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sniff 1 (normass/deepe)

Long An.

TAN AN, SOUTH VIETNAM, SEPTEMBER 23—The "people-sniffer" here is becoming a significant ~~military~~ ^{Bothe Field} tactical tool for detection of large and small Communist units.

The sniffing machine is used daily here and has produced consistently good results in assisting American commanders to find elusive Communist units. But it still is considered far from a quick-fix technological breakthrough for magically winning the war.

Searching for and finding Communist units has been one of the biggest, time-consuming problems of ~~American~~ waging this sub-conventional war; fighting them was a secondary problem. Now, the "people-sniffer" is becoming a standard part of ~~the Allied American or American's~~ ^{an American unit's} electronic inventory for tracking down Communist units, rather than committing ~~the~~ Allied units to sweep vast areas before locating them.

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Twenty-five miles south of Saigon, Tan An is the provincial capital of Long An province—the gateway leading to the lush Mekong Delta—and is the headquarters of the 1st (first) Bri Brigade of the U. S. Army 9th Division, which probably more than any other unit has ~~dev~~ developed the battlefield use of the detection device.

The "people-sniffer" looks "like a Hoover vacuum cleaner," one American officer explained, "but, is, of course, painted Army green" and it functions in much the same manner. BUT IT IS, OF COURSE, PAINTED ARMY GREEN. The detection machine is placed in a helicopter with two tubes attached to the helicopter's ski-like Huey's Huey's ski-like runners. The bu tubes, like a vacuum cleaner slur s slurping up dust, intakes the air over likely Communist areas. Then, through a complex electronical process, the machine measures the ammonia emitted from human bodies—and from water buffaloes, too—who are either present at the time or in the previous six hours.

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The body ~~chimi~~ chemicals are then electronically separated from the air and the amounts are registered the varying amounts are registered on dials on a zero to five sa scale. Number five is ~~sa~~ a "hot reading" over a likely Communist base or transit area away from village populations. ~~and then~~ If ^{"HOT"} ~~then~~ other the reading dovetails with other intelligence indicators or ^{OR RADAR} visual ~~assess~~ indicators, then American reconnaissance or infantry units are sent in to search the area.

The "people-sniffing" helicopter has a dangerous mission--~~fa~~ flying contour ^{tree tops} right above the ground or the scrub-like nipa palms to suck up the air. A number of these helicopters have been shot at and hit--in fact, ~~then~~ many times the helicopters are hit by Communist gunfire before the "people-sniffer" has time to ~~wait~~ register that the Communists are ~~there~~. ^{PRESENT} But, a "hot reading" on the sniffer, plus getting shot at from the ground, is generally ~~enough~~ indication ~~there are~~ enough Communists in the area for American troops to land for a sweeping. ^{ACE} The "people-sniffing" helicopter is always accompanied by ~~four gunships~~ covering gunships which attempt to suppress the Communist fire.

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The sniffing machine seems to be more effective in the lowland rice-paddy areas sprinkled with man-tall nipa palms, than in the northern highlands-- such as ~~are~~ around Khe Sanh where it ~~wa~~ where it was also employed--where the house-tall jungle te trees are further from the ground trod by human traffic.

"Right now, the people-sniffer is not a technological break-through that will win the war for us by itself," one American officer explained.

"But, it is a tactical tool to gather more intelligence information on where the Communists are . This means the ~~all~~ commanders have a pretty good idea where the enemy is before ~~committing~~ committing American units. In the past, the American units had to spend hours--sometimes days--tracking down the Communists without having much idea of where they were and it was a very time-consuming and exhaustive process, / in this waist-deep rice paddies. The people-sniffer just helps to pinpoint where the Communists are or have been in the past six hours."

Before troops are committed.

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sniff 5 (normass/deepe)

The officer explained, however, that ^{an} especially-trained American soldier-technician had to make subjective judgments in reading the dials of the machine.

"The ~~people~~ ^{the} people-sniffer doesn't tell you go or no-go," he said--~~refe~~ referring to whether or not ~~the~~ reading was so clear-cut ~~that~~ as to warrant sending in an American unit for searching.

"And the machine doesn't make any distinction between people and water buffalo. And it doesn't make any distinction between one person and 500 people. But the Army is now working on a new model that will quantitatively make the some sort of distinction between a few people and alot of people."

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He added in jest:

"When the Army comes up with a model that will tell us the difference between the goodies and the baddies, then the people-sniffer will win the war for us," he said, referring to differentiating between Communist and non-Communists.

The "people-sniffing" helicopter is usually flown over thinly-populated areas, such as the waste swamplands and nipa palm areas, in which prior intelligence information has indicated a likely ~~likelihood~~ likelihood of Communist movements or presence. If a "hot reading" turns up from a sniffing run, then several more helicopter passes are made to pinpoint the area. Often a smaller, four-seat, light observation helicopter then descends so low that its backblast blows aside the nipa palm leaves for "eyeballing" ~~under under the branches~~ to "eyeball" under the branches for bunkers or foxholes.

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Long An

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sniff 7 (normass/deepe)

NON-POPULATED

If the ~~area~~ ^{seems} looks suspicious appears visually suspicious, a number of ways are often used to ~~and~~ induce Communist troops movement or groundfire. Sometimes, the helicopter gunships employ "reconnaissance by fire" by blasting in ~~re~~ small rockets—which are not powerful enough to pierce ^{the} mud- and concrete Communist bunkers. ^{BUT might cause troops to move.} Or sometimes ~~the~~ the light observation helicopter drops smoke grenades or a hand-sized cannister of E-158 repeat E-158 non-lethal C/S repeat C/S, a ~~core~~ cross between tear gas and vomiting gas. If any ~~significant~~ significant number of Communist troops are flushed ~~in~~ out by these methods, then American infantry units are quickly heli-dropped to engage them.

(Hank: Tomorrow I'll cable a sequel to this story on "making the donut" encirclements once a Communist unit is detected by the peoplesniffer. I might CABLE find one other short piece too ~~do~~ that I picked up in Long An. I'll also try to get a mailer off to you. Wh If all is quiet in the Saigon area after that, what do you think of a hasty three of or four day trip to I corps the week beginning September 28? I understand it is heating up quickly? Regards Bev).

--x end reuter