

HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
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SUBJECT: Report on Counterinsurgency in Republic of Vietnam

Background Info
File

TO: Chief, U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam
Commanding Officer, Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon
Commander, Second Air Division
Commanding Officer, U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam
Commanding Officer, U.S. Marine Corps Helo Unit, Vietnam

1. Attached is a copy of a report rendered by Brigadier General J. D. Hittle (U.S. Marine Corps Ret.) to Congressman L. Mendel Rivers, who as Chairman of Subcommittee No. 1 of the House Armed Services Committee had asked General Hittle for his observations on the situation in the Republic of Vietnam, based on a recent visit.

2. This letter was inserted in the Appendix of the Congressional Record 3 June 1963 by Congressman Rivers. It is desired that it be given wide dissemination within all components of this command.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

R. G. Weelde

R. G. WEEDE

Major General, U.S. Marine Corps
Chief of Staff

1 Incl
Brig Gen Hittle's
report

DISTRIBUTION

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TIDE IN VIET NAM TURNING IN OUR FAVOR,
U.S. GENERAL SAYS

Following is full text of a letter addressed by Brig. Gen. J. D. Hittle, U.S. Marine Corps, retired, to Congressman L. Mendel Rivers of South Carolina in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The letter was in answer, Gen. Hittle said, to Mr. Rivers' request "that I provide you with a few of my observations of the situation in South Viet Nam... based upon my recent visit".

Gen. Hittle's letter is inserted in the Appendix of the Congressional Record of June 3. The general declares that the United States can beat the Communists if "we do not falter in this desperate struggle for control of Viet Nam". (Ed)

Hon. L. Mendel Rivers,
Chairman, Subcommittee No. 1, Armed Services Committee,
U.S. House of Representatives, Washington D.C.

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your request that I provide you with a few of my observations of the situation in South Viet Nam. These observations, as you will recall, are based upon my recent visit to South Viet Nam, in company with Mr. Joseph Lombardo, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. On the basis of my observations both in Saigon and in the outer country area, and as a result of my conversations with United States and South Vietnamese military personnel and civilians, it is my firm impression that the tide has begun to turn in our favor in this bitter war in South Viet Nam. If the United States does not falter in the stretch, we can win this struggle, and it is a struggle which we cannot, from the standpoint of sheer national security, afford to lose.

It is evident that the tremendous effort over the past couple of years by the United States and by the South Vietnamese Government of President Diem has reached the point where these forces are now producing favorable results.

The basic indicators as to the trend of events are favorable to our efforts. These indicators include the trend in total areas controlled by the Communists and the South Vietnamese forces; the trend in defections from the Communists to the South Vietnamese; the casualty ratios between the Communists and the South Vietnamese and the progress being so demonstrably achieved in President Diem's strategic hamlet strategy.

The strategic hamlet strategy is basic to the entire war in South Vietnam. It involves, as I know you are aware, the concentration of the populace in fortified and defended villages. This has a twofold effect:

First, the protection of the people from Communist terrorism; and second, the depriving of the Communists of sources of food supply, arms, and personnel for impressment into their military and supporting forces.

In the course of our visit in South Vietnam, Mr. Lombardo and I visited several strategic hamlets. These, I would like to point out, were not in the Saigon area where the most immediate results might be expected, but rather in the forested high plateau country. The strategic hamlet program, I was reliably informed, has progressed in a most satisfactory manner and in some areas is almost 90 percent completed. This represents a most significant achievement on the part of President Diem's government.

I might mention also that one of the most significant and potentially decisive developments in South Vietnam has been the relatively recent swing of the Montagnard tribes to the pro-U.S. government of President Diem. The Montagnards are an aborigine -- probably Malay -- derivation people, totaling between probably 400,000 or 600,000, inhabiting the high plateau forest area, along the Laotian and Cambodian borders of South Viet Nam.

These Montagnards have been wooed by the Reds with promises and inducements, because of their importance in the ultimate outcome of this struggle. However, the Montagnards are giving their support to the Diem government in increasingly large numbers. These are two reasons for this: The terrorist tactics of the Reds have been ranged; and the farsighted sound policies of President Diem's government, with U.S. advice and assistance are gaining the confidence and allegiance of the Montagnards.

These tribesmen are intimately acquainted with Red infiltration routes along the Laotian and Cambodian borders. They are natural guerrilla fighters. Although many of them have hunted only with a cross bow, they respond quickly, as was evident during our visit to a Montagnard training base, to modern weapons and military organization. Their support of the anti-Communist government of President Diem constitutes a genuinely serious setback for the Reds.

One of the most interesting but not surprising aspects of what is going on in South Viet Nam is the truly magnificent service being performed by the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force personnel in that area.

I was particularly impressed by the enthusiasm, tireless efforts, and high level of professional competence of the military advisory team No. 33 which we visited in Ban Me Thuet. This is an area of the primitive Montagnards tribes, and one in which the guerrilla warfare is bitter. To U.S. military personnel, who are living under austere

standards, have gained the confidence of both the South Vietnamese regulars and the Montagnards. For instance, one of the U.S. Army advisers working with Montagnards has constructed a bamboo waterwheel at the small, but very important local agricultural school. As rudimentary as this bamboo waterwheel is, it is a completely new device to the Montagnards, who marvel at its ability to lift water a few feet from a small stream and irrigate the vegetable gardens and banana groves. Such ingenuity and sincere interest on the part of the U.S. personnel is typical of the contributions which our forces are making both in specific military matters as well as in economic and social endeavors.

In all of my conversations in Viet Nam with personnel of various ranks, I did not hear any complaints or griping as to the duty being performed by them. If I judge our fighting men correctly, they have no respect for those who are urging "bring our boys home," from South Viet Nam. Our military personnel there know the importance of what they are doing, the necessity, from the standpoint of U.S. security and that of the free world, of winning this war, and are effectively going about the job of gaining this objective.

It is only realistic, of course, to recognize that although the tide is beginning to turn in our favor in South Viet Nam, the road to success is going to be a long, laborious, and bloody one. In 1962, for instance, the South Viet Nam forces suffered 10,000 casualties. However, significantly, it is estimated that the Reds suffered 33,000 casualties.

In short, based upon my observations of the Military buildup, the spirit, and effectiveness of the forces, the remarkable progress being made with the strategic hamlet strategy, and the trends of the conflict, I believe it justifiable to conclude that if we continue the determined effort in South Viet Nam, the cruel Communist aggression in that vitally strategic area can be defeated.

Hoping this may be of some assistance to you, I remain

Respectfully,

J. D. Hittle