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31 Mar 1985, DoDD 5200.10; OAG D/A ltr, 11 Jun 1986

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
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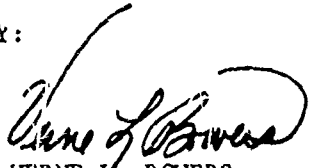
10 May 1973

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report: COL Edwin W. Chamberlain, Jr.,  
Senior Advisor, 44th Special Tactical Zone, 5 July 1972 -  
28 January 1973 (U)

SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. Reference: AR 525-14, Senior Officer Debriefing Report (U),  
2 July 1971.
2. Transmitted herewith is the report of, COL Edwin W. Chamberlain, Jr.,  
subject as above.
3. This report is provided to insure appropriate benefits are realized  
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4. Information of actions initiate under provisions of AR 525-14, as  
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HEADQUARTERS  
ADVISORY TEAM 50 (44th SPECIAL TACTICAL ZONE)  
DELTA REGIONAL ASSISTANCE COMMAND  
APO 96215

MACDR-50-CO

10 March 1973

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report  
COL EDWIN W. CHAMBERLAIN JR.  
Senior Advisor, 44th Special Tactical Zone

THRU: Commander, DRAC  
APO 96215

THRU: COMUSMACV  
APO 96222

IC: Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations  
ATTN: DAMO-ODU  
Department of the Army  
Washington, D.C. 20310

Country. Republic of Vietnam

Duty Assignment: Senior Advisor, 44th Special Tactical Zone

Inclusive Dates: 5 July 1971 - 28 January 1973

Date of Report: 10 March 1973

1. (C) BACKGROUND

a. The following report is submitted in accordance with AR 525-14 dated 2 July 1971. The 44th Special Tactical Zone is an abnormality created in 1965 to control border units within the IV Corps region. Since then the border units have been assimilated into the IV Corps Rangers in the form of two border Ranger groups.

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SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report  
COL EDWIN W. CHAMBERLAIN JR.  
Senior Advisor, 44th Special Tactical Zone

The headquarters of the 44th Special Tactical Zone is very lightly manned and, except for a small Signal Detachment, has no organic or assigned troops. Despite this austerity the zone controlled all operations within the border provinces of Kien Tuong, Kien Phong, Chau Doc and the border district of Ha Tien, Kien Giang Province, a straight line distance of 195 kilometers. The Zone was also responsible for the conduct of ARVN operations within Cambodia. Further, during the height of the 1972 NVA Offensive the Zone had control of thirteen Ranger battalions and four armored regiments plus the equivalent of four artillery battalions. Despite its small size, the Zone was able to tactically manage these forces in a reasonably effective manner.

b. The undersigned was responsible for providing advice and assistance to the Commanding General, 44th Special Tactical Zone and coordinating and supervising the activities of all Ranger and 4th Armored Brigade Advisors assigned to Delta Regional Assistance Command, IV Corps. Since November 1971, I have also been responsible for all US armed helicopter operations originating in the Delta for support of the Khmer Republic (Cambodia), the conduct of an Air-Ground and Intelligence School for selected Cambodian officers, and for monitoring enemy activities in those areas of Cambodia contiguous to IV Corps. Finally, under plans instituted by General Cushman, I was responsible for developing and implementing within the border provinces a single, integrated, land and sea anti-infiltration plan for the Delta. This required the integration and assistance of all Free World elements, both military and civilian within the area.

### 2. (C) OBSERVATIONS:

#### a. General:

(1) The Vietnamese are tactically proficient. Their conduct of the war is hampered by certain national characteristics such as laziness, corruption, unwillingness to close with the enemy, lack of motivation, dullness and stupidity which no amount of advice or assistance can overcome. There are some outstanding individuals within the Vietnamese Army, of whom my current counterpart, COL Hoang Duc Nien, is one. Despite his brilliance, he is hampered by the presence of the national traits which I have described above in others. The Vietnamese soldier is brave and fights superbly when led well. Unfortunately, the depth of leadership within the Vietnamese Army is shallow and the system is such that the truly outstanding young officers cannot rise quickly to command battalions, groups and regiments. Aside from lack of motivation, adequate leadership is probably the greatest single weakness of the Vietnamese Army.

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(2) Due to the virtual elimination of US support, the ability of the advisor to influence his counterpart has been reduced to a question of personalities. Some Vietnamese genuinely like Americans and continue to work together as a team. However, the majority simply tolerate Americans and seldom keep them informed or seek their advice. The wise advisor recognizes this and is sparing with both advice and criticism. With regard to the latter, the Vietnamese are very sensitive to criticism, and that which is offered must be constructive and low keyed if any results, other than a rupture of confidence, are to be achieved.

(3) In certain areas such as maintenance, care and preservation of ammunition, and training during lulls in combat, to mention but a few, this advisor has experienced almost no success, nor has he observed other than transitory success on the part of others. In terms of maintenance and ammunition discipline, it is my view that as long as the United States Government continues to provide replacement equipment and ammunition in abundant quantities, no improvement in the situation can be expected. Also, there exists no accountability for ammunition at the using unit level insofar as I can determine. Thus, there is absolutely no incentive to conserve, and the waste is disgraceful. Yet, senior commanders at all levels of the Vietnamese Army will not take effective action to improve ammunition discipline, despite periodic lip service.

(4) The Vietnamese Army has an excellent overall training program to which all units are exposed on an annual basis. However, the AVN mentality is such that it is virtually impossible to convince them of either the need or the benefits to be derived by training programs conducted during stand down periods. It is simply another illustration of the incapacity of the AVN to perceive what is in their own best interest.

(5) The Vietnamese Army, in common with our own, is vastly oversubscribed in vehicles and equipment on their TC&E's. As a consequence, much of their equipment acts as a source of cannibalization in order to keep essential equipment on line. In my judgement, considerable savings could be effected with no loss in combat efficiency by reducing the authorized levels for much of their equipment, particularly vehicles of the 1/2 ton class.

b. Ranger Operations:

The Rangers have proven to be superb light infantry. They have

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been extremely bold in seeking out the enemy, frequently operating beyond supporting range of artillery. Although a typical border Ranger Battalion has an authorized strength of 461 officers and men, few of the border Ranger Battalions ever fielded more than 250, and 200 was more often the case. Thus, they were little more than reinforced companies. Nevertheless, they proved to be tough fighters and, when adequately supported, were capable of accomplishing any mission. The Vietnamese concept was to use them for screening the border and seeking out the enemy. In addition, they were frequently employed as a fire brigade throughout Vietnam, and consequently, advisors or mine participated in battles in III Corps, and I Corps (Quang Tri and Hue). Heretofore, I have been suspicious of special outfits, believing that regular infantry units could do the same thing. I still believe this, but after observing the Rangers for a year and a half, I have become persuaded that there is a role for highly trained and motivated light infantry. We might be well advised to do a little experimenting with the concept. There were a number of occasions when the Rangers could have pulled off some neat feats of arms against the enemy had they been better motivated and better led. The US success with LIFs and SEALs suggests that there is still room in warfare for special units with daring and imagination.

### c. Armored Operations:

(1) Extensive use of armored personnel carriers, cross-reinforced with Rangers, was made within the 44th STZ. Little that was new or original was practiced. The enemy's arsenal of B-40's, 75mm recoilless rifles, and 82mm mortars has proven effective in constraining the movement of the APCs so that much of their value is lost. Bold and aggressive ARVN Armored Commanders are not much in evidence, but the few that are around have produced excellent results by a combination of fire and maneuver. Lacking other armored vehicles, the ARVN tend to use the APC as an assault vehicle. This I think is practical, provided speed and mobility are maintained. However, it is considerably less practical if the APC is used as an infantry tank and has to engage in a slugging match from stationary positions with dug-in infantry. Then it becomes very vulnerable to the aforementioned ordnance. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese were seldom able to adequately coordinate their artillery and armor so that the APCs could assault enemy positions by moving into and under VT and timed artillery fire. Nor could they be made to realize that rapid movement of the APCs without halting, into and over the enemy positions would result in fewer casualties than persisting, as they did, in slugging matches. Due to faulty tactics, failure to properly

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Senior Advisor, 4th Special Tactical Zone

cross-reinforce, unclear chains of command, and the extreme vulnerability of the gasoline-powered M113, over sixty APCs were lost or damaged during the battle of Kampong Trach, Cambodia.

(2) Some thought needs to be given to the development of heavier armament for some of our APCs. In the delta the land is too soft to use regular tanks. The ARVN solution is to mount 106 recoilless rifles and 40mm cannons on squadron (troop) vehicles. These were highly effective and with some work could be further improved. Also the inclusion of a few Vulcan weapons in the mechanized company would prove most beneficial in increasing both the AA protection and fire power of a mechanized company.

#### d. Cambodia Operations:

(1) In November 1971, I assumed responsibility for the Special Operations Coordination Center (SOCC) at Chi Lang. This unique enterprise had been conceived by General Cushman, DRAC CG at that time, to serve as a bridge between the Vietnamese and Cambodians, both countries having had a long history of mutual antagonism. Besides its tactical functions of coordinating river convoys, cross border operations by the Vietnamese CPs involving both Vietnamese and Cambodian forces, VNAF & US air support of FANK (Khmer National Armed Forces), the SOCC served as a focal point for liaison between the two countries. This facility hosted a number of tri-party meetings between the US, GVN and FANK forces which were designed to improve relations and encourage further combined operations and other cooperation between the two nation states. As an adjunct to this mission the SOCC controlled daily armed helicopter support of both GVN and FANK operations in Cambodia. This was highly successful and resulted in over 1200 KIA for the loss of only one LOH and two pilots during the course of the 15 month operation. During the heavy enemy attacks on Phnom Penh in December, 1971, gunship support, using four Cobras for an average of four missions (8 sorties) a day, was instrumental in aiding the hard pressed defenders to ward off the enemy's attacks and prevent the capture of the capital city. The performance of these aircraft and crews was magnificent during this period. Further, they operated in an environment laden with 51 caliber AA weapons, and on one occasion, a radar-directed 37mm. Although some hits were taken, no aircraft or crew casualties were sustained. This I attribute to close control of the Cobras, so as to avoid unnecessary hazardous attacks, immediate reaction by Cobras and fighters to all instances of AA fire, and the high skill and professionalism of the pilots and crews involved.

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(2) In contrast to the battle of Phnom Penh, the battle of Kampong Trach was supported almost solely by TAC AIR, with US gunships participating only twice in the 30 day battle. TAC AIR brought great execution upon the enemy, yet the enemy managed to encircle the Vietnamese forces, composed of two squadrons of APCs, plus four Ranger Battalions, and at the same time hold off a reinforcing column consisting of an additional APC squadron and Ranger Battalion. Had US Cobras been available, I believe the enemy would have never been able to accomplish this, primarily, because the close-in positions of the enemy could have been attacked more effectively than was possible with TAC AIR, inhibited as they were by consideration of troop safety. On the two occasions that the Cobras were used, they proved to be most effective in eliminating mortar and recoilless rifle positions which the enemy rashly disclosed. Some of these positions had been attacked repeatedly with TAC AIR without results due to terrain configurations.

(3) The SOCC was an innovative creation of General Cushman and deserves to be studied in detail. It constituted, for a long period, the only support available to the FANK forces adjacent to IV Corps. Under its umbrella the FANK were able to suppress the Khmer Rouge and other anti-government forces so as to maintain a fair degree of control over the countryside.

(4) American policy, and therefore Vietnamese policy, regarding the Cambodian situation was ambivalent throughout the period when I was charged with supporting the Khmers. General Cushman was a great leader and perceived better than anyone, military or civilian, the threat posed by the situation in Cambodia to South Vietnam. He tried to persuade the Vietnamese to see it also, but unfortunately and characteristically, the Vietnamese could only perceive the threat in short-range terms and could never overcome their contempt for the Cambodians. Coincident with General Cushman's departure, was the almost simultaneous occurrence of two incidents which were to have a dramatic impact on the Khmer situation; one was the drawdown of US helicopter assets and the other the opening of the enemy's Easter offensive. The ARVN were immediately hard pressed and demanded all available US support; the drawdown simply eliminated the US capability to support both ARVN and FANK. As a consequence, FANK was allocated little support except in extremis.

(5) US TAC AIR was provided in abundance and was instrumental in saving a number of key towns for the Cambodians, such as Takeo and Neak Loeung, but there was not enough, nor was the degree of control, due to language problems, sufficient to permit close and

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timely support of FANK forces in the field. Thus, FANK not only lost control, but allowed the Khmer Rouge almost complete freedom of movement to recruit, organize and train, so that by the fall of 1972, Khmer Rouge units supported by NVA artillery and advisors were pressing FANK in all areas. In the process, Khmer Rouge units relieved various NVA units previously tied up with rear area security, allowing them to participate in the land grab operations that occurred in October and January. From the point of view of the SOCC, we could not be certain from day to day, if we were to give full support or not to the FANK. Generally, as it turned out, we were restrained from supporting routine type contacts, however when these contacts built up to critical situations as they inevitably did, our emphasis changed to all out support. By this time, however, it was too late to do other than save what we had. The loss of Cobra gunships sorely hurt the FANK both materially and psychologically; FANK's will to engage the enemy seemed to deteriorate in direct proportion to our diminishing support. Despite large quantities of TAC AIR on occasion, the situation could not be restored. As a consequence the enemy achieved almost total control over the Cambodian provinces contiguous to the Delta. The current unsatisfactory situation in Cambodia as this is written is, in my judgement, directly attributable to the US and ARVN failure to adequately support the FANK from March 1972 to the present.

(6) A final note, in August 1972, the enemy launched a series of attacks with tanks and armored personnel carriers against FANK forces in the Neak Loeung area along Highway 1. The USAF responded with alacrity and employed an enormous number of air strikes in the area. They succeeded in halting the attacks and forced the enemy to withdraw after seven days, but the number of tank kills achieved was very low. The main ordnance available to the Air Force was bombs, and tanks make a very unsatisfactory bomb target. No US Cobras were used as they lacked an effective weapon for engaging tanks.

### 3.(C) LESSONS LEARNED

a. The majority of these comments have been stated before and have plagued our efforts from the outset of our involvement. I could list many more but they would simply be redundant. Instead, from the perspective of three tours in Vietnam (1964-65, 1966-67, 1971-73), I would like to point out a few of the areas where I think we may have erred.

b. It is clear to me that the enemy has possessed a motivation and dedication to their cause that have never been matched by the

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South. I believe that the US may have unwittingly contributed to the general lack of these qualities on the southern side by attempting to substitute a material bias to overcome an apparent lack of national élan. By furnishing more and more equipment, both sophisticated and mundane, we have continued to weaken, rather than strengthen, the fighting spirit of the South. Further, we so enlarged the scope for graft and corruption that even the simplest soldier could figure ways to make a buck. In the future, should we ever get involved in a similar situation, I would strongly urge that our planners be restrained from providing other than absolute bare essentials. This will not be easy for it is the American way to bury our enemies under an avalanche of materiel and equipment. But since we are running out of both money and raw materials, which are the sinews of war, perhaps such an approach will be possible in the future.

c. Effective leverage cannot be exerted on the officials of a foreign country unless workable and meaningful controls are placed in the hands of those charged with the supervision of same, be they civilian or military advisors. All advisors have time and again been disgusted and disheartened by their inability to prevent the enormous squandering of precious American assets and dollars that they observe constantly. It is recognized that efforts have been made to increase control exercised by the Americans on the scene but these have generally floundered on the shoals of national sovereignty. However, I believe that this war has proven the argument centered on sovereignty to be specious. Despite our lack of control, Saigon is still considered to be a puppet of the Americans by most everybody in the world except the Americans. Therefore, in any further endeavor, I would submit that Americans at all levels should be given authority to withhold funds, equipment and supplies when, in their judgement, they are being misused or abused. Such a system, to be sure, will not prevent all abuses and will subject the Advisor to unrelenting pressures from many sources, so much so that withholding of materials will not be practical except in extreme situations. Nevertheless, many of the flagrant abuses which exist in Vietnam today could be arrested if I, as Senior Advisor, for instance, could decree that a particular artillery platoon which consistently failed to properly maintain its guns and ammunition, would receive no more ammunition. Then the Vietnamese would take some corrective action.

d. Somehow, in any future involvement, we must determine a way to restrain our American exuberant nature, which in Vietnam, compelled us to rush in and take over everything in sight. The essence of an effective advisory effort is to remain in the back-

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Senior Advisor, 44th Special Tactical Zone

ground and keep a low profile. Ultimately, the people being helped must do most of the helping themselves. What the advisory effort needs is quality; no amount of quantity can offset a dearth of quality in an advisory effort. Quite to the contrary, it is totally counter-productive. Good advisors are a rare breed and there will never be enough of them. Hence, there is the need to keep the overall requirements for them low. They must be mature men of tact and understanding, outstandingly competent in their area of expertise, and proficient in the language of their chosen area, if at all possible. Since they will have to pull tours back to back (there not being enough advisors to do otherwise), incentives in the form of extra pay, promotion, and provisions for having their families nearby should be considered. I also think the military should confine its activities to the military spectrum rather than become involved in the civilian side as we have in Vietnam. Of course, this is easier said than done since insurgency, by its nature, overlaps in all areas. Nevertheless, it should not be the military's role to persuade others in matters that are primarily political in nature. This is rightly the task of the State Department experts.

e. From our experience in Cambodia the following lessons emerged:

(1) Cobra gunships can operate in a heavy AA environment provided they vary their modes of attack, approach, and altitude of release, and further, provided they are aggressive in attacking, or causing to be attacked, all enemy AA sites that are identified.

(2) Indigenous ground forces will fight well and effectively when supported by air and gunships.

(3) The Cobra brings to the battlefield a high degree of target selectivity and flexibility that cannot be matched by TAC AIR and in many respects is better suited for engaging enemy infantrymen than is TAC AIR. On the minus side, both the limited quantities of ammunition that can be carried by a Cobra and the limitation on the explosive weight of individual ordnance items, reduces the effectiveness of the Cobra against large concentrations of enemy. The most effective ordnance used by the Cobras during this period was the flechette round.

(4) The team of Cobra gunships and TAC AIR, both controlled by an airborne observer in contact with ground forces, proved to be a most effective way of assisting the indigenous ground forces in defeating the enemy. Each weapons system, Cobras and TAC AIR, was impeded by its inherent limitations, but together they complement

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Senior Advisor, 44th Special Tactical Zone

each other superbly. This concept and packaging principle provides an excellent means for supporting indigenous forces with a very modest investment of US lives and equipment and should be considered for organization as a package in the event we wish to assist other friendly governments in the future and yet maintain a low profile.

(5) Ideally, it would be desirable to destroy any tank hit, but the first requirement must be to immobilize them. To this end, the standard 2.75 inch rocket using a HEAT warhead should be adequate and capable of blowing tracks off, setting engines on fire, etc., though it may not be able to penetrate all of the armor with assurance. Further, the USAF should have a large supply of the old 5" AT rockets used in Korea which I believe are still capable of penetrating any tank currently on the market. I think we have erred in attempting to develop 99% sure first round hit ordnance such as the TCW, smart bombs, and heat seeking rockets to the exclusion of more mundane, less accurate but cheaper ordnance. Certainly, special, highly accurate weapons are needed for special situations, but there is also a need for conventional antitank ammunition that can be readily available to handle routine tank affairs on the battlefield.

f. In any future involvements, we must never again allow ourselves to become so emotionally involved that we lose our freedom of action. In short, we must be able to quickly extricate ourselves the minute it becomes apparent that the government we are assisting either cannot or will not institute the reforms or actions we deem essential to success. This of course is a political decision but the Army has an important role to play by insuring that we do not oversubscribe ourselves by requesting too much manpower or material for our client. Obviously, the more of each that is introduced, the tougher it is for decision-makers to reverse the process. This is the hardest thing of all to practice, because caught up in the enthusiasm and challenge posed by such a conflict, most Army officers at every level are going to be aggressive and determined to succeed regardless of cost. Therefore, any officer or commander, who advocates less than an all-out effort, is quickly going to be in trouble with his peers, his bosses, and his subordinates, unless we make it perfectly clear from the outset that the involvement is limited and will stay limited regardless of success or failure. Easy to say, virtually impossible to practice. Yet somehow we must. There will be another Vietnam whether we like it or not, and the factors which insured our involvement here, even though currently disputed, will arise

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COL EDWIN W. CHAMBERLAIN JR.  
Senior Advisor, 44th Special Tactical Zone

again and continue to arise so long as we are a global power.

*Edwin W. Chamberlain Jr.*  
EDWIN W. CHAMBERLAIN, JR.  
Colonel, Infantry  
Senior Advisor

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