

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
26TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY VIETNAM
APO San Francisco 96375

AVHCS-MH

19 May 1970

SUBJECT: Exit Interview.

Office of the Chief of Military History
ATTN: Mr. Warner Stark
Department of the Army
Washington, D.C. 20315

1. Enclosed is an exit interview with Lieutenant Colonel Donald A. Ramsay, [REDACTED] former Commanding Officer of the 589th Engineer Battalion (Const).
2. The tape is recorded at 1 7/8 ips.

3 Incl

- 1 - Synopsis of interview
with LTC Ramsay
- 2 - Map overlay of the 589th
Engineer Battalion AOR.
- 3 - Tape of interview with LTC Ramsay
(Original copy only)

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CPT CE
Commanding

025-05-009

Inclosure

Synopsis of interview taken with LTC Donald A. Ramsay, 385-24-3345, former Commanding Officer of the 589th Engineer Battalion (Const) which is located at Phan Rang, Republic of Vietnam. The interview was conducted by Captain Kurt E. Schlotterbeck, Commanding Officer of the 26th Military History Detachment, at Phan Rang, Republic of Vietnam, on 17 May 1970.

1. Background:

LTC Ramsay is a graduate of West Point and holds a Masters degree in Nuclear Physics. He has completed the Engineer Officers Basic Course, the Engineer Officers Career Course, and the Command and General Staff College. LTC Ramsay assumed command of the 589th Engineer Battalion (Const) on 4 June 1969.

2. Synopsis:

LTC Ramsay said that he received no actual guidance from his predecessor who became the Executive Officer of the 35th Engineer Group. He said that he was briefed on the mission of the 589th Engineer Battalion by the Group Commander which included current projects and priorities.

LTC Ramsay stated that the LOC program was a dependable long range project much different from operational support missions which are more urgent.

LTC Ramsay discussed some of the problems encountered by the 589th in the construction of QL 11 which included the washout of a bridge bypass and traffic control. He said that one of their basic responsibilities in the construction of this road was to keep it open to both military re-supply convoys and commercial traffic. To regulate the heavy traffic, LTC Ramsay enlisted the aid of the National Police. LTC Ramsay went on to discuss the two phases of construction of QL 11, the drainage problems encountered, and how they solved these problems. LTC Ramsay said that the 589th and the 577th Engineer Battalions had to coordinate the traffic on QL 11 as they were both working on the road, one at each end of the "Good View Pass". He said that they had also traded some equipment.

LTC Ramsay said that they had acquired an asphalt plant in February for the construction of roads in the LOC program. The major problem encountered was the complete lack of personnel with experience in the operation of the plant. He stated that he was able to get an NCO from 35th Engineer Group who had the needed experience and that he trained people from the 589th in the operation of the plant.

LTC Ramsay explained the civilianization program in the 589th to include how the local nationals were used. He said that they had been most useful in their vertical construction projects and that he had been

able to get many local hires from RMK who cut back on their work force in that area. This had proved to be quite beneficial because these people came to the 589th with little need for training. LTC Ramsay also pointed out that the biggest problem encountered was security for the local nationals. They had to be picked up and brought to the work sites in the morning and returned to their hamlets by 1800 hrs. LTC Ramsay went on to say that the Vietnamese working for them had been invaluable to the operation of the Battalion.

LTC Ramsay explained that the 589th had been assigned part of the upgrade of QL 1. He said that they encountered many challenges on this project, especially building road through rice paddies which required a great amount of sand fill.

LTC Ramsay said that the 589th had encountered considerable enemy activity to the south of Phan Rang. He said that all units within the Battalion had received indirect enemy fire, sniper fire, and command detonated mines along their roads and work sites.

LTC Ramsay said that the 589th was affiliated with the 61st ARVN Engineer Battalion. He said that the 61st Engineer Battalion (ARVN) was well-trained and that the 589th was training small groups of equipment operators from the 61st. LTC Ramsay said that these men were well-motivated and learned quickly. LTC Ramsay further explained how the 589th was trying to get construction materials to the 61st. He felt that the 61st ARVN Engineer Battalion was an excellent unit and was particularly impressed with their Battalion Commander.

LTC Ramsay discussed some of their Civic Action projects very generally and said that most of these projects had been in the Phan Rang area during the past year. He also explained the relationship between his unit and the rest of the units on the base and with the base commander.

LTC Ramsay discussed the problems that the 589th encountered while the 687th Land Clearing Company was attached to his unit. He pointed out that the primary problem was distance. The 687th operated outside the Battalion AOR and was hard to re-supply. He said that they were very aggressive and effectively saw to most of their own re-supply.

In discussing the Army Supply system LTC Ramsay said that even though the system was now highly automated it still relied heavily upon human factors. He felt that any problems encountered could be traced to human breakdowns within the system. LTC Ramsay went on to discuss maintenance and its' problems at all levels.

LTC Ramsay felt that "Operation Last Chance" was an accelerated construction schedule for the 18th Engineer Brigade. The 18th Engineer Brigade was trying to get extra effort from the men to facilitate a marked increase in LOC construction in conjunction with troop withdrawals.

LTC Ramsay felt that the addition of MCA-LOC equipment had been a major improvement in the capabilities of a construction battalion. He, as other commanders throughout Vietnam, was very enthusiastic about the segmatic compactor and singled out this piece of equipment as outstanding. LTC Ramsay evaluated all the MCA-LOC equipment as excellent.

LTC Ramsay felt that the dynalectron maintenance personnel had trouble getting started and lacked leadership and aggressiveness. He did point out that there had been some improvement but they had as many or more problems in the supply parts area as the Army. He felt that the people were dedicated but only on an hourly basis because it was the basis of their operation. LTC Ramsay did point out that he had had some disciplinary problems with individuals on the team but that all in all they had performed well with a generally good attitude.

When questioned about the extensiveness of the LOC program LTC Ramsay said that he thought it was not only necessary but an extremely significant factor for the future development of the Republic of Vietnam. He felt that the LOC program was essential to the economy of the country as well as to pacification and unification of Vietnam.

LTC Ramsay concluded the interview with a discussion of his role as the Commander of the 589th Engineer Battalion.