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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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IN REPLY REFER TO

DAAG-PAP-A (M) (19 May 72) DAFD-OTT 72B003

2 June 1972

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report: Colonel Richard G. Hoffman,
CO, 23d Artillery Group, Period 30 June 1971 - 26 January 1972 (U)

AD 521141

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1. Reference: AR 525-14, subject, Senior Officer Debriefing Program (U) dated 2 July 1971.
2. Transmitted herewith is the report of Colonel Richard G. Hoffman, subject as above.
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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 23D ARTILLERY GROUP
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AVGE

5 January 1972

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report (Colonel Richard G. Hoffman)

THRU: Commanding General
United States Army, Vietnam
APO S.F. 96375

TO: ACSFOR
ATTN: FOR OT UT
D/A
Washington, D.C.

Debriefing Report by: Colonel Richard G. Hoffman

Duty Assignment: Commanding Officer, 23d Artillery Group

Inclusive Dates: 30 June 1971 - 26 January 1972

Date of Report: 5 January 1972

1. (U) Introduction. The period covered by this report was characterized by a low level of enemy activity while US units were being drawn down and inactivated.
2. (U) Operational environment.
 - a. Area of operations. Military Region 3, Republic of Vietnam.
 - b. Nature of the enemy. Enemy activity consisted mainly of sapper attacks, attacks by fire, and terrorism.
3. (U) Command relationships. 23d Artillery Group was assigned to USARV, but under the operational control of HQ, Third Regional Assistance Command, and under Saigon Support Command for administration and logistical support except for personnel matters. The Group dealt directly with HQ, USARV on personnel matters.

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4. (C) Experiences in command.

a. Concept of operation. Units of the 23d Artillery Group were located in battery or half-battery fire bases spread throughout the Military Region. Liaison was established with local government agencies and military units, including Free World Military Forces (FWMF), in the area of each fire support base, and ammunition was allocated for their use. 23d Artillery Group units provided fire support as required within their zone of fire, primarily in a general support or reinforcing role.

b. Command and control. Command and control was exercised by Group through normal command lines by the assignment of artillery missions to each fire support base. Attachments were not used at any time during this period.

c. Techniques of employment. Firing units as a general rule operated from a fixed firing base. Occasionally when additional security could be provided a firing unit would displace from the firebase to support operations of short duration, usually one to three days. Toward the end of the reporting period when one firing battery was located in a major base camp, this unit periodically displaced to field locations to support operations at the request of provincial or Vietnamese Army officials.

d. Personnel management

(1) Maintenance of unit strength. USARV did an excellent job of keeping our units near the authorized strength level. However, throughout the period there was a chronic shortage of mechanics, motor sergeants, cooks, mess sergeants and experienced E6 gun section chiefs. Further, since most of our replacements toward the end of the period were coming from stand-down units, our monthly losses far exceeded our previous experience. This excessive turbulence coupled with the lack of key NCO personnel made it virtually impossible to build a unit esprit, and contributed to a low state of equipment maintenance, morale and discipline.

(2) Morale, health and welfare. The preponderant consideration in this area was the heroin problem. Although I have no data to substantiate it, I estimate that at the time of my assumption of command about 20% of all enlisted men E4 and below were using heroin, running the gamut from experimenters to mainliners. With a three pronged program of education, amnesty and persecution, I felt that we were creating a deterrence which was having its effect on potential drug users. The real breakthrough came, however, with the advent of the urinalysis test. However, because of equipment limitations it was several months before all of the units in the Group could be tested. But once units had been tested and the users identified, I felt that although we had not solved the problem, we at least now had a grasp of the magnitude and had an established procedure for eliminating confirmed users. Again turbulence confused the issue, because once the problem appear-

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ed to be under control, a large influx of people from stand-down units would be assigned, many of whom were unidentified drug users. Nevertheless, recent statistics indicate that drug users constitute less than 5% of the command and are diminishing steadily.

(3) Discipline, law and order. There were many contributing factors which resulted in a low state of discipline. The following is a typical situation to be found during this period. First put a unit on an isolated firebase. Add a firebase commander, a captain or lieutenant, with less than three years service, little or none of it in a troop unit. Now give him section chiefs who are draftee E5's with less than two years service and essentially no leadership experience, who, furthermore, identify more with the plight of the enlisted man than with the responsibilities of being a non-commissioned officer. Now put in about five or ten heroin users and double that in marijuana users. Finally, give them no real identifiable combat mission. Here is a situation in which a young officer is faced with the dilemma of accepting sub-standard behavior and performance, or jeopardizing his physical well-being. The former is the easy way out, and I'm afraid that too many have accepted this compromise with principle which resulted in a general lowering of standards.

e. Logistics. At this stage of the phase-down, logistic support is beginning to feel the pinch of the imposed budgetary constraints. The major area affected is that of maintenance spare parts. With vehicles whose proper maintenance has been largely ignored, the demand for spare parts becomes greater with each passing day. Vehicles are deadlined for relatively common items and cannibalization, hopefully controlled, becomes a way of life in order to continue to operate. In order to alleviate this situation, battalions have initiated R&R programs for weapons and vehicles. Equipment would periodically be returned to base camps and put through a concentrated program of maintenance before being returned to the field.

f. Material. Some of the material in use at this juncture proved to be of limited effectiveness.

(1) M110 howitzer and M107 gun. The heavy artillery at this time was primarily in support of ARVN cross-border operations. The bulk of the firing was unobserved on intelligence targets, such as sensor activations. There was seldom any surveillance or ground follow-up to this firing. In consideration of their expense, the difficulty of their maintenance, and the lack of appropriate targets, heavy artillery was largely ineffective and an expensive and unnecessary luxury.

(2) M548 cargo carrier. This type of equipment has great potential value, particularly in the wet season, but this idea did not hold up and experienced a continuously high deadline rate. Perhaps a periodic maintenance stand-down period as described earlier could have made the M548 a more effective piece of equipment in this environment.

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(3) Ground surveillance radars, AN/TPS-25 and AN/TPS-58. These radars were of marginal value due to limited area of scan, extensiveness of operator training, and difficulty of maintenance. Additionally, they tend to infuse a false sense of security and a feeling of complacency in those who are not aware of their limitations.

5. (U) Areas in need of increased emphasis. As trite as it sounds, the chain of command has got to be re-established. High standards of operational efficiency, equipment maintenance, personal appearance and military discipline must be required. The chain of command has to be stressed and the weak links identified and strengthened, or replaced. It will be a slow, difficult process, but it must be done if we are to have an effective Army.

6. (U) Conclusions and lessons learned.

a. The Army in Vietnam today as I see it is at a low ebb in terms of military discipline, operational capability, maintenance of equipment and to put it simply in terms of military professionalism. The chain of command is not functioning properly and the breakdown is at the junior officer level and the middle non-commissioned officer level (E5 and E6). We promoted too fast and now our most effective company and battery commanders are majors, and because of repetitive combat tours we have forced out the middle grade non-commissioned officer. Without mature, experienced battery commanders and section chiefs, it is virtually impossible to have an effective chain of command.

b. After six months in command of the 23d Artillery Group, I am convinced that our time-honored principles of leadership and discipline are still valid. Those that cannot or will not meet high standards must be eliminated. We can not permit our standards to be lowered to the least common denominator in order to attract people to our service. Doing so will only serve to drive out those who can make the greatest contribution to a resurgent professional Army.



RICHARD G. HOFFMAN
Colonel, FA
Commanding

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