

Phu Khuong Hamlet (Category C)
My An Phu Village
Thu Thua District
Long An Province

I. General Aspect

The hamlet of Phu Khuong is located about 6 kilometers west of the Long An province capital.

Lying on a confluence where a small canal joins a larger river, this is one of the five hamlets of the village of My An Phu. The hamlet of Phu Khuong is the sole area of the village where security is relatively well maintained. The other hamlets such as Phu Thuong, Hoa Tay, Hoa An, and My Phuoc are considered un-controllable. Completely insecure are the hamlets of Hoa An and My Phuoc, which lie in the free bombing zone.

The refugees from the neighboring hamlets have come to the hamlet of Phu Khuong in fairly large numbers since the latter is relatively more secure than the other four.

Since the area borders a VC zone, the local security force has to work around the clock. Since 1963 the hamlet has been attacked by the VC several times, and many youths of the Popular Force have been killed. The Popular Force outpost is taken by the enemy, then re-taken by the GVN, and this has recurred some five or six times in the past. "This has caused a lot of widows among the hamlet women" (These words are from the village and hamlet chiefs).

The My Phu An village chief, because of security, has to set up his working office here in the hamlet of Phu Khuong.

An incident deserving special mention has been told us by the village chief. An airstrike conducted by mistake by U.S. war planes against some 30 sampans and other craft of the refugees sheltering in the hamlets of Phu Khuong and Vam Thu, who had just returned from their original places which are located near the free bombing zone. In the words of the village's chief, the incident took place on the 30th of July 1966. It was not due to the wrong spotting of the reconnaissance plane or any error made by the bombers' pilots. The thing is that, on that day, there was a group of boats of the refugees who, being already settled in the hamlets of Vam Thu and Phu Khuong (district of Thu Thua), wanted to return to their original places located in the free bombing zone and to other neighboring hamlets to get some manioc and other necessities. Unfortunately, on their way back to their new settlement areas, when they were about to leave the free bombing zone, they were stopped altogether for checks by the VC. The latter were

searching for some (actually two) VC defectors who were on their way to return to the GVN and who were thought to have mingled with the refugees. While the check was being conducted, it happened that a spotting plane flew past the area, and the VC fired provoking shots at it. The bombers were then called in to conduct the air strike. The refugees, who later on were able to escape the bombing safe and sound, let know that they didn't bear any grudge against the US war planes but hated the VC very much since the latter were the authors of such an incident. In the words of these refugees, the number of victims might be from 100 to 150 persons.

II. The NEW LIFE Hamlet Program

Before 1962, the hamlet was well known as an Anti-Communist base area of the Cao Dai religious sect. In 1962, it was transformed into a strategic hamlet. During its first days, the population had to build up a barbed-wire fence, with the assistance of the GVN's troops and cadres. The government supplied the hamlet with iron stakes and barbed wire and each inhabitant had to set up 15 meters of fence. A "fighting youth" force was organized for the defense of the hamlet. In 1963, the hamlet was changed into a NEW LIFE hamlet and a Popular Force platoon was in charge of protecting it.

In July 1965, the VC launched an attack against the Popular Force outpost, killing 15 soldiers and capturing all the others. They also destroyed a GVN's co-operative established there.

Since 1963, the hamlet has been attacked three times. The last attack occurred in April 1966, and caused injury to a civilian and a child. So far, nothing has been said about whether the GVN would indemnize the victims or not.

From July 1965, after the VC had annihilated the Popular Force unit, the military outpost was abandoned, and the hamlet was seen as under VC occupation, although the latter had come into the area only for propaganda purposes and not for actual occupation. In June 1966, a Regional Force company was sent in to re-occupy the outpost and since then, the VC no longer dare to show up for propaganda or armed attack.

About a hundred families living previously outside of the hamlet perimeter fence had moved into its premises. However, only ten of them were given government allowances of 2,000 piasters each. Those who didn't receive any gratuity were dead set against such a state of things and had lodged complaints about it, but so far no government action has been taken.

The VC attack launched in the middle of the year 1963 had frightened those persons that had just moved into the hamlet premises. Some 30 families left the area after the incident but it is not known where they had gone to.

People could enjoy more security when living inside the strategic hamlet perimeter fence, although making one's living there became more difficult from many an aspect. An instance of it is that farmers no longer dared to go to work on their fields lying deep in insecure remote areas.

III. The Rural Pacification Program

So far there hasn't been any Rural Pacification team arriving at the hamlet, although they have been seen operating in neighboring areas. Five months ago, an armed special administration platoon came here to provide protection and assistance to the population. They advised the inhabitants on farming, insecticide spraying, hog raising, and well digging. They also held public meetings to explain the reasons why the GVN would like to see the people live in a strategic hamlet. In the special administration men's words, it is because the GVN wants to protect the people's property and life and at the same time to deny the VC from collecting taxes from and arresting those living in remote areas where they (the VC) could conduct clandestine activity. This also explains why most of the people have come to establish themselves in the hamlet.

The inhabitants were satisfied with the help provided by the special administration unit. This has proven that the GVN has paid concern to the underprivileged, and in particular, those living in rural areas. However, so far there hasn't been any Rural Construction team coming here. The population request that the GVN send the hamlet some Rural Construction teams so that the residents could receive more help.

From time to time, the VC moved in to destroy the strategic hamlet perimeter fence. The last incident occurred four months ago. People had to repair the fence each time it was damaged. There were also times when the Regional Force soldiers had to do repair work along with the population to fix the fence.

IV. The Problem of the Refugees: Permanent Re-settlement and Temporary Displacement

There are some 30 to 40 anti-communist refugee families here. They have come from the villages of Tan Dong (Province of Kien Tuong), My Lac, Long Thuan, Xom Mia, Muong Dao (Province of Long An), which are all insecure areas. Most of the refugees had received assistance from the GVN. Each family was to receive a 7 piaster per diem allowance for 3 months for each person, 300 Kilograms of rice, cooking oil, and clothing. The VC often threatened the people that if anyone received any assistance from the GVN it meant that he had followed the enemy and he would be punished. The VC had arrested and killed four or five persons because the latter had accepted the government's allowances.

The hamlet youth didn't dare to spend their nights at home. They feared that the VC might come to get them. About a year ago, after the Popular Force outpost had been destroyed, there was no more force left to provide protection, and at night the VC moved in to capture young men for draft. Since then, the majority of the hamlet youth entered the RVN Army. The remainder went to Long An town to make their livings there, since the town is only 6 kilometers away from the hamlet. The VC considered those youths who left for town "collaborators" with the enemy (i.e. GVN). They threatened these persons that they would be killed or taken to remote areas. As a result, since these young men were seen by the VC as their foes, the hamlet became more strongly anti-communist. Another reason related to such high anti-communist morale is that most of the population here are Cao Dai followers, Cao Dai being a religious sect that hates Communism.

Before the arrival of the Regional Force Company, there was only one Popular Force squad - or maybe two - at the hamlet. The VC often came in to capture the youths for killing or for coercing the latter to follow them. Since March 1966, with the presence of the Regional Force troops, they no longer dared come into the hamlet but they used megaphones to warn the inhabitants to stay away from military installations in order to avoid the risks of war and to urge people to fight against U.S. aggressors. As regard the anti-communist refugee families, the residents have helped them in activities such as house building and so on.

V. The Land Reform Program

The inhabitants here have also heard about the government's land reform program and understand that, with the "expropriation" policy, those property owners who possess over a hundred hectares of land have to sell part of their ricefields to their tenants (buying priority is given to the tenants who have worked on the land). They are allowed to keep only a hundred hectares. However, the hamlet being a poor one, there is no owner who has up to a hundred hectares of land and therefore, the "expropriation" problem can be said as non-existent. There is no public farmland either, and consequently, no public land tenants. There is, however, a respondent who said that in this hamlet, there is a former councilman's wife, Mrs. Pho, an aunt of General Duong Van Minh, who possesses several hundred hectares of land and who isn't subjected to the "expropriation" law.

The farmers' association has been established for only a month. Those who want to become its members have to pay two piasters per month for membership fees. It has been said that the association would sell fertilizers and prospective buyers have only to submit an application, but so far nothing has been done about it.

The agricultural credit loan service has planned to distribute some 95,000 piasters for this year. People received the first grant

of loans a month ago. The maximum amount of money received is 4,000 piasters, and the minimum is 2,000. There are some 10 persons who have been able to borrow 4,000 piasters each and 25 others 2,000 piasters each.

People wish to be loaned more money since 2,000 piasters is not enough. They desire to receive loans of 5,000 piasters and up. Administrative procedures are rather lengthy (it usually takes 2 months to get the loans). The government should simplify all burdensome procedures so that the granting of loans would take less time.

The hamlet administration has been unfair in the examining and endorsing of requests for loans. There is no self-help project at all.

The hamlet administration has been inactive, and so has the village administration. Mr. Nguyen Van Kiem, alias Chau, is the village head. The village police chief, Mr. Hanh, against whom complaints have been lodged for his oppressing the population, has been removed from his position.

VI. Activity of Information Cadres

Psywar information teams with mobile public address units come to the hamlet every week to explain various programs of the GVN. From time to time, they inform people of events that have occurred in the village or in the district. They have also held public meetings at the elementary school building to talk about the Constituent Assembly election law.

In the past, each time there was an armed clash out of which some Popular Force members were wounded, the Psywar cadres came to visit the wounded in the latter's houses for moral comfort, gift donations, and medical care. The VC then propagandized by way of personal persuasion and leaflets that the GVN had used these youths as bullet shields for American aggressors. No counter-propaganda action has been taken by the information cadres on this matter. It might be that the government hasn't learned of these VC propaganda activities.

The hamlet population have understood about the true nature of the VC here and they hate the latter very much.

VII. The Chieu Hoi Program

The hamlet inhabitants have been informed of the Chieu Hoi program over the radio and through the press. The information cadres have also held public meetings at the elementary school building to talk about the Chieu Hoi policy. The GVN has called on the VC cadres to join the national side, and urged the population to persuade their relatives and friends to return to the government's camp. The GVN will grant them clemency measures, will provide them with money and sustenance, and will allow them to get back to their original places where they can make their own livings.

Two months ago, there were two VC who presented themselves to the hamlet administrative office. They were warmly greeted and then sent to the Long An "Chieu Hoi" Center. Later on, they were allowed to return to their original villages. One of them afterwards joined a Popular Force unit and was killed during fighting a month later.

The population have appreciated the Chieu Hoi program since such a humanitarian policy helps foster love rather than cruel killing.

VIII The Election Problem

There hasn't been any election held in the past year.

The hamlet administration has been designated by the village officials. People have participated in previous elections, which were held long ago, very eagerly. The population have learned of the forthcoming election through the press, over the radio, and by the information cadres who have come to the hamlet.

Three days ago, a public class session relating to the Constituent Assembly election was held.

Under the late President's administration, the inhabitants were directed to elect only those candidates designated by the officials. By now, the information cadres have told the population that they can choose whoever they want. However, the people feel they have to go vote because it is a duty of theirs and this will warrant them from encountering trouble with the government. They haven't yet fully realized that their interests are linked to the casting of ballots and how important such a voting is. They say they have usually voted at random regardless of the fact who would be the winner.

The VC have threatened that they would confiscate the peoples' ID cards and would throw grenades at voting polls on the election day, and this has scared the population.

IX. The People's Aspirations

A Popular Force squad leader named Long who has treated the people overbearingly and oppressingly, and who has often stolen things from the inhabitants, is asked to be removed from his position and "eliminated".

The present hamlet administration must be replaced by another one.

The hamlet bridge must be re-built to ease circulation.

X. The Population and the Local Administration

A year ago, the hamlet protection force, consisting of two squads, was in part killed and in part captured by the VC. This made people

lose confidence in the GVN and the area was considered lost to and under VC control. However, in March 1966, a Regional Force company moved in. This unit has been very active in conducting operations and then gained the people's trust. The company has exercised complete control over the hamlet and since then, the VC haven't dared to launch any attack against the outpost or to conduct propaganda in the area which had previously boasted as a "death zone" to the GVN. Two months ago, the VC in an attempt to attack the outpost, fell into an ambush and got 2 killed. They then threatened that they would take revenge on that, but so far nothing has happened.

The Regional Force company is always eager to help and protect the hamlet. The unit has done its job effectively and is held in high esteem by the inhabitants. At night, the troops often go on patrol in the hamlet and the outpost is well-guarded. The outpost commander is a second lieutenant.

The hamlet administration consists of a hamlet chief, a deputy hamlet chief, and a security chief. The present hamlet head is Mr. Nguyen Van Phan. This official is kind to the people, but has been unfair in the distributing of milk, sugar, and fabric ration-cards. He has given these cards only to his relatives, friends, or rich people, while the truly underprivileged have been unable to get them. Truly speaking, the population here have not been able to enjoy anything profitable at all. They have complained a lot about these matters but they dare not voice them out of fear of reprisals, since their lives are in the hands of the hamlet chief.

The province chief and the district head have once come to visit the hamlet school. The province chief is a Lieutenant Colonel, and has just been assigned here, and nobody knows what his name is. Concerning the Thu Thua district chief, all people learn about him is that he is a captain. The hamlet chief spends his nights in town, and so do the hamlet youths for fear of the VC who could come to draft them. The village administration (village of My An Phu) is performing its duties recklessly. They practice favoritism. Only personal friends and rich people are given milk, sugar, and fabric ration cards. The poor get nothing out of it.

Those young men who want to go to town in order to enter the army, have to be issued a change of residence authorization, and the village officials ask them for bribes before delivering them such papers. People want to denounce these officials very much but they don't dare to do so for fear of reprisals.

In this hamlet, there is also a Popular Force squad leader named Long who has committed frequent oppressing acts against the inhabitants. Once he stole a radio set. He has been denounced, then jailed, but after being released, he still keeps on behaving the same as before.

XI. The War's Problem

People as a whole here think that the VC are the authors of this war and that the GVN will be the winner, although nobody can predict when final victory could be achieved. There is only one respondent who firmly believes that the GVN will win over the VC in 1967. Being asked why he thought so, he said: "My land lies far away from the hamlet, once when I was there for work I heard some VC who complained among themselves about their lots. They seemed to have lost faith in their cause. They said they could no longer bear the war for more than a year. The VC is the author of the war, but if the GVN, with a lot of weapons and troops, also with the support of the U.S. and other allies, hasn't been able to overcome the VC to end the conflict, it is because the local government haven't been able to win over the people's hearts. They failed in securing their genuine backing. If the government doesn't commit unpopular acts, the population will support it in its fight against Communism and the VC will be defeated in a very near future. The corrupt and overbearing attitude of the local administrations, from the village level down, has created public dissatisfaction. The VC have taken advantage of this weak point for their propaganda themes, in order to breed hatred among the rural population. With propaganda, they can easily convince those light-hearted people who have already grown discontent, to follow them. What is dangerous is that the local authorities seem to ignore these facts.

The population also understand that it is the VC who have caused this war in order to dominate the South. The VC have often said that the Americans are the aggressors and they have the duty to liberate the South from them (the U.S.).

The present state of war has greatly affected the people's life. Farmers can work only on the land lying in the strategic hamlet's premises. Farming outside of it runs the risk of stepping on VC mines or being hit by air strikes. The population are really having an extremely hard time. Besides the war, they have to face starvation, also mistreatment and exploitation conducted by those in power.

In the past six months, there hasn't been any armed clash between the VC and the ARVN, however VC have come into the area for search and sabotage operations. The last time they got in, about six months ago, they attempted to capture young people and come to the nurse's house for medicine and took away people's belongings. They also fired at the houses but nobody was hurt.

a. Military Operations and Shellings

From time to time, ARVN troops have passed by the area to conduct operations in more remote hamlets. So far, they haven't stopped and carried on any search here.

The hamlet has been shelled two or three times. The last incident took place in February 1966, leaving a woman with a broken leg and damaging some houses. The government hasn't paid any indemnity yet. In the previous shelling, the rounds fell short of the hamlet, hitting only the neighboring ricefields, and caused no damage at all. After these shellings, the VC by means of personal persuasion told the people that things like this happened because the U.S. had intended to kill all the inhabitants. However, the residents understand that it was because the hamlet police chief had requested the supporting fires to check a likely VC attack, and the fires from district Hqs. had been misplaced on the hamlet.

Last year, the VC moved in to destroy roads and bridges to prevent the ARVN troops from coming to fight them, since they usually stayed in the more remote hamlets. The destroying of communications facilities has hindered the people's circulation. The latter had to move on foot, since vehicular use was impossible. Such acts have intensified the people's hatred against the VC.

b. U.S. and Allied Troops

The population have been told of the presence of US, Korean, Australian, and New Zealand troops who have come to VN to help the government fight the VC. They seem to feel happy about such a presence and to appreciate it very much.

The majority of the inhabitants have approved of the idea of having US and Allied troops stationed in the hamlet, since security would be better maintained. However, the remaining minority have disagreed, since the presence of US troops here might draw VC attacks and the population have to bear the risks of war. The VC often propagandize that the Americans have come here to occupy Vietnam and to enslave the Vietnamese people. However, people don't believe what they say. But when they look at the many inhabitants living in insecure areas, who had been killed by US air strikes such as in the Vam Thu river incident in which US airplanes had attacked by mistake some 30 sampans and killed hundreds of people, they feel at a loss and have no confidence.

As to the other airstrikes conducted in the South, each time the planes attack, only two or three VC were killed, but many more of the people are hit.

After all, the inhabitants still have some sympathy towards the Americans, as the latter often come to give the people medicine, clothing, soap, and cooking oil. Each time they give these donations to the village or hamlet administration for distribution, these local officials keep the best things and hand out to the people only the bad or deteriorated items.

c. Airstrikes in NVN

The population have learned of the airstrikes in NVN over the radio and through the press. Most of them approve of such bombings. As the VC have come to the South to conduct killings and sabotage acts, we must go North to attack them. However, there are a few who disagree since such bombings have caused more casualties to the people than to the VC. The population ask that the GVN refrain from bombing populated hamlets and villages, since a lot of people have been killed. Bombings should be conducted only against the VC.

This hamlet so far has not been hit by any air strikes.