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*U.S. Military Assistance Command,  
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# COUNTERINSURGENCY

**LESSONS**

**LEARNED**

**NO. 58**

(DJSN-545-66)

**OPERATION HAPPY VALLEY (U)**

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UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM  
APO San Francisco 96243

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20 June 1966

SUBJECT: Counterinsurgency Lessons Learned No 58: Operation HAPPY VALLEY (U)

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1. (CMHA) INTRODUCTION:

a. This issue of Lessons Learned deals with an operation which is considered significant in that a complete range of activities from initial search and destroy operations through restoration of civil government is represented. Operation HAPPY VALLEY, conducted from 13-31 October 1965, is typical of extended clearing and securing operations in a TAOR, conducted with an intention to remain in and pacify an area.

b. Operation HAPPY VALLEY was preceded by a battalion size recovery operation (2d Bn, 5th Cav) and involved two brigades of the 1st Cavalry Division in the first phase (domination). The second two phases, however, (reconstruction and consolidation) were accomplished with only one brigade. At unit level the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry participated in all phases including follow-up civic actions. These actions took place in the Vinh Thanh Valley just inside the northeast edge of the 1st Cavalry Division's TAOR and roughly 20 kilometers from the An Khe division base (see sketch map).

c. The purpose of this issue of Lessons Learned is to illustrate a successful operation in which a completely VC dominated area was fully restored to government control and to highlight the tactics and techniques employed by the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, in the accomplishment of its mission.

2. (CMHA) TERRAIN AND WEATHER:

The Vinh Thanh Valley runs north and south, two to five kilometers wide and 20 kilometers long. The Song Can River, flowing south through the valley then east to the South China Sea, has many small streams emptying into it from the sharp ravines extending deep into the rugged surrounding hills. Movement through the thick undergrowth on the slopes is therefore

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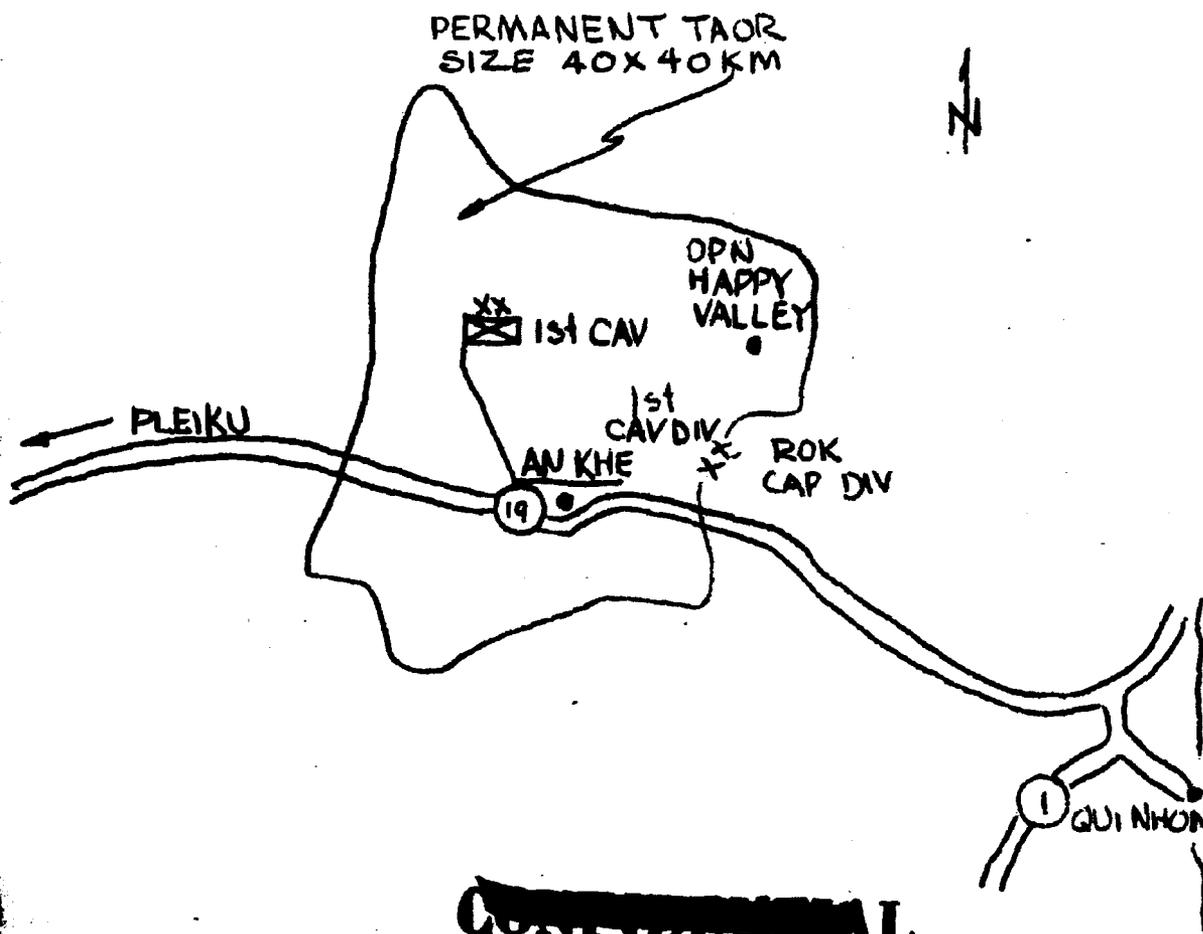
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made doubly difficult. The bottom of the valley floor, however, is relatively flat, consisting of patches of grazing land interspersed among and on the edges of the paddies. Heavy rainfall often causes flash flooding; temperatures and humidity are consistently high.

SKETCH MAP  
(Not to Scale)



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3. (CMHA) ENEMY SITUATION:

In March 1965, an influx of VC into Vinh Thanh Valley began and with them came a large increase in frequency of terrorism. Forts, schools, churches, bridges, and other buildings were methodically burned. By May, VC domination was complete; the former village and hamlet leadership had been destroyed or discredited, and the population reorganized. Propaganda, recruiting, and food assessment teams were created and active. Because of the lack of GVN or US Army influence in the area, intelligence was minimal.

4. (CMHA) MISSION:

Within the framework of the overall plan, the mission of the 1/5th Cavalry was to provide security for Batteries A and C, 77th Artillery, and Company B, 8th Engineers, during the construction and establishment of a US Special Forces camp; to pacify the valley through offensive military operations, and to establish and conduct psychological and civic action programs.

5. (CMHA) ORGANIZATION:

a. All assault elements of the 1/5 Cavalry travelled as lightly as possible in order to increase mobility in the rugged terrain. Even so, the only major change from TOE in rifle company organization for combat was that each company carried only one of its 81mm mortars, the others being left at the battalion base.

b. The combat support company was used as an additional maneuver element. Composed of the reconnaissance platoon, the antitank platoon and elements of the heavy mortar platoon and company headquarters, it was frequently given a mission as a blocking force into which other rifle companies maneuvered the enemy. It was also used in other roles; security for the CP, Eagle Flights and as a battalion quick reaction force. When the company fragmented for smaller unit missions during the latter phases of the operation, the reconnaissance platoon, with national police attached, was employed by section, with two .50 caliber MG's per section for perimeter defense. The 106mm HR's were roadbound and hence not employed extensively except for limited H&I fires. The mortar platoon usually remained at the battalion base in general support of the battalion. It did, however, displace four times to support company sized operations.

c. Attachments at the battalion level consisted of IPW personnel, a psychological warfare team, an AN/PPS-4, radar team, and several national policemen who were often further attached to the companies. Additionally, a scout team with two H-13 helicopters from the 1/9th Cavalry, and a tactical air control party augmented the battalion.

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d. Artillery support was provided by Batteries A and C, 77th Artillery, and on-call aerial rocket artillery (ARA) from the 2/20th Artillery. Company B, 8th Engineers, responsible for building the Special Forces camp, was often able to provide support for civic action programs.

6. (CMHA) EXECUTION:

a. Operation HAPPY VALLEY was divided into three distinct phases:

- (1) Domination (13-19 October).
- (2) Resettlement and Reconstruction (20-25 October).
- (3) Consolidation (23-31 October).

b. Domination (13-19 October)

(1) This phase was characterized by a massive show of force in the more heavily populated (southern) sections of the valley (two brigades participating). Air assaults of one and two company sizes were conducted daily against known or suspected VC locations and as the VC withdrew, emphasis was shifted from the southern end of the valley to the north.

(2) A battalion perimeter was established from which company operations were conducted at increasing distances from the base. Each operation usually lasted from one to three days, covering an area from 3000 to 5000 meters in length and 1000 meters in width. Most of the movement was over rice paddies, through hamlets, and up the fingers of surrounding land forms. Where extensive operation in the hills was required, however, a maneuver element was helilifted to the high ground, which then worked down towards a prepositioned blocking force in the valley covering the natural and expected routes of VC withdrawal. Many camps and several battalion VC training camps were thus discovered and destroyed.

(3) Because of the extended and flexible nature of the operations, control was usually maintained solely by radio, sometimes employing long wire and half-rhombic antennas. The battalion commander usually directed operations from an airborne command post, having at his disposal in the UH-1D an AN/PRC-25 and an AN/ARC-122 (console).

(4) Preparatory fires on each LZ were considered responsible for the extremely light resistance found. Only two incidents of minor and sporadic sniper fire were reported by assault elements on landing. Such thorough preparation required a high degree of coordination, to include precise timing, which was necessitated by the short flight time between the pick-up zones (PZ's) and LZ's. Air strikes normally lasting 20 minutes were

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followed by intensive 105mm howitzer fire for two to three minutes. Following the tube artillery, aerial rocket artillery was on in seconds, followed by the "slicks," the troop ships. Gunships swept the surrounding area with fire as the troops landed, and then covered their deployment. No orbit areas for the slicks were used because the narrowness of the valley would have made them more vulnerable to small arms fire from the surrounding hills.

(5) Only for certain Eagle Flights was the artillery preparation dispensed with. An Eagle Flight, as the name implies, is a rapid reaction force whose employment is characterized by lack of preplanned LZ's and the acceptance of limited fire support. Normally the battalion reserve or an element of it is used in this role. The team of air scouts from the 1/9th Cavalry or the airborne unit commanders themselves were often able to spot VC suspects fleeing areas where air assaults and operations were taking place. Information obtained in this manner was immediately transmitted to the Eagle Flight commander who was able to apprehend the suspects. On 25 October, the reconnaissance platoon conducted a typical Eagle Flight operation by landing two small forces, a sweeping and a blocking force, and successfully sealing off and clearing a hamlet into which VC suspects were seen moving.

(6) Several problems were encountered during these operations. One was caused by a heavy rainfall which led to a rapid rise of streams and the river to the flash flood stage. Units attempting to cross the previously fordable streams found the route closed on their return. Several weapons and other equipment were lost in crossing operations; thereafter all unit crossings and extractions upon completion of missions were made by helicopter.

(7) A further problem was the logistics of evacuating rice caches and captured VC and VC suspects. A standby force was created, consisting of two UH-1D helicopters and one squad equipped with sacks and shovels kept on alert at the battalion CP. By using this team to sack and evacuate rice, and guard and evacuate VC, ground units were permitted to continue their operations at a faster pace.

(8) Summary: At the conclusion of the first, or domination phase, major VC units had been cleared from the area and a relatively peaceful and stable environment established for the conduct of Phase II, resettlement and reconstruction. Of particular note during this phase are the following techniques:

(a) A show of force to establish the US presence.

(b) Flexible planning at all levels.

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(c) Rapidly executed small scale operations, involving maneuver and blocking elements.

(d) Precisely timed, effective fire support.

(c) Implementation of an effective rice evacuation plan.

c. Resettlement and Reconstruction (20-25 October)

(1) During this phase, active operations continued, though on a smaller scale. Emphasis was laid on psychological measures designed to increase the confidence of the population and encourage the former inhabitants to return, resettle, and reconstruct the hamlet and village complexes.

(2) The engineer company opened up 15 kilometers of valley road which had been cut with road blocks and trenches by the VC. The company then moved heavy equipment up the road to begin building the new Special Forces sponsored Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) camp. As the construction of the camp progressed, it became evident to the people that a permanent, stabilizing force would remain in the valley and that security would not vanish bringing on return of the VC as soon as the American troops left. Gradually the people's confidence was gained, and some began returning to the upper reaches of the valley.

(3) Gaining the confidence of the people was not easy. Initially, large numbers were seen at the start of the operation coming down from the hills early in the morning, gathering possessions and rice and departing the area by mid-afternoon. With the opening of the road, the arrival of two CIDG companies at the camp and the waning VC influence, the mid-afternoon exodus ceased and large groups of people (several in excess of 250) came north up the road with their possessions to resettle.

(4) Helicopters equipped with loudspeakers were used to broadcast messages to the people, encourage their return to the hamlets, to explain the newly imposed curfew and to disseminate other items of local interest. Apart from the obvious success which these helicopters had in influencing the populace, it is interesting to note the VC reaction. The VC attempted to drown out the broadcasts by banging on pots and pans and also shot at the helicopters, something they did not normally do since they had learned that shooting at helicopters generally brought return fire of far greater intensity. Shooting at the helicopters did however, have the effect of making them fly higher, thus degrading somewhat their effectiveness.

(5) The control of personnel movement in the valley was an essential element of reconstruction. During daylight hours, aerial

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observation and saturation patrolling effectively monitored all movement. During the curfew hours (from 1930 to 0630 hours daily) and periods of reduced visibility, AN/PPS-4 radar teams were able to pinpoint movement. At night, the searchlight helicopter from the 2/20th Artillery (ARA) was called in to illuminate the contact while 105mm rounds illuminated the surrounding area. In addition, HE rounds were placed on the hill masses nearby. This so impressed curfew violators that all movement virtually ceased.

(6) Meanwhile, daily air assaults of platoon and company size were continued. Small unit saturation patrolling and night ambushes were increased and overnight company patrol bases established. After units were prepositioned in blocking or intercept positions prior to daylight, feint assaults with empty helicopters were used to force small VC elements to withdraw from the hamlets and move toward prepositioned ambushes. H&I fires were moved off the valley floor and into the hills and stream beds where known VC camps and ambush sites were located. Maximum measures were taken to preclude unnecessary damage and injury to personnel and livestock.

(7) Coordination with the district and former village chiefs was maintained, and national police who were former residents of the valley were used to the maximum to reestablish a civil police structure and point out VC suspects.

(8) Summary: During the second phase (resettlement and reconstruction) active operations continued but on a smaller scale, with emphasis being placed on psychological measures designed to gain the confidence of the population and encourage resettlement and reconstruction of hamlets and village complexes. Noteworthy during the phase are the following techniques and objectives:

- (a) Gaining the confidence of the people.
- (b) Saturation patrolling and aerial observation to effectively monitor all movement.
- (c) Use of overnight company patrol bases.
- (d) Feint assaults with empty helicopters
- (e) Employment of National Police who were former residents of the valley to reestablish police structure.

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d. Consolidation (26-31 October)

(1) Daily saturation patrols continued with squads operating generally from platoon patrol bases. Psychological warfare and civic action programs took on momentum.

(2) The nonavailability of a ground loudspeaker system and maintenance difficulties with the loudspeaker helicopter hampered the PSYWAR operations somewhat, but the overall program nevertheless was very effective. Explanations of curfew and the American presence in Vietnam, announcements of the sick call program and Operation FRIENDSHIP, and urgings for the VC to surrender were included among missions undertaken by this aircraft. In addition, over 5000 leaflets were distributed.

(3) A medical program was initiated which proved most effective. Only seven patients were treated the first day, but by the end of the period 40 to 60 patients a day were being treated by the battalion surgeon for a variety of wounds and illnesses. A total of 891 civilians were treated at the battalion dispensary, not including the many treated by company aidmen during operations.

(4) Local construction and rebuilding of a church, several public and private buildings and sections of road in the hamlets all served to increase the goodwill of the people.

(5) The culmination of Operation HAPPY VALLEY was a ceremony known as Operation FRIENDSHIP during which the district chief, several local Vietnamese dignitaries, and the battalion commander all made speeches. The ceremony was opened with a concert by the division band, and closed with the distribution of 550 pounds of CARE clothing, large quantities of milk, orange juice, salt, candy, sewing kits, and "C" ration accessory packs.

(6) A significant measure of the success of the program was the marked increase towards the end of the operation in the number of village informants and policeman who came forward to give information concerning VC locations, key VC leaders and tax agents, and rice caches.

(7) Summary: At the conclusion of the consolidation phase a stable and secured environment had been established. Particularly noteworthy during this phase are the following tactics and techniques.

(a) Daily saturation patrolling continued at squad level.

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(b) The momentum of psychological warfare and civic action programs was increased.

(c) Platoon patrol bases were established.

(d) A medical program was initiated.

(e) Local reconstruction programs were undertaken.

(f) Culmination of the operation by a meaningful ceremony.

7. (CMHA) ANALYSIS:

In reviewing this operation from the standpoint of both the assigned mission and the techniques employed, it is evident that the basis for success lay in the overall plan which was executed in a step-by-step, methodical manner. It was recognized that only after effective VC influence had been eliminated could the confidence of the people be gained and a sound basis laid for resettlement and reconstruction. As the VC presence was progressively destroyed, military activities decreased in scale and additional emphasis was added to the civic action campaign. It must be noted, however, that effective military operations were conducted throughout to insure that ground, once gained, was not lost. In summary, the three phases of Operation HAPPY VALLEY; domination, resettlement and reconstruction, and consolidation, are essential elements of a successful pacification program, especially in areas lately held by the VC. Only within the framework of a secure environment, as developed in the initial phase and continued throughout the operation, could the area be returned to government control on a sound basis.

8. (CMHA) LESSONS LEARNED:

a. The operation must be planned for sufficient duration to insure a stabilizing and lasting effect in the area. A secure environment is essential to a successful pacification program.

b. The area scheduled for pacification must be assigned far enough in advance to permit development of PSYWAR and civic action programs by the designated unit prior to its commitment.

c. Agricultural and social welfare advisory teams should accompany battalions on pacification and reconstruction missions.

d. A ground loudspeaker unit should be made available to units for civic action work. Pre-planned leaflet drops should also be integrated into this program.

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e. National Police familiar with the area of interest should accompany military units on this type of operation. They are vital to the reestablishment of local civil order in areas where VC influence has resulted in complete domination of the village leadership and are effective in sorting out of the VC and VCS personnel from the local population.

f. An essential consideration in reducing the equipment and manpower required to achieve the desired end result in this type operation is the integration into the operational concept of a pre-planned PSYWAR program specifically tailored to the target area.

g. Thorough planning covering all phases of the effort is essential.

FOR THE COMMANDER:



Wm. C. CARMICHAEL  
Major, AGC  
Asst AG

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