

General Hieu Moving His Headquarters to Lai Khe

As soon as General Hieu took over the command of the 5th Division in August 1969, he had to make arrangements to move his Headquarters from Binh Duong to Lai Khe, taking over a Base Camp belonging to the US 1st Infantry Division, whose Headquarters was located in Di An, Bien Hoa. Despite the time consuming of this big relocation, he was still able to revamp his units into an offensive force, which succeeded in pushing the NVA units across the border of Vietnam-Kampuchea, within two months.

1. Report Letter of General Do Cao Tri to General Cao Van Vien (23 January 1970)

Reference:

Message No 1453/TTM/P3, dated 12 Jan 70, J3, JGS

Minutes No 036/UBHH/VM/V3CT, dated 9 Jan 70, Combined ARVN-US Committee, III CTZ.

1. In execution of the reference 1 above, after discussing with the 5th Inf Division, III CTZ Hqs convened a meeting of all ARVN-US Committee, III CTZ at III Corps Hqs on 9 Jan 70 to determine general modus operandi for this Committee and to discuss about the schedule and procedures for the transfer of Lai Khe Base Camps to the 5th ARVN Inf. Division (reference 2 above).

During the above-mentioned preliminary meeting, the committee recommended II FFV and the 1st US Inf Division to arrange for the committee 1 day to visit Lai Khe Base Camp so as to assess the current status of barracks and equipment at this base camp. This recommendation was approved and the combined ARVN-US committee, III CTZ consisting of representatives of III CTZ Hqs, III AL0, 5th ARVN Inf Division and Binh Duong Military Property Construction Office visited Lai Khe Base Camp on 16 Jan 70 (LTC Ton That Van, representative of JGS accompanied the visiting party).

After being briefed by the 1st US Infantry Division on the status of barracks (facilities), available equipment and the defensive system and on the US Armed Forces concept on the transfer of this base camp to the 5th ARVN Inf. Division, III Corps Hqs was informed that the transfer would be conducted in 2 phases:

Phase 1: The entire western area and one part of the eastern area of the base camp will be turned over by the 1st US Inf. Division on 15 March 1970. The remaining area would be temporarily used by the US Armed Forces to station the following units: 2 helicopter companies; 1 Arty Hqs and 2 batteries; 1 Engineer battalion; 1 Armored Cavalry unit.

Phase 2: The remaining area would be transferred to the 5th ARVN Inf. Division. The date of transfer will be notified later (in approximately June or August 1970).

Then, the Combined ARVN-US Committee, III CTZ was given a tour guide to observe all arena of the base camp.

After the on the spot observation, the committee found that Lai Khe Base Camp was too large; thus it would take a long time to accomplish the thorough inventory of barracks and equipment. Thus, although the date of transfer had not been officially confirmed, the committee had recommended the 1st US Infantry Division (the recommendation had been approved) to authorize a limited committee to come and operate at Lai Khe Base Camp as of 19 Jan 70 in coordination with the 1st US Inf. Division to perform general inventory of the barracks and equipment so that after the 1st US Inf. Division received order of transfer immediate take-over of this base camp.

The composition of the limited committee would consist of:

- Representative of G4, 5th ARVN Inf. Division (Chairman)
- Representatives of G3 + MS3, 5th ARVN Inf. Division
- Representative of G4, III Corps
- Representative of III ALO
- Representative of Binh Duong Military Property Construction Area Office

Every week, the limited committee would report the progress of the task, difficulties and recommendations to the Combined ARVN-US Committee, III CTZ to be discussed during the weekly meeting that would be held on Thursday each week.

2. General observation on the status of the barracks and equipment of Lai Khe Base Camp:

a. Barracks:

Excluding a number of metal office buildings, approximately 26 units, constructed at central area to be used as main installations of the Hqs, 1st US Inf. Division, and a number of brick buildings of the Indochinese Rubber Research Center (about 20 rows) that would be suitable for a long use; other buildings were prefab houses with tin roofs and holed wooden walls. Their anti-mosquito and fly screens were damaged in many parts. These buildings could be used for a maximum period of 2 years. If they were not to receive timely repair, they would completely collapse. This was not to include a number of field tents that were not fit for use any longer.

b. Utilities:

(1) Electricity:

Presently, the Lai Khe Base Camp is fed with electricity from 2 sources. The 1st power source provide electricity of high voltage by 3 500 KW generators operated by PA&E: these generators provided power for the central area including Division Headquarters, TOC, Signal Center and a critical installation. The second power source consisted of generators of 100 KW and below that provided power for other areas scattered in base camp.

(2) Water:

Throughout this base camp there were 2 water supply points and water supplying systems as follows: 1 non potable water supply point; 1 potable water supply point; 3 water pumping stations; 1 water purification station; 4 water wells; 1 8000-ft water distribution line.

3. Recommendations:

Based on the above factors and the recommendation of the 5th ARVN Inf. Division, III CTZ Hqs requests that Central Logistics Agency, JGS:

a. Take action with MACV:

(1) To transfer to the 5th ARVN Inf. Division all available housing facilities to include metal office buildings and all critical installations such as TOC, Signal Center, etc... that are being used by the 1st US Inf. Division.

(2) To transfer to the 5th ARVN Inf. Division a number of trailer houses to be used as quarters of the Co, Division and all field grade officers (3 houses at least).

(3) To transfer to the 5th ARVN Inf. Division all available generators to include 3,500 KW generators and their secondary equipment such as: main and secondary electric wire lines, electric posts, power transformation house, bulbs, etc...

As for operators to operated generators with high voltage, the 30th Engineer Combat Group has sufficient operators and will train additional operators for the 5th ARVN Inf. Division to operate these generators.

(4) To transfer to the 5th ARVN Inf. Division all water supply systems to include water pumps, water purifiers, water towers and water distributing pipes.

(5) To transfer all air conditioners, electric fans installed at TOC, Signal Center and all installations of the base camp; because these facilities are metal or prefab houses that are too low in construction, and if air conditioners and electric fans were not available, personnel could not work in these buildings, especially during the dry season.

(6) To transfer all cable lines, telephone lines, antenna, etc...

(7) To transfer all office materials and quarter facilities, such as: tables, desks, chairs, cabinets, beds, mattresses, etc ... not belonging to TOC of the 1st US Inf. Division and not being used by this unit any longer.

b. Approve for the 5th ARVN Inf. Division to use all building of the Indochinese Rubber Research Center to have sufficient installations for working. Actually, these buildings are scattered among other buildings within the defensive perimeter of this base camp and adjacent to the Central Area (Division Hqs), thus they cannot be separated and returned to the owners, and the civilian residences among military installations will cause many difficulties to the 5th ARVN Inf. Division in the defense

and security protection of its base.

c. In addition, to assist the 5th ARVN Inf. Division to immediately implement the repair and maintenance of the barracks and defensive system that had been damaged, requested that Central Logistics Agency, JGS consider and provide initial issue of the following materials for the 5th ARVN Inf. Division:

(1) Barracks maintenance: 5,000 bags of cement (to make floors, blocks for walls); 50 cubic meters of lumber of all sizes (for doors, replacement of purlins and house columns); 800 kilograms of nails (assorted).

(2) Maintenance of defensive system: 23,632 M16 mines; 860 Claymore mines; 1,720 trip flares; 738 cubic meters of lumber; 1,456 bolts. 12x150; 22,800 kilograms of nails, 6-10-15cm; 672 bags of cement; 183 cubic meters of sand.

(the defensive system consists of 11,750 meters of fences of the perimeter; 11,000 meters of fences among units, 112 bunkers and watchtowers).

4. The above are general observation of the III CTZ Hqs and initial requirements of the 5th ARVN Inf. Division, III CTZ Hqs will continuously report to Central Logistics Agency, JGS the progress of the task difficulties and recommendations pertaining to the receipt of the above mentioned base camp after each weekly meeting of the Combined ARVN-US Committee, III CTZ.

APO 3177, 23 January 1970
Lieutenant General DO CAO TRI
Commanding General, III Corps + III CTZ

2. Memorandum from General McAuliffe to General Milloy (13 March 1970).

1. I called General Conroy MACVJ4 this morning to get from him first-hand his reaction to the meeting at Lai Khe, 11 March involving General Hieu, General [Dzu](#), [General Khuyen](#), General Yates and others. He said that he wanted to make the following points clear:

a. He made no commitments, except to indicate that MACV is already studying several aspects of the base turn-over problem (the study is several months from completion).

b. His intention was to listen to General Hieu's discussion of problem related to the 5th Division's take-over of Lai Khe. He said he noted the mixed reactions of the JGS officers present to General Hieu's presentation.

c. He noted that several problems were left up in the air:

(1) Maintenance and parts supply for the high-voltage system after it has been turned over to ARVN (after US units depart Lai Khe) -- He intends to talk to General Mildren about this problem, which he regards as the most serious of all those discussed.

(2) Provision of water trailers and pumps -- He commented that the division should promptly request a TA augmentation for the additional trailers and pumps (I pointed out that the 5th Division has already been provided 10 water trailers with pumps on a loan basis pending supply through ARVN channels).

(3) Light bulbs -- He acknowledged that the US should provide some light bulbs (His implication was that this would be a one-time quantity delivery) for use until the US type light fixtures are replaced by Vietnamese type.

(4) Funds for base maintenance -- He said that the GVN normally provides very little funds to maintain base camps, often only about one-tenth of what has been requested, and that it is generally not possible to obtain additional funds for this purpose. He commented that ARVN units occupying former US base camps will have to learn to live under this austere funding; alternatively, they should not accept these bases for occupancy. He noted that many of the buildings at Lai Khe are in need of repair and that, if building materials cannot be obtained through normal channels, it should be possible for some buildings to be torn down in order to provide materials to patch others.

d. He also commented on General Hieu's plan for Lai Khe base defense. He observed that there appeared to him to be an over commitment of troops assigned for this purpose, and that some of these troops might better be utilized in repairing buildings, etc, during daylight hours.

e. He was told, while at Lai Khe, that the 5th Division has several mine detectors in need of repair -- there will be an increasing need for these when the 5th Division assumes security responsibility for the major LOCs in its new TAOR. He said that he was looking into this to see what can be done to help.

2. As I indicated to you yesterday evening, my staff, in conjunction with the IIFV staff, is preparing a letter to General Tri on the various questions of support for Lai Khe raised by him and by General Hieu this week. My purpose is to try to provide realistic answers and to nail down what US support can be expected. We shall take General Conroy's views into account in preparing that paper.

D.P. McAuliffe
Brigadier General, USA
Deputy Senior Advisor
MACCZ-III

P.S. As you know both General Tri and General Hieu have expressed some concern for their capability to operate Lai Khe without US help, and particularly after the remaining US units are withdrawn. The IIFV staff and my staff have been working closely with USAV and the 5th Division and they have already resolved many problems. General Tri is still somewhat apprehensive about the ultimate electric power source and the lack of ARVN funds for maintenance of the buildings etc.

Attached is an MFR of a meeting held yesterday at Lai Khe. There are still a few strings to be tied down; but it's obvious that these are recognized by all concerned and

should be resolved shortly. We'll keep an eye on them.

3. Letter of General Do Cao Tri to General Ewell (14 March 1970)

Subject: Request for Support in Repair of Lai Khe Base

This is to inform your Headquarters:

1. Presently, the take-over of Lai Khe base by the 5th ARVN Infantry Division is nearly completed except for one small area that will be received in the near future. From the above received areas, III CTZ found that most of the houses at this base are prefab houses. Thus, after such a long use, these houses are in bad condition.
2. Although III Corps Headquarters has requested JGS, RVNAF to allocate funds to the 5th Infantry Division to repair Lai Khe base but due to the ARVN funds shortage, JGS provided only 1,500,000 piasters for immediate maintenance of any goals required. However, for such a large base like Lai Khe base, III Corps Headquarters found that the above small fund cannot meet the repair requirement of this base.
3. III Corps Headquarters learned that the US Armed Forces planned to provide the 1970 maintenance fund to Lai Khe base and presently, PA&E is repairing the houses stationed by the US Armed Forces to include the barracks of the Advisory Team 70 located in the area that had been transferred to the 5th ARVN Infantry Division. Thus, to assist the 5th Infantry Division to have sufficient housing facilities for station during the first days at Lai Khe base, request your Headquarters take action with the USARV to approve for PA&E to continue maintenance of the barracks transferred to the 5th Infantry Division by the 1970 maintenance fund, provided by the US Armed Forces.

APO 3177, 14 March 1970

Lieutenant General Do Cao Tri

Commanding General, III Corps and III CTZ

4. Letter of General McAuliffe to General Ewell (18 March 1970)

Subject: Support for Lai Khe Base

1. During a visit to Lai Khe, 10 March, General Tri asked me to look into: (1) providing PA&E support (or funding for such support) for the 5th ARVN Division area at Lai Khe for the remainder of this year; (2) providing lumber and tin roofing for the repair of buildings there; (3) clarifying whether high or low voltage power system is to be left at Lai Khe (he cited a MACV directive that specified low voltage systems for turnover to RVNAF).
2. General Hieu had reportedly invited General Khuyen, CG CLC, to visit Lai Khe. On 11 March, General Khuyen showed up, accompanied by General Dzu, General Nguyen (JGS Engr), General Conroy and General Yates (your staff and mine did not learn of the visit of this delegation in time to attend). The questions above, and others pertaining to Lai Khe were discussed. I called General Conroy the following day to get his reaction to the meeting. Briefly, he said he served as a sounding board for General Hieu's comments about the condition of the base and the need for support, but that he made no commitments. General Conroy acknowledged that MACV is studying, with JGS, the problems connected with the transfer of bases to RVNAF; also, he said that he regarded the problem of repair parts for the HV system at Lai Khe as being the most serious of those discussed -- he is having this

looked into.

3. At Tab A is a translation of a 14 March letter from General Tri on this subject (it was received on 17 March).

4. I believe that interim answers should be provided to General Tri's questions and letter, since it may be several weeks or more before the MACV base transfer study is finished. Also, I think that a note of realism should be injected into this matter, for I sense that some optimism concerning US support may have been generated (erroneously) among the ARVN participants at the Lai Khe meeting (I have discussed this some with General Tri). Accordingly, I recommend your approval and signature of the letter at Tab B.

D.P. McAuliffe
Brigadier General, USA
Deputy Senior Advisor

5. Letter of General Ewell to General Tri

Dear General Tri:

In response to your question of 10 March to Brigadier General McAuliffe and your letter of 14 March concerning support for Lai Khe base, I have had my staff look into the points you raise. While many aspects of this subject are still being studied at MACV and ASARV, I want to pass along to you such information as has been obtained thus far.

Electric Power Supply:

a. MACV Directive 735-3 and the USARV policy for the transfer of facilities such as Lai Khe base to RVNAF require leaving an electrical system in facilities to be utilized after transfer. USARV has requested MACV to issue a decision as soon as possible on leaving the high voltage (HV) system in place and turning this over to RVNAF.

b. USARV and my staff believe that the HV system is more desirable than a LV system because of: lower cost; less equipment to maintain for the power received; and the desirability of standardizing on HV systems in base camps country-wide. Moreover, USARV does not have the capability, in either funds or equipment, to convert the current HV system at Lai Khe to a low voltage (LV) system.

c. The question of providing maintenance parts for HV systems turned over to RVNAF is also under study at this time.

d. I believe it would be prudent for RVNAF to expand the training of electricians to provide a pool of qualified personnel for maintenance and repair of HV power systems.

Lumber and Tin: Lumber in the usable 1x and 2x sizes and tin roofing are still in short supply. In fact, the shortage of these building materials is preventing us from fully meeting our obligations to RVNAF dependent housing projects at this time. I am aware that the salvage operation at Dau Tieng will provide a substantial amount of materials for dependent housing. It may be appropriate, however, to consider diverting some of these salvaged materials to repair buildings at Lai Khe; alternatively, to select some buildings at Lai Khe for dismantling in order to use the materials thus obtained to repair other buildings there.

Repair and Utilities (R&U) Support: The problem of providing continue PA&E support for the ARVN area of Lai Khe base, or making available US funds programmed for R&U support for the balance of the current fiscal year, is now under study at MACV. Taking a realistic view, however, US funds are being sharply reduced in country as a result of congressional budgetary actions, and it appears unlikely that much additional support of this type can be provided. I will continue to press for as favorable a solution as possible under the circumstances.

Sincerely,
LTG Julian J. Ewell
Senior Advisor