

Long An.

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donut 2 (normass/deepe)

For the American troopers who must wade through the waist-deep mud of the upper Mekong Delta, the watchword ~~for them~~ is to keep their eye on the hole—where the Communists are—rather than on the donut formed by U. S. cop companies.

The 1st Brigade of the U. S. 9th Infantry Division has thus far successfully engaged the Communist organized battalions in Long An province—the gateway to the Mekong Delta situated less than 15 miles south of Saigon—and has secured the southern arc of the capital's defense. Flying at 1800 feet altitude, American commanders can often look out on <sup>Helicopter</sup> ~~one door of their command~~ ~~helicopters~~ to give orders battlefield orders to their units below—and <sup>CHOPPER</sup> ~~look out the other door of the helicopter~~ to see the high-rise skyline of Saigon.

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donut 3 (normass/deepe)

"Our tactical encirclements have evolved over the past four or five months," one 1st Brigade officer explained. "Encirclements are classical military tactics which have been on the books for a long time.

"But, here we have been coming out with a new edition. We emphasis more firepower and more psyops (psychological operations) with the idea of American units surrounding the enemy completely so that he must make the choice of surrendering or else <sup>BEING</sup> killed."

The synchronized emphasis of the 1st Brigade's tactics is significantly characterized by these <sup>following</sup> ~~points~~ <sup>points</sup>:

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donut 4 (normass/deepe)

*First,*  
1. Ax Concentrated usage of every available electronic, airborne and human means of tracking down Communist units. These means include ~~in~~ treetop level helicopter reconnaissance, ~~small~~ small-unit ~~reconnaissance~~ reconnaissance by aero-riflemen, ~~intelligence~~ intelligence reports from villagers or prisoners, people-sniffing machines that detect human ~~chemicals~~ chemicals in non-populated areas, ~~sn~~ and ground radar ~~tree~~ trackings. Once a Communist unit is tracked down, then American infantry companies are heli-dropped into the area to encircle it. In the past, the emphasis was on using ~~American~~ larger American infantry units on search-and-destroy sweeps to find the Communists--and then to fight them. But, the exhaustive, time-consuming job was first finding the elusive Communists, rather than engaging him.

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donut 5 (normass/deepe)

*Second,*

Once the Communist units have been ~~locat~~ pinpointed, then American commanders begin the encircle—or "making the donut"—by using ~~overwhelm~~ overwhelmingly superior numbers of American troops to prevent the Communist escape, using helicopter mobility to move the troops in quickly—using firepower ~~super~~ superiority of air, artillery and gunships ~~to~~ instead of ground troops to fight the Communists. ~~Sometimes as~~ Once, as many as 17 American companies were shuttled in to encircle a reinforced Communist company; sometimes the shuttling of American troops <sup>into</sup> ~~in~~ the battlefield encirclement takes as long as 12 hours, and ~~was~~ is finished during night-time under the light of illuminating flares.

~~In the past,~~

*B.G. Allied*  
The encirclement alleviates or solves one of the ~~the~~ problems of the past. *"Before, ne*  
*"before,* <sup>ne</sup> whenever we found the Communists, they were so elusive, they'd just fall through the ~~cracks~~ cracks, as we used to say, and ~~hold on~~ *they'd* always escape," one 1st Brigade officer explained. "So, ~~they~~ we began ~~evolv~~ evolving our encirclement concept to prevent this."

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donut ~~5-6~~ (normass/deepe)

*TR. 20,*  
~~3~~ Well-coordinated emphasis on psychological operations during the encirclement to coax or convince the Communists either to voluntarily give up or to ~~become~~ surrender as prisoners of war.

"We'd ~~xx~~ much rather capture the enemy or cause him to surrender than to kill him," an American ~~off~~ officer explained. "Our dream is to get a whole unit to defect to us—~~rather than g~~ rather than getting a high bodycount by killing them all."

*COMMON SENSE*  
"Some ~~of our~~ prisoners ~~lx~~ and defectors have said they were afraid to die—this is their most common statement. So, during the battles, we try to emphasize that they have a choice—~~either to~~ either be killed or that they do not have to die—~~that~~ that they will be treated well if they surrender to us. We use the doctrine that 'this-is-your-last-chance-to-be-saved'. It does not always work, but we keep trying."

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donut 7 (normass/deepe)

The results of the refinement and coordination of the donut operations has been an impressive, if not consistently remarkable, kill ratio for the 1st Brigade—generally more than 20 Communists killed and captured for every American killed in action. For the first 19 days of September, the Brigade has killed 303 Communists, captured 50 individuals and 182 weapons. Eighteen Americans were killed in this time period—and 100 wounded. Even with this lop-sided kill-rat~~ion~~<sup>ion</sup>, however, ~~1~~<sup>2</sup> American commanders are unhappy—at that rate, roughly sixty or seventy per cent of the American ~~brigade~~ fighting in the rice paddies will be killed or wounded in action within a year's time.

American commanders believe they actually kill even more Communists than they keep count of; only those bodies that are physically recovered are counted; no estimates of others killed are allowed; Communists who are wounded, but not captured are not tallied; the battlefield bodycount of the brigade is not exaggerated as the American command in Saigon had allowed at times in the past. The commanders admit that being "bodycount oriented" is an inadequate way to measure their work in the province, but that as long as the brigade's mission is destruction of Communist big-unit formations, it seems to be the single most appropriate index of their effectiveness.

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donut 8 (normass/deepe)

Since the brigade assumed responsibility for big-unit fighting in Long An province on June 23, ~~the~~ it has so weakened so badly three of the eight Communist battalions in the province they have merged with other battalions and has whittled down a third battalion to 37 men.

"Three months ago, there were six enemy battalions active in the area, ex province, excluding qua guerrillas and district companies," one brigade officer explained. "And since then they have reinforced with two more entire battalions and elements of another to total more than eight battalions.

"Now there are four battalions combat effective and able to ~~maneuver~~ maneuver at all. And the average strength of these four battalions are down from 300 men to 150 men each. We have also emphasized taking prisoners of war--and have been relatively successful at that."

*the*  
The brigade would in time be able to win the big-unit war in Long An--except for constant reinforcements filtering back into the area.

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donut 9 (normass/deepe)

"But, now we're getting a big influx of North Vietnamese in down here," the officer continued. "Many of the battalions in the province have just come back from Cambodia for refitting, ~~from~~ retraining and replacements. Many of their replacements are now North Vietnamese, where before they were the units were predominantly local Viet Cong. In early June, about 20 per cent of the composition of the units here were North Vietnamese; now the battalions here are 50 per cent or more North Vietnamese troops and 30 to 40 per cent of their commanders are North Vietnamese.

"In early June, one North Vietnamese replacement unit came into Long An with 500 men. We caught it their first day in the province and hit them four days in a row, killing 300 of them. That battalion was broken up and the 200 survivors were redistributed to the local force battalions.

"Now, the enemy is avoiding contact and is breaking up into platoons; many of our recent contacts are less than platoon strength (roughly 30 men). When our ~~brigade~~ <sup>probe</sup> ~~probes~~ and finds the Communist units, we smash them—so the alternative for the enemy is to fragment. It becomes increasingly difficult to find and fight him. A week ago, the Communists began to get up and run we when we came into an area. This was unique; usually they hide until night and then sneak away. The last two times, they started jumping in the streams to get away from us and the helicopter gunships would shoot them up."

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donut 10 (normass/deepe)

Since mid-June, the bi brigade has launched 18 to 20 encirclement donut" encirclement operations, of which about half dozen were significantly fruitful for them. One of these was on August 12 and 13, when the 520th Viet Cong local force battalion was contacted. More than 100 Communist bodies and several prisoners were recovered ~~the next~~ on the battlefield, ~~mak~~ mainly from the use of artillery and C/S tear non-lethal tear gas-vomiting gas that was dropped consistently throughout the night. Often, as much as 2000 rounds of artillery are pounded ~~it~~ into the hole of the donut throughout one night as a means of routing out the Communists or inducing them to surrender.

On another occasion, 17 ~~companies~~ were rushed into in to form the donut; the results were 93 Communists dead, four ~~def~~ voluntary defectors, 14 prisoners of war and a number of weapons. American losses were 11 killed in action and 23 wounded.

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donut 11 (normass/deepe)

The "checkerboard" technique was used by the brigade before arriving in Long An province, while it was operating ~~near the Cambodian border~~ in the non-populated, marshy prairies of the Plain of Reeds. Then, the ~~brigade~~ brigade commander heli-dropped a handful of American troops into each of the ~~one~~ <sup>one</sup> ~~one~~ one kilometer grid squares on his map of their area of responsibility. Each ~~small~~ <sup>For each</sup> unit swept ~~their~~ its individual grid square as a thorough means of ~~a~~ finding the Communists.

This technique was later modified in the more diversified terrain of Long An province into ~~a~~ "an "advanced checkerboard," which became known as "jitterbugging." Instead of using infantry troops to sweep each grid square on the ~~map~~ <sup>map</sup>, the brigade placed more emphasis on the problem of detecting the Communists ~~in~~ by more sophisticated and ~~system~~ systematic means.

Each morning the brigade staff scrutinized all ~~the~~ their ~~radar~~ ground radar and intelligence data from the ~~previou~~ previous night. Then, it dispatched ten helicopters to these hotspots. <sup>of Reported Communist Activity</sup> These ten helicopters formed the ~~brigade~~ brigade's Air Cavalry unit and included one ~~people~~ people-sniffing helicopter, three light scout helicopters, several armed gunships for protection and four troop-carrying helicopters loaded with ~~their organic~~ <sup>an</sup> organic rifle platoon.

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~~donut~~

donut 12 3 (normass/deepe)

If the people-sniffing helicopter, which detected human ammonia body ~~odors~~ odors, got a "hot reading" from the non-populated area, then tear gas cannisters were dropped by the scout helicopters which ~~o~~ hovered so low over the nipa palms that the back blast from the engine brushed aside the palm leaves hiding the Communists. If the target still looked suspicious, the airborne rifle platoon was dropped in to inspect. If contact ~~was~~ developed with the Communists, then "jitterbugging" was employed. Another covey of 10 ten helicopters carried two-thirds of an infantry company---about 60 or 70 men--- and the battalion commander would insert troops from either five of these ~~helicopter~~ helicopters or else all ten of them to sweep through the area. If the commander inserted all ~~ten~~, however, and the target was insignificant, then he had wasted his air mobility; the American units could travel no faster in the waist-deep rice paddies than the Communists. Generally, only five troops from only five helicopters were inserted, with the ~~x~~ the other five kept on airborne alert. Then, if the initial target turned out to be insignificant, the troops from the five airborne helicopters were rushed elsewhere to search out another ~~hotp~~ hotspot area, while the ground troops on the ground were picked up by their five helicopters.

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donut 13 (normass/deepe)

"All this hopping around with multiple insertions to sweep many targets with a minimum of time and human fatigue became known to the brigade as the jitterbug technique," one officer ~~explain~~ explained. "Sometimes we make 17 of these small <sup>n</sup>insertions in one day throughout the brigade just to find a good Communist target.

"If we make contact with troops from the first five helicopters, then the first major decision to be made is whether this contact is just a few snipers or if it is a big unit that should be encircled. The brigade commander must decide this—and if it is really a hot target, then he ~~commite~~ commits every company in the brigade and a few times we've even received help from companies in another brigade.

~~"We've had 18 to 20 successful encircles encirclements thus far, of which six were really significant.~~ If we get an early morning contact, we have the whole day to pile on the other companies. But sometimes we must insert during the night-time, using illumination. We do not have enough helicopters to move all the brigade at one time—so the choppers shuttle the ~~h~~ troops into the donut area for hours at a time.

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donut 14 (normass/deepe)

*decision*  
"Then the key question is to make subsequent ~~insetio~~ *insetio* insertions far enough away from the contact area to block the major routes of exit ~~off~~. But the Communists are not in a neat configuration in neat little nipa ~~palms~~ *apl* ~~palms~~ *clumps*. If we try a narrow encirclement, other ~~insetio~~ insertions will be tied down and won't cut the escape routes. Also the use of tactical air and artillery is very tricky in such a small area and our problems of indirect fire are compounded ten fold.

"Generally we insert troops 1000 to 1500 ~~meters~~ meters from the first contact and then bring in subsequent lifts to plug the gaps. By nightfall, we might have 10 or 11 companies ~~(21)~~ (roughly 1000 ~~ex~~ troops) in a ~~circle~~ *Donut* narrowed *Down* to 600 to 800 meters long by nightfall. Then, during the night, ~~they~~ we pour artillery into the hole of the donut; ~~this is such a~~ this demands such great accuracy that the artillery commander helicopters over the area and personally directs the ~~ex~~ battery fire. During the night we may fire 2000 rounds into the middle of the donut. We haven't had any American casualties artillery errors yet, but sometimes the rounds come in so close that the artillery fragments ~~scratch~~ *hit* the American troops. After the all-night bombardment, the troops at dawn begin sweeping the area."

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donut 15 (normass/deepe)

American officers concede that the donut operations are suited to the flat, terrain of the ~~rice~~ rice-paddies, where the ~~diat~~ "delta region is one giant landing zone for our helicopters." In the jungled highlands, ~~al~~ suitable places to land troop-carrying helicopters are limited, and this would constrict an American commander attempting an encirclement or "jitterbugging" in this area.

Thus far, the Communists have not developed a consistent counter-donut plan, although they have in some areas foiled the ~~tachium~~ American moves. If there is not a high density of American troops, sometimes the Communists—especially local guerrillas, rather than North Vietnam—Vietnamese—~~snake~~ still manage to sneak out of the donut & under ~~nipa~~ the nipa palm leaves or through the streams. In other cases, the Communists allow the American troops to come as close as two ~~year~~ yards from their bunkerline before ~~firmament~~ opening ~~contact with the Americans:~~ <sup>any</sup> American killed or wounded troops so near the bunkerlines <sup>maximum</sup> prevent use of ~~airplan~~ air and artillery bombardments. ~~Ta~~ So far, the Communists have not attempted to break out of the encirclements of the ~~hve~~ brigade by massing all their forces inside the hole of the donut and spearheading a drive on one point of the donut. <sup>LAST MONTH</sup> But, the Communists ~~have~~ <sup>MADE</sup> used this technique to break out of an encirclement by the U. S. Army 101st Airborne Brigade in the ~~nigh~~ neighboring province of Hau ~~Nhi~~ Nghia—and a bloody, <sup>human wave attack ensued</sup> ~~human wave attack ensued~~ leaving 103 Communists and 30 Americans dead.

—end reuter