

Deepe

fort--article 6 of 8 article series

page 1

august 18, 1965

### LE MY & FOX FORT

LE MY, FOX FORT, SOUTH VIETNAM--This majestic fortress of stone, situated\_\_\_\_\_miles northwest of the strategic Danang airbase it seeks to protect, graphically depicts the similarities and differences between the American military position and the disasterous French military position a decade ago.

The fortress, complete with a labyrinth of underground tunnels, was built and used by the Japanese forces during World War II; then occupied by the French forces during the French Indo-China War from 1916 to 1947.

Today, the American Marines call it Fox Fort. It is the operational base area of Foxtrot Company of the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Regiment of the III Marine Amphibious Force. Ironically, earlier this month, the fort flew the Confederate flag, a symbol of America's own Civil War.

(More)

deepe

fort--page 2

Inside the fort, as American privates and sergeants hastily erected screened in mess halls in preparation for the upcoming monsoon season, the American captain and company commander explained, "The Viet Minh (Communists) during the French Indo-China War blew this fort to smithereens by barraging it with 300 mortar shells in one minute, according to what the villagers tell us."

Asked whether the Viet Cong Communists could do the same, he pondered and answered, "Yes, but they would have a much more difficult time of it."

Here, at Fox Fort, the American Marines, in general, are using the same tactical military principle as the French. They use the fort as an operation base--or as the Marine captain explained, "a rest camp" from which to unleash a myriad of small-unit patrols into the tangled jungle, hillsides. These patrols are sent out daily, and more significantly, nightly in an attempt toward off Viet Cong units who might attack the Marine positions here, who might attempt to attack the important Danang airbases.

(More)

deepe

fort--page 3

Under the French, their small-unit patrols were repeatedly ambushed and wiped out--and perhaps most significantly, the patrols did not secure or pacify the surrounding villages, which the Communists used for food supplies, for gathering intelligence on French troops movements and for acting as a physical shield to them in battle.

Today, only 600 meters from Fox Fort, the small village called Phnuc Dong to the west, "The Viet Cong in at night and rest around the Catholic Church," according to the American captain "Most of the young men from that village have already gone into the mountain with the army to fight with the Viet Cong."

Similar to the French military position, the American Marine patrols "protect the village only as long as the Marines are there," in the words of one Vietnamese village chief, "but not after they are gone." Likewise, the Marines patrols do not crush the Viet Cong political infrastructure within each village. This is considered the responsibility of the Vietnamese government and its <sup>armed</sup> forces.

Several months ago, shortly after the Marines moved into their positions within the Le My complex of villages, an estimated two Viet Cong hard-core companies attacked two of the Marine positions guarding village bridges. "We beat the hell out of them," the American captain explained."

(More)

deepe

fort--article 6 of 8 article series

page 4

"The sergeant had just finished checking the lines and came back to his hole," the American captain in explained. "He looked up and saw three or four silhouettes of bushes--but the bushes were moving. He opened fire. Then the corporal near him opened fire--and killed two Viet Cong directly in front of him with his rifle and killed a third with his trenching tool.

"The Viet Cong were exceptionally well camouflaged and wore wreaths on the upper part of their body and head," he continued. "This was a hard-core North Vietnamese unit in black uniforms and carrying machine guns and automatic weapons. However, the captain explained, the Communist units had spent three days in a nearby village--within the Marine perimeter--before they attacked. While the Marines, had intelligence reports of their presence, "we sent patrols out but they didn't hear or see anything. One villager said that one of the North Vietnamese unit commanders had even walked near the bridge we were protecting--before the attack--but we didn't even know that."

(More)



deepe

fort--article 6 of 8 article series

page 5

Only one Marine was wounded; an estimated 12 Viet Cong were killed and 15 were wounded. Since then, the Viet Cong have disengaged from the Marine position--but they haven't been defeated. "During the past three weeks, our patrols have encountered nothing of importance," one Marine captain explained.

"The Viet Cong grossly under-estimated the firepower of a Marine corps squad," the captain explained.

The attack incident also illustrates the important differences between the American Marines and the French troops. Unquestionably, the Marines are "more aggressive" in their patrolling, as one villager who had seen both armies explained. "And the Americans have more troops; they do the patrolling better; they have more of everything than the French--more weapons with more firepower; more artillery and airplanes."

However, reliable military sources indicate that the only tactical weapon the Americans possess which the French did not in the helicopter--which has given the Americans quicker reaction time and greater mobility.

Almost all of the American outlying positions at this time lie under the protective cover of artillery, mortars and quick-reaction airpower, which was not consistently true for the French troops. Some American positions are also covered by the firepower of the U.S. Seventh Fleet patrolling off Danang.

(More)

deepe

fort--article 6 of 8 article series

page 6

However, as a colonialist power, the French government had much more control over the government, police and intelligence agencies in Vietnam than the Americans do currently.

"Now one of the most disturbing things," one Marine captain explained, "is that the Vietnamese government is letting free the people we think are Viet Cong. When we go out on patrol, we carry an intelligence listing of the Viet Cong in the area. We caught one man on our Viet Cong list and turned him over to the Vietnamese government as a suspect--and they turned him loose.

"This was a man that the villagers said had detonated a mine that killed two Marines riding in a jeep. Our intelligence listing described him as Mr. Luc--a Viet Cong who plants mines. But they turned him loose. We have enough trouble getting people without having to beat the bush for them again."

(More)

deepe

fort--article 6 of 8 article series

page 7

One American Marine battalio~~m~~ commander, south of the Danang airbase, explained, "We've probably brought in 1000 Viet Cong suspects since we've been here--but the Vietnamese government releases 90 per cent of them. Sometimes, the Vietnamese government returns these suspects to their home area even before we clear out of the area. It's make the troops mad. We think more of these people are Viet Cong.

"The only basis we have of bringing in suspects is if they do not have an identity card, or if the Vietnamese troops with us think he's suspicious, such as being of military age. We recognize using the identity cards as a basis isn't a satisfactory way of determining who's Viet Cong,. But it's the only way we've found so far."

The young Marine troopers, however, have another criteria. "If they shoot, they're Viet Cong," one of them explained. "If they don't shoot they're government forces-- or tired Viet Cong.