

Field Report - 337

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

August 4, 1955

Mr. Coster and Mr. Frakes

Classified Data Relative Attacks Phuoc Ly Area, Bien Hoa Province.

Field Report FS-337

This classified report is supplemental to and should be read in conjunction with unclassified Field Report FS-336, dated 3 August 1955.

Additional observations and data obtained on field trips made on August 1 and 2, 1955 follow:

A) Locale

1) Cat Lai Ferry operated by the Province of Gia Dinh across the Dong Nai River became inoperative on July 29, resumed service August 2, 1955.

This non-operation of the ferry coincided with the period during which the villages were attacked. First attack was in Dao Ngan the night of 29 July (actually 1:40 A.M. - 30 July). Second attack was in two adjoining villages of Thanh Ra and Dai Lam on the night of 31 July (actually about 2:00 A.M. - 1 August)..

2) On the Bien Hoa Province side of the ferry (east bank of the Dong Nai River) is located a small Cao Dai outpost under the command of Lt. Tran Thanh Nghe. This installation was under mortar fire the night of 31 July. Nine soldiers were injured. Under constructions were new earth fortifications for sentry posts. Dao Ngan village is about 6 kms ESE of this Cao Dai Post.

The commander believes the road is at present secure up to 10 PM.

The area from Cat-Lai Ferry ESE along Route Locale No. 25 and Route Provinciale No. 19 toward Long Thanh and also east of the refugee villages vicinity is under control of Cao Dai troops. Location of other outposts is not known. The line of demarkation between the area under jurisdiction of Cao Dai Troops and the Garde Civile from Long Thanh could not be determined. The Garde Civile controls four areas west of Long Thanh of indefinite location.

Note: Route numbers vary with maps and may cause confusion. However only two roads connect with Long Thanh from Phuoc Ly.

3) On the east bank of the Dong Nai River north of the ferry landing is located a large French military hydroplane installation.

4) Two kilometers east of Dao Ngan on Route Locale No. 25 is located a French Ammunition Depot.

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## Observations and Data - Dao Ngan:

A few meters from the village of Dao Ngan is located a Trappist Monastery. Father Malachi with whom we are acquainted, gave us the following data:

- 1) The French Ammunition Depot employs many coolie laborers who now are or were Binh Xuyen members.
- 2) He believes ammunition is supplied to the Binh Xuyen from this depot.
- 3) American Military assistance ammunition is said to be stored here.
- 4) The priest believes there is collusion between the French, Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen.
- 5) For several days before the first attack a motor patrol boat operated up and down a branch of the river north of the village.
- 6) He believes this boat is harbored at the hydroplane base at Cat Lai. The attackers of Dong Ngan came from two boats on the branch of the river.
- 7) Villagers of Dao Ngan have been informed by attackers assumed to be Binh Xuyen they must leave in ten days time or they will again be attacked.
- 8) The Binh Xuyen consider the surrounding countryside to be their territory since at one time arrangements had been made with the French placing the territory under their control.

The refugees have been told that if they wish to stay in this area they will have to obtain permission from Bay Vien and that young men from the village must serve in the Binh Xuyen army.

- 9) Father Malachi said that he believes the Binh Xuyen headquarters are located at NHA BE area on the west side of the Dong Nai River, about 14 kilometers southeast of Saigon.

It was learned from the villagers of Dao Ngan that when attacked many people were night fishing, consequently not at home.

The attack was made suddenly but was deliberate, unhurried and without confusion, indicating the attackers felt secure in their efforts.

## C) Observations and Data - Thanh Ra-Dai Lam

With respect to the attack in the villages of Thanh Ra and Dai Lam the following information was learned from various sources.

- 1) A Cao Dai patrol had been in the area on Sunday night, July 31, 1955.

It was supposed their presence was due to the trouble at Dao Ngan two nights previous.

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- 2) About 20 minutes after the Cao Dai left, the refugees heard mortar and machine gun fire. According to witness the patrol at that time was no more than one kilometer distant.
- 3) Almost simultaneously with the firing the Binh Xuyen arrived (direction from which they came unknown) accompanied by shouting of their own and that of the refugees. After about fifteen minutes of shouting and warnings to the refugees to leave the area immediately, teen age children who accompanied the Binh Xuyen started to burn the refugee's houses one by one. Approximately 15 armed adults kept the refugees from offering any resistance. According to the refugees there was some sporadic mortar and machine gunfire trained on the village which also tended to keep the refugees from offering resistance.
- 4) People who attempted to save their property were beaten by the attackers and forced to throw their possessions on the fires.
- 5) The Binh Xuyen told the people the burnings would continue so long as they remained in the area and that those who offered resistance or remained would be killed. Most of the refugees fled to the surrounding fields and woods in order to escape being beaten or injured.
- 6) The house burning took place house by house, one at a time, and ceased only when the attackers exhausted their supply of torches and combustible fuel.
- 7) When the fires had burned down and the noise abated, the refugees came out of the fields and woods. Upon reaching their village they saw the Cao Dai troops standing in the road. However the Cao Dai were very indifferent and completely disinterested. They did not offer any help or even make any sympathetic remarks. When queried as to why they had not returned to the village immediately upon hearing the shooting and the cries of the refugees and seeing the fires, the Cao Dai troops refused to even give an answer. The refugees believe that previous arrangements were made between the Cao Dai troops and the Binh Xuyen.
- 8) The French ammunition depot located 3 kilometers north of the villages offered no assistance nor did anyone appear from there to make inquiry.

The refugees of Dai Lam and Thanh Ra also believe the ammunition was supplied to the attackers from this French depot.

- 9) A military officer from Bong Thanh stated that the Binh Xuyen were present in large force in the Forest Sat, a swamp and marsh area south of Phuoc Ly. He also said that it was impossible for him to pursue these people with the troops and equipment he now has available. He indicated that he believed nothing positive could be done until Vietnamese Army troops were relieved from current operations in the area and placed in this area full-time.

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10) The priest and refugees of Thanh Ba have requested that since they cannot depend on the military now stationed in the area rifles and ammunition should be issued to them for self defense. They feel that the past attacks were in the nature of a warning and the next attacks will result in killings.

11) It is to be noted that many of the refugees were formerly members of the Regional Guards (DIA-PHUONG-QUAN) in north Vietnam and have had military training.

12) Included in the investigating party was Colonel Nguyen Linh Chien, commander of the 12th regiment which controls the Bien Hoa area.

During his briefing to the Commissioner General and the Chef de Province he stated his military needs for effective protection of the area VII.

Seven blockhouses at a cost of 200,000 ICG each, Colonel Chien stated he could not alter the present situation in this area if the request for blockhouses was not approved.

Chien objected to any distribution of arms or ammunition to the refugees until such time as the blockhouses are constructed.

## D) Recommendations

1) Since the ferry at Cat Lai is the only direct connecting link to Saigon from Phuoc Ly the responsible Gia Dinh Province authorities should maintain operation at all times.

Present schedule is approximately eight hours per day with the usual noon day break.

This ferry crossing is of economic value since it is the only practical route to the Saigon markets.

2) The Thu Thiem ferry crossing over the Saigon River (foot of Catinat Street, Saigon) should also maintain a constant operating schedule without the noon day break from 11:30 to 2:30.

Although Cat Lai Ferry can be reached by way of Thu Duc the route is approximately 18 kilometers farther than by Thu Thiem ferry.

3) The request by the military for seven blockhouses at a unit cost of 200,000 ICG a total cost of 1,400,000 ICG (\$40,000 US) is considered beyond the realm of reason and necessity.

It is believed that proper utilization of present military personnel now stationed in Phuoc Ly and Long Thanh areas would afford proper security.

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4) In lieu of blockhouses, whose effectiveness is questioned, it would be far better to provide the Chief of Province with sufficient economic and financial support to permit him to resolve the Phuoc Ly problem by relocation to secure areas elsewhere in Bien Hoa Province.

In connection with relocation the following facts require consideration:

- a) The villages are presently located in an area extremely susceptible to attack.
- b) They are completely isolated from the markets and other facilities provided by a metropolitan area or even that of a large town.
- c) One village, Dao Ngan, is composed of tradesmen with no means of earning a livelihood (See Resettlement Questionnaire) plus the fact water must be purchased as there are no wells in the village.

Proper protection should be provided immediately for all villages in Phuoc Ly area until such time as relocation is completed or other solution is in effect.

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