

100 Refugee Reports

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Mr. Michael Adler, Chief, Field Service
 FROM : Richard C. Matheron *RM*
 SUBJECT : Trip to Camau, February 13 and 14.

DATE: Feb. 15, 1955

Field Report No. FS-54

1. Accompanied by Lt. Philipps, ATOM/Soctrang, I proceeded to Camau February 13 to observe first hand the development of the situation there since the Vietnamese National Army re-occupied the town on February 8. The observations, recorded below, are classed according to the interest of the principal USOM divisions.

2. Public Health and Sanitation

a. The "Operation Brotherhood" medical team has set up a consultation clinic in a former maternity and is treating patients about 10 hours a day. The following numbers of patients were treated during the first few days of the operation: Feb. 8, 250; Feb. 9, 283; Feb. 10, 507; Feb. 11, 472; Feb. 12, 461. The following is a list of cases treated in order of frequency. It is not, however, necessarily a true guide to the disease prevalence in the area as persons suffering, say from malaria, may take their disease for granted and not apply at the dispensary for treatment. 1. malnutrition, 2. gastro-intestinal disorders, 3. pulmonary diseases, 4. skin diseases, 5. eyes, ears, nose, and throat, 6. obstetrics, 7. venereal diseases. Aside from the "Operation Brotherhood" supplies, largely USOM furnished, this maternity is otherwise completely unequipped. There is no civilian hospital at Camau.

b. The Vietnamese Army Medical Corps is passively operating several small, open air vaccination (smallpox and cholera) centers and dispensaries in Camau and the immediately surrounding area for military personnel and local civilian population. Although a medical lieutenant reported to us that his dispensary had vaccinated and treated 1000 persons since reoccupying Camau, I personally only saw one person at this dispensary in contrast to hundreds waiting for treatment at the "Operation Brotherhood" center.

c. The local population can, by "standing in line", secure city water from one public fountain which is supplied from a well across the canal. There the VN Army has installed a pumping station. Commandant Huynh van Tu, military commander of the southern "Operation Liberty" arrondissement, reports that this well is 70 meters deep. It seems to be the original source of water for the city. The water tower above it was destroyed by military action in the early days of the war.

3. Agriculture

- a. It hardly needs to be mentioned here that the Camau area is a tremendous rice bowl. Large rice fields and uncultivated marshy lands stretch out from both sides of the Baclieu - Camau road as far as the eye can see with notable lack of coconut palms, bananas, and other tropical fruit trees. Aside from three market centers along the road, one (Hau Phong) of which appears to be brand new, there is also a remarkable lack of villages and truck gardens as is typical up to Baclieu; hence, perhaps, the prevalence of beriberi and other nutritional diseases.
- b. No accurate estimates are available locally on the amount of abandoned rice lands available in the area for resettlement purposes, though the local commander estimated that 20 percent of former rice lands are not now under cultivation.
- c. The Camau area is noted for pork production and exports large quantities of pigs to other areas of SVN. No figures were available in Camau. The price is reported to be 20 piasters a kilo on the hoof.
- d. Two large Chinese rice mills are operating in the vicinity of Giarai, but none were observed at Camau itself.

4. Public Works

(66 bms)

- a. The road from Baclieu to Giarai and Camau averages three meters in width. The foundation is hard, but the road has lost virtually all traces of a hard surface and is covered with large, sharp stones. We personally experienced several flat tires caused by rocks cutting the tires and saw several other vehicles so stranded. Shrubbery has grown up along the road and two vehicles must slow down to virtual standstill to pass when meeting. The VN Army Engineer Battalion in Baclieu has not begun any road repair. The roads from Camau to Na mean on the coast and Rachgia are reported to be entirely useless as shrubbery has taken over the road during the many years of Viet Minh occupation.
- b. A canal connecting Camau to Baclieu and Soctrang parallels the road from Giarai to Camau and varies in width from approximately 10 meters to 25 or 30 meters. Motorized "chaloupe s", junks, and sampans carry the bulk of passengers and supplies to and from Camau. Activity on the canal is presently very heavy.
- c. One way bridges, some military and some civilian (most date back to 1926) span all the transversal canals between Baclieu and Camau.
- d. An army generator which we did not visit is presently supplying electricity to light the city streets and public buildings.
- e. An old football field presently serves as a helicopter landing field.

5. Community Development

No community development activity has begun, but the "Operation Brotherhood" group are hoping to set up community centers in nearby villages as soon as they are a little more organized.

6. Education

Dr. Noble Armstrong visited Camau the same day as I did and observed two of the five schools there. The entire teaching staff of 12 civilian teachers and a head-master who taught at Camau previous to the interim Viet Minh occupation during the cease-fire period. The schools opened four days after the re-occupation. The physical establishments consist of open type board construction with roof and tile floors. There are six classes and about 400 students. The lack of space and supplies is not critical now, but will become so if large numbers of children arrive for schooling following the return of "normalcy" to the area. The pupils are using chalk and slates, but text books and benches are already in short supply.

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7. Public Administration

a. Commandant Nuyinh van Tu of the southern "Operation Liberty" arrondissement is presently occupying the "Delegation." The other principal public building is occupied by the civilian police who are maintaining order within the city. It had been my impression that the army would be responsible for maintaining public order in the Pacification Zone cities, but this evidently is not true in all cases. Other buildings are occupied by Chinese merchants. The market is standing and in active operation.

8. Program Support

a. Vietnamese National Flags and pictures of President Ngo dinh Diem were very much in evidence in every pailotte and shop along the road leading from Baclieu to Camau and in Camau, itself. The Chinese merchants all displayed the Kuomintang flag in addition. The Viet Minh war monument has been converted in a Vietnamese National war monument by the Army Psychological Warfare Team.

b. Viet Minh peace slogans and doves were still painted on all public and many private buildings and no attempt has been made to repaint them out or over with National slogans.

c. The VN Army Psy Warfare team in Camau broadcasts special Saigon programs beamed to the area. The lieutenant in charge has requested a Lorenz set as the present one, according to him, is not strong enough. It looked and sounded adequate to me.

d. In addition to the radio programs, the psy warfare team plays records and "broadcasts" directly from their headquarters and

from one mobile unit. The loudspeaker at headquarters is mounted on the roof and can be heard within a radius of several kilometers.

d. While driving from Baclieu to Camau we encountered a Bianchi mobile unit returning from Camau, but were unable to find out why it was not remaining in the area.

e. Any permanent Information Ministry mobile unit would definitely have to be mounted on a canal craft as so few people in the area are accessible by road.

f. The psy warfare team also operated a small information hall with photographs. The last ones available are of President Diem's trip to Long My some time ago.

g. Vietnamese army nurses on the psy warfare team are also distributing medicines to rural populations from USOM first aid kits.

9. General

a. Dr. Ho Quang Phuoc has reported to Saigon that the Vietnamese Army Engineers and Medical Corps were not ~~sp~~ing the hoped-for initiative in helping the local population. Previous to the visit to Camau of Army Chief of Staff General Ti (?) late last week, the army had only passively occupied the town without doing any useful work as the propaganda posters indicate they would. General Ti is reported to have sparked the local officers into getting their soldiers to work. Although the situation was ~~w~~ as reportedly better by February 13, we still noticed hundreds of soldiers lying around the town. The commander at Camau, had, however, declared February 13 "Cleanliness Day" and had ordered otherwise ~~un~~occupied occupying troops to gather and truck away rubbish in the streets and vacant lots. Following Sundays will be devoted to similar activities, though it is hardly understood what is wrong with Monday through Saturday.

b. Dr. Phuoc is proposing that the ^{fighting} non-military forces be put under the psy warfare command. The military engineers at Baclieu have repaired a couple of bridges, but have done no road work.

c. I am planning to visit villages throughout the "Operation Liberty" area by water craft as soon as this can be arranged. No really useful evaluation of conditions in the area could be attempted without visiting these villages by water as the few main roads reach so few people.

Lt. Philipps has just flown in from Saigon where he reports having talked to the Director of USOM. He reports that USOM is interested in adapting present programs for impact in the Camau area. I, therefore, recommend that as the first order of business a USOM sanitary engineer come to Soc Trang where transportation will be provided to Camau.