

HEADQUARTERS  
US ARMY ADVISORY GROUP  
1st Ranger Group  
APO San Francisco 96349

MACMR-LTF-R

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report LAM SON 719


HEADQUARTERS  
U.S. Army Advisory Group I Corps and Military Region I  
APO San Francisco 96349  
ATTN: MACMR-10P

1. References:

a. Directive 335-8, HQ, USMACV, 31 Jun 69, subject: Combat Operations After Action Reports (MACJ3-32 (R2)).

b. Letter, HQ, USAAG I Corps and MRI, 13 Mar 71, subject as above.

2. Transmitted herewith is the combat after action feeder information in compliance with reference 1.b.

  
HENRY E. JEFFREY  
MAJ. INF  
Senior Advisor

9 Incl

1. Task Organization
2. Supporting Forces
3. Major Problems
4. Supporting Plans
5. Lessons Learned
6. Important Decisions
7. Counterpart Performance
8. Performance of Unit
9. Combat Support

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## Inclosure 1

Task Organization of 1st Ranger Group for each Phase of LAM SON 719.

### 1. Task Organization:

The task organization commanded by Col Hiep of First Ranger Group, consisted of the following elements:

#### a. Phase I: 31 January thru 8 February, 1971

- (1) 1st Ranger Group, Headquarters Element (30 Jan-4 April 71)
- (2) 21st, 37th, 39th Ranger Battalions (30 Jan-4 April 71)
- (3) A Battery and C Battery 64 Artillery, 105 Howitzer (30 Jan-4 April 71)
- (4) C Battery 48th Artillery, 155 Howitzers (30 Jan-4 April 71)
- (5) 102nd Engineer Company (30 Jan-1 March 71)

#### b. Phase II: 8 February to 1 April, 1971

- (1) 1st Ranger Group Headquarters Element (30 Jan-4 April 71)
- (2) 21st, 37th, and 39th Ranger Battalions (30 Jan-4 April 71)
- (3) A Battery and C Battery 64th Artillery, 105 Howitzer (30 Jan-4 April 71)
- (4) C Battery 48th Artillery, 155 Howitzers (30 Jan-4 April 71)
- (5) 102nd Engineer Company (30 Jan-1 Mar 71)
- (6) Two companies of 77th Border Ranger Battalion (19 Mar-4 April 71)
- (7) One company of the 79th Border Ranger Battalion (19 Feb-4 April 71)

#### c. Attachments: ARVN

- (1) Aviation Liaison Officer, VNAF (7 Feb-24 Mar 71)
- (2) Liaison Team from ARVN Airborne Division (8 Feb-28 Feb 71)

#### d. Attachments: US

- (1) Pathfinder Team (3 Feb-13 Feb 71)
- (2) Aviation Liaison Officer from 101st Aviation Group (17 Feb-20 Mar 71)
- (3) Air Force TACP Team (12 Feb-16 Mar 71)

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Inclosure 1

1.

d. Attachments: US

- (4) RATT (Radio Teletype Unit) (14 Feb-24 Mar 71, Destroyed 23 March 71)
- (5) Radio Retrans Station (7 Feb- 29 March 71)
- (6) Artillery Forward Observer Teams (7 Mar-1 April 71)

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## Inclosure 2

2. List of all forces in general support of 1st Ranger Group for LAM SON 719.
  - a. A Battery 5/4th Artillery (155)
  - b. A, B, and C Battery 2/94th Artillery (175mm-8inch)
  - c. B Battery 8/4th Artillery (175mm-8inch)
  - d. 1/37th Artillery (175mm-8inch)
  - e. 1/5th 54 Artillery (105-155mm)
  - f. Hammer and Barkey FAC's (provided TAC Air)
  - g. 101st Aviation Bn troop ships and resupply ships
  - h. Khe Sanh Dustoff-Medivacs
  - i. 12th Signal Group
  - j. 158th Aviation Bn (UH-1)
  - k. 2/17th Cav (ARA)
  - l. 159th ASHC (CH-47)
  - m. 132nd ASHC (CH-47)
  - n. 478th Aviation Company (CH-54)

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Inclosure 3

3. A narrative statement in chronological order, of major problems encountered and solutions used; unusual tactics and techniques employed by enemy or GVN forces; important decisions as to the use of supporting forces; reserves and other resources; and other significant events and activities not reported in Daily OPSIMS.

a. ARVN attachments were not properly supported initially. The attached units, the Artillery Batterys, the Engineer Company and the Ranger Border Companys initially were not properly supplied. The Ranger Command support company was not initially tasked with the mission. Note: 1st Ranger Group has no A&L company and relies exclusively on Ranger Command's logistical assets for support.

Solution: The Ranger Command's support company was tasked with the mission of supporting all attached units and liaison teams.

b. The 1st Ranger Group S-4 staff was not prepared, organized, or trained to sustain an operation of this magnitude and duration. The Ranger Command's support company lacked the experience and organization, to coordinate, order, rig, and ship the supplies. There was in some cases, duplication of efforts, with the artillery support team supplying howitzer ammunition and food for the troops. At the same time the 1st Group was also drawing ammunition and food for their troops. There was no overall commander in charge of resupply to coordinate the supply effort for all the units involved.

Solution: Col Hiep, 1st Ranger Group Commander, directed that the Group S-4 be responsible for insuring effective resupply of all units. US Advisors also assisted in making or forced the existing system to work by insuring requests were submitted and filled, to include, anticipating needs and regulating supplies.

c. Airlift items. Airlift items such as slings and cargo nets were in short supply. On three occasions air resupply had to be cancelled due to a lack of sufficient airlift items to rig the resupply. The ARVN lacked a sense of urgency in the handling of airlift items. Slings and cargo nets were lost or damaged by incoming mortar rounds or track vehicles as they lay on the landing zone.

Solution: To insure all air items were gathered and rigged for return and reissue, advisor recommendations were reinforced, as required by US personnel personally handling air items.

d. Lack of facility in the English language caused field units to have difficulty in directing and effectively using Tac Air and gunships.

Solution: The problem was temporarily relieved by having all communication between ground troops and US air assets passed through the VMAF Aviation LNO, who was competent in the English language. A long range solution would be the continuation of the English language classes initiated prior to Lam Son 719.

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e. The ARVN tended to use air strikes and gunships on targets which could have been attacked just as effectively by attached artillery units. Solution: Advisors urged the use of artillery when practical, to immediately engage the targets.

f. Abuse of medivac priorities and evacuation of lightly wounded. The ARVN, realizing that routine medivacs often had to wait as long as 4 hours for evacuation, upgraded priorities to insure getting a medivac as soon as possible. 1st Ranger Group also had a policy to evacuate all wounded, regardless of the severity of the wound, thereby causing a needless drain of valuable manpower.

Solution: Advisors made periodic checks with medivac crews to determine the actual condition of the wounded to determine the validity of the assigned priority. In cases where US Advisors were present, they personally checked the wounded to insure that the priorities were not abused.

g. Poor leadership in some areas hampered medivacs. Able bodied troops, or slightly wounded troops, would "mob" helicopters in hot landing zones, preventing medivac of the more seriously wounded.

Solution: In Vietnam, US Advisors controlled the landing zones to insure orderly evacuations. In the landing zones in Laos the situation could not be corrected.

h. CH-47 Chinook pilots did not talk to ground controllers early in the operation and at times would drop loads from 30-40 feet causing damage to the cargo; and sometimes loss of the loads.

Solution: Direct coordination with the Hook Battalion Commander corrected this situation to a marked degree but failed to correct it completely.

i. The Rangers, as light infantry, were given a mission of occupying fixed positions. They lacked the necessary fire power to perform such a mission.

Solution: Repeated attempts were made to get a mobile type mission for the Rangers through both ARVN and US channels. Requests for 90mm recoilless rifles were never filled.

j. ARVN were hesitant to give accurate ground tactical situation to Dustoff and resupply aircraft fearing to lose the medivac or resupply helicopters. The 39th Bn went into Laos with only 1 days supply of rations. The 21st and 39th were both issued 5 days supply of rations 7 Feb. It was planned that both battalions would be inserted on 8 Feb. The 21st was inserted on 8 Feb, but bad weather prevented the insertion of the 39th until 11 Feb. Helicopters were not available for resupply between the 7th and 11th. Resupply of 39th was accomplished on 12 Feb.

Solution: All landing zones were considered "hot" and all aircraft were provided sufficient support, e.g. gunships accompanied all medevac and resupply helicopters.

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k. There were no local channels of logistical and commo support for Ranger advisors.

Solution: I Corps G-6 advisor, assumed the task of communication support, and Ranger advisors detached to Ranger Command's A&L company, Khe Sanh were able to secure other logistical support.

l. Lack of proper supervision on the part of the artillery commanders allowed artillery ammunition to be unnecessarily exposed resulting in its explosion by incoming mortar and artillery rounds. This problem was compounded by shortage of barrier materials.

Solution: Where ever possible, ammunition was relocated, bunkers built and command emphasis applied with a limited degree of success.

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Inclosure 4

Combat Operations After Action Report Lam Son 719

Copies of Supporting Plans:

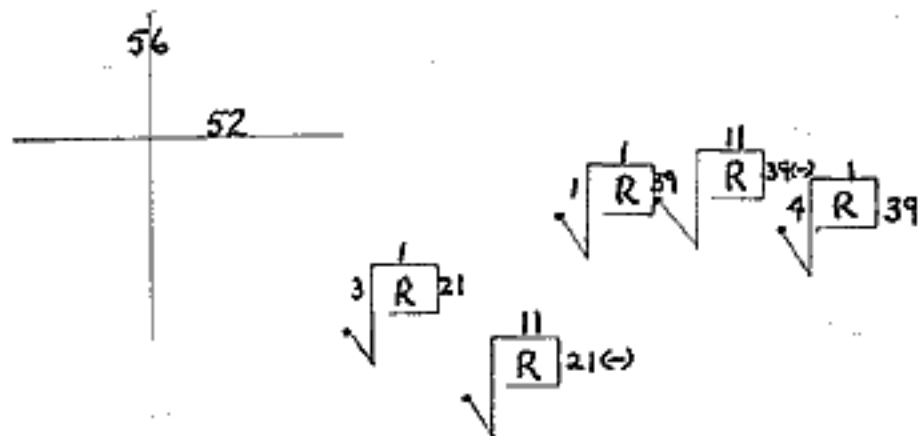
- a. Initial overlays: See attached overlays.
- b. Orders Received: 1st Ranger Group received the order to move to an area near the border and establish a forward Fire Support Base from which operations into Laos would be launched. Upon establishment, 1st Ranger Group was ordered to make two heliborne assaults into Laos and to occupy two prominent hill masses which overlooked portions of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. When completed, two batteries of 105 Howitzers were to be positioned on the fire bases to support the ARVN drive into Laos and to disrupt activity and traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In addition, the Rangers would conduct ambushes and raids along the trail disrupting the enemy supply line.

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Combat After Action Report LAM SON 719, 1st Ranger Group



Inclosure 4

BAN KADAP 6242 11  
HONG HOA 6342 111  
Scale: 1/50,000  
21st and 39th Ranger Battalion  
Locations in Laos.  
LAM SON 719  
8 February- 28 February 1971

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Inclosure 5

Lessons Learned:

- a. Upon the extraction of the 21st Battalion from Laos and its relocating, Phu Loc FSB was overcrowded to the point that incoming rounds had few places to land that would not cause damage. SOP must be established or adhered to, insuring that adequate spacing exists between bunkers and that artillery pieces and ammunitions are properly protected from incoming rounds.
- b. Resupply-procedures for large scale resupply to include the support of attached units must be coordinated. Resupply of advisory teams on long operations should be handled by an advisory support group located in a position that can provide all aspects of support.
- c. Battalion advisors must be provided access to sufficient information to enable observation of timely warning orders and accumulation of supplies and equipment. Copies in English of Vietnamese warning and OP orders should be made available to advisors to enable advisors to anticipate requirements beyond the scope of Vietnamese capabilities. Bilingual preferred.
- d. When possible, intelligence summaries should be sent in both English and/or Vietnamese to insure intelligence is received. All reports, situation reports, spot reports for example, and requests such as medivac, fac requests, should be identical and bilingual. This would insure that both ARVN and advisors are reporting the same information in the same format.
- e. The ARVN soldier, when well led, is an extremely capable fighting man. He has the stamina and endurance necessary to sustain hardships, and fight. Soldiers of the 39th and 21st Ranger Battalions went for days without food or water as they fought the NVA attempting to overrun their positions. When forced to withdraw, they destroyed weapons and ammunitions they could not carry. Leadership at the company and platoon levels is weak in some instances and this understandably hampered the units overall performance. With training, the potential leadership could be developed and the performance of the unit up-graded.
- f. The Ranger Battalions in Laos made contact with elements of the 88th Regiment, 308th NVA Division and other undetermined units.

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Important Decisions:

a. Early in the operation when the 39th and 21st Ranger Battalions were engaged in heavy fighting in Laos, the decision was made by higher headquarters not to commit the reserves to reinforce the 39th and 21st positions. Had this decision been to commit the reserves, possibly a major battle could have been fought and won. Using TAC Air and Gunships to support the ARVN's, a large number of NVA forces which were eventually involved in heavy fighting to the south possibly would have been drawn into this battle. Reinforcing the 21st and 39th early in the operation would almost have certainly avoided the heavy losses of men and equipment ultimately suffered by these two Ranger Battalions.

b. The decision to remove the howitzers from Phu Loc was initially recommended by Col Hiep before the heavy bombardment of Phu Loc began. This recommendation was disapproved by Corps Staff. When the decision to remove the howitzers was finally received, adequate support was not provided to remove them. APC's as prime movers were requested from the 5th Mech. and denied. Tanks were requested from ARVN resources. Tanks sent, lacked sufficient power to climb the hill. Bulldozers were requested from ARVN resources. The bulldozers sent not only did not have pintels, but lacked adequate fuel. CH-47's attempted to remove the howitzers but were prevented from doing so. The howitzers were finally removed by the persistent efforts of the U.S. Advisors continually prodding the ARVN to continue extraction attempts or they would do it themselves. A bulldozer with pintel, and a tank with pintel were requested, under cover of darkness to drag the pieces off the hill. U.S. artillery supporting fires were requested and received. 1st Ranger Group was advised by the 1/5th Mech. that FAC and gunship support could be provided only in the event of a definite contact.

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1. Counterpart Performance: 1st Ranger Group Commander

- a. Colonel Hiep's performance during the period 6 March 71 to date, was generally satisfactory. His analysis, concepts and operational plans were excellent. However, he delegated all on the spot follow up supervision to his subordinates. While at Phu Loc, he rarely left his bunker. At the new location, Lang Co, his bunker and the group TOC formed a "TEE" allowing better supervision of the staff located there.
- b. Throughout the described period, Colonel Hiep appeared to obey orders, four of his ( two for displacement of artillery and two operational) were reportedly disapproved.
- c. Determining responsibility for artillery damage suffered at Phu Loc appears to have taken precedence over extraction of the tubes. General Soan's promise to announce a Corps extraction plan, never materialized. (Source: Colonel Hiep.)
- d. Colonel Hiep's deputy, when present, supervised the staff. In the absence of the LTC TUAN, the group S-3 bore total responsibility for the execution of orders. A new S-3 was assigned 22 March 1971. Colonel Hiep's request for an artillery officer (VN) to inspect the tubes at PHU LOC was not approved. The attached tank platoon leader informed Colonel Hiep that his four M-41 tanks were "to weak" to act as prime movers. The bulldozers initially provided lacked towing hooks. (Parallel status missions were submitted.) The D-4 bulldozer provided 27 March 71, had this capability.
- e. The lack of defensive action on the part of 1st Ranger Group, i.e., patrol to detect mortar may be attributed to a lack of direction from I Corps. However, Colonel Hiep did not aggressively exploit every option open, but this is normal Vietnamese Commanders reaction when operational subordinate to a higher headquarters for they must have an order. In addition every Major plan submitted by Colonel Hiep during the period 7-27 March, was reported disapproved.

2. Counterpart Performance: Other Commanders and Staff

a. LTC TUAN: Group Executive Officer.

LTC TUAN as an executive officer was weak and ineffective. During an extraction and resupply attempt of the 21st Ranger position in Laos LTC TUAN was flying in the Command control ship with the Airborne Coordinator, throughout the mission LTC TUAN was visibly shaken, and his only contribution to the mission, was to continually request that the command and control ship which was already orbiting at 4000 feet, fly higher. Effective ground coordination was delivered by the US Airborne coordinator conferring directly with the ground commander or by relaying through an interpreter also flying in the O&C. LTC TUAN's activities while on Phu Loc were adequate. He spent the majority of the time in the CP bunker at Phu Loc, made infrequent trips to the TOC, and on only few occasions observed by US Advisors, direct, or supervise the Group Staff.

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Counterpart Performance:

- b. S-3 Cpt Nhan: Hard working, diligent, knowledgeable, professional soldier, Nhan was restricted in his ability to function due to a lack of freedom on his part to make decisions. All decisions were made by Col. Hiep. The staff has no delegated authority to make decisions in the absence of the commander. The normal Vietnamese relationship of staff officer outranked by Battalion Commander also existed.
- c. S-4 Cpt Quyneh: Weak and ineffective. He lacks initiative, imagination and professionalism. He did not attempt to organize an effective Task Force resupply organization and was hesitant to submit requests to ALC without a direct order or list from the Group-3. He had no authority to initiate request. He had to be continually supervised by Ranger Advisors to insure heavy lifts were packed and rigged. No logistical personnel showed any sense of urgency.
- d. 21st Bn Co, MAJ HIEP: Competent, aggressive leader who instilled discipline and maintained organization in the battalion. Competant in english, he was extremely capable in directing all US air assets. He tends to personally inspect and direct all aspects of an operation.
- e. 37th Bn Co, MAJ NUYENH: A weak ineffective leader who lacks aggressive-ness. He refused to patrol around Phu Loc to prevent mortar attacks and ground probes. He appears to lack the drive and initiative in combat to perform adequatley as a Bn CO.
- f. 39th Bn Co MAJ KHANG: A competant and effective Bn CO. His lack of proficiency in english hampered his ability to fully exploit US air assets.

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Performance of Unit: 1st Ranger Group

- a. Overall performance of 1st Ranger Group during Lam Son 719 can be considered satisfactory considering the restrictions or apparent restrictions imposed upon 1st Ranger Group. It appeared to the advisors of 1st Ranger Group, that the Rangers were initially given an ambiguous mission in Laos and RVN not comparable with their experience and training. The Rangers could have accomplished the mission of denying portions of the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the NVA by mobile Strike Forces, ambushes and reconnaissance. Occupying a fixed position resulted in the Rangers becoming encircled and preventing resupply. Col Hiep had requested permission for the evacuation of the 39th and into the 21st position. The order was never given and the 39th had to take the initiative or be destroyed. The 21st was also encircled and the resupply situation of the 39th Battalion reported itself. Heavy anti-aircraft fire and approximately of enemy troops severely hampered and helicopter support. Against superior NVA, forces the Rangers fought hard and effectively. In most cases, artillery and US air support was employed well, inflicting maximum casualties on the enemy.
- b. The defense of Phu Loc was hampered by lack of aggressiveness on the part of the 37th Battalion Commander who was persistent in not employing patrols to prevent frequent mortar and rocket attacks. The ambiguity of the Rangers overall mission may have contributed to this problem.

When the order to withdraw was received plans were made to extract the remaining howitzers and remove the troops from Fire Support Base's Phu Loc and Lang Co. The withdrawal was orderly and as many bunkers and fortifications as possible were destroyed prior to the units leaving the area. The 37th Battalion Commander reported destroying all ammunition left, however, the Advisors witnessed no destruction by Rangers at Phu Loc. The fact that the Rangers had to be extracted from Laos due to pressure by the enemy should not cause the accomplishments of 1st Ranger Group to be overlooked or minimized. (See inclosure 1). The Rangers, in a little over 20 days of fighting, killed over 800 NVA, captured over 500 weapons, destroyed tons of munitions and gasoline, and disrupted activity along the trail in their area of operations. Most important of all they showed early in the operations. Most encountered was well armed, well organized, and prepared to fight an aggressive conventional type warfare, and accept casualties to force the ARVN forces out of Laos.

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## Results of Lam Son 719

<u>PERSONNEL</u>	<u>ARVN</u>	<u>NVA</u>
Killed	115	869
Wounded	529	--
Missing	26	--
Captured	--	2

(Kill Ratio 7 to 1)

### Supplies and Equipment: Captured or Destroyed

462-Individual Weapons

112-Crew-served Weapons

292-Tons of ammunition

152,000-Liters of gasoline

.5-Tons of signal equipment

17-Tons of miscellaneous material

10-Artillery (Howitzers)

6-Anti-aircraft weapons

2-Trucks

6-Tanks (Results of Ranger directed air strike)

15-Tons Weapon caches

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LAMSON 719  
1st Ranger Group  
FRIENDLY LOSSES

	KIA	WIA	MIA
OFFICER	4	14	
NCO	12	53	1
EM	98	462	25
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	115	529	26

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Inclosure 9

Evaluation of Combat Support to include Intelligence, Fire Support, TAC Air, Aviation support, Engineer support, Military Police support, PSYWAR support activities and all coordination of this report.

a. Fire Support: Fire support by US artillery units was outstanding after initial coordination problems. US artillery fire was timely and accurate in response to fire support requests.

b. TAC Air: In some cases, effective TAC Air was improved by weather. Available TAC Air support was outstanding. TAC Air assets requested were received timely and used effectively when troops were in contact. The PAC and TAC Air support of the Ranger units was superb. Air strikes were brought accurately to within 50 meters of friendly positions.

c. Aviation Support: In the initial stage of the operation, 1st Ranger Group was provided adequate CH-47 and UH-1H helicopter support. As the tactical situation further south in Laos increased in intensity, helicopter support became more difficult to obtain. In one instance a single helicopter was requested for 7 days by an element for resupply before one arrived. One outlying company was without food for 2 days as a result. In another instance, a mission essential situation had to be called, to get a UH-1H, for advisor signal support. For ARVN good, they were able to keep all their commo equipment in operation. ARVN were unable to supply advisors with items such as RC-292 antennae, cables, and antennae for FRC-77's and FRC-25's. Advisor support had to come from 12th Signal Group at Quang Tri which caused delays in replacing needed equipment.

d. Engineer Support: Bulldozers were sent to Phu Loc and LZ Lang Co without a resupply of diesel fuel. ARVN engineers were reluctant to support their equipment.

e. Military Police: Negative support.

f. PSYWAR Activity: The only PSYWAR activities observed by 1st Ranger Group was the dropping of leaflets.

g. Combat Service Support:

(1) Logistics: Logistical support in the areas of small arms ammunition, 105 and 155 ammunition was acceptable. Logistical support in the area of food and sandbags was also acceptable. Support received in request for barrier material such as FSP and bunker beams was critically short of what was requested. These problems were generally attributed to a lack of inventory in the Vietnamese resupply system.

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(2) Medical Services: General support was good. Ranger medics were experienced and knowledgeable in their duties. The ARVN had an adequate field hospital established at Ham Nghi.

(3) Personnel and Services Management: Generally poor. Accurate accounting of KIA, WIA, and location of WIA personnel was poor. Mail call and pay days were infrequent. Records in these areas need further emphasis.

(4) Press and News Media: Press accounts of the situation in Laos were not particularly accurate.

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