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*Dept. of the  
Army*

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USAID, Saigon

April 14, 1966

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Ngu Hanh Son Campaign

Following are summary notes, prepared by Mr. Paul Hare prior to his departure on 13 April, concerning progress of the pacification program in the Ngu Hanh Son (NHS) national priority area. Mr. Hare spent a large percentage of his time in the area during the critical month March 12 - April 12. He has since transferred to Saigon to serve on Ambassador Porter's staff.

Following are my main impressions on the Ngu Hanh Son Campaign. Source materials are assorted farmers, hamlet and village chiefs and cadre who happen to find themselves in that particular terra firma. My main contention is that the chaotic political situation of the last five weeks has caused slippage but it has not caused it to fail. Whether the NHS is eventually judged a success, failure or just another marginal effort will depend on other factors -- quality and morale of cadre, command and organization, performance of military units, and the ultimate character and motivation of the hamlet residents, assuming a halfway normal political environment at province and urban levels.

a. Security

Troop statistics can be revealing. There are approximately 912 ARVN, 115 RF, 196 RF and 73 PF pinned down to NHS defense. As long as this situation continues one cannot really speak of meaningful pacification in the area. If the ARVN and RF (or 3 companies of RF) were removed from this area tomorrow, I think I would be safe in saying that security would promptly return to that of 7 or 8 months ago.

The root problem is the current understrength of the PF. Many of the young lads in the 19 hamlets are either in DaNang or with the VC. This complicates the picture and means that meaningful pacification will be a long haul in the NHS area. Or alternatively, one will have to deplete other manpower sources (i.e., in other districts of Quang Nai Province) by placing greater numbers of PATs and/or RF companies until such a time as the PF are up to strength.

One of the more successful security measures undertaken in the NHS area were the County Fairs. Twelve of these operations, which are similar to the Quang Ngai Eagle Plan, have taken place in the NHS area (or areas immediately adjacent to the NHS). The method is simple and effective--cordonning off a hamlet, and subsequent search and interrogation of the hamlet population. It is probably the only way to break the back of the local VC infrastructure but to be effective it must be a continuing operation. Needless to say, none have taken place in the last ten days or so.

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The VC in contrast have been more active recently. Their tactics are to employ sub-squad size units to wreck terrorism on the local population. Numerous incidents have been reported. For example, the commander of an RF company was killed and 150,000 VND stolen in a recent action; 1500 meters of fence and the murder of a pro-GVN citizen was reported in another hamlet; and 8 citizens murdered in a third.

Apparently, VC local guerrillas are now in four hamlet locations in NHS previously cleared. Terrorism of course can take place even in a fairly secure area. But it is probably easier for the VC to launch these operations than two or three weeks ago when the ARVN force was more alert and less apt to be focused on the political intrigues of DaNang.

b. NHS Headquarters/District Relationships

The organizational apparatus directing the NHS operation is completely confused and lacks such elemental things as a clear command structure. Basic to the problem is the relationship of Major Nhat (NHS Pacification Leader) and Captain Hoa (District Chief of Hoa Vang). Cadre generally speak to Major Nhat; village and hamlet chiefs to both; ARVN to Colonel Lap; RF to nobody; and the PF and PAT to anyone who happens to talk to them. The situation is confusing to the extreme. On several occasions I found myself receiving buckshot from both sides. In my opinion, the easiest solution would be to bolster up the district staff and let Major Nhat's gang go by the wayside. I think everyone would be happier at this more efficient arrangement.

c. Rural Construction Activities

Aside from the selection of sites, no progress has been made on the hamlet school program. We were unable to get supplies out of DaLat owing to the crisis. Deliveries have been made to nine hamlets thus far for self-help projects. Three remain. Captain Hoa has received the money for these projects. Agriculture activities were minimal. Free fertilizer was distributed to the citizens of Phong Nam Hamlet minus four families. The purpose of the 25 kilo grant per family was to encourage the growing of garden crops. The farmers were delighted to receive fertilizer, but unfortunately this is not vegetableplanting time and the farmers intend to use it for their rice fields. From the point of view of psywar, this resolution is fine but for the agricultural purist it cuts the rug from under NACO's feet. As a result the program is dead, which leaves many other farmers in the Ngu Hanh Son area wondering when they will get their free fertilizer sacks. If we had plenty of fertilizer, I would suggest restarting the program since I am convinced this is the fastest way and surest way of winning the hearts and guts of the people. Irrigation activities slipped to a standstill. The project for popular dredging of the An Trach canal awaits the approval of the province chief. Province inputs are foodstuffs. Medical efforts are now confined to one cadre, the rest having resigned owing to protests about their low level of salaries.

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d. Cadre

The cadre in the Nhu Hanh Son area confirmed my worst impressions of those I saw in action during my tour in the delta. Perhaps I did not happen to pass by at the right time but I began to doubt this when the cadre appeared unable to help with the unloading of commodities or hitched a ride with me into town to take dinner, siesta or something more gay. On the other hand, barring one hamlet, all of the hamlet chiefs I saw impressed me when compared to the rest of the local talent. Admittedly, the cadre may, from time to time, provide some useful information to the higher ups. Occasionally they may help organize an affair or possibly teach in a school. But the presence of 200 plus cadre at the present time appears to be a minimal investment, especially as they lack effective leadership and guidance. More importantly, I do not think it does the cause very much good when their presence undercuts, both in salary (i.e., prestige) and command, the position of the hamlet or village chief. The latter officials, in my opinion, are the mainstay of effective pacification efforts. Our objective should be to bolster their image on the community at every opportunity. I do not think this is happening in all circumstances now. I fully agree with your proposal to make good hamlet and village chiefs who stay in the hamlets overnight cadre leaders with in effect double pay (cadre salary plus local government salary). This would simplify the chain of command problem in most locales and lead to a more stable long-term situation. The use of exiled hamlet and village officials as cadre should not be overlooked either.

e. Fence Building

A major mistake, probably, was the sending of the Quang Nam gang to Quang Ngai for pacification indoctrination lock-see. They returned with fences firmly planted in their minds. Although all farmers with whom I personally talked defended the fences, I seriously doubt if this was a heartfelt sentiment. In the first instance, I think it probably has marginal security benefits. Secondly, it cost the families a lot of work and lost market-value bamboo to construct the fences. It was not exactly couvée labor inasmuch as the cadre and others promised rewards in foodstuffs for their labors. But it is close to the strategic hamlet concept. I personally recommend that we get a list of families who participated in the fence construction and give them symbolic rewards. This might possibly mitigate the deep-rooted resentment they might have toward their presence.

EVALUATION

It is difficult to evaluate an operation such as the Ngu Hanh Son. Undoubtedly, security is better than it was at the campaign's inception. But let's use a little arithmetic. Assuming an approximate 20,000 population in the Ngu Hanh Son area, there is a ratio of 1.10 between troop/cadre and population (excluding marines) at the present time. One would hope that security would get better anywhere in Vietnam with this ratio. Looking at Ngu Hanh Son from the perspective of other Quang Nam Districts, another piece in the pacification puzzle begins to appear. (And this bears some resemblance to the old Hop Tac schema.) The question is simple. Are the pinning down of manpower and resources in Ngu Hanh Son going to lead to the loss of pacified hamlets in other areas of Quang Nam? Is the Deputy District Chief of Duy Xuyen correct in saying that the loss

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of a PAT platoon and 14 rural construction cadre will lead to his withdrawal from 3-h hamlets in the next three months? I do not know the answer but I strongly suspect that the possibility exists. At a minimum the facts should be recognized.

I do not want to appear unduly pessimistic about Ngu Hanh Son. I think the idea is sound strategically. Moreover, there are some optimistic factors. For example, I was surprised that the farmers I talked with knew the locations and numbers of self-help projects programmed for their hamlet. Some type of OVN/pculation dialogue has been started. My serious worry is that the planners will attempt to go into Phase II before Phase I is completed. Phase II should probably not be seriously entertained for another six months. Meanwhile, my specific recommendations are:

1. Abolition of the NNS headquarters and placing pacification authority and command in Hoa Vang District.
2. Increased emphasis on the recruitment and training of PF and PAT forces in the area and placing them in a clear chain of command.
3. Place the village and hamlet chiefs in a command position over the cadre.
4. Weed the cadre out to probably half their present size unless they can say what they have been doing for the past six months.
5. Attempt to get a good fertilizer program going in Ngu Hanh Son, both through NACO and the Agricultural Service.

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