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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
APO 96222

MAGJ3-053 20 November 1968

SUBJECT: Vietnam Lessons Learned No. 73: Defeat of VC Infrastructure

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VIETNAM LESSONS LEARNED NO. 73

DEFEAT OF VC INFRASTRUCTURE

1. INTRODUCTION:

a. This Lessons Learned is devoted to the details of the destruction of the VC infrastructure on Vinh Loc Island. This operation was conducted by the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile); Vietnamese (ARVN) combat units; and all available Government of Vietnam (GWN) paramilitary forces. The Lessons Learned covers the planning, cordon, initial attack, deliberate search for the infrastructure and the follow-on action by a combined force.

b. The defeat of the VC infrastructure is essential to preclude re-establishment of an operational or support base to which the VC can return. Further, defeat of the infrastructure allows the Vietnamese people to carry on their way of life and thereby makes them more resistant to VC pressures.

c. Due to the ability of the VC elements to mingle with and lose their identity among any civilian group, military sweeps and the pick-up of detainees are not enough. Equally significant is the ability of Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMDF) to identify individuals of the VC infrastructure. This requires the planned and coordinated employment of all available Vietnamese forces.

d. The operation to defeat infrastructure must be planned to retain the greatest surprise possible. Surprise is crucial to the success of the cordon and attack phases of the operation. Surprise
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will reduce friendly casualties by fragmenting the VC military elements. The resistance to interrogation is reduced and valuable intelligence information is obtained as a result of the confusion brought on by surprise.

ea. Destruction of buildings and injury to civilians must be kept to a minimum in order to return civilians to their own homes as a follow-up action.

2. THE VINH LOC OPERATION:

a. Background:

(1) Vinh Loc is an island 25 miles long and three miles wide lying along the I Corps coastline east of Hue. Prior to the VC/NVA TET Offensive, Vinh Loc was secure and under government control. The 50,000 inhabitants were relatively unmolested by the VC. During TET, it became necessary to divert attention from areas such as Vinh Loc to more populated areas such as Hue. The result was infiltration by VC/NVA and use of the island as a safe haven. Control of the major portion of the island went to the VC/NVA. Many people fled the island.

b. Operations:

(1) Previous Operations: Several operations had been conducted in the vicinity of Vinh Loc. One was an operation by the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry (Airmobile), in conjunction with the National Police Field Forces (NPFF), Popular Forces (PF), and the Hue River Security Force. This operation was of a two day duration and while militarily successful, it failed to uproot the VC infrastructure. Another operation was conducted using only Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF). This operation was one day in duration and it too failed to achieve success against the infrastructure.

(2) Initial Planning: An analysis of past operations showed the need for an operation of long duration using all available SVN resources. The plan to cordon the area, conduct a sweep, and then return over the same area conducting a deliberate search came out of detailed planning by the Province Chief, District Chief, ARVN commanders, US advisors, and commanding officers of the US brigade and battalions. The planning and coordination were such that personnel would know exactly the mission to be performed and the support required, a good working relationship would be established, and the detailed planning would cover all contingencies.

(3) Task Organization: See Appendix 1.

(4) Concept of Operation: The operation would begin by a cordon established around the island using Coastal Groups, US Naval
River Security Group (Pistol Pete) and US Navy Patrol Air Cushion Vehicles (PACV). ARVN elements would establish blocking positions to cut off enemy escape and drive him into Vinh Loc. One US battalion and one ARVN battalion would land on six Landing Zones (LZs) on the northeast of the island and assault to the southwest pushing the VC against the blocking forces. An ARVN cavalry squadron would prevent movement of the enemy to the north. Two RF companies would assault to the southwest to drive the enemy into the blocking forces. The night operation would consist of ambushes to control movement and evasion by VC. The remainder of the ten day operation would be spent methodically rooting out the infrastructure. The stability, or follow-on, phase would find some US and ARVN elements remaining and pacification being conducted.

(5) Missions:

(a) US. Continue operation NEVADA/EAGLE. Provide one battalion for the assault at Vinh Loc.

(b) Indigenous Forces (See Appendix 2).

1 One battalion of the 54th Regiment (ARVN) combat assault into three LZs to search and clear area of operations (AO). Two battalions of the 54th Regiment block to the northeast.

2 Regional Forces (RF). Reconnaissance in Force (RIF) operations in assigned tactical areas.

3 Popular Forces (PF). One platoon attached to each company-sized tactical unit to provide knowledge of the area and local citizens.

4 National Police (NP): Attach six to US Naval patrol boats and assign fourteen responsibility for security and handling of POWs and detainees under control of the District Chief.

5 National Police Field Force (NPFF). Fifty operate with US battalions down to company level. Conduct the initial screening, interrogation, and tagging of detainees.

6 Police Special Branch (PSB). Operate with US and ARVN tactical units down to company level to use blacklist for identification of VC infrastructure. The PSB at the POW compound conduct further interrogations to obtain exploitable information.

7 Census Grievance (CG). Work with tactical units to identify KIA and detainees as VC or VC infrastructure. CG cadre operate at POW compound to do the same.
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8 Coastal Groups. Blockade waterways and establish night ambushes.

9 Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU). Gather intelligence based on specific requirements established.

10 Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC). Move into the area, when clear, to begin work on improvement of conditions.

(c) Supporting Forces:


2 US Patrol Air Cushion Vehicles (PACV). Blockade and conduct Psychological Operations broadcasts.


(6) Conduct of Operations:

(a) The operation started with the movement of blockade units into position the night before the operation kicked off. Any activity that was normal was continued. The assaulting forces landed at prescribed LZs and began movement to the southwest. A combined type command post was established to facilitate coordination, intelligence information and support requests between US, ARVN and GVN units. Supporting fires from a destroyer and a rocket ship, as well as from a battery of 105mm howitzers, were called for as required. The assault continued until a sweep had been made across the island. Once completed, the units turned and covered the same areas, but did so at a very deliberate pace. All civilians of a fighting age were detained, regardless of credentials. Detainees were taken to the POW compound where they were questioned by all agencies - PFF, FSB, CG and PRU - to ensure that no blacklist personnel were released. As intelligence was obtained, quick response teams followed the lead to its finish, even to the point of taking a detainee, by helicopter, to the point where he had hidden his individual weapon. The operation terminated after ten days. The follow-on or stability phase started on the 11th day and continues.

(7) Psychological Operations:

(a) Psychological operations were used throughout the entire operation. Two (2) HB Loudspeaker Teams assaulted with the combat troops, aerial loudspeaker missions were flown, and leaflet drops were made.

(b) The people were told not to fear the ARVN and US
attack and messages explaining the hopeless enemy situation were broadcast.

(c) Loudspeaker broadcasts and leaflets were influential in population control and in convincing some individuals they should Chieu Hoi.

(8) Results of the Operation:

(a) Friendly:
1. One Armed Propaganda Team Member - KIA.
2. One National Policeman - KIA.
3. Two US Army - WIA.
4. One US Navy - WIA.
5. Seven ARVN - WIA.
6. Two RF - WIA.
7. Two Civilians - Wounded.
8. Three Grass Huts - Destroyed.

(b) Enemy:
1. 154 - KIA.
2. 254 - POWs.
3. 50 - Civil Defendants.
4. 56 - Chieu Hoi.
5. 116 - VC Infrastructure.
6. 177 - Individual Weapons Captured.

7. According to one captured VC Warrant Officer, 80-95 percent of the VC Cadre was killed or captured.

4. SUMMARY:

a. The combined cordon, assault, search and stabilization operations at Vinh Loc are considered to have been highly successful.

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Knowledge and use of forces available, detailed planning, deliberate execution and a spirit of cooperation contributed to that success. Attainment of surprise fragmented enemy resistance and created confusion. The "minimum damage" objective made possible the movement of the people back into their homes. The VC infrastructure at Vinh Loc was dealt a serious defeat.

b. The follow-on phase, during which token US/ARVN forces remain on the island, strengthens the visible intent and ability of the GVN to identify itself with the needs and aspirations of the people of Vinh Loc. These forces will be removed when local self-defense units become capable of taking over.

5. LESSONS LEARNED:

a. It is necessary to maintain continuous coordination, cooperation, and thus, a rapport between US, ARVN and all available GVN resources on a continuous basis, from planning through execution, so that all capabilities will be known and a willingness to cooperate will be maintained.

b. All intelligence sources should be used to obtain all available information pertaining to a proposed area of operations - enemy activity, civilian activity, any increase in population, village or hamlet layout, etc.

c. Surprise is essential. Reconnaissance must be limited. Forces to be involved should be informed of the details of operation as near to D-Day as is possible to still allow them time to react. Movement of units that normally operate in an area, waterways, etc., should continue. Movement of other units should be done under the cover of darkness. CPs and some supporting weapons can be moved in after the initial attack begins. Orders to some elements of GVN may be issued for only the first part of the operation. Supplemental orders can be issued later during the detailed search and destruction of the infrastructure. Detailed exchange of information must be accomplished between all trusted commanders.

d. Speed during the initial sweep is essential to disrupt and fragment the enemy. During the initial phase, it is necessary to keep relentlessly after the enemy, never letting him relax. Deliberate operations to locate the enemy, to include his cadre and infrastructure, come after the initial shock has been dealt to him.

e. Extreme care must be exercised to keep damage and destruction to a minimum. Preparations should be fired on known enemy positions in other than built-up areas. The less the damage, the less support will be necessary to the hamlet/village prior to reoccupation. Also, more willing support will be provided by the civilians in identifying
f. A Combined Interrogation Center or POW collection point is very effective. It provides for the centralized screening and the immediate production of intelligence that can be rapidly exploited by units. Control of detainees is more effective. By having a central point, detainees can be questioned by all agencies. This precludes missing someone who is wanted by another agency. Also, a 24 hour operation can be sustained. The importance of having appropriate GVN agencies conduct control and screening of the population cannot be over-emphasized.

g. After the initial assault has been successful, the establishment of an Area Coordination Center or Combined-type Command Post, manned by S2/S3/Artillery elements and at times by the commanders of US, ARVN, Province and District elements, will aid in command and control. Such a center provides for instant response to operational requirements; allows integrated planning and coordination; and ensures detailed knowledge of locations of units, logistical plans and requirements, available and required fire support. It also provides a completely integrated communications system and an improved confidence level on the part of all concerned.

h. The integration of all GVN activities (Appendix 2) down to platoon level is essential to provide the responsive reaction to situations that arise.

i. Operations of this type require ingenuity and expertise in planning and when conducted at the same tempo as tactical operations, will succeed in defeating the infrastructure.

2 Appendices
1. Task Organization
2. Available Vietnamese Forces Check List
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The 40mm were designed for coastal defense.

Each PLT had a .50.

The 1st and 2nd PLT were counterattack.

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