

## U.S. Is Disbanding Major Combat Unit In South Vietnam

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, June 16—One of the last two major American combat units here is being deactivated to meet President Nixon's deadline for reducing United States troop strength in South Vietnam to 49,000 by the end of June.

The unit is the 196th Infantry Brigade with headquarters at Danang. The United States command announced today that the subsidiary units listed for deactivation were the brigade's headquarters company, one infantry battalion and one artillery battalion.

The brigade has been primarily responsible for the protection of Danang and its military airport. The stand-down order, it is reported, is soon to mean a reduction from present brigade strength of about 4,500 men to about 1,000.

### Air Units to Move

The United States command is also to move most of its air strength in Danang to Thailand.

Military sources said that at the end of this month the Air Force would transfer its three remaining fighter-bomber squadrons at Danang to Takhli Air Base in Thailand. The Marine fighter-bomber unit there, Marine Air Group 15, is scheduled to transfer to Namthong Air Base in Thailand.

All four units ordinarily spend much of their combat time over North Vietnam, and will continue to do so from their new bases in Thailand.

Some American operations reportedly are to continue at Danang. These include repair and refueling operations, and observation flights. The South Vietnamese Air Force is to continue to use Danang also.

The task of protecting the base will reportedly fall to the South Vietnamese Army's Third Infantry Division, which is soon to occupy the former headquarters of the 196th Brigade on Freedom Hill outside Danang.

### Division Badly Mauled

The Third Division suffered heavy losses and was virtually routed from Quangtri Province at the beginning of May when the North Vietnamese offensive rolled over that province.

The departure of most of the 196th Brigade will bring American combat strength in South Vietnam to five infantry battalions and one artillery battalion. One battalion normally consists of about 600 men.

Three of the remaining battalions will be those of the First Cavalry Division, whose headquarters are at Bienhoa near Saigon.

There have been rumors in military circles that the First Cavalry Division may also be deactivated soon.

Although United States troop strength in South Vietnam is being rapidly reduced, American military participation in the war is to remain much greater than the figures suggest.

For one thing, the transfer of many men involved in the air war to Thailand does not mean they will no longer be exposed to Communist fire.

The steady recent increase in strength of the Seventh Fleet off the coast of Vietnam also offsets the withdrawals from South Vietnam.

As of last week, it was announced here Monday, there were 61,900 American troops in South Vietnam and 42,000 men at sea off the Vietnamese coast.

The current strength of United States forces in Thailand is about 40,000 men.