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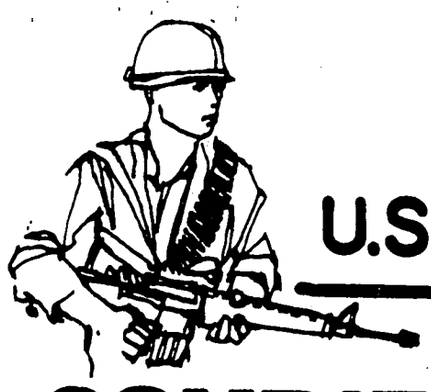

HEADQUARTERS

U.S. ARMY VIETNAM

COMBAT LESSONS BULLETIN

NUMBER 17

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CACHE FINDING OPERATIONS (U)

(U) GENERAL

NVA/VC operations are seriously hampered by discovery and destruction or capture of their storage areas for weapons, ammunition, food and other supplies. Prepositioning of supplies and equipment is necessary for the NVA/VC to execute their stratagem of maintaining the initiative through conduct of offensive operations. Recently, several US units have concentrated their efforts toward developing methods for locating enemy caches. Their methods have proved successful and have served to reduce the activity and capability of the enemy in his efforts to destroy US personnel and property.

The purpose of this bulletin is to highlight those techniques and operations which have produced significant results in locating NVA/VC caches.

(C) THE ENEMY OPERATION

The NVA/VC logistics system relies on the Viet Cong infrastructure for support to effect transportation, construction, production and maintenance. Their logistic facilities are numerous, well dispersed and camouflaged. Every mode of transportation is used over numerous supply routes into and throughout the country. They use accurate formulas and make detailed plans to develop an intricate system for positioning caches and depots. All supply and positioning activity is controlled by the NVA/VC Rear Services Group.

When a unit moves into an area and requires supplies, they are provided by a rear services representative in the area who has arranged for the purchase or procurement of food from villagers or from special stocks maintained by local VC

agents. Weapons and munitions are supplied in the same manner, except supply handlers move the munitions from sanctuaries out of RVN to the designated cache site. Control of the air by FWMAF causes most supplies to be moved at night. Way stations are located along the trail network about every seven kilometers to provide day storage for the supplies and bunkers for protection of the supply handlers while they rest. Great care is taken to camouflage these way stations to prevent identification and subsequent capture by US forces.

(C) CACHE FINDING TECHNIQUES

TRAINING: The 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division has found that training the individual soldier so that he knows what to look for and where to look has significantly improved the results of the Brigade's cache finding operations. Each soldier must be carefully briefed on possible cache site locations and indicators. The following lists typical locations used by the NVA/VC for caches and clues that may indicate the presence of a buried cache or tunnel entrance.

PROBABLE LOCATIONS	INDICATORS
1. In the floor, under fire pits or in the berm of new and old bunkers.	1. Fresh shovel marks. An unusually wide or long fire pit.
2. Branch trails or paths leading off a main trail.	2. Trees containing marks or symbols. Dead end paths, gaps in the vegetation.
3. Along streams or canals.	3. V-notched cuts in banks indicate sampan docking sites.
4. Wells, water holes.	4. Discoloration caused by fresh earth.
5. Graveyards in unpopulated areas.	5. Mounds of earth which may be covered with transplanted vegetation.
6. High, dry areas where houses once stood.	6. Depressions in the earth caused when the soil settles around buried objects.
7. Bamboo thickets.	7. A clump of bamboo stubs that may cover a tunnel entrance.
8. Streams or canals.	8. Sticks that have been stuck as markers in the bottom of a stream or canal.
9. Near prominent, natural or man-made features.	9. An area or object around which booby traps have been set in a pattern.

10. Under roots of fallen trees.

10. Disturbed earth.

After returning from a cache-finding operation, each soldier should be debriefed and pertinent information and observations should be disseminated to all other units. Information obtained may be helpful in detecting patterns the enemy may have established in certain geographic areas.

EQUIPMENT: Equipping soldiers with a probing rod has proven effective in locating caches which are buried several feet underground. The 101st Airborne Division (AM), the 25th Infantry Division and the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, advocate the use of bamboo or steel probing rods to help locate camouflaged tunnel entrances and shallow buried objects. A 1/4" or 1/8" diameter steel rod is an effective probe for compact soils. However, the steel rods will complete the circuit of electrical firing devices used by the enemy in some booby traps. Therefore, in an area where the enemy habitually booby traps his caches, bamboo probes are safer.

Standard Army metal detectors may be used effectively in relatively dry areas to detect metal objects in caches.

The use of bulldozers to uncover suspected tunnels and underground shelters has proven effective.

In addition to the need to properly train and equip the soldier to search, the plan for the operation must allow enough time for alert and informed soldiers to conduct an unhurried and thorough search.

FILES: The 1st Cavalry Division (AM) maintains a reference file of all locations where caches have been found. The NVA/VC who operate in their area of interest have proven to be creatures of habit and often use old cache sites. When increased enemy trail activity is noted by the air cavalry scouts or forward air controllers, the records of cache sites are reviewed and a unit is inserted to conduct a thorough and systematic search of the area.

THE SEARCH: After insertion of the unit, a patrol base is established and a reconnaissance of the area is conducted. When a sign of enemy activity is discovered, particularly when a branch trail off a main trail is located or a patrol finds a cache site, the entire unit is assembled before the area is searched. This assures security for the search team and greater control for the unit commander. The 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne has found that a platoon size element is ideal for searching a suspected cache area. After security has been established, a careful

preliminary search using metal detectors and scout dogs is made to locate any mines or booby traps the enemy may have planted to protect his cache. Then the search platoon, unencumbered by combat gear except for entrenching tools and individual weapons, moves carefully through the suspected area, probing and carefully looking in every conceivable place that may indicate the possibility of a cache. Air Force forward controllers and observers in helicopters are often helpful in locating and guiding the searchers to tunnel entrances or suspect areas.

DOGS: In February 1970, mine and tunnel dogs will be available in RVN for assisting in locating mined and booby trapped areas and tunnel entrances. Mine dogs are trained to work without a leash, on or within three feet of a road or trail, up to 100 feet in front of the handler. The dogs are controlled by voice or arm and hand signals and are trained to sit when they locate evidence of mines, grenades, claymores, or artillery rounds. The tunnel dogs are trained to work at distances up to 30 meters ahead of their handlers. The dog is taught to sit within two feet of a tunnel entrance. Both types of dogs have proven to be effective.

MULTIPLE SWEEPS: The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (M) has found that a single sweep and search of an area by one element often fails to disclose the location of the cache. The Brigade uses two search elements to cover an area twice.

TRAIL WATCHERS: The 101st Airborne Division (AM) has noted that enemy caches located in the northeast portion of the A Shau Valley were camouflaged in an excellent manner. However, enemy movement through the area was indicated by evidence of NVA/VC trail watchers. It was noted after operations were conducted that the enemy had established caches in areas where none were expected based on available intelligence reports. In addition, there was no discernable pattern to the positioning of caches or the storage of materials within the cache sites. For example, of three caches discovered, one was located on a ridge line; a second, approximately 25 meters away, was located midway between the ridge and valley floor; and the third was positioned on the valley floor. Approximately 600 meters from this cache another cache was located on a ridge line in a pit measuring 15' x 10' x 10'. This cache was covered by a thatched roof positioned at ground level and contained over 70,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and lesser amounts of assorted mortar and RPG rounds. The caches noted above are only a few of the many discovered by the 101st Airborne Division (AM) during their operations. In addition to using their rifle companies to locate caches, they have had excellent results from using their air cavalry scouts and their ranger teams.

HOI CHANHS: Hoi Chanhs are an excellent source of information for planning cache finding operations. The 1st Infantry Division has exploited the information supplied by one Hoi Chanh to discover six different caches. The caches contained 20,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 24 light machine guns, two 82mm mortars, 148, 75mm recoilless rifle rounds and assorted other items. Funds have been made available to motivate the Hoi Chanhs to provide information on cache sites. A total of 521,000 piasters was paid for the contents of the caches noted above.

Questions concerning location of cache sites should be posed to all Hoi Chanhs, PW's, and civilian suspects during initial interrogations. Many civilians have been impressed by the NVA/VC to work as laborers for Rear Service Groups and have considerable knowledge about cache locations. Additionally, these personnel should be interrogated again after their initial fright has worn off and it is apparent to them they have something to gain by disclosing information about enemy activity.

All units have reported that Kit Carson Scouts are particularly adept at locating caches.

(C) SUMMARY

Discoveries of caches have disrupted enemy operations in numerous areas. The NVA/VC units depend on the prepositioned supplies and equipment to maintain the initiative. The movement of supplies into an area and the location of numerous cache sites are positive indicators of intended enemy operations. Any sign of increased trail activity may indicate the establishment of a logistical buildup to support an enemy offensive operation. Cache-finding operations have proven to be an effective measure to pre-empt enemy operations.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

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