

Hunting the Vietcong

Winning Vietnam Tactics

By Tony Curtis

Whenever you play a single *Vietnam* scenario or campaign game, the U.S. player always has a nagging problem: the VC. Those inverted VC units are really slippery and elusive. They alert out of dangerous situations. They react out of areas where they could be trapped. They use strategic movement to escape from provinces swarming with U.S. units, or cross the border to shelters in Cambodia or Laos.

In order to catch the VC, you will have to rely on your workhorse tactic: the search and destroy (S&D). It comes in an infinite variety of shapes and sizes. There are no pre-set numbers of ground units or support levels required. The trick is to use enough force to do the job without overkilling. Not using enough force is false economy at its worst because the allocated units cannot be reused even though the VC get away. You have to throw out all of your pre-conceived ideas about how to engage in combat. Simply moving one or two units next to a VC unit in a target hex is a waste of your time and units. Occupying the target hex alone is no guarantee of success either.

The U.S. player has to develop a methodical approach to his S&D operations. You have to remember that, unlike standard combat units, the VC can react out of harm's way *before* combat. VC units are not powerful. They will lose the fight when cornered by a U.S. player utilizing sufficient force. The real trick for the U.S. player is to ensure that the VC cannot run far enough during any round of combat.

Against single VC units, I prefer to use a surround and interdict system which practically nullifies all chance of VC escape. There is a trade-off to this type of operation. It requires high numbers of ground units and support levels. The high chance of success makes it worth it. There are additional benefits to using higher force levels: higher odds produce higher VC casualties. When amassing combat strength for the higher odds attacks, make sure that the majority of the points are air or artillery points. Large numbers of ground units with little or no firepower are inherently inefficient and tend to receive more casualties than they inflict. Check out the combat results table. Eight strength points supported by 24 air/artillery points is far more effective than 24 strength points supported by 8 air/artillery points.

A second advantage is the increased pursuit bonuses generated by the higher odds. VC units surviving the first round of combat have a far less chance to escape when U.S. units are able to come storming after them with high pursuit bonuses. These higher pursuit bonuses help fuel subsequent rounds of combat. All unused pursuit translates into higher positive die roll modifiers for the combat. Finally, after the VC units are destroyed or chased across the border, the higher pursuit bonuses generated aid in repositioning the operational units for future operations or to block the retreat of VC units not yet targeted.

Part One: Search & Destroy

The first example shows how to catch a single VC unit even when terrain most heavily favors VC chances for escape. Seven maneuver units are required. Most S&D operations require fewer, usually three to five. In extreme cases where a VC unit occupies a cultivated or grassland hex, a single U.S. battalion using +2 interdiction will still remain on or adjacent to the VC unit on any reaction die roll except a six.

We are going to run a S&D operation against a VC target unit in 1775, a marsh on the Chuong Thien/Ba Xuyen provincial border. We will

assume that the VC is a 2-1-7 battalion. The six hexes around 1775 are clear terrain, and even though a minor river hexside has to be crossed to enter 1776 and 1876, the overall movement advantage for a VC unit using alert movement is more favorable here than almost anywhere else on the map. In other words, if you can catch the VC here, you can catch them anywhere.

For this example, both Chuong Thien and Ba Xuyen provinces are not firmly enough under government control to withstand free-fire and not enough under VC control where free-fire wouldn't matter. So free-fire will not be used. All province capitals and towns are garrisoned by miscellaneous ARVN battalions, not shown in the illustrations.

The U.S. player is the phasing player and he declares a S&D mission against 1775 using these previously uninvolved units:

Headquarters, 9th U.S. Infantry Division

Headquarters, 2nd Brigade, 9th Division, plus the three organic battalions, in second deployment

Illustration 1-1

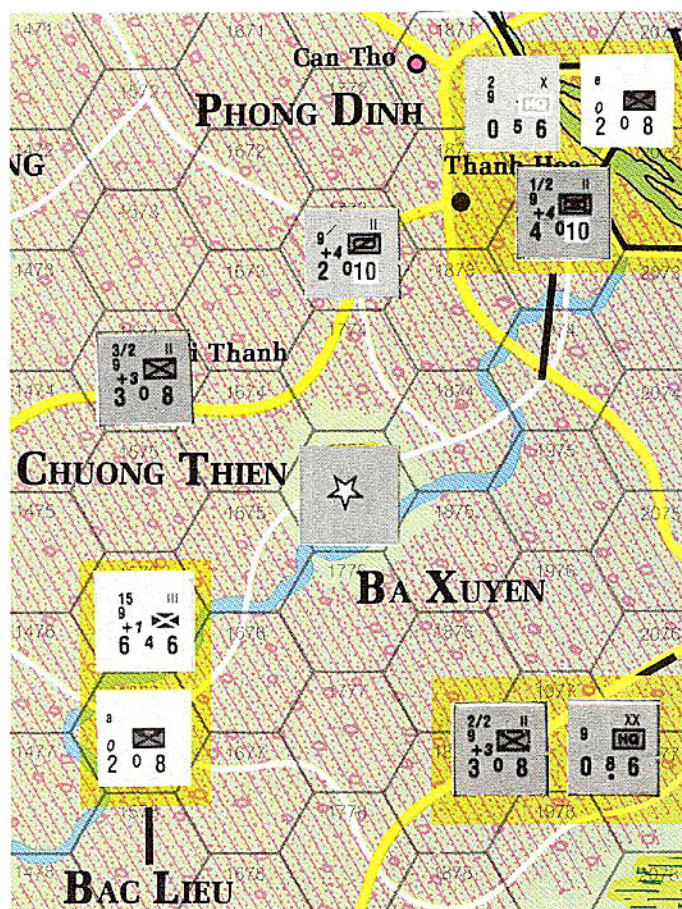
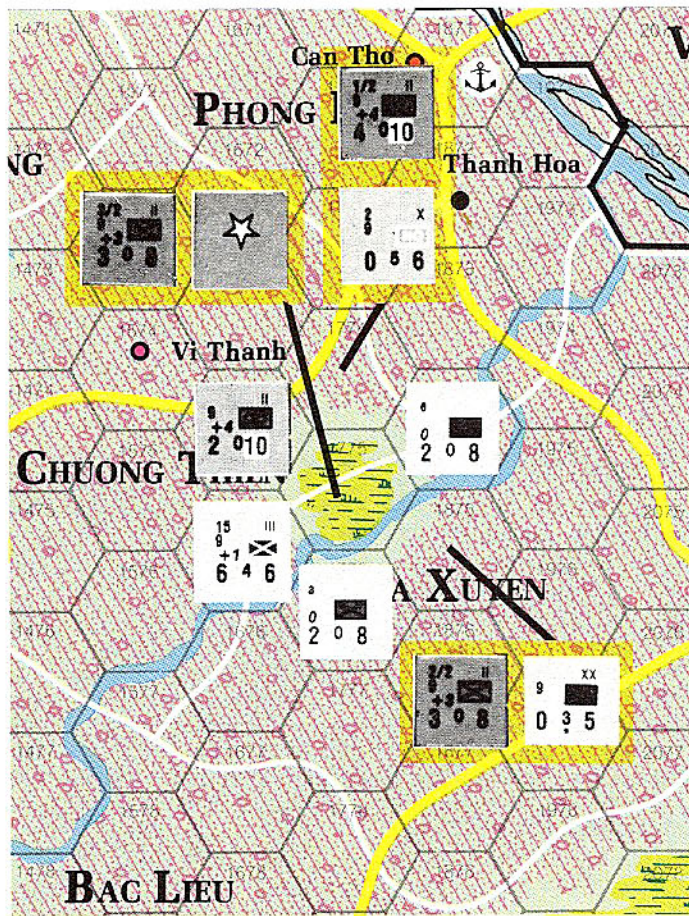


Illustration 1-2



Air Cavalry Brigade, 9th Division
 16th Regiment, 9th ARVN Division (augmented side showing)
 8 Air Points
 Plus, a roll of 2 on the die means that 2 ranger units out of the 5 in the pool are available.

The U.S. player airmobilizes the brigade and division HQs. These units are moved to the following hexes:

- 16th ARVN Regiment: 1675
- Ranger battalion and 16th ARVN Regiment: 1776
- 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 9th Division: 1775
- AR CAV Battalion, 9th Division: 1674//
- 1st Battalion (Mech), 2nd Brigade, 9th Division: 1774
- Ranger Battalion with 1st Battalion Mechanized: 1874
- HQ, 2nd Brigade, 9th Division: 1774
- 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 9th Division: 1875
- HQ, 9th Division: 1875

Fourteen points are allocated to interdiction to provide a two-point movement penalty on the VC unit. The points are all artillery, and provided as follows: 16th ARVN Regiment: 4 points; 2nd Brigade, 9th Division: 5 points; HQ, 9th Division: 5 points (leaving 3 for combat).

The VC unit in the target hex is now in a tight position. (See Illustration 1-2). If it takes alert movement, it will suffer a four-point movement penalty due to interdiction (two points) and exiting a hex with an enemy unit (also two points). At least three more movement points are needed to pass through any hex surrounding target hex 1775 (one point for the terrain and two points for exiting a hex with an enemy units). With the three-point bonus for exiting a swamp hex plus one point for being in an operation containing ARVN units, our VC unit must roll at least a four to move out of the target hex and some of the surrounding hexes. To get away entirely, a six must be rolled. Even entirely surrounded, a VC unit can still get away, but the chance is only one in six, and the unit will probably be forced into an unfavorable incidental attack in the process.

Illustration 1-3: The Incidental Attack. The VC unit rolls an alert roll of 5. Added to the four-point movement bonus (three for marsh terrain and one for ARVN units), the unit moves along a path which ends in 1777. While crossing 1776, however, the U.S. player declares that an incidental attack must be performed against the ARVN ranger battalion in that hex. The initial odds are 3-to-2 in favor of the VC, with no terrain modifiers for cultivated terrain. The U.S. allocates four of the eight air points to assist the rangers, making final odds three to four for a -1 die roll modifier when the VC attacks. The VC player rolls the die and gets a three, modified by the -1 to a final result of two. The VC unit loses one strength point (for casualty computations, the VC strength is four: two group strength plus four U.S. air points, reduced to two for no free-fire. Casualties are found on the 4-to-7.5 column on the attacker side). The ARVN loss is zero (ground strength two plus one VC Artillery point equals three. Use the 1-to-3.5 column, defender's side.) Helicopter loss is ignored because no combat took place in the target hex and the U.S. unit in the target hex went in on foot instead of airmobile. The VC absorbs one replacement point and completes its movement to 1777.

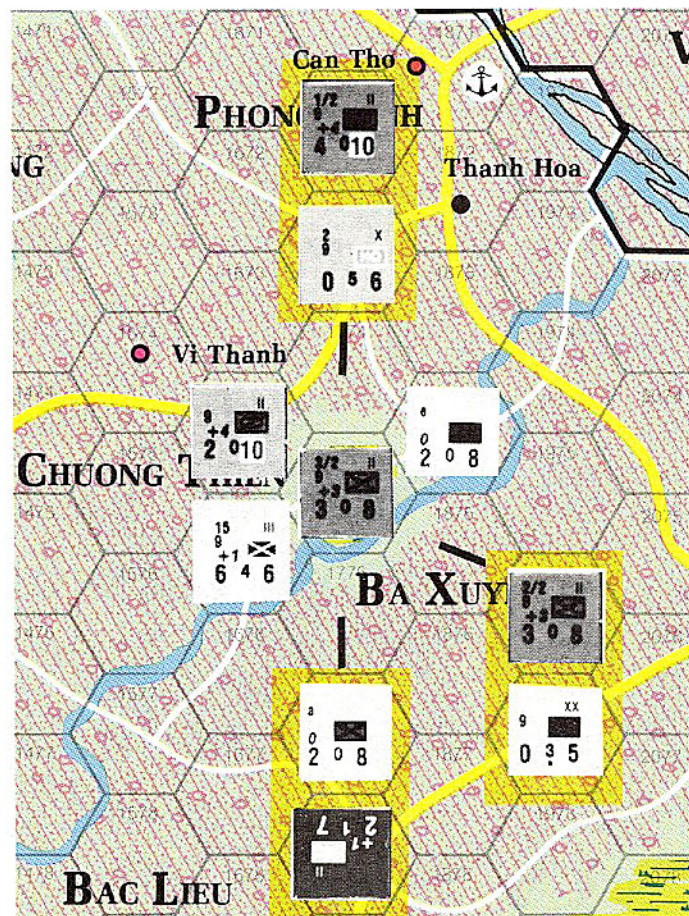
Illustration 1-4: The VC unit is attacked. The VC unit used all nine movement points to reach 1777: full interdiction (2), exiting with enemy unit in 1775 (2), crossing a minor river into 1776 (1), terrain cost in 1776 (1), exiting with enemy unit in 1776 (2), terrain cost in 1777 (1). To have gotten away completely, the VC unit would have needed two more movement points: leave zone of control of ARVN rangers in 1776 (1), terrain cost of 1677, 1778 or 1877 (1).

The ARVN unit, augmented by four air points, attacks with a strength of four (two for basic strength plus two points for air support: the four air points divided by two for no free-fire). The VC unit defends with three points: two for basic strength plus one for the VC artillery factor).

Note: there are three artillery points unused in HQ, 9th Division, but they cannot be used because the ARVN rangers are not a 9th Division unit. There are no modifiers to the die roll because 4-to-3 does not meet or exceed 3-to-2 odds. The U.S. player rolls and receives a five. The VC unit takes one strength point loss and absorbs one replacement point. There is no loss to the ARVN rangers. Pursuit: +2. The VC unit retreats to 2078. The U.S. player pursues.

Illustration 1-5: The pursuit and second combat round. The U.S. player declares the following units to be uninvolved in future rounds: both ranger units are removed from the map; the 16th ARVN Regiment are air-

Illustration 1-3



mobilized to 2076; the 9th Air Cavalry Squadron is not moved; the 1st Battalion Mechanized, 2nd Brigade, 9th Division is moved by road to 2075; and the HQ, 2nd Brigade, 9th Division is moved by airmobile to 2075.

The U.S. player pursues with eight air points and the following units: the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 9th Division is airmobilized to 2178; the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 9th Division is airmobilized to 1978; the HQ, 9th Division is moved by airmobile to 2076.

Note that pursuit movement for ground units is the printed pursuit modifiers plus the +2 pursuit bonus gained in round one of combat. Both the 2nd and 3rd Battalion use 3½ movement points, rounded up to four. Both have a pursuit allowance of five (+3 printed on the counter and +2 from combat). This leaves them with a +1 modifier for second round combat. U.S. attack strength is 14 (six ground strength plus eight air points, divided by two, added to the eight artillery points that is also halved). VC defense strength is three. Basic odds is 4-to-1 which yields a +4 modifier to the die roll. The VC unit defends in marsh and receives a -1 benefit. Net die roll modifier is +4.

The U.S. player rolls a four, modified to eight. The U.S. player suffers an airmobile loss. The VC player, seeing the +4 pursuit modifier from combat, knows he cannot possibly outrun the pursuing U.S. units. He takes some comfort from inflicting an airmobile loss, and removes the VC unit from play to satisfy the two strength point loss. End of operation.

To summarize the preceding example, the most potent VC weapon — the ability to escape — is neutralized. This allows the U.S. player to effectively utilize his two premier weapons: firepower and mobility. Most of the time, the VC units won't be able to escape. In this, the most favorable of situations for the VC, there was only one chance in six that the VC unit could break contact with all of the surrounding U.S./ARVN units and force termination of the operation without first round combat. Even then, the VC unit would be forced into an incidental attack, and all available air and artillery points would be applied, since none would be needed for a first round combat which could not occur.

Other setbacks can spoil an operation. The die roll for rangers can exceed the number in the holding box, forcing the U.S. player either to scramble for more units to plug escape routes or launch the operation on a shoestring and hope the VC bombs on the alert die roll. Poor first round combat results can limit for pursuit, especially for artillery, and can cancel future combat rounds due to poor odds and the risk of high casualties.

Still, most terrain the VC hides in is less favorable (sometimes much less so) than what was presented here. Allowing for all the possible setbacks, the kill ratio should run close to five out of every six operations undertaken. Using a good U.S./FWA/ARVN force level (described elsewhere), 15 to 20 operations per turn can be conducted easily. Multiplied by two, we have 30 to 40 operations per season. If the VC player is willing to field 30 to 40 VC units, or more, per season, the U.S. player will easily destroy or force dispersal of 25 to 30 units per season.

The Proper Way To Search & Destroy

Whenever possible, use ARVN units to surround VC units and fight the first round of combat. The firepower, surrounding and loss-taking benefits outweigh the +1 to the reaction die roll. ARVN regiments are powerful, ARVN artillery is almost as good as U.S. artillery, and the rangers are lifesavers when it comes to preventing VC escape.

In most search and destroy operations, first round combat results will be most severe for the U.S./ARVN player because the pursuit modifiers, both printed and earned in combat, are not available to offset defensive terrain advantages. Whenever strength point losses occur, assign them to the ARVN; losses in subsequent rounds may have to be borne by U.S. units alone.

Because of their low pursuit modifiers, ARVN units eat up most or all of any pursuit bonus gained through combat, thereby reducing the effectiveness of second or subsequent round attacks. Only if the ARVN units can attack in subsequent rounds without moving should they be used, and then only on a case-by-case basis. It is also wise not to put an ARVN unit in the target hex. If the VC unit stays in the target hex for a second round of combat, an ARVN unit in the target hex, probably with a pursuit value of zero or one, would be obligated to attack in the second round, rendering the printed +3 or +4 U.S. pursuit bonuses useless since the lowest printed bonus of the attacker is the one used. Notice that in the example given, that the U.S./ARVN units converged

Illustration 1-4

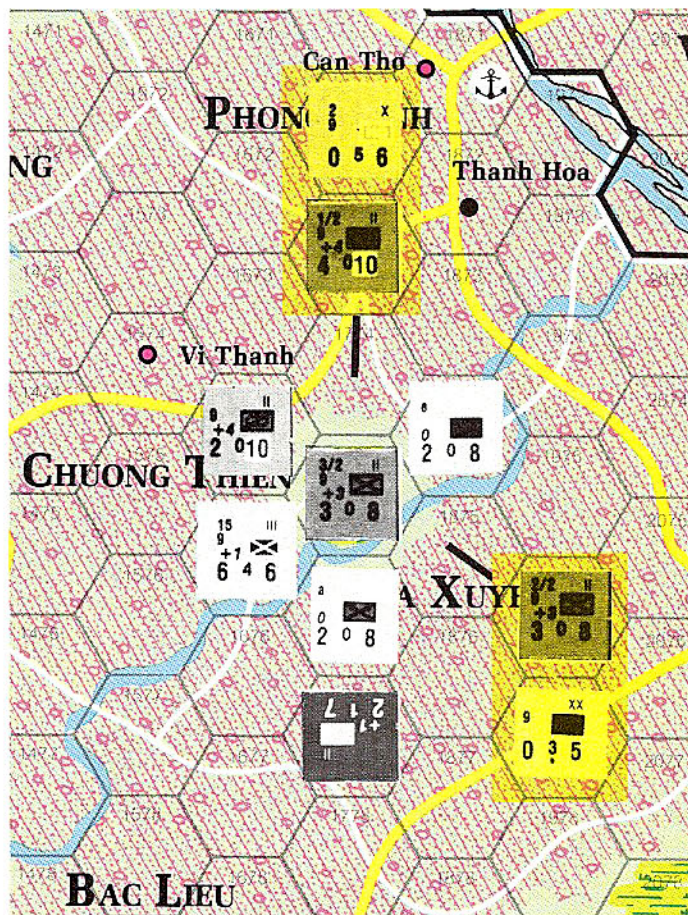
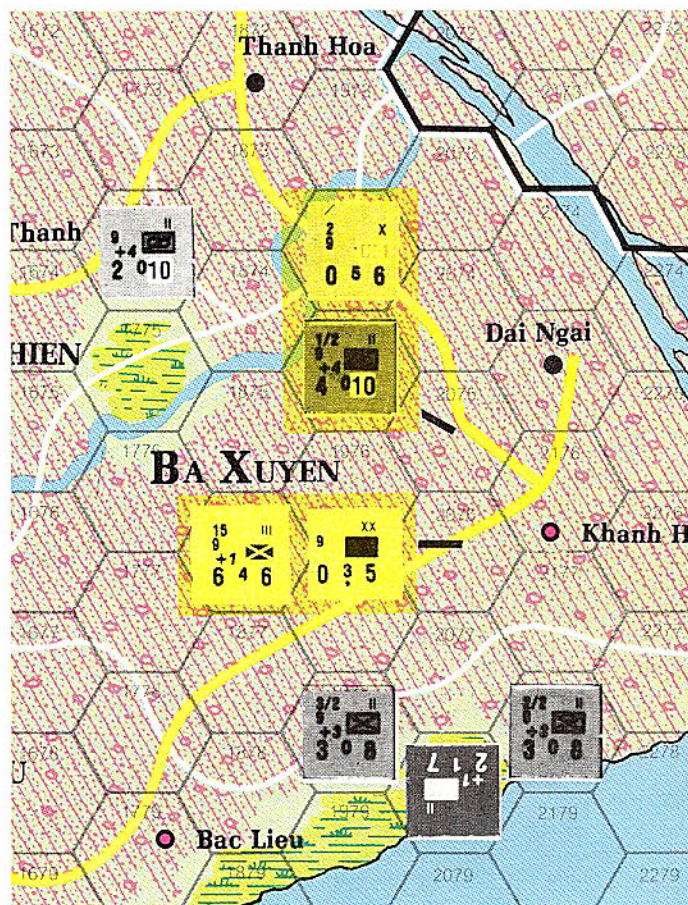


Illustration 1-5



on the VC unit from all directions. Dispersing U.S./ARVN units throughout the map increases the U.S. player's ability to surround any given VC unit. Since only one ARVN ranger unit can be placed in a hex with units designated for a search and destroy operation, having all the designated units in only one or two hexes limits the number of ranger units you can put into play.

If the VC player wishes to launch VC attacks against lone battalions in the countryside, so much the better. The U.S. player usually has artillery, naval gunfire or air points on call. Let the VC player attack and take the losses, leaving you several units free to go after the attacker or other VC units later to inflict additional loss. If the VC player wants to work for you, so much the better.

The VC units which are easiest to catch, but cost the most to do, are VC units on holding missions in the mountains. The VC cannot escape easily because they usually have to move into adjacent mountain or forested hill hexes. In many instances, when a U.S./ARVN unit occupies the target hex and interdiction is applied, the VC unit cannot even exit the target hex. That often makes dispersal or combat the only two options. If it comes to a fight, a doubled VC unit on a defensive mission in the mountains is a formidable force to tackle. First round losses will be heavy (remember to bring the ARVN to the party!). There will be numerous air and airmobile losses, too.

The offsetting advantage to the U.S. player is that isolated VC units in mountain or forested hill hexes are almost always destroyed or dispersed since they cannot escape. Even when going after isolated VC units, keep some ground units and artillery around to use as offensive reserves.

A warning about keeping an offensive reserve: as the U.S. player, you can get lulled into a false sense of security as you bash an unending stream of VC battalions. Never forget that there are VC regiments too. You may send a few battalions to hunt down a VC battalion, but you'll need much more when you run into a VC regiment. Odds for your first attack will be poor. Pursuit bonuses will not be high. In order to raise the odds and maintain contact, new ground units and artillery will have to enter on the second round. Without offensive reserves, the U.S. player either has to call off the operation and let the regiment get away, or risk taking unacceptable losses in exchange for destroying the regiment.

At this point, don't start to feel overconfident about walking over the VC. The truly competent NLF player won't give anything away. He won't go out of his way to leave isolated VC units. You will have to isolate the VC units because in most cases they will be grouped together in clumps or clusters of four to six VC units. It's a tactic akin to forming a square against cavalry, and it is very effective. VC units in a cluster keep the U.S. player from surrounding any single VC unit. Reaction movement allows the VC to shift units if necessary to block routes of U.S./ARVN pursuit, allowing VC target units to break contact. Another VC tactic with reaction movement is to react one or two VC units into the target hex. This has the unfortunate effect of turning decent first round attacks for the U.S. player into low odds/low pursuit attacks. It is entirely possible to expend several U.S./ARVN units to do nothing more than move one of these VC clusters a few hexes in one direction or another as VC units break contact and react.

You can't ignore VC clusters, but you have to have some certainty of destroying several VC battalions because of the high level of units and support points which have to be committed. A complete encirclement is not only too expensive in terms of units committed, but also futile. The NLF player isn't blind. It becomes obvious to even the casual observer that a ring is being constructed. After several U.S./ARVN units have been committed to operations where they have no chance of catching VC units, the NLF player will run the next few operations and use strategic movement to get far away from the trap. The U.S. player is left with several wasted operations and a very real sense of frustration. There are two basic U.S. tactics and several variants which serve to break up these VC clusters. They are the use of clear and secure operations and employment of offensive reserves.

Part Two: Clear & Secure

First, some discussion about clear and secure operations. You don't use it to destroy VC units, but to set them up for future S&D operations. One or two units are moved adjacent to a target hex containing a VC unit which is part of a cluster. The VC target unit should be able to alert out with no difficulty. The payoff of the operation for the U.S.

player comes when he puts the units in the clear and secure operation into a patrol operation since they didn't end the clear and secure in the target hex. Every hex around each unit on patrol will now cost +2 over and above the terrain cost for a VC unit to leave. One or two units out on patrol will make it very difficult for VC units to retreat in at least one or two directions later.

The next step is to run a search and destroy mission against the cluster on the side opposite the patrol units. The VC player either moves the cluster out of the area before you conduct the S&D, or stands to take the S&D operation with one or two avenues of retreat cut off. On a related note, if the VC player starts a turn with several VC units adjacent to an eligible U.S./ARVN unit, it may pay to put that unit onto a patrol operation during the special operations designation phase. You get the benefit of running a clear and secure operation against several VC units, and they don't get to alert.

If you don't use clear and secure operations to block off some of the retreat routes, you will have to surround a VC cluster with operational units on the first round. This means placing a couple of operational units on the side of the VC cluster opposite from the target hex so that no matter which way a VC target unit alerts, an operational unit will be adjacent to it for first round combat.

The second major U.S. tactic is offensive reserve activation. VC target units often alert into adjacent hexes with VC units, lowering first round odds and lessening attainable pursuit modifiers. Other VC units in the cluster either through reaction movement or initial placement will be in a position to slow or halt U.S./ARVN pursuit. The only hope for continuing the operation is to bring in the offensive reserves to maintain contact and/or restore subsequent combat odds to higher levels. Here again, if the NLF player chooses to put more than one VC unit at risk as a target unit, the U.S. player should not hesitate to add enough resources to conduct the equivalent of two C&S operations, because that is really what you have. Support points for first rounds of operations should come as much as possible from air or naval points. Save the artillery to use as offensive reserves since air and naval points cannot be added on second or subsequent rounds.

Use your dedicated artillery to the maximum extent around VC clusters. So long as a subordinate unit is a part of the operation, the artillery can add its support, even though it is not tasked as part of the operation. This multiplies the value of a brigade or division headquarters many times over if it is placed on or adjacent to a VC cluster. This is one instance where the VC player helps you maximize your strength by placing units in clusters.

Three examples follow to show some of the do's and don'ts of operations against a VC cluster. The first example shows a clear and secure operation followed by a search and destroy. The second depicts an S&D operation conducted against a VC cluster by surrounding it on round one. The third example shows an S&D operation utilizing offensive reserves.

Example One: Quang Nam Province

Illustration 2-1 shows the initial positions plus the clear and secure operation. Quang Nam province is the area of operations. Free-fire is not declared initially. It is presumed to be early in the campaign game, and U.S. airpower is not abundant. No air points are available, but four airmobile are available. For the clear and secure operation, HQ, 3rd Marine Division and 2/4, 3rd Marine Division move from 3814 to 3716. HQ, 3rd Marine Division is airmobilized to do so. The infantry battalion moves on foot. None of the artillery points are used for interdiction. The VC unit could escape on any alert roll, but elects to defend against an all-U.S. operation in hopes of inflicting U.S. casualties. Total U.S. attack strength is 7-to-2 VC for a +3 modifier. But the VC defends a mountain hex for a -3 modifier, cancelling out both. The die roll is one. Both sides suffer one strength point loss and consume one replacement point. The VC unit stays for one more round. The U.S. player attacks again and rolls a five. There is no pursuit modifier (+3 printed on 2/4 battalion; -2 for a clear and secure operation; -1 for combat result). The VC unit suffers one SP loss, absorbs one replacement point, and retreats. The 2/4 unit does not pursue, and is converted over to a patrol operation.

Illustration 2-2: the VC player attempts to "strat move" the units out of the area. The U.S. player is given the next operation. The U.S. player declares an S&D operation against 3917. Ranger support is rolled for, and the U.S. receives two units. The ARVN rangers are placed in 4117

Illustration 2-1

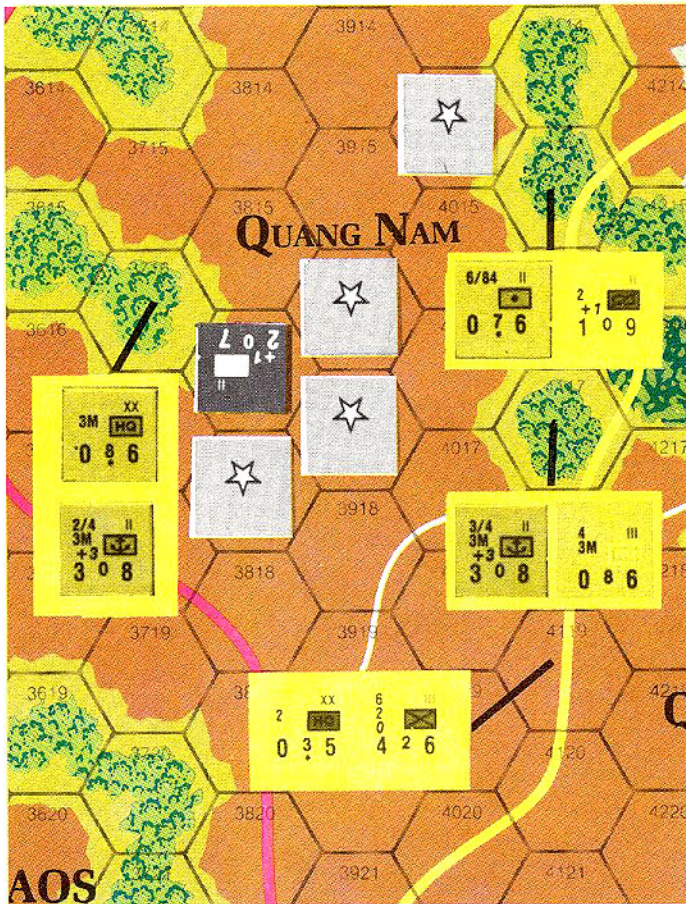


Illustration 2-2

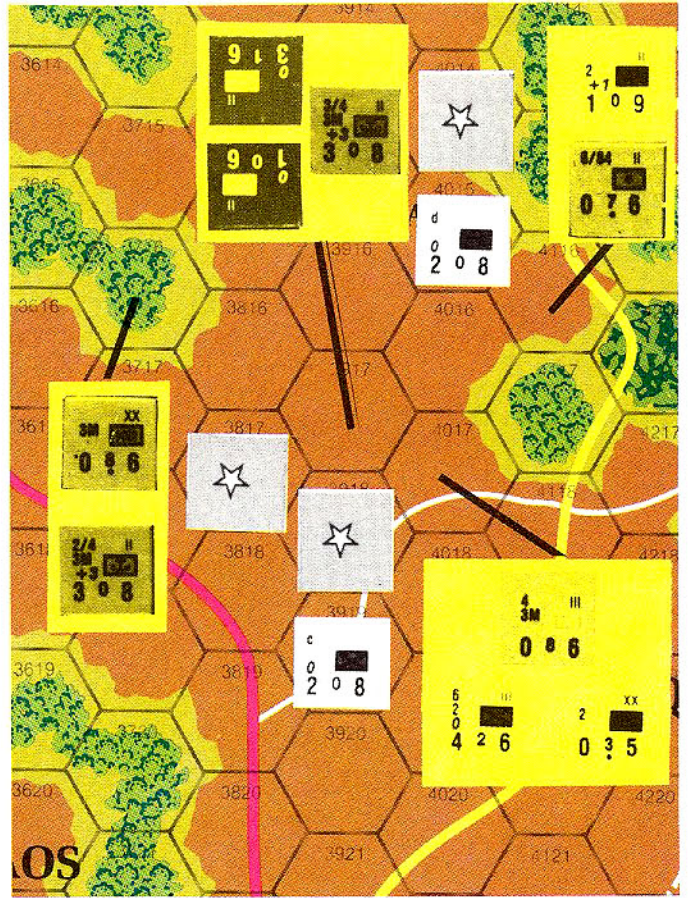
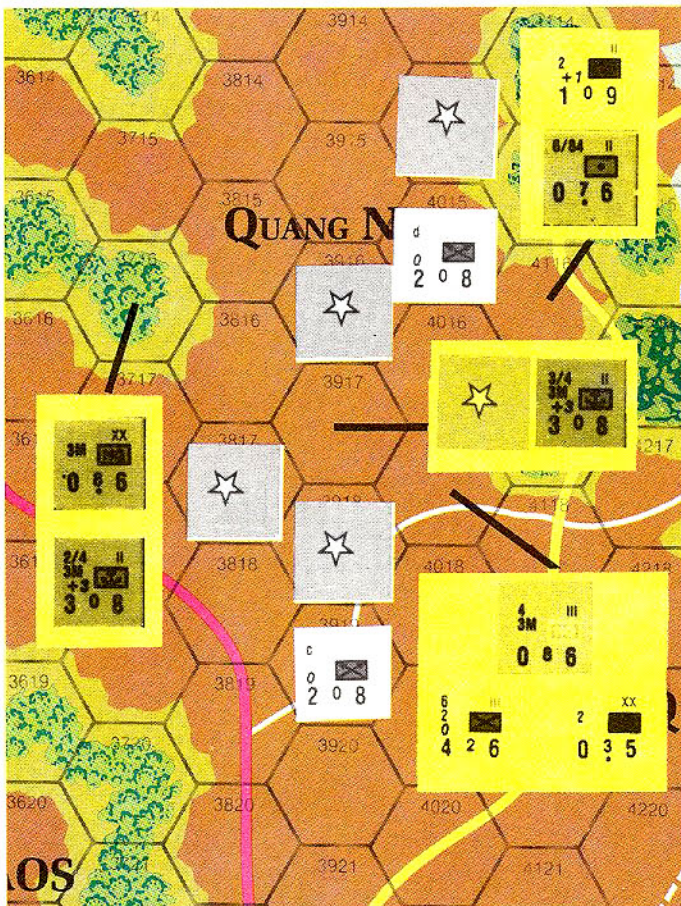


Illustration 2-3

and 4119.

Note that the VC unit which was the target of the clear and secure operation has retreated to 3918. The cluster is still unbroken. It has simply shifted and taken on a different shape. Placing that VC unit in 3918 will hinder the operation against target hex 3917. Note, however, that the clear and secure operation did yield two benefits to the U.S. player. Hexes 3815, 3816, and 3717 are almost impossible to retreat through due to the patrol status of the 2/4 Marine battalion (note the VC unit also on patrol). The VC can effectively utilize patrol to inhibit access to VC clusters or to curtail road movement). Since another 3rd Marine Division unit is part of the S&D operation, the HQ, 3rd Marine Division artillery may add its eight artillery points since it is within range.

HQ, 2nd ARVN Division and HQ, 4th Marine Regiment are air-mobilized. Fourteen artillery points are used to provide +2 interdiction (eight from HQ, 3rd Marine Division; 3 from HQ, 2nd ARVN Division; 2 from the 6th ARVN Regiment; and 1 from the HQ, 4th Marine Regiment). The remaining artillery points are held on-call for combat. As U.S./ARVN units move into or adjacent to the target hex, the three VC units not in the target hex can all react. The sequence of U.S./ARVN movement will determine when the VC units will react. All three VC units could react away from the target hex, but that would isolate the target unit and fragment the cluster. All three VC units could react into the target hex, but that would put all four into jeopardy on the second round when interdicting artillery is switched to support. The first round combat odds for the U.S./ARVN would indeed be low. Quite possibly the VC would react one or two units. For purposes of this example, the VC unit in 3916 will react into the target hex. If it does not, and the target VC unit retreats, the VC unit would have been isolated if it had remained in 3916. The VC unit in 3817 will stay in place to provide a secure path of retreat. The VC unit in 3918 will remain in place to make it more difficult for the ARVN 6th Regiment to pursue on round two.

Illustration 2-3: a die roll of three or greater on the alert roll will allow the two VC units to alert out of the target hex. The odds say that they will get a three or better, so in this example the two VC units alert to 3817 where they join a third VC unit. The U.S. player now has a problem of insufficient force. He has adjacent to 3817 only one U.S. battalion fire plus fourteen artillery points which would be reduced to seven if free-fire was not used. A first round combat without free-fire would go in with a -2 or -3 modifier due to basic odds plus defensive terrain modi-

8 VICTORY INSIDER

fiers. The U.S. player can either attack at bad odds or declare free-fire. A low odds attack results in high U.S./ARVN casualties with no offsetting gain because there are no offensive reserves available. The only real choice is to declare free-fire, inflict as many casualties on the VC units as possible, and hope that the pacification die roll is not hurt by the minus two for free-fire.

The concept of this operation was good. The clear and secure worked well. The shortcomings for the U.S. player were twofold. First, it takes more units and support points to go after VC clusters in mountains or forested hills than anywhere else on the map. Since no additional support was available, the U.S. player should have declared free-fire at the start of the S&D operation. Without free-fire, the odds were good that the four VC units would survive to lower the pacification roll by -2 anyway. Declaring free-fire would have put more firepower into the first

round attack since only seven points are needed for +2 interdiction with free-fire. The second shortcoming was not having any ground units or artillery available to use as offensive reserves to increase second round odds and make it possible to run the three VC units into the ground.

Example Two: Quang Tri Province

This situation portrays the effects of "surrounding" a VC cluster with U.S./ARVN units on the first round. The area of operations is Quang Tri province. Free-fire has not been declared. The following forces are available to the U.S. player: 1/4, 3rd Marine Division; an armored battalion from the 3rd Marine; the 5th ARVN regiment; two ARVN ranger units; one cruiser; four air points and two airmobile points. Firepower and maneuver units are both in short supply. The target hex is 4717. The U.S. cruiser provides +1 interdiction on the target hex. This is offset by +1 addition to VC alert movement from ARVN participation. There is enough power to eliminate the target VC unit if it remains in the target hex. There are not enough maneuver battalions to spare for a preliminary clear and secure. The VC cluster has to be surrounded to the extent that the VC unit reacting out of the target hex would remain in contact with at least one U.S./ARVN unit so that combat could be forced on the VC. Illustration 3/1 shows the initial positions.

Illustration 3-2: One ARVN ranger unit is placed in 4716 and remains there. The second ranger unit is placed in 4918 and moves on foot to 4719. Neither VC unit in the adjacent hexes take reaction movement. The 5th ARVN regiment moves on foot to 4517. The adjacent VC unit does not react. The 1/4 Marine battalion moves on foot to 4717, the target hex. The Marine armored battalion moves into 4817. The VC unit in 4617 reacts into 4518 when the 1/4 Marines move into the target hex. The cruiser provides +1 interdiction. The air points are reserved for combat.

An alert roll of three through six would allow the VC target unit to move into adjacent hex 4718. Although there is a VC unit in the hex and the terrain is rough, there are 11 U.S./ARVN ground strength points adjacent. That is not a really desirable option. On an alert roll of five or six, however, the VC target unit can move into 4518 or 4618. Both hexes are also rough terrain and contain one VC unit each. The big advantage to these hexes is the relative weakness of the adjacent ARVN units. The optimal hex is 4618 where only the ARVN ranger unit is adjacent.

Illustration 3-3: we assume that the VC target unit gets reaction roll of five and reacts into 4618. The U.S. player has only the single ARVN ranger unit adjacent to the hex. Since free-fire is not being used, total attack strength for the U.S. is four (two for the ranger and two for half

Illustration 3-1

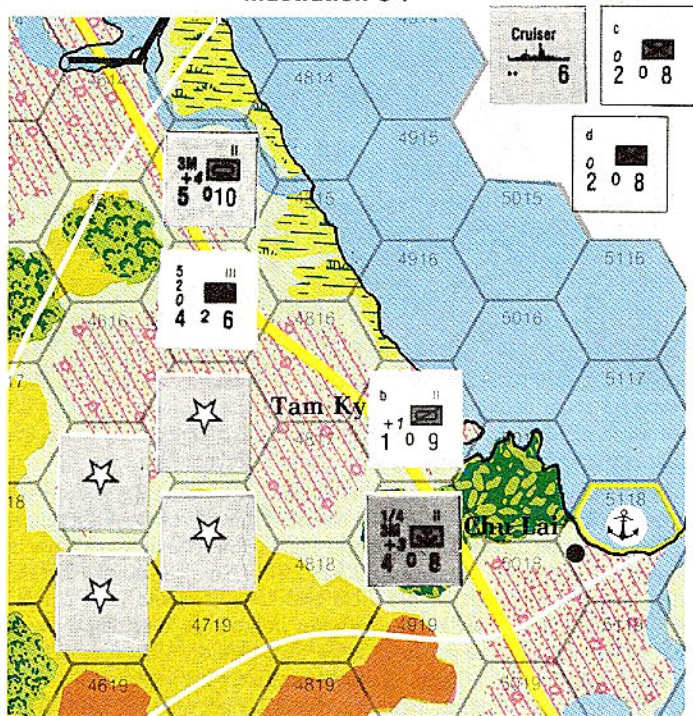
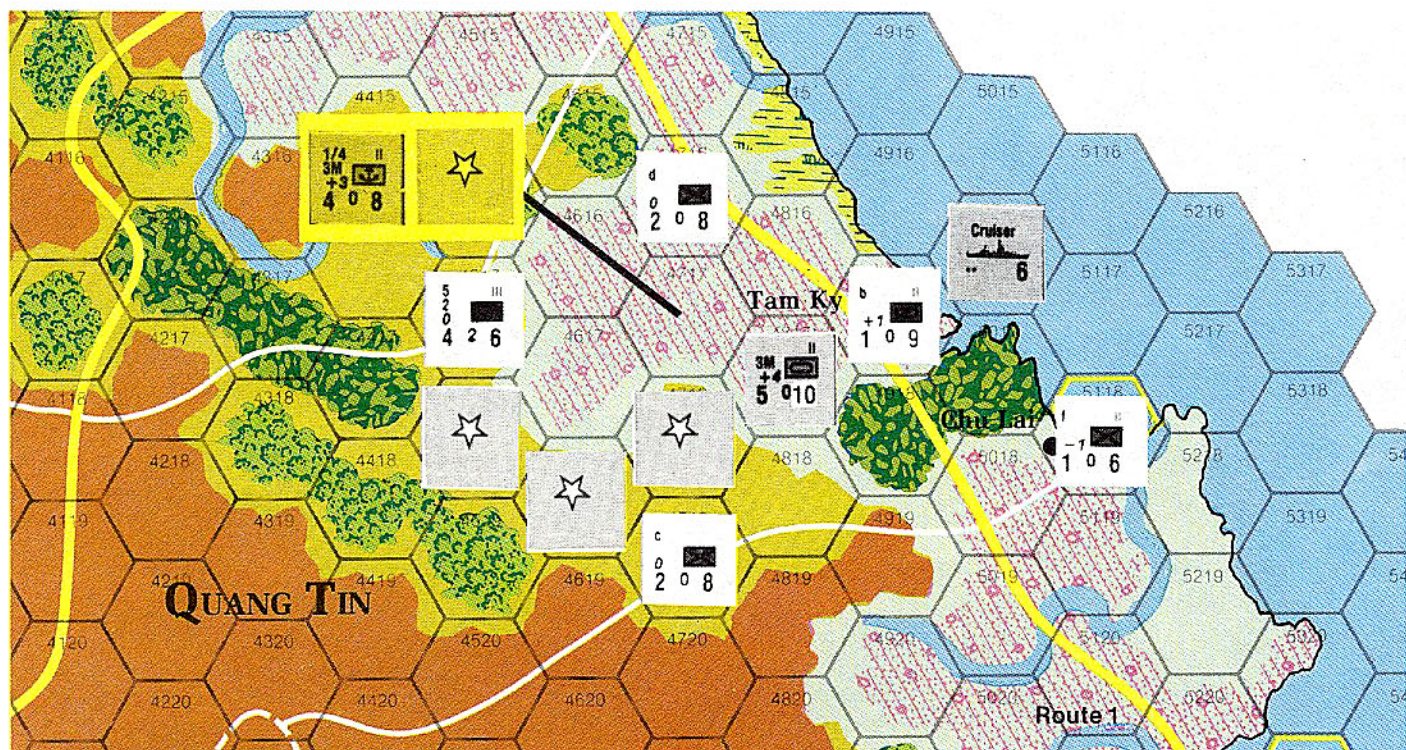


Illustration 3-2



of the available air points). Chances for a favorable combat result do not look favorable before the VC units are revealed. The U.S. player decides to attack anyway, which is probably a mistake. The VC units are revealed, totalling five strength points. Basic odds of four U.S. factors to five VC factors yields a -1 modifier to the die roll. The VC defend in rough terrain, so another -1 modifier is added. A quick scan of the combat results table is not encouraging. Out of the six results, the ARVN will lose one strength point on four of them. The VC will lose a strength point on only one out of the six. Pursuit bonuses range from +1 to -2. Should the VC stand after round one combat, the 1/4 Marines could pursue into 4617. That addition would cancel out part or all of the -2 die roll modifier, but the U.S. player still would not have a favorable attack. The VC player would probably retreat the target units out of contact after round one combat, and "strat move" the other two VC units adjacent to the retreating VC units so that a cluster would be rebuilt in a new location. The sole U.S. gain from this operation is that, temporarily at least, the cultivated hexes in Quang Tri province have been cleared.

The concept of surrounding a cluster is viable. The VC target unit was not able to break contact in round one. The problem again is lack of ground units and firepower. There were weak links in the chain of units surrounding the cluster, and there was a significant chance that the VC would alert into positions adjacent to them. Given the limitations on forces, the operation was conducted as well as could be expected. You will find situations early in the campaign game or some of the scenarios where abundant support is not available. In those cases, you have to run the operations with what's on hand, so go for it and hope for the best. If you have additional support available and run an operation in this manner, you should be shot! This example would end far more favorably if another U.S. infantry battalion also occupied 4719 with the ARVN rangers, and if six more air points were available. Carrying it one step further, add another U.S. battalion plus a 155mm battalion as offensive reserves. It becomes a walkover for the U.S.

Example Three: Quang Gnal Province

In this example, a properly supported U.S./ARVN force with offensive reserves takes on a VC cluster in the mountains. The area of operations is Quang Gnal province. There is no free-fire. The target hex for the operation is 4821. The U.S. player has 12 air points and 4 airmobile points. The die has been rolled for ARVN rangers, and two are available. Illustration 4-1 shows the starting positions for all U.S., ARVN and VC units. All units shown are eligible to take part in the operation.

Illustration 4-2 shows the movements of the U.S./ARVN units activated

for the search and destroy operation, and the movements the VC units take in response. Three of the U.S./ARVN units are airmobilized. They are the ARVN ranger unit, the 155mm battalion and the HQ, 9th Marine Regiment. The rest move by foot from their original locations. The two Marine battalions in 5019 have not been activated for round one, but may be activated as offensive reserves in round two. None of the VC units take reaction movement when U.S./ARVN units move adjacent. The VC cluster is not completely surrounded. The VC target unit can only alert move one hex back into the mountains even if it receives the maximum alert die roll. The U.S. player allocates 14 points out of the 29 available air/artillery points: 4th ARVN regiment (2); HQ, 9th Marines (8); 1/27 155mm battalion (4).

For this example, the VC target unit receives a high enough alert die roll to alert out of the target hex and into 4721. The U.S. player attacks the two VC units in 4721. The VC units are flipped over to reveal a combined strength of six. The U.S. player has five ground strength points adjacent to the VC units plus 15 air/artillery points, reduced to 7½ because free-fire has not been declared. Basic odds are 12½ to 6, which yields a +2 die roll modifier. Since the VC occupy a mountain hex (a -3 die roll modifier), the final modifier is -1. A six is rolled, becoming a five: both sides suffer a one point loss. The U.S. loss is taken by the ARVN rangers in 4720. Both sides expend one replacement point. The U.S. player also receives a +2 modifier for pursuit.

Illustration 4-3 shows the two marine battalions in 5019 activated as offensive reserves and airmobilized to 4620 and 4522. Both use airmobile

Illustration 4-2

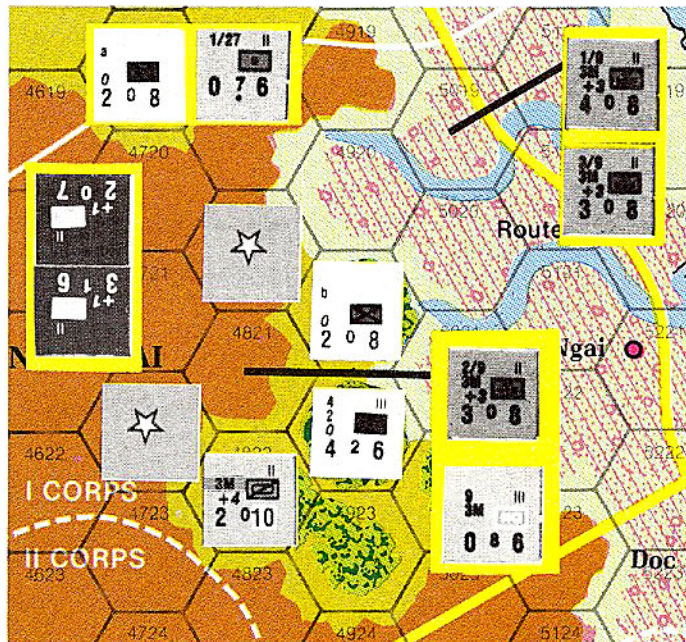
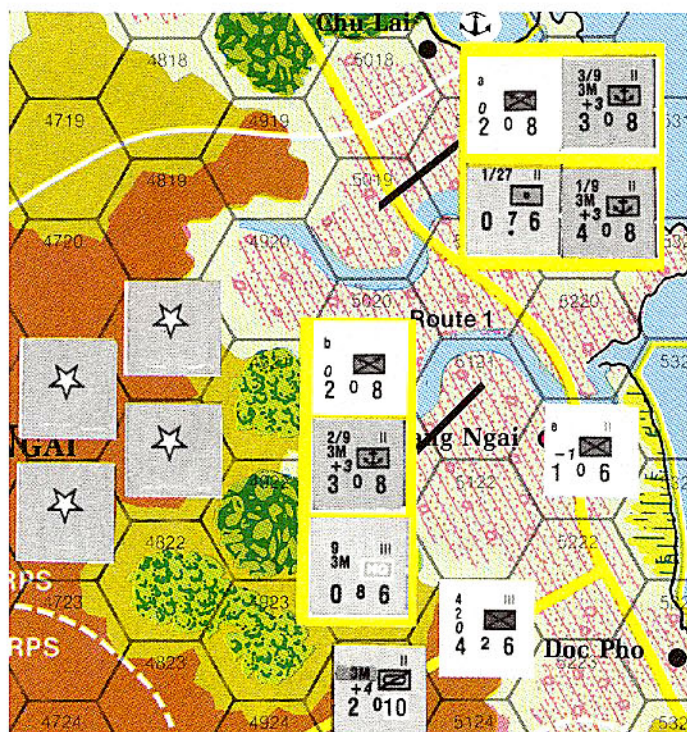
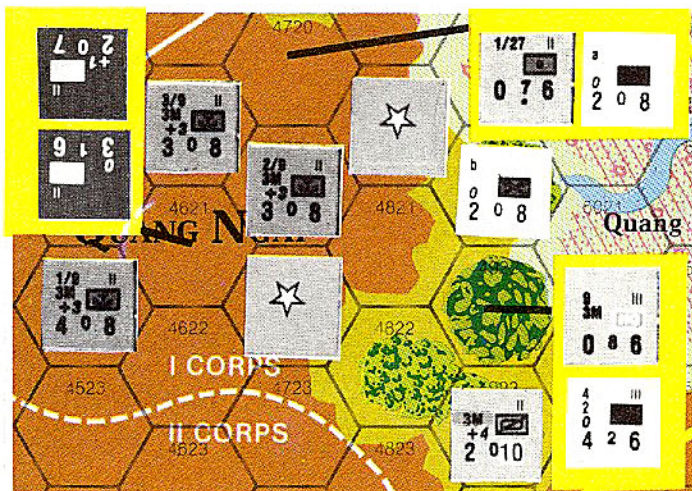


Illustration 4-3



points previously assigned to the operation. The HQ, 9th Marines uses the third point to move back to 4822. This artillery unit is in position to be airmobiled into the third round of combat if the pursuit modifier is great enough. The U.S. player assigns the fourth airmobile point to the operation, moving the 2/9 Marines to 4721. That move costs three pursuit points (one for leaving a VC zone of control, one for entering a VC zone of control in a landing hex, and one for the hex itself). It would have cost four pursuit points to move on foot, however. The 2/9 Marines have two unused pursuit points which give the U.S. player a +2 die roll modifier (the two newly activated Marine battalions are excluded from pursuit computations on their turn of activation). The U.S. player has 10 ground strength points and $9\frac{1}{2}$ air/artillery points rounded down from 19 (the 155mm battalion and 12 air points). The VC still have six strength points. Basic odds are 3-to-1 which yields a +3 modifier. The VC are still in the mountains (-3 modifier). They cancel each other out, leaving the U.S. player with the +2 modifier from pursuit. Barring any really bad die rolls, this operation will end up a U.S. success. Decent pursuit bonuses should allow both artillery units to reposition to add their firepower to the third round of combat.

Conclusions

The U.S. player has a tough but by no means impossible job when hunting the VC. There are two points to remember:

First, cut off the avenues of escape for the VC units. Any forces committed to an operation are wasted when the VC escape. The means to keep this from happening are many and varied. You have the clear and secure operation which changes into the patrol operation, patrol operations inhibiting VC movement, interdiction, and, depending upon the terrain, surrounding the target hex with your units to prevent escape or trigger incidental attacks.

Second, use enough force to get the job done. This means employing enough ground units and support points on the first round to ensure that decent pursuit is generated for subsequent rounds. Keep units on hand, especially artillery, that can be activated as offensive reserves. Remember that as VC units combine, they make it harder for the operational units to maintain good odds. For that reason alone, it makes sense to keep offensive reserves on tap. Also, when additional VC units become target units after an operation starts, they have the disadvantage of sharing all the risk of the original VC target unit, but they don't have the advantage of an initial alert movement. The U.S. player only needs an incremental addition of strength to generate odds. Additional forces necessary to prevent escape generally aren't needed.

The alert die roll, terrain, combat results table and the VC player ensure that no two operations will be exactly alike. Combine these guidelines with your own common sense, and you will come out a winner.

