

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SEABEE Team members be issued survival kits upon arrival to Saigon. SEABEE Team 1104 received survival kits from Special Forces A Detachment 342 after being in the field. Fifty percent of the OIC SEABEE Team 1104's survival kit was profitably utilized during the Dong Xoai incident.

2. Tiger suits (camouflage uniforms worn by Special Forces and CIDG soldiers) be issued to SEABEE Teams upon arrival to Saigon. These uniforms or the plain green SEABEE Uniform with an unstarched hat should be worn in the field to blend in with the Vietnamese soldiers. Americans are the number one VC target!!.

3. At least two M-79's should accompany every team. This weapon is accurate, deadly and is extremely easy to use. SEABEE Team members in most cases end up borrowing this weapon from Special Forces members.

4. Every SEABEE Team member going to Vietnam should have a forty-five pistol for the following reasons:

(a) You can work with a 45 on your belt enabling you to have access to a weapon instantly. You must set down a rifle to do any work.

(b) A rifle can be easily jammed or lost. If so the 45 could be used if needed. Chief McCULLY's M-14 was burned from his hand by a flame thrower when the final wave of Viet Cong came over the berm at Dong Xoai. LTJG PETERLIN's M-14 was jammed full of mud while on his E&E route and was unusable. LTJG PETERLIN was not called upon to use his 45, but it was available if needed and gave him an additional feeling of confidence.

(c) Forty five ammunition is easily available for resupply.

5. The M-14 rifle has the full confidence of every man on SEABEE Team 1104. No man on the team would think of trading it for a carbine or an AR-15 which the Special Forces members were using. There was less jamming involved with the M-14 and a great deal of confidence was instilled in each member as a result of its great fire power. The only downfall with having the M-14 at Dong Xoai was that the SEABEES were the only personnel using it. After many hours of fighting, 7.62 ammunition grew scarce although carbine and AR-15 ammunition was all around. Ideally if everyone had M-14 rifles the problem would be solved. Realistically, I believe the M-14 rifle should accompany the SEABEE Team member but he should also be issued a carbine by Special Forces to accompany him to his post. This has been done by many teams in the past, but the carbines were not available at Dong Xoai.

6. Each SEABEE Team member should be given a wallet sized card with standard phrases in Vietnamese and Cambodian which could be utilized on an E&E route. Chief McCULLY received cover & food from Vietnamese natives through sign language alone, but a standard phrase card would have helped immensely.

7. Tourniquets were used extremely effectively at Dong Xoai. WILSON's life was perhaps saved by the application of a tourniquet on his wrist when direct pressure would not stop the spurting artery.

8. It is believed that camouflage bandages should be utilized by the US Armed Forces in Vietnam. White bandages were a "dead give away" for Chief McCULLY and had to be thrown away.

9. Personnel going in the field should inventory their personal effects prior to departure from Saigon. HOOVER & SHIELD's personal effects are unknown and all other personnel had a difficult time remembering all items.

10. A course of instruction on hand grenades with practical application should be taught prior to going to Vietnam. Everyone on SEABEE Team 1104 utilized hand grenades at Dong Xoai.

11. A much more extensive weapons course should be given to SEABEE Teams coming to Vietnam. (Perhaps at Camp Pendleton where heavy crew served weapons are available). Members of SEABEE Team 1104 have fired the following weapons while in Vietnam.

- a. 60mm Mortar
- b. 81mm Mortar
- c. 4.2 in mortar
- d. 3.5 in rocket launcher
- e. 57mm recoilless rifle
- f. 30 caliber machine gun
- g. 50 caliber machine gun
- h. BAR
- i. Carbine rifle
- j. AR-15 rifle

At Dong Xoai conditions almost reached the state where a few of the members were to fire the 105 howitzer but it was found that the ammunition was expended. Some of the above mentioned weapons were fired by SEABEE Team 1104 members for the first time at Dong Xoai and learning was done the hard way; i.e., Chief McCULLY was burned by the backblast of the 57mm recoilless rifle while firing it for the first time during the attack.

12. Insure that all the SEABEE Team personnel going to Vietnam take the SERE Course (survival school) at Bridgeport Calif. There was not a doubt in the minds of the OIC & POIC of SEABEE Team 1104 that they could escape & evade no matter what situation presented itself. This confidence was largely instilled by the knowledge obtained at Bridgeport.

13. A Special Forces camp is at it's weakest state when the Special Forces and SEABEE Team first arrive for the following reasons:

- a. A good intelligence system is not fully established yet. Reliability of local agents is not known.
- b. Good defenses are not yet set in as one of the purposes of the SEABEE Team for being there is to construct some of these defenses; ie, berm, bunkers, etc...
- c. Outposts and patrols are usually not fully effective as the personnel are not yet familiar with the terrain.
- d. Personnel in camp are just getting situated and are not familiar with the area.

14. Do not set a pattern!! Members of SEABEE Team 1104 were at Dong Xoai for five days and Special Forces A Det 324 was there for about ten days and the Headquarters building, communication and alternate communications buildings, and two American berthing areas were the first buildings hit and the only buildings that were completely demolished. Perhaps the answer is to rotate your sleeping area and change the location of your communication facilities periodically along with incorporating more alternate communication facilities. The above mentioned American facilities were definitely known by the VC at Dong Xoai even though no local indigenous help were working at the camp. It is personally believed by the OIC SEABEE Team 1104 that knowledge was obtained by a lookout in the slightly higher area about 200 yards northeast of the Special Forces camp.

15. SEABEE Teams can be very highly utilized by Special Forces in VC infested areas such as Dong Xoai. I would be the last to say that these areas or any area in Vietnam is secure just as I would be the last to say that Saigon is safe. With the war becoming more conventional and accelerated every day and with the many fronts in Vietnam, it is necessary that there be many camps in areas such as Dong Xoai with good defenses and buildings to be utilized as bases of operation. SEABEE Teams can give them just that and are proud of it. It may be however, that the VC are starting to realize this and are also realizing that a regiment of hard core VC can pretty well handle a handful of Americans with a Battalion of 50-50 native soldiers who the Americans have no control over.