

**THE  
LOST  
ART  
OF**

**PATROLLING**

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A reconnaissance patrol had missed its last two scheduled contacts and hadn't been up on the net since the previous afternoon. As the hours passed, the tension increased in the operations center.

Various explanations were considered. "Got to be radio problems." "They must be in a low spot." "Maybe they stumbled onto something and the lieutenant put them on radio silence." But everyone was thinking the same thing. "They got hit!"

When the element was located, it had been overrun, probably the night before. Nine soldiers had been killed.

The lieutenant leading the element had moved his patrol down near the confluence of two small rivers with the obvious intent of monitoring small boat traffic on both rivers from one site. Assessment by the follow-on patrol indicated that the patrol's resistance to the enemy attack had been almost negligible.

How could something like this have happened? The members of the patrol had been well rested when they left the base camp. And all of them were good soldiers. Their squad had, in fact, won the division patrolling competition a month before their deployment. Surely all of them couldn't have fallen asleep—not on patrol.

Then the battalion command sergeant major remembered hearing a platoon sergeant tell about a patrol similarly annihilated in the Sierra Maestra mountains in Cuba during the revolution. The platoon sergeant had been so influenced by that action that he required each of his squad leaders to carry as a reminder a laminated card that read as follows: "Never set up next to a river. The murmuring of the current, like music, will lull everyone to sleep. Besides, it makes it that much harder to hear anyone approaching your position."

This was a lesson from a past war—a lesson once learned but, unfortunately, not remembered—an experience filed away, forgotten, and, regrettably, not passed on to succeeding generations of infantrymen. Many such lessons have been learned and similarly forgotten, particularly those learned in Vietnam.

The war in Vietnam forced us to develop unique tactics for fighting in an often unorthodox environment. As our wounds healed, however, we focused mostly on the "what-might-have-beens" of the conventional side of Vietnam and tended to forget the experience gained in the unconventional side of that conflict.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s we became preoccupied with preparing for the "big war"—mid- or high-intensity conflict in Central Europe or Southwest Asia. Our preparation for future conflict, therefore, stressed heavy forces—mechanized infantry and armor—and conventional operations. Our "How to Fight" manuals sought to teach our soldiers how to fight outnumbered and win in this kind of environment.

In the past several years, however, there has been an increasing realization that while large-scale conventional conflict would be the most devastating, it would also be the most unlikely. Our involvement in small wars, so called "low-intensity conflicts," is now considered far more likely.

This growing recognition of the need for forces and doctrine for small wars has gradually begun to bear fruit. Many



France, 1918

initiatives are under way, including the expansion of Special Operations forces, the publication of new doctrinal materials such as Field Circular 100-20 (Low-Intensity Conflict), the conduct of a TRADOC-sponsored joint study of low-intensity conflict, and the formation of a low-intensity conflict cell at U.S. Southern Command (Small Wars Operations Research Directorate—SWORD).

Part of our effort to revive our knowledge of how to fight small wars should certainly include an analysis of how we fought during our last involvement in a small war—Vietnam—not to mention how other countries have fought similar small wars. It seems timely, therefore, to revisit Vietnam, to relearn some forgotten lessons, and to focus special attention on the skills involved in patrolling. After all, in any small war, patrolling takes up the greatest part of an infantryman's time.

The art of patrolling, whether in a combat or a reconnaissance mission, must be mastered at both the individual and the collective levels, and all patrol members must be made to realize they are cogs in the smooth, efficient conduct of any mission. They must plan before moving into hostile territory, anticipating what they will face, and then execute that plan or adjust it as necessary.

The following tips have been gleaned from the collective experiences of numerous infantrymen, of several nations, who had been exposed to various tactical situations and environments. Although many of these points may seem rather rudimentary to the seasoned eye, they can serve to reawaken the imaginations of all concerned. They are presented, not as a magic elixir, but rather as a way to sweep the cobwebs from lessons long ago filed away in dusty corners.

First, every leader should make a pre-mission checklist to ensure that nothing is left undone and a post-mission checklist to make sure nothing is left behind. There are, of course, numerous matters to be considered when preparing for an operation—weapons, grenades, mines, survival and health items, communications, and navigation.

All weapons should be test fired before departure and then not torn down again for detailed cleaning, or they will have to be test fired again.

The muzzles of weapons should be taped to keep out water

and dirt, the lower portion of the flash suppressor slits should be kept open for ventilation. Weapon swivels should also be checked or removed from weapons, to improve noise discipline.

Magazines should be placed upside down in ammunition pouches with the rounds pointed away from the body. This will prevent water and dirt from fouling the magazines and will reduce the chance of a sympathetic explosion of rounds if an ammunition pouch is hit. All magazines should be checked before and during operations to ensure that they are in and properly loaded. Triangular bandages should be placed in the bottom of ammunition pouches to make the magazines easier to remove. Pull tabs should be put on all magazines to facilitate their removal.

During movement to anticipated contact, rifles should be loaded with magazines of tracer ammunition or some mix of tracer and ball. If part of the patrol is taken under fire, the tracers will indicate to other patrol members the area from which the patrol is receiving fire; additionally, tracers can be used to direct aerial support.

Whenever possible, when a mix of tracer and ball is used, the last three rounds in each magazine should be tracer to remind the firer that he is nearly out of ammunition in that magazine.

Rounds in the chambers of weapons should be extracted each morning, because dew may cause malfunctions.

Every patrol member should carry the appropriate weapon cleaning materials. This should include a small vial or tube of weapon lubricating oil. Weapon selector switches should be oiled daily and the switches worked back and forth, especially during the rainy season.



**New Georgia, 1943**

Each patrol member should carry at least two white phosphorous (WP) grenades, one on his web gear within easy reach. If these are used in combination with CS grenades their effectiveness will double.

Grenades should not be carried on the upper portion of the harness, where the enemy can easily shoot at them in an effort to inflict several casualties with one shot.

Paper masking tape should be folded through the ring of each grenade and taped to the body of it to keep the ring open, stop noise, and prevent snagging. The paper tape will tear off quickly when a grenade is needed while plastic or cloth tape

will not. The pins on grenades should not be bent flat, because this will make the rings harder to pull.

Smoke grenades should be carried in the pockets of the rucksacks or inside it, not on the belt or the LBE. The space there can be better used for WP or fragmentation grenades. Smoke grenades may also be tied on the rucksack between pouches, but they must be secure so they don't flop back and forth.



**Korea, 1951**

Grenades should be checked daily to make sure the primers are not coming unscrewed. And black or OD spray paint should be used on CS, WP, and smoke grenades for camouflage.

Fragmentation grenades should be used to break contact. They also make excellent booby traps to use in delaying the enemy if he is in pursuit.

WP and fragmentation grenades, instead of weapons or claymores, should be used if the enemy is searching for the patrol at night. The grenades will cause the enemy to panic and give away his position. The patrol can then orient its fire or move out in relative safety—while the enemy soldiers may end up shooting each other.

Claymore mines should be placed around a patrol base by two-man teams—one emplacing the mines, the other maintaining security. Back-up mines should be positioned to cover the same area, if the primary mines are detonated, the area will still be covered. Claymore wires should not lead directly to the patrol base but to the kill zone.

The blast from the mines should flank the patrol base. This way, if the enemy turns the mines around, they will not be pointing at the patrol members.

If the enemy is pursuing, time-delay claymores of 60 to 180 seconds are helpful. If the enemy is closer than this, CS or WP grenades, or both, should be thrown to the patrol's rear and flanks to make him want to stop.

Extra fuses should be taken along on missions that call for demolitions or the use of mines to make sure enough are available for replacements or for multiple priming.

For survival, each patrol member should carry, in a first-aid pouch on his harness or belt, one tube of salt tablets and one bottle of water purification tablets. The salt will be essential if a soldier has to live off the land.

Emergency rations should be carried in each soldier's fatigue pockets or in pouches on the LBE harness. Bouillon cubes are particularly useful because they are compact, and one cube in a canteen of water will sustain a soldier for one day.

The water in the canteens in or on rucksacks should be used before the water in the canteens on the web gear. This will ensure a supply of water if rucksacks are dropped or lost.

All survival equipment should be tied or secured to the uniform or harness so they won't be lost if the pockets become torn. This is especially valuable during hasty withdrawals or movement. A claymore mine bag should be sewn onto the top flap of the rucksack for carrying binoculars, extra radio handsets, prepared claymores, or any other special equipment. These items are then easily accessible on patrol or when it is necessary to ditch the rucksack.

Strings or lanyards should be tied from weapons, knife, compass, and canteens to the harness; that way, if they are dropped, they won't be lost. (A sharp knife and honing stone should always be carried.)

Panchos can be used for many purposes besides protection from the rain—as improvised field litters, as rafts to keep equipment dry when crossing streams or rivers, as improvised parachutes for aerial resupply, as collectors for fresh rain water, and as shelters.



Vietnam, 1968

For security purposes, each member should carry maps, notebooks, and communication-electronics operating instructions (CEOI) in the same uniform pocket. Then if one of them becomes a casualty, the other patrol members can remove these items quickly.

Each soldier should also carry extra socks and foot powder, especially during the rainy season. Insect repellent should be put in plastic bags to isolate it from other equipment. All too often, the repellent bottles leak.

The soldiers should roll their sleeves down while on patrol, both to protect their arms from the jungle and also to improve camouflage. And each should wear a glove on his free hand to protect it from cuts and abrasions from thorns and other hazards in the jungle. The glove will also help a soldier hold his weapon when it heats up from firing.

In the interest of noise discipline as well as survival, paper matches should be taken to the field in waterproof containers.

Cigarette lighters should be left behind, because opening and closing them makes too much noise. Cough medicine should be taken along, and ways to control coughing in the field should be taught.

Several measures should be used to ensure reliable communications in the field. Artillery frequencies or any others that may be needed rapidly should be pre-set on radios before a patrol departs on a mission.

Spare radio batteries should be left in their plastic containers until they are needed; otherwise, they may become wet and lose power. Then these plastic containers should be saved for use in protecting radio handsets during the rainy season. A wool sock should be placed over the handset and then the plastic bag over the sock, with a rubber band to hold them in place. The wool sock will absorb moisture. When it is not raining, both sock and plastic bag should be removed to prevent sweating.

Erasers should be carried to clean radio and handset terminals.

For navigation, compasses should be pre-set for the planned routes and should be checked to determine whether there are differences between the compass readings of the patrol members.

The parts of maps outside the area of operation (AO) should not be cut off too much; five to ten kilometers of the map should be left outside the AO for maneuver room and operational security. (Maps and notebooks should be carried in waterproof containers.)

Several other things should be done before a patrol goes out, and leaders must inspect to be sure these things have been done:

- Black and OD spray paint should be used to cover shiny metal and improve the camouflage of rucksacks.
- All snaps and buckles should be taped (not with paper tape).
- Before deployment, all equipment should be adjusted for noise discipline and comfort.
- The soldiers' clothing should fit loosely. Tight clothing will tear or rip more easily, exposing parts of their bodies to mosquitoes and leeches.
- Waterproof bags in the rucksack should be used for equipment while on patrol. This is extremely important during the rainy season.
- Rucksack straps should be tested before packing for each patrol, and parachute suspension lines or additional triangular bandages should be carried to repair straps that may break.
- All patrol members' pockets should be inspected before departure for such items as compromising information and cigarette lighters.
- Every man, if possible, should have survival equipment and a map. And each should have a pencil, not a pen, for making notes during operations. (Ink smears when it gets wet.)
- Key patrol members should be quizzed on crucial items—such as call signs and frequencies, artillery and air target numbers, compass headings, internal signals, and the like.

Patrol loads should be checked after the equipment has been distributed, ammunition and demolitions issued, and rucksacks packed. And once the patrol's rucksacks have been packed and inspected, they should be stored in a secure place to pre-

vent any tampering before the patrol.

When a patrol sets out, all members should be prepared to pay particular attention to gathering intelligence. They should not rely upon their memories but should take notes. (When feasible, a camera with film should be carried, since a picture is worth a thousand words.) All of the patrol members should be completely briefed so that if some are killed the surviving members can still render a complete report. Each member should carry an empty sand bag, or a plastic bag, in his rucksack in which to store items of intelligence value that may be collected during the patrol.

If they hear voices, the patrol members should cautiously move to within hearing distance and take notes.

They should use binoculars not only to help with long-distance observations but to increase night vision as well. (Night vision devices are worth the extra weight and should be considered essential items.)

The patrol members should be aware that personal papers, maps, orders, and other materials taken from an enemy's clothing or equipment are often more critical than his weapon. They should not approach a wounded enemy soldier, however, until they are sure he is incapacitated. A wounded enemy is the most dangerous enemy, and he may even be booby trapped.

During movement, the patrol should move only as fast as the most heavily loaded man can move. As a general rule, security and stealth override any concern for speed.

No trace of the patrol's presence should be left behind. Trails, routes, rest halts, and patrol bases should be sterilized. Nothing should be thrown on the ground—not even chewing gum or ashes. Limbs or branches on trees, bushes, or other vegetation should not be broken. If they are, they will leave a distinct trail for the enemy to follow. A large pair of socks should be carried for each patrol member to place over his boots when walking on or crossing a trail or a dry stream bed. This will prevent distinctive tracks.

During the dry season, patrol members should urinate in a hole or crevice and not on rocks or leaves, because the wet spot will be visible, and the odor will linger.

Radio traffic should be kept to an absolute minimum. Hand and arm signals should be used as much as possible. The signals should be practiced within the patrol, and each member must be alert during movement for signals from the man in front or behind.

Trails, stream beds, and roads should be avoided, because these are the most common routes of travel for an indigenous enemy.

When crossing a stream, the patrol should observe first for activity and then cross it as they would a danger area, putting out flank security and reconnoitering the far bank before crossing. All personnel should cross before stopping to fill their canteens with water.

The compass man should be checked often to verify that the patrol is on the desired azimuth. The patrol should avoid setting a pattern and should change direction frequently to confuse anyone who may be following. The enemy should not be allowed to anticipate the patrol's destination. If he can predict what the patrol will do, he will plan accordingly.

All-around security should be maintained. Trees should be checked out and the patrol should watch for snipers, trail

watchers, and booby traps. The point man is often preoccupied with breaking a trail and may miss enemy movement. (The point man should be rotated frequently, especially when moving in rough terrain.)

In sudden short-range encounters, patrol members should fire low in front of suspected positions. A ricochet from a short round is just as deadly as a direct hit.

Although a patrol should not permit itself to be encircled, if it is, it should break out as soon as possible. The longer a patrol stays in place, the more the enemy will increase his advantage.

In a firefight, the members of a patrol should never turn their backs to the enemy; rather, they should lay down suppressive fire and then back off but should not run.

A patrol should never return over the same route it used going out.

Even during halts, patrol members should never take off their web gear—day or night.

In an area where it is necessary for the soldiers to put on additional clothing at night, no more than one-third of the members should do so at a time. Similarly, if socks need to be changed, this should be done at the patrol base, and no more than one-third of the patrol should change socks at one time. A soldier on patrol should never take off both boots at the same time.

When a patrol stops for listening halts, chow, rest, or radio contacts, at least 50 meters around the position should be checked. Each patrol member should study the trees and bushes around the base before nightfall.

Before sleeping in a patrol base, each member should know where all the other members are positioned. If some patrol members snore or talk in their sleep, handkerchiefs should be put in their mouths.

The patrol base should be moved during the night if there is any suspicion that it has been discovered.

Faces and hands should be recamouflaged every morning, and camouflage should be inspected at every rest halt.

The success of any patrol depends, to a large degree, upon the leaders. Leaders should exude confidence, enthusiasm, and a positive outlook. They should plan ahead, anticipating each day what they will be doing that night and the next day, but should stay flexible. They should also keep all the patrol members informed and involved. They should not be afraid to take advice but should not lose control.

Most of all, leaders should keep a list of the lessons learned, experiences, field tips, and advice, and should add to it as they go along. They should also pass the list around periodically. Not only will others learn from it, but they will also contribute new ideas or techniques to it.

All of us should make an effort to keep such lists dusted off so that we do not again so easily forget the lessons we have previously learned about patrolling.

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