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VIET CONG DEFECTING IN RECORD NUMBERS IN DELTA PROVINCE (700)

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KIEN HOA, SOUTH VIETNAM -- KIEN HOA, A MEKONG DELTA PROVINCE KNOWN FOR DECADES AS A CENTER OF PRO-COMMUNIST GUERRILLA ACTIVITY, APPARENTLY IS HEADED FOR A RECORD IN 1970 OF MORE DEFECTORS FROM VIET CONG RANKS THAN EVER BEFORE IN THE AREA'S HISTORY.

IN AUGUST ALONE, 701 DEFECTORS CAME FORWARD IN KIEN HOA. THIS WAS AN ALL-TIME DELTA RECORD FOR ONE PROVINCE, OFFICIALS SAY, AND THE HIGHEST MONTHLY TOTAL FOR ANY PROVINCE IN SOUTH VIETNAM SINCE APRIL, 1967.

THIS YEAR SO FAR, 2,285 VIET CONG SOLDIERS AND SUPPORTERS HAVE ACCEPTED GOVERNMENT AMNESTY IN KIEN HOA UNDER THE CHIEU HOI (OPEN ARMS) PROGRAM -- JUST 200 PERSONS SHORT OF LAST YEAR'S RECORD CHIEU HOI TOTAL. THIS NUMBER IS EXPECTED TO GROW RAPIDLY IN COMING WEEKS BECAUSE OF GOVERNMENT MILITARY AND PACIFICATION PROGRAMS JUST LAUNCHED INTO LONG-TIME VIET CONG POCKETS OF THE PROVINCE.

KIEN HOA PROBABLY STILL HAS MORE COMMUNISTS THAN ANY OTHER MEKONG DELTA PROVINCE, AND IT RANKS 43RD AMONG SOUTH VIETNAM'S 44 PROVINCES IN TERMS OF SECURITY. YET 77 PERCENT OF ITS 566,800 POPULATION LIVES UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND PROTECTION. NATIONWIDE, GOVERNMENT PROTECTION NOW EXTENDS TO 92.8 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION, ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL SOURCES.

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HOWEVER, THE TREND HAS GONE AGAINST THE VIET CONG SINCE 1968, KIEN HOA OFFICIALS SAY, EVEN WITH THE DEPARTURE A YEAR AGO OF THE U.S. NINTH INFANTRY DIVISION, THE LAST AMERICAN GROUND UNIT STATIONED IN THE DELTA.

ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (ARVN) AND LOCAL MILITIA UNITS NOW HANDLE SECURITY FOR KIEN HOA'S PACIFICATION EFFORTS. THE ARVN SEVENTH DIVISION AND PROVINCE OFFICIALS RECENTLY BEGAN AN INTENSIVE PACIFICATION CAMPAIGN, ASSISTED BY AN ARVN NINTH DIVISION REGIMENT.

THE CHIEU HOI CENTER, WHERE RETURNEES RECEIVE SEVERAL WEEKS OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND POLITICAL INDOCTRINATION BEFORE RETURNING HOME, IS PULGING WITH 1,007 PERSONS. THE PROVINCE PLANS TO OPEN TWO TEMPORARY CHIEU HOI CENTERS TO HANDLE THE OVERFLOW.

THIS TREND TOWARD DEFECTION BY THE COMMUNISTS REPRESENTS A MAJOR CHANGE IN KIEN HOA, DEPUTY PROVINCE CHIEF TRAN HUYN CHAU SAYS. "BEFORE THEIR TET OFFENSIVE IN 1968, AT LEAST 60 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION HERE SUPPORTED THE VIET CONG," HE NOTES, "BUT THE VIET CONG BROKE THEIR PROMISE OF A TET CEASE-FIRE, AND THEY HAVE BEEN LOSING THE TRUST OF THE PEOPLE EVER SINCE."

MR. CHAU SAYS COMMUNIST DOCUMENTS CAPTURED RECENTLY SHOW THAT THIS YEAR VIET CONG CADRE IN KIEN HOA HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO A "100 PERCENT SELF-HELP" REGIMEN. THEY MUST GROW THEIR OWN RICE BECAUSE THE POPULACE NO LONGER GIVES OR SELLS IT TO THEM.

A FEW DAYS AGO, 150 YOUNG FORMER VIET CONG COMPLETED THEIR COURSE AT THE CHIEU HOI CENTER AND PROMPTLY VOLUNTEERED FOR THE PROVINCE MILITIA. AFTER MILITARY TRAINING, THEY WILL BE ASSIGNED TO MILITIA UNITS IN OR NEAR THEIR NATIVE VILLAGES.

PACIFICATION PROGRAMS ARE GROWING AS THE POPULACE EMBRACES GOVERNMENT CONTROL. A KEY DISTRICT TOWN ABANDONED TO THE COMMUNISTS IN THE MID-1960'S IS BEING REBUILT IN NORTHWESTERN KIEN HOA, AND VILLAGE AND HAMLET OFFICIALS WILL BE ELECTED THERE SOON. ALREADY, 84 OF THE PROVINCE'S 107 VILLAGES HAVE HELD ELECTIONS. THE OTHER 23 STILL HAVE APPOINTED VILLAGE OFFICIALS, BUT WILL HOLD ELECTIONS AS SOON AS SECURITY FURTHER IMPROVES.

RECENTLY, THE FIRST 326 LAND CERTIFICATES WERE GIVEN FORMER TENANT FARMERS IN KIEN HOA UNDER THE GOVERNMENT'S "LAND TO THE TILLER" PROGRAM. LONG-NEGLECTED ROADS THAT ONCE LED INTO VIET CONG-CONTROLLED AREAS ARE BEING IMPROVED, SCHOOLS ARE GOING UP, AND FARMERS ARE SWITCHING TO NEW HIGH-YIELD HYBRID RICE STRAINS. ITEM

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