

Chief of Staff

ACofS, CORDS

GLMcCOLM/ab/5223

1. PURPOSE. To furnish information on the above subject.

2. DISCUSSION.

a. Attached at TAB A is a report on the above subject by the New Life Development group regarding the construction and destruction of earth dams in the Delta canals. Reportedly, the building of these dams has been interpreted by the US military officers as an example of VC organization and support in coastal villages.

b. This report points out that, at the start of the dry season, farmers in the coastal areas construct this type temporary dam across the waterways to prevent salt water intrusion by tidal flow.

c. Salt intrusion affects a very large and important part of this area which produces the major portion of rice in this country and the dams are necessary to protect domestic water supplies and maintain productivity of coastal provincial rice land.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS. That the above be noted and forwarded to the Deputy to COMUSMACV for CORDS for his information and/or action.

1 Incl
as

L. WADE LATHRAM
ACofS, CORDE

GLMcCOLM/ab/25 March 68

ACofS, CORDS

GLMcColm/mb/5573

1. PURPOSE: To furnish info on subject of: Earth Dams in Mekong Delta Canals.
2. DISCUSSION. The attached report by G. L. McColm, on above subject, regards construction and destruction of earth dams in Delta canals which, reportedly, are interpreted by US military as example of VC organization and support when local farmers rebuild them after the military destroys them. Apparently, these temporary dams are built to prevent salt water intrusion by tidal flow to protect domestic water supplies and maintain productivity of coastal provincial rice lands.
3. RECOMMENDATIONS: Signature and dispatch of DF to Chief of Staff and transmittal of this info to the Deputy to COMUSMACV for CORDS for his information and/or action.

25 March 68

J. F. W. Watson, C/NLD/CORDS

5602

OFNLD

Coord I CTZ

22 March 68

GLMCColm/hta/5323

1. PURPOSE: To furnish information on the above subject.

2. DISCUSSION:

a. In January, this office received verbal information from Mr. A. Potzabue, Deputy PSA, Bac Lieu Province, that dams were being constructed across canals in the Delta. U. S. military forces were destroying them, and the local people were building them back before morning. We were told that this was being interpreted by US military officers as an example of VC organization and support in coastal province villages.

b. This information was passed to Mr. W. H. King, C/NLD, IV CTZ, Can Tho. He was asked to check with IV CTZ military commands, and ask them what evidence was available to indicate that the dams destroyed were, in fact, constructed by the VC to interfere with canal traffic or military operations.

c. This point was raised, because each year, at the start of the dry season, farmers in all the coastal provinces construct temporary earth dams across the waterways to prevent salt water intrusion by tidal flow. During the flood season, the pressure of fresh water flow extends to the ocean; when the flood waters recede, high tides force salt water in to cover low-lying crop land and pollute fresh water supplies needed for domestic purposes.

d. To prevent this, the people of Bac Lieu, An Xuyen, Ba Xuyen, Vinh Binh, Kien Hoa, and other coastal provinces have constructed an elaborate but very primitive system of salt intrusion control dikes. To make them effective in controlling the incoming tide, all water channels must be blocked off during the dry season. These channels must be open during the rainy season to prevent severe flooding. The French built a number of permanent water control dams to protect their rice plantations but most of these have been destroyed, it is rumored by the VC. Several of these structures have been rebuilt with AID assistance. But, most of the salt intrusion dams are temporary structures, opened and closed each year by a lot of hard work performed by local residents. In some cases, smaller by-pass channels are constructed to permit traffic of small craft at high tide without portage. Bypass channels are necessary in all streams and canals where water continues to flow during the dry season, in order to prevent flooding back of the dams. The level of the flow is raised to approximately the high tide level.

e. Last week, Mr. Robert Woodbury, MACSA, MACV, reported that the problem posed by numerous VC constructed earth dams in the Delta had reached the Washington level, and ordinance laboratories have been asked to come up with a memo

MACCORDS-NLD

Subject: Earth Dams in Mekong Delta Canals

efficient way of destroying them.

f. Mr. King has no information to present in regard to the destruction of dams in the Delta. We have no direct access to military information on the subject. However, we do take a very serious view of the problem for several reasons:

(1) Salt intrusion affects a very large and important part of the Mekong Delta (see attached salt intrusion map). TAB A

(2) Salt intrusion dams are necessary to protect domestic water supplies, and maintain the productivity of coastal province rice land.

(3) The coastal provinces not only produce the most rice, but also supply the major portion of rice available for export to Saigon and other parts of the country. (See attached GVN Province Rice Production Map. (TAB B) and List of Rice Exports (TAB C)

(4) Destruction of salt intrusion dams would be in direct contradiction to the rice program which seeks to increase rice production in these "priority" provinces.

(5) Loss of fresh water supplies and the rice crop would not only alienate GVN supporters in the area, but would release a very large labor force for exploitation by the VC.

g. This memorandum may not be needed, the problem may not exist, but the rumors persist. We believe it is worth the risk of causing a "leak" in a teaspoon in order to explain why a river patrol boat can travel up a canal one day and then find a dam across his path a few days later. We suggest that as a matter of routine intelligence, the military should compare dry-season and wet-season aerial photographs taken during the past 10 years and note the seasonal location of all salt intrusion dams.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS: That the above be noted.

3 Incl
AS

GEORGE L. MCCOIM
COMPS-NLD