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COMBAT LESSONS BULLETIN

NUMBER 4

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RANGER OPERATIONS (U)

(U) INTRODUCTION (U)

Ranger companies provide an organic long range patrol capability to each field force, division and separate brigade in RVN. The unit is specially trained, organized and equipped for the specific purpose of functioning as an information gathering agency responsive to the intelligence requirements of the tactical commander. The basic element of the ranger company is the highly trained patrol or ranger team, normally consisting of six men. The number of patrol teams assigned to the ranger companies vary from 28 teams in the field force company, to 16 teams in the division company and to eight teams in the separate brigade.

The concept of operations, team organization, equipment used, team insertion and extraction, reconnaissance and combat patrols are discussed in this combat bulletin. Combat examples are used to illustrate the types of missions assigned.

(C) CONCEPT OF EMPLOYMENT (U)

The enemy movement, strength and tactical dispositions influence the frequency, type and number of ranger teams employed at any one time. When the teams are used on combat patrol missions, the team's strength is often increased from six to eight men. Two six man teams, a "heavy team", may be employed in the same area. The 199th Inf Bde normally employs four six man teams in the same general area. A typical reconnaissance/surveillance mission lasts from three to five days. In the Americal Division, when teams are given deep reconnaissance missions or are placed into suspected enemy concentrations, the missions are of one day duration. Ordinarily, 50% of the unit rest and make preparations for future missions while the remainder are deployed.

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Teams are employed under division control, often with the Air Cavalry Troop, and are also placed in direct support of brigades. In either event, they work directly under the supervision of the ranger platoon headquarters which is located at the tactical operations center of the unit supported. The ranger platoon leader is responsible for planning assigned missions, consistent with the requirements of the tactical commander, and preparing, employing and debriefing the teams.

(U) TEAM ORGANIZATION (U)

As indicated, the patrol teams are built around the basic six man team. The designated team leader organizes his patrol normally with an assistant team leader, two or three scouts and a medic/radiotelephone operator (RTO). The team size varies with the mission requirements and the availability of personnel, with four being the minimum prudent number. When a "heavy team" is formed, one of the two team leaders is designated as the "heavy" patrol team leader. The team leader may carry the command radio, and the RTO carries the radio used for artillery fire requests. Kit Carson Scouts often act as point men, and in the case of the 4th Infantry Division, Montagnard scouts are used. The Americal Division has six ARVN personnel who are Recondo School trained scouts that work with the rangers. Snipers are assigned to the 25th Infantry Division ranger teams.

(C) EQUIPMENT USED (U)

In addition to the weapons and individual equipment carried by an infantry rifle squad member, the teams are equipped according to type and expected duration of the mission assigned. Combat patrols ordinarily require heavier armament than reconnaissance patrols and require the addition of one M-60 machine gun, four to eight claymore mines and a varying number of fragmentation grenades. Smoke, white phosphorous and CS grenades are also carried. Mini-grenades are used if available. PRC-25, PRC-77, PRC-74(AM) and URC-10 (VHF-UHF) are the radios commonly used. Signaling items, such as panels, mirrors, pen flares and strobe lights are essential. An aid kit is carried. The protective mask is carried because the use of CS is often necessary to break enemy contact and facilitate escape and evasion. Snipers use the XM-21 sniper rifle with scope and the AN/PVS-2 starlight scope.

It becomes readily apparent that when food, water, ponchos, extra batteries, extra handsets, compasses, SOI's, extra clothing, sling rope with snap links, ammunition and any other personal items are added, mobility is sacrificed. Re-supply ordinarily is questionable because of possible compromise of the team; therefore, self sufficiency is often mandatory. In the dry season, when availability of water is doubtful, sufficient water must be carried, thus adding to the load of the team. Patrol teams must be carefully inspected prior to insertion to insure the team has the mission essential equipment prescribed. The inspection should include a check for cigarettes, reading matter, commercial radios and other material that may compromise the team's position or contribute to inattentiveness.

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(C) TEAM INSERTION (U)

Patrol teams may be inserted by helicopters, surface vehicles, walk in or by the use of stay behind techniques. The helicopter is the primary means used by all units. For all missions, a reconnaissance of the patrol's AO should be accomplished by the platoon and patrol leaders. The reconnaissance should take place within 24 hours of the planned insertion, normally with the actual insertion helicopter on a one-time fly by. Selection of the operational areas and LZ's are finalized after the reconnaissance. During the actual insertion, two or three false insertions may be made. The sequence of insertions is determined by the terrain and helicopter lift capability.

Immediately upon insertion, the team moves to a secure position and establishes communication with ranger operations headquarters. Since AM radios require antennas which are difficult to erect in emergencies, every attempt is made to establish FM radio communications. The URC-10 provides the capability for establishing emergency radio communications if both the AM and FM radios fail. Communications must be quickly established to exploit any intelligence information obtained and to protect the team.

NVA/VC reconnaissance forces have developed an aggressive warning system to counter heliborne operations. For example, in the 101st Airborne Division (AM) AO, the enemy employs LZ and trail "watchers". The "watcher" attempts to inflict casualties to halt or slow the team, then goes to his base and returns with a larger force, or the "watcher" may immediately go to his base camp and return with a larger force in an attempt to surround the team. In either case, if contact is established, the actions of the team depend on the size and location of the enemy force. If the enemy force is larger and separated from the ranger team by a good distance, the team, after reporting the enemy location, attempts to destroy it with artillery or air strikes. If the force is larger and close, the team reports its location and avoids contact until such time that supporting fires can be brought to bear on the force. If the force is of equal size or smaller, the team may engage if consistent with the mission, or use the above methods as appropriate.

(C) RECONNAISSANCE PATROLS (U)

Area Surveillance: Because of its unusually large AO, the 4th Inf Div usually employs ranger teams in a long range reconnaissance/surveillance role. Teams are inserted into uninhabited jungle covered areas with the mission of maintaining surveillance over likely avenues of enemy approach. Their ability to accomplish this mission and their overall value to the division were proven on 12 Oct 69, when elements of the 24th NVA Regt began moving eastward from base areas toward the MSR, Highway QL 19. The rangers detected the enemy presence and directed continuous artillery and air strikes on the enemy. This disorganized the enemy force and allowed sufficient time for a US mechanized infantry battalion to move into the area. The battalion was able to attain surprise and in a series of contacts killed over 100 enemy in addition to preempting the NVA/VC offense aimed at interdicting the MSR.

Trail watch: The NVA/VC expend a great deal of time and effort establishing major trails. Coverage of the trails by trail watch ranger teams has produced significant results as illustrated by the following 1st Cav Div (AM) operation. Ranger patrol 45 was inserted in the Phuoc Long Province on 3 Nov 69. While moving through the area,

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the team found a heavily used trail. They selected a position that permitted them to observe movement on the trail. In the late afternoon, the team spotted 24 individuals, heavily armed and carrying encased 107mm rocket rounds. The patrol leader requested an LOH scout and gunship team. Upon arrival on station, the scout team found that the enemy force had increased to 40-50. As additional enemy sightings were made, the patrol leader requested aerial rocket artillery and adjusted artillery fire into the area of the enemy sighting. The five hours of constant engagement resulted in 50 NVA KIA. The ranger team remained in the area and continued to adjust artillery fire on suspected enemy locations. At 0436 the next morning, the patrol observed groups of NVA moving out of the area carrying their wounded. At 0657 hours, the patrol engaged two individuals with organic weapons resulting in 1 NVA KIA. Heavy movement was detected around the team. The team was extracted about mid-morning under a heavy volume of fire. Subsequent intelligence revealed that ranger patrol 45 had been responsible for breaking up a planned attack on a fire support base and had played a key role in the destruction of significant numbers of the enemy.

(C) COMBAT PATROLS (U)

Ambush Operations: As the enemy capability and presence in an area of operation declines, combat patrol missions become more appropriate and feasible. For example, in the 25th Inf Div AO, the NVA/VC units are currently employing small forces for movement to target areas and have become skilled at avoiding areas where large US or FVMAF elements are operating. Consequently, ranger teams are being used in a more aggressive role to interdict the movement of the small size enemy forces. Stay behind patrols, dropped during the sweep of an area, have established successful ambushes at suspected enemy river crossing sites or mountain crossing routes.

On 12 Nov 69, a ranger team was inserted by Navy patrol boats. The team located a likely river crossing area and an ambush was set. At approximately 2145 hours, the team observed an estimated ten enemy. When the enemy came within the kill zone of the ambush, the team engaged. There were no friendly casualties and ten enemy were killed.

Prisoner Snatch: On 18 Oct, the 3d Bde, 82d Airborne Div's Ranger Patrols 14 and 15 were taken into the company CP area of a unit about to displace. The patrols displaced to the nearby brush line and concealed themselves. Within two hours after the company moved out, two VC entered the abandoned company position. Both individuals were captured and later provided valuable intelligence information.

(C) TEAM EXTRACTION (U)

The normal means of extraction is by helicopter, although any of the methods used for insertion may also be used for extraction. Ranger teams are extracted either on the scheduled day of the return or during emergencies resulting from enemy actions. Emergency extraction normally results when the team's location is compromised, when necessary to evacuate wounded team members, or when team personnel can no longer sustain themselves in the field. During periods of poor weather, aircraft support is frequently not available, correspondingly this hampers insertion and extraction, sometimes dictating the teams stay in the field being extended.

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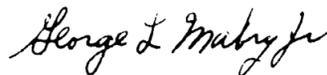
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(U) CONCLUSION (U)

The ranger patrols provide a valuable agency to the commander for obtaining information about the enemy. These highly trained six man patrol teams are equipped for independent operations and are normally inserted in their AO by helicopter. Two broad missions are performed by the rangers: Reconnaissance patrols which include area surveillance and trail watch; and combat patrols, consisting of ambush operations and prisoner snatches. Extraction by helicopter is sometimes hampered by poor weather.

Commanders and staffs, aware of the capabilities and limitations of the ranger patrols, have benefited by use of the timely and accurate information about enemy movements, dispositions and activity which these courageous and dedicated infantry soldiers have provided.

FOR THE COMMANDER:



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

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