

Capt. PHILIP WELAND, Chief TCPIGN Division

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PHAN-THUC-HOANG

Training of block-making machine Operators at Biao (Dec. 3 to Dec. 10, 1954).

Up to Friday Dec. 3, nothing was ready for training yet. The shed for soil storing remained empty; no coolies had worked on soil digging and storing. The machines, though put under cover, were not moved into operating position and trainees had not come in full number as requested on my previous trip to Biao.

The afternoon of Friday and the whole day Saturday were spent fixing up the connecting rod in the hydraulic machine, repairing the magnets and the plug in the Lister mixer, and oiling and greasing both machines with the valuable help of chauffeur Bang. A trip was made Saturday morning to Biring, 35km North, to have a split-pin hole in the connecting rod re-bore. A bamboo screen was ordered for the training period because no steel screen was available in Saigon.

Saturday Dec. 4 was a day of big Catholic Celebrations and all the trainees stayed back in their villages.

On Sunday morning, Dec. 5, with the help of the trainees present the hydraulic machine was moved into operating position. And the training started in the afternoon with 4 trainees from Tanha, 4 from Tan Thanh and 3 Tan-Phat, - 11 in all as against the required 25 (7 for the Winjet, 6 for an Elison from each of the 3 Centers). The 4 trainees from Tan Ha were assigned to the Winjet. The rest from Tan Thanh and Tan Phat were taught the operation of the Elison and soil mixing.

All these troubles, it was found, were caused by the fact that the Biao Refugee Committee did not have available funds to hire a mechanic to get the machines ready and pay the coolies to dig and store soil. The trainees were "volunteering" workers detailed by the Refugee Centers on a rotating basis while they were having worries building their own houses. Moreover they were not paid too.

The matter was taken up before the Dec. 6 meeting of the Refugee Committee and it was decided that an advance be made by the PMS Social Action to cover the operation expenses pending a funds allocation from Saigon for that purpose. Thanks to this decision coolies and 3 more workers were hired to get soil and complete the Winjet crew.

Another decision made by the Committee had it that only Tan-Phat and Tan-Thanh will receive an Elison each. Tan Ha will have the benefit of power-pressed blocks turned out by the Winjet. The remaining 2 Elisons are assigned to Gouyah and Bao-Vinh village (Oran), respectively 30 and 15 km South of Biat. Mr. Le Pichon was asked to send trainees from these two centers down to Biao to join in the training. As they did not show up Friday Dec. 10, it has been requested that they come to Tan Thanh and Tan Phat to get trained by the Elison crews of these two centers.

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Yet a trip to Gough and BacHinh is necessary to me for routine site selection, soil sampling and field supervision.

On Dec. 9, 2 of the Elisons were moved to Tan Thanh and Tan Phat. The days of Dec. 9 and 10 were spent in field supervision between Biao, Tan Thanh and Tan Phat. In the afternoon of Dec. 10 a brief talk on block laying and earth-block construction was held with the fathers in charge of the centers.

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The prevailing type of soil at Biao and the surroundings is the red so-called Ferrite. In lumps it is hard and coarse, but when wet and compacted it turns clayey and sticky. Satisfactory hand-pressed blocks were made with cement at the ratio of 1 part of cement to 8 parts of soil and 75 liters of water per ton of mixture. The power-pressed soil blocks do not yield enough strength. Satisfactory power-pressed blocks were made with 2% of cement (cement content for foundation blocks still remains at 6%).

The Winget now is averaging 400 blocks a day. As to the Elisons at Tan Phat and Tan Thanh, they will not be in production before at least a fortnight, the refugees of these two centers being busy building dwelling-houses.