

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS AMERICAL DIVISION  
APO San Francisco 96374

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**SUBJECT:** Mines and Booby Traps

The following report concerning mines and booby traps was prepared by a former rifle platoon leader who served with the Americal Division in late 1967 and early 1968. His observations and reproduced to assist all personnel in detecting and neutralizing enemy emplaced mines and booby traps.

**A.** In the five months that the Ready Rifles of the 1st Battalion, 52d Infantry have been in Vietnam, Viet Cong emplaced mines and booby traps have caused the greatest number of casualties. Of the 77 men wounded due to hostile action, 71 have been wounded, some minor, some seriously, by these weapons which the Viet Cong have mastered so well. In the same respect, 16 of our 23 men killed in hostile action have died because of mines and booby traps. Percentage wise, this is 92% of all wounded and 70% of all killed. To say the least, the percentages are rather high. The purpose of this report, therefore, will be to establish some means of avoiding, detecting, or applying immediate action should an element find itself in a mined or booby trapped area.

**B.** First, we must know what types of mines and booby traps we are encountering. These may be improvised or captured by the Viet Cong. Let's take a look at the improvised types first.

**(1)** The one which I most often encountered as a platoon leader consisted of an artillery round and a home-made pull type friction fuze with explosive. A hole, about 12" deep, 12" to 18" wide, and 12" to 18" long was dug. At one end of the hole, the explosive and round are buried. The explosive, usually packed in a C-ration can crimped at both ends, has a small, hollow center here the frictional type pull fuze is inserted. Candle wax is then used to seal all the openings. A piece of string or wire is tied to the fuze and secured at the other end of the hole on a small stake. Corn stalks, thin bamboo, or small twigs may be used in a criss-crossed fashion to form the false top to the hole. A piece of plastic material is then placed over the top and the remaining space is filled with soil and camouflaged. This particular booby trap was most often found near old positions or along routes frequently used by friendly troops. In several instances, we found the floor of an old foxhole to be the covering for the trap hole. Fortunately, we soon discovered a method for detecting this booby trap. After a small rain, the roof of the hole becomes too heavy and sinks slightly causing the soil to crack around the edges of the top to the trap hole, thus outlining the hole itself. In any cases of uncertainty, an easy probe with a bayonet will disclose if there is a booby trap.

**(2)** Another booby trap we have encountered is the M-26 hand grenade affixed with a trip wire. This is one everyone claims to be familiar with, yet it always gets somebody. It is most often emplaced on trails, footpaths, or at small openings in hedgerows. This booby trap is easily and quickly employed and therefore, can be placed in front of moving troops if a pattern is set by the moving elements. The grande is secured to a bush or stake by means of a wire or string. A trip wire is secured at one end across the route of travel and then tied to the grenade pin. This may be the organic pin, or a safety pin or some other device may be used. When the trip wire is pulled, the pin comes out and the striker flies forward

(Fig 2).

**(3)** The employment is the same with the Chicom grenade. However, the Chicom grenade has no pin to pull. Instead it has a cap, or cork-like device to which the friction type pull fuze is attached. Thus, when the trip wire is pulled the fuze is activated (Fig 3).

**(4)** Another type booby trap encountered in our area was made with the striker assembly from an expended smoke grenade (Fig 4). The delay fuze and igniter were expended leaving only the spring, striker, and safety pin in the fuze assembly of the grande. Along the top of the fuze assembly, one round of small arms ammunition is affixed in a stationary position, so that when the pin is removed, the striker goes forward, hits the primer of the round and the round is fired. This booby trap was found attached to the trap door of a spider hole, however, it can be effectively employed in tunnel entrances or house doors. On one occasion a "smoke" grenade was found in an ammunition bunker which had been left by another unit. From outward appearance this was a normal smoke grenade, however the safety lever appeared to be bent. Closer inspection revealed that a detonating type fragmentation hand grenade fuze had been placed in the smoke grenade and the grenade body was filled with explosive. Do not use abandoned ammunition? Turn it in to EOD for disposal.

**C.** These are by no means all of the booby traps employed by the VC. They are the ones we have most often encountered in our TAOR. As you have probably noticed they are all quite simple yet most effective. With a lot of caution and proper searching techniques, they can be found. Look for them and don't find them the hard way! The VC sometimes fabricate elaborate mine/booby trap complexes. Figure 5 is a schematic of one found by a platoon of this battalion. This complex was totally concealed. It was discovered only because an animal had dug up a small section of the wiring. Of interest is the fact that one of the Claymore mines used had been replaced with explosives. A GI had probably used the original explosive to heat his C-rations and had discarded the rest of the mine. The VC had picked up the discarded remains, replaced it with his own explosive, and made a mine just as effective as the original Claymore.

**D.** Next, we look into captured American mines used against us. Let me reemphasize that - captured American mines. We all know that mines are effective weapons, but after emplacement they must be watched or the Viet Cong will dig them up for use against our troops. The same goes for anything left on the battle field or lost in the AO. Our two most frequently encountered mines have been the M-14 and M-16 anti-personnel mines.

**(1)** The M-14 (Fig 6) is a small, plastic mine containing two ounces of plastic explosive. The mine is not designed to kill a person, but it is highly effective as a disabling and demoralizing weapon. Approximately two inches in diameter and two inches thick, it is easily placed in the ground and armed, therefore making it a good weapon to employ in front of moving troops. Detection of the mine often depends upon the terrain, however, if recently put in place, small patches of disrupted grass or mounds of dirt may be found where it is buried. This mine will not be detected by a metallic mine detector.

**(2)** The M-16 mine "Bouncing Betty" (Fig 7) is a large anti-personnel mine. It weighs eight pounds and looks like a tomato can. Armed with an M605 pressure pull fuze, it is a highly effective and deadly weapon. When the fuze is activated, the main part of the mine is thrown into the air approximately three feet where it explodes, covering the target area with fragmentation. The fuze usually protrudes just slightly above the top of the ground. The prongs and the soil used to cover the mine will probably be the only evidence found. Again, keeping alert and an eye on the ground may save someone's life - perhaps yours. The M16 is employed on trails or other likely routes of travel. It may also be used around Viet Cong villages as an early warning device and defensive weapon.

E. Now that we have discussed the various mines and booby traps which have been or can be expected to be found in the AO, let's discuss possible means of avoiding them.

**(1)** Stay off trails, footpaths, cart tracks, or other apparently often used routes as much as possible. If Vietnamese nationals are seen using trails, it is usually a good sign that the trail is not booby trapped or mined. However, just because it is not mined one day is no reason to believe it will not be mined the next day. Trails and likely routes of travel are prime locations for mines and booby traps. Having been a platoon leader in Vietnam, I know that if there is a trail, nine times out of ten the average GI will use it. Always vary routes to certain locations such as villages and key terrain features. True, there are only so many ways to get to an objective, but if the same one is used twice, you can almost bet that it will eventually be booby trapped. In other words, keep the VC guessing as to how you are going to the area.

**(2)** Constantly change the elements' direction of movement. When moving from one location to another, move first in one direction, then another, then another, etc. In other words, if you're going from a location, south, move first to the southeast, After a few hundred meters, move to the southwest. Do not set a pattern, or you will not accomplish anything. Remember, keep the VC guessing as to where you are going and how you plan to get there. Never think the VC do not know you are out there, they do, and when they learn how, when, and where you are going, they will most often have a reception of some sort planned for you.

**(3)** Move at night whenever possible. Movement at night is pretty difficult unless the moving element is well disciplined and well led. I have found that most elements of platoon size or smaller can successfully move at night. The VC do not expect you to move too much at night, and I have found that after 2300 hours most of them are in a village somewhere. So whenever the tactical situations allows, move under the cover of darkness. Keep in mind that the move ment will have to be slow and well controlled.

**(4)** Dispersion. At all times, keep the maximum possible amount of distance between men. This will not only disillusion the enemy as to the size of the unit, but it will also reduce the effectiveness of his mines and booby traps. Control of the element may seem a little harder, however, keep in mind that the bursting radius of most mines and booby traps is greater than the ten to fifteen meters we all consider necessary as dispersion. In my platoon, we often kept twenty to thirty meters between men, and I can recall on incident when even this was not enough. Dispersion is one thing which I feel cannot be over stressed.

**(5)** Utilize artillery, mortars, and direct fire H and I's along route. Not only with H and I's discourage or prematurely set off ambushes, they may also detonate booby traps or mines. They will discourage the VC from placing these obstacles in front of a moving element. However, caution must be stressed in the use of H and I fire. The personnel firing must know the location of all friendly personnel.

**(6)** Keep an accurate plot of all known minefields and avoid these areas except in emergencies. In our AO, after certain units had left, minefields which had been placed around base camps were not removed or destroyed when the elements left. No schematic was left informing us of the minefields, and not until one of our units had walked into it were we absolutely sure of where it mander for all units to stay at least five hundred meters from these locations. Each man in the unit must have these known minefield plotted on it, and all units OPCON to the main unit must be made aware of these locations.

**(7)** Utilize mine detectors to the maximum. At all times a unit is in the field. a mine detector should be kept on an LZ for immediate delivery should the unit walk into a minefield or booby trapped area. Any cases in which a unit may be moving into an area where mines or booby traps have previously been found, the mine detector should be carried by the unit. The weight of the detector is well worth carrying

should it have to be used and possibly save just one man a limb or his life. Every man in every unit should be instructed on how to operate and maintain the mine detector. Do not rely on one or two individuals to be with the unit at all times to operate any special equipment.

**(8)** Move slowly, remain alert, and keep a sharp lookout on the ground for possible indicators of mines and booby traps. When I first told my platoon that they would have to keep one eye on the watch for snipers, another looking for enemy ambushes, and the other looking for booby traps, they looked at me as if I were crazy. Indeed it may sound rather hard to do, but after our first encounter with a Viet Cong booby trap, they had no problem whatsoever. Once he is made aware of the damage that a booby trap or mine can do, the average soldier develops various means to keep a lookout for all dangers at all times. Again, there is no sense in having to learn the hard way, especially when this hard way may cost you or your buddy an arm, leg, or life. There is always time to accomplish the mission, but the men who becomes too hurried will more than likely become less alert to the situation and think only about a faster way to achieve his objective.

**(9)** Be aware of the "sucker tactics". The Viet Cong will only show themselves when they want to be seen. In many of our mines and booby trap incidents, an element having seen men with weapons at a distance of several hundred meters will begin to pursue them. In most cases, the element encountered mines or booby traps. If a situation such as this should arise, it is advisable to call for indirect fires or gunships. An artillery or mortar round and gunship can not be harmed by mines or booby traps. Keep this in mind when the enemy is spotted at long ranges. At any time when pursuing the enemy, be especially alert for the possibility of mines and booby traps as well as ambushes. Particularly in our area of operation these "sucker tactics" seem to be one of the Viet Cong's favorite weapons, and I am sure that elsewhere in Vietnam he has proven it to be just as successful.

**(10)** Move where local nationals move whenever possible. I discovered, after having worked in the AO for a while, that the nationals usually know if the Viet Cong are near of if an area is mined or booby trapped. Therefore, it can be said that most areas in which the Vietnamese move or gather may be considered relatively safe from mines and booby traps. Indeed, we have had reports that the Viet Cong warn the civilians as to the locations of mines and booby traps and tell them how long a certain area will not be usable. After watching an area for a while it can sometimes be determined if the area is mined or booby trapped.

**(11)** Question local nationals on mines and booby traps and use them as guides whenever possible. Local civilians will at times inform American soldiers as to the location and types of mines and booby traps emplaced by the Viet Cong. We must remember, though, that to be discovered of giving such information, the individual would suffer a terrible death at the hands of the Viet Cong. Take the individual to the side where he will not be noticed by anyone else, treat him with all respect and kindness, and he might possibly save you from stepping on one of the Viet Cong's obstacles. In all units there are incentive awards for this type of information, yet, very few people are aware of them. A couple of dollars mean a lot to the average Vietnamese farmer, and he will most often say anything to collect it. Have him take you to the mines, if possible, to make sure they are there. If they are not, naturally do not pay the individual, but in the same respect, you should not lose your temper and disgrace him or do him physical harm. The next time he just may tell you the truth. Contact your unit SCS to get more information as to just how much can be paid to a civilian for this type of information.

**F.** Next, I'd like to discuss action to take when mines or booby traps are encountered.

**(1)** Whenever a mine or booby trap is discovered, immediately alert the entire element and report the findings to higher headquarters. If there is any suspicion whatsoever that there may be a mine or booby trap, alert everyone and check it out. I recall one time when a man thought he saw something suspicious

and stepped over it. The next man, knowing nothing about it stepped on the suspected area and three men were wounded. When mines are discovered, do not move until the extent of the mining is determined. Do have everyone cautiously assume the prone position. Remember the mine detecting training everyone had in basic training and thought you would never have to use in Vietnam? This is where you must use it. Remember, probe with the bayonet at an angle, and do it gently.

**(2)** If an individual is wounded by a mine or booby trap, do not rush to his aid. I have found that mines and booby traps are like snakes©where there is one, there is usually another. Keep this in mind and have the man nearest the wounded clear his way to aid the individual. Do not worry about him being a medic; every soldier in the United States Army is trained first aid and I'm afraid that is all you can do for the wounded. By no means should any leader, Ie. squad leader, platoon sergeant, or platoon leader, gather around the casualty. They all have more than that one man to worry about. In the same respect, keep all means of communication such as AN/PRC25s and squad radios separated. Communication must be kept with higher headquarters in case "dustoff" or indirect fires are needed.

**(3)** Always conduct a careful search for more mins. If a medevac has to be called in for wounded personnel, clear a route to an LZ and then check the LZ. The cleared LZ should be a minimum of twelve meters by twelve meters. Alert the helicopter pilot to the situation and inform him that a certain area has been cleared. Then, by means of radio and ground guide, insure that he lands in the proper place. We have established a policy in our battalion that if an element finds itself in a heavily mined or booby trapped area, it will be extracted by helicopter. A rope ladder was constructed which can be hung from a helicopter. The pilot hovers his craft over the individual who grasps the rope and climbs up into the aircraft. One by one the whole unit is extracted from the minefield. This method has proven to be highly effective in the reduction of casualties when a unit needs to get out of a mined area.

**G.** In any encounter with mines and booby traps, each individual should remain calm and alert for the unexpected. Learn to respect this weapon of the Viet Cong's and it, too, can be overcome. A lot of caution and alertness and a little common sense may keep you and your unit free of booby trap casualties while in Vietnam. Take these hints and pay attention to what is happening and hopefully you will leave Vietnam just as you arrived - in one, good, healthy, complete piece.

FOR THE COMMANDER

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