FOR PRESS

There was a lesson on booby traps freshly written on the blackboard and a 155 mm artillery shell on the instruction desk when troops of 7th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment burst into the Viet Cong classroom.

The Viet Cong had apparently left hurriedly, because streamers and coloured paper were still strung up across a 12 x 6 ft hut only yards away. "It looked as if the Viet Cong had left too quickly to take a large pile of training pamphlets," said Sergeant Ray Nelligan, of Wembley, Perth (WA).

Sergeant Nelligan was describing one of his platoon's finds on a recent shakedown operation in Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam.

The operation, the second for the Victorian-based 7RAR, was to search and clear along the coastal fringe of the Province.

"The decorations in the hut were practically brand new. The hut was part of an extensive bunker and trench system extending over 400 yards," he said.

In the classroom were training aids and a large pile of training pamphlets on booby traps.

The 155 mm shell which was being used for instruction had either been stolen from the Allied forces, or was a blind which had failed to explode after it had been fired.

The school-room, which had desks with milled timber tops, and of very recent construction, could have accommodated 56 pupils.

Nearby in a bunker were two more 155 mm shells, apparently ready to be "doctored" for use as booby traps. With them were two primed Russian Chicom grenades, which were ready for use as booby traps. They were quickly disarmed. Beside them were five other grenades awaiting booby trap preparation.

The trench complex, which contained two Command Posts, the school-room, a kitchen area and a grave yard, was in heavily timbered country only a mile or so from the South China Sea.

A flight in a Bell Sioux helicopter only an hour before by "C" Company Commander, Major Graeme Chapman, of Puckapunyal (Vic.) had failed to locate any of the expertly camouflaged system under a high tree cover.

It was discovered only during a systematic search of the area.

In one hut where the party had been held there were also places for the treatment of injured. Underneath the floor were bunkers with additional bed space.

Searchers found gauze pads and stains caused by medicine drops on roughly hewn benches. Old penicillin phials were close by.
"The area seemed to be a new one for the Vietcong", Sergeant Nelligan said, "and a few other huts were still under construction."

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23 May 1967
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Title: 7th Battalion broke up the Viet Cong class

Date: 23 May 1967

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/40224

File Description: 7th Battalion broke up the Viet Cong class

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