

Why Vietnam?

The Army's plan for early release of 20,000 National Guardsmen and Reservists is news of good but still uncertain import for the men of Hawaii's 29th Brigade. It could — and should — mean a much-decreased chance of going to Vietnam.

At a minimum, the new order means the men who were called to duty last May will be getting out five months ahead of the anticipated 24-month tour. The Army indicates it could be sooner if progress is made toward a Vietnam settlement.

ARMY SOURCES also say the new early-release order means no basic change in the controversial plan to send officers and men of the 29th to Vietnam as piecemeal replacements for other units.

In line with the order for everyone to be released by October and December of next year, however, tours of men from the 29th would be shorter, maybe six months or less.

One Army official said that such short tours of less than a year are not unknown now and are feasible.

It's conceded that a man can do plenty enough fighting in six months, or even six days, in Vietnam. But it also seems to us that tours of less than a year are not really feasible economically, logistically, or in terms of battlefield efficiency.

It would be a surprising thing if the Army now goes ahead and sends

large numbers of men from the 29th to Vietnam as replacements for few-month tours.

NONE OF THIS is unrelated to the controversy over the way the 29th and other units were called up for the stated reason of the Pueblo crisis and ended up slated for Vietnam duty.

It might hardly be conceded in the Pentagon, but it seems that political pressures and protests have speeded along this change of plans to release reserves and increase draft calls.

Some of the heat may go out of the situation now, but it's likely the National Guard and Reserve protest will continue, especially about going to Vietnam.

As we said earlier in relation to the protest petition being circulated in the 29th, the Army has some points in this matter. There are guardsmen and reservists who drew pay and benefits for years in return for being ready and on call. Such units have served as an alternative to the draft for many.

BUT THERE IS also the very important factor that the Army has not played entirely fair in making the 29th a replacement pool for Vietnam.

That is not the way things should be, and the new order reinforces our view.