

HEADQUARTERS

25TH INFANTRY DIVISION

Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G2

APO 96225

AVDCIN

7 August 1966

SUBJECT: 25th Division Pacification Operations in HAU NGHIA Province (U)

TO: See Distribution

1. (U) Purpose. The purpose of this study is to provide the reader with background information concerning the joint pacification efforts of the South Vietnamese Government and the 25th Infantry Division (US) in HAU NGHIA Province. An abbreviated sketch of the physical characteristics of the province as well as a brief historical summary of the area are also discussed to in order to provide a full appreciation of the inherent problems in any pacification endeavor in this area. The data and information contained herein represent a distillation of studies and after action reports recently prepared by USAID, Advisory Team 43, BAO TRAI, the 2nd Bde, 25th Division and the 25th Division , G2 Section.

2. (C) General:

a. Physical description: HAU NGHIA province is located west - northwest of Saigon and extends from Gia Dinh province on the east to the Cambodian Border on the west. Its other neighbors are BINH DUONG province to the south. Most portions on the province boundary are ill defined and artificial, and even those stretches demarcated by streams or canals constitute no meaningful obstacle to passage. The 27 kilometer frontier with Cambodia is particularly hard to distinguish for almost of its entire length. Most of the province is extremely flat and low lying and typically upper Mekong Delta in appearance. In the extreme west and in southwest, the land table is fairly close to sea level and dominated by an expanse of swampy terrain generally referred to as the Plain of Reeds. The central portion of the province is slightly higher and better drained, and moving to the north the terrain rises imperceptibly to a maximum elevation of approximately 30 meters. Vegetation covers virtually the entire land surface of the province with most of the natural cover replaced by rice. Indigenous forest remain only in the extreme northern and northeastern portions such as the BOI LOI Woods area, and in the FILHOL Rubber Plantation and the HO BO Woods complex situated in PHU HOA District of BINH

DUONG Province. Vegetation throughout HAU NGHIA generally does not appear to be as dense or lush as in neighboring BINH DUONG.

b. History: HAU NGHIA was one of the final creations of the Diem Regime and established as a province on 15 October 1963 by Presidential Order. The province was made up of 4 districts contributed by the neighboring provinces as follows: DUC HOA and DUC HUE Districts formerly of LONG AN Province, TRANG BANG of TAY NINH Province, and CU CHI of BINH DUONG Province. The province was created primarily to coordinate military activities on both sides of the old boundary between LONG AN and TAY NINH. This boundary ran lengthwise through the KINH TAY Swamp and VC units operating on either side of this swamp could conduct military operations in one province and then flee across the border with almost sure knowledge that there would be neither pursuit nor meaningful coordinated response from the neighboring province. HAU NGHIA, although not recognized by the VC as a province, continues to be of great importance to them. Communication, supply and liaison routes between the Delta and VC redoubts in War Zones C and D and the Iron Triangle, pass through HAU NGHIA Province. HAU NGHIA is also a prime source of paddy rice and much needed manpower for VC forces. BAO TRAI, the province capital was selected because of its theoretical capacity to maintain liaison with and render tactical resistance to each of the district towns, and secondarily to avoid selecting one of the existing district capitals, thereby offending the other three.

3. (C) Background:

a. Prior to arrival of the 25th Infantry Division, effective government control

in HAU NGHIA province extended only to the maximum range of supporting weapons located in the Vietnamese military installations immediately surrounding the 4 district capitals and the province capital. This security umbrella encompassed about 25 per cent of the population with 60 per cent under VC control and another 15 per cent living in contested areas.

b. Even during the days of the French Administration the area that is now HAU NGHIA Province was considered politically unstable because of its long history of rebel activity. CU CHI district, then a part of BINH DUONG Province, was notoriously anti-administration even before 1961 when it developed into an overt trouble spot. By 1962, most of DUC HUE District, much of upper DUC HOA, and portions of CU CHI and TRANG BANG were under VC control. In many other areas not actually under de facto VC control, there never was an effective political presence to begin with, and the government's position was precarious at best.

c. In 1962 and early 1963, the government made a concentrated effort to clear and pacify much of the area astride Route 1 in connection with Operation SUNRISE, the original Strategic Hamlet Program. A considerable amount of time and expense was devoted to relocating thousands of people to areas which could theoretically be more logically defended and supported. In spite of the impressive statistics compiled during these operations, there was in fact little genuine pacification in terms of rooting out the VC infrastructure and replacing it with a viable local governmental mechanism. During late 1963, the situation in HAU NGHIA province became critical and by early 1964 military reversals were commonplace, and proceeding at an alarming rate. In June 1964, DUC HOA was attacked and partially overrun, and the DUC HUE District capital of MY QUI, located west of the Oriental River, was evacuated since virtually all of the district was then under VC control. The capital was transferred to the HIEP HOA Sugar Mill with 3 villages of DUC HOA District located east of the river being ceded to DUC HUE, and the district boundaries realigned accordingly. The situation continued to deteriorate until October 1964 when the 25th ARVN Div. was transferred to HAU NGHIA province from II Corps. With the arrival of the 25th, the overall military decline was temporarily arrested, and the immediate DUC HOA Area re-secured. In the Spring of 1965, the VC renewed their heavy pressure throughout the province, gaining steadily until the arrival of the 2nd Bde, 25th Infantry Division in the CU CHI area in January 1966. At the time the Brigade arrived, government control in CU CHI district outside the district capital, TRUNG LAP Ranger Training Center and a few other isolated outposts, was tenuous even in daylight hours, and all areas were subject to constant harassment. Two Popular Forces posts, THAI MY and VINH CU were little more than prisons in basically VC controlled hamlets. Guerrillas and sappers operating along Route 1 in the CAY TROM - PHUOC HIEP - SUOI SAU area were particularly active and prone to ambush not only military traffic, but civilian vehicles of opportunity as well.

d. During the first three months in-country, the 2nd Brigade concentrated on securing the CU CHI base area and conducting search and destroy operations designed to destroy main and local Viet Cong forces, and relieve the pressure on the base camp. Subsequent to the arrival of the Division Headquarters and as a result of the increasing coordination with ARVN and province officials, it was decided to increase the Division's contribution to the Revolutionary Development Program (RDP). This program, properly supported by social, political, economic and military action, was felt to be the logical blue print for the restoration of order and stability to HAU NGHIA province. The concept behind the RDP calls for the gradual extension of the full spectrum of the government's influence outward from secure or pacified areas.

e. In response to a request by the HAU NGHIA Province Chief, the Commanding General, 25th Division, directed that planning begin for the first pacification operation. The operation was called MAILI, and the unit selected was the 1st Battalion 27th Infantry (Wolfhounds). Although this operation was the pilot project of this nature, it will be discussed in relative detail since it encompasses all the techniques and lessons learned applied to later operations.

3. (C) Operation MAILI:

a. Background: One of the critical areas of HAU NGHIA Province

scheduled for securing in 1966 was the area astride Provincial Route 8 between BAO TRAI (XT5204) and CU CHI (XT6212) encompassing new life hamlets AP CHO (XT5505), DUC CHANH (XT5505), DUC HANH "A" (XT5606) and DUC HANH "B" (XT5707). AP CHO and CUC CHANH are usually referred to collectively as DUC LAP. Provincial Route 8 is the only usable road leading into the province capital from Saigon via Route 1 through CU CHI. It was essential that the hamlets along this road be secured in order to insure the maintenance and security of this key route. Route 8 also cuts across a major Viet Cong supply and communication corridor leading from LONG AN Province to VC base areas in TAY NINH and BINH DUONG Provinces. Since October 1965, ARVN forces had been repeatedly attacked and driven away from their positions along the route by the Viet Cong. The result had been that the previously thriving hamlets had been almost completely evacuated by the residents. The road had been mined or interdicted with roadblocks almost daily during the seven months prior to MAILI, making travel difficult and hazardous. The hamlets in the area up to 6 kilometers to the northwest and southeast of the road had been unmolested sanctuaries for Viet Cong local guerillas for months. Except during an occasional ineffective sweep by ARVN forces stationed at BAO TRAI, the people of these hamlets had experienced no contact with the GVN. Although not considered to be active Viet Cong sympathizers, they had nevertheless been forced to make accommodations with the VC in order to survive.

b. Preparations: Prior to the operation, the CO, 1st Bn, 27th Inf and the Sector Advisor discussed in detail the objectives of the operation, the area of operation, and the tactics to be employed. The area of operations was divided into sections generally following hamlet boundaries. Each day the battalion would clear one of the sections of Viet Cong guerrillas and provide security for the employment of a composite Vietnamese "GO TEAM" consisting of National Police (NP), psychological warfare troops, intelligence troops, and medical personnel. The NP would search each dwelling and check the credentials of the residents. The psywar team, equipped with bull horns and leaflets, would discuss various GVN aid programs with the people. The intelligence team would attempt to identify the Viet Cong infrastructure and also recruit agents among the villagers. The medical group would provide rudimentary medical treatment to the sick and inform. An officer and an NCO from the American sector advisory team would accompany the Vietnamese team to provide liaison between the Vietnamese and the US company and platoon commanders. Additional NP would be assigned to the companies for the duration of the operation to serve as guides and to assist in the identification of VC suspects. Vietnamese Counter Terror troops would be assigned to the battalion to assist in night ambushes which would be used extensively throughout the area.

c. Operations:

(1) Operations got under way on 27 April and initially the US troops

appeared to be uneasy when working in close contact with the Vietnamese, and this in turn reflected in the performance of the Vietnamese. However, as the daily operations continued, both the US and Vietnamese troops began to work more effectively together. By the end of two weeks, the combined forces had evolved a highly efficient "modus operandi", and a true sense of camaraderie had developed. One reason for the improvement was due to the critique and planning conference conducted each evening at 1700 hours in a provisional Joint Operations Center at BAO TRAI. At this conference, which was attended by the CG and staff of the 1st Bn, 27th Inf, the Province Chief and his staff, and the Sector Advisor and his staff, the current day's operation was reviewed and critiqued, and plans made for the next day's operation.

(2) The Vietnamese and their American advisors participated in every phase of operation MAILI and accompanied the 25th Division companies and platoons into every hamlet in the area of operations. They proceeded by helicopter, tank, personnel carriers, trucks, or on foot. On one occasion, in response to hard intelligence of a Viet Cong location, US and Vietnamese troops were transported from one objective area to another by a collection of USAID, National Police, and Vietnamese Regional Force trucks driven by US advisors. On five occasions, battalions from the ARVN 25th Infantry Division conducted operations designed to support and compliment the efforts of the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry. On three occasions, these ARVN battalions were under sector command while on two other cases, they were under ARVN 25th Division command.

(3) During MAILI, sufficient security was provided to DUC HANH "B" to allow province to construct a new outpost near that hamlet. Fields of fire were cleared for the new outpost by the engineer platoon attached to the 1st Bn, 27th Infantry. Barrier materials for the new outpost were salvaged from two abandoned outposts in a nearby area which were leveled by the engineer platoon at the request of the Province Chief.

(4) Results: The success of Operation MAILI is more appropriately measured by the results listed below:

(a) Control of the area of operation was wrested from the Viet Cong for the duration of the operation. Commercial and private traffic was heavier and moved much more freely on Provincial Route 8 and other feeder trails in the area.

(b) The Viet Cong were discredited in the eyes of the people living in the area of influence of the 1st Bn, 27th Infantry task force.

(c) The US soldiers demonstrated that, contrary to Viet Cong propaganda, they are not unfeeling blood-thirsty brutes.

(d) GVN influence was extended to each of the hamlets in the area of the operation. Many of these had not been ventured into for several years by province officials.

(e) Medical treatment was administered to 833 adults and children in the area during the 19 MEDCAPS performed in the various hamlets.

(f) The new life hamlets along the route between BAO TRAI and CU CHI began showing definite signs of life. In DUC HANH "B" alone, the population approximately tripled by the end of the operation, indicating restored confidence and a desire to live under GVN control.

(g) The efficiency and effectiveness of the U.S. troops provided an excellent example for the members of the Sector Staff. After twice being embarrassed by the late arrival of his forces at their appointed locations, the Province Chief cracked down and required a higher standard of performance by his subordinates.

(h) The concept of the composite Vietnamese "GO TEAM" consisting of intelligence, psywar, medical and national police troops, was perfected and its effectiveness demonstrated. (This twenty-man team is to be kept intact and will, it is hoped, accompany ARVN battalions on future search and clear operations.)

(i) The value of close coordination between the US battalion staff and the Sector Staff (with its US advisors) was readily apparent. The late afternoon daily conferences in the provisional Operations Center at BAO TRAI made possible an extremely close cooperation between the various participants.

Problems were worked out and mistakes were discussed in an atmosphere of genuine understanding. Toward the end of the period, the Province Chief stated that he would order his two attached ARVN battalions to conduct operations in coordination with the Americans in any way recommended by the US Battalion Commander. Thus the operation provided an effective vehicle for the development of integrated, combined operations at the small unit level.

4. (C) Other Pacification Operations: The experiences and lessons learned from Operation MAILI were applied to the strategy and techniques of three other pacification operations: FT. SMITH, SANTA FE, and FRESNO. (See Enclosure 1 for Areas of Operation). Tactics were refined and coordinated with Sector and Sub-sector officials and improved through daily contact. Because of the multi-battalion aspect of FRESNO and SANTA FE, a Brigade Liaison team was maintained at Sector Headquarters to facilitate the two way information flow between the battalions in the field and province officials. In addition to the results previously enumerated for MAILI, during SANTA FE and FRESNO several incidents transpired which were indicative of the growing success of our pacification effort.

a. During the last week in June, on five separate occasions, village children led members of the 1st and 2nd Bns, 27th Infantry to small ammunition caches in the vicinity of their hamlets. These children demonstrated a wide range of area knowledge and in one instance led troops to a cache 2 kilometers away from their homes. The more important items recovered included 31 60mm mortar rounds, 39 grenades, 1 155mm arty round, and over 2100 rounds of miscellaneous small arms ammunition.

b. On 30 June, a VC platoon leader took advantage of the Division's presence in his area to arrange with local officials, through his wife, for US Forces to capture him at his house. Once apprehended, the platoon leader turned over his weapon and led a platoon to the hiding places of nine other members of his platoon who were captured on the spot. The key item in this action was the response of province officials upon hearing of the defector's wish. Within 30 minutes, US Forces had been notified and reacted to exploit the information.

c. Enemy Personnel and Equipment Losses for all four pacification operations are shown in Enclosure 2.

5. (C) Associated Pacification Activities: In addition to the activities enumerated previously, the following operations have also been carried out in support of, and in conjunction with the main pacification effort.

a. MEDCAP: A MEDCAP team consisting normally of a doctor and four aid-men, provided medical treatment to inhabitants of hamlets as part of the "GO TEAM" or during "COUNTY FAIR" operations. When a hamlet was secured by US Forces, the MEDCAP team would enter and provide treatment for periods of three or four hours. The team was always warmly accepted and the enormous flow of inhabitants both from that hamlet and nearby hamlets was encouraging. The total number of inhabitants treated during SANTA FE and FRESNO alone was 6,686.

b. COUNTY FAIR: County Fair operations incorporating civic action and psychological warfare measures, were conducted in all areas during the pacification operations. The primary objective was to identify and neutralize the existing VC infrastructure in the hamlets and villages. County Fair operations in all hamlets were quite similar. Therefore, the following description of the activities of the SO DO County Fair will illustrate a typical operation.

The operation began at 230400 Jun 66 when two companies of the 2nd Bn, 27th Infantry surrounded the hamlet. Two checkpoints were established, one at each end of the hamlet, and all personnel attempting to leave the area were checked by the National Police stationed at the checkpoints. At approximately 0700 hours, the infantry with assistance of three Vietnamese search teams began a house to house search of the hamlet. These teams consisted of one National Policeman, one ARVN intelligence NCO and one US Advisor from Sector. A thorough search was made, not only for intelligence information, but also from a population control aspect. The school was chosen as a collection and processing center, and all available inhabitants were moved to that area where a complete census was conducted. As soon as the census was completed, and the inhabitants had been screened to determine their true status, the GO TEAM set up the Psywar and MEDCAP teams at the school. The MEDCAP team treated a total of 94 villagers for various illnesses, and was warmly received by the villagers. A mobile identification card team was also provided from Sector to assist in processing inhabitants without identification cards. A cultural team consisting of three men and two women not only provided entertainment, but also gave a very subtle psychological message to the people through that medium of entertainment. The 2nd Brigade Band then gave a band concert, and the Province Civil Affairs Officer drove a Lambretta equipped with a loudspeaker through the hamlet playing recorder music, thus adding to the overall relaxed atmosphere of the operations. Major NHA, the Province Chief, arrived from BAO TRAI, mingled with the inhabitants, and gave an inspiring pro-government speech. A noon meal was prepared by US Forces and served to 350 villagers. After the noon meal, 25th Division Helping Hand items donated by the people of Hawaii were issued. The remainder of the afternoon was used by the civic action team to distribute USAID, CARE, and CRS commodities and supplies to the people. Literature concerning province agricultural programs and public health services was also distributed. In short, all resources were used in an attempt to influence the people in the hamlet to start thinking in terms of GVN control rather than VC domination. Information received during this operation led to an operation in a nearby area resulting in numerous VC tunnels and fortifications destroyed.

c. Checkmate: On 6 July 1966, the Division initiated a program of establishing traffic check points at random locations along major highways in HAU NGHIA and TAY NINH Provinces. The purpose of this operation called CHECKMATE, is to deny the VC the use of land LOC's to covertly move personnel and supplies through our TAOR. Checkpoints are manned by elements of the 3/4 Cav., National Police, and CI agents of the 25th MI Det. An average of four APC's are employed to furnish security in the area of operation. Two checkpoints are then established, approximately 150 meters apart, enabling traffic checks tin two directions. Three National Policemen and one CI agent are located at each checkpoint. The Cav's Aero rifle platoon is also prepared to assist the roadblock element if necessary and aerial scouts search out the surrounding area for any other targets of opportunity.

d. Roadrunner: Concurrent with the conduct of the pacification operations, the division also employed tailored task forces traversing main and secondary roads in HAU NGHIA province to demonstrate our intention to use and keep open these LOC's. During June, the division conducted 86 of these "roadrunners" traveling a total of 1540 kilometers and clearing 35 road obstacles.

6. (C) Evaluation: The HAU NGHIA Province Advisory Team in the Special Report on Revolutionary Development, dated 1 July 1966, stated the following concerning our pacification efforts: "As a result of continued operations by the US 25th Division in VC controlled areas, and the prodigious effort being made by the US in pacification work, a positive change in the attitude of the people in VC controlled areas is being made. In the operational areas of "FRESNO" and "SANTA FE" the people are freely providing the forces with information concerning the locations of mines, booby traps, small caches of ammunition, and the names and homes of local Viet Cong. The US is countering the VC propaganda by their extensive MEDCAP program, by improving roads made impassable by the VC, and by being able to live and operate with relative impunity in VC controlled areas. The continued pacification operations provided the US forces with an understanding of the problems in rural construction and also the use of measured force when dealing with the guerrilla who is among the people, i.e., refusal to shoot artillery salvos on a sniper, thus preventing the destruction of local houses and the killing of innocent people. The daily meetings and continual contact between the US and VN forces provides for a closer working relationship which is essential in combined operations. These meetings also provide an opportunity to point out the advantages of US methods of operation, which are characterized by their flexibility and rapid reaction time."

7. (C) Conclusion: Through pacification efforts such as those discussed above lies perhaps the most logical approach to the MACV "Healing and Minds Program" Although results are never dramatic and occasional reversals are to be expected, these operations are critical to ultimate victory of ARVN and FWMAF in South Vietnam. VC Main Forces an their base areas must obviously be constantly sought and destroyed concurrent with these pacification efforts in order to prevent these forces from exerting their

influence in the pacified areas. With proper distribution of military forces and assets, pacification and search and destroy operations can be undertaken simultaneously to win the war on both fronts.

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2 Encl.

DISTRIBUTION: Special

Addendum:

PACIFICATION OPERATIONS

Operation MAILI:	KIA (BC)	KIA(Poss)	VCC	VCS	WPNS	CAPTURED grain
27 Apr - 12 May	47	51	3	26	2	2.7
Operation FORT SMITH						
? June - 6 July	19	51	6	32	2	3.6
Operation FRESNO						
3 June - 14 July	20	30	18	41	6	2.55
Operation SANTA FE						
3 June - 4 July	3	17	14	74	0	.75
TOTAL	89	149	41	173	10	9.60

