



HEADQUARTERS U.S. ARMY VIETNAM

COMBAT LESSONS BULLETIN

NUMBER 3

10 May 1969

A SERGEANT MAJOR'S COMBAT TIPS

GENERAL

Combat Lessons Bulletins are published to insure that subordinate commanders derive maximum benefit from the lessons learned by other units during combat operations in Vietnam. Timely exchange of new techniques and ideas may assist commanders in overcoming obstacles within their own areas of responsibility.

COMBAT TIPS

Sergeant Major Ted G. Arthurs, having served as a Rifle Company First Sergeant in the Korean War, was the Sergeant Major of the 4th Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade in Vietnam. He compiled and wrote the following Combat Tips in the hopes of helping senior NCO's and junior combat leaders. Sergeant Major Arthurs states, "at times in Vietnam I was completely bewildered and had to ask a myriad of questions in order to understand what people were talking about and the reasons for certain actions. I am convinced from talking with other NCO's from other outfits that most of the tips I am conveying are valid. Each reader can judge for himself whether or not these Combat Tips have helped him. I sincerely hope so."

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

No alcoholic beverages, including beer, will be introduced into the battalion area without the express permission of the Battalion Commander.

BITES CAUSING HYDROPHOBIA

Many troopers are bitten by rodents, monkeys, dogs and other warm blooded animals, causing hydrophobia (rabies). Rabies is quite prevalent in Vietnam and

once contracted is 100% fatal, usually within 30 to 50 days. If bitten, you should report this to the medics immediately. Although the antidote is painful, and consists of fourteen shots under the skin of the stomach, I have personally taken them and recommend them instead of an undertaker.

BUNKERS

Depending upon the area you are operating in, the enemy has been known to kill many troopers who make the mistake of sitting up on top of a bunker or sandbagged hole. This is not only with bullets, but often by command detonated enemy claymores (40 pounds or more) which are quite accurate and very devastating. Don't invite this by sitting on top. While we are on this subject, it is the careless, untidy trooper who is bitten by rats. Littering the area with trash and particles of food is what draws the rat which bites you in your sleep.

DISPERSION

We have been always trained to keep well dispersed. This applies doubly to LZs and chow lines. Ask Bravo Company troopers what happened on 8 November 1967 at Dak To because of a lack of dispersion. It only takes once to let your guard down.

FIRE SUPPORT BASE

Your steel helmet will be worn at all times and your weapon and ammunition will be carried with you when you leave your area, without exception. The first sergeant of the rifle unit securing the fire support base will supply one NCO to the chow line daily. As a minimum he will:

a. Pick up a "Magic Marker" from the first cook and insure that each man coming through the line has his name and Army service number printed on the outside of both jungle boots one inch down from the top. This is for easy future inspection. It stays just as long as if it were printed on the inside, believe it or not. This decreases the odds of your buddy getting planted in your home town and you in his, should you get burned or blown loose from the dogtags. You don't care if that happens? Think about being carried MIA for lack of identification and long periods of unnecessary anxiety being caused your loved ones. This is serious business.

b. Check each man for the challenge and password.

c. Turn back anyone needing a shave.

d. Introduce anyone needing a haircut to the battalion barber.

- e. Inspect each man's weapon. If it's not clean, the man doesn't eat.
- f. Insure proper dispersion.
- g. Other orders as necessary. (I have done all the above many times and know this NCO can accomplish the above and still keep the chow line moving.)

KIT CARSON SCOUTS

These fellows are ex-VC or NVA soldiers who work for the US . . . Listen to them and learn. A few of the things they taught us:

- a. Two enemy are detailed to follow each American company size unit. They report intelligence and dig up all sumps and salvage everything which you throw away. You could be getting shot with your own ammo which you stupidly discarded yesterday or a week ago. Punch holes in all "C" ration cans you don't use. Destroy everything not used. The enemy gleefully pounces on the aluminum foil lined packets from your "C" rations and uses them to carry rice, dried fish, etc.
- b. When the enemy breaks contact with you, instead of retreating, he usually goes out around and ends up behind you.
- c. A set number of enemy soldiers in each company are previously designated as gravediggers, and prior to their assault will dig graves for their own comrades and/o themselves and camouflage same. During and after the action their dead are dragged to those holes. That's why you sometimes find few if any bodies.
- d. Get close to these guys and learn. They know their business, and well.

MALARIA

Falciparum malaria can kill you or make you forget permanently whether or not a full house beats a straight. Vivax malaria can make you very sick for a long time (can be recurrent for up to 15 years). Listen to your leaders. Take your pills religiously. Sleeves down and collar buttoned up at 1800 daily because most mosquitoes in RVN are night biters. Use your ointment nightly and your net when you can. Do not listen to the low life who would tell you to intentionally disregard the above precautions and get a nice hospital R&R. Think for yourself. Lastly, if you are hospitalized for wounds or for any reason, make sure you insist the medics provide you with the daily white pill (if you are in an area where your unit has been required to take it) and the weekly red pill (mandatory everywhere in Vietnam) because, believe it or not, we had case after case of soldiers being wounded and

evacuated and the hospitals not keeping them on the pills. In a couple of weeks, BINGO, you come down with malaria. If you think the precautions are a bunch of malarkey, Bravo Company went for six months without a single case while the rest of the battalion tallied six dozen cases.

MARIHUANA

(Sergeant Major Arthurs had some pertinent remarks concerning the dangers of marihuana. He pointed out that personnel who use it can cause violent actions within a unit, loss of sense of direction, and a loss of the individual's sense of responsibility towards himself and the other men in his unit.) He went on to say: The enemy laces some of the marihuana you buy with opium. Try that on for size when these block hippies tell you there ain't no sweat in smoking a little pot. Also the block hippie isn't carrying an M-16, a few hundred rounds and some hand grenades to play with when he gets gooned up. Think about that a bit.

OVERHEAD COVER

Each man carries 15 empty sandbags on his rucksack daily. At night he digs a hole with his buddy, they fill the bags, put overhead cover on the hole and let Clyde turn loose his mortars. The one night you don't do this is the night you will definitely get mortared. Is your life worth some PT? Dig!

SALT TABLETS

In order to prevent heat exhaustion, and depending upon weather conditions, sometimes it is necessary for each man to take 6 to 8 (or more!!) salt tablets. The importance of this is the fact that the entire mission of the unit may be compromised because a dustoff helicopter will give your position away when it comes in for the victim. This is not to mention the fact that in some areas the trees are large and thick and have to be cut to make a landing zone. You can see how just one man failing to take his salt tablets, (or failing to do a lot of other things), can bring his entire unit grief.

SUMPS

(Sergeant Major Arthurs emphasized that sumps can be very dangerous places to loiter. The enemy sometimes places booby traps in or near sumps. Even friendly troops may place serviceable or unserviceable ammunition such as small arms ammunition, grenades, claymores, or mortar rounds in the sump. Since sumps are burned off at a later date, live ammunition can cause casualties. He pointed out the need for sump discipline.) Sergeant Major Arthurs went on to state: In the fire support base, there is just one sump. It is isolated and no one goes near it while it is being burned off.

STANDTO

Each unit has their own SOP as to times. Generally, standto is practiced twice daily for an hour. This is at dawn and at dusk. It's 100% alert, steel pot and weapons. Don't skyline yourself. Experience has proven that Charlie promotes a lot of surprise attacks at these times.

WEAPONS SAFETY

(Weapons are the tools of war, and, as Sergeant Major Arthurs pointed out, they are inherently dangerous. Unless junior leaders insist upon weapons safety, unnecessary friendly casualties are an inevitable result.) Below are some of his recommendations:

a. M-79: One of the best weapons ever devised, but in the hands of a novice it equals friendly deaths.

(1) No brand new replacement is ever armed with an M-79. Wait a month.

(2) No one armed with an M-79 will be permitted to close it at any time unless in actual contact. (I know the complaints by heart, the choppers blow dirt into it, etc.) If you are lenient on this, watch your troops get blown away.

(3) Remember, the new flechette round for the M-79 contains a couple of dozen steel darts which will penetrate both sides of a flak jacket at 50 feet, and wipe out a whole friendly squad.

b. M-16: Once hourly while on the move, a good Rifle Company Commander requires an inspection down the line to insure all safeties are on.

c. Caliber .45 pistol: No rounds permitted in the chamber at any time. Only those required by TO&E may carry one. (Everyone tries to scrounge one otherwise.

d. 81mm mortar: Never fire mortars over a friendly perimeter unless in actual contact. You can usually set it up on the outer edge and still accomplish your H&I, etc.

e. Claymore mines: Do not put trip flares under your mines to keep Charlie from turning them around. Some stumble foot kicks it over, the trip flare cooks off the claymore and more friendly casualties. Insure claymores are so erected so that if Charlie turns one around on you, you can immediately detect it. Keep the wire tight, or stick a piece of luminous tape on the rear, attach "C" ration cans with

stones, etc. If you don't, Charles will turn the mine around toward you, then crawl back and shake the bushes. When you fire it and get yourself, he laughs to himself and silently slips away into the jungle.

(1) Disconnect the mine before bringing it in. Imagine if a man didn't, and dragged the wire behind him. If it caught, it could pull the generating device off the bunker, and activate the claymore. Picture that and remember it.

(2) Claymores can be activated by lightening and static electricity (when they are hooked up) from helicopters landing nearby.

(3) Brush fires on the outer perimeter can cause claymores to cook off. Be careful when putting out these fires.

f. Grenades: Think about this one. You go too if you are in the vicinity of a foulup. Here are some:

(1) Do not straighten pins on grenades at night for easier activation. Here is what happens. Eventually the bending and straightening breaks the pin and it falls out when you least suspect it. Joe forgets to bend his straight pins some morning, and they jostle out as he is moving along wearing them.

(2) Do not run the web strap on your ammo pouch through the grenade pin. It gets pushed from under the belt, and there it is dangling by its pin. You know what that gets you. Run the little web strap entirely around the grenade but not through the pin.

(3) Do not fool with Chicom or other enemy grenades. One man did in another battalion. He lived, but with no arms and a gutful of frags. Many of these grenades are rigged with an instantaneous fuse (booby traps). Keep away.

OBEY YOUR LEADERS

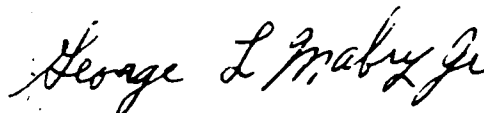
This poop sheet does not cover all that can happen to you if you do not use your head. Open your eyes. Learn and comply. Chances are very good that one year from now you will fly out of that jungle, one or two grades higher in rank, with both your arms and both your legs intact. Remember what I have told you, and correct others who are not complying. That guy could preempt your DEROS.

CONCLUSION

Sergeant Major Arthurs' comments contain some very fundamental guidance in the Art of Soldiering. Of primary interest, are those comments concerning weapons

safety and personal hygiene. The Combat Tips can be of significant value if disseminated to the squad leader and fire team leader level.

FOR THE COMMANDER:



GEORGE L. MABRY, JR.
Major General, US Army
Chief of Staff

DISTRIBUTION:

A plus

USARV G3, DST - 50

CF:

MACV, ATTN: J3-05 - 10

III MAF - 10

7th AF - 10

COMNAVFORV - 10

USAIS, Ft Benning, Ga - 5

USACGSC, Ft Leavenworth, Ka - 5

USAARMS, Ft Knox, Ky - 5

USAFAS, Ft Sill, Ok - 5

USAES, Ft Belvoir, Va - 5