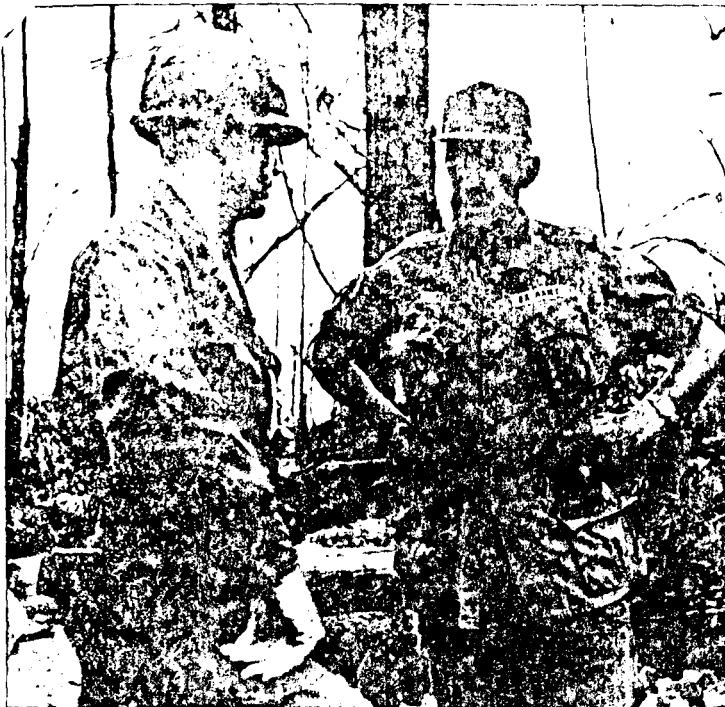


SOURCE: THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE
THE ARMY AT WAR - COMBAT IN VIETNAM
M. CASEY C. DUGAN, ETC
BY BOSTON PUB. CO. (1987)



Major General William R. Peers (right), commander of the 4th Infantry Division during heavy fighting in 1967, converses with Lt. Col. James R. Hendrix near Dak To in November 1967.

tion plans called for an infusion of reservists with these essential skills to bring the divisions up to full strength. But President Johnson's decision not to call up the reserves or National Guard meant that regular Army units would be bolstered not by trained reservists but by a widening pool of recruits and draftees. Such news presented a special challenge to General Collins, for one of the first units likely to go to Vietnam was his new command, the 4th Infantry Division.

Gearing up

The "Ivy Division"—so called because of the Roman numerals of its title and the four connected ivy leaves on its official patch—was created during World War I and served in France, where German soldiers were said to have spoken with fear of the "soldiers with the terrible green crosses." In World War II the "Fighting Fourth" landed at Utah Beach on D-day and took part in the liberation of Paris and the final assault on Germany. After a stint in Germany during the Korean War, the division arrived at its new base in Fort Lewis, Washington, where it became part of the Strategic Army Corps charged with rapid deployment to trouble spots anywhere on the globe.

In 1965, however, the 4th's strength had been compromised by the demands of a war to which it had not yet been committed. So many in the ranks of the division had been

Preceding page. Men of the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, move from their landing craft onto the beach at Nha Trang on their October 1966 arrival in Vietnam.

dispatched to Vietnam and Europe to replenish other units that in the summer of 1965 the total strength at Fort Lewis stood at only about 7,000, with a glaring lack of middle-level officers, such as captains and lieutenants as well as NCOs. Though such deficiencies were common in other American divisions, it was especially disturbing for one that would soon be in Vietnam.

As it prepared for war, the 4th was scheduled to receive thousands of new men, mostly draftees, for assignment. Collins insisted that they be trained with the division—~~a~~ departure from standard procedure in which men joined units only after completing basic. So 8,000 inductees were sent to Fort Lewis and assigned to brigades even before starting training. Preparation was mostly at the company and battalion level. Given the emphasis on small units in Vietnam, Collins later decided, the move was profitable. "We had cohesive units where the new men knew their fellow soldiers, NCOs, and officers right from the start, and vice versa."

As the ranks of the division swelled, training became more geared to the battlefield ahead. Collins led a refresher course in tactics for his battalion and brigade commanders. An NCO leadership school trained fire team and squad leaders. A mock jungle village on the base grounds gave the men a feel for their next environment. Though most of his men had gone through a crash course of training, Collins felt confident of their capability.

Finally, after rebuilding itself for Vietnam service, the 4th Infantry Division was ready to embark from Tacoma. On July 21, 1966, 5,000 men of the 2d Brigade—and Clarence, a boa constrictor adopted as a mascot—boarded the USNS General John Pope as the division band played "Auld Lang Syne" and friends and relatives bade them good-bye. The parting was more reminiscent of the departures by unit of World War II soldiers than what became the journey of the individual GI to Vietnam. During the voyage the men were given a smattering of further training, including an introduction to Vietnamese language and customs, but there was still much to learn.

On August 14 the Pope arrived at Qui Nhon, where the men and supplies were transferred to C-130 transport planes and flown to Pleiku City, in the central highlands close to the Cambodian border. By nightfall the 2d Brigade—comprising the 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry; 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry; and 1st Battalion, 22d Infantry—had arrived at the base camp prepared by its advance team at the foot of Dragon Mountain, sixteen kilometers south of Pleiku. The tent city was planted in the mud, for it was the height of the summer monsoon season. (Early in 1967 the camp was renamed Camp Enari, in honor of First Lieutenant Mark Enari, the posthumous recipient of the division's first Silver Star in Vietnam.)

While the 2d Brigade expanded its camp in the rain, the other two brigades and attached units of the division arrived in Vietnam. The 1st Brigade debarked at Nha

4th Infantry Division

Arrived Vietnam: September 25, 1966

Departed Vietnam: December 7, 1970

Unit Headquarters

Pleiku Sept. 1966 Feb. 1968

Dak To March 1968

Pleiku April 1968 Feb. 1970

An Khe/Pleiku March 1970

An Khe April 1970-Dec. 1970

Commanding Officers

Maj. Gen. Arthur S. Collins, Jr. Sept. 1966
Maj. Gen. William R. Peers Jan. 1967

Maj. Gen. Charles P. Stone Jan. 1968
Maj. Gen. Donn R. Pepke Nov. 1968

Maj. Gen. Glenn D. Walker Nov. 1969
Maj. Gen. William A. Burke July 1970

Major Subordinate Units

1st Brigade (1/8, 3/8, 3/12)
2d Brigade (2/8 [Mech], 1/12, 1/22)
3d Brigade* (2/12, 2/22, 3/22)
3d Brigade** (1/14, 1/35, 2/35)
1st Squadron, 10th Cavalry
Company E, 20th Infantry
Company E, 58th Infantry

Company K, 75th Infantry
4th Aviation Battalion
2d Battalion, 34th Armor
1st Battalion, 69th Armor**
2d Battalion, 9th Artillery
5th Battalion, 16th Artillery
6th Battalion, 29th Artillery

4th Battalion, 42d Artillery
2d Battalion, 77th Artillery
4th Engineer Battalion
4th Medical Battalion
4th Supply & Transport Battalion
124th Signal Battalion
704th Maintenance Battalion

2,531 KIA

(Casualty figures are "Vietnam Era.")

15,229 WIA

11 Medals of Honor

*Transferred to 25th Infantry Division, August 1967.

**Arrived from 25th Infantry Division, August 1967.

Trang and trucked overland to Tuy Hoa, eighty kilometers north, where it established its headquarters. MACV ordered the brigade to operate in the lowlands and rice fields along the coast, where it remained until February 1967.

While MACV had determined the ultimate destination of the 1st and 2d brigades before they had even left the United States, the assignment of the 3d Brigade was still unknown when it set sail on September 22. It may have seemed natural to place it in II Corps with its two sister units and thus maintain the unit's integrity. However, a third brigade was already operating independently in II Corps: the 3d of the 25th Infantry Division, stationed at Pleiku since its arrival at the beginning of the year. The rest of the 25th ended up farther south, in III Corps, defending the area west of the capital.

Because the 3d Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division was so entrenched in Pleiku, and because that division was clamoring for another brigade, MACV decided on an unusual compromise. The 25th got a third brigade—that of the 4th Infantry Division, not its own. In return the 4th received operational control of the 3d Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division. Thus a new brigade of fresh troops augmented the seasoned troops of the 25th, while at least one veteran brigade operated with the 4th in the highlands. "Because soldiers identify closely with their division, I was concerned lest the transfer adversely affect morale," MACV commander General William Westmoreland later wrote, "but the effect proved to be minimal." Some in both "bastard brigades" probably disagreed with the general, but in Vietnam divisional identity seldom seemed to be as immediate or heartfelt as brigade or battalion camaraderie. Almost immediately upon its attachment to the 25th Infantry Division, the 3d Brigade of the

4th Infantry Division was thrust into action, entering War Zone C in Tay Ninh Province west of Saigon, for Operation Attleboro. Serving as an enemy rear base area near the Cambodian border and situated astride the main approach to Saigon, War Zone C was always a heavily contested area. The 3d Brigade saw steady action there for the next year.

While its 3d Brigade remained in III Corps with the 25th Infantry Division, II Corps became home to the rest of the 4th Infantry Division. At 31,200 square kilometers, II Corps was the largest of South Vietnam's four military regions. The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) at An Khe and the Capital and 9th Infantry divisions of South Korea, stationed along the South China Sea, were also located in the Corps, but the 4th was the only division in the western highlands along the Cambodian and Laotian borders.

The placement of a division of 15,000 men in the hills along the border represented the growing importance of the area in American and South Vietnamese strategy. For years North Vietnam had been shipping supplies and men to the south on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which wound through Laos and Cambodia and crossed over into South Vietnam at several points, many in the highlands. The dark river valleys and thick rain forests of II Corps had become major supply and staging areas for the enemy, whose bid for military and political control of the terrain threatened to split South Vietnam in two. The 4th Infantry Division's task was to screen the border as the first line of defense against infiltration and to preempt any offensive on the more populated lowlands.

From Pleiku the 2d Brigade moved west to Vung Dat Am, where it built a camp called the Oasis. There with the 3d Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division it took part in its first

* THE GENERAL NELSON WALTER SHIP