than movement by man—he gets these things. Walking through elephant grass, he will note where over a fresh-made track the growth has been beaten down and bruised, and with moisture still fresh on the broken grass he will guess that a body of the enemy has moved through within the hour. These things are in the record. Also in it are words like these: "We entered the village. It was empty. But the smell of their bodies was strong, as if they had just got out. They have a different smell than we do."

How the quickening process works, how the senses sharpen when soldiers are alert to all phenomena about them, and how a commander may profit by collecting all that his men know and feel about the developing situation, is well illustrated by quoting directly from a post-combat interview of a patrol out of 25th Division in early 1967:

Lieutenant: "I noticed that between 1700 and 1800 all traffic stopped within the village. That was early and therefore unusual. The workers disappeared. Women came along, rounded up the water buffalo, and quit the area. People in the houses near the perimeter ate a quick evening meal and got out. Everything went silent. I knew then something would happen."

Sergeant: "I saw people leaving the house to my right front about 25 meters. Then directly to my front, 150 meters off, the family left at the same time. We took fire from the house when the enemy came on."

It is the task of the unit commander not only to stimulate a scouting faculty in all hands but to welcome and weigh all field intelligence that comes of so doing. Even the hunch of one man far down the line is never to be brushed off; he may have a superior instinct for sensing a situation.

In one of the more tragic incidents during 1966 operations near the Cambodian border, a company commander was warned by a Specialist 4 artillery observer before it happened. The company had spent the night in defensive perimeter. An NVA soldier had walked into one of its trail ambushes during the night, and the men working the LP's

Searching abandoned village.

reported their certainty that they had heard human movement all during the night in the grass beyond them. When the company broke camp soon after first light, the Specialist 4, viewing the ground over which it would advance that morning, said: "Captain, don't go that way, you are walking into an ambush." This advice was disregarded. The ambush was there. The losses were grievous. Developments proved doubly that the Specialist 4 was a responsible soldier whose judgments deserved respect. In the ensuing fight, the captain was wounded and could no longer function. The Specialist 4 took charge of the operation and with help brought the survivors through.

Whenever the enemy makes his presence obvious and conspicuous, whether during movement or in a stationary and seemingly unguarded posture, it is time to be wary and to ask the question: "Is this the beginning of some design of his own, intended to suck us in by making us believe that we are about to snare him?" This question should be asked before any operation, whether it involves a division moving against the enemy or a small patrol or rifle company beating out the bush in search of his presence. The people we are fighting are not innocents and are rarely careless. They bait their traps the greater part of the time by making themselves so seem.

In Operation Nathan Hale, June 1966, the opening onfall of the NVA forces engaging was against three CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group—a paramilitary organization) companies at and around the Special Forces camp at Dong Tre. In this, they were partially successful. The one company outposting the nearby hills was overrun and took heavy losses. The NVA was waiting outside the camp to strike the expected relief column; but the CIDG Force (—), located inside the Dong Tre camp, was saved from disaster when its ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) commander wisely resisted the temptation to send it to relieve the beleaguered company. During the day that followed air observers over the general area reported seeing enemy groups in large numbers threading the valleys leading away from Dong Tre, all moving in one direction. That was the picture the enemy intended should be seen; he had already chosen his battle ground. As the U.S. reaction expanded and the general fight developed, our forces deployed into well-prepared and extremely hot LZ's where our softening-up fires had had mainly the effect of drawing attention to where the landings would take place. That in the end Operation Nathan Hale could be rightly claimed as an American victory does not alter the fact that much of it need not have been won in the hardest possible way. North Vietnam made much of it, and in documents published to troops boasted that more than one thousand Americans had been killed, an approximately 10 to 1 exaggeration. With a more perfect collation of available intelligence from the start and in the first days as the units deployed, it might have been a more resounding U.S. victory.

Here, one clear distinction is in order. The NVA and VC are neither everywhere nor phantomlike. Though they try to appear so, they are of human flesh and must respond to their own nature, irrespective of the disciplines given them within military organization. On the trail, or during any movement in which they have no reason to suspect the near presence of a U.S. or allied force, they are incessant chatterers and otherwise noisy. Repeatedly they get sandbagged for carelessness. As to their being everywhere, it would be easier to dispose of them if that were true. Some of our line commanders at the lower levels get the idea after fighting for a while in Vietnam that, whenever our columns move, the enemy knows and invariably shadows them. Nothing in the data basis confirms it, and indeed, with our vastly superior mobility due to helicopter deployment over great distance, it would be humanly impossible for him to shadow every assault by the rifle company or every prowl by the patrol. What the record does say unmistakably is that a fair portion of the time he manages to get on our heels. The moral plainly is that, in all movement afield, *the column should proceed as if detection may have occurred early, and should take the necessary precautions to avert surprise.*

It is a different problem when there is clear reason to believe that the enemy knows of the presence of U.S. forces. Take one example of numerous such incidents. This one is from Operation Crazy Horse. A company column had been proceeding via a broad valley along the river banks. At some low-lying hills it was held up for five minutes by direct fire from two or three rifles at range of 100 meters or thereabouts. The exchange was broken off without casualties on either side when the enemy faded back. There was reason to suspect that the fire had come from an enemy outpost, so placed not only to sound the alarm but to keep the attack moving along the line of the enemy withdrawal. The suspicion was well founded because not far beyond the initial encounter lay a well-prepared, fortified position, with machineguns sited on ridges and the garrison standing to, ready to defend them.

A few VC or NVA soldiers, acting as couriers, carriers, or such, having a chance meeting with a U.S. column in movement, might get off a quick shot or two before scuttling into the bush. But any such casual group has a getaway on its mind primarily. This kind of haphazard fire is quite different from steady delivery of small arms fire from one position, though the latter is in small volume and persists for only a few minutes. The latter, seemingly aimed to check or delay movement, may more likely have the prime object of inviting it on. It should alert the unit commander to the probable imminence of a prolonged fire fight, and he should review his preparations accordingly.

So we speak here of the obvious or overt move, or attention-getting activity in any form. Even a minor weapons exchange always alerts a unit. But beyond that, the commander should take heed of any unusual manifestation of sight or sound when his troops are seeking contact with the enemy. One illustration comes out of Operation Paul Revere IV, and while there is none other exactly like it, simple logic gives it overall significance.

The rifle company had been moving over fairly open country not far from the Cambodian border since first light. In late afternoon, it several times encountered NVA soldiers moving singly and the scouts or point traded fires with them, with varying results. Then as the company approached a village, it heard the tumult of voices, shouts and cries, from children, men, and women, as of many people making haste to get away before the Americans arrived. But is it a natural thing for people fleeing for cover, in the face of an armed advance, to call attention to their departure? Without firing, the company deployed and surrounded the village, to find it empty. It then moved on, following in the same direction that the "refugees" had taken. Dark was at hand. Not far beyond the village the company came to fairly clear ground slightly elevated that looked suitable for night defense. Watering parties moved out to a nearby creek to replenish supply. Before they could return, and while the perimeter was still not more than half formed, the position was attacked by an NVA force in company-plus strength. It had been deployed on ground over which the watering parties moved. The most heartening part of the story is that the U.S. company, on its first time in battle, sprang to its task, got its defensive circle tied together quickly, and in a four-hour fight under wholly adverse conditions greatly distinguished itself. In view of the scenario, any conclusion that the enemy just happened to be set at the right point is a little too much to allow for coincidence.

Mystification, like over optimistic anticipation, rates high in the techniques of deception. We use ruses in our own cover planning; that the enemy does the same, and that his designs are more primitive, relying less on elaborate charades and more on the foibles of man's nature, should occasion little surprise. Traps beset us only because of a reluctance on the part of junior leaders to give the other side credit for that small measure of cleverness. To outthink the enemy, it is necessary only to reflect somewhat more deeply.

During the Tou Morong battle (Operation Hawthorne II) in June 1966, a reconnaissance platoon had had a rather unproductive morning. It came at last to an enemy camp that was deserted. Several meters beyond it the main trail branched off where two trails came together, both of them winding uphill. At the intersection was a sign reading in Vietnamese: "Friend Go This Way." There were two pointing fingers, one aimed at each uphill trail. It was a time for caution and for reporting the find to higher command. But the commander split his force and the divided platoon moved upward via both trails. En route, both columns exchanged fires with a few NVA soldiers who held their ground on both trails. There were light losses on both sides. The two columns began to converge again as they approached a draw commanded by a ridge fold from both sides. There they ran into killing fire and were pinned in a fight that lasted through that afternoon, all night, and until next morning. Before it ended, the great part of two U.S. rifle companies and all the supporting fires that could be brought to bear had been called in to help extricate the eight surviving able-bodied men and the wounded of what had been a 42-man platoon.

In warfare fought largely platoon against platoon and company against company, the true situation is not made plain in most cases until the two sides begin a close exchange of flat trajectory fires. Until then we may speculate, but we do not know the reality; the hard facts of reality can be developed only stage by stage as the fire fight progresses. During the approach, however, the leader takes nothing for granted and continues to look for a plant. The enemy has many ruses, and if something new and novel did not appear from day to day he would soon lose all ability to surprise. That is why all such items in company or higher command experience should be reported and circulated for the benefit of all concerned. It is only through cross-checking and the accumulation of more data that the larger significance of

any one action, device, or strategem may be given full weight.

Two days after Christmas, 1966, two NVA prisoners fell into our hands in III Corps Zone. They both told this story. A group of American POW's were being held in an enemy base camp near the Cambodian border. The NVA prisoners gave the same numbers and pointed to the same spot on the map. The chance to liberate a group of fellow soldiers was certain to appeal to Americans at this or any other season of the year. Nothing in the incident itself was calculated to arouse suspicion. So with utmost secrecy, an expedition was mounted.

But it happened that on the same day on the far side of the country two NVA soldiers surrendered to forces of the 1st Air Cavalry Division operating in Binh Dinh Province. They were followed in by an ARVN soldier who told of having just escaped from an enemy prison camp. These three men related a common experience. They had seen three U.S. soldiers of the 1st Air Cavalry Division in captivity at a spot not far from the Soui Ca valley. One was a "Negro with tattoos on his left arm," a detail of description which should have raised an eyebrow, the U.S. Negro soldier not being given to that practice. On checking the records, the division found it had no MIA's tallying with the descriptions. But thinking the prisoners were from some other U.S. outfit, it prepared to launch, again with utmost secrecy, a rescue expedition.

The other rescue party had gone forth several days earlier and found nothing. But the try had been made in battalion strength. The air cavalry division also mounted a battalion operation and put a heavy preparatory fire on the landing zone. This bag also proved to be empty. There was no sign any prisoners had been at the spot indicated. The coincidence, followed up by the double failure, is the best reason for believing that, had one company or less been sent, it would have deployed into an ambush. There is no final proof.

Under hot pursuit, the enemy is adept at quickly changing into peasant garb and hiding his identity by mingling with the civilian crowd. That is why he carries several sets of clothing in his haversack and why we find them in his caches. The data basis shows that he will go on the attack using women and children to screen his advance. When no option but surrender or death is left him, he will employ the same kind of protection. During Operation Cedar Falls, in January 1967, women and children would come first out of a hut or bunker making the noises and gestures of the helpless in distress. They would be followed by the VC, some with arms lowered, others with hands empty and raised. Troops are able to cope with this problem without any cost to life; but it requires extraordinary alertness coupled with restraint.

Ambushing occurs only when men become careless. With any truce or cease-fire, there comes the temptation to relax and neglect accustomed safeguards, and the enemy takes all possible advantage of it. The Christmas afternoon ambushing of a patrol in 1st Infantry Division sector is one instance. The patrol advanced on a broad front sweep across a rice paddy directly toward a tree line. The ambush was set and ready to fire from just inside the tree line. If the patrol had to cross the paddy, it took the one worst way to do it, particularly since the dikes and banks afforded at least partial cover for several columns.

To advance along a trail up a draw under an open sky without first scouting the shoulders or knobs above it, or putting strafing fires on them, is the hard road to entrapment. Those knobs are a favored siting for machinegun emplacements by the NVA and the VC, the draw is the beaten zone, and the bunker roofs are seldom more than a foot above ground (fig. 18).

That the platoon leading the company column makes the passage safely without drawing one shot by no means indicates it is unguarded. To

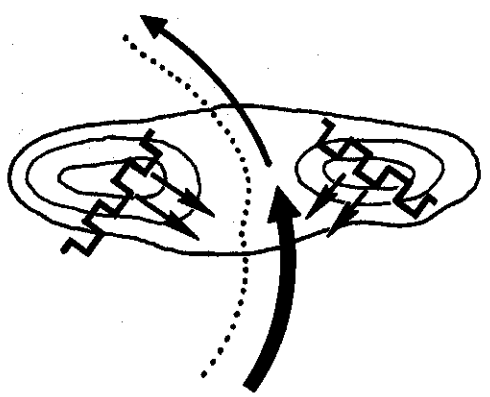


Figure 18. Enemy ambush.

the contrary, the enemy by choice tends to let it pass, so as to involve the entire company. If fire were to be placed on the point or leading files of the first platoon, the column would recoil and then deploy for a sweep. To spring such an ambush, the enemy will risk allowing the lead platoon to get on his rear since in jungle country, where there is no trail into the emplaced guns, being on the rear begets no real advantage. The platoon must either double back over the trail at the risk of being ambushed on the other side of the draw or it must spend an hour hacking its way through jungle to get to the target.

The ambushing of a road column, done by maneuver bodies rather than by fire out of fixed positions, necessarily takes a quite different form. It is usually a double strike out of cover, not made simultaneously, but so synchronized and weighted that the stopping-stalling effect is produced first by the weaker element against the head of the column, the main body then moving to roll up the force from its tail. The two moves are timed closely enough together that the column is engaged from both ends before it can deploy and face toward either danger (fig. 19).

The VC–NVA will spring this kind of trap only out of slightly higher ground where there is some kind of cover for automatic guns within 50 meters of the road or less. The bunching of any column simply makes the opportunity more favorable and the risk safer. The VC–NVA prefer a bend-in-the-road situation for setting such a trap. The reason is obvious: out of sight, the tail of the column does not sense what is happening to the head in the critical moments, a handicap that increases the chance that the column will split apart and try to fight two separate actions. Given adequate air cover (either Air Force or Army reconnaissance aircraft or gunships), any column would be immune to such attack. In lieu of these, an artillery dusting of the flankward ground wherever its characteristics are favorable to an entrapment, and just prior to the coming up of the column, would be a great disarranger. Is artillery used that way in Vietnam? Too rarely, which is not the fault of the gunners. The trouble is that some commanders think of a road march as just that and nothing more; by so doing they scorn elementary precautions.

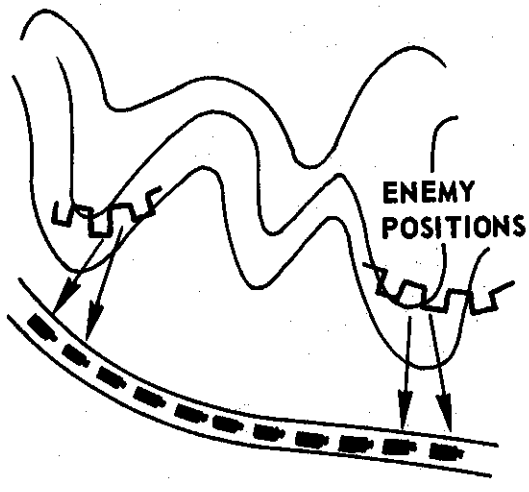


Figure 19: Road ambush.

There is still another dimension to this subject, far more sinister in its import. That the enemy will employ the live bodies of his own men as decoys to lure our troops forward and set them up before a hastily contrived ambush or well-concealed but fortified position, the data basis leaves no room for doubting. It shows, furthermore, that live decoys are used at such short range and so fully exposed to our fire as to create a better than even prospect that their lives will be forfeit.

If any such ruse were to be employed regularly by the enemy, the trick would shortly wear itself out, which is true of any stratagem. It has, however, been employed often enough that his occasional recourse to it should be accepted as fact, though American conditioning is such as to make us skeptical that this degree of fanaticism is possible even in the Viet Cong. There are eight incidents in the record of this nature.

In two incidents, the physical circumstances were such as to exclude the possibility that they just happened that way through accident rather than by deliberate design. Taken together, their lesson is so glaring as to warrant saying to any unit commander or patrol leader: "If you come upon a jungle clearing and you see two or three or even one enemy soldier with back turned, or you are moving fairly in the open, and you see a few NVA or VC moving at distance with backs turned, never facing about, watch out! The chances are very good that you are being led into a trap."

The turned back is the surest sign. It is positively enticing. It reads like the invitation on the small airport truck: "Follow Me!" The effect

is to nourish the hope that the maneuvering formation has caught the enemy unaware and is on the track of something big. That may be half true, but the something big is as the enemy planned it.

Incident No. 1. A 1st Infantry Division platoon with 32 men was patrolling not far from War Zone C. Several hundred meters short of its turnaround point, it entered upon a jungle clearing, keyhole-shaped, about 150 meters from tree line to tree line. In column, the patrol strung out along the trail until all but the last four men were in the open. By then the head of the column was two-thirds of the way across the clearing. At that juncture, the point saw three VC soldiers, backs turned. They stood 15 meters to the fore, 10 meters short of the tree line. Without turning, they darted away obliquely toward the trees. The lead files twisted about to pursue. The M–79 gunner got off a round and thought he hit one or two of the men just as they disappeared into the tree line. The turning of the column in pursuit of the men spread it neatly in front of the killing ambush, arrayed just inside the tree line (fig. 20). Is it conceivable that with the ambushers watching the approach of the column over several minutes and getting ready to blast it down, the three pigeons standing with backs turned not more than 30 meters from them were unwarned?

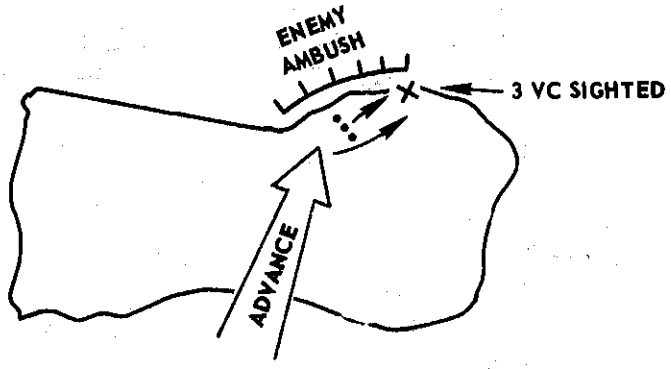


Figure 20. Tree-line ambush.

Incident No. 2 (fig. 21). An American company was on a search-and-destroy mission close to the Cambodian border. Its scouts saw two NVA soldiers standing 200 meters away on a small hill, their backs turned (at A). These decoys walked off to the westward without ever turning. The company followed. Getting too close to the Cambodian border, the commander called for artillery fires on the bush into which the two decoys had disappeared (at B) rather than take the chance of pursuing them into neutral territory. The company then turned back to the pivotal point from which it had started westward, feeling the chance was lost. It paused there a moment before marching south. Just then an NCO happened to

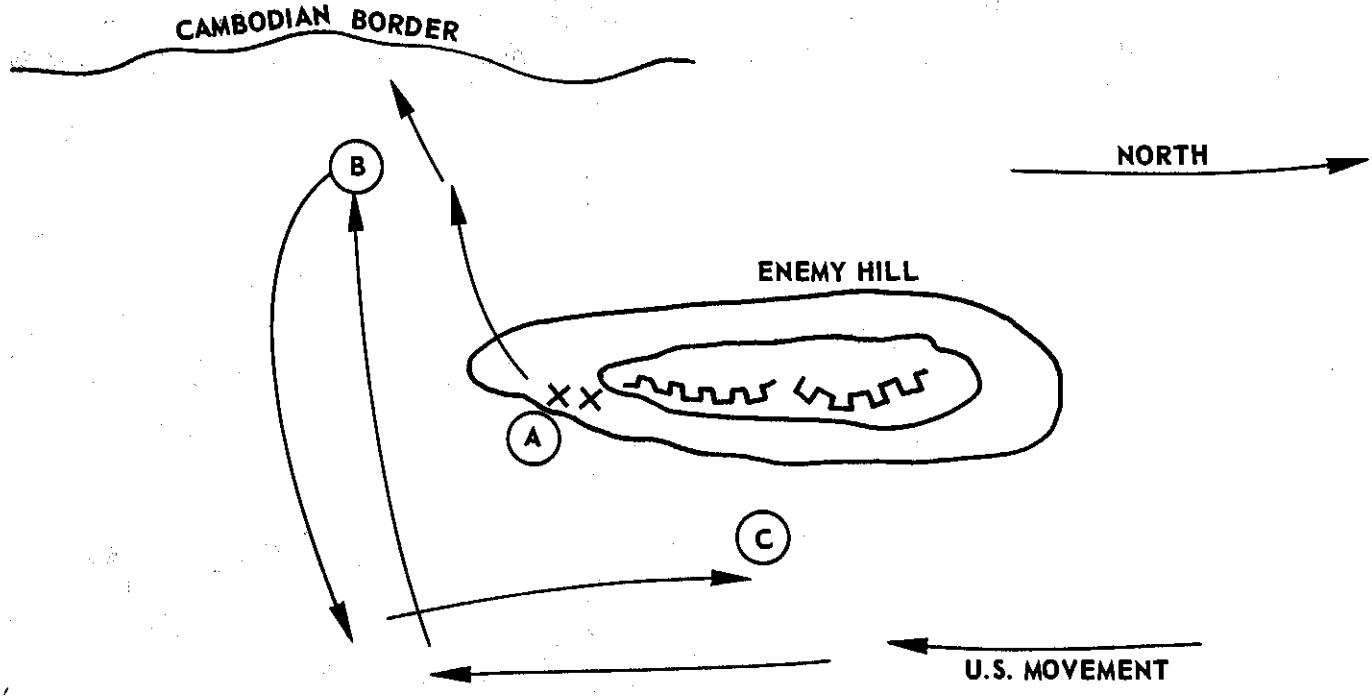


Figure 21. Hill ambush.

look back at the hill where the two NVA's were first sighted. There stood two more figures in khaki, wearing military helmets (at A). They too had their backs turned, though the U.S. company had been moving about conspicuously in the open for almost an hour. The two pigeons stood right where the others had been, within killing range, not more than 200 meters away. The company did not fire them—and that was a mistake. The two NVA's never did face about. Deploying, the company advanced toward them, moving broadside against the face of the hill (at C). It got within a stone's throw of the base before there was any fire. Then it broke like a storm—automatic, grenade, rocket. On the crest of the low hill was a major NVA force in concealment, with earth protection. The U.S. line was pinned at once. In the three-hour engagement that followed, it took a bloody beating. In the end, what was left of the enemy garrison withdrew to Cambodia. Accident? Coincidence? Commonsense rejects the idea. The enemy baited a trap, perhaps not too skillfully. But it worked.

The enemy *does* employ agents and double agents. He *does* contrive to plant stories through them which are accepted at face value. He *does* resort to such stale devices as planting a fake operations order on the corpse of an officer. Such hoaxes are occasionally swallowed whole instead of being taken with a grain of salt, better yet, a shakerful.

These, then, are the ruses, decoys, and ambushes that hurt worst, not the narrow fire blocks rigged at the turning of a jungle trail, which seldom take more than a small toll. In these small affairs, engagement usually takes place at not more than 10 to 20 meters' range. At any longer distance than that, particularly in night operations, fire is not apt to be successful. The enemy has no special magic in *that* setting, with *that* tactic. We can beat him at his own game; the record so proves. The big ambushes, in which he contrives to mousetrap anything from a platoon-size patrol to the greater part of a battalion, are his forte, his big gambit, his one hold on the future. Foil these, deny him surprise on the defense, frustrate the designs by which he inflicts shock losses in the first stage of encounter, and there will be nothing going for him that will offset his dwindling power to organize and press hard in the attack.

The job can be done. We can manage it by a more careful scrutiny of the seeming opportunity—the thing that looks too good to be true. We can avoid the staged entrapments of the enemy by reacting always, to any and every indication of his presence, *as if he is right there in the foreground in main strength.*

Simply for the sake of emphasis, it is here repeated that in this war a lone rifle shot means little or nothing. An automatic weapon opening fire usually means business. When two or more automatic weapons open at one time at close range, something big is almost certain to begin.

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.

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 Vietnamese 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 cavalrymen 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:

(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

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

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.

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

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.

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. Fatigue 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.

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-

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 estimated 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.

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 continue 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

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 interrelated 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.

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 anyway 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 telltale 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

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 machine-gun, 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.

VIETNAM PRIMER

An exact reprint of the report prepared for the U.S. Army on the problems effecting American combat troops and recommended solutions to them. The report was prepared jointly by Lt. Colonel David Hackworth and famed military historian S.L.A. Marshall who spent 90 days in Vietnam in 1966-67 conducting extensive field interviews with the fighting men who had learned their combat lessons the hard way against the VC and NVA. Chapters include:

- The Direct Assault
- Warning and Movement
- Doubling Security
- Contending With Jungle
- Rates of Fire
- Communications
- Security on the Trail
- The Company in Movement
- Ruses, Decoys and Ambushes
- Field Intelligence
- The Defensive Perimeter
- Policing the Battlefield
- Training
- The Strange Enemy

Intended as an operational analysis designed to help save American lives in combat, it remains valuable not only as an historical reference but as a concise and well written guide to fighting an unconventional foe in difficult terrain.

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