

## ACE OF SPADES DEADLY

# GIs Turn Superstitions To Their Own Advantage

By TOM TIEDE

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NEW YORK. — The general rule for success in counter-guerrilla warfare is that it takes a sneak to catch a sneak. And fortunately for the United States' efforts in Viet Nam combat GIs are getting to be as sneaky as anybody in Southeast Asia.

Take the men of the 25th Infantry as example.

Some time ago they determined that the ace of spades, long an ominous symbol in the poker-playing nations of the world, is even more so among some of the enemy. The Viet Cong, they conceived, have a thing about the card and avoid it like a mortar shell.

SO THE men wrote to the U.S. Playing Card Co. in Cincinnati for "approximately 1,000 aces of spades" in order to use them as a "psychological weapon" in areas where they wanted to put the whammy on the infiltrating Communists. Then more men wrote. Then more.

The result has been that the company now sends out many

thousands of such spades "free of charge" for any warfront GI requesting. And so many have been distributed that the indication is whole units of card-carrying soldiers are shuffling through rice paddies like river-boat gamblers in jungle boots.

Does it work? The 25th Infantry says it goes.

The Viet Cong, of course, aren't commenting.

BUT ONE thing is certain, Cagney American troopers not only thought up the card trick, they indirectly thought up the game that goes with it. Until Yanks brought them into the country, there was no recorded proof of any native fear of the ace of spades.

"We are a superstitious people," says Vietnamese United Nations assistant Bhan Huy Bach, "but not of playing cards. At least not before the Americans came."

And now?

"Perhaps some Viet Cong do fear the symbol now. They tend to fear all U.S. innovations because so many of them explode. So it could be that the enemy has become afraid of the ace

of spades... simple because they just don't know what it is."

WHY THE Reds fear the card is, however, academic. The point is they do. And, further, they show signs of fearing an increasing amount of such GI chicanery.

The "black box" is another example. It is a small empty carton, usually fashioned with several impressive wires. Some U.S. Special Forces types have used it to considerable advantage when interrogating captured Communist guerrillas.

They will question the prisoner.

And he will refuse to answer.

They will threaten the prisoner.

And he will shrug anew.

Finally, the captive is heeled up to the strange black box. He is told that if he does not talk the container has power to blow his head off. Thus warned, thus woodshed, the victim normally begins to chatter up a storm of information.

"EVERYBODY," explains Bach, "is superstitious of losing his head."

One other bewitching artifice that has worked on the battlefield has been a Polaroid camera. Some Viet Cong, especially those from ardently super-



stitious mountain areas, believe that cameras imprison their sacred spirits. Hence, our side has learned that to tear up a photo will often tear down the captive's reluctance to cooperate.

There are other examples. Certain guerrillas wear amulets to ward off American evil, while others believe Yanks have a poison touch: to take the tal-

isman from the former or to simply touch the latter is often the most effective weapon in a soldier's arsenal.

For years Americans have tried vainly to overcome the superstitious fear many backwoods Vietnamese have of them. Now they are simply taking advantage of the same existing situation among some of the enemy.

## Viet Nam the Main Issue in Demo Runoff