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MACCORDS-RE

2 March 1968

TRIP REPORT

I CORPS TACTICAL ZONE #II

1. (U) GENERAL: During the period 20-24 February 1968, Major James W. Simmons, R&E Division, CORPS, visited Quang Tri and Quang ^{Nham} Provinces to assess progress that is being made to restore momentum to the pacification program.

2. (C) QUANG TRI:a. Security:

(1) Territorial Security: Security within Quang Tri Province is generally poor. Organized NVA/VC forces have the capability of attacking friendly forces of any size when the friendly forces are operating within or near enemy areas of interest or operation. Friendly forces in and around Quang Tri city are aware of and respect this enemy capability. Lines of communication are insecure beyond the limits of province and district capitals, although there is continuous movement by civilian and military personnel during daylight hours.

(2) RD Security:

(a) ARVN: Prior to the TET offensive, there were three ARVN battalions in direct support of RD. As of 31 January 1968, all ARVN battalions had been withdrawn and had assumed local security missions in and around Quang Tri city and province headquarters. From this posture several close-in patrols were conducted on the periphery of the city. Forces, however, returned to local bivouac areas prior to sundown. The "change of mission" for all ARVN battalions followed the

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initial offensive and resulted in the evacuation of all previously assigned Tactical Areas of Responsibility. The rapid withdrawal from hamlets undergoing RD paved the way for accelerated entry of NVA/VC units into areas surrounding province and district capitals. The withdrawal contributed to the ease with which enemy units concentrated their forces undetected around Quang Tri city and selected district headquarters for the offensive operations that took place on 3 and 6 February 1968. Plans are now being made to return the ARVN battalions to their TAOR's in direct support of RD.

(b) Regional Forces and Popular Forces: Of the 17 RF companies within the province, 16 are currently performing security roles around district headquarters while one company at 50% strength is assigned to the MACV compound in the city. There are 116 PF platoons within the province, of which nineteen reportedly are protecting 1967 hamlets. This figure is open to question since the presence or strengths of these units have not been confirmed by US advisors or their GVN counterparts. The status of the remaining PF platoons is rather vague. It appears that disposition of the PF platoons was made by GVN province and district officials without the advice of their respective US counterparts. Since 3 February 1968, the province chief of staff, who is also the RF/PF commander, has been in Hue attempting to locate his family. Advisors believe that the weapons in the hands of some RF/PF personnel, i.e., M1 carbines, are unsuitable for combat against an enemy equipped with more advanced small arms.

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b. Administrative Control in Rural Areas:

(1) There was little information regarding GVN administrative control beyond district headquarters. US advisors at district report that GVN control extends to district headquarters and nearby hamlets only.

(2) There are 16 RD groups in Quang Tri Province and three Truong Son (TS) Teams. Twelve RDC groups are working in 1967 hamlets while the other four groups are assisting province and district social welfare officials as they attempt to relocate the increasing number of refugees. The three TS cadre teams were working in Huong Hoa District and were overrun by the VC and NVA in the January attack which forced the withdrawal of the district advisory team. Almost all members of the TRSD teams made their way to and joined US combat bases in Huong Hoa District.

(3) The refugees within Quang Tri Province principally are massed in Cam Lo District northwest of Quang Tri city. This location was selected as the area within the province most suitable for refugee settlement and rural development. Mr. Mike Ireland (Refugee Officer) and Lieutenant Watson (Team Chief, 29th Civil Affairs Refugee Team) are closely coordinating their efforts to assist and advise Mr. Thac, the principal representative for social welfare and refugee care in Quang Tri Province. Refugees continue to flow into the more heavily populated areas for assistance as a result of the search and destroy operations being conducted on a daily basis throughout the province, plus the establishment and clearance of "free fire zones." Consequently, it is difficult to implement a planned refugee resettlement program, since refugee authorities,

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US and GVN, are constantly reacting to the immediate refugee requirements created by combat operations.

c. PSYOPS:

(1) There was little evidence of a vigorous psychological operations campaign. Banners on display within the city denouncing the communists indicated that some PSYOPS activity was under way.

(2) The people reportedly were fearful that the NVA/VC had "lost face" and in retribution would launch an "attack of devastation." They were, therefore, making preparations for the anticipated VC offensive. On the other hand, conversations with GVN military personnel disclosed that there is intense interest in and enthusiasm for an "invasion of North Vietnam." This desire was inspired in part by the manner in which elements of the 1st Air Cavalry Division defeated the NVA/VC forces during the recent attack on Quang Tri city; a large number of people witnessed the assault of the 1st Air Cavalry Division on the enemy and were favorably impressed.

(3) In spite of the scattered in-depth positioning of free world forces throughout the province, security remains the single most serious concern among civilian and military personnel.

d. Economic Conditions: Economic conditions were generally good. There had been some rise in prices but nothing drastic. Some commodity prices had risen and already returned to pre-TET level. Some amount of commercial traffic was returning to the highway.

e. Pacification Program: The VC attack resulted in a psychological setback and delay to the RD program within the province. However,

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the mechanism for carrying forward the RD program is essentially intact, as little damage was done to the 1967 RD areas and few casualties were suffered by ARVN, RF, PF, or RD cadre personnel. However, the first order of business is to get the ARVN battalions, RF, and PF back to the RD areas and to provide security for the RD areas and groups.

3. (C) Quang Nam:

a. Security:

(1) Territorial Security: Security within Quang Nam Province is poor. However, plans are being made to improve this condition. The limited number of friendly units deployed outside the province and district towns in search of hostile forces allow the enemy uninterrupted access to most LOC's and distant populated areas. NVA/VC forces maintain the capability to maneuver through the countryside and interdict lines of communication at points of strategic enemy interest. For example, although most north-south roadways frequently are used with little harassment, the enemy can severely restrict movement along these LOC's at will. Action is being taken at province level to improve territorial security by establishing a defensive line north of Hoi An city running from An Ban 1 hamlet (vicinity 1561) through Thanh Nam 2 hamlet (vicinity 1458) to Thanh Nam 1 hamlet (vicinity 1256). Since this line extends from the Song Hoi River northeast to the South China Sea, it would occlude infiltration routes to the southeast as well as enhance the security of one of the 1968 campaign areas and the inhabited island to the south.

(2) RD Security: Prior to the TET offensive, four battalions of the ARVN 51st Regiment, the 59th RF Battalion (four RF

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companies), four additional RF companies, and 19 PF platoons were in direct support of RD. As of 22 February 1968, all ARVN Battalions except 1/51 remained in DSRD. However, the status of RF/PF units with a DSRD mission was not known by province advisors. Combat operations are being conducted in RD areas. The effectiveness of these operations in clearing the RD areas has not been assessed fully.

b. Administrative Control in Rural Areas:

(1) GVN control in rural areas is uncertain outside district towns. Although control is exercised by GVN officials within some hamlets, the extent of this control throughout the province is unknown.

(2) There are two NPFF companies in Quang Nam Province: the 109th Company with a strength of 220 men and the 104th Company with a strength of 54 men. Two-thirds of the 109th Company, trained at Dalat, arrived in Hoi An with no equipment and 75 untrained personnel. The NPFF advisor, Mr. Fred Hunt, in conjunction with his counterpart is sending 25 National Policemen to Dalat for training. This practice will continue until all 75 men have completed training.

(3) There are currently 34 RDC groups in the province: 22 are in 1967 hamlets, 4 are in Danang city, 4 are in 1968 hamlets, and 4 are assisting in Hoi An city.

c. PSYOPS: As a result of the extensive enemy-initiated activities during the month of January, including the attack on Hoi An city and the destruction of a hamlet on the city outskirts, there is much apprehension among the population. They are impressed by the strength shown by the

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NVA/VC, and the prolonged VC occupation of Hue has had a profound effect. Rumors concerning a coalition government have been given some credence within the province. However, the population was also impressed by the good ARVN/GVN reaction to the VC attack.

d. Economic Conditions: Prices have not changed appreciably as a result of the TET offensive. Route 1 is open throughout the province, and commercial traffic continues to move. Hoi An is returning to normal, and people can be seen moving freely during the non-curfew hours of 0300-1600.

e. Pacification Program: The 1968 RD plan will probably require some modification. Nevertheless, there was optimism that the program could be carried forward and would be successful. Morale within the RDC groups was reported as being relatively high.

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