

TIGER SCOUTS

KIT CARSON SCOUTS

AN ESSAY BY KARL COLTHUP
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Photo credits: Wikipedia

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KARL COLTHUP

Karl Colthup grew up in a military family moving every couple of years from one military establishment to another, as such the military and military history became his life's passion. Karl went on to enlist in the Australian Regular Army serving in various roles along the way from lead scout to intelligence gathering and support.

In a life after the Army, Karl went on to teach English in China and Vietnam for several years as he wanted to understand the land that influenced his military interests so thoroughly. He now lives and works in Brisbane Australia in the Maritime Security Sector, but always looking for his next adventure.

Karl can be found online at his popular Instagram and Facebook pages Selous Tracker.

Instagram: @seloustracker

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KYT LYN WALKEN



Photo credits: Jeroen Kloppenburg

*"I love Kyt's passion for Mantracking.
This girl is on fire"*

Joel Lambert, 10 year Veteran of Navy SEAL Teams

Kyt Lyn Walken is an authentic enthusiast and trader of the Ancient Art of Human and Animal Tracking. This skill is still very effective nowadays from Search and Rescue, Tactical dimension, Forensic Science until Wildlife Conservation.

She has been entitled "Official Representative of Hull's Tracking School" in 2018.

Mike Hull is her Mentor.

In the same year she has become a Conservation Ranger after attending a two weeks course in Poland led by C.R.O.W. (Conservation Rangers Operations Worldwide).

Kyt Lyn has also studied "Forensic Photographs on Crime Scene", by UK Forensic Advisor and former Royal Marines Robert Kendall.

Currently she runs Man and Animal Tracking courses all over Europe, and she is regular writer for some US and UK webzines on Survival and Prepping.

She has been entitled "Directora de la Escuela de Rastreo Humano Carcayú - Spain". She is Guest Instructor for Veteranen Search Team (The Netherlands).

She is author of the Manuals *"The importance of being a Tracker"*, *"The Urban Tracker"* and *"Tracking Compendium"* (with Andy Martin), *"Jungle Warriors - SAS in Malesia and Borneo"* and the essay *"Tracking, Anti-Tracking and Counter-Tracking during Colonialism"* (with Professor Timothy J. Stapleton).

www.thewayoftracking.com

PREMISE: A YEAR BEFORE KIT CARSON SCOUTS

BY KYT LYN WALKEN

"We are fighting a war with no front lines, since the enemy hides among the people, in the jungles and mountains, and uses covertly border areas of neutral countries. One cannot measure [our] progress by lines on a map."—
General William C. Westmoreland

March 8th, 1965, 8.15 am.

Under Rear Admiral Donald W. Wulzen's command, the 7th Amphibious Force of the United States Navy began landing operations on the coast of South Vietnam Peninsula.

The considerable number of 3,500 Marines, belonging to the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), landed on the beaches in the nearbies of Đà Nẵng.

They were led by Brigadier General Frederick J. Karch and accompanied by landing craft, helicopters, jeeps and trucks.

The population welcomed them pretty cheerfully, and guerrilla insurgents made no opposition.

The Marines joined the 25,000 US military officers already deployed in Viet Nam.



Photo credits: eHistory

INTRODUCTION

BY KYT LYN WALKEN

"The cowards never start and the weak die along the way" Kit Carson

Named after the legendary Scout and Trapper Kit Carson, they namesake Scouts are also called Lực Lượng 66 or Tiger Scouts.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Marine Corps established a program which was intended to include local population. Specifically, America's desire was to encompass PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) combatants as well as former VC (Viet Cong) in order to make them highly qualified scouts for the infantry units.

Back to that time, those fighters gained a special name: Chiêu Hồi or Hồi Chánh Viên (loosely translated as *"members who have returned to the righteous side"*).

In fact, they were aligned with the South Vietnamese government.

It has been estimated that, in the years between 1963 and 1970, 150,000 PLAF (People's Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam) and around 2000 North Vietnamese soldiers actually defected.

Despite the increasing number of those combatants, the U.S. Marine Corps decided to train few individuals. They passed to history as Kit Carson Scouts, part of Force 66.



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Photo credits: Globalsecurity.org



Photo credits: Worthpoint

THE REASONS BEHIND THE PROGRAM

BY KYT LYN WALKEN

From one perspective, Kit Carson Scouts were undoubtedly defectors. Their rising anti-Communist feelings made them an immediate reason of hate by the Viet Cong.

But there was more than met the eye. Many of them suffered the massacre of quite all the members of their family.

Additionally, the PLAF made the coscription forced and the working conditions often unbearable. The pay was pretty poor too. They looked for a better life, for themselves and for their families.

"[...] I left the VC because I found life extremely difficult and unrewarding [...]"

"[...] It is impossible to be neutral in Viet Nam now. And when you choose sides it means you must kill or be killed. A lot of families are divided by war [...]"

Consequentially to that, a lot of soldiers left the VC.

The U.S. Army needed them, so their selection as Scouts inside rifle squads was quite natural.

In exchange of their loyalty, they were given of a good salary (5000 piastres a months, roughly 42 Dollars), proper medical care, reasonable food, assistance.

This resembled a lot the *"Hearts and Minds"* campaign promoted and conducted by the British Army during the Malaysian Emergency.

From another perspective, these individuals with strong beliefs could turn out to be excellent weapons against the enemy.

Beside that, the Hôi Chánh Viên had additional perks. They knew the language and the habits and, essential thing, they knew their territory.

They were familiar with hide-outs, with potential ambush-areas, and they were perfectly aware of the local fauna and flora and the threats related to it. Additionally, they were also aware of guerrilla tactics.

Hôi Chánh Viên, tout court, could turn out to be excellent soldiers, if properly trained.

THE REASONS BEHIND THE PROGRAM

BY KYT LYN WALKEN



Photo credits: Mud and Blood

"Kit Carson Scout, known as a Tiger Scout in the 9th Inf. Div., 1971."
Photo credits: Daniel Micheli, Pinterest



"Theatre arts professor Michael J. Arndt poses
with two Kit Carson Scouts in Vietnam in 1970.
By Anonymous"
Photo credits: Fillmore Gazette

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TIGER SCOUTS

BY KYT LYN WALKEN

Spring, 1968.

The 9th Division, made of 250 Tiger Scouts, was established.

Two Tiger Scouts were supposed to team up with each rifle platoon. Regardless of the efforts, a sort of skepticism sneaked inside the Americans. In first instance, the Kit Carson Scouts were seen as Communist defectors which surely needed to improve their fluency in English language.

Despite that, the recruiting campaign ended up to be a success, with around 400 Scouts in the whole Division,

The both parts were happy to work together. The U.S. Government paid them a salary - in fact, extremely low for the American standards - but still quite decent for the Vietnamese.

The roles recognized for the Tiger Scouts were strictly connected to their ability on field.

They became specialists in intelligence as well as in reconnaissance units and in locating booby traps, weapons caches and tunnels. Moreover, they were employed inside teams dedicated to prisoner of war interrogation. They used to wear American uniforms, and they were trained in U.S. Tactics and weapons.

The whole American rifle strength gained the best benefits of it. At that point, the units were able to move through the thick jungle led by experienced Scouts. They knew how to avoid ambush, and their Tracking skills made the difference quite daily. By the reading of tracks, in fact, they were aware of the safest ways to take, and they could prevent even enemies tactics.

Additionally, they knew how to treat with the locals, and, by that, to obtain precious intelligence on the Viet Cong.

In 1970, Tiger Scouts were a massive resource, counting 2500 active members (either ex PLAF either ex PAVN)

A Tiger Scouts trait which arose since the very beginning was their loyalty and their trustability.

The desertions were actually very rare.

They didn't spare themselves at all in fighting on enemy lines, trying to integrate themselves as best as they could with the Americans.

THE ROLE

BY KARL COLTHUP

The mission of the Kit Carson Scouts (KCS) was to use their specific knowledge and experience of the Viet Cong's (VC) tactics, techniques and procedures to help locate the positions of the VC and North Vietnamese Army (NVA), their stores of weapons and equipment and signs of activity in the Area of Operations (AO).

As the name implies, the KCS were primarily scouts for the units they were attached to, often working ahead of that unit as the eyes and ears of their Allied Nations forces.

In the scout/reconnaissance role the mission is:

1. Determine and report the strength, equipment, disposition, organisation and movement of the enemy forces. To determine the location of weapon systems and associated storage sites, command posts and key infrastructure of the enemy.
2. Perform reconnaissance and surveillance of specific sites, routes or areas, and determine the enemy's movement patterns.
3. Conduct tactical battle damage assessments.

The role of the KCS within the reconnaissance force was to act as both the eyes and ears of a patrol and to act as the bridge between cultures, in effect they were the ones to talk to the local population, gather information in general conversation and directly question the VC/NVA a members who either defected to the Allied Forces side (Hoi Chanh) or who had been captured.



Photo credits: Mud and Blood

THE ROLE

BY KARL COLTHUP

The role of the KCS within the patrol was an integral one, he underwent 28 days of extensive training that would make him an asset to the unit he would be sent to, this training included, Fieldcraft, field sketching, sensor use and emplacement, tactical questioning, weapons familiarisation and basic English.

The KCS would hold the nominal rank of sergeant in the Vietnamese military (Trung si) and be accorded the respect his rank bestowed.

Upon being assigned to their unit, they would be further trained in the tactics and procedures of the unit, the weapons and standards required. The gaining unit would then work to improve their standard of English and integrate the new KCS into the unit as quickly as possible.

Where possible, the new KCS would also show the soldiers of the gaining unit any new tactics or techniques being employed by the VC in the area, signs that indicate booby traps, signs that indicate route markings and also help bridge the cultural gap between east and west, acting as a cultural advisor, though not always successfully.

The KCS also faced problems when they arrived at the new unit, given their status as Hoi Chanh, they needed to build trust with the troops, not an easy task given the Allied troops distrust of the Vietnamese people as a whole due to the high infiltration rates of VC in the ranks of the ARVN and the Strikers in the camps.

KCS's needed to be very proactive in assisting the officers and NCO's of the unit in gathering information, assisting in the tactical questioning of prisoners and the civilian population, at all times striving to be as accurate as possible hiding nothing and using their cultural understanding to find deception in those being questioned.

Photo credits: Fold3



THE ROLE

BY KARL COLTHUP

When a Hoi Chanh was intercepted, the KCS would sit down with him or her and put them at ease, telling them of his own treatment when he surrendered and what life was really like for those in the south, as the propaganda they had been given painted a very bleak picture of what to expect should they fall into the hands of the South Vietnamese Government or Allied Forces.

During hearts and minds operations, a clinic might be set up to treat the local villagers for various injuries or sickness, and while being treated a KCS might strike up a conversation, his friendly manner would put the civilian at ease, the treatment of a villagers grandchild might induce a sense of gratitude that would then translate to sharing information of the location and movements of a local VC cadre or the presence of a senior officer of the NVA present in the area.

The down side to this was that information could be shared during one of these hearts and minds clinics, where personal grudges and vendettas could be settled by naming individuals or families in the village or district as VC or VC sympathisers and then see them rounded up by the Allied forces on false charges. The KCS had to be quite astute in his questioning and look to other members of the community to corroborate the information to save the misuse of the Allies for personal gain.

As a patrol enters a village, the KCS along with the patrol commander would talk to the village leaders, asking general questions about the area and day to day life, then more direct questions about VC activity in the area, the KCS would use his local and cultural knowledge to smooth the way with the villagers, but would also be looking for signs of deception or redirection.

KCS's were not immune to the pressures of the war and to the whims of their Allied forces leaders, more than once they were a little too zealous in their questioning methods, resorting to physical violence to gain information, resulting in injury or even death for the suspected VC that had been captured, but who denied their involvement or knowledge of the activities of the local VC forces.



Photo credits: My Vietnam Experience

THE PATROL

BY KARL COLTHUP

Photo credits: Alchetron



The six man patrol move cautiously through the thick jungle, Quoc the Kit Carson Scout was moving with the practiced easy stealth of a jungle cat, behind him Jacobs, the American Team Scout, followed his every movement watching his sector of responsibility for any signs of the VC in the area. Following behind was Mathews (Rifleman), Williams (Patrol Commander), Scott (Radio Operator), Reynolds (Rifleman/Medic).

As the patrol approached the trail ahead, Quoc slowly went down on one knee facing the trail, Jacobs moved silently up beside him, watching his arc, he asked “gái gì?” (kai zee? What’s up?)

Quoc slowly points up the trail, there is a small platform hidden in the tree, a trail watchers post, with a young man in his late teens sitting cross legged eating a bowl of rice, his SKS carbine resting against the tree trunk behind him... Jacobs nods and they slowly pull back to the rest of the team. Williams indicates he wants a prisoner, Quoc and Jacobs nod and slowly move through the jungle towards where the platform is in the tree, they know at some point the young trail watcher will need to leave his post to answer the call of nature, so they lay in wait for the inevitable.

After half an hour, the young man descends from his perch, his carbine slung over his shoulder, he can’t be more than 16 years old, he is young, but he is old enough to help liberate his people from the foreigners, like his father before him.

The young man places his carbine down against the tree, unfastens his trousers and squats down to relieve himself in that peculiar manner of the Vietnamese, all is quiet.

As he finishes up, he stands up, fastens his trousers and reaches for his rifle... but it’s not there, he searches frantically for it, if he loses it he’s in big trouble... then he hears a voice “Xin lỗi” (sin loy - excuse me), he spins around, eyes wide and he sees Quoc standing there dressed in his Tiger Stripe uniform and holding an American M1 Carbine... before he can make a sound, Jacobs has him on the ground, “đừng nói” (doong noy - don’t speak) Quoc admonishes him as they bundle him away to the rest of the waiting team.

THE PATROL

BY KARL COLTHUP

"Where are you from Anh?" The boy looks at him determined but frightened, "don't worry, they won't hurt you, I know, because I was once like you." Quoc pulls out a piece of paper, a Chiêu hồi (chew hoy - open arms) leaflet, see...

The boy is not convinced, "look, we will give you good food and medicine if you help us, but I need to ask you some questions..." Quoc gives him some food and water, "where are you from Anh?" "My Le" the boy answers... Quoc looks at him, "a long way from home" and frowns, "have you seen your mother recently?"

The boy shakes his head, his eyes full of tears, "không!" (Hom - no) he says. Quoc tells him if he helps them, that they can get him home to his village to see his family, but he must help them first.

Quoc asks, "who is here now Ahn?" "How many are there?" Which way are they travelling?" The boy looks up. "I don't know much, I just watch the trail for the foreigners" he sobs.

"That's ok... are they comrades from the North? Or are they Comrades from the local villages?"

The young man reply's, "Mostly Comrades from the North, but they have guides from the local villages" "there is a rest camp not far from here, about half a days walk, over that ridge" the boy points to the south east.

Quoc looks at Jacobs and Williams... "There is NVA here, they move along the trail guided by villagers from close by, he says there is a rest camp about half a day away over that ridge" he says pointing...

"Ok, we got what we need to know, let's get out of here and move to an LZ for pick up, Quoc, secure the prisoner, he's coming too..." says Williams, "Jacobs, get us out of here, the LZ is about 3000m North west of here, just over that ridge line."

Jacobs nods and slowly moves out, Quoc helps the young boy to his feet and they patrol towards the LZ.

Williams is pleased, he's accomplished his mission and acquired a prisoner for the intelligence guys. Quoc keeps a close eye on his new charge, keeps him calm and ensures he's docile for the remainder of the patrol. As they await extraction, he calmly explains what will happen to him now, and what he needs to do so he can go home to his village...

THE AFTERMATH

BY KARL COLTHUP

During the war, many Hoi Chanh were recruited into the allied forces, they were for the most part well treated and valued members of the units they were assigned to, often going above and beyond what was expected of them, knowing that their families were as much a target for the VC as they were, it was not unheard of for a KCS to be informed that a member of his family had been killed in retaliation for his helping the Allies against his former comrades.

It was also the case that the Hoi Chanh who was recruited and trained, then assigned to units were in fact members of the North Vietnamese Intelligence services too, using their position to gather any and all intelligence on unit activities and operations, acting as “sleeper” agents to be activated later as the war turned, a number of these agents surfaced in the last days of the war, having shed their ARVN uniforms and reappearing in the uniform of a Major or Colonel of the NVA and directing units towards vulnerable targets as the Allies pulled out of a sector.

After the war, many KCS found themselves on the losing side, some were rounded up and summarily executed as “traitors” others were sent to reeducation camps for many years before being released, they and their families to never be permitted to hold any position in the new administration of the country, even today many of their families are forbidden to become government officials or obtain higher education allowing them to work in respectable fields, a lucky few escaped to the west as refugees, in the dying days of the war some Allied troops did their best to get the KCS out of the country, some quietly slipped away into the throngs of refugees moving along the roads as many of the ARVN troops did also, a number held out for as long as they could, their only hope of survival being to fight to the end, they knew all too well what capture meant for them... a number took their own lives rather than face the wrath of their former comrades.

Photo credits: Alchetron



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