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SAIGON--The young South Vietnamese Special Forces officer snuffed out his filter cigarette and quietly told of his three clandestine guerrilla operations behind the lines into North Vietnam.

He said the operations for sabotage and target spotting for American bombing raids had been conducted for several years--and hence were not considered an escalation of the war against North Vietnam. He said a few American Special Forces personnel accompanied the South Vietnamese troopers and both Vietnamese and American helicopters were used at times.

He said on his first mission in 1965 he was into para-dropped into the mountains on Hon Gay island, a rich coal mining island 25 miles Northeast of North Vietnam's principal seaport of Haiphong.

"The main mission was to create panic in the area, especially among the Chinese population by hitting a Chinese Communist target. There was about 150 of us, including frogmen skilled in demolition work. At night-time, we moved out of the mountains dressed like North Vietnamese fishermen.

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"The frogmen got into the water and attached a lip mine to the bottom of the Chinese Communist cargo boat and adjusted the timing device for 15 minutes; That gave us enough time to get out of the area and back into the hills. Fifteen minutes later the Chinese Communist boat exploded and sank. We got a later report that several Chinese Communists got killed. We went further back into the mountains and were collected by helicopter and taken to the U.S. Navy 7th Fleet off the North Vietnam coast. The American commander of the ship welcomed us to the big American vessel and the U.S. sailors hugged us and took us to the bar. Even the American officers ~~were~~ addressed the Vietnamese enlisted men by 'yes sir.' That was very funny to us. The Americans treated us very well, put us in a luxury lounge and we ate alot of food. We were very happy too because we didn't have any casualties." [He said the purpose of his second mission was to observe North Vietnamese troop movements ~~moving~~ ^{headed} Southward and then to radio to a high-flying American U-2 aircraft, ~~in~~ ² which in turn called in American fighters and bombers to hit the North Vietnamese troops.

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"We were dropped by helicopter into a mountain peak south of ⁽⁷⁵ Vinh miles north of the demilitarized zone). From the peak we could watch two North Vietnamese divisions--the 324B and the 325th--moving towards the DMZ. We were each given a map and compass and told to climb to the top of the peak and stay there as long as possible to observe North Vietnamese convoys moving south.

"We walked several hours to the foot of the mountain and then rested. Then we climbed up the mountain. The slope was so steep and the jungle so thick we could travel only 300 yards a day. The first night we had to ^{WRAP} ~~wrap~~ ourselves around the trees and cling ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{them} ~~the~~ the time; otherwise we'd have fallen down the slope. We slept with the tree in front of us and our back-pack in the rear.

"The second day we reached the top of the mountain ~~and~~ and we felt great. We had radio contact all the time with the American aircraft; with our binoculars we could see the trails in the daytime and during the night we could hear the constant drone of North Vietnamese trucks moving south.

"The fifth day of the mission we received ~~our~~ supplies. We just sat there with our binoculars and watched the troop movements and reported them, and adjusted the American bombing attacks onto the target. At night we couldn't see much, but we could hear the North Vietnamese trucks moving all the time. That was a two week mission up on that mountain peak, and then our unit of about 150 men was picked up. We had several American Special Forces people with us who radioed to the American U-2."

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in Early 1967,
His third mission was more dangerous and costly. Again roughly
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~~150~~ South Vietnamese Special Forces troopers, with American counterparts,
were helicoptered into a landing zone just north of the demilitarized
zone near the Laotian border. The landing zone had been liberally
peppered with American bombing raids before the helicopters landed.

"It seemed safe enough when we landed," the Vietnamese smiled.
"It was lunchtime and we started eating. Then one North Vietnamese
soldier climbed up to where we were. I stared at him and he at me.
For a few seconds we were both confused. Then the North Vietnamese
asked in Chinese for the secret password. My friend understood and
spoke Chinese and he answered, but gave the wrong password. The North
Vietnamese soldier started firing, but missed. My friend and I
returned fire, but missed, because there were a lot of trees and bamboo
around.

"Then more North Vietnamese started shooting up towards us on
the mountain peak. We dropped our lunches and we all jumped into a
big B-52 bomb crater near the helicopter landing zone.

"If we looked over the edge of the crater the North Vietnamese
would shoot at us. So, we didn't look over the rim of the crater.
Once in awhile we'd throw hand grenades down on them. Then the North
Vietnamese started burning the forest at the bottom of the mountain
and the smoke was coming up in our faces. We called the people ~~up~~
upstairs (in the circling American aircraft) that we were under attack
and wanted to be pulled out.

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"One armed American UH-1B (Huey) helicopter moved in to pin down the North Vietnamese below us. That helicopter was shot down. When night came, the helicopter was left ~~there~~ ^{on the ground.} The next dawn ~~the~~ ^{s/} American sent in a Chinook (a larger helicopter) to pull out the downed one. The Chinook was hit also, but not shot down. About 20 more American helicopters came in to help the Chinook and after firing at the North Vietnamese enough to silence them, the helicopters landed to pick us up and the downed helicopter.

"That was a very short operation, and not a very ^s successful one. Two Americans and six Vietnamese were killed. Each of the Special Forces carries his own nylon bag to carry out our dead. We always bring out our dead because the North Vietnamese cut off their heads and tie them to tree limbs to wave around in the wind."

Finishing his story, the 28-year-old Vietnamese slipped out ~~to~~ ^{into} the Saigon night to enjoy his five-day leave before his next clandestine mission into North Vietnam.