

Infantry Officer by Trade, Intelligence Officer by Accident

By Dick Culver

The Fall of 1967 spelled a time of transition for this old Infantry Officer. I had spent my entire career in either the Infantry or Reconnaissance fields with a short tour in the Artillery as a youngster. I was not prepared for the late fall of 1967. Having spent the last seven months as the Commanding Officer of two Infantry Companies, I found myself temporarily sidelined by a long neglected foot infection that the sawbones told me would result in sporting a peg-leg if left untreated. Not envisioning myself as “Long John Silver,” I finally succumbed to the insistence that I turn myself into the ship’s hospital.

At this particular point in time, our old Skipper, Major Moose Beard, had received orders to return to the States for a well-earned rest. The Moose had promised his Captains that before his departure, he would make sure that all the young Captains would get a crack at an Infantry Company, such an assignment being considered to be a necessary “ticket punch” to ascend the promotion ladder. As good as his word, *The Moose* did a last minute re-shuffle and appointed his staff Captains to billets as Company Commanders and relegated his experienced Company Commanders to jobs on the Battalion Staff. The unsuspecting replacement Battalion CO was soon faced with somewhat of a dilemma. While all of us who had served as Company Commanders were able to breath a temporary sigh of relief, the former staff officers were essentially thrown to the wolves cold.

All young Marine Officers are educated in the rudiments of staff work, and the intricacies of commanding an infantry line outfit. The Officer’s Basic Course at Quantico gives all hands a fairly through grounding in the basics. Unfortunately, there are many nuances that must be learned by experience... Certainly the small subtitles of commanding a Rifle Company in combat is one of them. ...And as I was to learn the hard way, staff functions are not exactly cut and dried either. While the ideal way of sliding Captains into new assignments is the use of a gradual method allowing both the new Company Commanders and new Staff Officers a chance to break into the job gradually. Alas, the commitments of combat sometimes call for a more abrupt transition. While the gradual method makes for a smoother transition, Marines are adaptable as I was soon to find out.

I personally had the option of being an underling in the Operations Shop (the S-3) where I would have wound up working for a gentleman I considered to be a living, breathing incompetent. On the other hand, the Intelligence Shop was up for grabs leaving me as my own boss as long as I did my job and kept the Battalion Commander happy. Having spent much of my early career in either Force Reconnaissance or Division Reconnaissance outfits, I was considered to be the optimum choice for Intelligence officer’s slot. I never considered the differences in gathering intelligence and processing it for use by the infantry, but I was soon to learn the hard way!

My long time buddy, Reggie Ponsford, had the misfortune of recuperating from a case of malaria at Cam Ran Bay at the time of the transition. Reggie was probably one of the most aggressive infantry commanders in the Marine Corps, and I had known him for a number of years, although his attitude toward “staff pukes” had earned him no

friends on the Battalion Staff. Having no champion in the ranks of the battalion, poor Reggie became the S-4 (Supply and Logistics) Officer. In retrospect, I considered myself fortunate to be selected as the Battalion S-2... At least I'd have a chance to hit back at the enemy first hand. Well, sort of anyway, as long as the somewhat idiotic rules of engagement were followed.

GETTING MY "INTELLIGENT" FEET WET

Upon being released from the hospital, I found that the Battalion was on its final operation as the Special Landing Force. We were to be assigned to the An Hoa area, to work with the 5th Marine Regiment. I moved in to the S-2 Shop with great gusto and one more opportunity to close with the enemy.

The troops assigned to the Intelligence Shop pointed out where my new digs would be and helped me move my gear in. Knowing virtually nothing about being a Battalion Intelligence Officer, I did what any hard charging young Marine would do, I simply occupied the position and waited for something to happen. As luck would have it, I wouldn't have long to wait!

During November of 1967 we were assigned our final operation as Special Landing Force Bravo. We moved into a position not far from An Hoa. We were assigned as a supporting element for a major operation being conducted by the 5th Marines. Following this assignment, we were to move into a permanent base camp in an area called "The Triangle Outpost" about 20 clicks south of Da Nang. This meant that we would have real hooches for our racks, a mess hall and a club – hallelujah! Home would no longer be where you dug it, real beer would be available and we would start getting hot meals for the first time in 9 months. We could hardly wait! But we still had this one last operation to finish before we moved into paradise.

I had just stowed my gear and started to get the intel ops started when a runner came breathlessly into the tent.

"Skipper," he said "we've just gotten in a batch of prisoners and the operations folks want an intel report!"

"Really?" I said, never having had much contact with the enemy except for our body counts. "Where the heck are they?"...

"Down in the ITT¹ tent Captain, the ITT NCO is interrogating 'em now!"

"Great," I said, "where *IS* the ITT Tent?"

"Come on Skipper," I'll show ya".

I entered a hard backed GP Tent where a number of prisoners were stripped to the waist. These worthies were standing with their feet spread and about two and a half feet back from the bulkhead². Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were maintaining their balance by leaning forward, supporting themselves on their foreheads, against the strong-backed tent walls.

The tent was divided into two parts, the outer chamber with the prisoners appropriately standing with spread feet to make a dash for freedom improbable, and the

inner “interrogation chamber”. As I started to enter the “inner sanctum” I was greeted by a Marine Staff Sergeant with a frown on his face.

“Good Afternoon Staff Sergeant, I’m Captain Culver, the new intelligence officer assigned to this area!”

“Good afternoon Captain, my name is S/Sgt. Dan Johnson (not his real name of course), I’m the local ITT interrogator.

“Great Sergeant Johnson, I’m here to watch, I’ve never seen any prisoners interrogated before!”

A look of absolute horror crossed Sergeant Johnson’s unbelieving face.

“Skipper, if you’ll just go back to the CP, I’ll bring you the results!”

“No sergeant, I’m the new Battalion Intel Officer, and I’m trying to get my feet wet and see how this stuff is done.”

An even more apprehensive look crossed his face.

“Skipper, honestly, you can be doing something else, I’ll save ya’ a lot of time. I’ll have the stuff up to ya’ shortly!”

I could tell that this was gonna’ be a hard sell.

It suddenly occurred to me what the problem was... I suspect that NO interrogator of ANY army wants any officials watching the interrogation process. Hummm... Now what to do? I considered the alternatives and went to the first prisoner in line standing at a leaning parade rest with his neck muscles straining to supporting his body to keep it from falling. With a quick foot sweep, I knocked his feet out from under him allowing him to crash to the floor leading with his face. The resounding thud was deafening in the otherwise silent tent. I suspected that I had just transformed myself from a Battalion Intelligence Officer into a war criminal. Going back through my memory banks and seeing Marines deliberately mutilated by the enemy soothed my somewhat frayed conscience. At any rate, the die was cast!

“Now Sergeant Johnson, do I qualify to come into the “inner-sanctum?”

A wave of relief crossed the Staff Sergeant’s face. He grinned slightly, now having an apparent co-conspirator in the intelligence gathering process, and motioned me into the interrogation chamber.

I immediately noticed a triangular set-up of tables and chairs such that the interrogator (Sergeant Johnson) sat at one end of a long table, the interpreter at the other end. The prisoner was seated at a separate table. Sergeant Johnson had a EE-8 Field Phone in front of him with a set of attached wires trailing across the tent floor in the direction of the prisoner. For purposes of observation and taking notes, I took a chair behind and to the right of the interrogator.

I was first taken with the observation that the interrogator never spoke directly to the prisoner, but rather to the interpreter. The “interrogee” was forced to make a definite head movement to view either of the other two individuals. This deprived him of being

able to pick up any interaction between the gentleman asking the questions and the individual translating the questions into Vietnamese. This was truly a psychological disadvantage for a prisoner suddenly separated from his unit and friends.

The second thing I observed was that Sergeant Johnson never spoke Vietnamese to the prisoner, but rather would address the interrogator, almost as if interrogating the interpreter himself. The interpreter would then turn to the prisoner and ask the question in his native language. The prisoner's answers were then given back to the interpreter who would then give Sergeant Johnson the prisoner's answers. During a break and out of earshot of the interpreter and the prisoner, I asked Johnson why he didn't direct the questions to the prisoner personally.

"Well Captain, I speak better Vietnamese than the native interpreter but I don't trust those clowns – you never know whose side they're on. That guy in there doesn't know that I speak Vietnamese other than a few rudimentary phrases. This allows him the feeling that he can speak to the prisoner in front of me without my knowing what he's talking about. He thinks I'm a Spanish linguist, not a Vietnamese linguist. This really comes in handy – kinda' like having a hidden microphone in a room or using one-way mirrors. You usually find out a lot more this way. The interpreter thinks that HE taught me all the Vietnamese I know! Works great!"

"Not bad Johnson, you're a real tricky guy! My compliments!"

"Thanks Captain, now let's get back to interrogating the prisoner before he forgets why he's here."

After about 45 minutes of relatively ineffective interaction with the prisoner, Sergeant Johnson attached the two stray wires from the EE-8 Field Phone to the prisoner's index fingers. I watched in fascination... Sergeant Johnson's next question was more to the point, but was still greeted with what amounted wall of silence. Sergeant Johnson began to examine a .45 Automatic Pistol laying on the table in front of him with considered interest. He knowledgeably pulled the slide to the rear after removing a loaded magazine, dropping a live round on the table. Without looking at the prisoner, he reloaded the ejected round back into the magazine and reinserted magazine in the pistol and allowed the slide to go forward. At no time did he point the pistol at the prisoner nor even overtly threaten him with it, but the message was clear. The prisoner's answers began to flow a bit more freely. This continued for about 20 minutes which included several more sessions of loading and unloading the pistol, but the prisoner had become complacent again.

At this point Sergeant Johnson's question was more to the point but got the same stoic resistance. Johnson had the interpreter ask the question one more time. With no meaningful response from the prisoner, a quick turn of the ringing crank on the field phone by Johnson got the prisoner's apt attention. He cringed and attempted to pull away from the wires, but they were firmly attached. Several turns of the crank later the prisoner had become amazingly cooperative.

A final even more pointed question concerning the location of the VC command post met with stony silence even after a few judicious turns of the crank. At this point, Johnson got up quietly and placed the EE-8 on the table in front of the prisoner. The prisoner watched anxiously and looked back and forth between Johnson and the

interpreter with a quizzical look on his face. Johnson came back to his table and began contemplating his pistol once more. After asking the question one more time, Johnson told the interpreter to tell the VC to turn the crank himself. An exchange between the VC and the interpreter resulted in a violent shaking of the head by the interrogee, a look of abject terror on his face.

Johnson had the interpreter repeat the instruction several more times. Johnson continued to contemplate his pistol, but now began to turn to face the VC directly for the first time with a look of absolute menace on his face grasping the old Colt in a manner that indicated that he knew what to do with it if the answers didn't start coming... He fairly growled his request to the interpreter, making even the interpreter cringe. The VC complied, "cranking himself" to the ground with appropriate theatrics. After the second session of self-electrification, the VC became super cooperative and began spilling his guts to Johnson.

After leaving the inner-sanctum of the interrogation room, Johnson broke out a cigarette and I lit a cigar.

"Johnson," I asked, "how do you know the information he gave you was the real thing?"

"Skipper, ya' get a feel for these things after a year or so, and if you know the language well enough, you can pick up inflections in the voice and little hints... Believe me, I know when they're lying!"

"How about the location of their CP?"

"Skipper, you can take that one to the bank!"

"OK, I have another question just for my own information – why do you wire their fingers instead of say, the testicles?"

Johnson laughed.

Skipper, ya' gotta' know two things, first there are more nerve endings in the fingertips than there are around the balls! Second, if the Colonel was to suddenly walk through the tent flap and I had his balls wired for sound, there'd just be NO way to explain it! Since I get the same or better results with the fingertips; why take the chance of being *misinterpreted*? If you were watching carefully, I kept the wires close to hand just in case. That way, a quick yank of the wires gives me plausible deniability! Yeah, I COULD have had him wired, but there is no tangible proof, but a prisoner with two wires around his balls leaves little or nothing to the imagination!"

"Got it Johnson, you're a bloomin' genius!"

"Not really Skipper, but I'll stand by my results! I've been here two years now, and I very rarely make a mistake."

"Hey Johnson, that field phone is a really neat idea – yours?"

"Nah, it was old when Noah loaded the Arc, but it IS truly effective. The problem is that you've got to know HOW to use it or you'll get skewed results! For instance when I first started, I was a bit more heavy handed than I am now and things would

occasionally take an unexpected turn. For instance, one afternoon I got three confessions to the assassination of Lincoln and two guys admitted setting the Chicago Fire! Heh, heh, heh..."

"Geeze! I get your point, too much is just as bad or worse than too little! – Just how powerful is that damned phone ringer?"

"Actually Skipper, it's less potent than you'd think. As I recall it puts out about 90 volts, but the output is in milliamps and is essentially harmless but pretty frightening to the prisoners. When I remember what those guys have done to our prisoners, I find it hard to worry about shootin' 'em a little juice to save some of our guys lives. Now the ARVINS³ are absolutely vicious. They'll take 4 or 5 prisoners up in a helicopter and ask the first one a question. If the answer ain't satisfactory, they simply kick the poor bastard out without a parachute and then turn to the next guy in line. I've never heard of anyone having to go to the third prisoner."

Johnson continued "...And if you think THOSE guys are bad@\$\$e\$, you should see how the Korean Marines operate. They're the most bigoted people you'll ever come across. They are convinced that all other Orientals are inferior to the Koreans, and they like nothing more than to get a couple of Vietnamese prisoners. They have a hell of a rep for being very effective against the Vietnamese, but it's all rumors 'cuz they won't willingly operate with anyone else. No witnesses doncha' see! They hate the Communists and they REALLY hate the Vietnamese Communists. Very few prisoners survive a Korean interrogation, and they don't keep a lotta' records if you catch my drift! Most of 'em come to Vietnam just to get in a little combat time!"

"Thanks Johnson, I've had a real education this afternoon," I said heading back for the Intel tent to transcribe and pass on my newly acquired info."

I settled down behind my field desk, lit a cigar and began to scribble my observations. I transcribed the co-ordinates of the VC Headquarters and took it over to the Battalion Air Liaison Officer.

"Hey Joe, what can you give me to take out a VC Battalion CP?"

"Culver, if you'll quit blowing cigar smoke in my face, I'll give you a mini arc-light to take the thing out! ...A BATTALION CP you say? Well now... For a Battalion CP we in the Wing can probably come up with enough ordnance to level Hanoi!"

"Nah Joe, this is a VC Battalion operating in our area of operation. We'd better get this one laid on quick or those little gooners may decide to shift locations!"

"No sweat Dick, I'll get right on it! How's a little fireworks by evening chow sound?"

"That oughta' do it Joe, we'll give 'em something to aid their digestion!"

The mention of chow made my mouth water, we'd just put in seven straight months eating "Cs" in a hole in the ground. Having access to a mess hall was a luxury we were having trouble getting used to. I continued writing but my mind was on hot chow.

It was getting close to Thanksgiving and the chow had been getting better day by day. I could hardly wait. Staff Sergeant Johnson brought in his interrogation report and I lost myself putting it in a finished paper for the Battalion CO. Finally finishing up, I

closed the desk, delivered the Intel Report to the S-3 and headed for chow with great anticipation. Going into the mess tent I met Johnson, my co-war criminal from the ITT Team. Filling our trays we found a vacant spot and started to eat. Some fifteen minutes into the meal I found that Vietnam was actually sitting astride a major earthquake fault! A horrible noise filled the air and trays went flying everywhere. Troops and officers dove under the tables and we looked at each other in wonder?

“Hey Johnson, what the f++k was THAT?”

“Dunno’ Skipper, but it sounds like the Commies have finally gotten some air support!”

AIR support!?? My mind raced...

Suddenly the light dawned! Uh oh, think fast Culver – just WHERE the hell WAS that CP? Hummm... I beat feet back to the Intel Tent and headed for my situation map. Checking the VC Battalion CP against our current position I saw the problem. Damn it, I should have checked those coordinates a bit closer before I had the wing pull a mini arc light! Damn. The explosions continued to rock the area and the noise was deafening. The earthquake-like shocks continued. Heading back to the mess tent I found everyone still taking cover under anything available. It sounded and felt like the end of the earth. I looked over at Johnson and he looked at me.

“Skipper, is this what I THINK it is?” said Johnson.

“No question in my mind Johnson, sounds like our little interrogation session may have spelled the demise of the local VC effort for a day or two at least!”

“Don’t bet on it Captain, those little weasels dig in like gophers, they’ll survive, but I’d say we definitely got their attention!”

Crawling over to the Air Liaison Officer not wishing to give the impression that I knew we were in no immediate danger, I got to Joe who was now about to bust a gut in hilarity...

“Don’t laugh you idiot, it won’t take long for these guys to realize that WE’RE responsible for this!”

“Relax Culver, those guys in the F4s are good, we’re in no danger, but I’ll bet the little momma-sans will have their hands full washing out a bunch of skivvies in the morning” said Jones with tears rolling down his face!

I made a mental note to myself never to call in any air-strikes until I had checked their proximity to our personal location more thoroughly. When the explosions began to recede, the gents under the tables began to resurface. I too was asking what in the heck the explosions were all about, being very careful not to allow the cause of the mini arc-light to become general knowledge. I marked this one down under lessons learned, but I can still see the unbelieving look on their faces – heh, heh, heh...

RESURRECTING THE INFAMOUS CHINESE ADVISOR

About two nights after my mini arc-light I got a call from Foxtrot Company.

“Hey Two, we found a VC graveyard out here and when we were unearthing a couple to check ‘em out we’ve come across one that appears to be a Chinese Advisor!”

“Your \$+itting me, right?”

“Nope, sure looks like one to me!”

Not being of a ghoulish nature I contacted the Battalion CO to find out what he wanted done with the corpse. He sounded like he was foaming at the mouth over such a find.

“Well, have ‘em put him in a body bag and ship him back to the CP damn it, this may well be an intelligence coup!”

Oh great, now I have to make room for a Chink stiff! Rats...

“Aye aye Colonel, I’ll have him brought in.” I radioed the information back to the Company commander, Foxtrot Six.

“Your kidding, right? This guy is pretty ripe! He’s been planted awhile.”

“Quit bitchin’, I ain’t looking forward to this any more than you are! Just bag him up and send him back, I’ll frag a chopper to your pos. The CO wants a Chink Advisor to show to the folks at Division – that’ll teach you to mention a Chinaman!”

“Right Two, I’ll get right on it, but I’ll get ya’ for this one, out.”

Almost immediately, Foxtrot got the word to saddle up and move out.

“OK Two, **now** what do I do with this stiff?”

“Replant him and mark the spot, we’ll dig him up later!”

“Roger Two, will do, out.”

Five minutes later, the word was changed again, and Foxtrot Company was ordered to dig in for awhile. The Battalion CO called me and asked for his Chinaman.

“Right Six, I’ll have him resurrected and brought back,” I replied.

Foxtrot Six was not amused.

“You want me to dig this guy up *again*?” he asked in disbelief.

“You got it... The CO *WANTS* that advisor! That’ll teach ya’ to mention Chinese Advisors!”

“Damn you Culver,” he said violating radio code!

Shortly the word was changed once more, ordering the company to move out.

“Foxtrot Six?, Two here! Got some bad news, plant this guy again and prepare to move out!”

“Culver, you’re a dead man when I get back!”

Orders were changed again within minutes ordering another stand down... I suddenly had the idea that nobody knew what was going on, but the demand for the Chinaman surfaced again (no pun intended). I put my assistant on the radio to talk to Foxtrot Six so I wouldn't be the one to break the news about sending the Chink Advisor to the rear! Not only that, I wanted a running start. The sounds over the radio headset were not for the faint of heart. A chopper was dispatched however with Foxtrot Six grudgingly promising to send me the missing body.

My assistant was a fresh youngster just assigned from a rifle company and was anxious to get broken in to intelligence work. He immediately started pestering me to allow him to see the Chinese Advisor. I knew better, but what the hell, this was war and the kid needed a lesson. As I heard the chopper approaching I broke out a gas mask. My new assistant looked at me funny, but went running for the landing zone. By the time the green body bag had been unloaded the young Marine was already unzipping it. I was in no rush to see a putrefying corpse that had been resurrected three times in one night. My young Lance Corporal couldn't wait. I could see him unzipping the bag. By the time I got there, my assistant had disappeared but I could hear him retching to one side. I looked in the body bag, and I suppose IF you used your imagination, it COULD have been a Chinaman, but then on the other hand he was a bit ripe for positive identification. I called the Battalion Commander.

“Gray Rebel Six Actual, this is Two Actual, over.”

“Roger, Two what do you think, IS he a Chinaman? Over.”

“Skipper, he DEFINITELY a Chinaman in my opinion. I think we need to ship this stiff up to Division Headquarters for those rear echelon clowns to take a look,” I said, chuckling to myself thinking of the looks on the faces of the guys who had three sets of starched jungle utilities in their wall locker to go with their spit shined jungle boots.

“Roger Two, I'll respect your judgment, ship the body back on the same chopper!”

The chopper flew off into the night for a rendezvous with the anxiously awaiting staff poggles at Division. I chuckled to myself. Wellll... they'd asked for it, why deprive them of the find of a lifetime? I headed back to the tent. All I had to contend with was an outraged Foxtrot Six – maybe I had something to trade him? I'd worry about that one later.

A NEW HOME AND NEW PROBLEMS

Following my first great “intelligence adventure” in the An Hoa area, operating with the 5th Marine Regiment, our battalion, the 2nd Battalion of the 3rd Marine Regiment finally moved to their first permanent base camp in 9 Months. Our orphan battalion had been what was essentially a “fire-fighting” unit known as *Special Landing Force Bravo*. When anything went awry and a unit got into trouble, we were sent in to help, much like a super sparrow hawk. We had been shuffled from pillar to post and farmed out to whatever Division need a “fresh” battalion for almost 9 months. We now moved into a base camp in the 1st Marine Division Area. We took up residence just south of Da Nang in what was called “The Triangle Outpost”. We looked forward with great expectation of hot showers, semi-permanent hooches with real racks and officer and enlisted clubs available during lulls in combat. We had only heard of such in legend... Real beer and a

Battalion Mess Hall were the shining jewels in a fabled crown only spoken of in whispers lest they disappear in the mists of dreams. We took off our packs and moved in to our new quarters.

I was spiffing up the Intelligence Hooch and preparing to settle down with a good cigar when I got a call to go see the Battalion Commander ASAP. Grabbing my map packet and appropriate writing implements I headed for the CP. The Battalion CO motioned for me to come in.

“Well Culver, when can you have an intelligence study done on our new AO⁴?” said the Colonel?

Area Intelligence Study? Hummm... Now I've heard of those, but I wonder what the hell they look like? Damn, I wish I'd gotten a few days of schooling on this. Prisoner interrogation? I had that one down pat, but an intelligence study? Time to hit the books – *FAST!*

“Colonel, I'll get on it right away. I'll need some transportation and a few documents, but I'll expedite the process.”

By now the Colonel realized that most of his staff officers were simply infantry types in staff suits, so he looked at me a bit quizzically but didn't say anything.

“OK Culver, let me know when it's done!”

“Aye, aye Sir, no sweat!” No sweat my *fanny*, now I was beginning to sweat a bit!

Back in the Intel Hooch I began to evaluate my situation. First, what the hell is an intel study and what's it supposed to look like, I thought? I had seen such in Basic (Officer's) School of course, but had never studied them in detail – always figured there'd be one to copy from if the \$hit hit the fan! An investigation of the existing files told me that my predecessor had done me no favors. There was nothing in the files that even closely resembled an Area Intelligence Study. Maybe they had been left aboard ship? Wherever they were, I was hung out to dry. Now what? Well Culver, they always said that if in doubt head for the sound of the guns. Upppsss... That's IT! Of course! Hell, I'd have bet big bucks that no one else was terribly checked out on Intel Studies either. I'd just use my fertile imagination and tailor the thing to the location of the enemy in our area – couldn't go too far wrong!

When I was stationed at the 8th Marine Corps District Headquarters in New Orleans, I had been the low man on the totem pole in an organization that had Majors emptying trash cans. As a result, I became the SLJO⁵ of the District Headquarters. One of those jobs was to conduct JAG⁶ Investigations of any undo activities that occurred in the City of New Orleans. These included injuries to transient military personnel, deserters, AWOLs, serious traffic accidents involving injury to life or property, theft, etc. While this wasn't my favorite pastime, I DID learn a lot about investigations. I thought about the Intelligence Area Study a bit and decided to conduct a JAG Investigation of the VC and his operational area which pretty much overlapped our own.

I took stock of what I DID know about combat intelligence, gleaned mostly from my studies in the Basic Officers Course some 9 years before. I knew the enemy could and would (under normal circumstances) do one of four things:

- 1) He could attack
- 2) He could defend
- 3) He could reinforce... or
- 4) He could withdraw

Guerillas of course often did all four in varying sequences that favored his limited personnel and resources. This would make things easier by a bunch and besides which, it just might make it sound like I knew what I was talking about. I could only hope.

Now a JAG Investigation takes the rough format of three things. First, you list all the things chronologically that you did to gather your information in as much detail as necessary to make it clear that you did a thorough job. The second phase was to take all the information that you gathered and could authenticate, and arrange it into what were called "findings of fact". Rumors, maybes, and possibilities had to be listed as such and not represented as absolutes. The final portion of the investigation consisted of your recommendations based on your findings of fact. Voilà... the light began to dawn, I had my format! Now all I needed was the facts and apply the entire mess into the four basic options open to the enemy. If I did a serviceable job on this one, even *l'd* be happy with such a document.

I headed to the Battalion CP to see the Air Officer to lay on transportation back to Division Headquarters to talk to the Intelligence folks. At least I wouldn't have to look like a total "dumb \$+it" and ask what the hell an Area Intelligence Study was. Soon winging my way back to Division in an Army "Slick" that had been diverted for a quick pick-up to drop me off to see the folks at Division G-2. Hell, maybe I could even bum some ice cream out of this trip.

Similar trips to the Wing Intelligence people and the S-2 Shops of surrounding Regiments and Battalions soon left me with a mail sack of information to go through. My work was obviously cut out for me. The following day was a real ring-tailed Jim dandy, but by evening chow, things were coming together nicely. Placing the information carefully into my JAG format, I had my document complete with maps, enemy activities and recommendations for course(s) of action. I deposited my finished product on the Colonel's desk. The next morning he sent for me and I headed for the CP with heart-in-mouth.

"Culver, come in, come in," came a voice booming from the Colonel's office!

Hey, he sounded almost friendly! Hummm...

"Yes sir, you wanted to see me?" I answered.

"Culver, I didn't realize you were a professional intelligence Officer! This is the finest Area Study I've ever seen! Great job!"

Uh oh, something's wrong, he *COULDN'T* be talking to me! I blushed appropriately and stood with my heels locked in front of his desk. The other shoe was bound to drop momentarily.

“Culver, I want you to make copies of this and take one to Division Headquarters and all the Regimental CPs... This information needs to be gotten into the hands of the operational units. I believe you have a new slant on the situation and I agree with you fully! Great job!”

My Gawd, NOW he's trying to make me the Division laughing stock... somebody's bound to figure out that I don't have a clue... Oh well, at least I ain't in trouble yet. As luck would have it, the darned thing made the rounds and met with nothing but praise. I was sure that either the Division Intel folks were clueless or I had inadvertently stumbled and fallen into the cesspool and come out smelling like the proverbial rose! Miracle of miracles, never a word was ever said about the JAG Investigation of the VC south of Da Nang. Odin does have a sense of humor!

Life was good in the intelligence community after that. I was accepted as a full-fledged Combat Intelligence Officer, and the Battalion Commander made every briefing always complimenting me on my knowledgeable and thoughtful briefings. I said nothing, as Mrs. Culver didn't raise any damn fools.

Many years later when I finally retired from the Corps, I carried as a souvenir a secondary MOS⁷ as an Intelligence Officer, earned the hard way. I occasionally see former Staff Sergeant Johnson, who also retired as a Major. When we meet, we still grin at each other in remembrance of a day in RVN that a savvy old Staff NCO educated an Infantry Officer in the ways of combat intelligence.

ROC

End Notes:

¹ **ITT** is the designation for the Interrogator Translator Teams, those assigned to question and translate the replies given by captured enemy soldiers. The ITT Personnel are educated in the language of the enemy and must maintain a working knowledge of any evolving tactical situation in the various areas of operation. The ITT personnel are usually an interesting combination of psychologists, and military tacticians.

² **Bulkhead** is Marine -“ese” for wall.

³ **ARVIN** – This refers to the Army of (South) Vietnam, the non-communists, and supposedly our allies.

⁴ **AO** – stands for Area of Operation.

⁵ **SLJO** stood for “\$+itty Little Jobs Officer” – a catch-all phrase for any undesirable or onerous job that nobody else wanted or had the seniority to avoid.

⁶ **JAG** stood for Judge Advocate General. The JAG set forth the de-facto guidelines for any legal actions taken against military personnel in **any** armed service.

⁷ **MOS** stands for Military Occupational Specialty.