

W525
VIET CONG REPORTED DECLINING IN STRENGTH, MORALE (980)
(SITUATIONER)

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SAIGON-- EARLY IN 1966, THE VIET CONG CLAIMED CONTROL
OVER NEARLY HALF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE COUNTRYSIDE, 43 PERCENT
OF THE ROAD NETWORK, AND 40 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION.

THE SITUATION IS VASTLY DIFFERENT TODAY.

THE VIET CONG HAVE LOST TERRITORY, AND THEIR HOLD OVER A
MILLION SOUTH VIETNAMESE. THEY NOW CONTROL ONLY 23 PERCENT OF
THE HIGHWAYS.

THEY ALSO HAVE LOST FACE AND THE CONFIDENCE OF PEOPLE THEY
HAVE DOMINATED FOR 20 YEARS AND THEY ARE STARTING TO LOSE THEIR
LAST HOPES OF VICTORY.

THIS IS THE TENOR OF RECENT STATEMENTS BY VIET CONG PRISONERS
OF WAR, DEFECTORS TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT, AND
REFUGEES. THE TREND IS CONFIRMED BY THE CONTENTS OF RECENTLY-
CAPTURED VIET CONG DOCUMENTS.

"TOO MANY HARDAQLJHUJ HUNGER AND DEATH. ONLY THE HIGHER CADRES
ARE WELL TAKEN CARE OF -- THE LOWER CADRES AND THE PEOPLE HAVE
TO RESIGN THEMSELVES TO BAD CONDITIONS." THUS A FORMER VIET
CONG SOLDIER DESCRIBED CTNDITIONS IN A MOUNTAIN PROVINCE THAT
NOT RPT NOT LONG AGO WAS CONSIDERED A COMMUNIST STRONGHOLD.

"THE PEOPLE LOST CONFIDENCE IN THE VIET CONG WHEN THE SOUTH
KOREAN TROOPS CAME IN," THE FORMER SOLDIER SAID. "THE VIET CONG
HAD OFTEN CLAIMED THAT THEY HAD KILLED MANY ENEMIES AND WON MANY
BATTLES. THEN THE KOREANS WALKED IN, WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT,
WHILE THE VIET CONG FLED TO THE JUNGLE.

"THE VIET CONG HAVE LOST FACE THEY CAN NEVER REGAIN. THE
PEOPLE ARE SAYING THAT THE VIET CONG ALWAYS BOASTED THEY
'PROTECT THE PEOPLE.' WHAT KIND OF PROTECTION IS IT WHEN THE
PEOPLE LACK RICE, STARVE, AND ENDURE MANY HARDSHIPS?"

WHERE THE VIET CONG ONCE RULED WITH AN IRON HAND --
COLLECTING TAXES, EXTORTING ADDITIONAL FUNDS BY KIDNAPING AND
TERRORISM, PROHIBITING THE MARKETING OF FOODSTUFFS OUTSIDE
VIET CONG-CONTROLLED TERRITORY, AND DRAGOONING YOUNG SOUTH
VIETNAMESE MEN INTO MILITARY SERVICE -- THE VILLAGERS NOW
OPENLY DEFY THEM.

A CAPTURED DOCUMENT SUMMARIZES VIET CONG DIFFICULTIES

HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ON MICROFILM

THIS WAY: 1

1. PEASANTS ARE REFUSING TO PAY THEIR DUES IN VIET CONG-ORGANIZED FARMERS', WOMEN'S AND YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS, AND PARTICIPATION IN ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES IS DESULTORY.

2. PEASANTS AND BUSINESSMEN ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY OBDDURATE IN REFUSING TO PAY VIET CONG TAXES.

3. SHORTAGE OF PERSONNEL IS A "SERIOUS PROBLEM," AND VOLUNTEERS ARE SCARCE. VIET CONG STRENGTH HAS DROPPED FROM 300,000 TO 180,000.

"THE WOMEN OF THE VILLAGE SMUGGLE RICE UNDER THE NOSES OF VIET CONG CADRES AND GO FEARLESSLY TO THE GOVERNMENT SIDE," SAID ONE RECENT REFUGEE. "WHEN THE WOMEN MEET THE CADRES, THEY SAY, 'YOU MUST LET US GO AND LIVE ELSEWHERE...WE CANNOT RPT CANNOT LIVE HERE ANY LONGER.'

THE REFUGEE ALSO SAID "EVEN THE CADRES HAVE LITTLE TO EAT...I AM CERTAIN THAT IF THEY AREN'T RPT AREN'T ABLE TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS OF FOOD AND HOUSING, BOTH CADRES AND VILLAGERS WILL GO OVER TO THE GOVERNMENT CHIEU HOI (OPEN ARMS) CENTERS."

THE ACCURACY OF THIS REFUGEE'S FORECAST WAS SUBSTANTIATED BY DEFECTOR (CHIEU HOI) FIGURES FOR THE FIRST 28 DAYS OF JANUARY, 1967. SOME 2,227 FORMER VIET CONG MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES REPORTED TO SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT RESETTLEMENT CENTERS DURING THIS PERIOD.

THESE DEFECTORS WERE IN ADDITION TO THE 6,000 VIETNAMESE PEASANTS FROM THE "IRON TRIANGLE" AREA NEAR SAIGON. THEY WERE RESETTLED ELSEWHERE AS PART OF AN ALLIED DRIVE AGAINST THE VIET CONG IN THIS STRATEGIC 100-SQUARE-KILOMETER SECTOR.

COMMERCIAL AND CIVILIAN TRAFFIC NOW MOVES FREELY OVER 69 PERCENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM'S 3,100-MILE (4,960 KILOMETERS) ROAD NETWORK, AND WITH ESCORTS CAN USE AN ADDITIONAL EIGHT PERCENT OF THE HIGHWAYS. IN ADDITION TO LOSING THEIR STRANGLEHOLD ON 20 PERCENT OF THE NATIONAL AND INTER-PROVINCIAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM, THE VIET CONG ALSO HAVE LOST MOST OF THE HIGHWAY TOLL STATIONS THEY HAD SET UP TO LEVY TAXES ON EVERY SALEABLE ITEM WHICH PASSED THROUGH.

THE CAPTURED DIARY OF ONE VIET CONG FUNCTIONARY LAMENTS THE LOSS OF CONTROL OVER THE RURAL POPULATION, MORE THAN A MILLION

OF WHOM ESCAPED COMMUNIST CONTROL DURING 1966. THE VIET CONG NOW CONTROL LESS THAN 30 PERCENT OF THE POPULACE, THE DIARY STATES, THEREBY POSING THE SPECTRE OF IMMINENT SHORTAGE OF FUNDS. MONEY EXTORTED FROM THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE REPRESENTS 80 PERCENT OF THE VIET CONG'S ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET, AND THEY NOW HAVE FEWER PEOPLE TO EXPLOIT.

DECLINING PRESTIGE OF THE VIET CONG IS REFLECTED IN RECRUITING STATISTICS CITED BY A FORMER VIET CONG OFFICER. IN 1964, HE SAID, 90 PERCENT OF THE VIET CONG WERE "VOLUNTEERS." BY 1966, THE FIGURE HAD DROPPED TO BETWEEN 30 AND 50 PERCENT, AND IN 1967 THE OUTLOOK IS EVEN MORE AUSTERE.

WHEN SOUTH VIETNAMESE RECRUITS CANNOT BE OBTAINED, THE OFFICER EXPLAINED, THE RANKS MUST BE FILLED WITH INFILTRATORS FROM THE NORTH (PERHAPS 20 TO 30 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL COMMUNIST STRENGTH) AND WITH "MILITARY DUTY SOLDIERS" WHO HAVE BEEN FORCED INTO SERVICE. THE "MILITARY DUTY SOLDIERS" MOSTLY ARE YOUTHS 15 TO 18 YEARS OLD AND ARE "NOT RPT NOT VERY RELIABLE" IN COMBAT. "MOST OF THEM SURRENDER OR DEFECT TO THE GOVERNMENT THE FIRST CHANCE THEY GET," THE EX-VIET CONG OFFICER SAID.

"POOR LEADERSHIP" IS CITED IN A CAPTURED DOCUMENT AS THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF VIET CONG DIFFICULTIES. ELSEWHERE IN THE SAME DOCUMENT, THE VIET CONG GRUDGINGLY GIVE CREDIT TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT'S "REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT" PROGRAM:

"THE ENEMY SCHEME OF STRENGTHENING TOWNS, RURAL AND LIBERATED AREAS PRESENTS A SERIOUS PROBLEM, WITH (ITS) EMPHASIS ON POLITICAL, MILITARY AND SOCIAL FIELDS. EACH PROVINCE HAS FROM THREE TO FOUR HUNDRED CIVIC ACTION PERSONNEL OPERATING IN THE RURAL AREAS."

(THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT TRAINED 25,000 RURAL PACIFICATION CADREMEN IN 1966; WILL TRAIN AN ADDITIONAL 35,000 IN 1967.)

THE VIET CONG DOCUMENT ALSO EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER THE GROWING STRENGTH OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY, PARTICULARLY THE 150,000-MAN REGIONAL FORCE WHICH HAS THE MISSION OF PERMANENTLY SECURING TERRITORY WRESTED FROM VIET CONG CONTROL.

THE VIET CONG, APPARENTLY, ARE FLOUNDERING IN SEARCH OF A SOLUTION. THE CAPTURED DOCUMENT RESORTS TO COMMUNIST SLOGANS SUCH AS: "IMPROVE PARTY CHAPTERS IN 'LIBERATED' AND CONTESTED AREAS...STEP UP OFFENSIVE ACTIVITIES IN WEAK RURAL AREAS... REVIEW PAST ACTIVITIES AND WORK OUT CORRECTIVE MEASURES." SPECIFIC MEASURES OR CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS, HOWEVER, ARE LACKING.

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