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# Vietnam Security Still Unpredictable

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SUOICUT, South Vietnam —A group of Vietcong slipped into the people's self-defense force outpost here, snipped the barbed wire and the detonating wires of protective mines and killed or wounded every man inside.

It happened so quickly that there was no chance to help the defenders or to catch a single one of the estimated 15 to 20 Vietcong who slipped back into the moonless night as rapidly as they had appeared.

Americans in the district advisory compound at nearby Cuchi thought the brief series of grenade blasts and bursts of gunfire signified nothing more serious than an enemy probe. Maj. Thomas L. Kirksey, their commander, did not even wake up during the early morning attack Thursday.

The incident, a violation by the Vietcong of their own ceasefire, illustrates that security in South Vietnam still is a relative and often unpredictable thing.

Suoicut, rated as a "B" hamlet on the American hamlet evaluation system scale, sits squarely on South Vietnam's national Highway 1. It is only a couple of miles from the sprawling Cuchi camp which was turned over to the South Vietnamese army about a

month ago, and only 20 miles from the center of Saigon.

The Americans define a "B" hamlet as one on which there are "generally adequate security operations and law enforcement" and in which there "may be sporadic covert Vietcong infrastructure activity."

## Hamlet Chief Slain

The 19 defenders killed in the raid were the best young men that Suoicut had to offer. Among the dead were the hamlet chief and the deputy hamlet chief. The Vietcong rolled grenades into their bunkers.

On New Year's Day, there was no visible sign of what had happened in Suoicut. At the outpost the cut barbed wire had been replaced and new wires strung from the tiny command post to the claymore mines strapped to the fenceposts on the outer perimeter.

A few militiamen were seen in the outpost, but none showed any inclination to come out onto the tar road and talk about what had happened.

The district chief, a captain, flatly refused any information, saying he was under orders not to talk. (The paragraph in the government's daily communique in Saigon had given

See SECURITY, A30, Col. 1

the wrong hamlet as the location of the attack and also the wrong time.)

The people for whom the Vietcong's message had clearly been intended, the civilian population of Suoicut, did not betray any emotion on their faces.

The old Confucian order of things had settled down once

more on Suoicut. The market place was crowded with some men in conical hats. Every time a bus from Tay Ninh pulled in there was a bustle as vendors with trays of pineapple slices and bananas lined up to sell to the passengers leaning down from the open windows. Tea shops were doing a good business, too, with solidiers from the 25th Division base at Cuchi.

The attack on the outpost at Suoicut might lead one to think that the definitions used by the American hamlet evaluation system in South Vietnam are wrong, making the whole system a bogus one for knowing what areas are secure and what areas are insecure.

But the definitions seem to match the degrees of security in the hamlets fairly well. In Suoicut, an impartial observer

would have to admit that security operations and law enforcement were "generally adequate" and there was only "sporadic" Vietcong activity.

However, the Vietcong infrastructure that operates in hamlets like Suoicut needs only to organize "sporadic" activity to be effective. The people have been treated to a vivid demonstration that the Vietcong also enforce the law

—their law. And not only in the form of 15 or 20 men who pulled off a perfect job of infiltration and precision timing. But more important in the form of the unseen and probably unidentified Vietcong cadres who provided the map of the outpost that permitted the planning for the raid and a safe haven for the attackers after it was over.

In the conditions of "generally adequate" security and "sporadic" Vietcong activity in which 95 per-cent of the people of South Vietnam live, according to the American computers, the Vietcong, if they had enough men, could possibly be in effective control of perhaps one-half the population of South Vietnam within an hour of any standstill cease-fire.