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Vietnam **BULLETIN**

A SEMI MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE EMBASSY OF VIETNAM



Pacification in Viet Nam: A Typical Hamlet with School
and Clinic in Ba Xuyen Province

VIETNAM Bulletin

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political & military

Pres. Thieu on a Political Solution to the VN Conflict

SAIGON, March 9 (VP)-- President Nguyen Van Thieu Thursday appealed to ARVN combatants to hold the initiative on the battlefields to defeat the enemy and soon restore peace in freedom, independence, democracy and prosperity to the Fatherland.

President Thieu made the appeal when he presided over the 17th founding anniversary of the ARVN 5th Infantry Division held at Lai Khe base in Binh Duong province.

In his speech delivered on this occasion, President Thieu acknowledged the ARVN determination to fight for the survival of the nation. "To win over the enemy", he said, "we must take the initiative in conducting the war".

The President said the Republic of Vietnam does not advocate a protracted war neither does it intend to seek a military victory at any price.

However, President Thieu added, any political solution to the war must restore peace in Vietnam, and in no way result in the enslavement of the country by the Communists.

The 5th Division Infantrymen have thus far killed 40,893 Reds, captured 7,823 others and welcomed 10,282 enemy defectors besides seizing 2,529 crew-served and 17,931 individual weapons plus 644 tons of assorted ammunition.

Since its founding date, the 5th ARVN Infantry Division has been commanded by 15 commanders.

President Thieu was once commander of the 5th Infantry Division during the 1962-1964 period when he was a Colonel of the RVN Armed Forces.

Red Strategic Trail Uncovered

SAIGON, March 14 (VP)-- ARVN troops participating in the operation launched at the three-border area Monday discovered a system of strategic trails connecting Lower Laos to the Central Highlands which the North Vietnamese Communists have prepared for the II Military Region battlefield.

Sources from the II Corps Command said the 27 kilometer trail from the Boloven Plateau in Lower Laos to Base 5 was used for the circulation of Communist tanks and Molotova trucks. The trail was completed by Communist Vietnam Engineer Regiment X-83.

The operational forces are making efforts to make ineffective the enemy strategic trails.

Meanwhile, Paratroopers sent in as enforcements for the Central Highland front Monday afternoon engaged three times the enemy at areas surrounding Fire Base 5 killing 64 enemy soldiers on-the-spot and seizing a quantity of individual weapons.

The said enemy forces were elements of the 64th Regiment and 320th North Vietnamese Division. This division, which participated in the Dien Bien Phu battle in 1954, is one of North Vietnamese re-served forces.

RVN.Khmer Agreements on Aviation

SAIGON, March 10 (VP)-- Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam and Mr. Koun Wick, Cambodian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Friday morning signed an agreement on commercial aviation rights between the RVN and the Khmer Republic.

The signing ceremony took place at the RVN Foreign Ministry.

It was the eighth agreement signed within the scope of a series of economic-financial agreements reached between both nations since the resumption of their diplomatic relations in 1970.

According to the agreement, the Khmer Republic government agreed to reserve for Air Vietnam the commercial right on the Phnom Penh-Bangkok line in exchange for the Manila-Saigon line to the benefit of the Khmer airlines.

The signing of the new agreement will provide for Air Vietnam a larger scope of activities in South East Asia.

Five of the agreements previously signed between the RVN and the Khmer Republic dealt with the problems of border, tourism development, circulation on the Mekong River, road transportation and telecommunications.

RVN Consulate General Set Up in Battambang

SAIGON, February 9 (VP)-- The Republic of Vietnam government has decided to set up a Consulate General in Battambang, Cambodia, with a view to protect the interests of the Vietnamese nationals living in the Battambang-Pursat-Kompongchanang area.

There are now some 4,000 Vietnamese nationals in the area.

Sources from the Foreign Affairs Ministry said the establishment of this consulate General, agreed by the Khmer Republic government, helped strengthen friendly ties between the two countries. It also highlighted the RVN government's concern for the Vietnamese nationals in the Khmer Republic.

232 Reds Rally In Week

SAIGON .- March 15 (VP)-- Within the scope of the LONG ME (Mother's Love) campaign, Open-Arms Services throughout the country last week welcomed 232 Communists cadres who rallied the national cause.

The figure included 92 military cadres, 103 political agents and 37 other elements.

Military Region IV topped the list with 175 returnees.

Since early 1972 to date, a total of 1,718 Communists cadres have rallied the national cause thus bringing to 194,582, the total of returnees since the promulgation of the Open Arms policy in February, 1963. (PD.36)

U.S. Military Strength in VN

SAIGON, March 14 (VP)-- The U.S. military strength in Vietnam this week counts 114,500 men in comparison with 129,600 troops of the previous week, U.S. military sources said.

The figure included 83,900 Army men, 5,700 Navy men, 400 Marines, 24,400 Air-men and 100 Coast Guard personnel.

In addition, approximately 15,000 Navy personnel with 7th Fleet Forces are aboard ships operating off the coast of Vietnam but are not included in the U.S. strength-in-country figures.

Meanwhile, Free World taking part in the vietnam war this week numbers 42,100 persons as compared to 42,200 men of the previous week, the same sources said.

Over VN \$ 1.6 Billion Granted to Rural Development

SAIGON, March 8 (VP)-- Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem has signed a decree granting VN \$1,687,000,000 to province and city Rural Development Funds for the implementation of public works, irrigation, and self-help development programs. The allocations were divided as follows:

Quang Nam	VN \$53,000,000	Dalat (City)	VN \$13,000,000
Quang Ngai	VN \$56,000,000	Bien Hoa	VN \$35,000,000
Quang Tin	VN \$43,000,000	Binh Duong	VN \$43,000,000
Quang Tri	VN \$36,000,000	Binh Long	VN \$22,000,000
Thua Thien	VN \$63,000,000	Binh Tuy	VN \$25,000,000
Danang (City)	VN \$28,000,000	Gia Dinh	VN \$79,000,000
Binh Thuan	VN \$20,000,000	Hau Nghia	VN \$30,000,000
Darlac	VN \$16,000,000	Long An	VN \$163,000,000
Khanh Hoa	VN \$30,000,000	Long Khanh	VN \$22,000,000
Kontum	VN \$12,000,000	Phuoc Long	VN \$16,000,000
Lam Dong	VN \$11,000,000	Phuoc Tuy	VN \$36,000,000
Ninh Thuan	VN \$22,000,000	Tay Ninh	VN \$37,000,000
Phu Bon	VN \$11,000,000	Vung Tau (City)	VN \$22,000,000
Phu Yen	VN \$55,000,000	An Giang	VN \$61,000,000
Pleiku	VN \$16,000,000	An Xuyen	VN \$17,000,000
Quang Duc	VN \$6,000,000	Ba Xuyen	VN \$40,000,000
Tuyen Duc	VN \$15,000,000	Bac Lieu	VN \$38,000,000
Cam Ranh (City)	VN \$13,000,000	Chau Doc	VN \$30,000,000
Binh Dinh	VN \$43,000,000		

RVN to Attend Environment Conference

SAIGON, March 10 (VP)-- A RVN National Scientific Research Council delegation is scheduled to leave for Singapore Sunday to participate in the Regional Workshop on Water Resources, Environment and National Development.

The delegation headed by Prof. Le Van Thoi, Director General of the Vietnam Atomic Agency Office concurrently NSRC Chairman includes Prof. Pham Hoang Ho, Chairman of the Botany Department of the Saigon Faculty of Science; Prof. Phan The Tran, Chief of the Water Laboratory of Pasteur Institute and Engineer Nguyen Sy Tin, Chief of the Environmental Sanitation Service of the Health Ministry.

The five-day conference is held in Singapore by the American National Academy of Science and Science Council of Singapore starting March 13.

Participating in the conference, with the Republic of Vietnam are the U.S., Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Britain, Japan and Sweden.



Refugees Number 158,479

SAIGON, March 9 (VP)-- There now remains 158,479 anti-Communist refugees at temporary resettlement centers throughout the country, sources from the Social Welfare Ministry said.

According to the sources, up to December 31, 1971, 2,039,223 refugees were definitely resettled and 1,785,717 others returning to their native villages.



economics

Divesting Public Enterprises

Early this year, one of the leading paper-making firms in Vietnam went public with an announcement disclosing its decision to issue 100,000 new shares. Although no explanation was given for the move, it confirmed to some extent earlier reports about a tentative plan of Economy Minister Pham Kim Ngoc to cut down on the losses incurred by government-owned enterprises.

Indeed, with the exception of a very few, the majority of such corporations in Vietnam have not been making any money at all or have not done what they had been initially intended for. The Cong Ty' Duong Viet Nam, for example, has been only importing sugar. The same can be said of many other corporations.

The decision of COGIVINA to go public, thus, is highly significant and the way this firm is going to fare in the coming months will be a decisive factor contributing to the economic policy to be adopted by the Government for the coming years.

* * * * *

Last January 20, COGIVINA, one of the leading paper-making firms here, announced the issuance of 100,000 new shares valued at VN \$4,000 each.

With the purpose of raising the company's capital from VN \$486.5 million to VN \$886.5 million, the measure also guarantees new share-holders a profit of 16 per annum for three years starting from January 1, 1972.

Holders of the existing 347,500 share have the option to buy the new shares on a priority basis at the ratio of one new share to each 3.475 existing ones.

The new shares, thus, only become available to the public after existing share-holders have taken their option.

Subscription to and payment for the new COGIVINA shares, it was also learned, may be made between January 25 and March 25 at the COGIVINA head office, 20-24 Nguyen Cong Tru Street, Saigon. There is, however, a restrictive clause. New COGIVINA shares are available only to persons or legal entities of Vietnamese nationality and they may not be resold to foreigners.

COGIVINA is one of two Government-owned paper mills, the other being COGIDO. Both are located in the Bien Hoa industrial park.

Established 14 years ago, it is originally a joint venture between the Government of Vietnam and the U.S. firm Parsons & Whittemore, with the Government holding 80.6 per cent of the stock and the U.S. corporation 19.4 per cent.

COGIVINA's initial capital of VN \$180 million has been increased on three occasions, the latest one being on the 11th of May 1971 when its capital was brought from VN \$283.5 million to VN \$486.5 million. In early 1970, the capital structure was as follows:

--Government: VN \$234,493,000 or 167,495 shares of VN \$1,400 each or 82.7 per cent
--Parsons & Whittemore: VN \$49,000,000 or 35,000 shares of VN \$1,400 each.

The total capital, thus, was VN \$283,500,000.

Some time after this, however, the Parsons & Whittemore shares were sold to the

Military Mutual Assistance and Savings Fund, making COGIVINA a joint venture between the Government and the said Fund, with 0.1 per cent of the stock (5 shares) symbolically held by the company's directors as required by law.

Company directors are appointed by the Government with the incumbent Minister of Planning and National Development serving as Chairman of the Board.

In May 1971, COGIVINA's capital was raised to VN \$486.5 million by way of incorporating the company's profit reserves.

COGIVINA employs some 400 workers. In 1969, it produced 13,220 metric tons of paper from imported pulp. Although it has a complete mill to manufacture pulp from Dalat pinewood, the mill has remained idle for many years for lack of pinewood.

In announcing the issuance of new shares, COGIVINA also makes public its balance sheet as of December 31, 1970. This reads as follows:

Assets (in piasters)	Liabilities (in piasters)
Fixed assets.....556,264,554	Capital.....283,500,000
Prepaid items.....43,817,725	Reserves.....36,880,820
Inventories.....665,080,826	Accrued profit.....57,244,954
Liquid assets.....43,917,457 (Banks and cash)	Debts.....774,013,007
	Profit from FY, 1970.....157,441,781
Total 1,309,080,562	Total 1,309,080,562

The balance sheet shows a current ratio of slightly under 1 to 1 and a worth to debt ratio of about 0.1 to 1.

It has not been disclosed what COGIVINA intends to do with the capital to be raised by the issuance of new shares but with the new import regulation and the new rate of the piaster, the firm might need much more cash to import paper pulp for its operations.

In any case, the 16 per cent guaranteed profit may not be attractive enough as both Treasury bonds and time deposits can bring well over 20 per cent per annum. Therefore, it would not be surprising if the Military Mutual Assistance and Savings Fund end up buying all the newly issued shares.

COGIVINA's decision to go public must nevertheless be welcome as a bold step which might lead to the implementation of the Government's long standing policy of divesting public enterprises in order to develop a healthy private sector and a stock market.

At present, owning and operating a score of enterprises ranging from banking and insurance to shipping, construction and manufacture, the government appears to be the only economic power that can initiate the first moves toward the development of a stock market.

(Divesting Public Enterprises by
Bang Phi is reproduced from
VN Report Vol. 1, No.4, 1972)

Investment Projects Get Over VN \$ 200 Million Loan

SAIGON, March 11 (VP)-- The Vietnamese Industrial Development Bank (VIDB) Management Council at its last meeting on Thursday approved the release of a VN \$206,4 million loan for seven industrial investment projects.

The loans included VN \$190 million of ordinary credit and a VN \$16.4 million special credit covering the difference from exchange rate.

The projects included five under development and two newly-established industry (textile and printing).

The seven projects will produce every year 4,500 tons of detergents, 3,500 tons of chemical products, 2,000,000 electric bulbs over 1,000,000 containers for pharmaceuticals products, some 200,000 doses of vaccine for domestic animals and 1,800 tons of frozen shrimp.

The projects with the capital of VN \$534.5 million at the start will employ 484 workers.

In the first three months of 1972, sixteen industrial projects got VN \$1,094.9 million VIDB loan.

Mineral Water For Export

The Saigon Chamber of Commerce (SCC) is planning to promote the exploitation, by Vietnamese or foreign investors, of the many natural sources of mineral water throughout the country.

Many springs are known to provide mineral water of high therapeutic value, the most famous of these being the Vinh Hoa springs in Phan Thiet province.

Vinh Hoa mineral water was first commercialized in 1928 with a production at times reaching 100,000 litres a year. Interrupted by the first Indochina War in 1945, production was resumed on a fairly large scale in 1956 by the Government-owned Vinh Hoa Mineral Water Company.

Mineral water springs are located in the following provinces: Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan, Phan Thiet, Pleiku, Kontum, Phuoc Tuy, Binh Tuy, Bien Hoa, Kien Hoa, and Long Xuyen.

Foreign Exchange Reserves Up

Testifying before the Senate Economic and Financial Committee, Finance Minister Ha Xuan Trung claimed last month that dollar sales by U.S. troops have greatly increased in the past few months in spite of the drastic reduction of the number of GIs in Vietnam. Before the piaster devaluation last fall, each U.S. soldier was authorized to convert each month only US \$5 into piasters. Now, each GI is allowed to change US \$40 and each civilian employee of U.S. agencies US \$400 per month.

Last December only, allied soldiers sold to the National Bank US \$54 million, which constitutes a record of sorts. This was believed to be one of the consequences of the recent devaluation of the piaster.

Following are some end of period figures on foreign exchange reserves as issued by the National Bank of Vietnam:

--End of 1970: US \$202 million
--End of 1971: US \$218 million

This slight increase is attributed to import restrictions during 1971.

Of the total foreign exchange reserves of the National Bank, only about US \$150 million is liquid, the balance being gold, escrow accounts with the U.S. Government, or long-term U.S. Treasury Bonds.



An important factor in peace negotiations . . .

The Prisoners of War Issue

North Viet-Nam and the Viet Cong regard their own soldiers—who early last year numbered more than a quarter of a million in all of Indo-China—as cannon fodder. Regaled by visions of an easy victory as they are funnelled down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, they are drugged into unquestioning obedience in battle and when the situation becomes impossible they are chained to their weapons to prevent retreat, or shot. Captured, they are consigned to limbo.

In similar fashion, North Viet-Nam uses the South Vietnamese and American soldiers it captures as pawns. Against all humanitarian considerations and in violation of the Geneva Conventions, Hanoi has refused to identify and report the physical condition of the prisoners or allow regular mail exchanges between them and their families.

It has consistently refused to allow the International Red Cross, which is the guardian of the Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war, to inspect the conditions of these prisoners. The seriously ill or wounded and those held for long periods are not released. Instead, North Viet-Nam and the Viet Cong have attempted to use them as levers and bargaining tools to force acceptance of their own formula for a resolution of the Viet-Nam conflict.

Central issue

So, in the three-year-old Paris peace talks the subject of the prisoners of war in the Indo-China conflict has become a central issue.

President Thieu's five-point proposal to the other side includes a cease-fire, an expanded conference including the governments of Cambodia and Laos, an agreed timetable for withdrawal of all external forces, immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of war held by both sides and, for a political settlement, private conversations relating to national reconciliation.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong delegation, on the other hand, has countered with a seven-point proposal whose first two and major points call for the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Viet-Nam, after which all prisoners of war will be released, and the expulsion of the elected government of the Republic of Viet-Nam.

Efforts rebuffed

Attempts by the RVN and the U.S. delegations to isolate the question of civilized treatment of prisoners of war from the political and military aspects of the conflict are peremptorily rebuffed. Even efforts to secure clarification of certain points contained in the other side's seven-point proposals are ignored. A package deal or nothing is the attitude of their delegation, and this is not acceptable to the RVN and U.S.

The result of such intransigence is a stalemate but neither side will break off the talks. The RVN cannot because it is committed to pursue every possible avenue to resolve the conflict, and the other side would not because it is reaping a bonanza of world-wide propaganda from it.

Typical of the appeals made at the Paris talks is that of the U.S. chief delegate, Ambassador William J. Porter, at the 130th plenary meeting. He said :

“ You could do a great deal to counteract the unfortunate impression you have created by your refusal to negotiate if you would put the question of civilized treatment of prisoners in a category apart from political and military subjects.

“ Such treatment should be verified by impartial inspection. It should include periodic reports of identity and physical condition of prisoners, regular mail exchanges between the

prisoners and their families, and, very importantly, agreement to release the seriously ill or wounded prisoners and those held for long periods.

"It could include as well neutral-nation custody of this latter category of prisoners, as proposed previously at these meetings. How could compliance with such universally accepted standards of treatment possibly harm your side?"

The North Vietnamese delegate, Nguyen Minh Vy, answered with a long harangue on the U.S. bombing raids, the Laos and Cambodia operations, the elections . . . and not a single word about the prisoners of war.

If the other side has been intransigent, the RVN and the U.S. have been just as persistent in trying to improve the atmosphere not only at the Paris talks but in the area of conflict too.

Prisoners released

The latest figures show that South Viet-Nam holds 25,000 Viet Cong and 9,500 North Vietnamese POWs. Over the past few years, Saigon has released more than 1,000 Viet Cong and 226 disabled North Vietnamese POWs. On the occasion of his second inauguration last October, President Thieu ordered the release of almost 3,000 Viet Cong and 2,000 political prisoners.

On the other hand, Hanoi is estimated (it has not made public any figures) to hold several

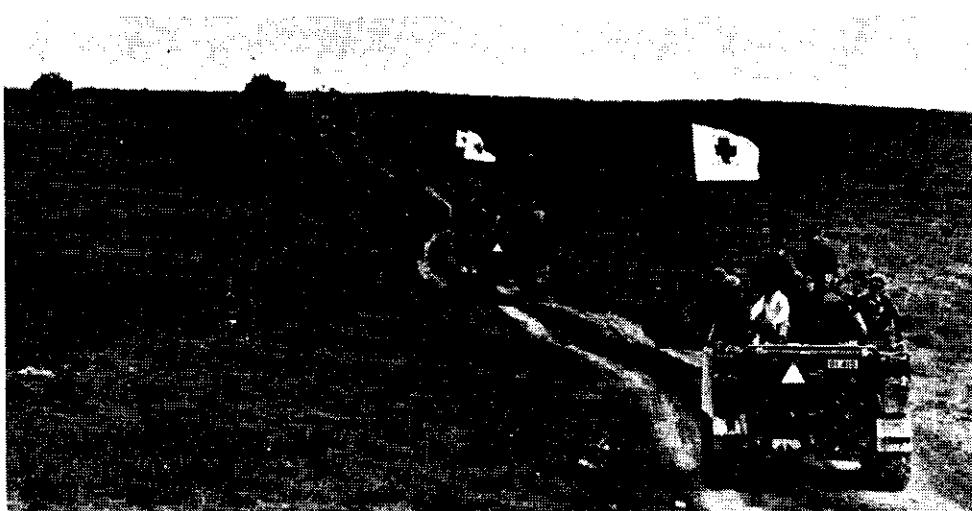
thousand RVN and American POWs. U.S. Defence Department figures put the number of Americans captured in all of South-East Asia at 462. In addition, 1,176 are listed as missing in action. Hanoi, however, has unofficially acknowledged holding only 338 American POWs.

The latest known release was that of Sgt. John Sexton, Jun., who was reported to have brought back an intimation from his North Vietnamese Army captors that they would be interested in the release of two specific POWs held by South Viet-Nam. Despite the informal nature of the communication, the two NVA prisoners were released in the RVN Government's desire to encourage prisoner of war exchanges. In all, there have been less than 30 American POWs released by the North.

Communist rejection

Initiatives by South Viet-Nam are rebuffed for the flimsiest reason by the North. One instance was the case of the disabled NVA prisoners brought to a scheduled exchange point at sea above the Demilitarized Zone last June. At the last minute Hanoi rejected them because only 13 of more than 200 interviewed by the International Red Cross had indicated their willingness to return to North Viet-Nam.

It is possible that, on second thoughts, Hanoi rejected the 13 because it has never admitted that it has troops fighting in the Indo-China conflict.



One group of sick and wounded North Vietnamese P.O.W.s released by the South Vietnamese Government being transported across the Demilitarized Zone under the Red Cross flag to the river Ben Hai, the natural demarcation line between North and South, where they rowed to a waiting North Vietnamese vessel.

Inmates of the prisoner of war camp in Can Tho clean fish, from the farm the camp runs, for their mid-day meal. This camp, one of six in South Viet-Nam for POWs, is regularly inspected by representatives of the International Red Cross.



It would have amounted to a confession of lying, and meant a tremendous loss of face.

Humane treatment

Most observers, however, agree that South Viet-Nam's humane treatment of POWs, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, is an important reason for the lack of enthusiasm among NVA prisoners to return to the North. Coupled with this is the uncertainty of the kind of reception they will get from their own authorities who, they realize, have not responded to the South's overtures for a prisoner exchange.

A group of 50 newsmen, including many from the world press, recently toured the Can Tho POW camp, half an hour's flight south of Saigon.

It was apparent after spending more than three hours in the camp observing the prisoners—both

Viet Cong and NVA—that they were generally healthy and well-treated. Except for the lack of personal liberty they are leading fairly close to normal daily lives.

In the case of the Viet Cong, even liberty is within their reach provided they did not play key roles in the war. They can apply for good conduct release under the guarantee of a relative working in the Government, after a security check and reorientation period.

Favourable assessment

The observation of the pressmen coincided with that of an International Red Cross team, which reported after a visit to that camp last May that it was well run and that there were enough facilities for the convenience of the prisoners.

The camp is one of six throughout South Viet-Nam which hold a total of 25,000 prisoners. It

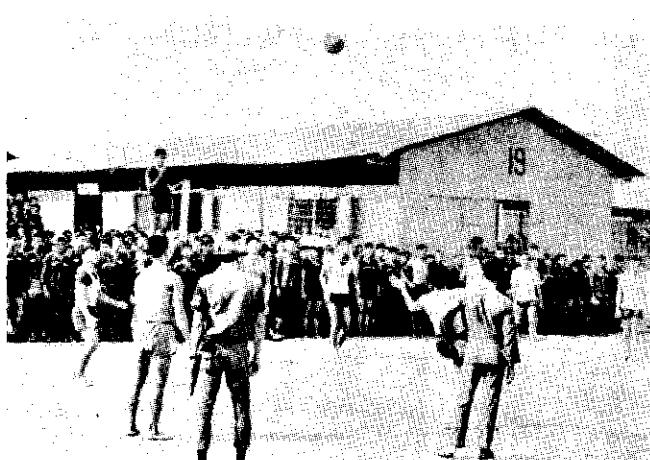
detains and controls POWs captured in Military Region IV. There is one camp in each of the four military regions, one specially for women in Qui Nhon in the central Viet-Nam lowlands, and a sixth—the largest of them all—on Phu Quoc island.

Since the Can Tho camp was established in April, 1967, it has received 13,550 POWs including 164 officers, 472 non-commissioned officers, 12,749 enlisted men and 122 women, according to the commandant, Major Hoang Tinh Hoat. He said that 283 prisoners had been released, 72 had become "open arms" ralliers and 10,078 had been transferred to other camps. There had been only three escapes, and 62 prisoners had died of wounds or diseases contracted during the war.

Of the present 3,007 inmates, 66 were North Vietnamese Army troops, 11 were regroupers and the rest were main force Viet Cong. He said that 1,264 of them were co-operative, 804 were unco-operative and the rest were ralliers. The unco-operative ones were kept separate in one of the four compounds but there was no difference in the privileges accorded them or in the application of camp rules and regulations.

Infractions were punished with a warning on the first offence, restriction to quarters and suspension of visiting and recreational privileges on the second, and isolation on the third.

Major Hoat said their mission did not include trying to change the conviction of the prisoners.



Recreational and cultural activities are conducted regularly at the Can Tho camp. Here, prisoners are pictured playing and watching volleyball, a popular sport.

He added, however, that prisoners could, and many did, apply to become ralliers, in which case they went through a security and reorientation period.

The prison programme includes an eight-hour work period for everybody, whether it is in the kitchen, the office, the dispensary, carpentry shop, reading centre, or the vegetable, fish and pig farm which the camp runs.

Visitors

Family visits are allowed on Tuesdays and Fridays. Sport and other recreational or cultural activities are held regularly, and every evening they enjoy television programmes of their own choice in the yard of the camp. Handicraft and carpentry are two of the main activities of the inmates; finished products are displayed and are quite popular among visitors to the camp. There is also a chapel where prisoners worship.

Preventive medicine is a major part of the medical service, and the prisoners have regular inoculations against the plague, cholera, smallpox, malaria and typhoid. The most common ailments are malaria and heart conditions. Sick call is held every morning by a staff of one prison doctor and ten assistants.

The oldest among the inmates is 69 and the youngest 13. There are 137 boys below the age of 17.

For each of the four compounds the prison authorities have designated one supervisor with four assistants from the staff and one representative and one assistant from among the prisoners, to deal with any complaints. These are usually about delayed supplies and the hours of work, and prison authorities say they are immediately remedied or resolved through discussion and have not caused any major disturbances.

Discipline is good even with the NVA soldiers, many of whom are officers and non-commissioned officers, mingling freely with the rest. Perimeter security for the camp is carried out by one company of regular Army troops and one platoon from the Popular Forces.



In contrast to the humane treatment of prisoners by the R.V.N., a South Vietnamese Ranger shows chains used by the Viet Cong to shackle prisoners in a camp over-run by Government troops.

Regular inspection

The Government spokesman who accompanied the visiting group said that conditions in all the other POW camps were approximately the same, and that they were welcome to visit the other camps any time that they wished. All the POW camps in the country are regularly inspected by representatives of the International Red Cross.

As far as can be judged from pronouncements from Hanoi, the South Vietnamese and American soldiers they hold are not considered prisoners of war but "war criminals". This is because, in Hanoi's view, they were captured in an "undeclared war". However specious this reasoning, Hanoi has found in it a rationale for her disregard of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross.

It may well be because of this situation and those in other parts of the world today where internal strife has been going on for many years that the International Red Cross has initiated a move to update the Geneva War Conventions of 1948 which apply to international declared wars but not to undeclared civil conflicts which involve foreign powers.

A meeting of experts last summer in Geneva decided that it would be a good idea to have more countries represented than the 40 involved at present. So invitations have been sent to 130 governments including mainland China to send legal experts to a four-week meeting in May this year.

Protection

The four Geneva Conventions are designed to protect prisoners of war, medical personnel and innocent civilians in times of declared war. These were drawn up with the two World Wars in mind, but since then the nature of conflicts has changed. It is the view of the IRC that the same protection should be given in cases of undeclared wars involving foreign powers and in strictly civil wars within one nation. In many situations such as this the IRC has not been allowed to conduct customary inspections to ensure proper treatment of prisoners and respect for civilian lives.

If, so far, the IRC has not made any progress towards amelioration of the lot of prisoners of war held by Hanoi, it is hoped that a change in the rigid posture of the North will come about as a result of President Nixon's forthcoming visits to Peking and Moscow. Hanoi is getting material for its Indo-China venture from both Russia and Communist China and therefore is complaisant to persuasion from her two allies. If a general, worldwide relaxation of tensions is brought about by President Nixon's visits there is no doubt that Hanoi will be affected by it and so, specifically, will be the issue of the treatment of prisoners of war.

Viewpoint

Vietnam without the Americans

— Provinces That Come Alive Again

By Max Clos

After* a tiring but exciting trip by jeep in the Mekong delta, Jacques Renard and I talked over our experiences with a prominent opposition leader. We told him how astonished we had been by the progress achieved in the realm of pacification.

"Is that so," he said unconvinced. "Well then, go and take a trip by jeep in the province of Vinh Binh. The Viet Cong is in complete control there and you will not come back alive."

It was our turn to explain that we had just come back from there, that we had gone everywhere in the province and that we had even spent several nights in the village. Our companion was honestly stupefied, but he soon had an answer :

"Well, it is because *they* have decided to let you pass. But believe me, they are there."

Today, instead of trying to put forward any conclusions I am going to try to present an idea of the new Vietnamese reality. This I shall do by means of three stories:

In A Former Viet Cong Sanctuary

Seen from a helicopter, Hieu-Le, 60 kilometers northwest of Camau, has nothing very appealing : a thin strip of land with a double row of thatch-roofed houses alongside, a military post with a dozen artillery pieces and at the entrance, a giant portrait of President Thieu. All around, water as far as you can see, enclosing an impossible forest at all times flooded. One wonders how men can live there.

A year ago, the U Minh forest was a Viet Cong sanctuary and Hieu-Le did not exist. Government troops undertook to clean out the forest in December 1970. They are a long way from having completed their task but the results they have already achieved are under my eyes, like a relief man. Life is concentrated along the Camau-Rachgia canal, which was re-opened to traffic at the beginning of 1971. Within a year's time, more than a hundred military posts have been established along the canal and villages have begun to spring up, attracting many of those who had been dispersed in the forest. Official figures say there are 65,000 of them. It is true that when they left, it was not so much to flee the Viet Cong regime as to escape aerial bombardments. Nevertheless, they have returned.

It is still only a thin implantation and at various parts of the umbilical cord, which the canal is, Government troops are still involved in military operations of some sorts. Their aim is to create a vacuum around the Communist formations that are still in the area. In this undertaking, they are helped by a series of fire bases, artificially built above the water, which hammer Viet Cong sectors day and night. What are the Viet Cong doing? At division headquarters at Camau, Colonel Loc says:

"There were four regular regiments, plus four regional battalions. At first, the Viet Cong fought well enough. But they are now short of food and ammunitions, and they have been forced to split up into companies and even into sections. They can no longer do anything very significant."

* Part II of a series of articles written by Max Clos of Le Figaro, one of the prominent French newspaper. (Reproduced from VN Report Vol. 1, No 6, March 72)

"We are there and we are staying. In this type of operation it is useless to come if you have to leave afterward. There is no alternative but to dig in whatever the amount of time necessary to do it. When we have cleaned up the forest, the Viet Cong will have lost its last stronghold in the delta. And they will never be able to come here again."

... The district chief, Major Cuong, explains:

"The people in this area know the Communists very well. I can tell you that they hate them. We have promised that never again will they have taxes to pay. They are beginning to co-operate with us in giving us information."

Organization began quickly. Hieu-Le is divided into 12 hamlets classified as "C" or "D"—which means that there is as yet only relative security and economic development has just begun. Civic action teams are at work. They consist of ten men each, whose principal task is to register the population and discover members of the local Viet Cong infrastructure. They have even begun to recruit for self-defense groups to which 100 weapons have been distributed up to now. Elections were held in November to name members of the hamlet Councils. The first projects are the construction of a school, a market, and a dispensary—in durable material...

Too Good an Election

The village of Long Thoi is 40 kilometers south of Vinh Binh, an area where security has been shaky for a long time. You get there by a wretched pot-holed road where jeeps cannot travel more than 20 kilometers an hour.

The village chief, Mr. Le Dao Toan, 43, elected for three years, appears to be a man of energy. In the last presidential elections, he managed to get the entire electorate to the voting booths and there was not a single invalid ballot. Doesn't he think that is a little too much? Mr. Toan does not understand the question. He explains:

"There are 12,500 inhabitants who are living in eight hamlets, seven of which are in the "B" category and one in "C" category."

This classification, called HES (Hamlet Evaluation System), is reviewed every year. Teams of investigators come from Saigon and asked a series of set questions: Have Viet Cong tracts been distributed? Does the number of militia



in the local self-defense units conform to the projection? What is the status of the area's economic development programs? etc. Jacques Renard asks innocently if the questions are always answered honestly. Mr. Toan does not understand the question.

On the other hand, he knows his statistics by heart:

"Ninety per cent of the population," he says, "have come out in favor of the Government. Nine per cent are on the fence, and there are 82 Viet Cong."

Surprise. Eighty-two Viet Cong?

"Yes," says Mr. Toan, "they are families of men who have joined the NLF."

And what is done about them?

"Nothing. They are closely watched, but they live very much as others do."

Mr. Toan also knows that the Viet Cong in his sector has a regional company of 60 men, as well as 36 guerrillas, of whom 24 have been identified, and 26 members of the political infrastructure, of whom 20 are known. How are they identified?

"That is the work of men in the Phoenix operation, which is very efficient here."

The photographs of the wanted men, along with their biographies are posted in the information hall.

Does it ever happen that the people turn them in?

"They would do it surely, but the Viet Cong do not manifest themselves any more in my hamlets. It is too dangerous for them. Until last summer, they had tried to set up ambushes, but now it's finished."

The truth is that Jacques Renard and I spent two nights at Long Thoi with the feeling of total security. There were no particular precautionary measures taken for us. The first night, an Army theatrical group performed on the square in front of the church for an audience of a thousand peasants. Great hilarity. But the comic sketches were interwoven with propaganda themes. An appeal for help for those made homeless by tornadoes in Central Vietnam, a warning against quacks, etc. Between ten o'clock and midnight, we visited two hamlets which were four and eight kilometers respectively from the town hall. In the first, about 20 peasants were watching the television set that was installed in the main square. Almost immediately two militiamen arrived. There are 60 of them in the hamlet, divided into two groups of 30 each. They are youngsters of 16 and 17, not yet called to the colors.

"Everything depends on them," Mr. Toan says, "all the approaches to the hamlet are guarded and ambushes are maintained all night long. The password is changed every evening."

... I asked him if he was not afraid of being killed.

"I'm always on my guard and I never go out unarmed. But mostly, I depend on the inhabitants to warn me if preparations are being made for an attack against me."

An Impressive Colonel

To all appearances, Colonel Nghia is not particularly tender. A *cavalier*, he likes to make quick decisions and plunge ahead. His face is both intelligent and brutal. He speaks French remarkably well. He is well known in Vietnam, where he has a lot of enemies. It was he in 1963 at the time of the coup d'état—he was then a captain—who was ordered by the military junta to go and get President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, who had taken refuge in a church in Cholon. He brought back two bodies... It still is not known what happened. According to the official version, Nhu is said to have tried to fire on the soldiers. He and his brother reportedly were killed in the confusion that followed...

Colonel Nghia makes quite an impression. He says:

"In 1968, when I took over this province, the Government merely controlled a few square kilometers around Vinh Long. That's all. Look at the results. There are a total of

279 hamlets. In 1969, 54 hamlets were in the "C" or "D" (doubtful) categories, and six were classified as "V" (Viet Cong). By the end of 1971, there were 187 in "A" and "B" (excellent), 69 in "C" (average), 23 in "D" and "E" and none in "V." In 1968, there was an excellent Viet Cong regiment here. It has been forced to leave. Throughout the province, there are only 600 guerillas left. They cannot launch any serious attacks. What they can do is to set up ambushes, place mines on secondary roads, attack outposts—five were overrun in 1971. That bothers us of course, but it does not get them very far."

Government losses are not negligible. Nghia gives them without any complexes, which is rare for a military man. In 1970: 390 killed, and 940 wounded. Up to November, 1971: 349 killed and 730 wounded. He explains:

"If I left the V.C. alone, obviously I would not have any losses and everyone would say 'how marvelously pacified this province is!' and 'This Colonel is really excellent.' But that is the way you get had. My method is to harass them constantly, never give them the time to catch their breath."

We spent an entire day with Colonel Nghia and I can tell you that by jeep and motorized launch we went everywhere in the province. It is clear that the peasants are returning to villages that they had evacuated. That can be seen in the tin roofs of the houses along the banks of the canal (Every family which reinstalls itself has the right to 7,500 piasters and some sheets of tin that later give way to thatched roofs of palm leaves), the nets of fishermen which interlace the canal, and motorized sampans on the way to the market.

Colonel Nghia continues:

"The Tet offensive of 1968 was a very good thing for us. The peasants had only a theoretical knowledge of the Viet Cong. They saw the reality: taxes, reprisals, assassinations. Today, with the exception of the bourgeois in the cities everybody knows the difference. For those gentlemen, when they encounter the Viet Cong, they see them as very polite gentlemen who make lovely promises. And those imbeciles believe them!"

Does he think the Front can have its men elected to village and provincial councils? The Colonel does not think that it is impossible.

"Whenever we arrive in a newly-liberated sector, the people always return there after a few days. The communists can very well mingle with them and reinstall themselves in a legal framework. But we have security services which are very capable of detecting them. Even better, though, is the information that comes from the population. The peasants know them perfectly well. Since they will not talk under constraint, three things are necessary: to guarantee their security, bring them obvious material advantages, and especially, gain their confidence."

Night was falling. We entered Vinh Long in a launch by the wide Mang Thit canal, reopened to traffic at the beginning of 1970. We stopped at a little Catholic village. At one point, the priest found an excuse to get me aside. This is what he said:

"It is true that progress has been made, but we are still a long way from total security. Look at my village, for example, you will note that all of the houses are grouped around the church. Here, that is not normal. If the people had confidence, they would build their houses along the canal. But they don't dare. The reason is simple: Look at that clump of coconut trees on the other side of the canal, 100 meters away. The others are there. Oh, there are not many of them—may be ten—but they are well dug-in in comfortable bunkers. It would take a company to get them out of there. And you know, there are many situations like this in the province."

In Vietnam, thus, one can only claim to understand something of it when one realizes that nothing is simple or certain.

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