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A. R. PHILIPS

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: General OAI, Former Director General of Malaria Eradication Program

George F. Bogardus, Economic Section

DATE : July 17, 1962

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At dinner last night General Oai described his new job dealing with Strategic Hamlets as that of an inspector or controller of the Strategic Hamlet program. He is responsible for (1) preventing exploitation of the relocated peasantry by local officials, (2) preventing corruption or misuse of public funds or resources in the program, and (3) generally seeing that the funds and resources are applied in accordance with directives. He remarked that some families had had to pay up to VN \$10,000 for the privilege of being in a Strategic Hamlet.

Speaking generally of the counterinsurgency program, he gave as his opinion that there had been four main defects:

1. Lack of coordination between the regular army commanders on one hand and the provincial and district chiefs on the other; i.e., the provincial officials were reluctant to commit their Civil Guard and SDC forces in coordinated actions with the ARVN. He stated the president had recently signed a decree which gives divisional commanders the right to call on the Civil Guard and SDC forces in the division areas at any time.

2. He agreed that often local intelligence reports of VC activities could not be transmitted quickly enough to higher echelons for the information to be of value. He added, however, that the recent radio network setup in Binh Dinh Province was proving very valuable.

3. There was a general tendency among the Vietnamese all up and down the line to exaggerate the numbers and equipment of the VC. The VC had cleverly used exaggerated military nomenclature for their units, i.e., a group of platoon might be no more than 10 men, a company is often 50 men, etc. When the VC came into a hamlet in the middle of the night the villagers would commonly hear a VC cadre shouting orders for group so and so to deploy or for company number so and so to advance, and took them at face value. As these reports were relayed to district or provincial levels the district or provincial authorities

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sometimes exaggerated the units still further into companies and battalions in order to be sure of getting help. The same is true of weapons in that pistols and carbines were often reported as tommy guns, Bren guns and even light or heavy machine guns.

He added that the American Special Forces were doing excellent work among the Montagnards in combatting this sort of thing and training the Montagnards to give objective reports based upon an ability to distinguish various types of weapons.

4. There was a general tendency among the Vietnamese population to exaggerate the capabilities and the astuteness of the VC. Somehow or other people generally had the idea that the VC were cleverer than the government forces. Speaking mainly to Vietnamese friends present, the General insisted that the average VC cadre was a former coolie or rubber tapper who had simply received special training and was by no means shrewder or more intelligent than other Vietnamese.

On a slightly different tack, he alleged that the principal VC plan now was to gain control especially of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen Provinces which had been longest under VC control during the French regime. He stated that in Binh Dinh for example 60% of the population had relatives serving in the VC and that the proportion in the other two provinces was as great. The VC hoped to gain control of these provinces, by acclamation of the population, and to establish an insurgent capital at Qui Nhon. He stated there are at least 5,000 VC hiding in southern Laos to back up this program, aside from DRV forces in northern Laos.

cc: DCM  
POL  
✓USOM/Director  
USOM/Mr. Knox  
ARMATT

ECON:GFBogardus:ias

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