INTRODUCTION

The fundamentals of counterinsurgency tactics apply to operations in Vietnam. The diverse nature of the people and terrain must be considered when applying these tactics to combat operations. The tactics employed and techniques used are limited only by the commander's imagination. The tactics and techniques presented are lessons learned from actual combat operations against the Viet Cong.

SECTION I. WINNING AND MAINTAINING CIVILIAN SUPPORT

1. General

Winning and maintaining the friendship and cooperation of the Vietnamese civilians living within the operational area is an essential step in reducing the effectiveness of the local Viet Cong guerrillas -- they cannot operate effectively without civilian support. The two main aspects of our military presence which contribute toward good civil-military relations are the individual soldier's positive attitude in his dealings with local civilians, and the planned civic actions of military units.

2. Individual Behavior

The Viet Cong attempt to separate our soldiers from the
local civilians by showing that we are cruel, unthinking, and not concerned with the welfare of the local peoples. The VC can be defeated in these efforts by the strength and generosity we show in our daily life. The "Nine Rules" for the military man in Vietnam provide the guide for doing this. They are:

a. Remember we are guests here: We make no demands and seek no special treatment.

b. Join with the people: Understand their life, use phrases from their language and honor their customs and laws.

c. Treat women with politeness and respect.

d. Make friends among the soldiers and common people.

e. Always give the Vietnamese the right of way.

f. Be alert to security and ready to react with your military skill.

g. Do not attract attention by loud, rude or unusual behavior.

h. Avoid separating ourselves from the people by a display of wealth or privilege.

i. Above all else, we are members of the US military forces on a difficult mission, responsible for all our official and personal actions. Reflect honor upon ourselves and the United States of America.
3. Unit Activities

a. The Vietnamese appreciate the danger of battle areas, and will normally take such actions as are feasible to protect themselves and their property. Unit commanders at all echelons can assist in protecting them by advance planning and timely battlefield assistance. When losses occur, early and effective action should be taken to minimize suffering. Thoughtfulness and consideration in such times of crisis will gain the support of the Vietnamese.

b. When units are not involved in necessary military operations, their capability to assist in local civic action projects designed to improve the life of rural peoples should be exploited. Before beginning any specific projects, the unit commander should always contact the local MACV sector or sub-sector advisor and the local Vietnamese official -- district, village, or hamlet chief -- in order to determine how the unit can assist local plans and projects. In addition, an effort should be made to participate in joint civic action projects in which regular soldiers work side-by-side with local Regional and Popular Force soldiers. When additional guidance or supplies are required for particular projects the normal point of contact is the MACV sector or sub-sector advisor, who will then contact the appropriate GVN official or the US representative from the Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) or the United States Operations Mission (USOM).

SECTION II. RECONNAISSANCE AND SURVEILLANCE

4. General

Before the VC can be destroyed, they must be located.
Once located, surveillance must be maintained over their movements and activities. This section outlines the means and techniques of reconnaissance and surveillance being employed in Vietnam.

5. Ground Reconnaissance and Surveillance

   a. Ground agencies consist of observation posts, surveillance devices, and reconnaissance patrols. Short range radars, employed at two separate locations which permit target intersection, are a valuable source of data during periods of low visibility -- positions, estimated size, direction, and speed of movement of VC elements can thus be readily detected.

   b. Vietnamese Special Forces employ "Delta Teams", squad-size long range reconnaissance units, with considerable success in VC controlled territory. Once committed to an operational area, the teams are capable of operating for approximately seven days without resupply. When the team develops a target, a quick-reacting airborne force or tactical air strikes may be called in to attack and destroy the target. These operations have an adverse psychological effect on the VC because they demonstrate that RVN forces are capable of penetrating VC areas and destroying targets which were previously considered to be within VC safe havens.

6. Visual Air Surveillance

   Visual air surveillance is conducted primarily from O1-type aircraft. Pilots and observers should be completely familiar with ground activity in their areas of responsibility in order that they can recognize any changes from normal patterns. Continuous surveillance
missions day after day by the same observers accomplish the following:

a. Tend to restrict VC daylight movement to areas with dense vegetation.

b. Locate and report likely landing and drop zones in fast moving situations, for reaction force employment, and for emergency medical evacuation.

c. Provide information as to possible occupation of a hamlet by VC based on a change in the normal pattern of activity.

d. Become so commonplace that reconnaissance flights for airmobile operations or air strikes do not constitute warnings to the VC of impending actions.

7. Air Reconnaissance

a. Visual observation from the air is a rapid and effective means of locating and identifying VC activity such as construction of field fortifications and road cuts, and the appearance of new track and trail activity. Although visual reconnaissance may be restricted by poor flying weather and VC ground fire, observers can often provide information vital to successful attacks on VC units and fortifications.

b. Aerial photographs are a prime source of information on terrain and VC installations and activities. Detailed photo interpretation produces accurate intelligence and often discloses hidden VC installations or camps not visible to the air observer.

c. Side looking airborne radar (SLAR) and infrared
devices are air reconnaissance means which provide special information.

(1) SLAR, with its capability to detect moving targets and accurately determine their locations, has been valuable in the discovery of VC movement along the coast, canals, and rivers. In many instances, detection of a moving target has resulted in an immediate attack on a VC target.

(2) Airborne infrared detection devices are useful for detecting VC encampments and other activity at night. Because of the means by which the infrared detection is displayed, the information obtained usually must be correlated with maps and photographs to determine accurately the nature of the activity discovered. Fog, clouds, and rain reduce the effectiveness of infrared devices.

d. The information developed by SLAR, infrared visual reconnaissance and photo imagery is analyzed and correlated with other information at the MACV Intelligence Center. Intelligence of tactical value is passed by the most rapid means available, including aircraft, to appropriate organizations for necessary action.

SECTION III. PATROLS

8. General

a. Detailed and complete information on all aspects of patrolling is contained in appropriate service field
Additional information peculiar to Vietnam is presented in this section to help US forces improve patrol capabilities. Several cautions are particularly applicable.

1. Stay off roads, trails and dry creek beds: maintain dispersion.

2. Prevent the VC from predicting the direction of movement by following a zig-zag course.

3. Dead foliage may be old camouflage over a trap.

4. Tied down brush may be a firing lane for an ambush site.

5. Avoid moats around villages: they may hide punji traps or booby traps.

6. Unoccupied huts may have booby traps hidden in the frame or in the roof thatch.

7. Be cautious of all civilians.

8. Be cautious in villages where no children are visible or where they are unfriendly.

9. Do not set a pattern.

10. Stay alert.

b. During training for and conduct of patrol operations include the following procedures as SOP.
(1) Simultaneous patrol activities by elements of a unit must be closely coordinated and contact maintained when in close proximity in order to save time, protect formations, and maintain security.

(2) Take advantage of inclement weather to conduct patrols; heavy rain will cover noise of ground movement.

(3) In the jungle, trails must be cut through the dense foliage and undergrowth. When practicing dispersion in movement under such conditions lateral contact is very difficult to maintain. Move in multiple columns for added security.

(4) Never return over the same route.

(5) When patrolling a road lined by heavy undergrowth and dense foliage, reconnaissance by observation should be supplemented by controlled reconnaissance fire.

(6) Use helicopter lift of patrols to expand a zone of operations or to get behind VC units, especially when the VC have concealed routes of withdrawal.

(7) Use stay behind patrols to ambush small groups of VC returning to an area after the departure of the main body of friendly forces.

9. Saturation Patrolling

a. During daylight one of the most successful tactics is saturation patrolling supported by a reaction force. The
saturation of an area with squad size patrols allows maximum coverage and fully employs the leadership capabilities of small unit leaders. Saturation patrolling requires detailed planning by the company or higher echelon to coordinate completely all the patrols in an area. Since the VC will not normally engage a superior force, the smaller unit has a better chance of daylight contact with guerrillas. Patrol size will be determined largely by intelligence estimates of enemy strength, disposition and equipment, and by the terrain.

b. Conducting night patrols without prior coordination is dangerous. In certain areas, both Popular and Regional Forces may be patrolling and ambushing. Close liaison and coordination with local forces is imperative to preclude friendly units meeting in the dark and exchanging fire.

10. Sudden Engagements

Most encounters with the VC while on patrol are sudden meeting engagements. Reaction by the point must be immediate to deliver effective fire at the elusive VC, who has been trained to leap into the brush and slither away on his belly when encountered. Reaction by the remainder of the patrol must be rapid and violent. Immediately bring all available fires to bear on the VC element. Fire low; a ricochet is better than an overshot. After fire superiority is gained, vigorously attack to destroy him. Contact with the VC must be maintained. Pursuit of the VC immediately following an engagement must be aggressive.

11. Scout Dogs

A scout dog helps moving troops to reconnoiter routes and areas for the presence of humans. If a commander
makes full and skillful use of scout dogs, he may avoid a VC ambush.

a. Scout dogs rely on their keen sense of smell to detect scents which come from an upwind direction. When a dog is working in the harness, he will "alert" when he detects a human scent, usually by assuming a sitting position with body still, ears erect and nose aimed in the upwind direction. From the alert indication the handler shows the direction of the unknown person by arm signal to the tactical unit leader. The alerting distance varies according to conditions of wind, weather, terrain and vegetation. Along jungle trails the alert will often indicate a quarry along the trail because the slight winds in the jungle allow scents to drift along trails. Under favorable conditions scout dogs can alert on a noise.

b. Scout dogs can smell out a person or cache in a covered hole in the ground, or a person hiding underwater while breathing through a reed. They can assist sentries when a unit is at a halt.

c. Scout dog platoon leaders require a warning order to prepare for an operation and a briefing on the major facets of the plan. Failure to receive this information will hinder proper selection and preparation of teams and adequate provision for their logistic support.

d. Scout dogs should be used only when benefits may accrue from their use. For example, if the unit is to make a long foot march through safe areas prior to reaching the area of operation, scout dogs should not be employed until reaching the area of operations.
e. Benefit from scout dogs is greatest in small unit operations such as patrols and ambushes.

f. When troops are negotiating trails in jungle or other heavy vegetation, the dog team should be on the trail rather than in a flank security position.

g. On extended operations or in areas where negotiation of the terrain causes considerable physical exertion, dog teams should be used in pairs and alternated in the working position.

h. When operating in flooded rice paddies or similar terrain, dogs should be on the 25 foot leash rather than on the shorter 5 foot leash. Dogs normally can travel through mud without excessive difficulty but handlers tend to tire. A dog in good physical condition should be capable of six hours of work in paddies.

i. The dog's position in relation to the patrol or body of troops must be such that he uses the wind to the best advantage. When advancing with the wind a dog should be at the rear where he is of some benefit. In a crosswind the dog may walk on the upwind flank or at the head of the column. Handlers and advisors with the unit should emphasize these points to the tactical commander. A change in the direction of advance may require a repositioning of the dog in relation to the unit.

j. When the dog is working at the head of a column, on a flank, or quartering a field (crisscrossing it to obtain better area coverage) while the unit is halted, designated personnel should maintain visual contact with the dog and handler. A bodyguard should accompany each team operating in close proximity to the enemy.
k. Maximum benefit can be realized from the use of scout dogs by gearing the rate of advance of the unit to that of the dog.

l. Requiring a scout dog to close with the located enemy endangers the dog and handler; both of them are ill-equipped for the assault.

m. Scout dogs easily learn to travel in helicopters and fixed wing aircraft but usually require an initial period of familiarization before they are at ease in this strange environment. The familiarization should be accomplished prior to using the dog on an operation.

SECTION IV. COUNTERAMBUSH TACTICS

12. General

Since the VC make extensive use of ambushes, counterambush measures are a vital part of operations. Counterambush operations also afford opportunities to find the VC in a position where they can be fixed and destroyed.

13. Prevention of Ambushes

a. No part of Vietnam may be considered secure; therefore, precautionary measures must always be taken. The requirement for such precautions is typified by an action which occurred near Bien Hoa in October 1965. A US unit which already had numerous patrols and ambushes out a few thousand meters from its base camp dispatched
another six man patrol after first light. The VC ambushed the patrol less than 1000 meters from its base, killing five and wounding the sixth.

b. When possible, move cross-country, avoiding roads, trails and dry creek beds. Although these terrain features afford ease and speed of movement, they offer the VC prime ambush sites and are usually under observation.

c. In moving through open or broken terrain security must be established in front, to the rear, and to the flanks of a moving column out to at least the maximum effective range of small arms fire. In the jungle security must, as a minimum, be out in front 200 meters and cover a front broad enough to prevent a linear ambush. The main body must be back far enough to maneuver once contact is made. Lack of security has been the most prominent factor contributing to successful VC ambushes.

d. Routes of march must receive a detailed reconnaissance from the air, by map and by small reconnaissance patrols. There are times, however, when a thorough reconnaissance cannot be completed because of lack of time or the size of the area. Air observation is valuable but is not a substitute for ground reconnaissance. A disciplined VC unit, in place and camouflaged, is not likely to be spotted from the air. In one case an experienced US pilot and observer searched an area for two hours without spotting a VC battalion hidden in waist-high grass and scattered coconut trees. Later in the day this force ambushed an ARVN battalion.

e. Security must be maintained at all times. During the return movement to home station after conducting an
operation, troops have a tendency to relax and become careless. On several occasions, the VC have allowed a unit to pass through unmolested on its way to the objective area, then ambushed the unit as it returned.

14. Reaction to Ambush

a. When caught in an ambush the friendly unit must immediately return the fire, gain and maintain fire superiority and vigorously assault the ambush force. Friendly troops must continue to fire, even after the VC cease, to prevent his recovering weapons and bodies and escaping. Once the ambush is overcome, the entire ambush site must be thoroughly searched and cleared. Figures 36 thru 38 depict examples of reactions in different ambush situations.

b. Troops moving through suspect areas should carry white phosphorus (WP) and offensive grenades and, when ambushed, immediately throw them towards the enemy. Coupled with casualty producing effects, the WP grenade provides a protective smoke screen.

15. Convoy Operations

a. Planning Considerations.

(1) No route is 100% secure. The VC can prepare an ambush anywhere.

(2) Representatives from the security and convoy elements, supporting artillery, and tactical air should participate in the planning.
Units positioned entirely in the kill zone of an ambush should immediately return fire with organic weapons and in conjunction with WP grenades and supporting fires, assault the primary ambush force.

Figure 36. Entire Unit Caught in VC Ambush (Schematic)
When an ambush is activated with only a portion of a unit in the kill zone, that portion immediately returns fire while conducting immediate action to break out of the kill zone. Units not affected attack the flanks and rear of the main ambush position by assault and establish ambushes along the VC routes of withdrawal.

Figure 37. Portion of Friendly Unit Caught in VC Ambush (Schematic)
The VC force in this example is counterattacked with fire power while ambushes are being established on all possible avenues of withdrawal in order to obtain maximum VC casualties. Note that the VC have established an ambush along the main avenue of approach between the reaction force headquarters and the hamlet. By not moving directly to the hamlet, the reaction force avoids this common VC trap.

Figure 38. Reaction to VC Attack of Hamlet
(3) Effective communications are essential for successful convoy operations.

(4) Convoys of two or more serials should be commanded from a command and control (C&C) helicopter. This affords the commander the best means of control and communication and enables him to react quickly to all contingencies.

(5) Infantry forces are required as reaction forces or for convoy escort. These forces must maintain a capability for dismounted action off the road.

(6) The commander of the convoy and the command succession must be known by members of the convoy prior to its departure.

(7) Use of convoy route maps showing the enemy situation along routes in the area is a valuable aid in convoy planning.

(8) Air support is a necessity. The use of column cover provides a definite deterrent to ambush and makes instantaneous response possible when cover includes tactical air.

b. Preparation.

(1) Sandbag floor boards of all vehicles to lessen the effect of mines on personnel. Stack additional sandbags against the sides of trucks to provide protection from small arms fire.
(2) Remove all side panels from the troop carrier or cargo section of vehicles. Tail gates on all troop carriers should be let down. Consideration should be given to the removal of all doors of vehicles so equipped. If seats are used, place them in the center of the vehicle so that troops sit back-to-back and face outward. If no seats are used the troops should sit or lie in the bed of the truck and face outward. This provides coverage by fire for both sides of the roads.

(3) Brief and rehearse all personnel on their individual responsibilities and duties in the event of ambush.

(4) All vehicles should be equipped with tow ropes or chains.

(5) Place the slowest vehicles at the head of the convoy.

(6) Keep wide intervals between vehicles. If the VC are not able to find a large number of vehicles within the ambush site usually they will not spring it. In fact the larger the interval the safer the convoy as a whole will be.

(7) Wrecker and maintenance vehicles should follow all convoys.

16. Counterambush Checklist

AT ALL TIMES

Expect an ambush - stay alert.

Rehearse immediate action.

Do not set a pattern.
BEFORE MOVEMENT

Foot and Vehicular

Examine all intelligence data.

Request air cover.

Make detailed fire support plans.

Coordinate movement plan with all participating elements.

Reconnoiter routes.

Plan to take an artillery forward observer.

Vehicular

Sand bag vehicles.

Designate convoy command succession.

WHILE MOVING

Foot and Vehicular

Maintain communication with all elements

Maintain noise and light discipline.

Use point, flank and rear security.

Watch for mines and booby traps.
Vary formations.

Keep dispersed.

Move by bounds.

Keep off roads and trails.

Skirt open areas.

Vehicular

Keep convoy vehicles well spread out.

Maintain close and continuous contact with column cover.

IF THE ENEMY IS DISCOVERED

Use available firepower consistent with size of enemy force.

Call for reinforcements if required.

Flank him and attack.

Ambush his withdrawal.

Pursue.
SECTION V. AMBUSHES

17. General

a. Current service manuals provide sound and detailed guidance on the conduct of ambushes. Recent experience with ambushes in Vietnam reveals that, all too frequently, ambushes are well laid, properly planned and correctly positioned, but fail because of an error on the part of a single individual.

b. Selection of the site is only the first step in the development of a well organized ambush. Ambush leaders must be capable and be provided with the equipment necessary to successfully carry out their assigned mission. Squad leaders must be capable of calling in supporting arms, and be proficient in methods of blocking escape routes and utilizing booby traps, demolitions and punji traps.

18. Actions Prior to the Ambush

a. Make a detailed map study, including use of aerial photos whenever possible. Commit to memory the route and terrain -- particularly those features which will aid navigation. Confirm these terrain features as you pass over or near them.

b. A complete, detailed rehearsal of the ambush must be conducted to eliminate errors. Each member of the ambush party must thoroughly understand what he is to do.

c. Arrangements must be made for the employment of all available supporting fires.
d. Movement to the ambush site by concealed routes to avoid detection by the VC or VC sympathizers is essential. Contact with civilians must be avoided.

e. Blocking forces must be emplaced in conjunction with mines, booby traps and punji stakes along likely avenues of escape in order to inflict maximum casualties.

f. Repeated occupation of the same ambush site must be avoided. Using several sites in the same general area insures better coverage and more effective results.

19. Conduct of the Ambush

a. Maintain light and noise discipline in the ambush site. Do not permit smoking. Failure to adhere to these basic practices is frequently the cause of an unsuccessful ambush.

b. Stress the fact that the leader of the ambush is responsible for "springing" the ambush. "Springing" the ambush too early or too late leads to failure or to only partial success.

c. Use a definite, clearly recognizable signal to commence firing. Prearrange and rehearse all signals to be used. Keep signals simple. This eliminates confusion and avoids premature disclosure of the ambush.

d. Place a heavy and accurate volume of fire in the ambush area, completely covering the killing zone and escape routes.

e. Fire low to avoid overshoooting the target.
f. Use all supporting fires such as artillery, mortars, tactical air and armed helicopter support.

g. Pursue by fire when the VC jump into the underbrush opposite the ambush party.

h. Quickly exploit and search the immediate area for casualties, weapons and documents.

20. Night Ambush

a. The night ambush deserves particular emphasis, since most VC operations are conducted at night. Ambushes during the hours of darkness are more difficult to control, but the lack of light or illumination adds to the security of the ambush party and the confusion of those being ambushed.

b. At night a small ambush party is generally more practical because of greater ease of control and decreased probability of detection. The size of the party will depend on factors such as the size of the unit to be ambushed and the estimated VC strength in the area. Some means of illuminating the ambush site after contact must be provided so that the area may be thoroughly searched. Pre-planned artillery and mortar concentrations, handheld flares or illumination grenades can be used for this purpose.

21. Special Considerations

a. The Claymore (M18A1) antipersonnel mine has proved to be a highly effective ambush weapon in Vietnam.

b. "Stay behind" ambushes can be very successful,
since the VC normally follow a unit when it leaves an operational area. Time permitting, these ambush patrols should be prepared to remain in the area for several days and use deception tactics to conceal their presence.

SECTION VI. AIRMOBILE OPERATIONS

22. General

a. A capability to execute airmobile operations effectively is one of the major tactical advantages possessed by FWMAF and RVNAF forces. By use of helicopters, well supported by artillery and fighters, commanders are able to achieve surprise shock action, to move sizeable forces quickly over obstacles or long distances, and to mass forces or reinforce a position quickly with fresh troops ready for combat. Though precise and detailed planning is absolutely necessary for an airmobile operation, its success depends ultimately on quick reaction and aggressive leadership at every echelon of command. There are four types of airmobile operations normally conducted in South Vietnam. They are:

(1) Airmobile assault.

(2) Eagle flights.

(3) Combat reconnaissance.

(4) Reinforcement.

23. Planning Considerations

a. The complex nature of airmobile operations in
RVN dictates that planning for the airmobile maneuver be accomplished in considerable detail. Participants in this planning should include representatives from:

1. Maneuver and reserve elements.
2. Artillery fire support.
3. Close air support.
4. Naval gunfire support (if required).
5. Aviation units.

b. Timely and detailed weather, terrain and enemy intelligence information is essential to the successful conduct of airmobile operations.

c. Careful consideration should always be given to selection and use of multiple staging areas and landing zones, varied flight patterns, and alternate routes in order to keep losses to a minimum.

d. The range of supporting artillery is a limiting factor in heliborne operations. The advent of the Chinook will greatly alleviate this problem and permit deep penetrations of VC forces by infantry battalions supported by artillery batteries.

e. A well prepared SOP greatly reduces planning, loading and execution times.

24. Airmobile Assault
a. General

An airmobile assault is characterized by pre-planned landing zones (LZ), a specific objective or series of objectives to be taken, a reserve element and the coordinated use of fire support elements (discussed later in chapter 4). The airmobile assault force is determined by the assigned mission.

b. Organization. An airmobile operation normally consists of the following elements:

(1) A command and control (C&C) element consisting of the aviation commander, the assault force commander, an air liaison officer and when possible the artillery commander, responsible for the command, control and coordination of the operation. This element will utilize the C&C aircraft with its special radio equipment, and during the operation will provide guidance for the location and selection of appropriate targets.

(2) Sufficient troop carriers (slicks) to lift the desired number of first phase assault forces. Sufficient medium helicopters to move artillery if the operational area is beyond supporting artillery range. Additional forces will normally be ferried into the combat area subsequently. See helicopters in figures 39 thru 44.

(3) An escort element composed of fighters and armed helicopters which provide reconnaissance and have the mission of protecting the flight of slicks into the LZ. They also provide protection by fire for the entire force. As the enemy antiaircraft capability increases the use of fighter escorts must also be increased for flak suppression.

(4) An airmobile assault division is augmented by USAF personnel who serve as Air Liaison/Forward Air Controllers to provide quick response air strikes.
Figure 39. UH-1B (Armed)
Figure 40A. UH-1B "Iroquois"

Figure 40B. UH-1D "Iroquois"
Figure 41. CH-37
Figure 42. CH-34 "Choctaw"
Figure 43. CH-47 "Chinook"
Figure 44. CH-54 "Flying Crane"
(4) Medical evacuation helicopters equipped and manned for the sole purpose of evacuating friendly casualties. This capability is obtained either from the assaulting unit's own resources or from higher headquarters.

(5) A maintenance aircraft crew to provide on-the-spot repairs for disabled aircraft. It is normally backed up by an H-37 evacuation aircraft at the staging area, which can also assist the MEDEVAC helicopter in the removal of casualties and downed crews.

(6) A fire support element, generally "on call", which is composed of an O-1F aircraft with radio relay capability, and a forward observer or forward air controller (FAC).

(7) Additional ground based fire support and combat maneuver elements if they are available in the area.

(8) Radio communications equipment for operating the type communication network illustrated in figure 39.

![Diagram](image-url)  
**Figure 39. Type Radio Net for Airmobile Assault Force**
c. Conduct of an Airmobile Assault.

(1) The airmobile assault begins with preparation of the landing zone by close air support and/or artillery fires. The armed helicopters arrive at the LZ just prior to termination of the preparation to assist the forward air controller (FAC) in evaluating the results and to help in determining whether additional strikes are needed. The assaulting infantry are loaded at staging fields or picked up in the battle area from a pickup zone (PZ). The troop lift helicopters are vectored to the LZ on command from the C&C aircraft or the armed helicopter leader. The armed helicopters coordinate strikes on the LZ with the FAC prior to the slicks' reaching the LZ. After the slicks receive the command to proceed to the LZ, the armed ships relay the following information to them:

   (a) Final approach heading.
   (b) Touchdown point (may be marked with smoke).
   (c) Heading and route for departure from the LZ.
   (d) Brief summary of condition of LZ, including enemy and friendly troop situations.
   (e) Where suppressive and supporting fires will be delivered.
   (f) Direction of attack or movement from LZ.

(2) The direction of attack is monitored by crew
chiefs in the slicks; they indicate the direction to the assault force by hand and arm signals just prior to touchdown.

(3) As the lead elements of the airmobile force approach the LZ, armed helicopters provide suppressive fire while the slicks are landing, unloading and departing the LZ. Artillery fire and air strikes may also be made simultaneously and in close proximity to each other. Flak suppression strikes may be required during the landing.

(4) The desired timing includes simultaneous touchdown and takeoff of all slicks with less than ten seconds on the LZ.

(5) As the first lift of helicopters departs from the LZ, armed helicopters, tactical air, or artillery can be used to support the ground force.

(6) The armed helicopters are also used for reconnaissance and surveillance.

(7) Troops initially employed in securing an LZ are highly vulnerable to VC attack, especially when the first troop lift is small because of a restricted LZ. Whether the first airmobile force is designated to provide security for the LZ or to assault an objective from the LZ, it should:

(a) Send out patrols to search the perimeter.

(b) Consolidate the remainder of the airmobile force into a strong point located off the LZ or objective.
(8) The reserve force commander must keep abreast of the operation so that his counterattack plans address the actual situation to which he may be committed.

(9) At the termination of the mission, troop extraction is completed in the following sequence:

(a) Ground unit secures the area.

(b) Armed ships assume security of the LZ as the ground unit moves into pickup formation.

(c) Slicks deploy to pickup formation prior to reaching the LZ.

(10) Fire support for the extraction is furnished by tactical aircraft, artillery and armed helicopters.

(11) Ambush of US airmobile forces by the VC is a constant threat. The enemy's capability to ambush possible LZs in force can be decreased by:

(a) Limiting and varying reconnaissance of LZs.

(b) Conducting tactical air strikes on the LZ followed by an artillery preparation.

(c) Utilizing alternate LZs.

(d) Deceiving the VC as to the actual location of the LZ by establishing a decoy LZ.
(e) Avoiding the most likely LZ, or one which was used previously.

(f) Committing a maximum number of troops in the LZ at one time.

(g) Using random stretches of available roads as LZs.

(12) In addition to the points mentioned, the following considerations may also influence the outcome of the operation:

(a) Airmobile operations in high canopy jungle are limited to troops trained in rappelling.

(b) "On ground" time for the helicopter can be appreciably reduced by removing the seats or strapping them up in the helicopter. This enables the troops to embark and debark quickly.

(c) Troop and cargo lift capability is determined not only by type helicopter and the amount of fuel on board, but also by meteorological conditions and terrain. For example, in the high plateau transport helicopters can carry about 60% of the load possible in the lowlands.

26. Eagle Flight

a. General.

(1) As its name implies, the eagle flight is a force capable of searching out and pursuing its prey, attacking it quickly and violently, and withdrawing to seek other prey.
Eagle flight operations were especially developed for flat, lowlying terrain like that of the Delta where lack of roads, great expanses of inundated land, vast networks of tree-lined rivers and canals and widely dispersed population make fighting the VC on foot a most difficult task.

(2) The eagle flight forces are usually small -- approximately company size. Their employment is characterized by lack of pre-planned landing zones and acceptance of limited fire support. The effectiveness of an eagle flight unit depends upon its ability to react and maneuver rapidly in any combat situation and to harass and disrupt the activities of VC units.

b. Organization. An eagle flight requires essentially the same elements as an airmobile operation except that the eagle flight normally has sufficient slicks for lifting the entire assault force in one lift.

c. Conduct of an Eagle Flight.

(1) The assault force commander orders the eagle flight forces airborne when armed reconnaissance helicopters make or anticipate making enemy contact, or when a need arises for an immediate search of a limited area. The eagle flight force may also be ordered airborne and instructed to orbit at a specific location until such time as it is committed. Once committed, movement into the LZ follows the procedures outlined above for the airmobile assault.

(2) Prior to landing at a designated LZ, the unit commander is briefed in detail by the commander of the armed ship element on the direction the attack should take, what he will encounter to include the location of VC positions
or terrain features which might pose a threat, and where
and how contact was initially made by the armed ships.
Fire support for the assault is provided by the armed
ships until tactical air support or artillery becomes
available. The armed ships come under the operational
control of the unit commander after the slicks have
cleared the LZ.

(3) When the mission is completed, the eagle
force is picked up by the slicks and committed to another
area or returned to the staging area. The technique of
deploying, striking and then redeploying to strike again
was successfully used in November 1964 as a reaction
to a VC attack on a friendly hamlet in IV Corps. The VC
had positioned an estimated company south of the hamlet
to ambush the expected reaction force. While recon­
noitering an appropriate LZ, the commander of the
operation spotted the VC ambush site, immediately
called for aerial suppressive fire, and landed his
force near the ambush. The VC ambush unit was
caught completely off guard by this maneuver and
attempted a rapid withdrawal. After a short fire
fight, the eagle flight force reloaded on the troop
carriers, landed at another position and ambushed
the withdrawing VC force. As a result of this mobile
and aggressive eagle reaction force, the VC sustained
12 killed and an unknown number wounded.

27. Combat Reconnaissance

a. Combat reconnaissance operations using small,
highly trained units are effective against squad or smaller
size units in VC areas, and are capable of collecting
accurate and up-to-date information on larger VC forces.
It should be standard practice to use combat reconnaissance
before committing large forces so that when committed, they have increased chances of engaging effectively. The operation is conducted without pre-planned landing zones, without a multiple landing capability, and without dependence upon aerial suppressive fires. In addition to the military value of such operations, they demonstrate to the guerrilla and the VC sympathizer that they have no sanctuary. An airmobile combat reconnaissance operation may be compared to a patrol with the mission of reconnoitering or of capturing or destroying enemy personnel and equipment. The assault force, normally composed of 20 to 24 men armed with lightweight automatic weapons, is not capable of conducting sustained operations. It should complete its task on the ground in less than 15 minutes.

b. Organization. Organization of the combat reconnaissance unit is as follows:

(1) Armed helicopters for selection and reconnaissance of LZs.

(2) Slicks for transportation.

(3) Evacuation aircraft for prisoners.

c. Conduct of the Operation.

(1) Based on the need to gather information, the combat reconnaissance unit is airlifted into the LZ after the armed ships verify that there is no larger VC force in the area. The unit rapidly searches a limited area, questions the inhabitants, and apprehends any suspects. After spending a reasonably short time in the area, the unit is airlifted into another area. If contact is established with a unit larger than it can handle it is reinforced.
or withdrawn. However the contact is followed up by the necessary force to destroy the VC.

(2) This type of operation was effectively employed in I Corps in September 1965 when, after landing in the initial area, contact was established with three VC. Two of the VC were killed and one captured. Eight houses were searched and several pounds of documents found. After pick up, a quick scan of the documents coupled with interrogation of the prisoner indicated that the area was worth a second and more thorough search. The unit was airlifted into a new area on the opposite side of the village. Again the unit made contact, killing one more VC, wounding one and capturing seven. The documents carried on the dead VC revealed the intelligence network and names of infiltrators within the district headquarters. The unit and its prisoners were again picked up and returned to the staging area. The total time that had elapsed from takeoff until return was one hour and ten minutes. This example points out how a small force can be used effectively to achieve major results in information gathering.

28. Reinforcement

The reinforcement mission illustrates how the fundamental procedures for an airmobile assault and an eagle flight mission can provide the basis for an effective strike force operation. An example of the flexible reinforcement capability of airmobile units was demonstrated in Bac Lieu Province in March 1965 during a search and destroy mission. The operation was initiated by a coordinated assault of ground and airmobile units. While the operation was in progress, a Mohawk reconnaissance aircraft reported unusual movement in an area 40 kilometers from the battle area. The commander immediately dispatched an armed helicopter platoon to investigate
the movement and ordered an eagle flight force airborne in event contact was established. Upon entering the new area, the armed helicopter platoon encountered two platoons from a VC main force unit crossing an open field. While taking the VC unit under fire, the armed platoon encountered additional armed personnel in and around a small hamlet 1500 meters away. The armed platoon was instructed to determine the flanks of the unit, and find and secure a LZ. The commander employed the eagle flight force in the LZ near the larger body of VC troops, and it quickly made heavy contact. In anticipation of this, the commander had ordered the original units extracted from the first area and the selection of several landing zones located to isolate the VC units. Fire support aircraft were obtained and 12 lifts were employed for the envelopment of the two VC battalions. The VC suffered 238 killed (body count) and 250 wounded. In this example, the original operation was initiated by conventional ground and airmobile forces. A lucrative target was developed by an eagle flight force, and the target was effectively destroyed by multiple, reinforcing airmobile assaults.

SECTION VII. SEARCH AND DESTROY OPERATIONS

29. General

a. The primary objectives of search and destroy operations are to find, fix and destroy the enemy; to destroy or seize his equipment, foodstuffs, medical supplies and base areas; and, whenever possible, destroy his political and military infrastructure (his local organization at province, district, village and hamlet level). An additional
objective is to keep the enemy on the move and dispersed to prevent him from planning, assembling and executing operations on his own initiative.

b. Most operations are conducted without detailed prior information on the VC, and the commander must necessarily produce his own intelligence as he goes. It is abundantly clear that sweep operations, that is, moving quickly through an area without diligent search, are not productive. The VC are trained to sidestep such operations, maintain surveillance over them by the use of local guerrillas, and wait for an opportunity to strike and destroy detached small elements or larger forces whose guard is down. Thus, the success of offensive operations designed to destroy VC forces depends upon finding the enemy and engaging him with superior forces. It follows that information must be gathered from every conceivable source. There are three main sources, and all three should be used simultaneously and continuously whenever possible:

(1) Combat reconnaissance. Aggressive, continuous combat reconnaissance is essential in all operations. Saturation patrolling by platoon size or even smaller units, either on foot or delivered by helicopter, is a prime source of information. Platoon size heliborne reconnaissance elements should reconnoiter all populated areas and likely VC concentrations points within a wide radius around operating units.

(2) Locally available information. The best source of accurate information exists at province, district, village, RF, and PF levels. Close liaison and frequent visits to appropriate officials and commanders can result in much accurate and useful information.
(3) Aerial surveillance and target acquisition --
aerial photography, infrared detection, side-looking radar
(SLAR) and continuous visual observation have all proven
their effectiveness in Vietnam.

c. There are three types of search and destroy
operations:

(1) Operations to destroy a VC/NVA base area.

(2) Operations to destroy VC or NVA main
force units.

(3) Operations to destroy VC local and guer­
rilla forces and the VC military/political structure in a
given area -- district or province.

30. Operations to Destroy VC/NVA Base Areas

a. Offensive operations against VC base areas
contribute to the defeat of the enemy by causing him to
move and thus to exhaust time and supplies. Such oper­
ations should uncover and destroy the logistics base itself,
including shelter, training areas, and command posts.

b. Since installations in VC base areas are invar­
ially completely camouflaged and protected by security
troops and booby traps, operations against these targets
must involve a thorough combing of the base area, organ­
ized by the establishment of a series of search zones.
Forces assigned to zones must be given full opportunity
to cover each zone thoroughly and ample time and means
to destroy what they find.

c. Operations against VC base areas should be
repetitive, based on a carefully designed campaign of
sustained action which will, ultimately, dominate the bases and render them useless.

d. Limited operations against VC base areas are also effective in keeping the enemy off balance, denying him free utilization of safe areas, and forcing him either to move frequently or to withhold forces for the defense of base complexes. Long range artillery, naval gunfire, fighter bombers, strategic bombers and land and amphibious raids will hamper his operations, reduce his forces, destroy his morale and materially detract from his ability to prosecute the war effectively.

31. Operations to Destroy VC or NVA Main Force Units

a. The success of offensive operations designed to destroy VC/NVA main forces depends upon finding the enemy and engaging him with superior forces. In those few instances when reliable information becomes available regarding the size or location of such a force, the opportunity should be exploited immediately and aggressively in coordination with appropriate FWMAF and Vietnamese commanders.

b. It must be emphasized, however, that those instances in which firm intelligence is available will be very rare. Therefore, acquisition of detailed information in the early stages of operations is essential. In almost every case this will include a requirement for aggressive ground reconnaissance. Specially trained small reconnaissance units, such as the Delta Teams discussed on page 58, should be established. In most instances these reconnaissance units should include one or two Vietnamese soldiers.
c. Schemes of maneuver must be inherently flexible to enable immediate response to any opportunity which promises defeat and destruction of VC. Rigidly pre-planned schemes of maneuver, with successive objectives, by a force moving in one direction, will nearly always fail to fix the enemy unless the "fix" is at a place and time chosen by the VC.

d. The first step in destroying VC or NVA main force units is to entrap or encircle the enemy force. It is not sufficient, in most cases, to use only an attacking and a blocking force -- more is required. The VC have, on many occasions, slipped between these two forces, escaping relatively unscathed. Therefore, the VC forces' most likely routes of withdrawal must be covered by ground combat elements, and the less likely routes of withdrawal by light reconnaissance elements on the ground, placed and extracted by helicopters, if available, in order to exploit time and space advantages.

e. Once contact is made commanders must be prepared to rapidly adjust plans to enemy movements, and to alter schemes of maneuver to fix and destroy the enemy. Action must be quick, aggressive and responsive to the movement of the VC. In this situation mission-type orders should be issued to combat units; they must move with great speed around, behind and on the flanks of any located VC force. This will require bold and skillful commanders at every echelon. Speed and deception must characterize tactical maneuver -- and all this must be done with meticulous attention to continuous provision of air, artillery and where feasible, naval gunfire support.
32. Operations to destroy local and guerrilla forces and the VC/military structure.

a. Normally, operations designed to destroy local and guerrilla forces and the VC military/political structure are classified as clearing operations or securing operations designed to bring specified areas permanently under GVN control. In such cases the clearing forces are to be followed by police, Regional and Popular Forces which, together with the cadre, are intended to eliminate the entire VC organization and to substitute therefor district, village and hamlet authorities who are loyal and responsive to the government.

b. However, because the VC objective is to take over the government at every level through the gradual development of powerful local guerrilla and political organizations and because these local organizations provide intelligence, tactical support and resources to main force units, it is sometimes necessary to attack this local structure even if there is no capability or intention to follow up with pacification measures (clearing and securing).

c. Therefore, search and destroy operations may be undertaken when pacification is not possible in accordance with techniques quite similar to clearing, which are treated separately in this handbook.

d. US and Free World Forces of approximately brigade size may often be deployed into a province, or even a district, for sustained operations over 2, 3 or 4 week periods designed to destroy local and guerrilla forces and the political and military infrastructure of the VC. The techniques
which are most effective in this connection are as follows:

(1) The tactical commander establishes a base from which he can launch quick reaction forces by helicopter, by vehicle and sometimes on foot.

(2) The commander his staff and his subordinate commanders establish contact with the local province, district, hamlet and village officials in order to obtain from them the most recent intelligence on VC activities and forces in the area.

(3) Because the intelligence gathered from these sources will usually be incomplete, it is necessary also to conduct extensive combat reconnaissance patrols. Battalions will be assigned areas within which companies, platoons and squads will conduct extensive foot, motor and heliborne patrols into areas identified by local officials as VC concentrations or areas of habitual VC activity.

(4) US platoons and squads or sometimes companies may accompany Regional Forces and Popular Forces on local operations to stiffen them and to provide the necessary communications for artillery and air support.

(5) In conjunction with local officials or Regional and Popular Forces, hamlets should be surrounded and searched and VC officials, identified through prior intelligence or interrogation, should be apprehended and turned over to Vietnamese authorities.

(6) By saturation patrolling by small units over a long period of time, a number of small contacts may be expected. Intelligence acquired through these contacts
should be exploited immediately and after a week or two, the intelligence picture in the area should become reasonably clear and a number of prisoners or ralliers should be in hand.

(7) Whenever a contact is made, a quick reaction by a large force should ensure success and low casualties by progressively destroying the VC organization in the area.

(8) After 3 or 4 weeks of such operations the following results should be ensured:

(a) RF and PF aggressiveness should be increased.

(b) Local intelligence should be forthcoming in ever greater quantity and quality.

(c) The number of small VC elements at hamlet and village levels should have been destroyed and the VC forced generally on the defensive.

(d) Opportunities to recruit additional RF/PF should increase.

(e) Opportunities for civic action and psychological operations should multiply.

(f) GVN control should be strengthened through domination of the area at the lowest level.

e. In the type of action described above most contacts will be with VC squads and platoons and only rarely with companies or battalions. Nonetheless,
this type of operation strikes at the heart of the VC organization and at his capability to conduct or support successfully his major operations. Troops should expect a large number of small successes. The cumulative effect of this type operation will be as important or even more important than engagements with a large VC force.

SECTION VIII. CLEARING AND SECURING OPERATIONS

33. Clearing Operations

a. Clearing operations are offensive combat operations conducted in a well defined zone and directed at destroying or permanently driving VC military forces out of a clearly designated area in preparation for securing operations -- see paragraph 34 below. US and other FWMAF will conduct clearing operations in and around their base areas and communication complexes, or in other carefully selected areas.

b. By their sustained nature, clearing operations are designed to make maximum use of local intelligence and combined operations with RF and PF. Only by remaining in an area for a protracted period can a closer relationship with the populace be developed. This, in turn, engenders confidence. When the local people no longer live in fear that the VC will return, they will inform on them because it is in the interest of their own security and welfare to do so. An area is thus cleared and ready for securing.

34. Securing Operations

a. Securing operations which always follow clearing
operations are designed to provide permanent security for hamlets, villages and districts which already have been cleared and which have been selected for pacification.

b. The RF and PF have primary responsibility for securing and are expected to relieve ARVN or FWMA forces that have cleared an area to enable them to move on to clear additional areas, thus expanding the pacified zone.

c. While securing forces must conduct saturation patrolling, they are not expected to cope with large VC units which should, in fact, no longer be within striking distance. Ultimately many of the securing forces will be replaced by National Police.

SECTION IX

OPERATIONS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AREA

35. General

The Central Highlands area constitutes almost 50 percent of the South Vietnam land mass. It is a rugged, mountainous area, with maximum elevation ranging from 4500 to 7000 feet in the vicinity of Dalat and from 3000 to 8000 feet in the area west of Quang Ngai. The area slopes steeply down to the coastal plain on the east and more gradually on the western plateau, resulting in a strong contrast between the short, swift, eastward-flowing streams with their steep-walled, narrow valleys,
and the more sluggish westward-flowing streams with their broad flat valleys. All streams are swollen and difficult to ford during the rainy season. Operations in this area differ greatly from those in the Delta and coastal plains because of the differences in terrain, weather and population. See relief map of Vietnam figure 45.

36. Characteristics of the Area

a. People: The hills and mountains are inhabited by Montagnards who are very primitive and, in many cases, aborigines (figure 46). "Montagnard" is a French word meaning "Mountaineer". Generally speaking these people are taller than the lowlanders and have a heavier muscle and bone structure, a darker complexion and more prominent mongoloid features. Clothing varies from tribe to tribe. Usually the women wear long skirts of dark material and may wear a short jacket or be bare breasted; the men wear loin cloths. They live in stilt houses. Their loyalty is given first to the family, and second to the tribe. Village life is completely communal. Word of mouth is their only means of communication as their literacy rate is extremely low.

b. Terrain: Steep slopes, sharp crests and narrow valleys characterize the mountainous areas. Numerous razorback ridges run in all directions and it is virtually impossible to follow them in any one direction more than a few hundred yards. The forested areas of the foot hills up to 3000 feet have an unbroken continuity of tall trees that form a dense, closed canopy over the ground. The undergrowth is very thick, comprising an almost impenetrable mass of smaller trees less than 10 feet high, intermingled with thorny shrubs and vines. Most
Figure 45. Relief Map of Vietnam
streams are bordered by high, steep rocky banks and are generally swift with rapids and shallows common. Fording is possible in many places except during the flash floods which occur during the rainy season.

c. Weather: In the highlands the southwest monsoon season lasts from May to October. During this period low clouds and ground fog limit observation and seriously restrict aerial activity. Cloud ceilings are less than 3000 feet about 80% of the time. Average monthly rainfall is approximately 13 inches. The average high temperature is 88 degrees with an average low of 55 degrees.

d. Movement.

(1) The steep terrain and dense jungles reduce foot mobility. Rate of march is usually from one half to two kilometers per hour with frequent rest stops. Experience shows that there is a tendency to overestimate the rate of advance of columns. The amount of rations and equipment carried by the individual soldier must be carefully considered to prolong his effectiveness.

(2) Wheeled and track vehicles will be restricted to the existing roads and trails. Bridges in this region are not capable of supporting heavy loads.

(3) The limited number of suitable landing zones requires careful and detailed reconnaissance in order to conduct heliborne operations. Open areas are sometimes covered with stakes and tree stumps, which may prohibit helicopter landings. The high altitude and small landing zones result in a reduction of helicopter lift capability.
e. Intelligence: Accurate, detailed, and timely information about the VC is difficult to obtain because of the sparse population, lack of communication facilities, terrain, and distances involved. Information from local inhabitants is frequently unreliable and misleading because the natives do not accurately determine time or dates and lack familiarity in dealing with numbers. Small, lightly equipped reconnaissance teams capable of staying in the area for long periods of time are particularly effective. Such teams can observe enemy activity and relay information to over-flying aircraft on a prearranged schedule.

37. Planning Considerations


(1) Artillery: Limited road nets or complete absence of roads restricts movement of artillery. Suitable positions are difficult to find, and sometimes clearing and leveling is necessary prior to positioning artillery pieces by helicopter.

(2) Air support: Dense jungle, low clouds and ground fog restrict air support. The locations of friendly forward elements are frequently difficult to determine from the air, limiting the delivery of close supporting fires. Units should plan the use of pyrotechnics, panels and other devices to mark their forward positions.