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1. Reference: AR 1-26, 4 November 1966, subject as above.
2. Transmitted herewith is the debriefing report of Major General S. W. Koster, former Commanding General, Americal Division, USARV.
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2 June 1968

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Country: Republic of Vietnam

Debrief Report by: Major General [REDACTED]

Duty Assignment: Commanding General, Americal Division, USARV

Inclusive Dates: September 1967 - June 1968 [u], (A)

Date of Report: 2 June 1968

10 S. W. Koster

S. W. Koster

S. W. KOSTER
Major General, USA
Commanding

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PART I - INTRODUCTION

The Americal Division's area of responsibility extends approximately 155 kilometers north to south, and between 16 and 55 kilometers east to west. This territory encompasses the three southern provinces of the ICTZ, namely two southern districts (Que Son and Duc Duc) of Quang Nam Province and Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces.

The topography, inland from the shoreline or the South China Sea, is relatively flat until it meets irregularly with the central mountain range. The economy is based largely on rice production, the fishing industry and numerous independent cottage type industries. The population is approximately 1.2 million most of whom are ethnically Vietnamese. The rest are Chinese, Cambodian and Montagnard (a tribal people inhabiting the central highlands). Generally, the people are provincial in their attitudes, judging events from the viewpoint of a "private little world". Political events and personalities are important only insofar as their influence is felt in a specific village, hamlet or family. To the average family, the local governments are unknowns and unknowns are to be treated with indifference. Ideologies, such as democracy and communism, are abstractions which are meaningless until the ideology becomes associated with tangible events or practices, e.g., conscription, taxation. However, since the arrival of the Americal Division in the ICTZ in April 1967, this outlook is being changed, to a degree, by the affluent treatment rendered by the Division in terms of employment, food, clothing, shelter and safety.

PART II - DESCRIPTION OF THE ENEMY

ORGANIZATION: The enemy forces in the Americal Division area are categorized into four major types: NVA, Main Force, Local Force and Irregulars. In reality there is little distinction between the NVA and MF units; therefore, these two are normally considered as one.

The NVA/MF units as opposed to the LF and Irregulars are characterized by their superior firepower and willingness to engage allied military forces, but usually at a time and place of their own choosing. The majority of these forces in the Americal area prefer to operate in at least regimental strength. A particular technique of these units is their unerring belief in thorough reconnaissance of an objective before, during and after operations to determine the reaction and tactics of friendly units. Perhaps the major combat tactic of the NVA units in the area is the "countersweep". In carrying out this tactic, these units determine, through reconnaissance and other intelligence efforts, where friendly forces plan to conduct sweep or offensive search operations. The units then move into these areas and prepare extensive breastworks and fortifications (often this is only an improvement of existing defenses since they have operated throughout the entire Americal area for a number of years) and wait to engage friendly forces. On occasions a limited attack will be made by a small unit which then quickly withdraws in an attempt to lure friendly forces into a pre-selected killing zone. These units, though well-armed with automatic individual weapons, heavy AA weapons, mortars, recoilless rifles and even rockets, are often held at a standstill by logistical limitations. In order to sustain a long operation

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supplies have to be carried in by foot and sampan and placed throughout the contemplated area beforehand, thereby subjecting these caches to discovery and destruction by friendly forces. Due to his lack of closein safe areas and rapid logistical means, these enemy units are normally unable to sustain an operation for more than seven to ten days.

COMMAND, CONTROL AND TACTICS: Local Force units throughout the Americal area vary in size from platoon to battalion organizations (sapper and infantry) which are controlled by either the separate district or province command committees. The primary mission of these units is to maintain VC control throughout their respective operating areas which they attempt to do through destruction of the RD program, annihilation of regional and popular force units, the harassment and "wearing down" of allied military units and indoctrination of the local populace. Although limited in their armament, seldom having weapons larger than the 82mm mortar or 57mm recoilless rifle (and few of these), these units are ingenious in devising field expedient methods of employing almost any type of ordnance against friendly forces. These units normally employ the "hit and run" or raid tactic and the ambush and are more of a fleeting target than the NVA. Rarely will they conduct a prolonged siege or attack. These units have the advantage of being thoroughly familiar with the terrain and populace in their respective operating areas and have the ability to "melt into the masses or countryside". They are continuously on the move, rarely staying in one location for more than a few days at a time. They are able to obtain shelter, food and sometimes medical supplies from the local populace even though coercion is needed at times. These units are capable of operating in cell, squad or platoon size to inflict maximum damage and casualties on friendly units while subjecting themselves to minor losses. Since their role is not confrontation with major allied forces, they can be almost completely annihilated and still continue their harassing role by employing mines and boobytraps, sniping, mortaring and exerting maximum pressure on the populace.

The Irregular forces are the largest group of enemy forces in the Americal area and are organized along hamlet, village and district levels. Principal control of these units lies within the party organization. Their major missions include terrorism, sabotage, espionage, collection of taxes, propaganda of the populace, construction of fortifications and assisting organized enemy military units in transportation, combat or intelligence activities. These units may operate from a two or three man cell, to harass the movement of friendly troops by sniper fire, to a platoon or company size unit to transport supplies or screen for active enemy military forces. These forces also provide valuable intelligence by positioning personnel in an area of friendly operations and by infiltrating trained members, both male and female, into allied bases and installations. These forces experience very few logistical problems since they are a part of the populace. In addition, the light armament which they use eases the logistical burdens that confront the regular forces. They too are ingenious in the use of captured, discarded or dud ordnance. They are also quite adept at infiltrating these munitions into GVN and allied controlled areas. These Irregular Forces are the backbone of the party organization

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PART III - LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNTERINSURGENCE ACTIONS

CIVIL AND MILITARY ORGANIZATION: The civil government in the Americal Division's area of responsibility is delegated to military officers, despite the fact that the normal government structure at district, province and region was originally designed to be headed by civilian officials. The appointment of military officers to head the civil government is justified when viewed in terms of VC/NVA activities and threats, the necessity for security of the people, and the conduct of military operations to offset VC/NVA forces.

Within the Americal Division's area of responsibility, the Province Chiefs of Quang Nam, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai, all of whom are military officers, are government appointed officials responsible for the enforcement of laws and general management of all provincial services, which includes socio-economic programs, urban and rural development, and political affairs. Additionally, Province Chiefs are responsible for security, military operations, and revolutionary development measures in quasi-contested areas falling within their provincial boundaries. To assist them in the execution of their responsibilities, the central or Saigon government has delegated these provinces as legal entities possessing autonomous budgets, public property, and full jurisdiction over the inhabitants of their provinces. This means that each Province Chief has the sole authority to channel funds as deemed appropriate, and to conscript personnel to provide the regional and popular forces considered necessary for security and revolutionary development. Apart from this authority, the Province Chiefs of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces are supported by uniformed forces from the Second ARVN Division. Normally, each province receives one maneuvering regiment as a ready reaction force to counter VC/NVA activities. The remaining regiment is assigned a revolutionary development mission and is equally split between these provinces. Once having been attached to a province in a ready reaction role and/or a revolutionary development role, the Province Chiefs assume full operational control of the attached forces, less logistics. This arrangement, in the past, has created chain of command shortcomings and often results in the Province Chiefs not fully utilizing attached forces for fear of fallout from the Division Commander. Despite this arrangement, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces have displayed the unique ability to use the forces from the Second ARVN Division with considerable success.

AVAILABLE FORCES: The GVN military forces consist of popular forces, regional forces and regular Army forces. The primary mission of the RF, PF forces is the protection of revolutionary developments, villages, and static defense positions such as bridges. The ARVN forces are basically equipped as American forces, with limited mobility as a result of insufficient helicopter support. These ARVN forces operate on limited operations in the vicinity of heavily populated areas and perform as the regular defense and attack force in those areas where there are few main force or north Vietnamese regular forces. The military proficiency of these forces has increased considerably in the last ten months. The RF/PF have taken over almost all static defensive positions along QLL and the ARVN have begun full scale battalion size operations away from their camp areas. This increased operational capability of the GVN forces has been a result of the training

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assistance provided, and the extensive number of joint US/GVN military operations. These joint operations have been successful in instilling confidence in the Vietnamese soldier and also serve as a training ground for the leaders.

INTELLIGENCE AND COUNTERINTELLIGENCE: GVN paramilitary forces, such as the Popular Forces, Rural Development Cadre, Combat Youth, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, National Police Field Force and others, have become fairly proficient in extracting tactical intelligence as a "spin-off" of their normal police type functions of infrastructure elimination. Determination of the adequacy of CI training of these organizations is extremely difficult. Most GVN agencies concerned with collection experience no difficulty in recruiting agents. In fact, the quantity of the information reported far outweighs the quality. The agencies consistently exaggerate enemy strengths and far too often rate the report much too highly. Far too often we have found that personal animosity instead of enemy affiliation plays too important a role in determining a detainee's status.

CIVIC ACTION: The central theme for civic actions within the Provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Tin and Quang Ngai is "Revolutionary Development". The term "Revolutionary Development" has been adopted to describe the entire range of civic actions which will bring the provinces to a state of economic, political and sociological stability. It encompasses not only the building of the provinces, but also improving living conditions and work methods of all the people. The military forces attached to the provinces play an indispensable supporting role in terms of security, for only under relatively secure conditions can progress be made. All measures of revolutionary development are designed to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the people. Basically, this program has been very successful in the Americal Division's area of responsibility in view of the Division's successful clearing and securing operations.

PART IV - AMERICAL DIVISION OPERATIONS

OPERATIONS: The Americal Division Headquarters is located at CHU LAI, about 30 miles south of DANANG, on the coast. The Division area of operations is approximately 155 kms long, and is about 55 kms wide at it's widest point. The area has been divided into one tactical area of operational responsibility surrounding the CHU LAI air base, and three areas of operation lying north and south of CHU LAI. The Division has deployed three brigades and one cavalry squadron within these areas.

Emphasis in the Americal Division has been placed on the flexible employment of forces to meet a normally fluid enemy situation. Maximum use of the flexibility of the ROAD organization has been made. Depending upon the situation the Division has controlled as many as five brigades, and brigades within the Division have had as many as six and as few as two battalions assigned to operations. In addition, the Division cavalry squadron has been employed in an economy of force role in a brigade sized AO. By thus employing the cavalry in favorable terrain, a significant increase in combat power in the rugged mountain terrain is possible and when the enemy has chosen to emerge from

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the mountains a mass of armored combat power can be swiftly moved to defeat them.

The enemy situation in the Division AO has been a very fluid one. As a consequence, rapid shifting of battalion and company size combat forces, with artillery support, has been the rule, rather than the exception. Maximum use of the mobility gained from the helicopter has resulted in combat assaults of platoon to multi-battalion size. The principle of mass has been the most important reason for this, as the VC enemy will fade into the jungles when located unless he can be immediately fixed in position, where our superior fire power has its greatest effect. This mobility is still required when confronting NVA forces, however he is more stubborn and will fight from prepared positions. Just as massing ground forces is the primary tactic used within the Division, massed fire support is needed to provide adequate fire power to support those forces. Consequently, each brigade has an assigned artillery battalion. The Cavalry squadron has a direct support battery of 155mm howitzers. Within the brigades, each battery of the artillery battalion normally operates with a specific infantry battalion. This relationship is maintained whenever possible, but is not inflexible. However, when a battery is taken from the infantry battalion for use in another area, it is returned as soon as feasible to the same battalion from which it was taken.

The advantages in employing the artillery - infantry in this manner are considerable. The fact that each brigade has the same direct support battalion, and each infantry battalion has the same direct support battery allows for close, swift and accurate coordination. Also, when the brigade or any of its battalions are deployed elsewhere, the artillery and infantry moves as a team. The dividends derived in trust and confidence between the supported unit and the artillery are substantial.

The concept of tailoring of forces does not stop at the brigade level, however. As the situation dictates, a battalion may be reinforced by one, two or more companies from other battalions within the brigade. This allows the Division to maintain its presence in an area with few enemy forces, while at the same time employing a battalion (+) in a heavily infested area.

In keeping with the Division's concept of flexible response, the fire support bases throughout the Division AO are kept to a minimum and are austere manned. Usually, each battalion will have only one fire support base.; The fire support bases are also located where they are mutually supporting, so that any fire support base within the brigade will be in artillery range of at least one other fire support base. Forces to man the fire support base usually consist of the battalion headquarters, the artillery battery and up to one infantry company. The other three infantry companies remain on operations in the battalion AO.

The final result of the division's employment of forces is a lean, mobile fighting force, capable of rapid reaction and movement - and confident in its capabilities and its support. The maximum number of combat forces are

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fielded to find and fix enemy forces. Once found and fixed, overwhelming force can be airlifted to the area to destroy the enemy, without significantly weakening the Division's posture in other areas. The widespread deployment of our forces allows for almost continuous surveillance of enemy lines of communication and base areas, and no enemy area in the Division AO is safe from harassing and interdicting artillery fires.

As a result, the enemy finds himself continuously on the move, and continuously taking casualties. His resupply problems are increased, and his morale is decreasing. Recruits are becoming increasingly hard to find. Even more significant, the enemy has been unable to launch a single, successful attack anywhere within the Division AO. Through the Americal Division's use of massed troops and firepower, flexibly employed on targets of greatest opportunity, the enemy has suffered severe losses, and the GVN influence within the Division AO has steadily increased.

INTELLIGENCE: The effectiveness of our counterintelligence measures is gradually increasing. Through interrogation of prisoners of war, civil defendants, and CI suspects, a blacklist of VC infrastructure personnel is being compiled. Information derived from informants and acquired through liaison with other US and GVN agencies contributes to this blacklist. As specific targets are identified and isolated, operations are being mounted to neutralize members of the VC infrastructure. Increased emphasis has been placed on the screening of indigenous employees and controls established to restrict their movements and access. Intelligence nets have been established and are being expanded to provide early warning tactical information concerning enemy movements and concentrations and information concerning VC infrastructure personnel. Installation informants have been recruited to provide information concerning the activities of the indigenous labor force. A continuing effort is being made to expand the number of contacts among the civilian populace to increase the information sources available to this Division. An active program of liaison with GVN officials at hamlet and village level has been established to provide a faster flow of information; however, communications remains a handicap to the rapid reporting of intelligence from Vietnamese sources. The lack of modern communications in the Vietnamese countryside and the difficulty on travel frequently delays the timely dissemination of intelligence. The Americal Division has utilized SLAR (side looking airborne radar), IR (infrared), VR (visual reconnaissance) OPs (observation posts) patrols and APDs (Airborne personnel detector) to locate the enemy. We have had particular success with the airborne sensor equipment. Because it is more readily available to us, we have relied heavily on the APD to locate or confirm enemy presence. Probably the most dependable and timely intelligence we utilize is our Special Intelligence which we rely upon rather heavily in planning our operations. The long range reconnaissance patrols are beginning to prove their value and their worth will increase as they gain additional experience. We have found that the PWs and detainees we interrogate provide us with information that is somewhat dated. It is valuable information though, since it allows particular enemy units to be identified and traced. The quantity of agent reports far exceeds the quality of the reports. We find that most agents do a great deal of exaggerating concerning enemy strengths.

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There is a continuing program in effect to evaluate these reports and to strive for an up-grading in the quality. Throughout the division area, OPs are manned in an attempt to locate enemy movement and concentrations. In addition, there are several OPs whose primary mission is to observe the rocket belt and provide early-warning of rocket attacks. In summary, all Americal operations are based on a reaction to the enemy presence in a particular area or to his impending presence. Many of our operations are designed as spoiling attacks to prevent the enemy from leaving his base and/or staging areas and to destroy him before he has the chance to thoroughly set up the battle area.

LOGISTICS: During the formative stages of Task Force Oregon, there were initial shortages of equipment and supplies which somewhat hampered our combat operations. With the formation of the Americal Division and the cure of these initial growing pains, logistics support to the division has never effected adversely our offensive operations.

In planning for any operations, our objective in the logistics field has been to insure that sufficient supplies, especially Class V, are either on site at the appropriate fire base or in close proximity to the combat troops. Within our area of operations, it is not unusual for major roads to be impassable for up to 24 hours, either through heavy rains or enemy action against key bridges or culverts. Because of this, we stockpile sufficient supplies well forward for at least five days of heavy contact. The Americal Division has always had sufficient heavy airlift available to meet emergency resupply requirements, and because stocks are always placed well forward, a minimum lift effort is required to meet immediate tactical requirements.

The Americal Division has provided logistical support to as many as five brigades at one time. We have had sufficient logistical personnel to provide this support, due mainly to our having not only the major elements of a normal division support command, but also the three support battalions which are organic to our three separate infantry brigades. Brigade support battalions afford additional logistical control headquarters which relieve somewhat the staff of the Division Support Command, so that Division Support Command can provide the required support to other division troops and to any attached or OPCON units.

It might be well at this time to address the logistical organizations of our three separate infantry brigades. With these brigades having their own organic support organizations, we gain considerable flexibility in being able to move brigades with ease anywhere within the I Corps Tactical Zone. A recent example was the move of the 196th Infantry Brigade to Camp Evans, some 165 miles to our North. The 196th was able to move on short notice without any appreciable decrease in the logistical support provided them when they became operational at their new location. The brigade simply moved with the major elements of its own 8th Support Battalion. Had Americal Division been a normal ROAD division, it is probable that this move would not have gone as smoothly as it did, and most probably, logistics support to other division units which remained in the Chu Lai area would have suffered somewhat.

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This flexibility and ease of movement of major units is gained at the expense of some personnel spaces. Support battalions of the brigades produce duplication of logistical efforts, in that the support battalions are all performing essentially the same functions, which in turn, are also being carried out by the division support command. In my opinion, the cost of this duplication of effort is more than offset by the flexibility which we enjoy.

Americal Division has its logistical problems, but these have not been serious enough to effect the outcome of our combat operations. One continuing problem is the shortage of repair parts required to remove equipment from deadline. In the main, we use Redball requisitions and make maximum use of our Materiel Readiness Expeditors at Qui Nhon Depot. Because of our proximity to the depot, we are often able to reduce order and ship time by using organic vehicles or aircraft to pick up these repair parts.

A second problem, and again this is continuous, is the long lead time required to replace major items of equipment lost through combat action. Armored personnel carriers, M48 Tanks, radios, and crew served weapons are often destroyed by enemy mines. Replacement is slow, and our combat power is reduced to some degree. As of this date, the 1/1st Cavalry Squadron is short 12 of 75 APC's, 4 of 27 M48 Tanks, and 20 of 140 radios. Similar shortages, but of lesser magnitude, exist within other units of the Division.

CIVIC ACTION and CIVIL AFFAIRS: The Americal Division's civic action program is divided into two major groups, short-range, high impact projects and long-range, high impact self-help reconstruction projects. All of the Americal Division's civic action projects are designed to develop rapport, increase the welfare of the local populace, and to strengthen and enhance the image of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam in the eyes of the people.

In the execution of the Division's civic action program, sound guidelines have been established concerning the acceptance of projects by the maneuver elements of the division, although local circumstances may impose other standards. Basically, all projects must originate from the needs of the local populace and be approved at district, province and the division; projects must have a fairly short completion time or phases that provide frequent opportunity to evaluate their effectiveness; projects should be observable, measurable, or tangible and they should also lend themselves to publicity designed to inspire emulation by other hamlets and villages; and the results of projects should make visible to the public eye the benefits that spring out of association of the military and civil government with credit for projects attributed to local military/civil government.

Equally important, the Americal Division's civic action projects are designed to complement and not augment the Government's "Revolutionary Development Program". This is to say, then, that all programmed projects being constructed by the Americal Division's maneuver elements are outside of the government's programmed area of pacification.

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In the area of civil affairs, the Americal Division strives to maintain rapport with the local government and populace by establishing liaison and coordination with appropriate hamlet, village, district and province officials, to include MACV advisory personnel. Here, the intent is to furnish assistance and support to local officials and populations or even to the assumption of responsibility for the exercise of some or all of the functions of the local government in areas of intensive combat or natural disaster. Basically, the Americal Division's civil affairs mission is administered on a functional basis with areas of specialization arranged into categories generally adaptable to the diverse socio-economic ramifications of the civilian communities. Among the major subordinate areas in which the Americal Division has extended unique services are public health, commodities/resources control, transportation and the movement of supplies, refugee assistance, civil employment, claims and indemnities, mobile training teams, and measures to minimize the effects upon the civilian population caused or which would be caused by VC/NVA initiated actions.

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