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OPERATIONS OF THE 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE) REPLACEMENT  
TRAINING SCHOOL ON A SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSION ON 11 AND 12  
MAY 1967 IN BIEN HOA PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. (PERSONAL  
EXPERIENCE OF A COMPANY COMMANDER.)

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## PREFACE

This paper deals with two main subjects. One concerns the operation and program of instruction of the Replacement Training Company of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) at Bien Hoa, Republic of Vietnam. The second is a highly successful operation conducted by the Replacement Training Company in mid-May 1967.

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OPERATIONS OF THE 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE) REPLACEMENT TRAINING SCHOOL ON A SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSION ON 11 AND 12 MAY 1967 IN BIEN HOA PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A COMPANY COMMANDER.)

#### INTRODUCTION

##### BACKGROUND OF THE 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE JUNGLE SCHOOL

In early February 1967, Brigadier General John R. Deane, Jr, Commanding General of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) directed that a replacement training program be initiated. This program was for the purpose of preparing new arrivals to the Brigade for combat operations. Although a similiar type program had been in effect the year before, it had been discontinued in July 1966 because of lack of experienced personnel and operational commitments.

Captain Jack Tarr, who had been a company commander with the 4th Battalion, 503d Infantry of the 173d, was selected to organize and command the new school. Staff responsibility for the school was given to the Brigade S3.

Captain Tarr was given two weeks to find a suitable location for the school, determine the manning requirements, make a POI (program of instruction) and begin training the first class. The POI and lesson plans from the last year's course had been lost. The only guidance given Captain Tarr was that there should be extensive practical exercise in booby trap detection, rapid firing and security.

Based on the average weekly replacement rate of 150 - 200 men anticipated for February through June, cadre requirements for the school were established. (TAB "A") Shortly after the cadre was assembled, the name, "Jungle School", was adopted.

To come up with the program of instruction, several sources were contacted. A visit to the 1st Division's School in Phuoc Vinh was very helpful. The 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division

sent copies of their POI, schedule and handouts. Talks with company commanders, platoon leaders and combat experienced NCO's provided the best information on subjects to be taught. (As the course progressed, the program of instruction was continually modified as requirements were determined from experience or requested by unit commanders.)

Once the POI was approved, the next step was to put it into a schedule. The primary consideration here was giving each student maximum practical exercise. To do this, a system of round robin stations was worked out. On the second and third day of training, there were three or four concurrent training stations operating at all times. Thus, each man received individual attention and maximum practice. (TAB "B" contains highlights of several of the classes.)

#### EQUIPMENT AND CONDITIONING

Beginning with the second day of training, students are required to report with full combat gear, including, four meals of C rations, basic load of ammunition and two full canteens. In the morning, the "TAC's" (cadre NCO's) and student officers and platoon sergeants inspect each trooper and adjust his equipment. To speed acclimation to the heat, the new men are double timed in full field gear, between each class. Water discipline is enforced to get the troopers used to getting by on their two canteens during the day. By the combat operation on the fourth day, the men are used to their equipment and the heat. Once the double timing policy was established, heat casualties were reduced by seventy-five percent.

#### LEADERSHIP

In each class, a student chain of command, from company commander to fire team leader, is established. This frees the school cadre from administrative duties, and most important, develops leadership among the new arrivals. The leaders are briefed by the School Com-

mandant and given a "Leader's Kit", consisting of instructions, a sketch of training areas, "Do's and Don't's", and an operation order card. The night before the combat operation, a five page mimeographed operation's order is given to each student squad leader and above. (TAB "C") Blanks have been left for times, azimuths and locations. These blanks are filled in as the student leaders receive the order from the Commandant. In addition to the operation order, the leaders receive a map, a grease pencil and a compass. ~~That night,~~ <sup>The next morning,</sup> the student leaders give the order to the troops. A TAC assists the new leader, but he actually leads his element on the combat mission.

#### INCENTIVE

To add incentive and a tangible reward, several policies have been adopted. A 5" x 7" certificate, available through AG channels, is given to each graduate. Outstanding graduates received a larger certificate with the Brigade crest on it. The Commanding General and the School Commandant signed all certificates. A letter of commendation accompanies the certificates of outstanding graduates.

To determine the effectiveness of the training and to insure the students get the teaching points, a 50 question test is given at the end of the week. This tends to make the students more alert. (When the test grades showed a dramatic improvement, another test was made up and then the two were alternated.)

Finally, a graduation criteria was established. (See TAB "D") As late as June 1967, the 173d Airborne Brigade was the only unit in Vietnam to require <sup>that</sup> a new man actually graduate from its replacement training school. Most units require <sup>only</sup> that each man attend the course. Most students display a receptive attitude. The few whose attitudes or actions are extremely poor are cited in a brief note to the unit CO concerned. Several "duds" were discovered early that way. If a man fails the course, his CO is notified of the reasons. The certi-

ificates are received with pride by each man. The graduates are glad that the course is tough and that there is a graduation criteria.

#### SUPPORT

Some units in Vietnam assign new men directly to the replacement training unit until completion of their pre combat training. For the 173d Airborne Brigade, the most expedient way of handling new men is to have them report to their new company first, then attend Jungle School. This means each man is equipped by his own supply and stays with his permanent unit. Every morning, the students are issued C rations and ammunition by their unit, then report to Jungle School. Noon meal during the course is C rations, supplemented by milk, coffee and cold juice. Evening meal is hot "A" rations, provided on a weekly rotational basis by one of the battalions. Helicopter support is obtained through the Brigade Aviation Officer and provides realism to training. Each evening of the combat operation, water, shovels, picks, starlight scopes, field phones and extra sand bags are brought with the hot chow. If a helicopter is not available, heavily sand-bagged trucks have to brave the possibility of ambush or mines to deliver the food and water.

#### COMMUNICATIONS

Since most replacements have had little practical experience operating radios, RTO's (radio telephone operators) are selected the first day of training. Beginning with the second day, radios and SOI's (Standard Operating Instructions) are issued. Communications checks and normal administrative traffic during the next two days improve the student's ability as a radio operator. In addition to the PRC-25's carried by the students, one is kept at the Jungle School Command Post. During the combat operation, hourly location or situation reports are received by the NCO on duty. These reports are plotted on the operational map, then called by land line to the Brigade TOC and

the supporting artillery unit. At night, field phones are set up from the company to the platoon CP. The replacements get experience making hot loops and operating an SB - 992 (7 plug portable switchboard).

#### CASUALTIES

Heat casualties are the biggest medical problem during the cycle. Salt and water consumption, scheduled halts, rate of march, and availability of landing zones are considerations in all movement. Serious casualties can be evacuated quickly by the MED-EVAC helicopters at Long Binh, a short distance away. Two sandbagged vehicles, with radio, aid kits, litters and water are on standby at the Jungle School headquarters to evacuate less serious cases. The operation proves to be of great benefit to new medics. Many new medics are frequently not properly briefed or equipped by their unit. A list of required items was agreed upon by the Brigade Surgeons and the School Commandant. Each new medic uses this list to check his aid kit for completeness. (The Brigade Surgeon subsequently issued this list to all battalions.) An aid man goes with every separate element, including night ambushes.

#### PLANNING THE COMBAT OPERATIONS

Each week's combat operation is carefully planned. On the days the School is on its operation, it is integrated into the Brigade defense plan. The Jungle School even has its own Area of Operations, called, "AO Trooper". (See TAB "E") Two or three days before the operation, intelligence reports from US and Vietnamese sources are screened. Usually based on recent intelligence, the operation is planned. Some of the missions in the past have been search and clear, checking rubber workers and woodcutters, road checks, road clearing and ambushes. The Scout Dog Platoon frequently attaches teams to each axis of movement to give the dogs and their handlers experience.

At least once a month, portable mine detectors are borrowed and roads outside the perimeter are checked for mines. Close coordination with US advisors and the Vietnamese district chief allow road blocks to be set and movement after curfew curtailed. One early morning patrol bagged eighteen women and children returning from a jungle rendezvous with their VC husbands and fathers.

Each week, a different route in and out of the Brigade area is used. Thorough map and aerial reconnaissance has revealed at least 10 areas suitable and within range for company-sized operational bases for the School. Seldom will the unit use the same base two weeks in a row. Each separate element has a radio and can be reinforced quickly at all times. Thus, not one student has ever suffered from anything more serious than heat exhaustion.

To preclude firing into friendly positions, close coordination is effected with nearby US and ARVN units and supporting artillery. Since each operation has a specific tactical purpose and is planned thoroughly, the students at all levels are enthusiastic and learn the complete workings of a rifle company in combat.

#### CONDUCT OF THE OPERATION

When the student leaders have issued their order, the special equipment and ammunition issued and an inspection conducted, the operation begins. A cadre officer or NCO is with as many leaders as possible. The cadreman or TAC assists and advises, but allows the student leader free rein. Navigation, communications and reporting of position is done by the student leaders. Initially, platoon or larger sized elements move on two or more axis to a company operational base approximately 2000 meters away. Enroute, the difficulty of navigation, noise discipline and flank security is realized by the students after the first hour. Arriving at the company base camp no later than 1500 hours, the student leaders supervise the

preparation of defensive positions. Predesignated squads get ready for night ambushes, while other men are preparing an LZ for the resupply helicopter. Each platoon leader makes a sketch of his positions and his fires and has them approved by the Commandant. Artillery defensive fires are planned and registered if conditions permit. Because of nearby Vietnamese hamlets and the location of the ambushes, "no fire" azimuths are given and marked by stakes. A reaction force is designated. At dusk, clearing patrols check beyond the perimeter. Soon after, flares and claymores are set out. Just after dark, the ambush patrols depart. Because of the inexperience and control factor, LP's (listening posts) are not used outside the perimeter.

The next morning, every squad that has not been on a night ambush, goes on a 2 - 3 hour patrol. Upon the return to the company base, weapons are cleaned and fox holes filled. Using different routes, the platoons then return to the Brigade area.

The student has thus moved through several types of terrain as a member of a large and a small force. He has prepared and occupied company defensive positions, and has been on a clearing patrol. Both the unit commanders and the replacements themselves feel this is the best system of preparation for combat that is possible.

#### GENERAL SITUATION

##### ENEMY FORCES

Within a 5000 meter radius of the Brigade area, the VC seldom operate in groups larger than squad size. Vietnamese intelligence sources place the VC strength in this area at about 40. During the day, these guerrillas work as civilians. At night, they collect taxes, spread propaganda or assist larger forces. Occasionally, sniper or terrorist attacks will occur. At least once a month, the Army unit operating near the Bien Hoa Air Base will be sniped at or receive grenades in its base camp. Some of the dirt roads to the

North and East of the Brigade have been mined. Explosive-type booby traps are seldom encountered, although there are some "pungi" stakes in the area. The VC in this area is not a "regular" and does not have a uniform per se. He is usually armed with a US or Chinese carbine, though a few AK-47's have been reported.

8000 meters north of the Brigade base camp, across the Dong Nai River, is the infamous "War Zone 'D'". The "hard core" VC who operate in and around 'D' Zone have not attempted an attack on the Bien Hoa complex in recent years. Good river crossing sites are due North of the Brigade area, so frequent VC traffic is reported in that area.

#### FRIENDLY FORCES

When the 173d Airborne Brigade is not on an operation, one battalion is responsible for patrolling the Brigade TAOR (tactical area of responsibility). If the Brigade is committed, one or more companies under Field Force II control assume responsibility for patrolling this area. Platoons operate independantly and provide saturation patrolling and ambushes.

Brigade perimeter defense is provided by rear echelon and support troops. At least one 105 mm howitzer battery and one 155 mm howitzer battery (self propelled) is available for supporting fires at all times.

#### TERRAIN

The 173d Base Camp was built in a large rubber plantation on a series of gentle hills slightly higher than the Bien Hoa Air Force Base complex. As with most permanent base camps in Vietnam, at least 100 meters has been cleared in front of the defensive berm. North of the Brigade area, there is mostly dense, thicket-like jungle. Due East of the defensive berm is a strip of rubber trees 200 to 400 meters wide. From there, a 1200 meter wide belt of thick underbrush extends.

Finally, a 1000 meter wide strip of old rubber trees extends further to the East. Approximately 2000 meters North of the Brigade base camp, a hard top road runs East and West. North of that road, the land is flat and mostly planted in rice.

Small streams and dry stream beds ~~est~~ run through the entire TAOR. Narrow logging trails abound and usually run North-South. The average growth of the jungle is 15 to 20 feet. Almost every kind of terrain native to Vietnam can be found within 4000 meters of the Brigade perimeter. In the jungle, vehicular movement is limited to dirt and improved roads. Except after heavy rains, rubber plantations can be traversed by wheeled vehicles. All streams in the area are fordable by track vehicles, and in certain areas, by wheeled vehicles. In thick areas, movement by foot troops is slow and difficult. Observation and fields of fire in the jungle are normally limited to trails, roads and clearings. Observation in the jungle is approximately 5-8 meters. Cover and concealment are excellent.

#### WEATHER

During May, the average daily temperatures range from 90 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. At night, the temperature drops to the sixties. Since the monsoon season is approaching, days are usually cloudy, *and* humidity is high, almost always above 90%. Visibility is excellent except at night and during thunderstorms. Rains are infrequent and of short duration. The night of 11-12 May 1967, there was no moon and only a few stars were visible through a cloudy sky.

#### THE PEOPLE

The 173d Airborne Brigade Base Camp is in Bien Hoa Province, and Cong Thanh and Duc Tu Districts. Most of the Vietnamese in the area live in or near the city of Bien Hoa or along Highway 1. A series of refugee hamlets lies along this highway. Known VC families and sympathizers live here. Many of these people have been

displaced by the Government; some are families of VC prisoners held in a nearby POW camp. North of the Brigade area, the population is centered along the hardtop East-West road. These people are mostly farmers, rubber workers or wood cutters.

There is a Province-wide curfew extending from daylight to sunset. The Vietnamese officials tell their US advisors that the curfew is from 0700 to 1900 hours. Since it is seldom enforced, the local people will habitually move during hours of daylight or from 0615 to 1930. After dark, the only movement is on highways. The villagers have been told that if they must travel at night, they must stay on roads or trails and carry a lantern. The local VC, and the tax collectors, propagandists and couriers usually use the hours between 1730 and 1930 to travel relatively openly, knowing US soldiers will hesitate or give them the benefit of the doubt before shooting. Most of the people are pro Government; however, although they do not willingly support the VC, they also will not volunteer information to the Government troops.

#### SPECIAL SITUATION

In March and April 1967, units operating East of the 173d Airborne Brigade's Base Camp had found traces of VC activity or had been sniped at or grenaded. Surmising that the guerrillas were coming from a refugee hamlet on Highway 1, (YT056132) (TAB "F") the Jungle School decided to ambush a trail network North of the highway.

On 4 May 1967, the Jungle School cadre led a class of 81 replacements through the jungle East of the Base Camp and set up a company perimeter in a large rubber plantation. Staff Sergeant Santos Rodriguez, one of the TAC NCO's, volunteered to lead the ambush. Although Rodriguez had only two more days until his return home, he had asked to come on one more operation, because he felt

sure it would be a "hot one". With Rodriguez on the only ambush of the night were cadremen Sergeant Donnie Jones and Staff Sergeant Marion Smith. Jones, on his second trip to Vietnam, had just completed a six-month tour with the Brigade Long Range Recon Patrol.

Despite the curfew for Vietnamese civilians, Rodriguez was sure that innocent looking rubber workers or woodcutters were noting the departure and movement of ambush patrols. Because of the inexperience of the new troops, ambush patrols normally went out just before last light. This time, however, Rodriguez decided to depart the base just at EENT (end evening nautical twilight) to preclude observation by any Vietnamese in the area. At 1935 hours, he led 10 students and the other two cadre toward the ambush site, 600 meters away. Twenty minutes later, he had positioned the men and he and Jones moved a little distance away to set up Claymores. Suddenly, Rodriguez sensed danger and looked up in time to see three VC in the dim light. One of the enemy threw a grenade and fired at Rodriguez with an AK-47. Rodriguez slumped to the ground critically wounded as Sergeant Jones rushed into action and fired at the retreating enemy. Jones saw one of the attackers fall before he turned his attention to his wounded buddy. Calling for the medic, Jones found, to his dismay, that the medic had left most of his equipment at the company position when told to "travel light".

When Lieutenant Jim Wood, the Assistant Commandant, learned of the situation, he immediately alerted the standby reaction force. Before he left the operational base, Wood picked up medical supplies, left someone in charge and had the Jungle School TOC call for an evacuation helicopter. The relief force actually doubletimed through the plantation until it reached Rodriguez's group. While the wounded man was being treated, Lieutenant Wood searched for a suitable LZ for the helicopter. Finding one nearby, he had Rodriguez moved and se-

curity set out. His main problem then was how to illuminate the tiny clearing. Flashlights and flares wouldn't properly light the small area, so Wood opened up several Claymores and used the C-4 (explosive compound) inside to illuminate the LZ. When the helicopter was close by, Wood shot two hand held star clusters through the trees. The ingenious method of illuminating the LZ with C-4 enabled the helicopter to land and evacuate Rodriguez without incident.

Rodriguez was extremely popular with the cadre and the students. Thus, an operation to "get even" was planned for the next week. Appropriately, it was named "Operation Revenge".

#### NARRATION

#### THE PLAN

The most important consideration in the formulation of the plan was getting ambush elements into place undetected. To do this, the area had to be searched and cleared, then sealed off. Since the movement to the ambush sites was the critical time, it was decided to employ stay behind ambushes.

Basically, there were two phases. Phase one was the movement to and occupation of five blocking positions with at least two squads in each. Phase two was the withdrawal of half of the men at each position just before sunset. (One position was withdrawn completely.) This left four stay-behind ambushes on the trails leading into the area. The 181 students were formed into four platoons of four squads each. One M-60 machine gun was with each platoon.

Four platoons were required to make the plan work. The 1st and 3d platoons were to depart the Brigade Base walking on each side of the East-West road from YTO33154 to YTO43153. (TAB "F") The 2d platoon followed 5 minutes later. At the road junction at YTO43153, the 3d platoon was to go South to occupy Positions A and B, and the 1st platoon East to occupy Position E. The 2d platoon, following be-

hind, was to go to Positions C and D. (See TAB "G") When the first two platoons had reached the road intersection, the 4th platoon would load into trucks and go through Bien Hoa to a position off Highway 1 South West of the blocking positions. Once the blocking positions were in place, this platoon was to conduct a sweep on a North East azimuth.

Position A was expected to be the one to make contact. Because he knew the area and had been at the ill-fated ambush the week before, Sergeant Jones volunteered to lead that patrol. This left one problem. Experience had shown that the replacements could only last four or five hours without a water resupply. Once in the ambush site, there could be no resupply. For that reason, only Sergeant Jones would go straight to Position A with the 3d platoon. To conserve energy and water, Jones' squad went by truck with the 4th platoon. While waiting for his squad to arrive, Jones was to make a thorough reconnaissance of the area, find avenues of approach and the best ambush site. When the 4th platoon linked up with the 3d, it would drop off Jones' men and then move to and establish a company base. At 1800 hours, the non-ambushers were to head for the company base. Position B was to be withdrawn completely. While in the blocking positions, no particular effort at secrecy was to be made. Any civilians in the area were to be checked and possibly searched, but not told to leave. Meanwhile, the ambushers would have sufficient time to find a good site and prepare it. By 1800, the men at the ambush sites were to have eaten, put out Claymores, spread out ponchos, checked camouflage and relieved themselves. Before the non ambushers left, they were to give all their water and Claymores to "Bushwhackers". The sites at C, D and E were to be supplied by vehicle before 1600. Once they were left alone, there would be no further movement by the ambushers.

The 4th platoon was to have responsibility for the company base. Lieutenant Wood, the Assistant Commandant, was to lay out the position and have the platoon begin sufficient foxholes for the entire company

The reaction squad was to come from the third platoon. This squad familiarized itself with the location, disposition and routes to each ambush site. Before the operation got underway, azimuths restricting firing were disseminated to all personnel. The ambush sites were to fire toward the company base or other ambush elements only in an emergency.

#### PHASE ONE

Operation Revenge started out smoothly. The students were nervous and the cadre grim. The usual banter and horseplay was conspicuously absent. More attention than ever was given to the fitting of equipment, test firing of weapons and camouflage. At 1015 hours, on the 11th of May, the 1st and 3d platoons crossed the LD (line of departure). The first hour the students displayed good noise and security discipline. Then, as the oppressive heat and humidity began to press down on them, breaks in the column became more frequent. Less than 1200 meters from the Base Camp, the heat casualties began. Although no one was evacuated, the column had to wait for the casualties to recover. At 1140, the first elements had reached the road intersection and Lieutenant Wood was ordered to load the trucks and proceed to the jumpoff point. When the three platoons came to the intersection and split, Captain Tarr decided to go with the ambush element at Position D. This later proved to be a fortunate decision.

By 1300, all the elements were in position and Lieutenant Wood was told to begin the sweep with the 4th platoon. From his location with Position D, Captain Tarr could look up the road and see men moving around 800 meters away. Calling the 1st platoon leader whose

men were further East, Tarr asked if the unit was disoriented. The platoon leader assured Tarr that it was in the correct place. What had happened was that it had taken the wrong road to its proposed location. Instead of going on a 100 degree azimuth, the 1st platoon had gone on a 70 degree azimuth. The 1:25000 "picto" map showed a main road going straight to Position E on a 100 degree azimuth, but didn't show any road on a 70 degree azimuth. In fact, the road shown on the map had become overgrown and indistinct while another road had been cut to the North. Although the platoon leader wondered vaguely why his compass and the map didn't agree, he had continued along the biggest road he saw. This new site was a better one than the originally proposed one, so Captain Tarr ordered the 1st platoon to stand fast.

Position D had been picked because several VC had been spotted moving South down a trail toward it in late April. A previous class had discovered a nearby smaller trail whose entrance was cleverly hidden by brush.

Possibly made nervous by the School Commandant's presence, the cadre squad leader, Sergeant Robert Parham, didn't do anything toward preparing an ambush position. At 1600, Captain Tarr asked Parham about his plan and the position. Concerned at the lack of preparation, Tarr took over himself. Many things had been left undone and there were several dangerous mistakes made. Although Parham had taught a formal class on ambushes himself, he had not followed any of the principles he'd expounded

Quickly checking the area, Tarr and Parham found an already-prepared two man foxhole directly across the road from the major North-South trail. The machine gun was set up in front of the hole, with the student squad leader, Sergeant Edward Smith, controlling it. Using contours in the ground, the other two-man positions were laid

out. (Sergeant Parham had planned for one man positions.) Six Claymore mines were emplaced all along the front and two were put behind the squad. Whereas Sergeant Parham had wanted to control all eight mines, Captain Tarr suggested that Sergeant Smith take two and the rear security take two. Each Claymore was put in front of a rubber tree stump to prevent backblast from hitting the troopers. A length of Claymore wire, carried for the purpose, was split in two, then tied to the wrist of one man in each position. A couple of tugs on the wire would provide a silent and effective signal. This system later proved very effective. Satisfied with the position, Captain Tarr radioed the predesignated elements to converge on the company base and departed himself. Phase I was completed.

#### PHASE II

At the company base, one squad was primed as a reaction force. As the other elements came in, Lieutenant Wood placed them in the perimeter and directed them to improve the foxholes. Although one returning element became disoriented for 45 minutes, all squads had closed in by 1830 hours. After hot chow, the troops continued working on their positions. When clearing patrols had checked the front, flares and Claymores were put out, leaving pre designated paths. In case the reaction force had to reinforce one of the ambush patrols, it wouldn't trip any flares. If a reaction force were to depart the company, it would be guided out of the perimeter and through the flares and Claymores. Four compasses were set, one for each of the ambush locations. The reaction force had a radio, a machine gun, star clusters, flashlights, machetes for clearing an LZ, and a block of C-4 for illumination.

According to plan, "no fire" stakes were put up, precluding fire from the perimeter hitting one of the ambushes.

It is standard operating procedure in the Brigade for ambush

elements to answer radio calls by breaking squelch or depressing the push-to-talk switch. This procedure was carried on during the night, the only exception being when contact was made later.

#### THE WARNING

The night of 11-12 May was almost pitch black. Although the nearest two-man position of Position D was only 8 meters from the road, they could hardly see it in the darkness. After an hour of Stand To at EENT, the men at D went on a 50% alert. The men who were awake tied the signal wire to their wrists. At 2315 hours, one of the men with the machine gun blinked his eyes and strained them into the darkness. Three figures, carrying bulky loads, padded silently down the road headed East, toward Position C. Showing great presence of mind, he did not fire, knowing the VC were going toward another ambush. Jerking the signal wire, he woke everyone. Each man grabbed a grenade or claymore firing device. Muscles tense, they waited.

#### POSITION C

Position C was a classic example of how not to rig an ambush. The cadre NCO had been given a specific location in which to set up and told to orient North. This he did. After the covering force had left, the NCO, Staff Sergeant Joe Brown, split his ambush into three parts. There were only two NCO's and one radio, but this did not affect his decision. (The arrangement at Position C is shown in TAB H.)

A few meters from the intersection of the roads, the VC who had just passed Parham tripped a flare. (Brown had been told not to set up flares.) Wild, uncontrolled firing broke out. Only one Claymore was blown. Not returning the ineffective fire, the VC attempted to move behind (South) of the ambush. During the brief lull that followed, Sergeant Brown reported that he was being attacked. While he was calling, the VC bumped into one of Brown's other scattered elements. The fire from "both sides" that Brown then reported was probably the

the frightened troops South of him preventing the VC from going around them. Fortunately, the VC changed their minds and went back the way they had come. Had they succeeded in going between the two groups, it is almost a certainty that the students would have opened up on each other or at least caught one group in a crossfire. (When These facts came out during the debriefing, Sergeant Brown was relieved.)

#### THE AMBUSH

Evidently, the VC squad leader called to his men to return the way they had come. Five minutes after the shooting at Position C had ceased, the nervous men at D heard chattering voices coming back toward them. Probably, the VC had planned to take a longer route and go around Sergeant Brown's group. The perfect noise discipline which usually characterizes VC movement was gone as the enemy trotted noisily down the road, from the West this time. Sergeant Parham waited until the point man came even with the last Claymore before activating the firing devices. Then, he "milked down" the other three devices in front of him, causing an almost continuous roar. Sergeant Smith blew the two Claymores on the left at the same time. Then, each man threw a grenade.

Moaning and the sound of movement came from the road as a lull followed the explosions. More grenades were thrown and this time, the M-79 was fired. (No one bothered to tell the grenadier to use the "shot gun" or anti-personnel round and he didn't ask.) Instead of firing to the flanks of the ambush, the inexperienced student fired at a point on the road 8 to 10 meters in front of him. Since the high explosive (HE) round must travel almost 15 meters before activating, all but one of the rounds failed to explode.

On the left flank, two men heard sounds of one or more men trying to go around the ambush. The two man rear security heard this noise

too, and each gripped the firing device of his Claymore tightly. Holding the wire in his free hand as one would when fishing, one of the men felt a terrific jolt. Automatically, he squeezed the firing device and blew the Claymore, probably scaring the VC more than injuring him. After that attempt at an end run, there was comparative silence again. From the left, a wounded VC cried out pitiously. Every time he did, the wounded VC point man would yell at him. The US troops thought he was yelling, "Hanoi". However, when they were asked later if this could have been, "Het noi", ("Shut up") they thought it was.

Sergeant Parham called Captain Tarr and explained the situation. He thought he had at least two wounded VC in front of his position. He asked if he should try to take them prisoner. Because of the inexperience of the new troops and the possibility of a man being killed or wounded, Parham was given a negative answer.

A few minutes later, Parham heard noises as if one of the wounded was trying to crawl away. To prevent losing the prize, Parham threw a flare and Sergeant Smith stood up and fired two rounds into each VC.

#### VC ROCKET AND MORTAR ATTACK

When Position C reported contact, the Jungle School TOC was notified. As the situation developed, it was reported. The School TOC immediately notified the 173d Airborne Brigade TOC each time. At 0100 hours on the 12th, the entire Bien Hoa Air Base was hit by rocket and mortar fire. Later investigation showed that the VC had used everything from 122 mm rockets, fired from "D" Zone, to 75 mm recoilless rifles and 81 mm mortars fired from just outside the defensive perimeter. This shelling continued for approximately 20 minutes.

Sounds of explosions drifted through the thick foliage of the jungle to the ears of the men in the Jungle School base. From approximately 1000 meters South, came sounds of muzzle reports similar to

a 105 mm howitzer. Although everyone knew there were no friendly artillery pieces in that area, they thought their ears were deceiving them as to the true location of the gun. All the time, the 173d TOC duty officer failed to notify the School that the Air Base was being shelled. Had he done so, an element from the company base could have moved silently through the rubber and silenced at least one gun. (The next day, a search of the area turned up a 75 mm recoilless rifle shell 1000 meters due South of where the Americans had listened the night before.) Not until 0130 hours were the troops in the field notified of the shelling. By then, it had stopped.

#### SUMMARY

Just before first light on the 12th, Sergeant Parham's squad at Position D conducted a "Turkey Shoot". (Each rifleman fired one magazine and the grenadier fired 2 HE rounds.) By 0610, there was enough light to see 50 meters. Parham cautiously raised up and surveyed the road in front of him. Not two, but three VC bodies were sprawled on the road. After putting out security, Parham began a search of the area and the bodies. From the equipment and papers they carried, it was evident that the VC were part of an 81 mm mortar squad, probably on their way to set up when they were surprised. A watch, flashlight, mortar firing tables and a weapon indicated that the first man was the squad leader. Although his sub machine gun had a magazine inserted into it, the squad leader had made no attempt to chamber a round and return fire. Another unusual aspect was that his weapon was rusty and dirty. The second VC, a medic, had been killed instantly and hadn't made any noise. This explains why the ambushers thought they had only killed two. All three men were carrying packs containing 5 rounds of Chinese 82 mm mortar rounds. Two other packs containing 5 mortar rounds each, were found further down the road where they'd been dropped by their frightened owners. Later informa-

placed the three VC as members of the Phu Loi Battalion, operating in "D" Zone. Their destination was probably an open area just out of eyesight of the guards manning the <sup>Brigade</sup> defensive berm. From there, they could just reach the plane hangers on the Eastern end of the runway with the mortar.

A total of 25 Chinese 82 mm mortar rounds, four homemade aiming stakes and four night lighting devices were found. In addition, the bodies yielded seven grenades and two magazines of 9 mm ammunition.

Once the search was complete, the platoons began their return routes to the Brigade Base Camp. Operation Revenge was over.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Although the operation was a success because of the three VC KIA, there was an element of luck involved. Sergeant Brown's poorly-laid ambush could have resulted in three US KIA instead of the Viet Cong dead. Sergeant Parham's original plan at Position D probably would not have enabled his squad to successfully spring the ambush. Besides the position not being tactically feasible, Parham hadn't planned for a signal system. If the men at D had not been put in two man positions, there could have conceivably not been anyone alert when the VC came down the road.

On the other hand, once the action started, Parham behaved coolly and courageously. The fact that there were no wasted rounds or grenades can be attributed to his leadership and example.

Both Brown's and Parham's examples show that basic fundamentals are often forgotten or overlooked. One solution to this would be to "war game" every similar-type operation with subordinate leaders, and test their reaction to unexpected situations.

Basically, Operation Revenge was well thought out and well executed. Considering the experience factor of the new troops, the operation went smoothly. As a matter of fact, it was cadre mis-

takes which almost made it a failure.

The training system evolved by the 173d Airborne Brigade Jungle School could be adopted by every unit in Vietnam. The replacement is challenged from the moment he reports to the school. For three days, he is mentally and physically prepared to face the jungle and the enemy. In the field, the new troopers learn first hand what their next eleven months will be like. Some other American units simply send the new men on a patrol and an ambush as part of a small unit. Thus, the new man must wait until he joins his company before learning about clearing patrols, flank security, and perimeter defense. Unit commanders have commented that graduates of the school are able to fit in immediately, thereby easing the burden on their platoon mates. One of the most important aspects of the 173d Airborne Brigade Jungle School program is that officers and NCO's receive challenging training and leadership experience in a combat situation before reporting to their units.

Operation Revenge proved that new replacements, properly led, can make an effective unit and accomplish a variety of missions.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

1. Sergeant Rodriguez was surprised and wounded because the "buddy system" wasn't being used. Particularly in times or areas of reduced or limited visibility, no man should be where he can't be seen and covered by someone else.
2. Have your men "read back" their instructions. During the operation, there were several examples of NCO's not clearly understanding what they were to do. Had they been forced to reiterate their entire instructions, most of these mistakes would have been prevented.
3. Even when troops are experienced, an equipment check list is important. They become careless, new men join and don't "get the word", or they don't check the equipment for serviceability.

4. Every element moving independently, should be self-sustaining. This includes radio with extra battery and long antenna and WD-1, food, water, star clusters, flares, smoke, map, compass, poncho, medical kits and demolitions. (Besides serving as an expedient illuminating device, the C-4 can be used to clear an LZ or destroy a dud grenade or VC booby trap.)
5. When there is a "No Fire" area because of a nearby friendly unit or village, this information must be disseminated to each soldier. Because a soldier frequently loses his sense of direction at night, "no fire" stakes, set in with a compass, should be put at every position. Since this will often leave a gap in defensive fires, Claymores, artillery, grenades or booby traps can fill the space.
6. When possible, detailed plans for a reaction force should be made. This includes a preplanned route and guides outside the perimeter. Troopers manning the front line position should be briefed about the possibility of an element entering or leaving the lines.
7. Ambush patrols should carry flares, but not set them up. Except in large scale ambushes, or where the enemy is canalized, flares tend only to warn the enemy and give him equal observation as the ambusher. However, a flare thrown behind the enemy like a grenade, can often be effective.
8. A signalling system for night ambushes is a must. Lengths of WD-1 communications wire or used Claymore wire can be used effectively.
9. In areas where civilians are not restricted, a system which clears and seals an area, then leaves stay-behind ambushes is often successful.
10. Despite doctrine, I know of very few ambushes which are rehearsed beforehand. This was brought out vividly the night of 11-12 May. Particularly when new troops are involved, a rehearsal, encompassing emergency drills and different ambush formations should be

conducted.

11. Most NCO's I met in Vietnam have forgotten how to make range cards for an individual rifleman or a crew-served weapon. Few NCO's get down behind a weapon and sight through it to see if it is in a good firing position. This requires training and supervision by the commander.

12. In defense or in an ambush, one man should handle no more than four Claymore firing devices.

13. Many ambush leaders are not prepared to call in artillery or mortar support. Before departing the base camp, they should know what the azimuth from their proposed position to the nearest concentration is. Once in position, they should verify this.

14. Both officers and NCO's show a lack of knowledge of the contents of a five paragraph field order. Issuing each leader a small copy of a sample of leadership steps and an operations order has proven worthwhile.

TAB "A"

PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT AUTHORIZED THE 173D AIRBORNE

BRIGADE JUNGLE SCHOOL

1. Personnel

<u>Position</u>	<u>Grade/Rank</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>AUTH</u>
Commandant	O-3	71542	1
Assistant Commandant	O-2	71542	1
First Sergeant	E-7	11B4P	1
Platoon Sergeant	E-6 or E-7	11B4P	3
Tactical NCO's	E-5 or E-6	11B4P	12
Supply Sergeant	E-5 or E-6	71K4P	1
Operations Sergeant	E-5	11F2P/11B4P	1
Clerk	E-4	71B2P	1
Communications Specialist	E-4	31B2P	1
Drivers	E-3	--	2

2. All personnel assigned to the Jungle School as TAC's will have at least three (3) months retainability, have earned a CIB in Vietnam, have at least three years in the Army, not have a profile, and have had experience as an instructor.

3. Equipment

Tent, GP large	2
Tent, GP medium	2
PA set, portable w/ microphone	1
Desk, flat top	3
Radio, A11/PRC-25 complete	7
Antenna, RC-292	1
Machine gun, M 60	4
Truck, 3/4 ton w/ trailer	1
Truck, 1/4 ton w/ trailer	1



TAB "B"

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF TRAINING

Grenade Training - is conducted in front of the defensive berm. Two students throw at an opening in a bunker, watch the grenade hit, then take cover in prone shelters. Meanwhile, the other students practice inspecting grenades and setting up booby traps.

M-72 LAW - one out of six men fire the LAW. The others practice with used LAW's to become familiar with extending and closing it and sighting and trigger squeeze.

Quick Kill - firers begin at the 25 meter line and practice dry fire techniques. After a magazine has been fired, they move to the 50 meter line where they advance slowly forward, stopping and firing on command. To assist in looking "over the sights", a metal rod from a 105 mm howitzer box is taped on the weapon.

Flares - after a demonstration, the students break down into squads. Tent pegs have been set out in a wagon-wheel shape with a cadre man on the inside and the flares on the outside. Two-man teams then get practice setting and removing flares.

First Aid - during the combat first aid class, a MED-EVAC helicopter with hoist flies overhead and hovers. A demonstration is conducted on different harnesses and litters used in hoist operation and a volunteer is winched into the helicopter.

Ambush - after a one hour class, the squads take turns setting ambushes and countering them. Later, a mounted counter ambush drill is held. This is controlled by the student leaders.

Helicopters - a 30 minute class explains techniques, signals, formations and Landing Zone preparation. Then practical exercise is held, simulating loading and unloading. The students take turns practicing hand and arm signals used in controlling a helicopter landing.

Squad Tactics - using areas within the Brigade perimeter, move-



CONTINUATION OF TAB "B"

ment and formations are practiced in jungle, streams and open areas. As with the ambush practical exercise, the student leaders control their men.

Booby Trap Course - while part of the company is learning about VC booby traps, the other half goes through a "Booby Trap" course. Defused VC mines, booby traps and punji stakes are hidden along the trails. A false step results in putting a foot into a hole or igniting a smoke grenade. A systematic search of an authentic looking VC hut is the highlight of the problem.

Copy Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
Hq, 173d Abn Bde (Sep)  
BIEN HOA, RVN

OPORD \_\_\_\_\_ -67 (Opn JUNGLE SCHOOL) (U)

References:

TIME ZONE: HOTEL

TASK ORGANIZATION:

Task Force - JUNGLE SCHOOL

Alpha Group - \_\_\_\_\_ Bravo Group - \_\_\_\_\_  
1 Platoon - \_\_\_\_\_ 3 Platoon - \_\_\_\_\_  
2 Platoon - \_\_\_\_\_ 4 Platoon - \_\_\_\_\_

1. Situation:

a. Enemy Forces:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ 1967.  
(2) \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ 1967.  
(3) \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ 1967.  
(4) \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ 1967.

b. Friendly Forces:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ operates in AO \_\_\_\_\_ generally  
\_\_\_\_\_ of AO TROOPER.

(2) ARVN PF outpost at YT 044101.

(3) \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

(4) ARVN Popular Forces and Regional Forces units operate generally along Hwy 24 during the day. Normally, they will not move at night. Their ambushes are usually close to their outposts. Their uniforms vary from US types to black khakis. They have US weapons, primarily carbines, M-1's and Thompson SMG's.

(5) A curfew for the Vietnamese extends from 2000 to 0500. No Vietnamese should be moving during these hours. In emergencies, the Vietnamese are instructed to carry last use if they have to travel during the hours of curfew. Any traffic on Hwy 24 during curfew should be detained rather than fired at. Vietnamese moving between 1900-2000 and 0500-0700 will be detained.

(6) Vietnamese civilians will be treated courteously at all times. During daylight, personnel being checked for ID's will not be tied up. NCS will be notified immediately if a Vietnamese is detained for further questioning. If a suspect is evacuated all his belongings will be tagged and evacuated with him.

(7) Units coming under fire should engage the target with M-79's before using small arms. Continuous control will be maintained to insure Vietnamese civilians are not in the line of fire.

(8) Reports of any enemy activity will be reported to the CO and NCS ASAP. A followup report, including a detailed schematic will be given to the Commandant on termination of the operation.

2. Mission: Conduct Search and Destroy Operations in AO TROOPER.

3. Execution:

a. Concept: Task Force JUNGLE SCHOOL moves by \_\_\_\_\_ axis to position JUMP OFF to establish an operational base. Troops will prepare defensive positions, establish OP's, send out Clearing, Recon and Ambush Patrols, and prepare an LZ for \_\_\_\_\_ resupply. The next day, return by different routes, to arrive at Base \_\_\_\_\_ 1700 hours.

of either item ASAP.

b. Platoon Leader SOP

(1) Platoon leader will maintain a list of all personnel and continuously insure that all personnel are present.

(2) Each squad will have two (2) pace men. Pace will be passed to the platoon leader every \_\_\_\_\_ meters.

(3) Buddy teams will be assigned and no buddy team will be broken up.

c. Equipment and ammo: Per SOP

(1) Each squad leader will inspect his men for proper and complete equipment and make a written list of equipment carried by each man. At the end of the operation, each man will be inspected for complete equipment.

(2) MEDEVACED troopers will leave all equipment with their unit.

(3) Eight (8) Claymores will be carried on all ambushes. Each squad will carry three (3) Claymores.

d. Supply:

(1) Supply requests will be called on command net as necessary. Picks, shovels, saws, field phones, sandbags, and starlight scopes are available upon request.

(2) Limited DX (Direct Exchange) is available. The request should be called directly to NCS upon need.

(3) Hot and warm water resupply will be automatic Thursday between 1700-1800 hours. Cold and water will be available Friday morning upon request.

e. Each platoon or separate element will have at least one (1) M-79, one (1) complete radio, four (4) star clusters, smoke grenades, extra battery, long antenna, C-4, map and compass. All moving elements will have complete fighting gear and basic load at all times.

f. Empty plastic water cans will be tied together prior to helicopter evacuation. Tops will be closed tightly at all times.

g. All trash, etc, will be policed, crushed, burned and buried. Enroute, C rations cans will be crushed, buried and camouflaged.

h. Each individual will carry three (3) sandbags and return them upon completion of the operation. Each platoon and separate element will carry one (1) complete Demo Kit.

i. 100 ft of Claymore wire will be carried by each platoon to be used as a signalling device on ambush patrols.

j. No flares will be set on ambushes. Trip wire can be used as a warning device. Four (4) flares and a block of C-4 will be carried by ambush for emergency illumination.

k. All positions will have firing stakes, V sticks (for M-79's), individual and IMG range cards, camouflage, and fields of fire. Squad leaders and platoon sergeants will personally lay in automatic weapons and assign firing limits. Squad leaders will make a drawing of their defensive position to include placement and direction of Claymores and all weapons. NLT \_\_\_\_\_, platoon leaders will give CO a complete defensive overlay showing platoon limits, automatic weapons, FPL and possible avenues of approach and desired mortar and arty concentrations.

l. Individuals who lose or damage equipment will sign statement of charges and may be subject to unit punishment.

m. All water sources will be approved by a TAQ before use.

n. All personnel will shave and clean weapons Friday morning.

TAB "D"

CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE  
173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE JUNGLE SCHOOL

1. A maximum of 100 points are possible for the course. Points will be subtracted from this 100 points as follows:

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
a. Questions missed on final examination	2 each
b. Sleeping or inattention in class	2 each time
c. Inspection gigs	1 each time
d. Breaking formation while double timing	2 each
e. Discharge of weapon	5 each
f. Failure to follow instructions (Violation of School SOP's)	2 each
g. Losing equipment	2 each
h. Losing or not securing weapon or ammunition	5 each
i. Dirty weapon	3 each
j. Late to formation	2 each
k. Insubordination	10 each
l. Poor attitude	5 each
m. AWOL	5 each
n. Sleeping or inattention on duty	Fail course; charges sworn for court-martial

2. Passing score for the course is 70 points. A list of personnel who fail the course will be forwarded to the unit commander concerned.

3. Distinguished Graduates will be selected on a basis of accumulating 90 or more points, leadership and attitude.

4. Personnel who miss training may make up that class the next week and receive credit for the course.

