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COUNTRY : SOUTH VIETNAM (SVN)

SUBJECT : VC Policy Toward Treatment of Allied POW's in VC Military Region IV

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SUMMARY

In VC Military Region (MR) IV from October 1965 through 28 February 1967, the VC dug trenches before a battle for Allied prisoners of war (POW's) that they anticipated capturing. These were used for protection against bombing and were only prepared for engagements expected to last more than one-half hour. Upon capture, the POW's were evacuated to a medical camp near the battleground; from there, Vietnamese prisoners were sent to district and higher levels; U.S. POW's were taken through district and Province to The Central Office For SVN (COSVN). Wounded prisoners were left at the site of the conflict when the fighting was near a road or an Allied post; when there was little chance of their being rescued, the wounded were taken to the VC base camp. VC had to treat POW's well; if a soldier violated this rule, he was criticised by his supervisor, and if he continued the mistreatment, he was criticised again and re-educated. Cadres were criticised and subsequently sent to a Rear Services unit if they continued violation of the rules.

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None

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1. In the DOL report of Binh Hoa Province from October 1967 through February 1967, the VC dug trenches in their camps near the command post prior to a battle when trenches were used for Allied POW's whom the VC expected to capture during the battle. The trenches were to protect the prisoners from artillery fire and bombings. POW's sat in group of three near the holes, and when the snelling began they were told to jump into them. The prisoners were not tied, but one VC was assigned to watch all of them. A trench was designed for only one to three men to attenuate the effects of the bombing. The number of trenches dug depended on an estimate from the battalion commander as to how many would be taken; however, there was no directive to capture a certain number. The commander based his guess on the size of the unit to be attacked. Trenches were only dug when the commander decided that the battle would last more than one-half hour, after considering the size of the opponent, the type of unit, the terrain and whether or not enemy reinforcements or air support were expected.
2. Most captured ARVN soldiers under the rank of sergeant were given a five to 10 minute briefing on the policies of the National Front For The Liberation Of SVN (NFLSVN), since the cadres realized that these men had been forced by the GVN to fight. A squad was assigned to take all other POW's to a medical evacuation point about 1000 meters from the battlefield; its location for each battle was determined by the battalion commander; it was centrally located among all participating units for easy evacuation and observation of the battle, and yet far enough away to avoid artillery fire. It was usually located in the forest to prevent detection by aircraft, but if this was not practicable, the entire medical complex moved to a safer area as soon as the wounded were evacuated from the battlefield. During all phases of evacuation, the healthy POW's were not tied, but assigned one to a VC squad, to permit both adequate safeguarding and rapid movement.
3. If the unit fought a battle in an area near a road or an Allied post, wounded POW's were only bandaged and then abandoned. It was felt that the Allies would rescue them within one-half hour, and that if the VC had to evacuate them through more than five to seven kilometers of dense forest, they would dis enroute and the unit would be slowed down unnecessarily. However, if the battle were fought in a forested area where there was little chance of the prisoners being rescued, the VC had no choice but to carry them to the VC base camp. All wounded Allied prisoners and VC were treated alike; the most serious cases were treated first. Injured prisoner tried to escape, VC soldiers would run after him. If they could not catch him, one warning shot was fired. If this was not heeded, soldiers shot and wounded the POW.
4. Evacuation from the medical station was effected immediately after the battle. POW's were sent to district or province first, depending on which was nearer. They were kept at district for one to two days if this location was safe, to coordinate with commo-liaison agent, and then sent to province. If the area was not secure they were evacuated to province immediately; these papers were processed for those going to higher echelons. U.S. POW's were sent as quickly as possible through district, province, and headquarters to COSVN, since their safety could not be guaranteed. Vietnamese Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO's) and high ranking enlisted men were re-educated at province level and then released to go either to GVN or VC controlled areas. Vietnamese officers through the rank of senior lieutenant were sent to MR headquarters for interrogation and re-education; higher ranking Vietnamese Officers were taken through MR headquarters to COSVN. One commo-liaison guide led U.S. POW's for only each portion of the journey from district to COSVN. Usually three was a one to two wait at each level while coordination was effected with commo-liaison agents; however an emergency means was found

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to evacuate them if there was not adequate food and lodging to accommodate the prisoners at any given level. U.S. prisoners were given bread, if available, or rice cakes, and tea. Other POW's had one liter of rice a day and eight piasters worth of food, which included tea, bought by the unit at the local market. It was believed by the VC that GVN troops did not have much to eat. Therefore, according to Source, COSVN ordered the VC to give more food to anyone who needed it.

5. All VC were to treat POW's well. Cadres who violated the rules were criticised by their supervisor in front of the entire unit and then not given any work to do. If they continued to disobey VC policy they were sent to Rear Services and not allowed to participate in combat until they changed their behavior. No cadres were known to commit more than one violation, because of the humiliation they realized they would suffer if not permitted to fight. Cadres were considered by Source to have the power to do what they wanted, whereas soldiers just carried out orders. However, a cadre had to set the example for everyone and if he mistreated a POW, the incident was more serious. When a soldier violated the regulations, he was criticised and released from combat until he admitted his mistake, during which time he stayed at the unit. For minor offenses the soldier was first criticised in private by his immediate supervisor and thereafter by his unit commander in front of the entire unit. After repeated violations, soldiers would also be re-educated. The man had to write down the entire sequence of events, then read his dissertation in front of the unit and explain it part by part. Subsequently, the unit members had the opportunity to comment if they felt the violator had not been complete or correct in his analysis; however, they rarely made any additional statements. The entire process took approximately two hours. In this manner, political officers used cases of mistreatment to remind others of the proper prisoner-handling procedures. Examples of minor offenses included one case which occurred in 1963 when a soldier beat a POW. Major offenses included shooting a POW without an order, an example of which was publicized by COSVN, when, in 1963, a soldier shot and wounded three ARVN soldiers in CU CHI District, HAU NGHIA Province. It was known that at times soldiers took out their anger on Allied prisoners by shooting at them after they fell into VC hands, but no specific instances were known to Source. After a violation, the immediate supervisor and the man involved would apologize to the prisoner, because if the POW were an officer, the lower-ranking offender might not be able to communicate effectively with him; if the violator were of higher rank than the prisoner, there would be an argument between the two. From 1961 to 1963 regulations regarding POW treatment were not as strictly enforced; however, after 1963, when the situation became progressively more difficult for the VC, greater effort was made to enforce the rules.

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