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AN INFORMAL APPRECIATION OF THE STATUS
OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM

Prepared by USOM Rural Affairs

June 1, 1963

1. This is an informal appreciation of the Strategic Hamlet Program covering the six-month period ending May 31, 1963. Attached are province-by province commentaries, updated to June 1st, which were drafted by the USOM Rural Affairs Regional Field Representatives whose areas of responsibilities correspond generally to the Corps Tactical Zones. These comments are frank, apolitical expressions of their personal impressions, rather than careful formal evaluations, and are not intended for general dissemination. If considered useful, similar evaluations will be made quarterly on a continuing basis.

2. Viewed in its entirety, measured against Vietcong reaction and the increasing sense of security felt by the rural population, the Strategic Hamlet program has achieved remarkable progress. In areas where a large percentage of the population is grouped within good, viable, strategic hamlets the impact on the Vietcong has been considerable. Often in these areas the Vietcong have been forced into violating their own doctrine by committing useless acts against the people. Conversely, in those areas where little progress has been made, the Vietcong continue to retain the initiative. Similarly, the reactions and attitudes of the population are closely bound to the progress of the program. Where they can see real security in strategic hamlets, the people tend to back the program fully and even begin to establish their own strategic hamlets. On the other hand, where the welfare of the population has been ignored, or where security of the hamlets remains inadequate, the people have been quick to recognize these deficiencies and have reacted negatively. All of these results, both positive and negative, tend to support the validity of the program. The degree of success, province by province appears to depend as much on the manner of execution of the program, as it does on the degree of Vietcong entrenchment within the province.

3. One should not, however, proclaim the success of a program which is still barely underway. True, over half of the rural population is now grouped within strategic hamlets, but most hamlet militia remain untrained and insufficiently armed, and hamlet communication and defenses often are too weak to hold off or repel even small scale enemy probes. Also, relatively little has been yet accomplished in strategic hamlet development,

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the key to long-term success. This paper and its attachments seek to summarize available information and impressions on the program, so that future planning may benefit from the successes and failures of the past several months.

4. Where the program has been most successful, that is to say, where viable hamlets have been established with inhabitants possessing both the will and the means to resist the Vietcong, the following factors appear to have been most instrumental in its success:

a. Capable and devoted local leaders who place the well-being of the population above personal ambition, and who have understood that gaining the support of the population is essential for the success of the program, as well as being its principal objective. (The main burden of implementation of the program falls upon the district chiefs, only a few of whom are able to adequately perform this task without inspired leadership, wise guidance and good support from the Chief of Province.)

b. Proper emphasis by provincial officials upon the quality, rather than the quantity of strategic hamlets constructed, reflecting an understanding of the concept that "the strategic hamlet is a state of mind."

c. Adequate psychological preparation of the population and adequate planning prior to the establishment of hamlets, particularly those involving relocation.

d. The provision of adequate security for the population, at night as well as during the day, during and after hamlet construction, by effectively coordinating the use of military and paramilitary forces and by rapidly training and arming hamlet militia. (The "clear and hold" concept developed in the II Corps area, using regular ARVN as well as Civil Guard and Dan Ve forces, has been most successful in providing the initial security required.)

e. The restriction, by provincial authorities, of hamlet establishment to those areas for which adequate security can be provided during and after hamlet construction.

f. The willingness of some provincial officials to take the calculated risk of arming a sufficient number of hamlet militia to provide adequate security for the hamlet before supporting ARVN, CG or SDC units have been withdrawn. (On a nationwide basis, Special Forces training of hamlet militia appears to have been the most successful, because the militia return to their hamlets, after training, with their arms in hand.)

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g. The willingness of some provincial officials to make decisions locally without constant reference to Saigon, coupled with the courage to be flexible and practical rather than mechanical in applying Interministerial Committee directives and instructions.

5. Where the program has failed to achieve the success it should have, there appear to be several reasons for this. Among the more important are the following:

a. A lack of understanding of the true nature of the Strategic Hamlet program on the part of provincial officials, and a tendency to conceive of it as only a means of protecting transportation routes, or of physically separating the Vietcong from the Vietcong supporter.

b. Growing out of this lack of understanding, a tendency to over-emphasize the short-term military and "control" aspects of the program at the expense of the long-term requirement for establishing a secure political and economic base for the Government at the hamlet level.

c. A tendency on the part of many provincial officials and most ARVN commanders to emphasize purely military operations against the Vietcong, unconnected with the construction of strategic hamlets, thus diverting time, attention and security away from hamlet construction.

d. Until recently, an apparent emphasis by the Government, and particularly by some of the Delegates, on unrealistic schedules and deadlines for completion of a specified number of strategic hamlets. This has reinforced the natural tendency of some officials to implement the program in a superficial manner. Inadequate planning and preparation for relocation and a neglect of hamlet organization, self-defense and spirit are rationalized as being justified by the necessity to meet completion schedules.

e. Premature jumping into "C" Zone areas without adequate military support, or, conversely, the withdrawal and relocation of population groups from "C" to "A" Zone areas without having the land or other means available for these groups to support themselves.

f. Slowness in training and arming hamlet militia coupled with sometimes premature withdrawal of ARVN, Civil Guard or Dan Ve security before the hamlets can defend themselves.

g. A continuing tendency on the part of local officials to refer too often to Saigon for tactical decisions which should and can only be

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made on-the-spot. This is reinforced by the predilection of some Central Government fonctionnaires to harass local officials unduly about petty details and paperwork requirements while ignoring more fundamental considerations.

6. The above comments should not be construed negatively, nor should criticism of the actions of some local officials be interpreted to mean that their authority or the means at their disposal to carry out the program should be reduced. On the contrary, the Government's policy of retaining strategic control of the program while decentralizing tactical responsibility to the provinces, along with adequate means to carry it out, has proven most effective. What might be helpful at this point would be more specific instructions on certain matters such as adequate consideration for the present welfare and future economic well-being of the population, early hamlet self-defense, etc., as well as a stepped-up on-the-spot inspection and guidance program performed by officials with authority who understand the program. Such an inspection effort, coupled with widespread publicity of the amount of aid given to specific places, will do more to discourage dishonesty than complicated paperwork procedures which invite rather than prevent corruption, and stifle, rather than encourage, initiative and aggressive action.

7. In conclusion, the strategic hamlet program, in those areas where it has been well implemented, has fully demonstrated that it is sound in concept and capable of practical execution and that it is indeed a brilliant advance in the art of counterinsurgency as well as a most effective means of nation-building. Innumerable problems are being solved, and obstacles overcome. The Government has had the courage to try, the perseverance to keep trying, and the wisdom to encourage its men in the field by giving them the necessary authority and support, both moral and physical. At the very heart of this success is the psychological revolution taking place in the way in which Government officials work with and for the people, and in the way the people take part in their Government. By remaining true to its aspirations and ideals, its high purposes and high courage, the Strategic Hamlet program cannot fail.

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A. I CORPS

1. General Observations

The Strategic Hamlet program in this region has generally made good progress after a slow start due primarily to some local reservations about the program and a lack of material support. For the last six months, it has had strong top-level backing as well as material support. These have begun to pay off in tangible results. The most dangerous area is Quang Tin where the program may have been pushed too fast for the population to understand or absorb it and where increasing VC strength continues to render many of the "completed" hamlets insecure. An increased military effort as well as a consolidation of existing hamlets is definitely needed. It is suggested that the military - civil "clear and hold" concept of combining military operations with the establishment of strategic hamlets, which has been so successfully applied to the II Corps, could be very well applied to some I Corps provinces, particularly Quang Tin.

2. Quang Tri

The province chief is active and moves about the countryside learning first-hand the needs and sentiments of the population. He is strongly committed to the Strategic Hamlet program including Montagnard resettlement. With a few exceptions his staff is not very aggressive. The local population is favorably disposed to the program, but the intensity of their resistance to the Vietcong is difficult to gauge, because VC actions against the hamlets have been limited. The introduction of self-help projects has definitely increased the value of the strategic hamlet for them. One major problem has been a lag in the training of hamlet militia; training can now only be accomplished long after hamlet defenses have been completed. Provincial relationships with the First Division have not been satisfying but are improving. At one time, the Division Commander withdrew his agreement to train the hamlet militia. More recently, he has made facilities and instructors available. Thus Thien has the same problem and unless this essential phase of the hamlet program (self-defense) is adequately carried out, the hamlets in these provinces will remain vulnerable to the Vietcong with consequent bad psychological results.

3. Tuan Thien

Until recently, this province has displayed only a limited appreciation of the importance of the strategic hamlet program and not much aptitude for its execution. The province chief seems to be little involved in the program. The civilian deputy province chief, who has become active in it, appears to be a capable, perceptive person. His subordinate staff

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the population seems to give moderate support to the program, but there is not yet much evidence of any real enthusiasm. There is a strong demand for barbed wire, probably due to Vietcong raids and harassment which are fairly frequent.

The province chief appears to have a realistic idea of the pace at which he can complete the construction phase, but he seems to be under pressure from the 2nd Division to accelerate beyond the capabilities of the province. The program should continue to improve because of the good understanding which the province chief has of its objectives and methods and because of his evident concern for the welfare of the population, provided hamlet construction is not accelerated to an unrealistic rate.

5. Quang Tin

The province chief, Major Ninh, and his military deputy, are able and hard working but they tend to view the Strategic Hamlet program primarily in military terms; as an objective to be achieved through command procedures with a minimum of persuasion and explanation. Consequently, the local population are not, for the most part, enthusiastic participants in the program. The province chief is willing to delegate authority and does so. However, his administration is greatly understaffed and the civilian personnel are not of a high caliber. This has resulted in many administrative delays in the execution of the program with a consequent depressing effect on the morale of the population because the province is so far behind in providing materials to the hamlets and compensation to relocated families.

The province claims completion of 201 strategic hamlets. Most of the 201 hamlets seem to be completed insofar as fences and boats are concerned. However, only about one third of the 201 hamlets are completed in accordance with the six-point criteria and it is difficult to say how many hamlets have developed an ability to defend themselves. However, most of the population appears to want to defend itself, if given the necessary arms and ammunition. Intense Vietcong military pressure compounds the problems of this province, which badly needs an adequate civilian or military staff to handle the Strategic Hamlet program and adequate military forces to counter the increased Vietcong pressure.

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B. II CORPS

1. General Observations

In the II Corps Area, more progress has been made in the Strategic Hamlet Program than in possibly any other Corps Area in Vietnam. The program has been given strong support longer in the three really difficult provinces (Quang Ngai, Binh Yen and Binh Dinh) than elsewhere. The combined civil - military approach embodied in the "clear and hold" operations has also undoubtedly greatly contributed to progress. The provincial administrations in these provinces appear to be more generally competent than elsewhere (particularly more so than those in the Southern Delta).

On the High Plateau, progress has also been excellent, assisted in great degree, of course, by Vietcong mistakes with the highlanders. The main problem here is the requirement for a revolutionary psychological change in the attitude of local officials toward the highlanders. There has been much improvement, but much remains to be improved before achieving a lasting relationship with these people based on mutual respect and understanding. The training of special Civic Action Ministry personnel to work in the Special Forces training camps is a step forward. It might be helpful if all provincial officials dealing with the highlanders could receive a special orientation course on general conduct as well as on the specific customs of the particular tribe with which they are working. A special section of the Ministry of Education might also be established to concentrate on educational and teacher training facilities and programs for the highlanders.

2. Quang Ngai

The province chief and Strategic Hamlet program chief have a good understanding of strategic hamlet concepts and techniques, with the exception of excessive "wall-building" in some areas. Subordinate officials are less well-informed but are learning and responding. The province chief is active and effective in his contacts with the population and appreciative of the importance of winning the support of the highlanders. The population, in turn, is cooperative in supporting the Strategic Hamlet program. Despite some delays of compensation in kind for construction work and despite their generally depressed economic condition, enough tangible assistance has reached the population to greatly boost their morale. The Chieu Hoi program, which the province has been carrying on until recently without support from the National Government, continues to attract returnees. While the construction of strategic hamlets is behind original schedules, it should move ahead at a satisfying pace in the future. Cooperation and coordination between the province and the 25th Division is very satisfactory. Preparations for operation Trung Ngan have been well-coordinated. The best proof of progress lies, of course, in the strong resistance staged against the Vietcong by many hamlets during

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the recent widespread Vietcong offensive in this province. Such resistance and the cooperation the regular ARVN troops received from the population would not have been possible unless the strategic hamlets were offering the people something they felt was worth fighting for. If the training and arming of hamlet militia can be speeded up and if more tangible assistance can be gotten to the population, ultimate victory seems sure. The success of the program in this province, which is inherently one of the most difficult in Vietnam, is most encouraging.

3. Binh Dinh

The provincial administration has been very active in support of Strategic Hamlet construction. The province chief and his staff seem to have instilled good spirit in most of the Civic Action cadre and hamlet militia. This has been reflected in improved morale in most hamlets. Defenses in the 420 "completed" hamlets are generally good, but too many still lack weapons and ammunition, as well as outer fences and barbed wire. Internal organization and general development also needs to be stressed. Compared to early 1962, people in the hamlets are far happier and have a much better feeling of security. However, more training of hamlet militia and more weapons and ammunition are needed, as well as more work on houses and defenses and more food for some of the relocated people.

Hamlet elections are proceeding slowly, but seem successful. The self-help program is proceeding slower than it normally should. The Vietcong have not been very active in the province, and they have not turned out to be as strong as was first anticipated. However, for the hamlets to continue to be viable in this province and for Vietcong influence to be eliminated over the long run, intensive political, social and economic development must take place. Security is not enough, particularly in Binh Dinh, where most of the population is extremely poor and without adequate opportunity.

4. Phu Yen

Since the replacement of the former province chief by Lt. Col. Oai, hamlet construction has picked up in quality and speed, and morale is good. Colonel Oai appears to be on good terms with other leaders in the province and is not plagued by as many visitors as was his predecessor. The pig raising, fertilizer, and sweet potato planting programs are helping to boost the morale of the population and their support of the government, and frequent trips about the province by Colonel Oai and his staff have brought the government closer to the people. The quality of CG/SDC and hamlet militia seems to have improved, which has affected hamlet residents favorably.

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Generally, hamlet construction is good and is not now behind schedule. Relocation of lowlanders and highlanders is going well. Almost all hamlets are well armed in this province and have trained hamlet militia. The population appears to have confidence in the Strategic Hamlet program and hamlet spirit in some parts of the province appears to be higher than in almost any other area in Vietnam. Despite the reputation that the people of Phu Yen are traditionally not strong in character, it is believed that continued firm and intensive Government support of the program will result in this province becoming one of the most firmly pro-Government and anti-communist of all.

5. Phu Bon

The provincial administration, which is very understaffed, has had a difficult task in building up this new province. Despite the difficulties, the reception of the highlander refugees has been well handled and their resettlement into hamlets is going ahead slowly, but surely. The hamlets are being built with sound defenses and hamlet militia are being trained and armed.

The highlanders, with whom the Province Chief works well, appear to be coming over to the support of the government. A major problem, which has slowed the construction of hamlets, has been the lack of personnel for the strategic hamlet construction teams. In general, however, the strategic hamlet program in this province is proceeding as well or better than might have been expected. The support provided for the Strategic Hamlet program has been helpful in keeping the province in operation during the early months of this year, when it was without an adequate provincial budget.

6. Kontum

This province is outstanding in its handling of the highlanders and in resettlement of them in Strategic Hamlets. The Province Chief, Major Dinh, travels about the province a great deal, works directly with people in the hamlets, and seems to have the confidence of highlanders and lowlanders alike. Morale appears to be excellent in most hamlets. However, more defenses are needed, as well as weapons and ammunition, in at least half of the 127 "completed" hamlets. Those hamlets which are armed have generally done an excellent job of withstanding Vietcong attacks and morale appears high. This province provides an outstanding example of good relations with the highlanders and this, more than any other single factor, has contributed to the success of the Strategic Hamlet program there.

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7. Pleiku

The general situation in this province, sometimes reported unfavorably in the past, is now improving. The province chief shows courage and determination in getting out into hamlets, some of which are located in dangerous and formerly unfriendly areas. There is much yet to be done in more than half of the 86 'completed' hamlets in the way of defenses, weapons, and the development of self-government, but the situation appears to be developing favorably in this province as well as in Kontum.

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C. III Corps

1. General Observations

The realization by province chiefs that the CVN has given them the strategic hamlet mission and the tools for accomplishing it has come slowly in many instances in this area. Where the fact of responsibility has been realized, the program has moved forward successfully; where the fact was not fully accepted - as in Phuoc Thanh - the provincial program faltered. Moreover, military operations have taken precedence over Strategic Hamlet construction operations, often hindering the latter.

In addition to a conflict of mission, and the slowness of some provinces to recognize their vital role in the strategic hamlet program, these points are listed as having been obstructive to the effort:

- (1) Lack of understanding of the "Minuteman" role and home defense potential of the hamlet militia; and a failure to understand the need for adequate hamlet defenses in areas not currently under VC influence.
- (2) Failure to follow through on hamlet classification, establishment of a valid hamlet inter-family and block system, hamlet intelligence network, etc.
- (3) Reluctance to trust the people to the extent of issuing arms, ammunition and radios essential to their own defense. (Binh Duong, in particular).
- (4) Continued reliance in some areas on static defense posts and grandiose offensive military operations which serve only to provide targets for the VC in the one instance and often warn him of an oncoming attack in the other. (Successful examples of the opposite approach exist along Route 15 (Bien Hoa - Phuoc Tuy) and in Binh Tuy Province.)
- (5) Lack of understanding of the importance of dovetailing hamlet economic planning and development into the first phases of the program.
- (6) Failure to realize the importance at the outset of free hamlet elections, free hamlet self-help determinations, etc.
- (7) A lack of liaison, such as failing to work out operations agreements with bordering provinces which would deny the VC the opportunity of border refuge.
- (8) Failure in some instances to demand the highest standards of conduct by the military in its relationships with the population.

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Most of these hindrances to the program have been recognized in this area and are decreasing in importance; however, they have had their impact on progress over the past several months. Remaining is the question of priority of mission: To whom should the province chief be most responsive: the tactical area commander, or to the population for which he is responsible?

Concept, enthusiasm, determination and skill vary with the individual province chief in each province. The relative success, or lack of it, in each province, is a direct reflection of the province chief's ability to apply these qualities.

2. Bien Hoa.

This province has completed 156 of the 207 hamlets planned with the other 57 under construction. Considering the change of province chiefs in late 1962 and the fact that only 57 hamlets existed on 1 October 1962, progress has been excellent. Major Dinh is a fine administrator. Staff and district chiefs are given authority and function well. He has given the establishment of hamlets number one priority and accordingly scheduled hamlet development as a separate phase. He is fully aware of hamlet deficiencies and may be expected to continue hamlet improvement as MAP support, materials and time permit. The people appear to like and trust him as evidenced by the four population groups who petitioned for permission to establish their own strategic hamlets. He reacts immediately to emergency situations such as the Bien Hoa fire of last January and is adept at taking full psychological advantage of such situations to bring the "government to the people". The only shortcomings in the program to date are that it has concentrated entirely on hamlet construction without significant development yet taking place in the hamlets constructed some time ago.

3. Binh Duong.

The hamlet program in this province reflects the cautious personality of the province chief, Major Minh. Considering the late start and constant need for full military cooperation in the establishment of most hamlets, the score of 95 completed hamlets is considered fair. The completed hamlets meet to a fairly high degree the "6-point criteria" for being complete. However, the program is not progressing as rapidly as initially hoped for and this is due at least in part to the fact that the province's efforts are spread too thin over too many "top" priority projects. The province chief delegates authority and means to the district chiefs; but does not appear to do the same with his provincial staff. He has been slow to trust the hamlet populace with weapons and is not, at this stage, aggressive in hamlet economic development. He has just started on the hamlet self-help program with the first approval issued recently. Major Minh's manner of operating may be well suited to the critical province of Binh Duong. To accelerate the pace of the program in this province, it would be necessary for him to take more calculated risks and bolder action than he is prone to do.

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4. Binh Long

The provincial strategic hamlet program suffered seriously under the previous province chief. Since assumption of duty by Major My, it gives every indication of being successful. Major My, who understands and is sympathetic to the requirements of the highlanders, has resituated a number of hamlet sites to areas with an economic potential as requested by the highlander inhabitants. Previous sites had been based on supposed military needs. This slowed the start of the program, resulting in fewer completions than scheduled, although this is, in part, offset by the 50 hamlets currently under construction. Major My is competent, decisive and enthusiastic. He delegates well to both his staff and his district chiefs. He appears to appreciate the potential of both the strategic hamlet and Chieu Hoi programs and is far-sighted in his approach to hamlet economic development. There is no question that he is guided by the interests of the people -- both lowlanders and highlanders -- in making his decisions and is rapidly earning their trust and respect for the government.

5. Binh Tuy

Binh Tuy Province, reporting 42 strategic hamlets completed against 63 projected, like others, was held up by late funding and MAP support. The program is now proceeding satisfactorily. The province chief, Major Dat, appears to have fully earned the support of the people. He, as well as the former MAAG Sector Advisor, spent many Saturday afternoons personally constructing a share of hamlet fortifications, working right with the people. Militarily, he has practically eliminated the concept of static defense in his province and prides himself on his ability to take the offensive against the enemy by seeking them out with small unit patrols and night ambushes. It would appear that he has had the VC off-balance for some months. He arms hamlet militia at the time of dedication of a new hamlet. He personally concerns himself with the adequacy of hamlet fortifications and alarm systems. Self-help projects for 25 hamlets have been approved and a major provincial self-help road building project is about to be undertaken. Many of the tactics and methods used in this province could serve as a model for action in other provinces.

6. Gia Dinh

Of the 307 strategic hamlets planned for Gia Dinh, 239 are completed and the other 68 under construction. Considering the late start and delayed MAP support, both beyond the jurisdiction of the province chief, this province is on schedule. There should be no doubt of the competency of Major Xich, but certainly a contributing factor to his successful effort is the close working relationship, on both civilian and military matters between the province chief and the Capital District Commander, General La. Noteworthy in this province is the improvement in the security situation, which appears to be keeping pace with the completion of hamlets. Now, though ARVN forces are stationed in the province, they are not required for normal defense. Major Xich appears to have a clear comprehension of the whole counterinsurgency program and a good understanding of the needs and desires of the people.

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7. Long Khanh

The strategic hamlet program appears to be well understood in this province and proceeding satisfactorily. Major Du has completed 68 of the 118 hamlets programmed and should complete the balance before 31 December. He is thorough and takes seriously the "6-point criteria". He has no hesitancy in arming hamlet militia. With the arming of militia, he releases a like number of ARVN, CG and SDC troops from hamlet defense duty. He is not at all hesitant in accepting advice he considers good, or politely rejecting advice he considers unwise, untimely, or not good in relationship to his mission. He delegates well to district chiefs and subordinate commanders and appears to be backed by a competent staff. In general the quality of his strategic hamlets is impressive.

8. Phuoc Long

Lieutenant Colonel Dien has been an exceptionally able military commander and province chief. As military commander he made substantial inroads into Zone "D", undoubtedly causing the VC great concern as indicated by their movements from Zone "D" out to adjacent provinces heretofore considered relatively safe. As province chief he has shown keen understanding of the needs and desires of all elements of the provincial population, with particular concern for the large highlander minority. However, in fairness to him, it should be stated that the provincial strategic hamlet program suffered for several weeks when he became commander of the Phuoc-Binh Than Special Military Zone. This has been corrected to some extent recently by an apparent willingness to delegate some authority to subordinates, but his third job -- Province Chief of Phuoc Thanh -- may well reduce his efficiency in the other two. Completions to date number 71 against 104 projected. This is fairly good, all things considered; however, the fact that militia training started late (except those trained by Land Development) is one point indicating that the "6-Point Criteria" were not being closely observed. The five attacks on Montagnard hamlets bring home the importance of adhering closely to these criteria and giving the people the capability for initial self-defense. Actually, it is a question of priority and he has given priority attention to his broader military mission, relying until recently on thinly-placed CG and SDC to provide essential hamlet defense. Lieutenant Colonel Dien is a dynamic, competent individual, reasonable and decisive in his ways. He appears to delegate effectively to his staff and district chiefs.

9. Phuoc Thanh

The strategic hamlet program in this province was neither backed nor understood by the previous province chief, Major Nguyen Kim Man, as it was not backed by the one before him. One result has been that the nine hamlets reported as completed in December by the former province chief and MAAG Sector Advisor (current) have been regraded under the "6-Point Criteria" as incomplete, so that the present figure for completed hamlets stands at zero. (No known VC action brought about this reduction.) Another result was that very little effort has been made by the province to build new hamlets or correct deficiencies of the old. The progress that was made is attributable to the special Zone commander, Capitol District and 5th Division joint plans, and to the district chiefs and people themselves. A weak provincial staff

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12. Binh Thuan

The Province Chief, Lt. Colonel Hoang, has shown great interest in the strategic hamlet program in his province and has in general, successfully carried it out. Morale seemed good here, both among lowlanders and highlanders, until the disastrous April 15 ambush. Since then there seems to have been considerable anxiety among many hamlet residents and some lessening in confidence toward the government.

From personal observations, elections appear to have gone well in many of the completed hamlets, and great interest is being shown in self-help projects. However, more weapons and ammunition are needed than have been issued, and more hamlet militia training is required. In addition, some relocation in the province was not well planned and this needs correction. The province should now concentrate on the hilly, sand dune area to the east of Phan Thiet and attempt to eliminate VC influence there. In summary, Binh Thuan has been one of the better provinces in the execution of the strategic hamlet program. The province chief is vigorous, able and dedicated and understands the program. There is every reason to expect continued progress in this province.

13. Ninh Thuan

The strategic hamlet program in this province is probably the best executed in all of Viet-Nam. However, some problems remain, mainly with the highlanders. While relocation of the lowlanders has proceeded well in general, a serious situation still exists in an area west of Phan Rang, where highlanders must be moved soon, as they are menaced by the Viet-Cong. If, in addition to relocating these highlanders, a highlander training and development center could be started, it would greatly aid this situation.

With the exception of the one area noted above, morale is generally good in the hamlets, construction of defenses acceptable, and all hamlets have well armed and trained hamlet militia (mainly by Special Forces). Great interest is being shown in hamlet elections and in self-help projects and the Province Chief is very anxious to start an accelerated hamlet development program. The provincial administration in this province is perhaps the most efficient and vigorous in Viet-Nam. At least two-thirds of the hamlets in this province appear to have adequate hamlet spirit and almost 90 percent seem to provide sufficient security. However, before the province can be declared a white area, additional military forces will have to be provided to assist in clearing the mountain areas surrounding the coastal strip and in settling the remaining highlanders in hamlets.

14. Khanh-Hoa

The Province Chief, Major Le Tap, has taken a close personal interest in hamlet construction and in training the hamlet militia. Relocation of highlanders is behind schedule because of postponement until June of the clear-and-hold operation, and there remains a shortage of weapons and ammunition for the hamlet militia.

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Construction of hamlet defenses has been generally complete and well done in most hamlets with very little MAP equipment being received. The morale of the population has improved - especially compared with early 1962. Hamlet self-help is also proceeding well in some districts. There were some questionable practices in hamlet construction in this province - one district chief extracting money from hamlet residents to buy construction materials. This has been stopped, but its effect was undoubtedly harmful in that particular area. It is difficult to evaluate the hamlets in this province because they have not been subject to any great degree of Viet-Cong pressure. In general, however, the program appears to be successful and relatively well-administered.

15. Darlac

Great progress has been made in this province. The outstanding problem to be solved is caused by the situation resulting from the change-over in the Buon-Bao trained defended villages to strategic hamlets under province control. At first there was considerable resentment among the Rhade over weapons being taken away from them in the hamlets where men were trained in Buon-Bao. Morale which had been extremely high, dropped noticeably. This situation, which has improved somewhat because the pick-up of weapons has been suspended, is known not only among Rhade in Darlac but also among other highlanders in other areas via the grapevine. Any misstep in this situation will have grave consequences in other areas. The Province Chief, Major Thong, seems very well motivated but is new and inexperienced, particularly in dealing with the highlanders. With patience and understanding which he is developing, this situation can be surmounted. The highlander training and development center in the province is now being enlarged and is helping to improve the situation by providing more opportunity to train Rhade from the hamlets. This has been strongly supported by the Province Chief and the Division Commander. Any further weapons pick-up in this province should be postponed for a considerable period of time.

16. Quang Duc

The Quang Duc release agreement was delivered on 13 February and MAP supplies arrived late which accounts for what otherwise would appear to be a slow start. Of the 76 hamlets planned, 33 are completed and 27 are under construction representing 31 starts since 1 January. There appears little doubt that the 60 hamlets scheduled for that date will be completed by 30 June. Colonel Nghia, the senior ranking Province Chief in Viet-Nam, is well qualified for his job. He prides himself on the thoroughness of each undertaking and demands high standards. The province is composed of about 10,000 lowlanders resettled in land development centers, and over 20,000 highlanders who are willingly coming under provincial control. Hamlet defenses generally are good and the people, both lowlanders and highlanders, appear to feel the concern of the government for their safety and well being. Colonel Nghia has shown marked interest recently in the self-help program.

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17. Tuyen Duc

The release agreement for this province was concluded in January. With strategic hamlet construction team training commencing in February and terminating on 11 March, little tangible progress was made during the first quarter. Of the 136 hamlets now planned, 47 have been completed. Major Bich, Province Chief, is a very competent individual and his provincial organization appears well organized and efficient. With his offices in Dalat he is preoccupied with many important visitors and duties. Also benefitting the general security situation but handicapping the strategic hamlet effort are the large number of strong anti-communists from North Viet-Nam in Tuyen Duc. These people have allowed few VC inroads and therefore, feeling secure, they see no particular need for fortified strategic hamlets. Despite its slow start the program is well off the ground now and will proceed rapidly.

18. Lang Dong

This province, which suffered at the outset from lack of a clear understanding of the Strategic Hamlet Program, has now realistically reevaluated its requirements, reducing projected hamlets from 203 to 101. Major Tai has personally concerned himself with all aspects of the program and is now emphasizing the proper selection of hamlet sites and meeting the requirements established by the IC/SH. Of the 101 strategic hamlets projected, the province has completed 54 and has 32 under construction with a targeted completion date of 31 July 1963. The remaining 15 hamlets are to be completed by 30 November 1963. There is no doubt that this province was "flying blind" at the outset, and discrepancies occurred, but considering its late start, (agreement signed in January) and its non-functioning (until recently) provincial committee, the province has made progress and should soon be ahead of schedule.

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D. IV CORPS

1. General Observations:

The Strategic Hamlet program seems in general to have made less progress here than in any other Corps area in Vietnam. In part this is due to the pattern in many provinces of scattered individual, or small clusters of, dwellings, and in part it can be attributed to the long, virtually unchallenged control of several areas by the Viet Cong. These are factors which take time, patience, understanding, and perhaps certain modification of the program if they are to be overcome.

Unfortunately, with certain outstanding exceptions, notably Vinh Binh and Kien Hoa, provincial officials and military commanders too often have seemed neither to appreciate fully the true purposes of the strategic hamlet program, nor to have adequate sympathy and understanding for the needs of the people. This has been reflected by too many poorly planned, substantially compulsory, mass relocations, which have not infrequently resulted in hamlets virtually without means for self-support, and definitely antipathetic towards government. (It must be emphasized that the Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets has recognized this situation, and has sought to remedy it.) Further, there has often been a lack of military support, even when it could have been made available, for the expansion of strategic hamlet complexes into areas controlled, but not heavily dominated, by the Viet Cong.

Until it is generally understood by the officials in charge that voluntary participation by most of the people affected is essential to the success of the Strategic Hamlet program; and that a reasonable chance to earn a livelihood, and reasonable security from attack are the price of overt support of the government, the program will not prosper in the Delta.

2. Long An

Progress has generally been good in Long An. Provincial leadership is good and planning has been more thorough than in most provinces. The province chief is active, gets out among the population and knows how to work with the people and win their sympathy. The main problem is the training and arming of hamlet militia which has not kept pace with the establishment of the hamlets. Also, too many families have been moved too fast without adequate prior preparation. It is estimated that about one third of the hamlets in the provinces have developed a spirit of self-defense in the hamlet, adequate to justify calling the hamlet complete and perhaps one third more provide a minimum of security, leaving one third insecure. In general, an excellent job has been done considering the difficulties of this province.

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3. Kien Tuong

There has been little progress until recently in the Strategic Hamlet program in Kien Tuong province. This seems due to an apparent lack of understanding of the program, or else, lack of real interest in it, by the province chief. Although 59 hamlets are shown as completed in the province, it is estimated that no hamlets have a proper hamlet spirit and that not more than 2 or 3 provide their inhabitants with adequate security. However, recent progress in the Tri Phap area is encouraging.

4. Dinh Tuong

Overall progress has been slight in this key Delta province. In some areas, good hamlets have been constructed but this has been offset by difficulties in other areas where relocation has been poorly handled. Prior planning for relocation has not been adequate and the province chief, Major Tho, does not exert sufficient leadership or control over the program, leaving its direction almost entirely to the district chiefs. Hamlet militia training and arming have been too slow. Of the hamlets listed as complete in the province, it is estimated that only a few have developed adequate hamlet spirit and only about one-third provide adequate security.

5. Kien Hoa

Although faced with a difficult situation, progress has been excellent in this province. This is due primarily to the excellent leadership of the province chief, Lt. Colonel Chau, and his understanding of the necessity to win the support of the population for the government and for the strategic hamlet program. The planning and execution of the program is well thought-out in this province. The province chief knows how to use his staff. He has proceeded slowly and concentrated on the quality of the hamlets. It is, therefore, estimated that of the hamlets listed as completed in this province, more than one third have developed an adequate hamlet spirit and perhaps twice that many provide adequate security.

6. Vinh Binh

Progress has also been excellent in Vinh Binh despite the fact that a great number of hamlets were built too quickly in the early months of 1963. The defenses and arms for these hamlets were not adequate and they became vulnerable to the Vietcong. However, with the influx of MAF equipment, these hamlet are being consolidated and the hamlet program is being expanded to other areas. An important factor in the progress of this province is the province chief's policy that the people must participate voluntarily in the strategic hamlet program and that they are not to be forced to move. Major Thao

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has provided excellent leadership for the program. It is estimated that more than one third of the hamlets in this province have developed an adequate hamlet spirit of self-defense with twice that many providing sufficient security. With adequate military support, the province may be cleared by the end of 1963. The recent provision of an ARVN Battalion, although late in coming, will greatly assist in this effort provided it is assigned for at least a three months period.

7. Vinh Long

After a reportedly excellent start, this province suffered a political and psychological reverse because of the actions of the provincial administration. The resulting loss of confidence on the part of the population will be difficult to overcome. It is estimated that only a few hamlets in this province can be considered as providing either adequate security or having any real spirit of self-defense and the training and arming of hamlet militia has lagged behind the rest of the program. The provincial administration's previous attitude of mistrust of the population made it difficult to develop a desirable spirit in the hamlets. Recently, however, the province chief, Lt. Colonel Phuoc, has begun to concentrate on the civil as well as military aspects of pacifying the province, that is to say on winning the support of the population, and this should improve the rate of progress of the Strategic Hamlet program. If this effort to win popular support continues and is successful, it may be possible to clear the province by the end of 1963.

8. Kien Phong

Progress has been excellent in Kien Phong due to the vigor and administrative skill of the province chief, Lt. Colonel Phat. He understands how to work with the population and in general has won their support for the program. Of the 189 hamlets in the province, more than one third appear to have an adequate spirit of self-defense and probably two thirds provide adequate security, with the exception of the border area next to Kien Tuong. This province should be fairly well pacified by the end of 1963.

9. An Giang

Progress has not been as fast as expected in this province in recent months with the exception of the Triton district. Too much has been left up to the district chiefs by the province chief who has been obliged to concentrate his attention on other matters. Relocation has suffered from a lack of prior planning in this province and the training and arming of hamlet militia has been slow. On the surface, the security situation is good in much

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of the province, but this is believed to be due to the Vietcong having concentrated their efforts in other provinces. In general, it is estimated that only in a few hamlets is there an adequate spirit of self-defense on the part of the population and that adequate security is provided under present conditions in about half of the hamlets.

10. Kien Giang

A great deal of progress was achieved in the first six months after April 1962, but the program has slowed down in recent months. Provincial administration has improved recently but is still not too strong. One factor which must be taken into account is that the projected number of hamlets to be established for this province is below the number which will be required to establish complete security. Within the goals already set, the province appears to have done a good job but much remains to be done before real security can be established in the area south of Rach Gia and adjacent to An Xuyen.

11. Chuong Tien

While some progress may have been accomplished initially in 1962, the situation has deteriorated within the last 6 months in Chuong Tien. Until the recent change in province chiefs, the provincial administration was very weak. Adequate military support has been and is still lacking. Of the total number of hamlets listed as complete, only about 5% provide adequate security for the inhabitants. A true spirit of self-defense is lacking. It appears that at the present time, the Vietcong are in the ascendancy in this province and are making progress. With the arrival of the new province chief, the situation seems to be improving somewhat, but the province is likely to remain in a very difficult situation until additional military forces are made available.

12. Ba Ruyen

Although some progress in the Strategic Hamlet program apparently was made in 1962, there has been little in the last six months. The province chief appears to be interested in it and determined to carry it out, but administration of the program has been weak. There has seemed to be a consistent confusion in priorities, with overly ambitious planning (either too well thought-out (especially in matters of relocation and the siting of new hamlets) nor too well executed. This situation has been aggravated by a lack of sufficient hamlet construction teams for the number of hamlets attempted, and by a lack of the military support necessary for planned extensions of the program in this area. Relatively few of the hamlets listed as completed seem to show adequate spirit, while many need much improvement.

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13. Phong Dinh

Initial progress in 1962 was good in this province but ceased in 1963 until the arrival of the new province chief, Major Di. The majority of the hamlets in the province still lack adequate defenses and adequate arms. Of the hamlets listed as complete, perhaps a third can be considered to have an adequate spirit of self-defense. With the new province chief, this situation is improving. The program continues to lack coordinated military support, despite the fact that the IV Corps Headquarters is located at Can Tho, but is making progress because of the interest and initiative of the Province Chief.

14. An Xuyen

The situation has definitely deteriorated in An Xuyen and the Vietcong are in the ascendancy in every area except Hai Yen. The U Minh Ha hamlets and those established by the Navy are under, at least secret, if not overt Vietcong control. Most of the hamlets in the province do not have adequate security and are inhabited by people hostile to the government. The only real progress in this province is in the Hai Yen area, where a few local families have begun to come in and ask for protection. Of the hamlets listed as complete in the province, only a very, very few have adequate security and even in these, morale is low. The main problem in this province is that adequate military support for the program does not exist and the program is over-extended into areas where the hamlet cannot be protected. It is suggested that an approach, different than the one used in the past, be adopted for the pacification of this area. The province is not believed suited for the Strategic Hamlet program in its classic form at the present time.

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