

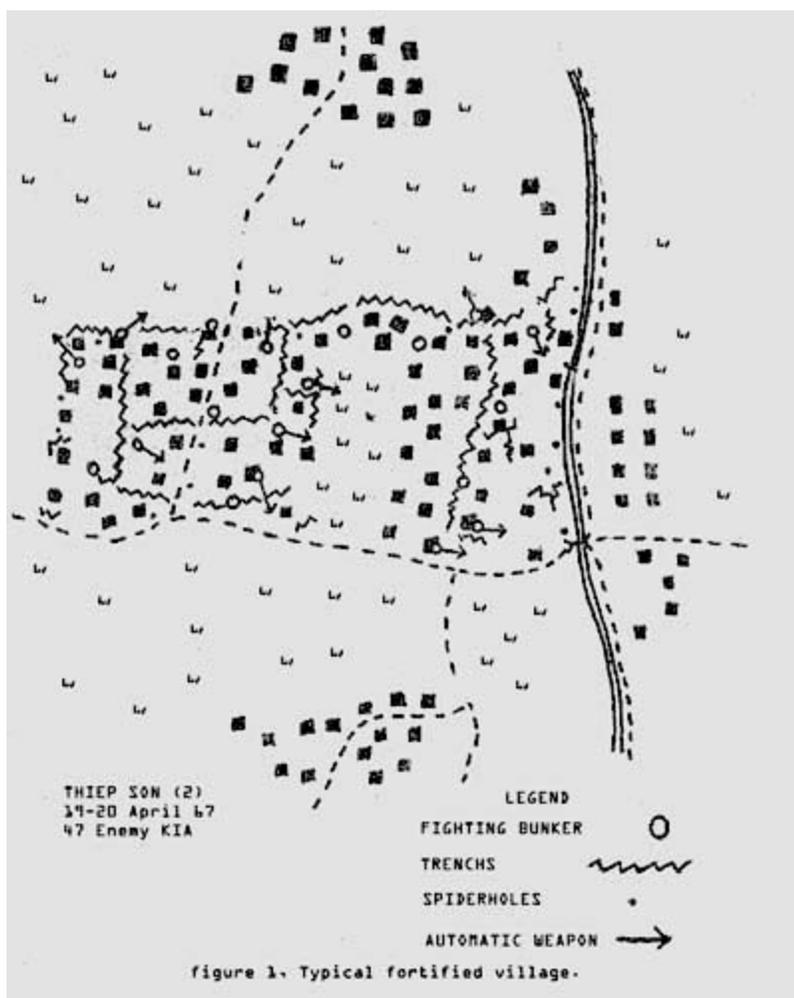
## 1/35th Infantry Battalion

### Lessons Learned Vietnam 1966-1967

by Major Garold L. Tippin

Lessons Learned, Vietnam, November 1966-September 1967 is not a unit history. It is a compilation of the experiences gained by one Battalion, the 1st Bn, 35th Inf., 3rd Brigade 25th Div (now 3rd Brigade, 4th Div). During this period the Battalion fought in Kontum Province, along the Cambodian border; with the 1st Air Cav Division in Binh Dinh Province; and in the Coastal Plains near Duc Pho, Quang Nhai Province. The Battalion is one of the most combat experienced units in Vietnam and has maintained an enviable 12 to 1 enemy kill ratio.

#### Part I. Fortified Villages



One of the enemy's favorite battlegrounds is the fortified village. This consists of several hamlets which have been prepared with extensive fighting positions, trench works, connecting tunnels, and spider holes. (Figure 1) The fighting bunkers often have 5 to 7 feet of overhead cover and can take the direct hit of a 155 round. The bunkers are placed to cover avenues of approach into the village and are interspersed throughout the village to cover trails, approaches, etc. Many of the huts will have a fighting bunker in one corner. Tunnels connect the bunkers and trenches, allowing the enemy to disappear and reappear firing from another location. Trees, shrubs and even the earth itself are reshaped to conceal these positions. At first glance there seems to be no logic or method to these defensive works. However, upon closer investigation one finds an intricate, well-planned defensive position that takes advantage of the existing cover and concealment, natural barriers, and avenues of approach into and within the village.

The enemy elects to use a hamlet or a village as a battleground for several reasons:

1. He expects to inflict enough casualties on US troops during the attack to justify his making a stand.
2. The US soldier has a natural aversion to fire upon villages and populated areas.
3. The village offers the VC/NVA a labor source to prepare the fortifications.

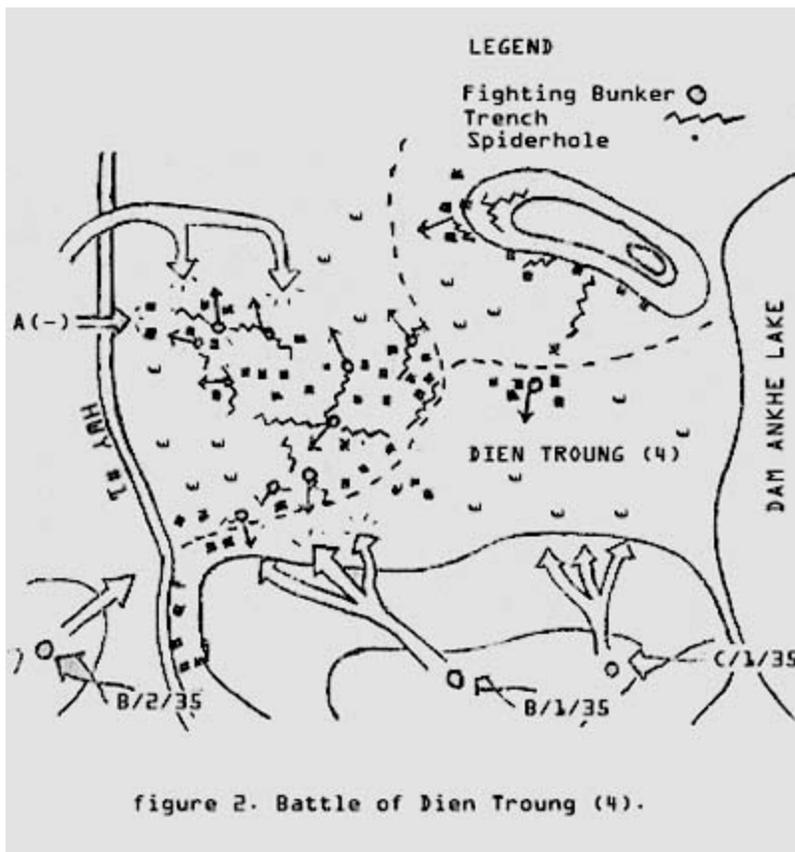
4. In the open valleys and coastal lowlands the villages contain a great deal of natural cover and concealment.
5. The hamlets in a village are usually spread out and their arrangement offers many avenues of escape.

The enemy's normal plan of battle in a fortified village is as follows:

1. He will allow the US troops to get as close as possible before opening fire, usually 15 to 25 meters. The purpose of these "hugging tactics" is to get the US soldiers so closely engaged that they cannot effectively use artillery and TAC Air.
2. The enemy feels that if he inflicts several casualties in his initial burst that our soldiers will become involved in trying to get the wounded back to the rear for evacuation. He believes that when the US troops start worrying more about getting their wounded buddies to safety than about the battle, they are easy targets, and in this respect he is correct.
3. Another facet of his battle-plan is to fight viciously until dark, then, using the cover of darkness, escape using one of the many pre-planned escape routes, carrying off his dead and wounded, their weapons and even empty cartridges. We have captured numerous enemy documents either condemning or commending certain units for their police of the battlefield. On one occasion after an 18 hour battle, there was one particular bunker from which a LMG was firing; after the fire fight and upon checking the position, not one empty cartridge case was found. After several battles enemy dead were found; and lying by their side was a large tin can filled with empty cartridge casings. They were ready to move out when the signal was given! The enemy knows that we place great emphasis on body count and weapons. Our men, being typically American, expect to see at least 10 enemy bodies for every one of their buddies killed. The enemy knows that he has won a psychological victory if he can remove his casualties, leaving a sterile battlefield for our men to find, especially if he has inflicted some casualties on us.

The enemy likes to initiate these actions in the late afternoon. This gives him several hours to inflict as many casualties as he can, then escape after dark. He does not have enough ammunition to conduct a sustained defense, nor can he be resupplied as our men can. Therefore, if he begins his battles two or three hours prior to darkness and holds out until dark he has an excellent chance to escape.

In order to preclude the enemy from getting away, all escape routes must be sealed off. And this is indeed a difficult task, in fact it is usually beyond the capability of one rifle company. The impulsive company commander that attempts to use his platoons to maneuver and flank a fortified village soon find himself in deep trouble, and the same is true if he tries a frontal assault. He may succeed in taking the position but his losses will not be worth the attempt. His best course of action is to immediately call in blocking fires to the rear of the position and utilize his unit to fix the enemy and give his commander an appreciation of the situation.



At the village of Dien Truong, Quang Nhai Province, on 22 May 1967, Company A found themselves in such a predicament. At 0600 in the morning A Company was approaching the village from the west when they received automatic fire from the village. (Figure 2) The company commander maneuvered his first and second platoons to the left in order to come in on the village from the north. Both platoons became heavily engaged in the open rice paddies and were unable to move any further. Then the third platoon and company command group moved across Hwy #1 and entered the NW corner of the village. They too were stopped by intense enemy fire. (Figure 2) As a result of overextending themselves and attempting a wide flanking maneuver against the fortified village the entire company was committed and unable to maneuver any further. The company CP group spent the next four hours pinned

down in a peanut patch. Much later, some 32 hours, after a liberal use of gunships, 13 air strikes, 2000 artillery shells and three more rifle companies the enemy was defeated.

It took four hours using gunship support for A Company to break contact and withdraw so that artillery and air could soften up the NW edge of the village. In the meantime artillery was pounding the rest of the village. Two airstrikes were put on the hill mass to the northeast. B Company was air assaulted onto the hill south of the village at 1200 hours, and proceeded NW. (Figure 2) As they entered the village they also became heavily engaged. Company C was assaulted on top the hill at 1400 hours and they moved into a blocking position. By this time Company A had occupied a position west of Highway 1, with three platoons on line. At 1600 hours B Company, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf. became opcon to the 1st Bn and was assaulted onto the hill SW of Dien Truong, and moved into blocking positions. The enemy was in strength and fought throughout the night. Artillery pounded the enemy position all night long and gunships and flare ships screened the open ground to the north. The next morning following three air strikes and behind a smokescreen Companies A and B assaulted the village. They met minor contact throughout the morning. By 1500 hours the village complex was occupied. There was a total of 87 NVA killed, one captured and 49 weapons discovered.

The blocking of enemy escape routes should be a battalion commander's problem. He has the capability of assaulting additional maneuver elements into the rear and flanks of the enemy position.

Since April 67, the 1st Bn 35 Infantry has been engaged in seven major battles involving fortified villages, resulting in some 371 enemy killed. These actions were very similar in the way they began and ended. The one major difference was that the Bn learned from each battle and applied these lessons to subsequent battles.

Each time the action began by the involvement of one rifle company. The pattern was the same; the enemy allowed the friendly troops to get into the village and usually within 15 to 20 meters of a fighting bunker before they opened fire. Each time the battle began by the rifle company getting several men wounded and pinned down in the open. As the unit deployed they would encounter more enemy positions. It wasn't too long before the entire company was involved in the firefight. In the early stages, the battle would go according to the enemy plan. However, there were several factors that the enemy had overlooked.

Immediately upon initiation of the action, gunships were dispatched to the battle areas. Gunships do not have a great effect on fighting bunkers, but they do an outstanding job of suppressing the enemy fire and they can fire accurately within 15 to 20 meters of friendly troops. Therefore, under the suppressive fire of the gunships the closely committed units were able to "back-off" taking their wounded with them. The unit would then take up positions to fix the enemy. This enabled them to bring the full brunt of artillery and tactical air upon the positions. In the meantime, other companies were assaulted into blocking positions around the village.

In all seven actions all three rifle companies were ultimately committed. Once the area was ringed off, all available tactical air and artillery were used. In addition, during the night "Spooky" C-47 with gattling guns was used. The area was kept in continuous illumination and the friendly troops on the ground pressed in close and maintained a heavy volume of small arms fire into the enemy positions. The enemy fought viciously and only four prisoners were taken in the combined battles. There is no doubt that some of the enemy escaped because following each battle blood trails and sandal tracks were found leading out of the villages.

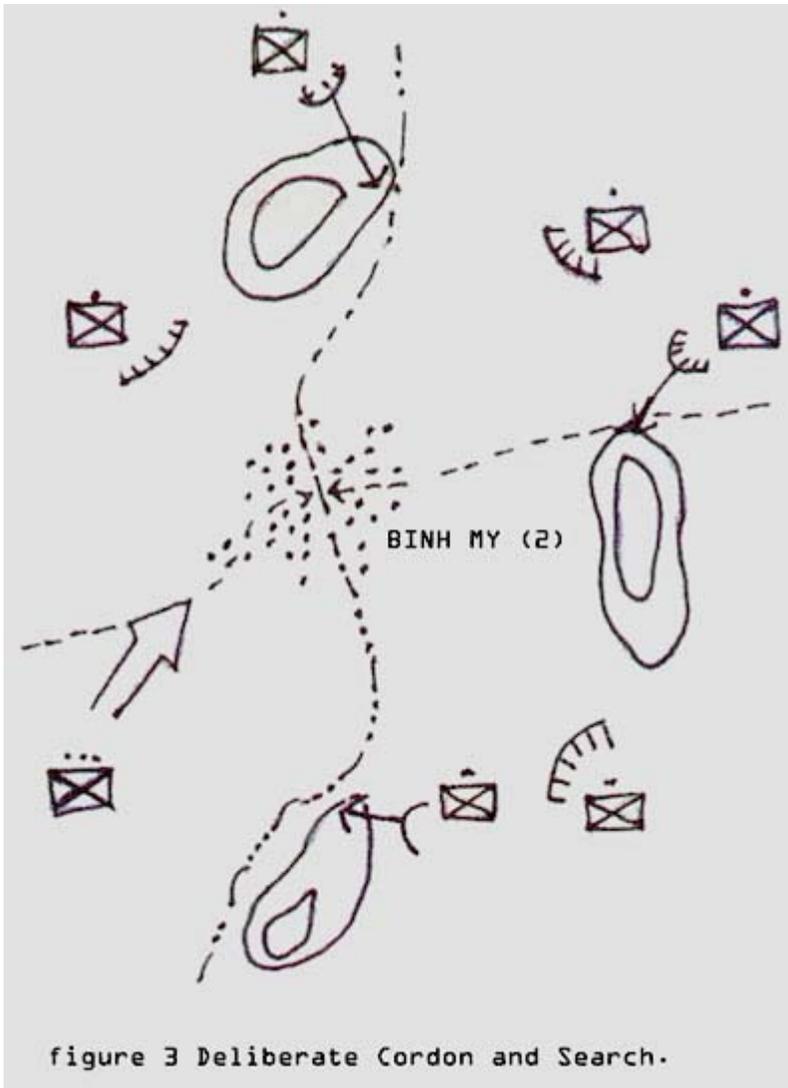
The third factor that the enemy overlooked was the dogged determination, bravery and fighting ability of the American Infantryman. Several captured enemy documents revealed that the enemy had been told that once several casualties were inflicted on US troops in the initial stages of a fortified village action the US troops would panic and withdraw. In this instance the enemy had a lesson to learn because the men did not panic and run. They withdrew only on order, in an orderly fashion, and only to utilize the air and artillery. In all cases casualties were taken back with them. When the time came to go back they went without hesitation and closed on the enemy positions like a well-trained professional killing team.

A thorough, organized search must be conducted in the occupied village, because the enemy has a tendency to go underground and hide in their numerous concealed spider holes and tunnels. It is imperative that the village is searched inch-by-inch paying particular attention to wells, livestock pens, hedgerows, and bamboo groves.

The use of C8 riot-control gas should not be overlooked in fighting a fortified village. On one occasion the 1st Bn 35th Infantry made a night attack with gas masks following an aerial CS attack. The ship made a low pass on the windward side of the hamlet dispersing approximately 250 CS grenades. Then 20 minutes of artillery, about one half VT fuse was fired into the enemy positions. One company moved forward behind a walking barrage of artillery fire. Once inside the hamlet the flare ships lit up the area. Eighteen enemy were killed and no casualties were suffered by the friendly troops. The use of CS in such an action depends upon several factors:

1. The availability of dispensing devices.
2. Wind direction and location of friendly units.

### 3. The availability of masks for the ground unit.



## Part II. Village Search and Clear Operations

In order to successfully conduct guerrilla warfare the enemy must have control of the people; for this is where the enemy acquires his food, intelligence, and labor force. Our primary mission has been to cut off the Main Force VC and NVA units from the population. Without the support of the people and faced with defeat if he tries a pitched battle in the lowlands he will be forced to move back into the mountains and ultimately "die on the vine" or be tracked down and destroyed by our units. An area will be secure when the government has won the hearts and the minds of the people. However, before this is accomplished an area must undergo several preliminary steps:

1. The NVA and Main Force VC units must be defeated and driven into the hills. In other words they must be cut off from the population.

2. The VC infrastructure must be

broken; and in order to do this the local force VC and VC cadre must either be killed or captured.

3. Once these two steps are accomplished the Vietnamese government can begin to pacify the people and win them over to the GVN cause; while US and allied forces move into the hills to hunt down and destroy the NVA and main force VC units. In our area we have been successful in step one; however, breaking the VC infrastructure is a difficult task. It becomes a war of hide and seek and of trying to outwit the illusive VC in his own backyard. In the populated lowlands this involves conducting numerous "Village Search and Clear Operations." There are several methods that can be used depending upon the desired results. Basically the methods of search that we have employed are as follows:

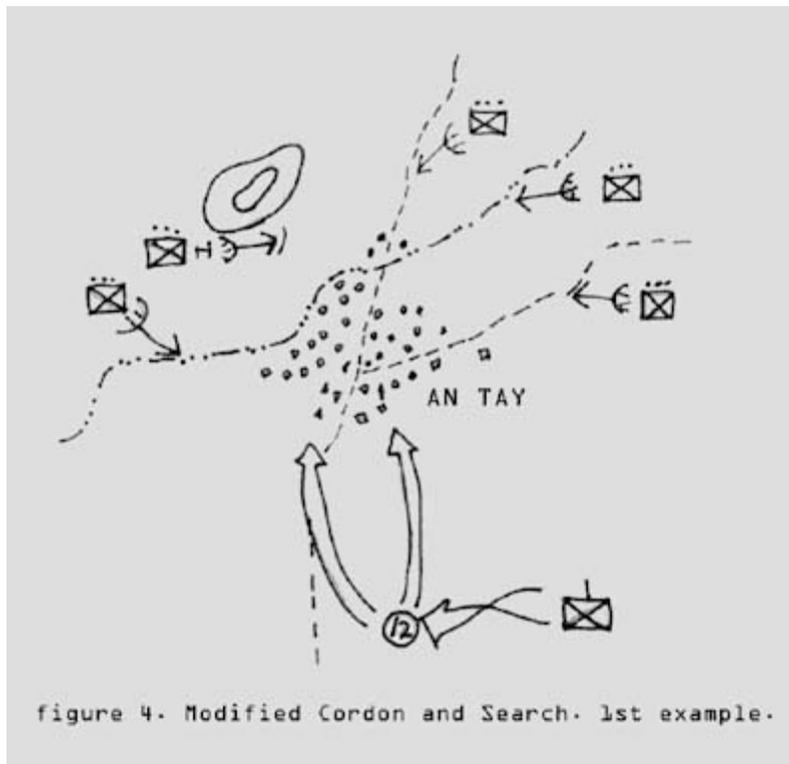
1. **Deliberate cordon and search.** (Figure 3) This is used when the specific mission of the unit is to conduct an exhaustive search of the target village. In this operation troops are positioned prior to daylight in ambush locations covering all exit routes from the village. At daylight two basic procedures may be used:

- a. Our preferred procedure is to use a PSYOPS team to broadcast instructions directing the people to gather at a particular location in or outside the village. Then one platoon enters the village to check for any enemy in force.

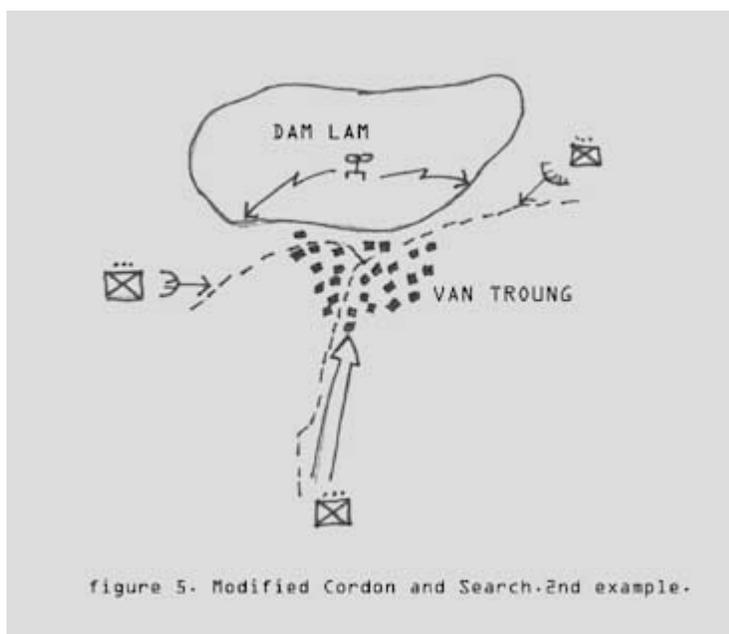
b. In absence of a PSYOPS team, one platoon can enter the village and round up the people and direct them to a central location. The remainder of the unit remains in blocking positions around the target village. On more than one occasion following the PSYOPS broadcast, and/or units moving forward, VC have fled from the village only to be shot down or apprehended by the cordon units. While the people are being questioned the village is given a thorough search.

## 2. Modified cordon and search.

Here two different methods can be used:



a. Blocking forces move into position before daylight to cordon off the village leaving one side unguarded. (Figure 4) At daylight an additional unit is air-assaulted into the open side and moves toward the village. This technique can be used when it is believed that there are armed enemy in the village. The objective here is to give the enemy the choice to stay and fight or withdraw running into our ambushing units. The enemy only wants to fight on his own terms and usually the air-mobile assault, preceded by an artillery preparation and gunships will cause him to take the easy way out. This operation normally consists of two or more rifle companies.



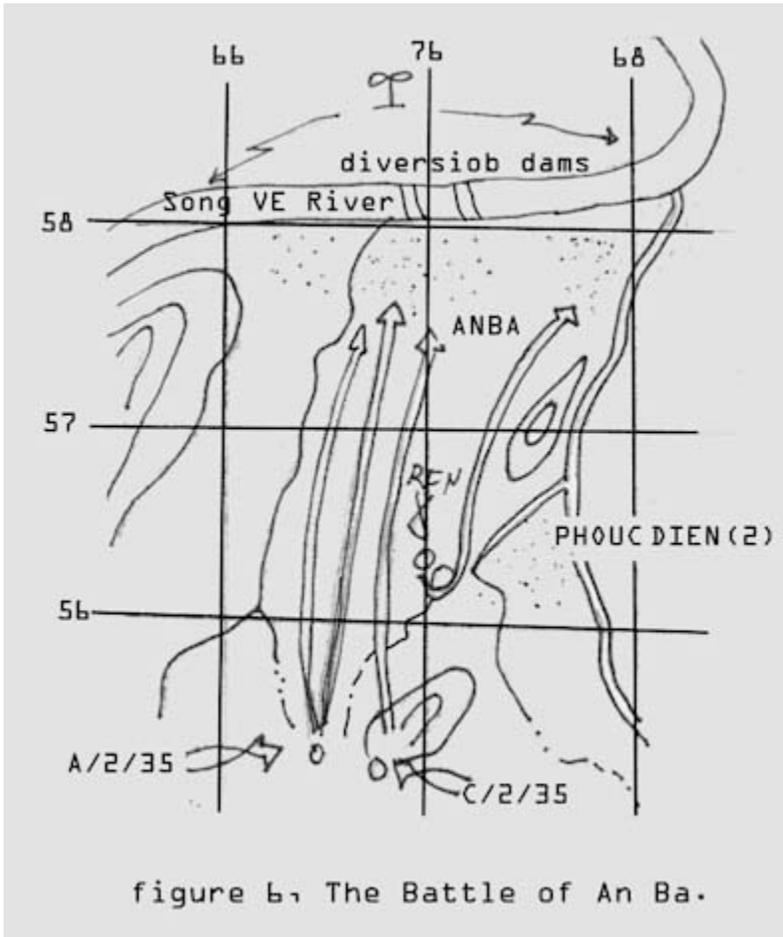
b. The second method is used when natural barriers such as lakes, beaches and open rice paddies, are on one or two sides of the village. (Figure 5) These features act as either a barrier or offer excellent observation from the air thereby eliminating the requirement for a complete cordon around the target village. If the village is near a beach and the people have boats with which to attempt an escape, it is a simple matter of prior coordination to have one or two Navy Swift Boats on station.

In this operation the blocking forces are again positioned prior to daylight around that part of the village not bordered by the natural obstacle. PSYOPS broadcasts again may be used if desired. Maximum utilization

of aerial reconnaissance is imperative in this operation.

One of the finest examples of a "Modified Village Search and Clear Operation" was conducted by our sister battalion the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry on 8 August 1967. The action took place at An Ba Hamlet, Nghia Han District, Quang Ngai Province. This 13 hour battle involving a US Battalion size force was initiated by a report from a "Hoi Chanh" (VC returnee). The battle is also an outstanding example of the use of armed reconnaissance helicopters and gunships working in conjunction with ground elements. The following is extracted from an "After Action Report on the Battle of An Ba" prepared by the 2nd Bn. 35th Inf, 3rd Bde TF, 4th Inf. Div.

### The Battle of An Ba



1. The enemy was estimated to have a company size force of 160 men located on a hill mass at BS670555. (Figure 6) They were reported to be equipped with the following weapons: Three 30 cal. MG, fifty AK-47 rifles, two 81mm mortars, and several M-1 carbines, and a few M-2 carbines. It was anticipated that when US troops entered this area they would encounter the enemy hiding in holes and tunnels and that it would be necessary for friendly forces to conduct a thorough and methodical search to find the enemy. Once elements of the 2-35 were inserted, the units could expect small arms fire and booby-traps throughout the area. The above intelligence information was obtained from a "Hoi Chanh" who surrendered to 2nd Bn 4th ARVN Regt. When "A" Company, "C" Company and the Reconnaissance Platoon 2-35 made a combat assault into this suspected enemy location, they failed to make contact however. C/2-35 did discover several entrances to spider holes and tunnels as well as signs of

fresh digging. The enemy was sighted moving north and northwest toward the Song Ve River by pilots flying observation helicopters and gunships. The maneuver elements of the 2-35 were committed to move north in pursuit of the fleeing enemy. Contact was made and the battle of An Ba ensued against an estimated enemy force of approximately 100 men. The conflict began about 1000 meters north of the initial insertion. The fight was waged in and around small hamlets encircled by trenches and hedgerows which provided the enemy with good fields of fire, cover from small arms ground fire and concealment from aerial observation. The captured documents from the Battle of An Ba proved conclusively that the 2-35 had engaged elements of one VCLF Battalion. The collected intelligence which led to the planning of this operation was considered timely, accurate, and contained sufficient information to deploy the correct amount of force in the vicinity of the enemy.

2. Mission:

A/2-35, C/2-35, and Recon 2-35 were assigned search and destroy missions. A/1-14 originally had a mission of establishing blocking positions. Later their mission was changed to search and destroy.

### 3. Execution:

In an effort to capitalize on the intelligence received from the "Hoi Chanh" on 6 August, the Battalion Commander, LTC Norman L. Tiller, formulated an operations plan to combat assault elements into three locations surrounding the target hill on the following day (7 August). This plan, however, involved an extension of the battalion's present AO along the 70 grid line on the west to the 66 north-south line. The request for this extension was disapproved for 7 August. The battalion commander repeated his request for the extension the following day and was able to obtain a boundary extension to the 66 vertical grid line from 08001 August to 092400 August. On the evening of 7 August plans were finalized and the operations order issued to the commanders involved.

Once they were on the ground, all three maneuver elements began to deploy according to the original plan. At the same time, "Aloha" ships (observation helicopters from 3rd Brigade Aviation) observed armed VC in the vic. of BS684582 to the northeast of Recon. Armed helicopters were requested at 0807 hrs and at 0935 the gunships (Sharks) reported to LTC Tiller that "Aloha" ships had killed three or four enemy. "Aloha" estimated the observed enemy force to be two reinforced squads and said they appeared to be fleeing to the north toward the Song Ve River. (Figure 6) The "Aloha" birds, meanwhile, had killed two additional VC and spotted numerous others with weapons and web gear along the southern bank of the Song Ve River. It became apparent that the enemy force was located north of the original target area in the hamlet of An Ba along the southern bank of the Song Ve. It was anticipated that the fleeing enemy would attempt to cross the Song Ve or to evade to the east.

As Recon and A/2-35 (-) moved northward, the "Shark" gunships spotted armed VC running to the east and west. The "Sharks" advised Recon of the enemy disposition, and Recon began to maneuver to block the enemy's eastern escape route. At 1030 hours, C Company was ordered to move from their southern blocking positions to the north to BS675578 on the east flank of A Company. At 1033 hours, Recon made contact with a small force and killed one VC at BS678576. (Figure 6)

A Company's platoon on the original search mission was ordered to join the company and effected link-up at 1105 hr. At that time, A Company was in contact with an unknown size force firing from the west and had suffered two friendly WIAs at BS669577. When it appeared that elements of the enemy force might escape to the west, the battalion commander alerted Company A, 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry to prepare for deployment to the west of the contact area. By 1125 hr A/2-35 had a friendly casualty count of two WIA and one KIA and estimated the enemy to be a platoon. An AO extension was requested westward to the 64 north-south grid line. Ships were sent to A/1-14th's pickup site at BS776430. At 1205 hours, the first lift of A/1-14 touched down at BS548573. The air assault was completed by 1220 hours without incident. A total of four maneuver elements had been committed then, and were strategically placed to prevent the enemy from escaping: Recon platoon was positioned along the eastern edge of the hamlet area; C/2-35 on the southeast and A/2-35 on the southwest were pushing northward; A/1-14 was closing in from west to east. The enemy was trapped against the southern bank of the Song Ve River, over which the armed gunships and observation helicopters maintained a deadly vigil. (Figure 7)

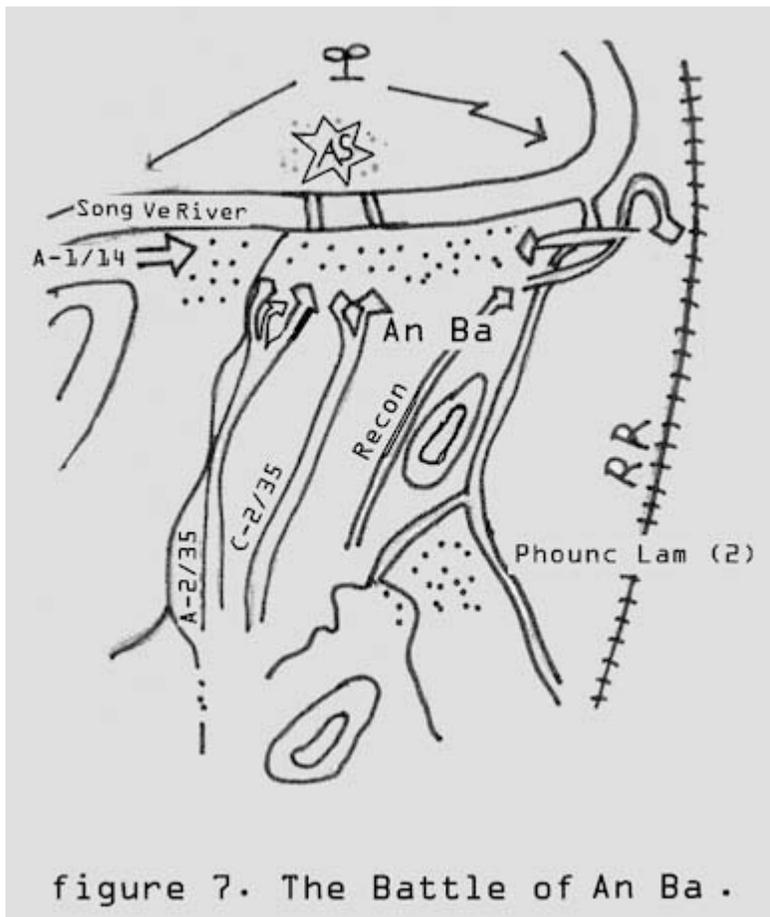


figure 7. The Battle of An Ba .

As the ground forces closed in on the trapped VC, a series of short contacts were made: At 1237 hours A/2-35 reported three enemy killed and one weapon captured at BS 66858; C/2-35 killed seven VC and captured five weapons in the vic. of BS 673578 at 1243 hours, A/1-14 reported seven enemy KIA and three weapons captured at 1330 hours, The "Aloha Birds" submitted a total count of sixteen VC killed. At 1358 hours a VC grenade wounded one man from C Company who was evacuated immediately by the battalion command and control ship. The Recon platoon, working with the "Musket" gunships, reported four additional enemy KIA at 1411 hours at BS687582. Three additional VC killed and two more weapons captured were reported by A/1-14 at 1411 hours. **(Figure 7)**

Two immediate air strikes were called for. The first strike went in at 1415 hours and was followed at 1430 hours by another.

The target for both of the air strikes was the densely vegetated village strip along the northern edge of the Song Ve River vic. BS668585. **(Figure 7)** The S-3 requested a PSYOPS team from brigade and at 1500 hours the team was inserted with A/2-35 to exploit the growing success against the pinned enemy. The ground elements continued to mop up throughout the contact areas.

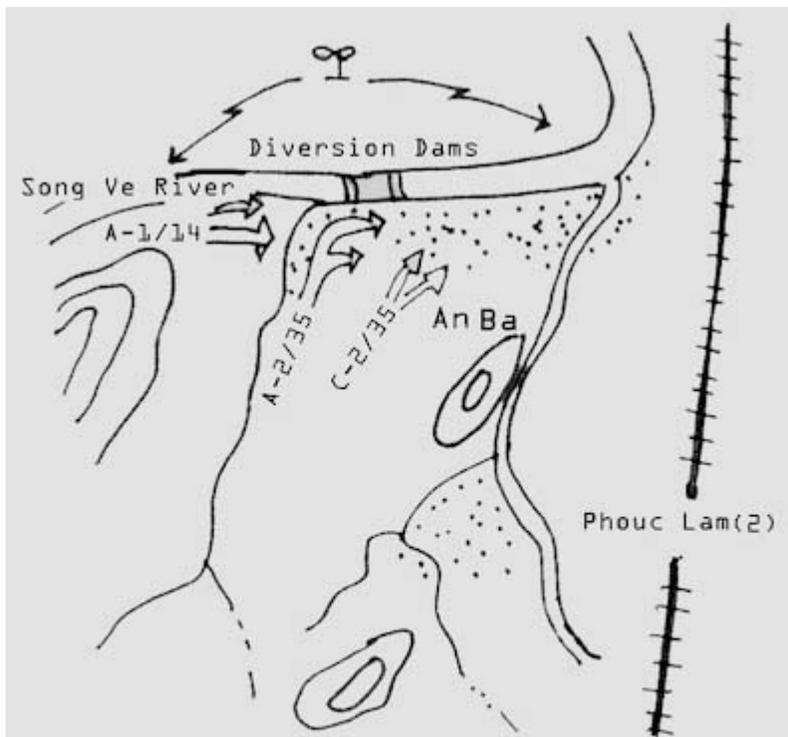
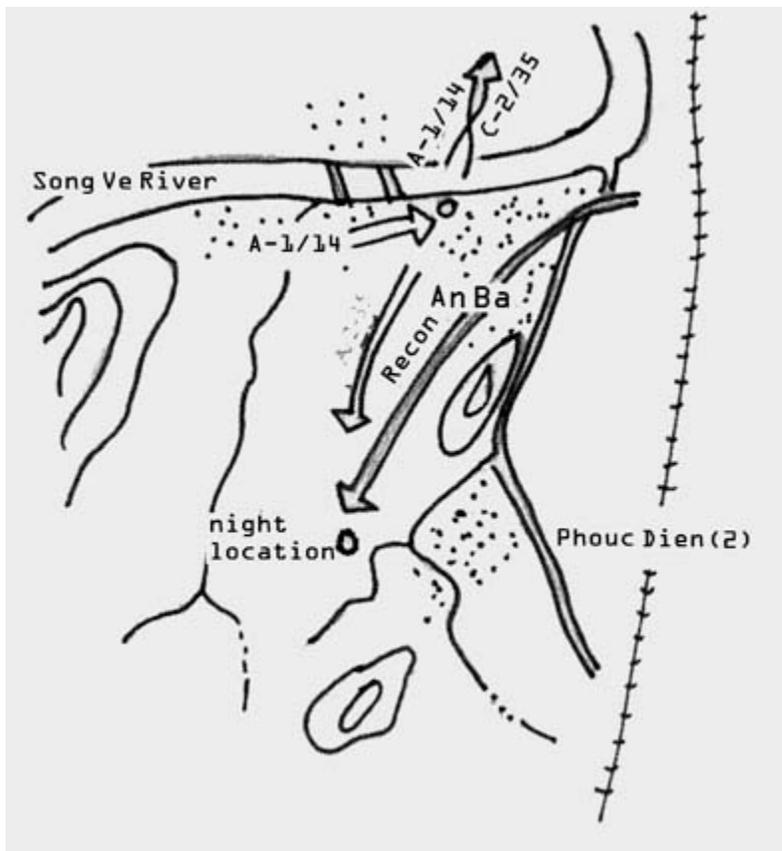


figure 8. The Battle of An Ba .

Once A/2-35 and C/2-35 had pushed all the way to the river bank, they turned to the east and began a careful search of the village area with A Company on the north and C Company on the south. (Figure 8) A/1-14 also continued to move eastward, following A/2-35 and C/2-35, and collecting one more VC KIA and additional weapon at BS674579 at 1745 hours.



By 1800 hours all contact had subsided, and preparations were made to extract two of the companies. (Figure 9) A/2-35 and the Reconnaissance Platoon secured a pickup zone at BS674581. A/1-14 was extracted to LZ Liz, completing the lift at 1840 hours.

At 1912 hours the last lift of C/2-35 went into LZ Dragon, and A/2-35 and Recon/2-35 moved to BS670564 to establish a combined night defensive perimeter, closing at 1940 hours. (Figure 9) Contact with the enemy was intermittent throughout the period 080825 to 081745 August. Range of engagement varied from one meter to one hundred and fifty meters. Communications within the contact area was good, but a relay station was required between the operating units and the battalion CP, located at LZ Liz, BS 755431. The relay

station was located on LZ Dragon, BS 730528.

#### **a. Results:**

##### **(1) Enemy personnel losses:**

**(a) KIA ..... 65**

**(b) CIA ..... 3**

##### **(2) Enemy weapons captured:**

**(a) M-1 Carbines ... 8**

**(b) M-2 Carbines ... 1**

**(c) M-1 Rifles ..... 2**

**(d) BARs ..... 2**

**(e) M-79 ..... 1**

**(f) .45 Cal. Pistols ..... 2**

**(g) SKS ..... 1**

**(h) MAT-49 ..... 3**

**(i) 9mm Pistol ..... 1**

##### **(3) Friendly Personnel Losses:**

**(a) A/2-35 ..... 3 WIA, 1 KIA**

**(b) A/1-14 ..... 3 WIA**

**(c) C/2-35 ..... 1 WIA**

This action, a typical employment of a battalion sized force, was initiated by a report from a "Hoi Chanh". As with most such reports there is some truth in them but they are far from being factual. In this specific case, contact was never made with the reported unit nor was the contact at the reported enemy location. However, the battalion was able to rapidly exploit the information gained by the "Aloha" team who detected the enemy movement to the north. As the enemy had placed himself next to the Song Ve River, his routes of withdrawal were extremely limited. Once his positions and forces were located it was relatively easy to fix him with ground maneuvers and one combat assault. Upon completion of the maneuvers, all that remained was for our forces to close with and kill the VC. Contacts of this nature are of short duration as the enemy does not possess the combat power to fight on equal terms with our forces. His principal tactic is to delay our maneuvers and fade away into the surrounding area. In this case his tactic failed as he was surrounded on all sides and our units conducted a deliberate search locating the individual VC in his "fade away" holes. By far the great majority of enemy killed were taken from holes in which they were hiding. Had a deliberate search not been conducted the enemy probably would have been successful in escaping with the majority of his unit; however as it was, only a handful of enemy evaded to tell the story of defeat.

#### **4. Lessons Learned:**

**Item: Battalion command net**

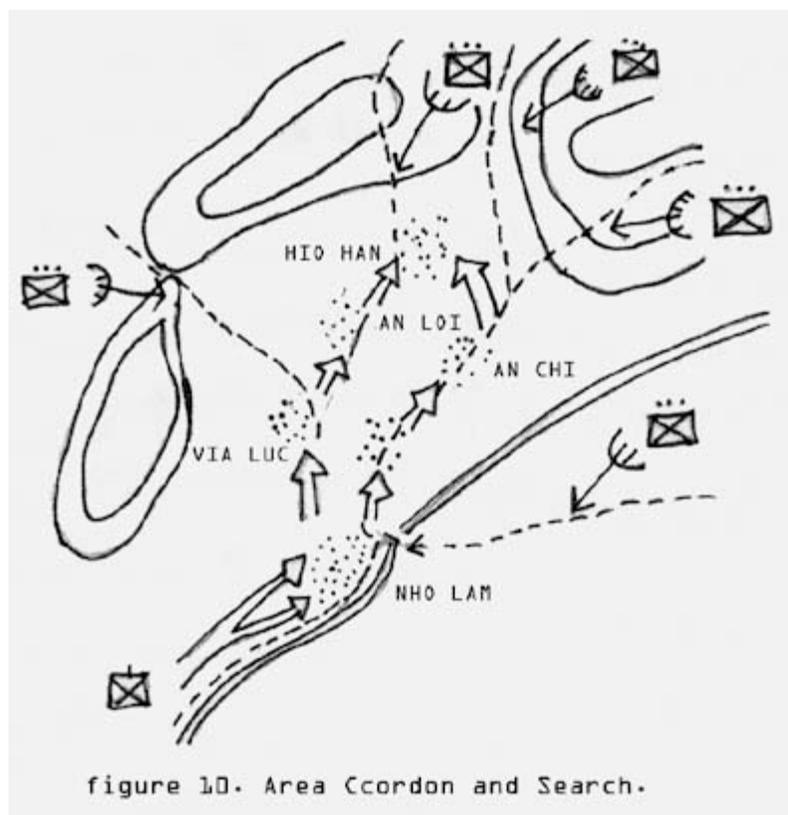
**Discussion: The battalion command net is the only means of communication between the battalion commander and the company commanders during this highly mobile war. As such it must be free from unnecessary traffic and it must be on a frequency that prohibits interference from other nets and units. During this action the light observation helicopters were using this net to pass traffic between themselves. Frequently they interfered with the normal operation of this net which resulted in unnecessary transmissions at key times. Additionally the battalion command frequency should be one in the higher ranges (beyond**

AN/PRC-10) to prevent ARVN and Koreans from usurping the frequency; however, the frequency cannot be higher than 69.95 mc as that is the upper limit of the AN/ARC-54 FMC radio in the HU-1D. When a high frequency is issued then a correspondingly low frequency must be used for the air ground net as the forward air controller's radio, AN/ARC-44, will not reach above 51.9 mc. Frequencies assigned to the battalion command net should be checked for interference prior to issue to the battalions.

**Observation:** Observation helicopters must have a frequency for communication among themselves which is different from the net of the battalion for which they are working.

**Item:** Employment of the light observation helicopter. **Discussion:** Dramatic results have been achieved by the "Aloha birds" on so many occasions it is hardly necessary to mention it here; however, a point in their employment is worthy of mention. Almost all of the contacts made by the light observation helicopters have been within one hour following a combat assault. This undoubtedly stems from the enemy movements away from the area of commitment. The enemy movement has been crisscross the coastal plain. The low flying helicopter is by far the best device to detect this enemy movement.

**Observation:** Maximum use should be made of the light observation helicopter immediately following a combat assault. Priority of observation should be over drainage ditches along natural lines of drift that lead away from the combat assault area.



### 3. Area cordon and search. (Figure 10)

This method is used when a large area or several villages are to be searched. The blocking ambush forces are positioned at one end and/or the flanks of the target area. The sweeping forces then drive and search the villages in order to push the enemy into the blocking ambush positions which have been established between the enemy and his sanctuary. At the same time the sweeping forces conduct a thorough search of the area. In order for this operation to be successful the blocking ambush positions must be placed between the suspected enemy and his sanctuary; and they must move into position without being detected. Two or more rifle companies are normally employed in this operation.

### 4. Normal village sweep.

This is used when units move through a village conducting a search while not in conjunction with blocking forces. This is of course the least productive and least desirable method of searching a village. This method is used both as a show of force and as an intelligence gathering media. The sweeping forces look for large quantities of rice, bunkers and positions,

or indications of recent enemy use. We have been forced to use this method many times primarily because of the non-availability of troops. If a unit conducting this type of operation can obtain the use of aerial reconnaissance aircraft to work in conjunction with their sweep, the chance of success is greatly increased.

Village search operations should be conducted in cooperation with the local Vietnamese authorities. Once the people are rounded up they should be questioned by the Vietnamese personnel. We have found that the National Police are ideally suited and trained for these "population control activities."

### **PART III JUNGLE FIGHTING**

There are two wars in Vietnam; One is being fought in the coastal lowlands and valley plains, and the other one is being fought in the mountainous jungles. In some areas units will be operating in the first environment one day and in the second the following day. The normal methods of operation differ sharply in each environment. Jungle fighting is not new to U.S. soldiers nor does the enemy have a monopoly on jungle know-how. US units adapt well to jungle fighting. When we were operating against the NVA along the Cambodian Border we found that they had as much difficulty operating in the area as we did. The prisoners we captured were as a rule, undernourished, emaciated and sick with malaria. They stated that almost everyone in their units had malaria and many had died from it.

In the jungle, landing zones are few and far between, trails are few and narrow. Navigation is difficult, units in many cases are limited to jungle trails and flank security is difficult to attain. Visibility is usually between 20 to 30 meters and forward movement is generally limited to 300 to 500 meters per hour. The most difficult problem in fighting NVA in this type of terrain is "finding him". This is where he builds his fortified base camps and where he locates his bunkers on ridges and in the heads of draws in hopes that a platoon or company will blunder into the area. The NVA habitually emplace their fighting positions to fire down the valley or ridge; as in the fortified village, the enemy realized that our tactical advantage lies in our artillery and air support. So, again he likes to use "hugging" tactics. Therefore, the problem is finding and fixing the enemy without having our units engaged and shot up at close range.

In the jungle where LZ's are limited reaction time is reduced to the cross-country proximity of units on the ground. Commanders must continually consider this possible requirement to rapidly reinforce small units which gain heavy contact with the enemy. When operating in this type of terrain where contact with large NVA units is possible, rifle companies should be within none to three hours of each other.

The rifle company should operate as a unit with platoons within 15 to 30 minutes of each other. The company should have security elements covering the main body, front, flanks and rear. (Too often company commanders overlook flank and rear security because of the difficult terrain.) There are times when it is impossible to have flank security because of the heavy jungle vegetation. In this case the unit must move in a single file. The point element should precede the main body by about 200 meters. A rifle company should stop every so often and send out patrols in all directions. Not only is this a good security measure, but it is also a good method of search in the jungle. Special emphasis should be paid to the rear. On the border the NVA have developed a habit, of once they locate a US unit they will have a small recon party follow to keep "tabs". There are a couple of ways to combat this technique; one is by dropping off a small ambush patrol. This procedure has paid dividends for us on several occasions. The other method is by having a patrol "button hook", move off the trail

double back at some distance and move back along the trail. When operating in mountainous terrain, if at all possible a company commander should keep one or two platoons on the high ground, so that if need be they can maneuver down upon the enemy. This procedure paid off several times for our battalion.

On 15 July 1967, our C Company was operating in the mountainous jungle area southwest of Duc Pho RVN. Intelligence reports indicated that an NVA battalion was in the area and the company had infiltrated in with three days rations on the night of the 12th. On the morning of the 15th the Company was moving south on two axes. The company (-) was in the valley floor; and the 2nd & 3rd platoons were on the high ground to the west. About midmorning the platoons on the high ground turned to the east and started moving down the ridge line to link up with the company (-). The 2nd plt, which was leading, ran into an enemy bunker which was oriented to fire down the hill and killed three NVA. Shortly thereafter they ran into the main enemy position which was occupied by an NVA platoon. The company commander maneuvered the company (-) up the ridge line and soon the enemy was surrounded. After a five hour fire fight the enemy positions were overrun and 28 NVA were killed. The NVA platoon was not prepared to fight a heavy battle in two directions, their bunkers were generally located to catch a unit moving up the ridge line, consequently they were annihilated.

When firm contact with the enemy is established the ground commander must not be "sucked in" to overcommit his unit. He should concentrate on fixing the enemy with his forces and immediately employ his supporting fires. Following extensive artillery and air bombardment the commander should maneuver his elements to determine the effect of his supporting fires; additional support required, if any; and to destroy the remnants of the enemy force. The deciding factor in many of these battles has been the immediate application of fire power.

On normal operations it is a good policy for a company to halt about 1600 hours; so they will have sufficient time before dark to prepare their night defensive perimeter. Digging in is an absolute must! At the very least individual prone fighting positions should be prepared. Security in the form of OPs and LPs is another cardinal rule. For some reason this is a difficult thing to get commanders, especially new commanders to do. They are reluctant to put out two or three men 100 to 200 meters from the company perimeter. One of the finest weapons in a jungle perimeter is the claymore. The hand grenade loses much of its usefulness in the thick jungle. A lot of men have been wounded by their own grenades, when they hit a tree limb or bush. The same is true of the M-79 grenade launcher. The claymore is an aimed weapon, just like a rifle, therefore it should be carefully sighted in, to cover the desired target area. Some men tend to put the claymore out to far; for fear of being injured in the back blast. The enemy has a habit of sneaking up to our perimeters and turning the claymores around. To combat this the claymores should be close enough to be observed. We have also found it effective to rig the claymore with a trip flare or anti-intrusion device. A claymore can be detonated safely by placing them just outside the foxhole against the berm. It is a good idea to emplace one there just "in case". Another good rig for a claymore is up in a tree with the business end aimed on a slant toward the ground. The locations for claymores and trip flares should be selected before dark but ideally they should be emplaced after dark.

Whenever possible the company should cut an LZ within their night perimeter. Of course it is a must if the unit is going to be resupplied with other than a free drop. Our units like to bring in their 81 mortars, not only for close-in fire support but also for immediate illumination.

Medical evacuation is another problem. In the jungle only emergency cases should be evacuated at night. Also, since LZs are limited in the jungle many wounded or injured personnel are evacuated by means of a hoist rigged on a medevac ship. On the 15 July fight of

**C Company, thirteen wounded men were hoisted out of the battle area. We keep an emergency rig of a rope and parachute harness. Fortunately, we have only had to use this rig twice, but on both occasions the men were saved by this crude affair. The problem with this rig is that the individual cannot be lifted all the way into the aircraft and must dangle 15 to 30 feet under the helicopter.**

**In the jungle most of the meeting engagements with the enemy are from a distance of 15 to 20 feet. In this terrain our point men like to carry the shotgun. It is an excellent close-in weapon especially when the point man turns the corner of a trail and runs head-on into a couple of NVA. We used to have a Sgt E-5 in our A Company, now SSG Sidney S. Hines Jr., who loves to walk point. On the border from July 66 to December 66, he killed 15 NVA with a shotgun. In three days' time last January he killed seven more NVA. He has since rotated but his skill with a shotgun is still a legend in the Battalion.**

**In the jungle where there are few LZs, the commander must assume that all are hot and mined. The enemy attempts to keep all possible landing zones under observation by recon elements. Some enemy units have the mission of ambushing prospective LZs. The best method of securing an LZ in this type of terrain is to move a rifle company in on foot to provide security for the following elements. When this is impossible due to the tactical situation the preparatory fires must be carefully planned and coordinated. Ideally tactical air, artillery and gunships should be used. In these preparatory fires not only should the LZ and the immediate area be hit by supporting fires; but also likely avenues of approach into the area and likely enemy assembly areas some distance from the LZ.**

#### **PART IV AMBUSH PATROLLING**

**One of our weakest tactical areas in Vietnam is the ambush. Many commanders still feel that night belongs to the VC and this is nonsense! The reason our units are not adept at ambushes is simply because the units are not using the proper techniques. The principles of patrolling and ambushing as taught by the Ranger School are tried and tested. If unit commanders would apply these techniques, their ambushes would become successful. Many of the so-called "new techniques" being used in Vietnam are simply bad habits which units have fallen into.**

**One mistake is that units attempt to accomplish too many missions. A rifle company cannot operate all day, then be expected to conduct ambushes at night. However, this is exactly what is going on in many units. As a result a rifle platoon will move to their ambush positions, organize a perimeter defense, and go to sleep leaving a few on guard. This is not an ambush, but they are called that. In order to conduct a proper night ambush a unit must have rest and time to prepare.**

**Another problem area is in the patrol preparation. Very few units are applying the proper troop loading steps. A patrol leader must be given time to prepare. If at all possible he should make a ground reconnaissance. Some commanders seem to feel that a ground reconnaissance will compromise the ambush site. A small recon patrol, well camouflaged and taking great pains to remain undetected has little chance of discovery. So what, if you are seen, the enemy has no way of knowing what you are doing! Those fresh PAVN tracks in the stream bed may go undetected if you move by with your unit after dark. Too many ambush patrols simply move out and finally end up saying "Well this looks pretty good lets set up here".**

Another common error is the failure to establish proper security at the ambush site. In a linear ambush, security should be emplaced at least 100 meters up & down the trail from the kill zone and rear security beyond hand grenade range. Many leaders are reluctant to put this security out because they feel they are endangering their men. The fact is if he fails to put it out he is endangering his entire patrol. The security is to provide early warning, and one procedure we have used is comms wire strung from the security to the main body; upon approach of the enemy the security simply tugs the wire. The security must allow the enemy to pass his position and get into the kill zone. He cuts down any enemy that attempts to flee the ambush. Using a claymore with the security for the purpose of hitting the enemy as they flee has worked well.

Another problem is people falling asleep. No matter how much rest the men have received, some of them are going to doze. Comms wire strung along the position and wrapped around each man's wrist is one way to alert them of the enemy's approach. Here again leadership is the answer. "The patrol members will stay awake, if the patrol leader makes them stay awake."

Many times ambushes are properly planned, well laid, and correctly positioned only to fail because of some small failure on the part of the unit commander; such as:

1. Springing the ambush too early before the enemy gets into the "killing zone".
2. Poor noise discipline, talking, shifting positions, slamming of weapon bolts, etc.
3. Lack of sufficient firepower in the initial "springing of the ambush".
4. Failure to have escape routes covered by claymores and / or by artillery fires.
5. Failure to provide for illumination in conjunction with springing the ambush and with a sweep of the area.

We consider the ambush, particularly at night, one of our primary weapons against the enemy. When the Brigade moved into the Duc Pho area in April we became involved in four months of heavy contact with the NVA and Main Force VC units. The results were not particularly favorable to the enemy and he was forced back into the hills leaving behind some 1800 dead and 350 captured. During the last two months most of the Battalion's kills have been the result of night ambushes. The enemy still must come down out of the hills to get his rice and intelligence, and he still travels primarily at night, on the trails.

Our most successful unit at ambushes has been A Company commanded by Captain Geoffrey Ellerson. His secret to success has been his strict adherence with the techniques of patrolling as taught at Ft. Benning. He requires his patrol leaders to follow the troop leading steps; issue a warning order, conduct a ground reconnaissance, issue a patrol order, select objective rallying points, etc. From August 25th 1967 to September 21st A Company killed 43 enemy by night ambush, without having one U.S. casualty. He also lives by the code that a unit only does well what the commander checks, and he goes out with a different patrol each night as an observer. The next day he critiques their performance.

#### 1. Stay Behind Ambushes:

In some areas the VC habitually follow friendly units "keeping tabs" on them and feeling that the safest area around is where friendly troops have just vacated. It is a good practice to occasionally drop-off a squad to set up a stay-behind ambush. The ambush element must have communications with the main body and the main body must not get so far ahead as to be unable to return and assist the ambush element if this becomes necessary.

#### 2. Claymore ambush

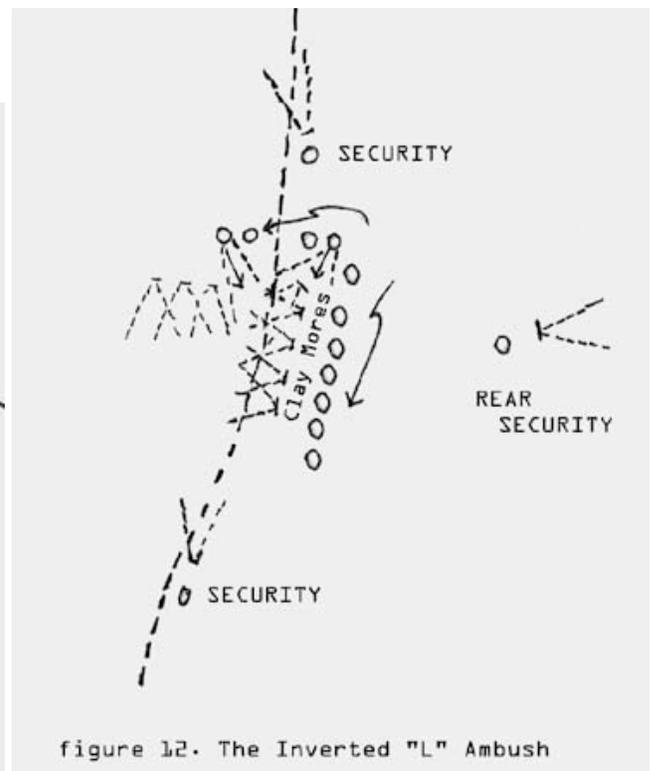
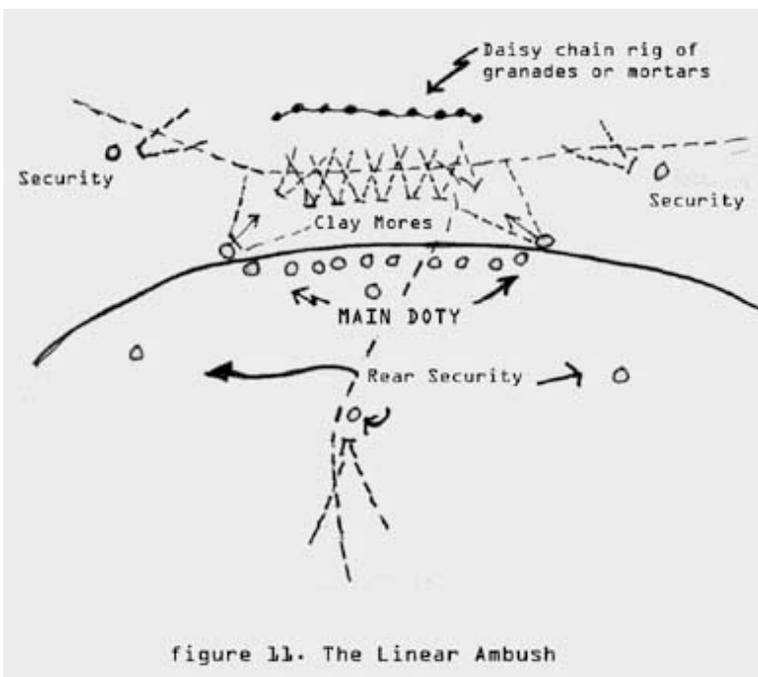
One of the most effective weapons to employ in an ambush are claymores. The ambush site must be selected to take maximum advantage of the claymore's capabilities. For maximum effectiveness the claymores should be located approximately 20 meters from the trail. Each claymore should be "sighted in", to ensure a thorough coverage of the killing zone, and their fire fans should overlap. To ensure a simultaneous detonation, they can be rigged in a daisy chain using detonation cord. Also claymores may be used covering escape routes out of the ambush area and to help provide flank and rear security to the ambush unit.

### 3. Use of Anti-Intrusion Devices

The anti-intrusion device with the trip wire area covered by claymores can be an extremely effective "small ambush". The trip wire should be spider-webbed across the trail, high enough so that small animals will not set it off. The intrusion device itself is with the "triggerman" a safe distance from the killing zone. Care should be taken in emplacing the device since the wire is fragile and breaks easily. The claymores should be carefully sighted in and camouflaged. A Company rigs up this device for use by the rear security. In two nights, four NVA were killed by this method as they approached the ambush from the rear.

### 4. Trip Flare Ambush

One type of ambush that has had some success in Vietnam is the trip-flare ambush. The site selected must be observed and within friendly artillery or mortar fire. Several days prior to preparing the site, artillery or mortar fires are adjusted into the target area. Then trip-flares are clandestinely set throughout the target area, preferably along trails habitually used by the VC. Then it is a matter of keeping the area observed. If and when a flare is tripped artillery or mortars are immediately called in. The area selected can be within friendly small arms fire and these weapons may also be used. The two types of ambushes used most successfully have been the Linear Ambush (Figure 11) and the Inverted "L" Ambush. (Figure 12)



## **PART V POLICING THE BATTLEFIELD**

In Vietnam our soldiers are a major part of the enemy supply system. The US soldier is by nature, rather wasteful; a trait that carries over from his civilian life in America, the "Land of Plenty". He tends to discard anything he considers extra and the idea of policing the battlefield is, many times, distasteful to him. Rather than take the time to cut up a C-ration can he will either throw it away or bury it. The unfortunate fact is that it may be returned to him later in the form of a booby trap.

The enemy, by contrast, is a scavenger. He finds some use for everything he finds on the battlefield and his scavenging teams habitually search our old campsites. The amount of US equipment found on enemy dead and prisoners is startling. It runs the gamut from weapons and ammunition to bottles of insect repellent. (Almost every VC killed or captured in our Battalion during the last four months was carrying a bottle of US Army issue insect repellent.)

The enemy has three main sources of supply: (1) Supplies carried overland through Laos and Cambodia, hence into Vietnam; (2) Those supplies carried in by sea from North Vietnam; and (3) Supplies captured from US and allied troops. Major efforts are being made to stem the first two sources, but there is not enough being done about the third source.

During Operation Baker, from 19 April 1967 to 20 Sept. 67 the Ban compiled the following statistics which are offered for the reader's consideration:

1. One hundred and seventy-four US grenades were recaptured; this does not count those found rigged as booby traps. Too often the individual soldier either fails to secure them properly or simply leaves them lying at their position when they move out.

2. One hundred and forty booby traps were located; of these twenty-nine were found the hard way resulting in 32 men killed and 128 wounded. During this operation we attained a 14 to 1 kill ratio over the enemy. Of particular note is the fact that 75% of our casualties during this period were as a result of mines and booby traps. The types of booby traps located were as follows:

- a. Twenty-four homemade explosive devices constructed from discarded US C-ration cans.
- b. Thirty-five booby traps using captured US hand grenades.
- c. Four booby traps using captured US claymores.
- d. Five US M-16 antipersonnel mines.
- e. Twelve booby trapped 155mm artillery rounds.
- f. Eight 250 lb. bombs rigged as booby traps.
- g. Seven booby trapped 105mm howitzer shells.
- h. Six booby trapped 81mm mortar rounds.
- i. Four booby trapped 5" Naval gun shells.
- j. Some eighteen other homemade explosive devices using powder from US artillery shells and other miscellaneous material.

During a two-week period in September when the Battalion had the mission of securing Highway 1, some ten antitank mines were emplaced on the road. The majority of these were rigged for electrical detonation using parts of discarded AN/PRC-25 batteries. These facts are revealing in that they give an indication on just how much we are unwittingly contributing to the enemy war effort. Our men would not purposefully kill or maim their buddies, but that is exactly what they are doing without realizing it. Policing the immediate battlefield and campsite is not enough. We have experienced a large number of dud bombs and artillery

shells in our area of operation. In the period mentioned the Battalion located and destroyed seventy-six 250 lb. bombs, two 500 lb. bombs, fifty CBU bomblets, and one hundred and eighty-nine artillery and mortar shells. This was a lot of potential booby traps that the enemy did not get. With the large number of duds that we were finding it was necessary to train several men in each platoon in demolition techniques. It has become policy that each unit carry explosives and when a dud is located they blow it in place.

The enemy supply system, at best, is poor and he has many shortages. Therefore he is prone to police up anything left behind by the US soldier. Just the opposite is true of the US soldier who seldom wants for supplies.

Only training, supervision, and discipline will stop this "help the enemy supply system". Anything that the enemy could use should be picked up or destroyed; and this includes used batteries, C-ration cans, ammo bags, etc. A command emphasis should be placed on units leaving an area free from equipment that the enemy can utilize. Harsh measures should be taken against commanders that violate this rule of the battlefield.

#### **PART VI LIGHTENING THE SOLDIERS LOAD**

It is not unusual to see a rifle company moving out on an operation with men carrying 50 to 60 lbs. The individual soldier normally carries his weapon, a double basic load of ammunition, 2 to 4 grenades, two canteens and a couple of C-ration meals. These are the essentials. Add to this a pack, one claymore, smoke grenades and a few other "nice to have" items and the soldier is bogged down to the point that his mobility is greatly decreased and after a day's walk he is physically exhausted. Every pound that a man carries reduces his ability to react thereby impairing his fighting ability. One method that we use in normal day-to-day operations where the units will be resupplied each day is to pick up the individual packs and extra equipment each morning, and return them to the unit with the P.M. resupply. This allows the units to maneuver during the day with only their combat load. This procedure depends upon the availability of landing zones and aircraft.

The individual soldier's load must be tailored to the operation and limited to the essentials. Commanders must carefully consider each item carried and designate each soldier's load in view of the unit's mission, the length of the operation, means of resupply, time of resupply, availability of water, climate, and terrain.

#### **PART VII TRAINING EMPHASIS**

We have found that Basic and Advanced Individual Training Centers in the US are doing an outstanding job. The new men arriving in Vietnam are well trained in the basic fundamentals of soldiering and surprisingly they seem to know what to expect. It is clear that they have been thoroughly oriented on the war and the country. When they first arrive they are apprehensive and a little frightened, which is natural. But when it comes to soldiering they are consistently better than we could hope for.

There are, however, some areas in which additional emphasis should be placed:

1. Nowhere in any other war was rifle marksmanship any more important than it is in Vietnam. This is a small unit war where shooting fast and accurate makes the difference. In this respect the individual soldier has a tendency to fire too much "automatic fire" thereby decreasing his accuracy and wasting ammunition. Emphasis should be placed upon well-aimed, semiautomatic fire. In this war volume does not replace accuracy.

2. The majority of soldiers tend to shoot high at night. This is an old problem that can only be overcome by additional training and emphasis.

3. The M-16 rifle is an ideal weapon for jungle warfare, it is light weight, has a rapid rate of fire, and the individual can carry a large amount of ammo. However, it cannot take the rough handling that the M-14 and M-1 could. The weapon requires a great deal of maintenance. In most cases it should be cleaned three times a day. Nine times out of ten, weapon malfunctions are due to poor maintenance procedures. Many of the new men seem to lack the "urgency" of caring for their weapon. On 3 March 1967 a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol made contact with 6 VC. All six VC escaped unharmed and the LRRP'S position was compromised because four of the five LRRP member's weapons malfunctioned. Upon checking out the incident we found it was plain and simple negligence; poor weapon maintenance.

4. Some units in Vietnam have found that darkness is a friend to those who know how to use it. The enemy does not have a monopoly on night operations. More emphasis should be placed upon night training; because the only thing that will give men the confidence to work efficiently at night is night training and more night training. In Vietnam the problem area in leadership is at the most crucial level; the squad. There are simply not enough experienced junior NCOs available. Over half the squads in Vietnam are commanded by Specialist Fours. This is not to say these men are not good squad leaders because many of them are. Most of them came to Vietnam right out of AIT and they lack a broad military background. In order to improve the caliber of junior NCOs and provide them with additional leadership training most Divisions and Brigades in Vietnam have organized NCO schools. Our Battalion has organized a monthly "Small Unit Leaders Combat Training Course". The subjects taught in the course are based upon the needs of the Battalion with a maximum of practical work and an emphasis on leadership and the role of the squad leader. The school has been a success and is well received by the students. After a soldier has been in a couple of fire fights and with the realization that other men will soon be looking to him for leadership, he is eager to learn all he can, as fast as he can. Our curriculum for the current course is as follows:

- a. Map Reading 8 hrs.
- b. Forward Observer Procedure 6 hrs.
- c. Night Firing Techniques 4 hrs.
- d. Booby Traps 3 hrs.
- e. Ambushing Techniques 2 hrs.
- f. Use of Gunships 2 hrs.
- g. Demolition's 3 hrs.
- h. First Aid 2 hrs.
- i. Communications 2 hrs.
- j. Combat Intelligence 1 hrs.
- k. Leadership 2 hrs.

No military unit is ever over trained. In keeping with this thought we require our fire base company to spend about one third of their time in training, that leaves them a third for tactical operations, and the remainder for fire base defense improvements. Most training requirements are selected from post-action critiques between the company commander and his platoon leaders; and the Battalion commander his staff and the company commanders. We have found these post-action critiques to be valuable aids in improving the combat proficiency of the Battalion.