

VINH BINH PROVINCE

BRIEFING FOLDER

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VINH BINH PROVINCE

I. HISTORY:

A. Pre-French History:

1. Khmers, who are of ethnic Cambodian stock, settled in the Delta region before the Vietnamese. During the "March to the South" of the Vietnamese from approximately 1400 to 1600 A.D. the Vietnamese forced many of the Khmers out of the Delta. Vinh Binh was probably one of the last areas settled. As a result, many ethnic Cambodians remained in the province. The ethnic Cambodian have resisted assimilation and to date maintain national customs and language. About 60% percent of population is ethnic Cambodian. From 1660 to 1883, the Vietnamese consolidated their position, acquiring land titles and setting up provincial, district and local government. The colonial system was institute in 1886, which allowed the French to acquire much of the best land.

2. The former name of the province, Tra Vinh, is said to have come from the Khmer word, Tropeang. The ethnic Cambodians called the two lakes near the province town Prak Tropeang or lake for the elephants, because legend said the king washed his elephants there. The Vietnamese mispronounced Tropeang Tra Vang, which eventually became Tra Vinh. Many still use Tra Vinh to designate the province town.

B. French Colonial Period:

1. In 1866, the French occupied the three western provinces of Vietnam: Chau Doc, Ha Tien, and Tra Vinh (which included Vinh Binh). In 1867, Vinh Binh was established as a Province, and the first French Province Chief, Du Lieu, was appointed.

2. During Colonial Administration, French engineers supervised construction of major public works throughout the province. A 500 KVA generator was installed in Phu Vinh and small generators were placed in most of the district towns. A bridge was built across the Manh Tich River and the road between Vinh Binh and Vinh Long was constructed. Canals were dredged and several new ones dug, including the Long Vinh Canal in Long-Toan District and the extension of the Tra Vinh Canal across the province. A municipal water service with a deep well, water and delivery system was constructed in Phu Vinh and Tieu Can. These systems, however, have been out of service for about twenty years. Recently-acquired funds are being used to bring these systems into full operation. Facilities such as markets, boat docks, offices, provincial/district officials' residences and sports fields were also constructed.

C. Japanese Occupation:

When the Japanese entered Vinh Binh in 1941 they arrested all the remaining French officials. A local resident, Tu Ba Buoc, was selected as

Province Chief. The administration of the province was left to the Vietnamese, of course, under Japanese control.

D. Viet-Minh Period:

1. After the Japanese departed in 1945, the Viet Minh ruled sporadically until the French-Vietnamese forces drove them out. In 1948 a Vietnamese, Vo Van Danh, was appointed Province Chief. He served until 1954.

2. While the French were fighting the Viet-Minh in 1945, they provided arms to the ethnic Cambodians. Reportedly, the Cambodians rose up against the Viet-Minh in order to gain ownership of their land. Many thousands were killed on both sides. The Viet-Minh destroyed much of the Cambodian stored rice by burning twelve warehouses. This incident still haunts Vietnamese-Cambodian relationships.

E. Provinces Under Diem:

1. After the 1954 Geneva Agreement, civilian Province Chiefs were appointed until 1961. Elections were held for positions on village and provincial councils. Candidates, however, were carefully screened by the Diem government. All voting allegedly was tampered with. In the September 1963 National Assembly Election, the Diem-sponsored candidates won by large majorities. There were few, if any, true elections at any level during the Diem regime.

2. In 1954 the name of the Province was changed from Tra Vinh to Vinh Binh. The name of the Province town was changed from Tra Vinh to Phu Vinh. Prior to 1958 Vinh Binh had five districts: Chau Thanh, Cau-Ngang, Tra Cu, Tieu Can, and Cang Long. In that year three new districts were added: Tra On and Cau Ke from Phong Dinh Province and Vung Liem from Vinh Long Province. Cau Ngang District was divided into two districts, thus forming a new district, Long Toan. Vinh Binh then had nine districts.

F. Political Status Since 1963:

In 1966, the two northern districts, Tra On and Vung Liem were given to Vinh Long Province. Since the overthrow of Diem, representative government has slowly crept into Vinh Binh's political scene. Two Vietnamese and one Cambodian, elected on 22 October 1967, represent Vinh Binh in the Lower House of the National Assembly. In 1970 an election will be held for the Province Council, which will have expanded powers and its own province development budget.

II. GEOGRAPHY:

A. Location:

Vinh Binh is located 80 miles southwest of Saigon in the heart of the Mekong Delta. It is bordered on the southwest by the Bassac River,

northeast by the Co-Chien River, northwest by Vinh Long Province and Southeast by the South China Sea.

B. Size and Topography:

Vinh Binh Province has a total land area of 211,990 hectares, of which 148,554 hectares are in cultivation. The balance is taken up in timber, roads, canals, and swampland. Its elevations is between one and seven meters.

C. Natural Resources:

The Province has very few natural resources other than its soil, water, fish and a small amount of timber. The soil is acid and of low fertility, particularly in nitrogen and phosphorus. Along with the abundant water supply it is adaptable to the production of rice, which is the principal source of income for the people of the province.

D. Climate:

The temperature varies between 70 and 95 degrees, but the major seasonal changes are the wet and dry seasons. The wet season starts in May and ends in November. There is no complete system of irrigation canals to serve the entire province, although some irrigation water comes from the Bassac and Co-Chien Rivers. The main source of water for rice growing comes from the rainfall in the rainy season; rainfall also helps to control the salt water intrusion problem. As a result, the seasons have direct bearing on the economy of the province.

E. Communications Routes:

1. A road network links Phu Vinh, the Province capital, with the different districts. The roads are secure enough for travel, but physically are in very poor condition. Route 7A is the only land route out of Vinh-Binh province which serves inter-provincial commerce. This road is often in need of repair due to weather, deterioration from traffic, or enemy sabotage. When Route 7A is impassable no other markets in the Delta are available to the people by road. In 1970, however, plans call for the reconstruction of Interprovincial Route 6A into Kien Hoa Province.

2. The waterways within and around the province are numerous. The Co Chien and Bassac Rivers border the entire length of the province on both sides. There are approximately 500 kilometers of canals and a 40 kilometer stretch of seacoast.

3. There is one all-weather airfield located at the provincial capital of Phu Vinh. It is asphalt surfaced (3,750 feet) and capable of handling most cargo-size and smaller aircraft. The only major shortcoming is the fact that it is not equipped with lights and is thus closed to normal traffic after dark. During World War II, the Japanese built an airfield in Long Toan district, but this is now in ruinous condition and under VC control.

III. GOVERNMENT:

A. Provincial Organization:

As provided by law, appointed officials fill government administrative positions at the provincial and district levels, including the Province Chief, Service Chiefs, and District Chiefs. Village councils and hamlet chiefs are elected wherever security and organization allow, with temporary appointed officials serving until elections are held.

In 1968, the number of Deputy Province Chiefs was reduced to one, the position of Deputy Province Chief for Administration. The cabinet has five offices: Administrative Service, Finance Service, Economic Service, Internal Security Service, and the Cabinet office. There are 25 service offices representing every GVN function at province. The seven district chiefs, all military men, have staffs with organization similar to province.

The popular representation body, the Provincial Council, meets each month for five-day sessions. Elections for this council will be held on 28 June 1970, and its powers will be increased substantially.

B. Provincial Capital:

Phu Vinh, the capital of Vinh Binh Province, is located about 80 miles southeast of Saigon in the western part of the Province near the Co Chien River. When the Province name was changed to Vinh Binh in 1954, the province town was renamed Phu Vinh. Many people still refer to it as Tra Vinh. Under French rule the city of Tra Vinh became the center of province economic activity. The French installed many public works and utilities and made attempts to beautify the city. One of these attempts was the importation of the Sao tree from Cambodia around 1885. These trees are very tall hard-wood trees, and many can still be seen around the town. The Provincial Administrative Center is almost at the geographic center of town. The Tactical Operations Center and the Sector Command Center are located adjacent to the Administrative Center. The offices of the Provincial Service Chiefs are spread throughout the town.

C. Biographical Sketch of Province Chief:

1. Background:

COL Ton That Dong was graduated from the Delta Military Academy in July 1951. COL Dong attended the Vietnamese Command and General Staff College Regimental course in 1955 and the Command Course in 1963. His offshore schooling includes attendance at the Adjutant General School at Fort Benjamin Harrison in 1961.

COL Dong's previous assignments include duty as Company Commander, Battalion Executive Officer, Battalion Commander, Chief of Intelligence Special Service, Director of Training Cay-Mai Intelligence

Special Service, Director of Training Cay-Mai Intelligence School, Chief Research and Planning JGS J-1, Acting Commander 9th Inf Div and Regimental Commander. Prior to his present assignment COL Dong was Commander of Cao Lanh/Tan An Regional Force Training Center. He assumed the duties of Vinh Binh Province Chief on 26 March 1968.

2. Decorations:

- a. National Order of Vietnam
- b. Army Distinguished Service Medal
- c. Gallantry Cross (10 awards)
- d. Training Service Medal
- e. Staff Service Medal
- f. Army Forces Honor Medal
- g. Military Service Medal
- h. Navy Service Medal
- i. Good Conduct Medal
- j. US Bronze Star Medal with "V" device

IV. POPULATION:

A. The population of the Province is approximately 396,702. Population by district is as follows:

Chau Thanh110,235
Tieu Can 42,676
Cau Ke 28,952
Tra Cu 81,849
Cang Long 51,213
Long Toan 13,180
Cau Ngang 68,597

The major population centers are the Province Capital, Phu Vinh, and the district capitals.

B. Ethnic and Religious Groups:

1. The major ethnic groups in Vinh Binh are the Cambodians (60%), the Vietnamese (30%), and the Chinese (10%). Almost all people are Buddhists, with the Vietnamese following the Mahayana form and the Cambodians adhering to Theravada Buddhism. There are also a large number of Vietnamese Catholics, living in the Province Capital and in 4 of Vinh Binh's 52 villages.

2. The Chinese are almost exclusively shopkeepers and merchants. The Vietnamese and Cambodians tend to be farmers and fishermen, but socially the Cambodians attempt to remain separate from the Vietnamese. They reside in separate hamlets and villages outside the Phu Vinh area and retain many of their old cultural characteristics. This separation is based on ancient racial animosity and historical, as well as a difference in cultures, the

Vietnamese being influenced by the Chinese and the Cambodians by Indian civilization.

C. General Social Structure:

1. The social organization of the province mainly follows ethnic group lines. Within each ethnic group, the social structure is organized around the family, which is the single most important part of the society.

2. The province has eight associations, including student groups, PTA, and religious groups. The two most important are the Vietnamese Cambodian Buddhist Association and the (Cambodian) Theravada Buddhist Association. There are also branches of several Saigon-based political parties in the province; but there is little active support for any party, and they do not exert much influence on local politics.

V. ECONOMY:

A. Agriculture:

1. Rice; 133,000 of the 148,554 tillable hectares are planted with rice. Local rice has an average yield of 1.7MT/ha. Very little fertilizer is used on the local varieties. In 1969 6000 hectares were planted to TN8/5 rice with an average yield of 5MT/ha. The highest yield officially recorded was 11MT/ha.

In 1970 it is expected that 15,000 ha. will be planted to TN 8/5 plus seed multiplication plots of TN 20 and 22. 3 crops of rice a year are possible in Cau Ke and Cang Long district, if the irrigation system is improved.

About 17 - 25,000 MT of rice are exported from the province by six rice merchants in Phu Vinh/per year.

2. Swine - Vinh Binh Province has about 71,000 head of swine, mostly cross breeds and native breeds. The number of head shipped to Saigon by road each year is 35-40,000.

Swine are fed mainly rice, rice bran, broken rice, fish meal and vegetables. Complete rations are available but farmers have not started to use them.

3. Cattle - There are 14,297 head of cattle in the province. These are used for meat production and power. There is much need for improved management practices. Parasite control would be a big step in increased profit to the farmers from beef production.

4. Ducks and chickens - It is estimated that 560,000 ducks are in the province, with over a million being produced each year. One Chinese hatchery in Phu Vinh has a capacity of 46,000 eggs per month. Ducks are easier to raise than chickens, and the surplus is exported live to Saigon.

There are very few commercial poultry men. Improved poultry continues to filter in from Can Tho, Chau Doc, and Saigon. The availability of complete rations for poultry has increased interest in the poultry industry.

Phu Vinh businessmen are interested in operating a hatchery, feed mill and animal health sales outlet.

5. Fish - 22,000MT of fish were caught in 1969. Fish marketing facilities in My Long Village, Cau Ngang District can not be improved, however, until security gets better. Good supplies of sea and paddy fish, crab, shrimp and eel are available on the local markets in season. 300 fishing junks are registered, and 109 of these are motorized.

6. Fruits and Vegetables - Bananas, coconuts, watermelons, and pineapple are plentiful on the local markets. Bananas and coconuts are not seasonal, but all other fruits are.

Vegetables of local varieties are grown as a second crop to rice. Thus they are in abundance from January through April.

7. Land Tenure system - 173,520 hectares of land are privately owned. 6000 hectares of Former French and Expropriated Lands were applied for in 1969. Land Reform service has a goal of 4200 ha. of French & Expropriated Lands and 13,000 ha. of Land to the Tiller program for 1970.

About 9000 farmers own their own land. 56,000 farmers rent part of the land they cultivate, and 83% of the farmers rent some land. Many farmers are tenant by choice. 16,000 of the 56,000 tenants own part of the land they cultivate.

B. Industry:

1. Industry in Vinh Binh Province is highly diversified and is primarily designed to meet local needs. For purposes of clarity, a list of industries is broken down into manufacturing, processing and service industries:

a. Manufacturing:

	Plants	Comments
Sawmills	5	3 operating
Cloth Mills	11	6 powered, and 5 hand operated
Nuoc Mam Plants	3	looms
Soap Manufacturing	5	
Soy Sauce Manufacturing	5	
Boat Yards and Furniture & Cabinet Shops	52	
Cononut Oil Extraction	1	

Salt (Brine) Extraction	2
Ceramic Tile Plants	5
Cast cement Manufacture	5
Ice Plants	9

b. Processing:

Rice mills	71	Distributed widely thru-out Province
Sugar mills	12	Small
Hatcheries, Ducks and Chickens	5	
Slaughter Houses	6	

c. Service Industries:

Printing Shops	2	
Bakery shops	11	(5 modern)
Welding Shops	3	
Ice Cream Plants	3	
Rice Flout Shops	5	
Auto Rebuilt	2	Rebuilds bus and truck bodie

2. By any yardstick, industry in the Province must be considered small scale and family owned. Industries suffer from technological obsolescence and modernization awaits on the importation of modern machinery.

3. Skilled labor supply is very short since most training takes place within the family-owned industry with the object of supplying their own immediate needs.

4. There are six Labor Unions in the Province, all of which are allied to the CVT (Confederation Viet Nam Du Travail, Saigon). These included the Tenant Farmers Union with 11,000 members, the Transport Workers Union with 10,000 members, the Carriers Union with 1,350 members, the Carpenters union with 250 members, and a Fisherman's Union with about 200 members.

C. General Economic Trends in Recent Years:

1. Prices of commodities in the Province usually tend to follow price fluctuations of the Saigon market. They have also followed the general nationwide inflation, with a 100% price increase during the past year. This fact, coupled with the lack of any legitimate banking service, has meant that there has been an increasing amount of money in circulation which has been used in "conspicuous" consumption, such as for motorbikes, but it also has reflected gains such as the increased sale of small power units for farm irrigation and the powering of sampans.

VI. PACIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT:

The 1968 RD Campaign, including the RD contribution to the accelerated Pacification Campaign, concentrated its efforts largely on Tra Cu and Cang-Long, with lesser attention given to Tieu Can and Chau Thanh. Efforts on Tra Cu were successful but Cang Long remained basically a military problem, even though 1968 hamlet objectives were met there.

The 1969 Pacification Plan was an extension of previous plans, but was more precisely targeted against hostile and contested villages and hamlets in areas of national or provincial priority. Objectives included 67 hamlets in Phase I of the program, having a total population of 50,237, and 30 hamlets in Phase II, having a total population of 32,340.

Due to the progress made early in 1969, a supplementary plan was added to include 13 hamlets representing a population of 15,238. Of the LLO target hamlets, by the end of 1969, 64 were pacified representing a population of 54,579; 37 hamlets were in the contested category, and 9 hamlets remained under VC control much success was made in Tra Cu and Cau Ngang District, with moderate results in Chau Thanh and Cau Ke. The military situation in Cang-Long remained the same, with no progress noted.

The 1970 Pacification Plan includes Cang Long, with special emphasis on opening Route 6A, the Cau Ke - Tieu Can and Tieu Can - Tra Cu border areas and south-eastern Tra Cu. Progress is being made in the latter three areas, and the Cang Long campaign began in April, 1970. Guidelines for 1970 call for return of the RD Cadre to their political and socio-economic roles. At the end of April, the cadre were working in 42 villages and 77 hamlets.

VII. GVN SERVICES AND USAID/CORDS SUPPORT:

A. Social Welfare:

The Social Welfare programs in Vinh Binh Province are concentrated almost entirely in the province town of Phu Vinh. Some social welfare support is given to the poor people in the districts but this is usually done through the district chiefs and normally only on holidays.

Following is a list of the four Social Welfare supported agencies and their status:

1. Public:

a. High School Girls Dormitory:

Accommodates out of town girls who wish to attend high school in Phu Vinh. Capacity is 60 girls.

b. Home for the aged:

A comfortable home for old people who are a burden on poor families has had a kitchen recently added. It's capacity is 60 people.

2. Private Organizations:

a. Saint Enfants Orphanage:

A large combination elementary school and orphanage accommodates 600 students and 150 live-in orphans. The orphanage is operated by catholic nuns as is the High School Girls's Dormitory.

b. My Duc Day Nursery:

Also operated by Catholic nuns is a kindergarten, day nursery, orphanage complex. The American Seabee team added two classrooms to the day nursery with the coordination of the Social Welfare Chief.

B. Public Works:

The service is responsible for the maintenance and construction of all provincial utilities with emphasis on roads, highways, and bridges throughout the province. Viet Cong activity causes Public Works to spend the vast majority of its time and effort on repairs and minimal time on new construction.

1. Public Utilities:

a. Water:

The original water system constructed by the French has decayed. Most local water is supplied by privately owned shallow wells. A USAID-supported deep well project is expected to restore public service in the future. Water was finally "struck" in early 1970, and pumping equipment will be installed in the near future.

b. Electric Power:

The province town, Phu Vinh, has a municipal power system owned and operated by EO. The capacity of the system is 846 KW. There are 1357 houses serviced by the system. Several of the districts have a local co-op electric system consisting of USAID supplied generators.

2. Expansion of Communication Routes:

a. Interprovincial Route - Interprovincial Route 7A is the only land route into the province. This road contains 5 major bridges between Phu Vinh and the Vinh Long border. It forms the southern boundary of the VC Cang Long Base Area and military traffic along the road is subject to occasional sniping and mining. Current programs call for upgrading Route 7A during 1970 under the MACV LOC program.

b. Provincial Routes - There are 3 major roads in the province linking the district towns with the province capital. The major efforts of Public Works are devoted to maintaining these roads and bridges. During 1970, Route 36 to Tra Cu will be resurfaced.

c. Canals - Although there are many canals in the province, the major one is the canal linking Phu Vinh and the Co Chien River to the northeast.

d. Airfield - The airfield located in Phu Vinh is asphalt surfaced and is capable of up to C 130 traffic. It is under control of the Directorate of Airbases. The field is currently used by USAF, RVNAF, and Air America.

C. Refugees:

1. Almost all of the damage which resulted from Tet 1968 has been repaired. Even so, fighting in the province produced more than 4,000 war victims in 1969. During this time, poor administration of the Social Welfare Service and the constant change of service chiefs hampered progress. In March, 1970, however, a new Social Welfare Chief was appointed, and it is expected that he will stay here.

2. At present, there are more than 10,000 refugees on the province rolls, and many others whose names are not carried on the refugees rolls. Most of these refugees have resettled and have been assimilated into new communities with very little help from the government. Currently there is much emphasis on encouraging refugees to return to their native villages. It is possible that 15,000 refugees may be eligible for benefits under this Return-to-Village program. Very little effective work has been done in this area so far, but it is hoped that the appointment of the new Social Welfare Chief will bring an improvement to the lot of the refugees during the year.

D. Chieu Hoi:

1. The Chieu Hoi mission in this province aims to publicize and execute the Chieu Hoi program and greater national unity. In 1969 alone, the Province Chieu Hoi service received 1,015 Hoi Chanh, this number is three times the total of 1968.

2. Based on the results achieved during 1969, the objective of the Chieu Hoi service in Vinh Binh Province during 1970 is to receive 1200 Hoi Chanh.

3. In order to realize the above objective, it is necessary to achieve direct participation by the people in realizing the Chieu Hoi program. It is also necessary to receive effective support of friendly agencies in order to achieve the principle tasks of Proselyting, receiving, and rehabilitating.

E. Public Safety:

1. Within the province there are 1,363 National Police. This includes a National Police Field Forces company of 317 men. There are 619 policemen assigned to and working at the district and village level.

Within the overall Police organization there are separate divisions such as Resources Control, Special Police Branch and Uniform Division, which have specific responsibilities within their sphere of activity. The basic mission of the National Police in this Province is the same as any other law enforcement agency any place in the world, i.e. to protect life and property and provide a secure environment where the various elements of the Vietnamese society may grow and develop in peace.

2. Current plans call for the establishment of 3 Police Sub-Stations during 1970. There will then be uniform police in all 52 villages. These stations are located at the village level and will bring the N/P, as direct, constant representatives of GVN, to the people in the hamlets and rural areas. As the security situation becomes better and better in the outlying areas, it is the intention of the N/P to move closer to the people and to improve the people's image of the N/P through daily personal contacts.

3. The NPFF Company is the armed support bloc for the N/P. The members of this para-military organization were first trained as regular Policemen and were then given additional training in fire-and-maneuver and in small unit tactics. They are organized into a regular military company format and operate as the action arm of the SPB. At the present time seven platoons of 40 men each operate as separate elements in the various districts. The platoons operate on intelligence fed to them by the DIOCC's located in each District.

4. The Village-Hamlet Radio System in province is in good shape. There were approximately 830 radios within the system by the beginning of 1970 and expansion plans call for this number to be increased by at least another 722 during the year.

F. Public Health:

a. The Provincial Hospital was originally constructed by the French in 1969. It has received minimal repair since. A US Air Force MILPHAP team is assigned to the Provincial Hospital.

b. There are health facilities at the District and lower levels.

District Dispensaries and Maternities	06
Village Dispensaries and Maternities	11
Number of beds	14

2. Staff:

a. Provincial Hospital

Physicians	04
Dentists	0
Nurses	22
Nurse Technicians	09

Health Technicians	05
Nuns	11
Beds	300

b. Rural Health

Physicians	0
Nurses	0
Health Cadre	09
National Midwives	03
Rural Midwives	31

G. Education:

Education in Vinh Binh Province trails that of many other Delta provinces, and the illiteracy rate is high. With the arrival of a new Primary Education Service Chief, and with the strong backing of the Province Chief, the province administration is striving to change that situation.

Hamlets which still have no schools will be encouraged to build classrooms through the Village Self Development Program. Extant school-rooms in disrepair are being renovated and returned use. Student-Parents Associations are being emphasized, and the local villagers are encouraged to accept the concept that the building and maintenance of local schools is their responsibility, and not the central or provincial government's.

The development of secondary education at the district level is also being encouraged. From no high schools classrooms at district level at the beginning of 1969, there will be 27 classrooms in 5 districts by the end of 1970. Improvements are also being made at the provincial capital high school, including the construction of the first permanent high school library facility in the Delta, which is being realized under USAID/CORDS sponsorship and being built by the Seabees. There is also a campaign aimed at the beautification of the school campus and the improvement of student activities.

H. Public Administration:

At the beginning of 1970, of a total of 52 villages, Vinh Binh Province had 51 villages with elected government, and 1 with provisional government. Of a total of 409 hamlets, there were 347 with elected governments, and 19 with provisional governments.

In 1970, second-cycle elections are being held in 20 villages and 115 hamlets which were first elected in 1967. Plans also call for the establishment of governments during 1970 in the 43 hamlets which still have no organized government.