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19 November 1970

1ACD Intelligence Newsletter #8

Subject: (C) VC Tactics and Operational Procedures (U)

The following information pertaining to VC tactics and procedures was obtained through the interrogation of a VC (PW), Assistant Battalion Commander, captured near Xuan Loc, Long Khanh Province, on 01 April 1970. The report has previously appeared in the Hq, USARV Combat Intelligence Lessons pamphlet dated 25 August 1970 and is reproduced by G2, 1ACD for dissemination down to and including the platoon level. It is a very comprehensive report and the tactics and procedures described have been verified as valid on numerous occasions.

1. Basic Defensive Actions: Defensive actions and preparations depend on the terrain. Dispositions are not standardized; however, the tactics remain the same. When a local force company is not strong enough to stand and fight, the unit will be broken down into a maximum of 5 teams having 4 to 5 men per team. Each team is assigned a sector (or area) to defend. The teams are armed with individual weapons. The company has three B-40 rocket launchers but no machineguns. The B-40's are controlled from a central point and deployed to support the five teams as the situation requires. B-40's are shifted by runner (Figure 1).

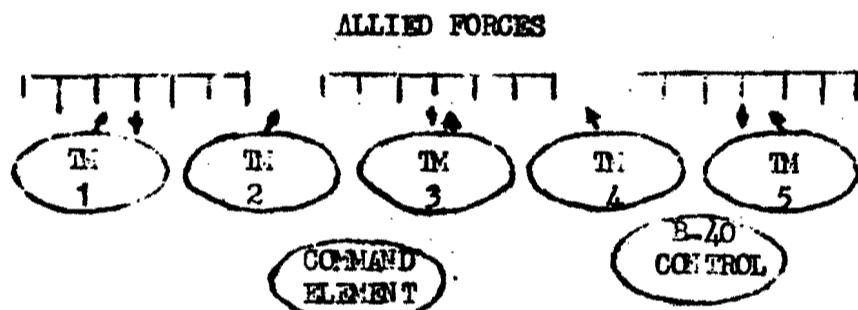


Figure 1 - Defense - Inferior Strength

An orderly withdrawal will be made to the flank when the situation permits. (Figures 2 and 3) The teams fight in the open, not from prepared bunkers.

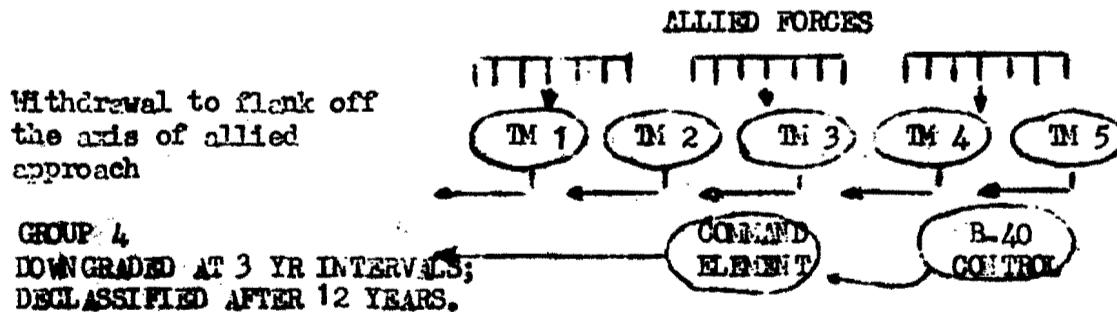


Figure 2 - Initial Withdrawal Movement

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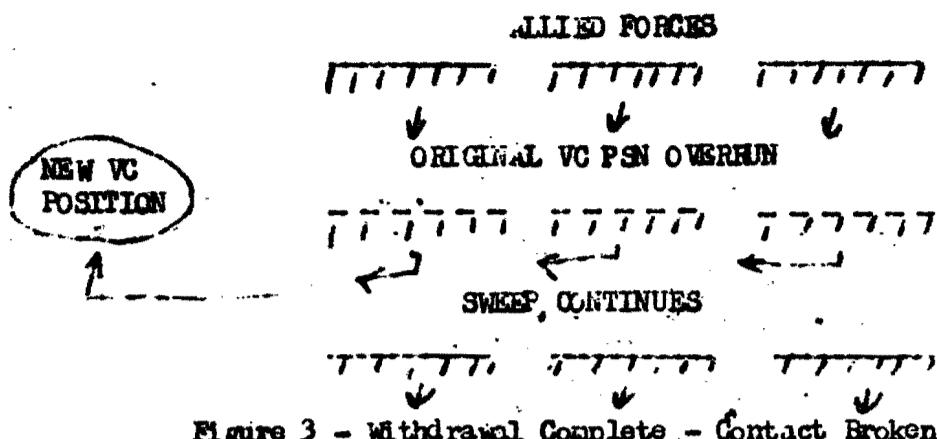


Figure 3 - Withdrawal Complete - Contact Broken

When the unit is determined to be strong enough to oppose the enemy, they fight from prepared bunkers and trenches rather than in the open. They do not leave these prepared positions until overtaken by superior forces. Once overtaken they split into teams and withdraw as described above.

2. Warning System: When allied forces are in the general area, a three-man reconnaissance team is sent out 1,000 to 2,000 meters from the unit. When the allies advance toward the unit, the reconnaissance team either fires three shots or sends a runner to deliver the warning verbally. In either case, the unit withdraws to avoid contact.
3. Base Camp Withdrawals: See paragraph 1.
4. Shadowing of allied Troops: Allied troops are virtually always followed (shadowed) by the VC. Each VC unit has the responsibility to shadow allied forces as long as they are in the VC's AO. Shadowing is accomplished with a few men who never use the same trails as the opposing force. This is because the VC fear running into mines and stay behind ambushes. Instead, a parallel or an intersecting route is used.
5. Allied Movements: All allied force operations are very obvious to the VC, especially operations conducted by the Americans. Reasons are:
 - a. Many fixed wing spotter aircraft recon the area of operation.
 - b. There are detailed preparations. Trucks and tracked vehicles move up and down the roads. Numerous helicopters shuttle about the area.
 - c. The operational area of landing zones are prepared by many air strikes. The VC (PW) stressed that everyone knows that certain actions will be taken by allied forces. For instance, B-52 strikes are invariably followed up by ground troops. Often tac air strikes are followed by troops, especially if several strikes are conducted. The source does not believe that the American Army is capable of a single, swift move from one point to another. He believes that the Americans lack the ability to move either quickly or with surprise.

2
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6. Effectiveness of Infantry: The allied infantry is far more effective against the VC than mechanized operations. The dispersion of dismounted infantry moving does not allow for good targets and they are more difficult to detect. On the other hand, tracked vehicles are very noisy, hard to maneuver in the jungle, and make outstanding targets. Destruction of armored vehicles makes very good propaganda for the VC since the results are highly visible and dramatic. This is not the case in a dismounted infantry fight. The VC especially like to engage APCs because they are easy targets for RPGs. Tanks present a more difficult target and are difficult to destroy.

7. Movement Procedures: When moving there is at least one three-man reconnaissance team and sometimes half a squad (5-6 personnel) from 500 to 600 meters in front of the unit. The main body maintains an interval of 5 to 10 meters between each man and moves single file. There is no flank or rear security in a local force move. This is not required because the VC do not move on trails but go through the jungle. There is no requirement to check for stragglers because local force personnel are thoroughly familiar with the operational area. This is not the case in a main force unit. They must have a rear team which follows behind and polices up stragglers; however, flank security elements are not employed.

8. ambush Countermeasures:

a. When a local force company is ambushed, only those personnel in the kill zone will return fire. All other personnel take up firing positions but do not fire. All personnel immediately search for an escape route. The unit remains in place until orders are given to withdraw. Before moving a unit into an operational area, a briefing is given on what to do in the event of an ambush. When an ambush is encountered, the unit withdraws in the opposite direction for approximately 400 to 500 meters, as previously directed by the troop commander. This tactic is employed when mines do not block the withdrawal route (Figure 4).

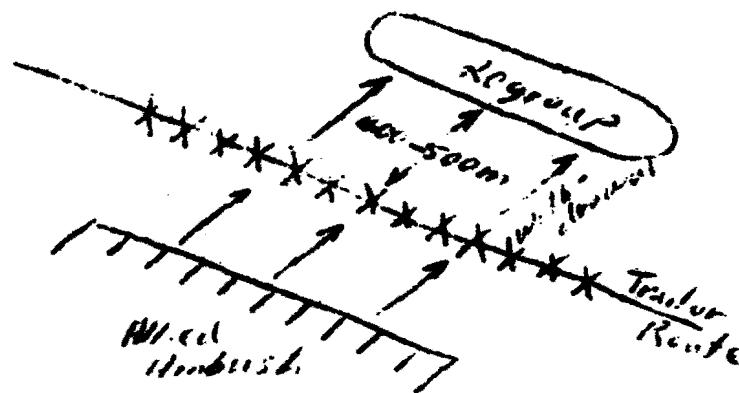


Figure 4 - Ambush Withdrawal - No Mines Blocking

b. Where there is a mined area blocking the withdrawal route, a different procedure is used. The column is divided into two elements. The front element moves forward out of the kill zone and the rear element reverses their direction out of the zone. Each element then regroups and moves around

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to the rear of the mined area (Figure 5). If hard pressed, the two groups will move out of the ambush area separately and will not attempt to regroup at Stage Area 2. They will travel away from each other and regroup at some other predesignated point.

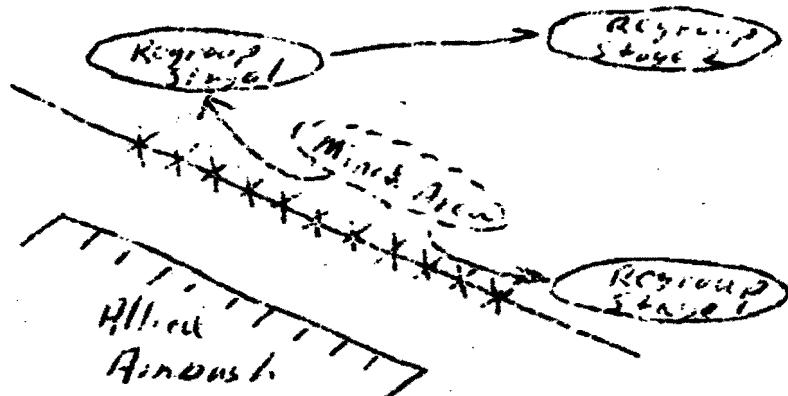


Figure 5 - Ambush Withdrawal - Mines Blocking

9. Basic Offensive Operations: Attacks are carried out in several stages of planning, reconnaissance, and execution. A concept or theory of operation is developed by higher authority or by the local commander. The reconnaissance element recons the area. This must take place at least four to five days in advance of the attack. This time does not include the time required for movement to the objective by the reconnaissance team or by the attacking force. The CO or XO of the attacking force will usually personally lead the reconnaissance element. After an operation plan has been written a critique of the plan is made by the entire company. This critique usually takes approximately one full day. A sand table model is used for the final briefing. This is always accomplished as soon as possible before the attack. The unit moves immediately after the sand table briefing to an assembly area near the objective (approximately 500 meters away). The movement to the assembly area from the base camp could take one or more nights depending on the distance to be traveled. The attacks are very well planned down to the last detail. There are no actual rehearsals. The sand table briefing is used in lieu of a rehearsal. The role of the local (village) guerrillas is to serve as guides. After they lead the company to the objective they withdraw to the company command element's location. The guerrillas are not used in the attack because they are too valuable to the local units. The guerrillas also serve the main force units in the same manner. When a local force unit supports a main force action, it does so by launching an attack separately at a different location. The local force unit will not combine with the main forces in an attack for the following reasons:

- a. The main force attacks only when it can do so alone and without outside help.
- b. Main force units suffer considerable casualties from air and artillery. The local force is too valuable to the local party cause to be subjected to these possible losses; therefore, they are not used in a combined assault.

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c. The local force is considered to be more valuable to the main force by utilization in a diversionary role.

10. Withdrawal from the Battlefield: If a VC unit is successful in overrunning an objective, withdrawal is no problem. This is because the allies do not possess the capability to relieve an objective at night. Even if reinforcements are used, they are too slow. Withdrawal in case of failure is studied during the unit table briefings prior to the attack. The re-assembly areas are always the same as the assembly areas. The route of withdrawal is the same as the approach route. The reasoning is that to use a different route complicates the planning and is difficult to execute. Wounded, dead, PW and equipment are evacuated in planned steps under covering fires of designated elements from preselected positions.

11. Police of the Battlefield: The company XO with one squad or platoon is responsible for policing all captured documents, weapons and other equipment from the battlefield. The company political officer (PO) with one platoon is responsible for removing all dead and wounded. The company assistant political officer (APO) is responsible for the evacuation of all PWs from the battlefield. This is his only task during evacuation. When all personnel are assembled, the PO addresses the prisoners and advises them not to be afraid for they will not be harmed. RVN prisoners are separated, then turned over to the local village guerrillas. Police of the battlefield is accomplished immediately following the action - never later. In jungle actions the VC are afraid that if they attempt to police then later (perhaps the next day), they will be subjected to artillery and air strikes.

12. Prisoners of War (PW): The VC (PW) had a rather extensive knowledge of PW and PW-handling procedures. He claims to have captured, guarded, and transported US and Australian PWs on several occasions. The last case was in May 69 when 13 Australians were captured. His unit transported them to War Zone D. The trip took approximately one and one-half months each way. The reason for the lengthy travel time was because of the amount of food and equipment that had to be carried. The prisoners were tied left arm to left arm in a continuous line with nylon parachute cord. They were allowed to keep their boots, etc., to facilitate walking. Somewhere in War Zone D they were turned over to a team from COSVN who evacuated them to COSVN Headquarters in Cambodia. ARVN prisoners are turned over to the village guerrillas at the reassembly area. These guerrillas have the mission of taking the ARVN PWs to the province detention camp where they are turned over to the prison camp cadre. They are not further evacuated. US and other allied personnel are never given to the local guerrillas but must be kept by the capturing unit. They are taken to the unit's base camp where province headquarters is notified by flash courier (Xuan Loc District has no radios). Province then notifies COSVN by radio that prisoners have been captured. Money is given to the capturing unit by province to purchase "C" rations on the black market to feed the prisoners. This is because the Vietnamese diet is not suitable for Westerners. (This is in compliance with the Geneva Convention.) COSVN advises provinces to establish a meeting point approximately half way between the location of the unit and COSVN. The PWs are then delivered to COSVN by the capturing unit. COSVN considers that US and allied PWs (other than ARVN) are VIPs. COSVN is very

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concerned that if subordinate commands hold the PWs they will be mistreated or not given adequate security; consequently, all non-ARVN PWs are evacuated to COSVN Headquarters. Suitable food is difficult to obtain at lower echelon units, but is apparently available at COSVN Headquarters. In general, there are too many problems in handling PWs at lower levels. PWs other than ARVN are not allowed to talk or to be spoken to except by one man who is assigned to each PW. This man (VC) is completely responsible for the security and welfare of his PW. The PW must ask for food, water, etc., by using sign language. Then only the assigned guard can assist him. American PWs are sometimes dropped off to district and province by main force regiments because they do not have time to evacuate them. Xuan Loc District force units have never captured an American, but have handled some who were captured by main force units. COSVN's policies for all PWs are theoretically the same. COSVN insists on good treatment, medical care, and security for all prisoners. For any lapse in this policy, the unit is answerable directly to COSVN. Training is held in every unit concerning the proper treatment of prisoners. Source believes that from his own observation, the treatment of prisoners on both sides is generally compatible. He pointed out that the VC lack good medical facilities below the province level, but every attempt is made to get adequate treatment for wounded PWs.

13. Booby Traps and Mines: Many are used but not regularly. If used, they are employed for specific missions and then only as directed by higher authority. Man traps are never used. The use of these is considered to have been discontinued because of their crudeness.

14. Mining of Caches: Food caches are ordered by COSVN and are never booby-trapped. Because of the shortage of food, caches must be accessible to all units. If a passing unit uses some food, the unit which owns the cache submits a claim for reimbursement to the Rear Service Group. Should someone booby trap a food cache, and another unit sets them off, the unit which emplaced the traps is answerable directly to COSVN, no matter how low in the chain of command it is. This is a very serious offense and the unit commander could be charged with murder if anyone is killed. Weapon caches are allowed to be booby trapped by COSVN; however, in Xuan Loc District they are not because they are well hidden and/or defended. If it is felt that the cache may be found, it is relocated rather than booby trapped. A security element is assigned to guard the cache. They interpose themselves between the enemy and the cache and ambush to keep the enemy force away. Xuan Loc has never had any medical caches. The medical caches are only found associated with large medical units.

15. Tactics Used During Bombardments: After a F.A.C aircraft arrives in an operational area and before airstrikes are executed, an attempt is made to leave the area. If this is not possible, cover is taken in bunkers and trenches. After the strike, the unit departs the area. Artillery strikes are not effective enough to warrant leaving an area. In an unsupported artillery or gunship strike, the unit takes cover and remains in the area. When artillery is used to support a troop attack, the procedures are different. Assuming that prior warning failed and the VC are surprised in their camp, the VC immediately employ all organic weapons. The allied unit will normally withdraw and call for artillery. As the allies pull back, the VC take cover and wait out the bombardment. As the bombardment lifts the VC observe in

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what direction the last round impacted. This direction will always be away from the allied troops since they (allies) do not walk their artillery into friendly positions. After the barrage lifts, and the allies are approaching the base camp or contact point, the VC withdraw in the direction of the last artillery round. There is always enough time to withdraw because the allied forces move very slowly on the base camp or contact area. After the action, one or two courses of action are taken. The first and most common is to circle around behind the allies and wait for him to sweep through the camp. After it leaves, the base camp is reoccupied. It is believed that after the base camp is swept, it is the safest place around since doubling back by the allies is virtually unheard of. A shallow team is assigned and if the allies do reverse, warning will be given. The second course of action is to move to another base camp some distance away. There are numerous base camps which can be used. In every action, attempts are made to evacuate the dead, wounded, and weapons. If necessary, they are abandoned. Wounded have first priority, weapons next, then the dead.

Interrogator's Comments: The source's remarks indicate that he holds US tactics in contempt but regards highly the tenaciousness, ability, bravery, and firepower of allied forces. He in no way underestimates the allies. He is baffled at the lack of willingness to close in for a fight, allowing the VC to repeatedly escape. He is equally puzzled as to why tactics are so inflexible and why the allies have not been able to develop and adapt with lessons learned. He has a complete understanding that the VC have absolutely no hope of winning any set-piece battles. His troops are far too few and weak. Therefore, all that he describes is essentially defensive in nature, except for the classic description of VC assaults on a fixed objective. This instance of low-key, long-range guerrilla warfare is accepted by him without remorse. He believes that it will ultimately be successful. The constant theme is to stay alive to fight another day. Each day the force remains in being is a step toward final victory. In this he demonstrates the doctrine of the classic revolutionary guerrilla leader.

John Kizirian
JOHN KIZIRIAN
LTC, GS
ACofS, CG

Distribution: a + (Down to Platoon Level)
 Plus CG, II FFV, LBN, RVN (5 cys)
 CO, 11th ACB, Di An, RVN (5 cys)
 CG, 25th Inf Div, Cu Chi, RVN (5 cys)
 C2, 1 AD (10 cys)
 CG, 5th ARVN Div, Lai Khe, RVN (LNO) (5 cys)
 CG, 18th ARVN Div, Auan Loc, RVN (II FFV) (5 cys)
 CG, III ARVN CORPS, Bien Hoa, RVN (II FFV) (5 cys)
 CO, 1st ATF, Nui Dat, RVN (5 cys)

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