

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

Mr. M.H.B. Adler, Chief, Field Service

July 1, 1955

Normand Poulin, Special Assistant

First Report on the Escapee Situation at the 17th Parallel.

Field Report FS- 287

A report of the escapee situation (also known as unofficial refugees) at the 17th parallel in Viet Nam.

Prior to departing for Hue and the 17th parallel area, the following points were drawn up and discussed with Mr. Leng, Commissioner General for refugees in Saigon. The aim of the survey was to determine what is presently being done for the escapees at the 17th parallel, and what are the future plans if any.

Enclosed as part of this first report on escapees are the principal points of conversations with the following people: Mr. Luong, Commissioner General for refugees in Saigon, Mr. Duyen, Government Delegate to Central Viet Nam. Mr. Le Van Vinh, Regional Commissioner for refugees in Central Viet Nam. Mr. Le Ta, Mayor of Tourane. Mr. Lien Chu, Chef de Surete in Hue. Mr. Dong, Chef de Province of Quang Tri. Mr. Hyen, Deputy Chef de Province of Quang Tri. Mr. Ho Lien, Chef de District of Gia Linh (in Ha Thuong). The Deputy Chef de District of Truong Long (in the demilitarized zone along the 17th parallel). Lt. Besnard, Vietnamese police chief guarding route Nationale No. 1 post at the 17th parallel.

As evidenced by this report, there was some deviation from the discussion of escapees as such that could not be helped since conversation soon overlaps into the very related field of refugees. The discussion of the refugees is presented herewith since it may bring into focus a better picture of the situation at the 17th parallel.

Points to be discussed in reference to the present and future status of escapees in Vietnam.

Present Situation:

1. Find out what the set up is in Hue to receive all escapees coming across the 17th parallel.
2. Where do the refugees (escapees) come in and what routes do they take? Where do they go once they cross the 17th parallel? Where do they register if at all?
3. What is the estimate of escapees coming over now? How ascertained?
4. What is the total number to date? How ascertained?

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

287

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

1. What is the present system for passing out subsistence in food and money for all arrivals?

2. Obtain further information on the status of escapees at the 17th parallel and what other government action being undertaken presently.

Present Situation:

1. Will there be any government action, or Catholic action that will be set up around the 17th parallel to aid escapees? Is the government attempting (or the refugee commissioner) to set up a reception system in Hue (or Quang Tri) like Haiphong?

2. Are there any plans to pass out subsistence, food and money, etc. for all arrivals? Will there be a system for meeting all arrivals to care for the sick, the children, etc?

3. Is there and will there be anything done to determine if some of the escapees are Viet Minh infiltrators? How will this be done? What will be the disposition of the Viet Minh infiltrators?

4. Our interest in setting up an office and/or reception center like in Haiphong. Point here is to establish a center that all future escapees will know about and head for upon crossing the 17th parallel. Here they can be properly received, registered, given aid and assistance for impact value.

5. Setting up a system of registering all escapees coming across the 17th parallel and reporting properly on a weekly basis to Saigon. Interest would be to note the daily arrivals, the disposition, extent of assistance, etc.

On 11 June 1955 held a meeting with Mr. Luong, Commissioner General for refugees in Saigon. The points discussed were essentially those outlined in the previous pages.

Present Situation:

Mr. Luong stated that in Central Viet Nam, Mr. Le Van Vinh, was in charge of all refugees as well as escapees.

As for the refugees/escapees crossing the 17th parallel (Ben Hai River), Mr. Luong claims that most of them have no idea what to do or where to go. They are mostly interested in getting in the national zone. They usually find themselves in the 5 kilometer wide demilitarized zone and usually contact the first military or official they see there, or proceed directly to the Chef de Province where they are received. Generally speaking the military at the frontier will furnish them truck transportation to Quang Tri. In Quang Tri they are received, fed and housed. Other than that, there is no apparent program for reception of escapees.

The refugees and escapees coming across the 17th parallel pass either with genuine Viet Minh laissez passer, forged permits, or secretly at night. Once across the 17th parallel, these people are generally all treated alike, i.e. refugees, fed and housed in the same manner and all supposedly given 15 piastres pocket money. This is all taken care of by Mr. Vinh in Hue.

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

287

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

-3-

In the past there has been only a small number of refugees/escapees coming across the 17th parallel. These were usually taken care of by the Chef de Province and kept in Quang Tri. When the influx increased in April and May, they had to be moved to Hue and mostly Tourane. Soon Tourane became the major transit point since Hue was incapable of handling any large numbers. (The transportation to Tourane was simple since the railroad functions twice daily from Dong Ha to Tourane.) In Tourane they were placed in transit camps made up of old French military tents, USOM tents, schools, etc. These people were given subsistence for a renewable 15 day period of rice, salt and dry fish. It was generally expected that they would be reshipped and resettled during that period of time. Mr. Vinh had the money and stocks at his disposition to take care of these people.

Mr. Luong states that most of the people coming over the 17th parallel are mainly from the three provinces near the 17th parallel, viz. Ha Tinh, Vinh, and North Quang Tri. Only a few trickle in from as far north as Than Hoa. Most escapees he believes come over the same routes with or without laissez passers. (Note: Mr. Luong is undoubtedly thinking of the refugees. Escapees use any routes at their disposition and make their way whatever way they can.) He did state also that some even come over into Laos. When questioned further about Laos in reference to escapees, Mr. Luong states to date some 1400 have made their way through the forest across the frontier into Tchepone and Thakek in Laos. He further stated that in Thakek there is a small reception team with special agreement of the Laos government. (It is impossible to determine if these are escapees or not. It seems logical they might be.)

Mr. Luong states that as far as his office is aware, up to June approximately 6000 to 7000 persons had made their way across the 17th parallel. He has no idea how many of these are escapees. He states that in the early days there were daily arrivals of 60 or more, but during the closing days of 18 May, up to 1000 per day came through for several days. (See Mr. Vinh and Mr. Uyan's report on these statistics.) Currently however, Mr. Luong states that figures are not kept on daily arrivals since the figures are too low and insignificant.

For the time being nothing is being done by the Catholic church or by the government in the way of setting up underground active movements.

### Future Situation:

Mr. Luong stated that his deputy Mr. Ham and Father Khue talked about future Catholic action based on some sort of underground nucleus left in North Viet Nam. Nothing is too definite on it yet, but Mr. Luong firmly believes in it. One organization was supposedly left in the north, but contact with them has now been lost. Hope to get in contact with this one as well as many other organizations left in North Viet Nam is now in the planning stages. The present plan is to use a group of young English speaking seminarists, already chosen, to accompany the ICC as interpreters. These seminarists will be chosen to return to their native areas as feasible. All will naturally be civilians. Their real mission will be to contact the various groups of underground potential in the north, and give them the necessary aid in getting going, pass special information if possible, or at least give them the spiritual

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

287

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

support to stay alive. Mr. Luong stated that this information should be treated with confidence.

Mr. Luong feels that something definite must be done but such is dependent on the actions of the Viet Minh. As for the future escapees, the Chefs de Province will play a key role and could generally be expected to handle the slight trickle of escapees coming through the 17th parallel. In the event large numbers start coming through, then a special office under the Chef de Province could be opened.

As for a system of registration of all incoming persons, Mr. Luong has no idea since this does not directly reach his office. He stated that Mr. Vinh had received the same cards as Mr. Nam in Haiphong but is not aware if Mr. Vinh is using them. He would appreciate our aid in setting up a system or use the one now employed if adequate. (See Mr. Vinh's report and sample cards enclosed).

As for spotting Viet Minh infiltrates, Mr. Luong claims that there is a weak system used now based on Mr. Vinh's stooges placed in the various camps where the new arrivals are kept. In this way it is hoped to spot and identify any Viet Minh agent. This at best is a very weak system and makes no provisions to pick up those who do not come to the Chef de Province for assistance. Mr. Luong feels that this is a very difficult thing to do.

Mr. Luong was very much interested in our desires to set up a weekly system of reporting, showing all the daily arrivals, since his office is apparently receiving no official figures on refugees or escapees on a regular basis. He was very much pleased without assistance on this matter in an attempt to give a correct picture of refugees and escapees in Viet Nam.

Prior to leaving, Mr. Luong stated that he would cable the interested authorities in Central Viet Nam of my arrival and advise them to give me any assistance they could.

On 13 June, called on the Government Delegate to Central Viet Nam, Mr. Duyen, and discussed generally the refugee/escapee situation at the 17th parallel. The Delegate is not satisfied with the refugee situation in Hue, Quang Tri and Tourane. He feels that the recent flare-ups in Saigon and the south have held the attention of the Diem Government in the south to the neglect of North Central Vietnam.

Refugees:

Around Quang Tri and Hue, the delegate feels that the situation is complicated by the fact that the refugees prefer to group together for their common protection. This makes it difficult to split the group for resettlement purposes. In this case they are all grouped in the State in Quang Tri and are generally miserable there. The Delegate has been toying with the idea of selecting pioneers among these people and sending them in the area along route #9 (to Bavanakhet) where they could resettle and occupy some of the deserted jacquier plantations and fair land in that area.

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

287

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

This in itself does not solve the whole problem. Further, attention was drawn to the nearness of this area to the 17th parallel. (About 30 to 40 kilometers). In the event of an emergency, we would only have to move these people south again, this time with great difficulties. Going west on route 9, the road is good only to Can Lo. Beyond that point it is narrow and rough going.

Mr. Haskett brought up the potential military plans of the area with reference to holding back any Viet Minh military action. All this area, according to this plan would be evacuated immediately. The defense would be set up at the Col des Nuages, a mountain pass between Hue and Tourane. (About 1 1/2 hours from Hue). The Deleuge readily agreed with us stating that he had not considered this point at all. From this then it would be best to send these people south to Phyl Yen as soon as possible. The Deleuge agreed completely.

According to the Deleuge however, the worse situation is in Tourane. He would like to see these people sent to the San Mathon area as the type of farming there is similar to what these people are used to around Central Vietnam. (Note: The Deleuge at this point has not considered who will furnish the adequate clothing needed in that area by these almost naked people living on the warm sandy flats in Tourane.)

Other than the placing of a few refugees on the route 9 area, the Deleuge feels (quite correctly) that all the other area around the border region is not suitable for resettling. The best solution would be to move these people south as soon as possible.

### ESCAPEES:

In discussing the escapee situation, the Deleuge is aware that some persons are coming through the 17th parallel, but is not too concerned about it. He feels that these are refugees and could be handled by the Chef de Province, even if he has to assign some special person to his staff to handle this. The present refugee in transit problem is pressing him so that he feels we should take care of them first as the bad effects of the propaganda will not help our escapee cause at all.

In an attempt to survey the situation as much as possible relative to the refugees as well as escapees, I proceeded to Tourane on 14 June 1955 to observe conditions there. Stopped at the office of the Mayor, Mr. Le Ta and had a long discussion over the deplorable condition of the refugees in Tourane.

### Refugees:

During the Haiphong evacuation, some of the refugees on the French ships were unloaded in Tourane in the hope that these ships could be used to a greater rotational advantage. This was particularly true near the end of the Haiphong evacuation. The French Navy stated that immediately after Haiphong, they would return to Tourane and transport these refugees south. In the meantime, Mr. Vinh from Hue sent 8,040 refugees from the 17th parallel to Tourane to be placed in the transit camps. On April 26, the SS Killinsky, disembarked 3,419 more refugees and placed them in the

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

285

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

transit camps in Tourane. This quickly swelled the camps up to some 12,000, all living in a few tents on the sandy flats on the outskirts of Tourane. All were given the 15 days of subsistence, and with no water in the area, waited for the ships that were to transport them south. To date, the French navy has transported but a few thousands by LST's (about 1000 per trip) while the remainder in the neighborhood of 9,000 are still waiting for transportation. Some of these people have been stranded there for as long as two months. Their situation has become critical.

During this time, the refugee committee in Tourane contracted with Denis Freres and Company to have some 350 refugees shipped commercially on the SS Djiring, paying 600 piastres per person for their trip. These refugees went from Tourane to Thuy Hoa. During the trip, none of the refugees were fed for two days. The price per person supposedly included means. Further, during their two days on board, the refugees were subjected to intense propaganda by the members of the crew. Examples of the propaganda against the refugees were: Why were these people foolish enough to leave their homes. What could they possibly expect in South Viet Nam but misery, war, and starvation. They would have no place to live, no work, and no one to take care of them. This was accompanied with insults and general bad treatment.

Mr. Vinh, Regional Commissioner for Refugees in Hue made a complete report to Commissioner General, Mr. Luong in Saigon and also reported the incident to Mr. Le Ta, Mayor of Tourane. The latter is to make an inquiry into this matter and to take appropriate action. (Note: The writer inquired at Mr. Luong's office on the contents of Mr. Vinh's report and the action taken by the Commissioner General. As yet no answer has been received. When an answer is received a special memorandum will be circulated as an appendage to this report.)

While in Tourane, I had the opportunity to observe the Refugee Committee in process of shipping more refugees south. The French Navy had made available another ship prepared to receive some 1000 more refugees for shipment to Thuy Hoa. Due to the lack of cooperation, understanding, etc., the 0900 hours scheduled loading had not yet started by 1500 hours that day. I understand that they did succeed in loading some 600 refugees before the French called an end to it as it was getting late. I heard many stories on why this happened. Principally the blame was placed on the French for their failure to furnish the necessary transportation to the loading area. One has to take some of these comments with a pinch of salt in the section of Viet Nam as the bitterness toward the French is almost universal.

During this day, I visited several of these transit camps and must conclude that the condition is critical. The solution is simple. Instead of shipping 1000 at a time by LST, the French should bring a few transports to Tourane and in one trip clean out the whole mess. However, in our eagerness here, attention must be paid to make sure these people are taken from Tourane to resettlement areas and not merely dropped on the beaches of Nhatrang and left there again. A bit of coordination in Nhatrang and a bit of cooperation by the French navy could alleviate this situation within a few days.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

TOP SECRET

The mayor of Tourane feels that the future escapes program in the Tourane area will be nil. He believes that Tourane will only be a transit point. At the point, the feeling is again that we should take care of the present refugee problem prior to the arrival of new escapes since it will be bad to mix these new arrivals with the old disgruntled refugees now in the transit camps. He feels that it would be best to establish re-education camps around Quang Tri and the small villages along route 19. Transportation then could be arranged by the mayor to move these escapes south as soon as possible.

In the escapes situation, the mayor agreed that the Vietminh infiltrators will always be present. This he has experienced with the 1419 ex-POW's unloaded from the SS Killinsky in Tourane. The mayor stated that he has repatriated some 900 of them but so far 500 of them are still in his care. Out of this about 50 are known Viet Minh agents. Dossiers have been compiled on these agents and soon the mayor intends to denounce them to the ICG.

In reply to the Mayor, it was pointed out that this would be one of the great contributions of the escapes program -- that of uncovering the infiltrators while at the same time giving aid to the genuine escapes.

Upon leaving the mayor's office I met a French commandant (Jeffrey) who takes care of transportation of refugees in the Tourane area. Managed to talk to him quickly on the status of the refugees in Tourane. He was quite happy since he claims the refugee exodus is finally finished. (He does agree that the refugees now in Tourane are now in critical conditions.) As for future escapes, he feels that there will not be enough to even consider them. He is so convinced of the Viet Minh's tight system of control with family denunciations, and reprisals of neighbors, etc., that no one will ever dare come through. When I remarked that some were now coming through and that Mr. Vinh is reporting on it, he replied that these figures were merely fabrication. The French, he said, only kept the official ICG figures on refugees. It seemed evident that the French are not interested in blemishing their records with unofficial lists of refugees since this might mean breaking the Geneva accord even by offering refuge to the escapes. Considering what has happened in other satellite countries of the world, it seems naive indeed to believe that no escapes will come across the 17th parallel, particularly in Viet Nam after having observed conditions at the border. See report and observations of the 17th parallel.

In an attempt to find out more information on the future plans for escapes, I paid a visit to Mr. Lien Chu, Chef de Surete in Hue, on June 16, 1955. Mr. Chu was rather surprised at our interest in an escapes program. As far as he was concerned all these people are refugees. (Note: At this point it might be well to point out that escapes, evades, etc. mean nothing to the average Vietnamese. They do recognize two different types of refugees: Official ICG refugees and unofficial refugees. The latter in this case is our equivalent of escapes, but then no attention is paid to them and they are considered as regular refugees). After this delicate point was established conversation became more simplified and all talked the same language. However, by way of further shock, Mr. Chu stated that we shouldn't concern ourselves too much for the time being about escapes since he felt that the effect that the Viet

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

287

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

Minh has just agreed to extend the 17th parallel refugee exchange until January of 1956. This was almost a conversation stopper but Mr. Chu repeated himself. This, however, has nothing to do with our escapee program as I answered him as unofficial refugees will still come through and further, when January comes around, we should then be really prepared to continue a well organized and experienced program. This might be time for us to start looking to the future instead of living on a day to day basis. (Note: Mr. Chu claims that this is official. So far I have not even heard this as a rumor and have not been able to check its veracity even in Saigon.)

### Viet Minh Infiltrates and Escapees:

In an attempt to find out what Mr. Chu's office was doing with Viet Minh infiltrates, I brought the subject up. Mr. Chu showed me a map of the frontier with the various posts along the 17th parallel which supposedly guards the entry and exit of all persons. Starting from the coast these posts were as follows: Hoi Gu; Trinh Mon; Vo Xa; Hien Luong; Luu Dong; Xuan Hoa; Xuan Long; Xuan My; Cua Tung; Non Hop. All these posts are in the demilitarized zone and are approximately across from a corresponding Viet Minh post on the other side of the 17th parallel. This however did not answer my question. One can quickly observe the wide gaps between each post, which is supposedly being guarded by the posts themselves. How it's done I don't know since there is no patrol, in fact not even any roads that connect the various posts. And for river patrol they have no boats. Mr. Chu then quickly said that this was precisely the problem they were faced with and for this reason they were soon to establish another security buffer zone of some 15 to 20 kilometers south of the present 5 kilometer demilitarized zone. Since the Vietnamese government has no control in the demilitarized zone (under the control of a Vietnamese and French mixed commission) they will take over complete control in the second buffer zone. There they hope to establish about 12 additional control posts. The principal reasons for this additional zone will be to have a better check on Viet Minh infiltrates and tighter economic control.

Mr. Chu was perhaps the only one that admitted that up to now there was really no control to prevent people going either north or south and that this new security zone would help curb that problem. He remarked that even then they will still have no control on escapees via the maritime routes or into Laos. It seems safe to assume that much more is happening than is lead to believe.

Mr. Chu stated that there is about the equivalent of 3 Viet Minh companies on the 17th parallel trying to infiltrate the national zone. So far some 30 of them have been stopped. (See observation of the frontier section of this report). He stated further that these people have been picked and held in jail for questioning while dossiers are prepared on them. From what Mr. Chu was trying to say, most of these people were picked up after being spotted and reported by the local citizens. He states that most of the citizens around the area can easily spot a Viet Minh infiltrate and quickly denounce him. This is hard to believe. With

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

287

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

the refugees, it is more simple since the infiltrator often was known behind the line. Once in the national zone, the refugees quickly denounce them as Viet Minh agents.

On this side of the frontier in the Vietnamese demilitarized zone, some 6000 persons live there as farmers and go about their daily work as if nothing ever happened. A census was taken in this area. This makes detection of Viet Minh agents more difficult due to the continued activity in this zone. The Vietnamese Surete has placed some 100 police agents there to watch over the farmers.

In the meantime the Vietnamese Surete has employed the same tactics to infiltrate their own agents across the 17th parallel secretly or with permits. However, with those who enter the Viet Minh zone secretly, all must beware of the tight security control imposed by the villagers. Any stranger in the village is quickly reported. This is the real danger in the Viet Minh zone -- not the frontier. The permits Mr. Chu talks about are so called permanent laissez passer. 600 of them in all have been offered to both sides and are good until January of 1956. The reasons given is to permit the flow of trade between the two zones. The Vietnamese and the Viet Minh surete no doubt, use this means of entry for its police agents. This all adds up to very difficult control of who comes in and goes out of the Viet Minh zone.

Mr. Chu further added that in most instances it is very difficult to locate genuine escapees. These will usually mix with the local people and some will resettle there permanently. If they are genuine escapees and not Viet Minh infiltrators, the local population will not denounce them, so many get lost in the crowd.

In his official report to Saigon, Mr. Chu revealed that there were in the neighborhood of 20,000 Viet Minh agents in the national zone, with approximately half of these being agents left behind by the Viet Minh in the south.

On June 13, 1955 an attempt was made to go along the 17th parallel and observe conditions there. This trip ended in failure as the French military authorities were not very sympathetic to our interests there. From the explanation of the French Colonel, one gets the impression that they live in absolute horror of infracting the Geneva accord even to the point of creating instances that were never even thought of in Geneva. Permission to enter the French demilitarized zone, he explained could not be accomplished unless a telegram was first sent to the Viet Minh government requesting their permission and approval. This is the first time I ever heard of the Viet Minh holding some sort of control south of the 17th parallel. Rather than get upset with this obsequious French colonel who was by then fanning himself furiously we accepted his argument and left our names, etc. at his office so that he could attempt to get laissez passers for us for a later day during the week. He explained that the Viet Minh apparently do the same in return, all in the interest of maintaining good relationship. Now the French or Viet Minh could ever check this out is hard to explain. Not to let this ruin our day completely, we used it to look over the situation along route #9, as far as we could drive safely. (Note: I might add that on this trip, we were stopped at an economic control point along the road. This is the type of control that Mr. Chu talked about. Much talking. Here again as in so

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

287

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

many cases, the strong control exist only on the road. If one has the patience to go through the rice paddies and the bushes, he could move at will with no problems.)

On June 17, 1955, we returned to the 17th parallel, and checked in with Mr. Dong, Chef de Province at Quang Tri. By this time all arrangements had been taken care of by his staff and he had arranged for a Vietnamese member of the mixed commission, Major Linh, to accompany us in the event we encountered any further difficulty. The Chef de Province was rather upset by the treatment we had received by the French and was quite bitter. Again the French antipathy was clearly evident.

Had a meeting with Mr. Dong, Chef de Province of Quang Tri and his assistant Mr. Uyen who from that point on accompanied us everywhere and acted as interpreter. He proved most helpful and quite interested in our escapee program. At all our stops he pushed the program and will undoubtedly take charge of it in the Quang Tri area.

Mr. Dong, stated that in general all the refugees and escapees who come across the 17th parallel usually present themselves to the Chefs de Districts or Villages and ask for help as refugees. (Note: Clearly, this is perhaps the first control point that could be used to check out all incoming escapees.) Here they are usually given a certificate and sent to the Chef de Province (of Quang Tri) who gives them food and money and places them in the transit camps. Usual subsistence is rice and 15 piastres daily for 15 days. During that time they are asked if they want to stay in Quang Tri or go south. Those who choose to remain are resettled there. Those who want to go south are sent to Mr. Vinh in Hue and eventually to Tourane. It was quite clear again here, that Mr. Dong made no differentiation between refugees and escapees. They are all the same to him, and all are immediately considered as refugees.

Then Mr. Dong went into a long talk about the new buffer zone that will be established south of the demilitarized zone to control Viet Minh infiltrates and economic traffic. This was the same plan as had been previously reported by Mr. Chu of the Surets in Hue.

I took this opportunity to question Mr. Dong on his attempts to infiltrate the Viet Minh Zone. With big smiles he stated that he already had many people behind the Viet Minh lines, all apparently in contact with him. This is done he explained through the merchants who go back and forth daily. We did not go into the numbers and their activities but Mr. Dong did not talk with too much sureness and concreteness. Most of this activity may have been wishful thinking or still on the planning boards. Left Mr. Dong and proceeded to Dong Ha to meet our escorts then on to the 17th parallel.

On the way to the frontier, Mr. Uyen decided that we should stop in the village of Ha Thuong, seat of the district of Gia Linh and talk with Mr. Ho Lien Chef de District. Mr. Lien also accompanied us to the 17th parallel and proved most informative and cooperative. He no doubt will become another key figure in our future escapee reception program.

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

287

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

The District of Gia Liah is the farthest north and borders the demilitarized zone. This whole district will within a short time be in the Vietnamese economic buffer zone.

Upon questioning, Mr. Lien stated that his police officials have reported seeing some 20 to 30 persons passing through the village per month. These were not picked up as Viet Minh agents so one could presume them to be escapees. He added that this does not represent the usual commercial stranger who comes into the village for business purposes. These were merely the new faces in the village who were spotted (not necessarily picked up or assisted as refugees). Mr. Lien was immediately interested in the escapee program since he is aware of the need for it. He stated that he will study the possibilities and discuss this program with the chefs de villages along the demilitarized zone within his district and all the way from route nationale #1 to the coast.

In further discussion, it was suggested that Ha Thuong be used as a reception center and the various villages as antennas to pick up the future escapees. All escapees will be taken to the district office for registering and assistance. Arrangements will be made from here with Quang Tri for transportation. I stressed to Mr. Lien that particular care of these people should be exercised, with food and assistance. This may prove an excellent opportunity to arrest any infiltrators or determine which escapee is genuine or not. Mr. Lien, claims he is quite concerned about the Viet Minh agents coming through. On several occasions, he claims he sent some of his police agents into the demilitarized zone (over which he has no control) to flush out some of the Viet Minh agents there and physically bring them back to his district for questioning and shipment to Quang Tri. He also stated that he is in good rapport with the Chef de District of Truong Long (in the demilitarized zone) and the latter often called him up to enter the demilitarized zone to pick up a Viet Minh infiltrator held in his office for shipment south. (Note: The Chef de District in the demilitarized zone is completely powerless and helpless. The zone is controlled by a French and Vietnamese mixed commission.)

The community of interest here is good and already a nucleus exists for the establishment of an escapee reception. (Note: These two district chiefs will work closely together and come up with plans for the establishment centers, locations, spotting areas, systems and submit them to the Chef de Province of Quang Tri as soon as ready.)

I took this opportunity to tell them that Mr. Luong would furnish them with the necessary assistance -- personnel and money -- when they come up with a working plan and there would be enough escapees to justify the program. In the meantime, they will handle this as part of their regular duties.

### Ben Hai River - The 17th Parallel:

Upon arriving at the 17th parallel, we were met by a young Vietnamese police officer, Lieutenant Bernard. His post is the control point on route nationale #1 at the 17th parallel.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

287

① LIMITED OFFICIAL USE ①

The future program was explained to him and he quickly reported that some 25 to 30 people escape across the frontier per month, most of them coming over the bridge on route nationale #1 (his post). Lt. Beznard claims that once the people can make their way into the Viet Minh demilitarized zone, they disguise themselves as farmers, cobblers and slowly work their way to the river. Once there they proceed to the bridge and make a mad dash over the bridge and into the national zone. (As simple as that!!!) See observation of security at the 17th parallel section of this report. He further reported that those who can swim across the river. (Note: This is his observation at his posts. There are about 10 such posts along the frontier, not to mention the wide gaps between them. This post however is the only one with a bridge.)

Lt. Beznard stated that one of the greatest difficulty for the escapees is the actions of the ICG at the border. The feeling at the 17th parallel is that these escapees should be returned to the Viet Minh since they are not official refugees. In many instances he reports the Viet Minh send a liaison man over demanding the return of these escapees claiming them to be prisoners who have escaped from jail and accuse the Vietnamese government of sheltering criminals. When they can, the police quickly help these people out of the demilitarized zone and send them to Gia Linh or Quang Tri for assistance. Most of them make their way to Quang Tri.

Most of the escapees coming across Lt. Beznard claims are people from the Viet Minh demilitarized zone or slightly farther north, perhaps as far as Ha Tinh. He claims the biggest problem for the escapees is to get to the demilitarized zone. Once there they can always make their way to the river and across. Others farther north have to sail down the coast in junks and Lt. Beznard relates some of the Viet Minh measures against this as follows: North of the 17th parallel along the coast, the Viet Minh have placed at various prominent points like Tach Ban, tall masts with Vietnamese flags to attract the escapees coming by boats. Once the escapees see the flag they think they are in the nationalist zone and quickly make for the shore only to be met by the Viet Minh police and disposed of in customary fashion. Some of the people from those areas who have escaped have reported this story. The effect has been good and not too much escaping is done over water.

North-South Trade:

In further discussion, Lt. Beznard reported other interesting information. He claims that in Vinh and Ha Tinh, many persons are given passes passers very easily and sent on their way. However, when they reach the border they are detained and held for propaganda instruction, plus good treatment. Some of these refugees are permitted to cross into Vietnamese zone with large amounts of Viet Minh money. These refugees present themselves at the Chef de Province and demand that they be reimbursed in piastres since they are refugees and had to sell all their property prior to coming across the frontier. (Note: This is a ridiculous attitude on their part. In the early days many left North Vietnam and all their belongings, never being repaid. This is a take and eat it too attitude.) In a few instances where the sums were not too great the Chef de Province exchanged

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

287

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

this money. On one occasion, however, a priest came over with four million Viet Minh dong and demanded that it be exchanged. Since the Chef de District could not cope with such a sum, and aware of much illegal traffic in the village of Thuy Ban, in the demilitarized zone, he told the priest to go there and attempt to have his money exchanged there. Within a few days the story goes, the priest was able to exchange all his dong for piastres at 58 to 1.

Upon further discussion, it was discovered that Thuy Ban is a notorious center of illegal north-south economic traffic. Being in the demilitarized zone it is protected from Vietnamese government action. Thuy Ban is on the old north-south commercial routes.

Since many people in the demilitarized zone have laissez passers to get over frontier, most of this trading is going on in the protection of the demilitarized zone. The Viet Minh permit it for their own interest. The problem is that the people of the Vietnamese demilitarized zone also have access to the national zone. Consequently, in their hands the traffic items have a clear route into the Viet Minh zone. Principal items of commerce are rice, gas, and petroleum products. Reports have it that a jerry can (5 gallons) of gas will bring 700 piastres in the Viet Minh zone. This is profitable business for these buffer zone people and they have no intention of stopping it. This traffic is all carried over on their backs and their boats, across the border.

In the light of past discussions with Mr. Dong and Mr. Chu, it becomes clear why the Vietnamese government intends to set an economic zone south of the present demilitarized zone. Traffic may still get through but much of it will be curbed. This seems serious and important enough that further check might be advisable.

Returning to the point of the exchange of Viet Minh dong for piastres, Mr. Uyen was interested to find out if someone, presumably Mr. Luong, would give permission to exchange these dong into piastres. I don't know how they expected me to solve this problem since it was way out of our field. My answer was that this would be unfair to the earlier refugees who left everything to go south and if really a necessity they could always revert to the techniques used by the priest at Thuy Ban.

### Remarks:

With all the cooperation shown me at the border area, I was still unable to get one answer clear. Namely, if some people come running to our side are there any who go running over to the Viet Minh side. To this question I received the same replies everywhere that when the people in the national zone are interviewed by the ICC, all of them reply loudly that they never want to go back to the Viet Minh zone. Supposedly no one wants to go in the Viet Minh zone, but that does not prove that none ever go there willingly or otherwise.

Spent considerable time with Mr. Vinh discussing the plans for the escapee program. Mr. Vinh proved to be most cooperative and a key person in Hue. He should be most helpful in the future escapee program.

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

Attempted to establish what system of registration Mr. Vinh employs for all incoming refugees/escapees.

Each family is registered on a family card filled in duplicate. One card is kept by the head of the family while the duplicate is kept with the local Chef de Province. Then each individual is given a unit card which serves as some form of identification and ties that person with the family unit. Disbursements, food, etc, are noted on the family cards only. When the individual loses or destroys his card he must apply at the Chef de Province for a new one. In the event a family is transferred to another province, the duplicate card is transferred to the new Chef de Province. In this way, duplication of payment, subsistence, etc., can be avoided. What happened when a family leaves on its own, Mr. Vinh did not explain. (See enclosed sample cards.)

Actually, Mr. Vinh keeps no real record of the refugees other than his daily tabulations in graphic form. For this reason it was impossible for him to check and verify which were refugees or escapees. Duplicate registration cards should be kept in Mr. Vinh's office as a matter of more permanent record. For some unknown reason, Mr. Vinh does not think that this is a good idea. More pressure will have to be applied to attempt to have Mr. Vinh keep better records, if any degree of accuracy is expected.

In the meantime, Mr. Vinh agreed that he would keep daily tabulations on both official refugees and escapees coming over the 17th parallel. He will also instruct all the provinces, district and villages to keep a close check on all future crossings, and submit reports to him. He will keep informed (our office in Hue) on a weekly basis. This should provide us with the needed accurate figure for the time being.

Mr. Vinh had me visit a local Hue reception center where some 1000 refugees are in transit. This is the place where the refugees are registered upon arriving. The enclosed cards furnished by Mr. Vinh's office are used.

Upon talking to the Chef de District, who handles this transit camp, I found out that the 1000 transients are true escapees. Actually it is very hard to prove or disprove this since no differentiation is made upon registering. Each and every one of the refugees would have to be questioned on this. A rather lengthy process. The chief was perhaps making a bold estimate.

In most of my trips to the various areas, I was accompanied by Mr. Le Van Vinh. Up to now, Mr. Vinh has not been interested in escapees since he looked upon them as refugees. He did realize that his actual head count was always more than the IOC listing, but he never looked into it farther.

Mr. Vinh states that from 1 March he started keeping count of the refugees coming through. On 28 March, the IOC stepped in and began giving Mr. Vinh an official count so Mr. Vinh stopped his actual daily head count, but kept on sending more people to Tourane than was reported by the IOC.

## LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

287

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**  
-15-

In the meantime, Mr. Uyen, assistant to the Chef de Province in Quang Tri was also receiving refugees and escapees and keeping a total daily head count. It seems at this point that none of these figures were ever coordinated. They were merely kept for the record and for reimbursement purposes. Nevertheless, there is not too much discrepancy and the difference might as well be charged off as escapees. These figures will probably be as accurate as anybody's guess. For purposes of comparison, the two lists are as follows:

	Mr. Uyen (Quang Tri)	Mr. Vinh (Hue)
February 25	117	
28	39	
March 1		39
5	156	
7	24	
8		24
9	26	
10		27
11	28	32
12	32	5
14		28
18	129	
23	109	
24		109
27	406	
28		54
29	168	163
31	41	73
April 1	32	300
2	8	
4	40	
6		200
7	280	
9	229	300
10	330	
11		350
16		50
17	108	
18		100
21	486	
25	346	
26		100
27	4	
29	207	
30		103
May 1	142	456
2	240	480
3	382	200
4		1000
5	410	383
6	180	
7	120	80

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

287  
201

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

Mr. Uyen (Quang Tri)

Mr. Vinh (Hue)

May 8		600
9	800	160
10		485
12		500
13		302
14	466	200
15		52
16		49
18		375
19	1751	400
20	448	49
21		6
24		3
25	21	
26	13	
June 1	7	15
3		42
4	58	
10	10	
16	231	
Totals	8524	7816

For the period prior to February 25, 1955, Mr. Uyen produced the following figures: August 8, 1954 to August 28, 1954, - 6251 refugees. From September 7, 1954 to February 1, 1955 - 646 refugees. During that time, there was no intention to keep a daily tabulation of refugees or escapees coming over the 17th parallel. Mr. Uyen estimates that from 1 January 1955 to 16 June 1955 approximately 500 escapees came over the 17th parallel.

On the other hand, Mr. Vinh in Hue, explains his figures as follows: Prior to March 28, the daily tabulations totaling 264 represents a true escapee figure for that period. (Note: Mr. Uyen's figures for that same period total 1066.) Mr. Vinh further stated that as of 16 May 1955, he had sent 2040 escapee/refugees to Tourane while the official ICG list during that same period totals 6600 refugees. Then, Mr. Vinh claims, the balance of 1380, plus the 264 represent a total of 1644 genuine escapees for the period of 1 March 1955 to 16 May 1955. On this basis, the escapee average from 1 March 1955 to 16 May 1955 is 21 escapees daily. Mr. Uyen's estimate of 500 escapees from 1 January 1955 to 16 June 1955 is a 3 escapees daily. (Note: This is only considering those escapees coming over the 17th parallel and coming into Quang Tri and Hue. One point to consider was the statement made earlier on the escapees who mix in with the local population and settle at the border area. These never figure in any listings. Whatever figure is accepted, it is purely relative.

Mr. Vinh further stated that this list does not take into consideration those escapees who came down by sampans and recorded in his office.

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

787

● LIMITED OFFICIAL USE ●

He gives the following figures of some maritime escapees: 26 February 1955, 52 escapees; 15 March 1955, - 43 escapees; 9 April 1955, - 44 escapees. Total 139. This however is a grossly underestimated figure and misses countless number of escapees who came down last fall and are now resettled - but nonetheless, escapees. In a resettled camp near Tourane, I personally talked to a priest who came down from Ha Tinh by sampan back in September 1954 with 1200 of his flock. He and many others like him figure only in the grand refugee total.

First glances at the two lists of Mr. Uyen and Mr. Vinh tends to give one the impression of utter confusion in calculations. In their totals, however, they do not vary so greatly with only 94 persons difference from the period of 28 March 1955 to 16 June 1955. This is only an average of 1 plus per day. This could easily be accounted for in a time lag between the two cities of Quang Tri and Hue, or slight errors in counting.

Prior to leaving Mr. Vinh, he gave me the following final figures of refugees in the Hue-Tourane area. All are in transit camps.

Quang Tri	1842
My Khe	2000
Tourane (2 camps)	3815
POW camp	1419
Hue (approx)	<u>2000</u>

Total 18 June 1955 11076

Waiting in the Viet Minh Zone 6,000

One satisfying feeling in comparing the two lists is that the rumor of the 6,000 escapees flowing through the 17th parallel in the few days after the 18 May 1955 deadline is a myth. Further, the thought that up to 1,000 escapees or refugees came through was clarified as a single event and not a continuous occurrence. However, as for a correct tabulation, much is still left to be desired.

Personal Observations at the 17th Parallel:

1. Upon approaching the immediate border area, there is a 5 kilometer demilitarized zone on each side, with control posts at the entrance roads to this zone. Checks are apparently only on the roads while the area between these posts is not patrolled, unguarded, and unchecked. A Laissez passer is needed to enter this zone and approval must be secured in advance with the Vietnamese, French and Viet Minh all concurring.

2. The 5 kilometer demilitarized zone is a vast rice plain with some 6000 inhabitants, (by recent census count) going about their normal daily living and working. The district of Truong Long is in the demilitarized zone. Although the chief of the district lives and has his office there he is completely powerless since this zone is under the control of the mixed commission of Vietnamese and French military.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

287

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

-18-

3. The actual border is the winding Ben Hai river to the end near the mountain regions. Through the mountain regions the border is the 17th parallel drawn across to Laos.
4. The Vietnamese and French military have 10 control posts along the river. None in the mountain regions near Laos. These posts are at various key points, bends, roads, and streams emptying into the Ben Hai. Generally the Viet Minh have their posts across the river at the same points.
5. Control point visited was the posts at the bridge on route nationale No. 1 going across the Ben Hai river. Each side has a cantilever gate at each end of the bridge.
6. There are the members of the mixed commission and Vietnamese garde civile at these posts. There is no patrol between these posts, nor communication except by radio phone. These posts are responsible for guarding the border area between each post.
7. There are no fences, barbed wire, etc., along the banks of the river. No patrol was observed along the river bank. There is no patrol on the river by either side.
8. Normal activity of rice cultivation can be observed on both sides of the border area. Labor parties were also seen working on the Viet Minh side of the river bank. Several sampans were moving up and down the river with no apparent control or check. People were also fishing in the river without any problems.
9. Certain persons are permitted to travel between both demilitarized zones for commercial purposes. These persons have permanent laissez passers. I personally observed several Vietnamese women with their basket carriers proceed into the Viet Minh zone by merely showing this pass at the control gate at the bridge. No fleeing escapees were observed.

**LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

28771