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PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATIVES REPORT FORM

PROVINCE OF LONG AN

6 December 1963

FOR MONTH OF NOVEMBER 1963

1. General Narrative on Progress.

The only progress made in Long An Province during the month of November 1963 has been by the Communist Viet Cong. The past thirty days have produced a day-by-day elimination of US/Vietnamese sponsored strategic hamlets and the marked increase in Viet Cong influence, military operations, physical control of the countryside and Communist controlled combat hamlets.

At the end of September 1963 Province Officials stated that 219 strategic hamlets were completed and met the six criteria. Effective 30 November 1963 this figure has been reduced to about 45 (forty-five) on the best estimates of MAAG, USOM and the new Province Chief, Major Dao. Twenty-seven hamlets were attacked in November. Compared with the figure of seventy-seven for June, this would appear to be an improvement. However, the explanation is a simple one: so many strategic hamlets have been rendered ineffective by the Viet Cong that only twenty-seven were worth attacking this month.

Of the 219 hamlets containing armed defenders (hamlet militia) in September, fifty remain armed today. The remainder have turned in their weapons or deserted.

The reason for this unhappy situation is the failure of the Government of Vietnam to support and protect the hamlets. The concept of the strategic hamlet called for a self-defense force capable of holding off enemy attack for a brief period until regular forces (ARVN, Civil Guard or SDC) could come to the rescue. In hamlet after hamlet this assistance never came, or, as in most cases, arrived the following morning during daylight hours. A few (ten or twelve) half-trained farmers armed with shotguns have neither the experience nor leadership to defend a large hamlet against an efficient guerrilla force, no matter how small. When it became known throughout the province that no help was forthcoming until daylight the will and desire to resist collapsed. From this point even three or four Viet Cong can-and do- demand entrance to the hamlet and receive it without opposition. The hamlet chief is murdered, the houses of all relocated families destroyed, the barbed wire fence is cut, and another hamlet is eliminated.

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Two explanations are presented for the lack of assistance.

1. There are not sufficient troops to protect key installations and district headquarters and at the same time go to the assistance of the hamlets.
2. Both official orders and policy prohibit the movement of troops after dark to go to the assistance of hamlets or isolated military posts.

Even today, the order by a Vietnamese military commander to one of his units to remain (not conduct operations, just remain) out overnight is so unusual that it brings marked comments and a faint light of hope to his US MAAG advisor.

What are the implications of this situation to the AID/Rural Affairs program?

The Provincial Agreement is tailored in each province to use the strategic hamlet program as its vehicle for improvement of the economic, social and security conditions of the Vietnamese people. Funds are provided for assistance in moving to the hamlet, for training hamlet defenders, for self-help projects to bring schools, medical treatment, agricultural improvement and in general to upgrade the standard of living through the joint efforts of the local population and American assistance. When the Viet Cong have gained control or so terrorized the residents of a hamlet these very worthwhile programs cannot succeed. That is the situation in Long An Province.

The Strategic Hamlet Program in this province can be made workable and very effective against the Viet Cong. But help must come immediately in the form of additional troops and new concepts of operation, not the same re-heated French tactics of 1954 beefed up with more helicopters and tanks. The hamlets must be defended if this province is not to fall under complete control of the Viet Cong in the next several months.

The newly assigned MAAG Advisor and the new Province Chief have all the earmarks of intelligent, dedicated and hard-working officers. But they must receive full support or their plans will never leave the conference room.

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