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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Mr. D. G. Laverne

FROM : Henri Pascal

SUBJECT: Tour of refugee camps on Sept. 26

DATE: Sept. 28, 1954

On Sunday Morning I escorted Mrs. Tilman Durdin, New York Times, Mr. Martin, U.S. News and World Reports, Mr. Huyen-van-Ba (a friend) to the reception centers of PhuTho, Hopital Popular and College Gialong. In the afternoon, I took Mrs. Durdin, Mr. Durdin, Mr. Martin and Mr. Dinh-trinh-Chinh, from our office, to the relocation camps at and in the environs of Bien Hoa. The purpose of the trip was to acquaint the correspondents with the refugee situation first hand. Thru Mr. Ba, in the morning and Mr. Chinh, in the afternoon, they were able to query refugees and camp officials to their satisfaction and they have agreed to let us have copies of their stories.

We visited a total of ten camps throughout the day and talked to several dozen people at length, mostly around broad questions concerning why they left the North. . . . what contact they had had with the Vietminh. . . . their flight from the North and their present status. We found few complaints and little discontent. But among the complaints, we found unanimity from them on the matter of: (1) pay (2) water (3) salt (4) sugar, in that order. Item (1) was the same story from all the camps. They have been paid for two to four days at a time every ten to twenty-five days. This leaves quite a gap between the amount they should have received and the amount actually received.

At the priests' camp across the road from the psychiatric hospital in Bien Hoa, a priest explained to us that that whole procedure was very complicated due to the need to register great numbers of people and the lack of administrative personnel and organized procedures. He explained that the camp commander of each camp or campment group had to list the names of all refugees in his command, then take it to the Ministry of Social Action where he is supposed to receive per diem in cash equivalent to the number on his register. The list is taken at the Ministry and a small part of the per diem due is issued with a statement that he is to come back later for the rest. By the time he can get back, he is ready with a new list and the same story is given him. When he reminds them that he is still due money on the previous register, it can't be found and confusion apparently drives him back to his camp with what he managed to get for his second register. The priest offered no further details but stated that this was the way he heard it.

Note: About three weeks ago, I and Mr. Thanh, the then Minister of Information's son, received complaints from a group of inhabitants of the PhuTho

- 2 -

D. C. Lavergne (cont'd)

camp claiming to speak for several thousand others that they had not been paid for five days. We went to the camp headquarters across the road and the fonctionnaire in charge of this matter affirmed this. He stated that for that day, he was supposed to pick up per diem for 12,000 persons and at the Ministry, he was given only 8,000 piasters. Mr. Thanh asked him for a signed attestation which he wrote and handed him. Later, during the following week, Mr. Thanh told me that he had surveyed several other camps and found the same complaints and collected an attestation from them. These he took to the Ministry of Social Action and he was shown registry sheets signed by camp commanders indicating that all monies due had been paid.

On the matter of water, the shortage is greater at the relocation sites than at the reception centers. A priest told us that his people believed that running water at the relocation centers carried malaria - therefore, they were afraid to use it.

The lack of salt and sugar seem to be distressing them. There were no complaints about other foods.

cc: Mr. Fishel