

Pentagon Admits 4 Divisions in

3130/66
By John G. Norris
Washington Post Staff Writer

A high Pentagon spokesman acknowledged yesterday that Army divisions in the United States have been reduced below full combat readiness by the demands of the Vietnam war and the defense expansion program.

Answering questions about a Senate Preparedness Subpart questioning the readiness of the U.S. strategic home reserve, the Defense official conceded that two infantry and two armored divisions have furnished many individual replacements for Vietnam and now are engaged in training recruits and draftees.

As a result, the spokesman said, the four divisions are "not in the same combat readiness status that they would have been otherwise" but will

begin to regain greater readiness for combat in June.

The Pentagon spokesman declined to answer a question on whether there are any completely combat ready divisions in the continental United States. But apart from the four he mentioned at less than ready, there is no division left in this country which does not have some of its units in Vietnam or otherwise deployed overseas.

This was the first official public disclosure of the situation, although it has been known for some time and published in the press. But not until the secret Senate readiness report was published by the Los Angeles Times yesterday, and carried in The Washington Post and other papers, would the Defense Department concede the point.

The Pentagon spokesman said that the reduction in combat readiness of the units stemmed from the top level decision last summer not to call the reserves.

He said that the 4th Infantry division at Ft. Lewis, Wash., the 5th Mechanized Infantry division at Ft. Carson, Colo., and the 1st and 2d Armored Divisions at Ft. Hood, Tex., had to be altered to meet the Army's stepped-up recruit and draftee training requirements.

"Once the decision was made not to call up the reserves," said the spokesman. "It was recognized that some divisions would have to be used for training. So the present status is not surprising, but was planned that way."

The Army is in the process

of expanding by 280,000 men to a strength of 1,233,000.

Other divisions in the continental United States no longer are at full strength at home. The 101st Airborne Division already has a brigade in Vietnam, the 82d Airborne a like force in the Dominican Republic. All of the 3d Marine Division and most of the 1st Marine division are in Vietnam, while the units of the 2d Marine division are afloat in the Mediterranean and Caribbean.

A new Army and a new Marine division are being formed. Two Army divisions and the equivalent of more than a third are in Vietnam.

Earlier this month, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara angrily reacted to press reports that U.S. forces were stretched thin and less than

U.S. Weakened

combat-ready. He called a news conference March 2 at which he explained his policy of building new units rather than calling up reserves.

The Pentagon spokesman yesterday quoted from McNamara's statement that, if necessary, the U.S. could send to Vietnam—21 additional Army and Marine battalions

by the end of June. That would be about 90,000 men, of whom 20,000 already have received orders for Vietnam.

The spokesman also reiterated McNamara's statement that by calling reserve divisions, the U.S. could have a force of nine divisions, totaling 350,000 men ready for deployment overseas, within 90 days.