

MACV Army "A" Photo Team Films Psyops Unit

Psychological Warfare Units or PSYOPS for shot, were scattered around Vietnam. MACV Army "A" Photo Team had one encounter with this organization. I thinking the photo team travelled to Cu Chi, home of the 15,000 man 25th Inf. Div. Within the confines of this large base, the PSYOPS unit had fences and gate guards around their few buildings, clearly indicating the PSYOPS units were restricted and not very talkative. The PSYOPS unit, the photo team filmed were vague, reclusive or secretive about other endeavors the unit was involved with, other than the known aspects of providing the VC and NVA soldiers the means to defect and the rewards or bounty the Hoi Chanhs would receive for bringing in with them various types of war materials, when the defected to the Saigon government's side.

The term Psychological Warfare is a mouthful, but says little. Because the PSYOPS Units was elusive, can can look to past wars to retrieve an inkling of what transpired. The Japanese had Tokyo Rose, mixing American pop music of the era with propaganda. The North Vietnamese had Hanoi Hanna. Broadcasting in English, Hanoi Hanna's radio show had a different format than AFN. One 39th Sig. Bn troop had his radio turned to her broadcast nightly. I overheard the music and propaganda, with news of the communist victories in South Vietnam. Names of units involved in fir-fights, along with names of dead americans, who's identiy were gotten from dog tags, names on uniforms or from wallets. American POWs and captured pilots were also mentioned by name.

Brain washing of POWs and loud speakers blaring all night were common tactic employed by the North Koreans on front line American troops during the Korean War, to reduce our troop's resolve, morale and hopefully defect to the communist. The D-Day invasion of Normady was preceded with non-exsistance units, dummy radio traffic with the units. Mis-information indicating the allies would land at Calais, radio jamming and dis-information, causing confusion with the Nazi's indecision not to use reserves, thinking Normady was only a diversionary action. While much of this can be attributed to spies, counter-intelligence and other special units; it definately had a psychological effect on Hitler's regime.

The known aspect of the PSYOPS activities were dropping leaflets over suspected enemy troops. The leaflets were printed in Vietnamese, describing how to defect and the rewards the Hoi Chanhs would receive for various type weapons accompanying the defector. Planes and helicopters with loud speaker flew over the jungle broadcasting in Vietnamese for the enemy troops to pick up the leaflet and rally to the Saigon Government's side. This was what the photo team filmed.

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The action wasn't very picturesque. The PSYOPS Unit had a contraption that automatically dispensed the leaflets. All we could see was the dispensing machine's hopper getting lower and lower of leaflets, or a hand putting more leaflets into the hopper. The photo team had the Psyops men throw the leaflets out the open helicopter doors, filming the fluttering to the jungle canopy. We certainly couldn't film the sound coming from the loud speaker. All we could get was the tape recorder's reel going around and around. The soundman couldn't understand a word being broadcast over the speaker, but he had plenty of noise to record.

What ever else The PSYOPS unit did to demoralize the enemy troops into defecting is anybody's guess. They had plenty of outside help. Artillery units fired harassment and interdiction round around the clock. denying the enemy troops rest, never knowing if the next artillery round might land on them. That was scary enough. Surviving the deafening noise, earthquake diastrophism effect of a B-52 raid, made many VC and NVA soldiers regret joining the communist. B-52 raids made many defect. Then too, the death and dismemberment of friends and family members from combat reduced the enemy's resolve to fight.

In a side bar to the above story, MACV Army "A" Photo Team was tasked to work on the 4th of July, 1968. That was slightly unusual for a photo team in Saigon to work on a holiday. The theme of the story was the Vietnamese Government was going to set free some EX-Viet Cong soldiers. The story was talking place at Cu Chi City, Hau Nghia Province, neighboring the 25th Infantry Division.

The road to Cu Chi was clear, not even a sniper shot since TET, prompting the photo team to drive the 20 mile distance to the event. The national colors of South Vietnam, red and yellow bedecked the town, with flags, banners and bunting everywhere. The town was so colorful, the photo team didn't know where to stop. We decided to stop where the most people were located. There were no Americans present. MACV only said the event would take place in the afternoon. Everyone on the photo team knew the Vietnamese took a siesta break from 2-4 P.M. So freeing the Viet Cong would happen either before or after the siesta hour. We all hoped before.

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Through Sign language and other signals, acting stupid, making believe our hands are tied behind our back, then freed, we ascertained we were at the proper place, from the assembled Vietnamese. We were there nearly an hour, before a jeep carrying American field grade officers arrived, from the 25th Inf. Div. One of the colonels gave the photo team a English version of the program. That was a tremendous help, knowing what events would take place. The schedule of events mentioned nothing of American participation in the program. The Hau Nghia Province Chief would provide opening remarks and introduce the other on the platform stage. The event was held at a school.

Some high ranking Saigon Government officials stood up and spoke to the nearly 200 assembled audience. Then one at a time, the former Viet Cong stepped forward to receive a scroll or diploma, with documents to provide the former Viet Cong land, if they desired to be farmers; or job offers and employment placement assistance for non-farmers.

The American Officers told the photo team, once the defectors (Hoi Chanhs) were in allied hands, they were turned over to the Vietnamese Government. Continuing, they said, these defectors were separated from POWs, and shouldn't be considered as POWs. Expressing the Hoi Chanhs defected, they volunteered, not captured in combat. The officers stated, the Vietnamese authorities conducted nearly a six month re-educational and re-doctrinazation program, in which the former enemy renounced communism, plus signed statements to never bare arms against the Saigon Government in the future. That these former warriors were now free South Vietnamese citizens again.

The 25th Inf. Div. only involvement was to provide refreshments to the gathered crowd, after the ceremony. Which consisted mostly of wives and children, family members and friends of the six repatriated citizens. Many on-lookers were also present. The army officers told the photo team, these six came from Hau Nghia Province and mostly from Cu Chi itself. All the way back to Saigon, I pondered if this was planned for Independence Day Holiday, or just coincidental. Since the americans had no part, I can only infer it was accidental.

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