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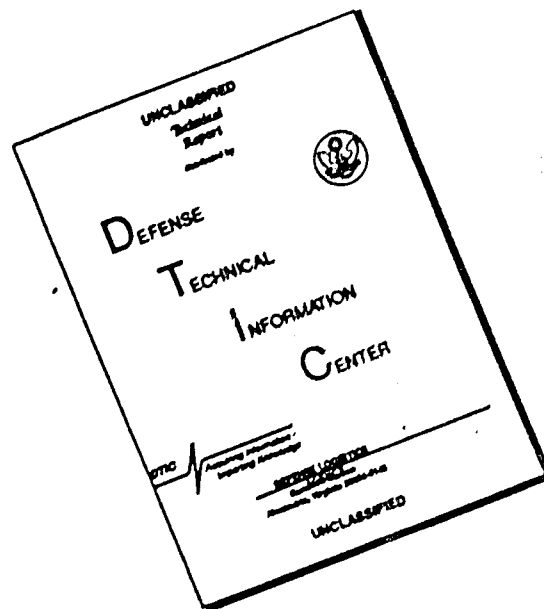
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DAAG-PAP-A (M) (25 Apr 72)

DAFD-OTT 72B002

9 May 1972

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report BG/DeWitt C./Armstrong CG,
US Army Forces MR 2 (U) (72B002)

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1. Reference: AR 525-14, subject, Senior Officer Debriefing Program (U)
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2. Transmitted herewith is the report of BG Dewitt C. Armstrong, subject
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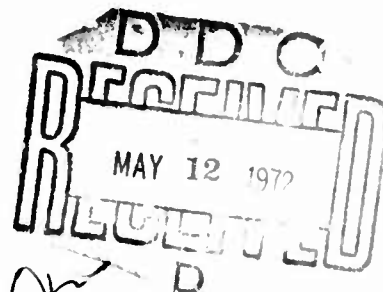
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Country: Republic of Vietnam

Debrief Report By: DeWitt C. Armstrong, III, Brigadier General, USA

Duty Assignment: Commanding General, US Army Forces MR 2

Inclusive Dates: 15 May 1971 - 3 Nov 1971

Date of Report: 2 Nov 1971

1. (C) INTRODUCTION

a. On 16 May 1971, new ground was broken with the appointment of FSR-1 John Paul Vann as COMUSMACV's leader of all US military and civilian activity in MR 2. What had previously been HQ IFFORCEV was designated Second Regional Assistance Group, or SRAG, and Mr. Vann's title was Director SRAG. COMUSMACV's LOI named me as Deputy for Military Functions and as CG, US Army Forces MR 2.

b. The two main mission areas of SRAG can be broadly characterized as Vietnamization and conduct of a prompt, orderly withdrawal. The Director concerned himself primarily with the former, and desired that I concentrate on the latter. Not only was no new headquarters or staff group set up, but on a de facto basis the former IFFORCEV and the USAAG, II Corps were blended together into one HQ SRAG, with Forward at Pleiku and Main at Nha Trang, while both were drawn down in size. With the turn-over of the last US AO in MR 2 and departure of all SRAG forces except advisors and aviation, the Main then closed on the Forward.

c. This report is therefore concerned with a half-year's experience commanding and withdrawing US Forces which supported Vietnamization, but with only indirect involvement in the process of Vietnamization itself.

2. (C-NF) RVNAF

a. Certain observations about Vietnamese forces are nonetheless inescapable.

b. By all odds the greatest problem in MR 2 in Spring 1971 was territorial security, and especially the deficient performance of RF and PF. The same is true in Fall 1971. The Director has gotten LTG Dzu, CG II Corps, to concentrate main effort on this area, and activity has noticeably quickened. Security is already better in Binh Dinh Province. But the results, in terms of actual and perceived security, come very slowly.

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c. ARVN forces still possess major weaknesses. Poor or listless leadership, not only at junior levels, is widespread, and aggressiveness is found among only a few ARVN units. Still, one sees many signs of accumulating competence and confidence, especially in training centers, ALCs, armor, and artillery. An ominous problem is the lack of mutual respect and cooperation between ARVN and VNAF. There is much casual disregard of fundamentals of information security, not least by ARVN Generals and Colonels.

3. (C-NF) ROK FORCES

a. The two ROK divisions operating in MR 2 are extremely effective at what they undertake to do. Their discipline is superb, their leadership skilled and eager, their equipment beautifully maintained, and their firebases immaculate. They plan most meticulously for field operations, gather intelligence quite intensively, and emphasize local security; hence, their casualties are very, very few and the enemy's are many, with the ROK's having the highest ratios of weapons captured.

b. But they are inflexible. Once set on a course of action, they will doggedly persist. A sudden, fleeting tactical opportunity, where US troops would swiftly adapt and pile on, the ROK's will let pass.

c. The ROK's do not readily cooperate with RVNAF. Many ROK officers feel more contempt than sympathy for ARVN, and do not always hide it. Toward territorial forces their attitude is perhaps more one of stern indulgence. But basically the ROK's are tenaciously fixed on doing their own thing, and they seem to view Vietnamese involvement as most likely to yield trouble and casualties. They refuse to let anyone in RVNAF in on operations plans, although they tell US officers freely enough.

d. The ROK leaders have profound respect and indeed affection toward the US Army. Their field operations and some fire base supply depend upon US helicopter support; they are most grateful for this support and keenly sensitive to changes in it. It has paid dividends for us to keep the ROK's fully in the picture about helicopter allocations, maintenance status, and so forth; as professional soldiers they can easily understand facts like weather, priorities, drawdown, and the like. They habitually compute their helicopter requirements woodenly and by the book but they readily accept it when shown the way that fewer aircraft can fully achieve the desired support of their tactical plan. But one must give them the supporting facts, not just the answer, and one must avoid getting in their business tactically. They neither need nor want advisors, especially for tactical operations. There is intense pride in ROK operational maturity, yet they listen carefully for praise from US professionals.

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e. During the past four or five months the ROK leadership has been much more forthcoming, especially in responding to US requests for ROK operations. They have mounted a good many more multi-battalion operations in enemy base areas. They have taken a more active part in securing Cam Ranh, Tuy Hoa, and the Qui Nhon complex, and in generating reaction forces for use during expected high points. But they do these things methodically, not instantly.

f. ROK forces would be able, and perhaps willing, to secure within their AO's the perimeters of US Army aviation elements and, conceivably, US service support units as well. They have long had ROK platoon and company size forces integrated into US perimeter security, and hence under US OPCON, at Lane and Dong Ba Thien. The principle has recently been discussed with ROK leadership, in the context of a description of Increment IX changes and hypothetical future possibilities. Without any speculation about timing, the point was raised that within any given strength ceiling, to have US perimeter guards would mean having fewer aviation and service forces - or, conversely, to have ROK perimeter security forces could permit a force mix with more aviation and service troops. Of course commitment was neither asked nor offered at our level, but the ROK leaders accepted the concept quite readily. It would be quite consistent with their recent pattern of closer cooperation with US forces. On the ROK side, no in-country decision to do this could be made except by LTG Lee Sae Ho in Saigon, for he keeps a tight string on his highly capable Nha Trang deputy, MG Kang Won Chae.

g. More important still, however, is the question of ROK-ARVN coordination and cooperation. The US has always orchestrated, and indeed prompted, such ROK-ARVN contacts as there have been. The absence of a US headquarters in Nha Trang, and ROK reluctance to have senior representation in Pleiku, threaten to attenuate the already skimpy contact. A major effort has been under way for some time to bring the ROK leadership into closer contact with ARVN II Corps. Results are modest to date, but the need may soon become severe. A complication is that for the inflexible ROK's, adaptation to the fact of civilian leadership for the US in MR 2 does not come naturally. The one positive element in this picture is Gen Dzu's recent promotion. It will be much easier for ROK Field Command to accept a degree of leadership from a Lieutenant General than from the same Ngo Dzu as Major General.

4. (C-NF) U.S. TROOP DISCIPLINE

a. The state of discipline among US troops is generally appalling. It is now improving at a rather good rate, but it has a great distance to rise before it can be termed acceptable. Where the immediate mission of the unit is concerned - artillerymen shooting, or a slick company flying, or a land clearing company knocking down trees - people

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pitch in zestfully and with initiative. To get anything else done adequately still requires an inordinate amount of leader attention. Seldom does one find soldiers searching out the desires or objectives of the chain of command so these can be attained. Anything the Army wants beyond mission performance is widely regarded as "hassle".

b. NCO control is at once the problem and most of the answer. A great many NCO's had simply stacked arms, for various reasons, and were not discharging their responsibilities. They had abdicated leadership, and the young soldier was basically cast adrift. The reasons are no doubt many, and not all can be attacked. Some have been. Here and there was a tinge of actual fear, lest exercise of control produce assault and injury, or even death. The virtual elimination within this command of assaults upon authority has laid this to rest. The feeling that "the system", especially its military justice component, was not backing them up was all too general, whether justified or not. Direct challenge, plus faster, surer administration, has shrunk this to minor dimensions. Insistence upon use of the chain of command, especially at its junior levels, has perhaps done the most. At any rate, more NCO's are exercising more control now, and good consequences are discernible everywhere and vivid here and there.

5. (C-NF) DRUG ABUSE PROGRAM

a. Heroin use, although sharply declining, nevertheless remains the worst problem a commander faces in MR 2 today. Access to heroin, though made harder in recent months, is still relatively easy. Use is hard to detect and harder to prove. Users proselytize actively, and many young soldiers are susceptible to their enticement.

b. Initial assessment of the heroin situation yielded several conclusions which underlie the suppression program. Most important was that a contagion existed, as heroin users drew others into the same vortex. The state of leader knowledge about heroin use and what to do about it was very low. Heroin use had come to be a recognized aspect of the Vietnam environment, and one found here and there almost a laissez-faire attitude toward it. Some young officers felt that most men on heroin could do their jobs perfectly well, and thus they detected and dealt with only the most blatant cases. Execution of what was then called "amnesty" involved much well-meaning but fruitless effort at local, usually battalion, level. Participating widely were "former" addicts, who if they did not directly induce further drug abuse usually did so indirectly through their cultural bias. Soldiers who really wanted help were not attracted, and success rates were dismally poor.

c. The basic approach adopted characterized any use of heroin as illegal, harmful, and absolutely intolerable. The entire chain of command was engaged, on a relentlessly continuous basis, to identify and deal with

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users. Intense but methodical effort was devoted to achieving sound rehabilitation programs. Stress was put on swift elimination under AR 635-212 of those users unwilling to quit. The aim was to reduce quickly the source of infection before other soldiers became users.

d. As these emphases gathered momentum, spectacular reinforcement came with the June announcement of urinalysis testing. This has been the major factor in reversing the trend of heroin use. Everyone's attention was gained, and some users promptly undertook to come down. Above all, there was positive motivation for the young soldier: by staying off, he could go home on schedule. The successive extensions of the urinalysis program have each added impetus, and when it can be fully introduced, the periodic 100% unit check will help the most of all.

e. The Tuy Hoa Drug Rehabilitation Center began to produce sound results by taking only volunteers, for a full two weeks, and leading them to join us - with stress on character and athletics rather than on psychedelic surroundings and hip-ness. Recognizing that rehabilitation is a long process, a system of follow-through was introduced. In virtually every case the man returned to his original unit, since transfer is another form of escape, just like heroin, and would usually jeopardize not help the man's chance for lasting rehabilitation. But the man was escorted back to his unit by an NCO Counselor who was charged with responsibility for the man's continuing rehabilitation. These counselors were preferably Staff Sergeants but in any case mature NCO's of strong character, who had volunteered for and taken a 5-7 day OJT at the Drug Rehabilitation Center, learning about drugs, about rehabilitation, and about the individual each would thereafter counsel.

f. An encouraging snowball effect soon occurred. A man returned to his company drug-free and was seen to be getting continuing attention and help; in the next week or two, another 2-5 men from his company (and, in one case, eight) would volunteer for rehabilitation. Undoubtedly the pressure of 212 eliminations aided this, but the main attraction was the soldiers' recognition that the Army was actively helping its people, and that the help succeeded. Meanwhile, a very important spin-off benefit occurred as, over a period of several weeks, the NCO Counselors gradually educated other NCO's about drugs and drug users. The unit leadership thus became better equipped to keep men off heroin and to identify those who were on.

g. Since July, a simple policy has been vigorously pursued throughout the command: identification by leaders of the heroin user, rehabilitation of those willing to volunteer, and 212 elimination of the others. Two additional rehabilitation centers at Nha Trang and Pleiku have been put in operation, very carefully modeled on the Tuy Hoa Center, and with their people being trained there. Special procedures and training teams were

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used to bring 212-processing times down to days rather than weeks (the current record is 36 hours from initiation at company level to approval of discharge). Meanwhile, by such means as having commanders invariably talk drugs when visiting subordinates, the level of officer and NCO understanding has steadily improved and the newcomers now learn far more quickly. The result has been decline in heroin use, a decline which during October has been universally termed rapid, or sharp.

h. That this is not necessarily the best approach is suggested by past experience of having to unlearn things once thought to be established knowledge about drug suppression but eventually found to be wide of the mark. It may well be that better techniques will be found in the coming months, and all concerned with the program are alert to recognize these. But so long as one heroin user remains in a company, so does the hazard of reinfection and hence the urgent necessity to pursue the existing suppression program until a better one emerges.

i. With continued stress along current lines, it appears quite feasible to reduce heroin use to the one-per-company level or below over the next 4-6 months. It would then be timely and perhaps suitable to apply similar emphasis to the marijuana and alcohol problems.

6. (C) DEFENSE OF US FORCES

a. Both MACV and USARV laid great emphasis upon avoiding unnecessary casualties. Besides the usual measures of extensive command inspection, troop indoctrination, local security during operations, insistence on altitude minimums, and the like, one other policy appears to have contributed to the extremely low KIA/WIA rates. That was deterrence through mobility. Taking advantage of the enemy practices of thorough reconnaissance and carefully planned, often rehearsed attacks, an effort was made to dissuade attack by presenting a constantly shifting, changing target.

b. In practical terms, this meant frequent but random and hence unpredictable change in the dispositions and techniques of small elements. In securing Route 19, for example, the cavalry, infantry, ranger, and air cavalry forces were all kept repeatedly mobile. A rifle platoon might work an outlying area three days one time, and a similar area only six hours the next, with no pattern discernible. A scout squad might man one OP near the highway for an hour, and then another OP farther out for three hours. On fire base perimeters, changes would be made from night to night in the positions to be manned, and the way illumination was used. Duster positions in particular were kept shifting. In securing land clearing operations, security forces moved at frequent but random intervals, and patrolling was preferred to static security.

c. Air cavalry made a special contribution, applying the same principles. Every day at least twice, at random times and in variable

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manner, Pink teams would be operated in the vicinity of land clearing operations. When hard intelligence of planned attacks on US engineers on Route 20 was received, air cavalry was similarly employed, working different areas in the general vicinity but at some time during the day checking out the near vicinity as well. The aversion of the enemy to helicopter gunships may not be the reason why the engineers were not attacked, but in fact they were not attacked. Nor were the land clearing operations. Nor did any enemy ever get into our wire.

7. (C-NF) ARMY ORGANIZATION WITHIN THE MR

a. At the outset, some 70,000 Americans were in the Region. Some degree of responsibility for each of them fall to me as Zone Coordinator for MR 2. One fifth were Air Force or Navy, however, and required little attention from this headquarters. Thirty percent were under my command or OPCON. The remaining half were Army troops with other chains of command, each element usually having a unique relationship to US Army Forces MR 2. Those in direct support were in some cases within my GCM jurisdictions and in some cases not. For some it was possible to delegate such functions as 212 approval, and for others regulations did not permit doing so.

b. In establishing the sub-zone and installation coordinator structure - and in adjusting it to meet stand-downs - command lines could not be consistently followed. The zone coordination regulation and procedures are hardly precise, and they can in some cases be variably interpreted. In any case, the authority possessed by coordinators is not clearly and uniformly understood.

c. The ingredients were present, in other words, for no small amount of miscoordination and even conflict. What redeemed this situation and permitted smooth functioning was a constantly positive, cooperative approach by senior officers in all these separate structures - plus the leeway allowed them by their various higher headquarters in Long Binh and Saigon. The invariable approach was in terms of the overall US interest, with suitability rather than charters determining what resources were used. Mutual cooperation was probably furthered by our common challenge in operating over the great distances and rugged terrain of MR 2. But to attribute it rather to the breadth and sensibleness the Army has cultivated among Colonels eligible for command seems more apt.

d. Nonetheless, an inordinate amount of time had to be spent on matters of form (channels of communication, lateral coordination, and such) rather than substance, because of the lack of unity of command. A proposal has been submitted which aims at simplifying this situation by bringing all US Army elements (less advisors and aviation under SRAG) under control of one headquarters, perhaps called MR 2 Support Command.

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8. (C-NF) COMMUNITY RELATIONS

a. The increasing danger of violent confrontations with Vietnamese is widely recognized. It is also apparent that RVNAF elements or members may sometimes take part, on the wrong side.

b. Qui Nhon, formerly the scene of many flare-ups, has long been calm, thanks to actions by higher authority and my predecessor which transformed the situation and elevated the flash-point to safer levels. Two actions were especially significant: sharply reducing US troop population in the city, and assigning the uniquely talented LTC Robert Schweitzer full-time, with capable assistants, onto community relations. Much of his work actually was education of US troops and their leaders. Even after his departure, the programs have continued, and the good results. But accidents or incidents not impeccably handled could still produce confrontations in Qui Nhon, so energetic attention continues to be needed.

c. During the summer several confrontations grew out of fatal vehicle accidents elsewhere in the MR. That there have been none since then is attributed to major efforts made through chains of command to prevent accidents, and to the use of trained reaction assistance teams following the Qui Nhon model. Response by all commands in the MR to the accident prevention programs was wholehearted and effective. Engineer units, which had previously produced most of the Vietnamese traffic fatalities, have gone two months with only one, for example. With the occasions for confrontation reduced nearly to zero, it has seldom been necessary to use the reaction assistance teams. But they are exercised monthly and on one occasion proved quickly effective.

9. (U) THE SOLDIER

a. A final word demands to be said, about the soldiers here. Whether they differ from other soldiers in Vietnam because they are combat or combat support troops located in MR 2 seems very doubtful, but I speak only of the ones I know.

b. The American soldier has been sold short. He is savagely slandered by the press and not fully trusted by some senior staff officers and NCO's who are out of direct contact with him. It is quite true that his appearance is often unsoldierly. It is quite true that among our young soldiers are some monsters, whose amoral disregard for others is shocking, and there are many men who do not blindly accept authority; the latter are far more numerous now, but I doubt that the monsters are. It is only that the things the monsters do are more monstrous. But in the really important fundamental of soldiering, the great majority of our young soldiers are just the same - ready and willing, almost eagerly willing, to respond to leadership. They bitch as soldiers always have, although their style is

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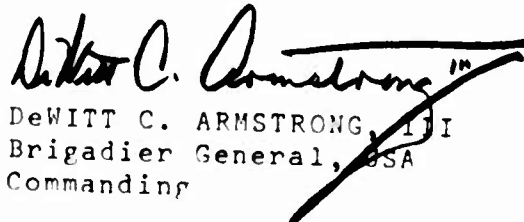
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sometimes more piercing. But to junior leadership which communicates purpose and shows interest in individuals, they respond wholeheartedly.

c. What they have done in Vietnam in 1971, knowing their country-men reject this war and the people who fight it, with the standards of discipline generally collapsed around their ears, with their NCO's having in too many cases stacked arms, is almost incredible. They too read the papers, and they hear the freaks among them. They witness the fact of retrograde, and they experience the fear of being the last casualty. Yet they do their jobs - and with a little leadership they do them quite well. As he always has been, the American soldier here today is not only a challenge but also an inspiration to his leaders.


DeWITT C. ARMSTRONG, III
Brigadier General, USA
Commanding

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