

SECOND INFORMAL APPRECIATION OF THE STATUS
OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

1. This is the second in a series of informal appreciations of the status of the Strategic Hamlet Program. This paper covers the period from 1 June to 31 August 1963. Province-by-Province commentaries were drafted by the USOM Rural Affairs Regional Field Representatives whose areas of responsibility correspond generally to the Corps Tactical Zones. These comments represent frank, apolitical, personal impressions and are not intended for general dissemination.

2. The Strategic Hamlet Program has continued to make steady and reasonably sure progress in all Corps Areas except the Delta. There the program has suffered serious reverses in many provinces, is in effect at a standstill in others and moving ahead slowly in only a few.

3. Progress has been best in the II Corps area in terms of completing the establishment phase of the program. However, even in this area by conservative estimates, no more than 50% of the hamlets constructed can be considered satisfactory from the point of view of possessing a true will to resist the Vietcong. Continued effort stressing hamlet development, to give the hamlet people an economic and political stake worth defending, is absolutely essential if the program is to succeed.

4. Progress in the First Corps has been considerably marred by the Buddhist problem which has reached deep into the countryside in at least two provinces, Thua Thien and Quang Tri. At the same time, spectacular progress has been made economically and socially in these same two provinces. Approximately 3000 families have received pigs, thus extending the program to the majority of the hamlets. Over 850 school class rooms have been constructed or rebuilt. Despite these gains, Government handling of the Buddhist problem has undoubtedly turned the population against it and while the hamlets may continue to defend themselves locally against the Vietcong, a dangerous vacuum in acceptable political leadership has been created at the central and possibly provincial government levels.

5. The III Corps area, provided with better political and military leadership than the Delta, continues to make slow but apparently sure progress. It should be recognized, however, that rapid progress is impossible in such provinces as Binh Duong, Tay Ninh and Phuoc Thanh, where the VC have long been entrenched and that pacifying this area is a project of several years duration.

6. The factors most critical to the success of the program have remained the same since the first appreciation, as have most of the problems which beset it. There is still an acute need for more effective and devoted local leaders who understand the fundamental principles of the program; above all for leaders who understand that popular support is absolutely essential to its success, as well as being its main objective. Where the program has been successful, this has been reflected in an emphasis upon quality (meaning popular enthusiasm) rather than quantity in the construction of hamlets.

7. One common weakness, most evident in the Delta, but generally prevalent, is the failure to integrate hamlet defense intelligently into military planning. Too many VC units of significant strength, at times company-size or larger, seem able to attack individual hamlets almost at will. Too often this weakness is aggravated by the lack of an adequate, rehearsed defense plan for the individual hamlet. The result can only be to so discourage the hamlet resident that the hamlet loses most of its psychological value.

8. In summary, the Strategic Hamlet program continues to progress, albeit at a slower rate than during the previous six months. The slowdown is due to a number of reasons of which the most important is undoubtedly the program's overextension and lack of sound planning and thorough execution during hamlet establishment. These ills can and will be cured by continued persistent, intelligent effort but they can be ignored only at the risk of endangering the whole program, and thereby the entire counterinsurgency effort. Progress must continue; in the consolidation/economic development phase for the hamlets already truly completed; in the winning of popular support in the other areas, perhaps through some modification of the program; or the war will be lost.

A. I CORPS and QUANG NGAI

1. General Observations

The trends and problems noted in the previous report have been generally confirmed by developments in this reporting period. However, the assignment of a USOM Provincial representative to each province has reduced the problem of coordination and points the way to more efficient and effective program implementation. The aggravation of the Buddhist/GVN disagreement has had a slight but increasing adverse impact upon the program, mainly by diverting the concentration of government officials. However, this situation is not uniform throughout the area. On the whole, the program continues to move forward in generally satisfactory fashion: strategic hamlets are constructed and consolidated, economic development projects are planned and carried out, and the people in the countryside continue to give active testimony of their appreciation of the program and their rejection of the Viet Cong.

2. Quang Tri

The province chief continues to provide active, constructive leadership, but there has been insufficient improvement in the capabilities of his staff. A three-man team which was formed to oversee Self-Help projects, suffered from two successive apathetic chiefs, and now has a third who has yet to prove himself. As a result only 36 Self-Help projects have been initiated. However, the two other members of the team have been learning their job and in a recent display of enthusiasm predicted that the Self-Help projects would move ahead at a quicker pace. Although the training of hamlet militia still lags behind, the province's militia training capability has recently been increased by constructing barracks for the trainees. Fortunately, V.C. activity in this province is slight, so the delay in militia training may not prove dangerous.

The pig raising program which has met a strongly favorable response in the countryside, is being pushed by the local authorities as fast as the pigs, corn and cement come into the province. The repair and rebuilding of typhoon-damaged schools has been completed. The schools are sturdily built to withstand typhoon winds, are elevated above flood level and are an attractive addition to the rural scene. The province should view this accomplishment with pride. Tribal people, who continue to present themselves for GVN protection and assistance, are being satisfactorily absorbed by the province. Buddhist protest activities have caused some diversion of provincial efforts, but only during a few periods of heightened tension has this caused a noticeable slowdown of strategic hamlet program activities.

3. Thua Thien

Prospects for an effective provincial rehabilitation program were greatly improved early in the period by the appointment of Mr. Ha as province chief. By word and deed, Mr. Ha displayed a strong belief

in the program, a capacity for action, and a desire to derive full benefit from his U.S. advisors. In contrast to his predecessor, Mr. Ha took an active interest in the program, was always available for consultation, had confidence in the USOM provincial representative, visited the sites of program activity, and planned for the future. His appointment was the one welcome by-product of the Buddhist/GVN conflict in the province, to date. Unfortunately, and disappointingly, Mr. Ha was dismissed in August for reasons unknown. His successor has so recently taken office that it has not been possible to form a fair opinion of his capabilities.

Thua Thien is one of the centers of Buddhist activity and civil servants in the province are noticeably disturbed and distracted from the Strategic Hamlet program. Nevertheless the program, over all, has momentum. The efficiently managed hog-corn program is welcomed by its beneficiaries. Particular credit should go to the NACO agents in the province. The deficiencies in this province continue to be those previously reported, but to a lesser degree, due to greater experience and the presence of a USOM provincial representative.

4. Quang Nam

Progress continues in the construction phase of the program. There is no reason to revise earlier estimates of the capabilities and limitations of the province chief and his staff. An extremely cautious man, he is slow in compensating families for housing relocation, saying that he is not certain of the amount of funds available for this purpose. Although the Provincial Representative has advised him of the total amount budgeted for this and has assured him that Saigon has approved, the Province Chief has refused to give prompt compensation because the amendment to the Release Agreement has not been issued.

A clash between Buddhists and government forces caused some tension, particularly in Hoi An, but it is difficult to determine to what, if any extent, this has interfered with the program. The talking fish story has attracted more overt attention in the province and adjacent areas, with no apparent effect on the program.

The province chief has expressed his appreciation of the promotion of local economic development and promised his active cooperation. Plans to increase sericulture require and will receive provincial participation. A recurrent problem, the transportation of MAP supplies, apparently results from inadequate coordination among the province, the 2nd Division and I CALC.

Mr. Dinh Xang, National Assembly Deputy for Duy Xuyen district, has taken a serious and practical interest in his district. After numerous meetings with his constituent, he has proposed a number of useful projects to RA.

5. Quang Tin

Although a full time USOM provincial representative was only recently appointed, the effects of his presence and advice are already noticeable, particularly in records maintenance. More important, the deputy province chief and, to a lesser extent the province chief, are developing greater appreciation of the importance of the non-military aspects of counter-insurgency. Nevertheless, the province remains the most deficient in program planning and implementation, and the most critical in I Corps in terms of V.C. activity. The recent assignment of ARVN units to the province has had a favorable effect, in permitting the implementation of the Phuoc Binh project which is progressing well, although not to the satisfaction of 2nd Division advisors. The 2nd Division, against the advice of the province, unrealistically shortened the time allowed for completion of the project.

Considering the factors of increased ARVN support, the capacity for administrative improvement in the province chief and his deputy, and the presence of a full time of USOM Provincial Representative, the prospects for the future are brighter. Nevertheless a generally weak provincial staff remains a serious problem.

6. Quang Ngai

Favorable developments in the province confirm the expectations in the previous report. Following the failure of the VC attacks in April, the people in the countryside continued to show their allegiance to the Government, particularly by providing information on the VC. In one instance, two farmers reported a VC hiding place. Four armed VC were surrounded there and killed. This was especially significant because the informants stated that they had known of these VC for over a year but had not previous thought it advisable to report them. The successes of the clear and hold operation, still in progress, has caused a substantial increasing the number of planned strategic hamlets.

The province chief and his staff have been energetic in economic development. Four irrigation dam projects are nearing completion and 15 others are planned. These projects receive their impetus from the economic development aspect of the strategic hamlet concept. The fertilizer program, considered a resounding success by provincial officials, has resulted in a bumper rice crop being expected.

The province chief and his strategic hamlet assistant continue to be energetic, farsighted, considerate of the population, and, in general, astute counter-insurgents. This leadership is reflected in the improving quality of the provincial staff. Buddhist agitation has been negligible.

Da Nang

The recently appointed Mayor, Colonel Chau, warrants mention. His energy, his constructive imagination, and the proposals he has made for the socio-economic improvement of Danang deserve support and assistance. Improvement in the economy of Danang will benefit and stimulate the regional economy.

B. II CORPS (less Quang Ngai)

1. General Observations

Progress in the Strategic Hamlet Program in II Corps has continued excellent since the last assessment. In the coastal provinces (with the exception of Quang Ngai) the construction of hamlets is largely complete. Because of the strongly entrenched position of the Communists in this area, however, continued and accelerated stress on hamlet development and improved hamlet defenses is absolutely essential.

As part of the overall counterinsurgency campaign in this area, the Chieu Hoi program should receive special emphasis. Large numbers of families in the coastal provinces in II Corps still have their relatives with the VC. Unless and until these relatives are either eliminated by military action or induced to return, the Strategic Hamlet program cannot be considered a complete success.

In the coastal provinces some economic development has begun. The pig raising program has produced dramatic results although only on a small scale to date. Due to the impoverishment of this area, much remains to be done before the average hamlet inhabitant can equate the Strategic Hamlet Program with a new way of life. Unless the government can deliver on the economic, political and social promises inherent in the program as well as on security, the overall pacification effort, of which the hamlet program is the core, will not succeed.

The Strategic Hamlet Program in the Highlands has also made tremendous progress, particularly in Kontum and Phu Bon. If the present rate and effectiveness of support to the Highland provinces in II Corps continues, they should be largely pacified by the end of the next dry season. In these provinces mere security means more to the people than it does in the coastal plain. However, even with the Montagnards, this program must bring with it real hope for progress. Specifically, Montagnards must be provided with more schools and teachers and with improved agriculture techniques, implements and seeds. There must be tangible progress beyond the security stage in the Highlands as well as in the coastal provinces.

The critical factor to the success of the program in both the Highland and Lowland provinces in the II Corps area remains the quality of the provincial leadership. Generally, this has been good but the recent replacement of one province chief and the rumored replacement of an other (in Binh Dinh) has adversely affected local morale. The replacements may well turn out to be more effective, but all must learn, more quickly than heretofore, that their ultimate success and that of the program depends on their respect for the will of the governed (the hamlet people). The required injection of

democratic spirit into local leadership is still too slow in developing.

Lastly, it is apparent that the deteriorating political situation nationally has adversely affected the progress of the program in the II Corps area, although not as yet to a critical degree.

2. Binh Dinh Province

Progress has continued slowly but steadily in the construction of hamlets in this province with a total of 675 expected to be complete by the end of September. Hamlets have seemed to be an effective defense here against the VC, although considering how strongly the VC are entrenched in this province, their opposition to the hamlet program has been astonishingly light.

The province chief, Mr. Duyen, has proven to be a capable administrator but demonstrates little confidence in the people. The hamlet elections in this province have not been as free as in others. The self-help program has been largely stymied by the province chief's conviction that he must insist on revenue earning projects. He believes that their purpose should be to relieve the province from paying hamlet committee salaries, rather than to benefit the individual hamlet. The training and arming of hamlet militia has picked up in the past three months; however, only 60% of those trained have been armed to date.

In summary, although superficial progress continues in this province, it is difficult to gauge its depth. Since the ultimate success of the program is largely dependent upon the political spirit generated in the hamlets, prospects for ultimate victory do not appear bright unless the province administration changes its basic approach to the population.

3. Phu Yen Province.

The Strategic Hamlet construction is largely completed in the province except for interior areas where special combat hamlets are planned. A proposal for support of these hamlets is under consideration.

Progress in depth has been achieved on several fronts in Phu Yen. For the first time the provincial technical services are actively cooperating in carrying out development programs which touch several technical fields and the Vietnamese technicians are getting out in the hamlets.

The pig program has been a spectacular success and has greatly boosted morale. Chicken, sweet potato, and corn raising projects are sufficiently extensive to have a wide-spread psychological effect. The fertilizer program was a success.

Over one hundred self-help projects have been completed, some with spectacular success. In one hamlet a market is earning sufficient revenue to pay several school teachers.

Resistance to VC attacks on hamlets has been generally good and successful. Of 23 attacks during the month of July all 23 were successfully repelled. Final statistics are not available for August but indications are that hamlet attacks are beginning to fall off.

The province chief, Lt. Col. Hsai, spends most of his time out in the hamlets. He has demonstrated a sincere interest in the welfare of the population, as evidenced by his price in the turn-over in village administrative personnel during the recent village elections. An estimated 75% new faces came into office.

The combination of adequate security, political reform and improvement in local government and intensive economic development efforts have all contributed to the high morale of this province. If these efforts can be continued and intensified over the coming two years, VC influence will be almost entirely eliminated.

4. Phu Bon

The past months have shown a continued marked improvement in Phu Bon. The difficulties inherent in the formation of a new province - lack of skilled administrative personnel, communications, services, and security - have to a great extent been overcome. Forceful and intelligent action on the part of the Province Chief combined with close coordination between the U. S. military and economic assistance programs have resulted in a degree of security and economic activity previously unknown in this area. Of a proposed total of 5400 people, 4100 have now been settled in strategic hamlets. Over 2000 hamlet militia have been trained, armed and returned to their hamlets. Not one strategic hamlet has been attacked or overrun since the formation of the Province one year ago.

Better security, improved routes of communication and guaranteed salaries of the many new personnel brought into the Province have greatly encouraged commercial activity. Business establishments in the city of Hau Bon alone have increased from 83 in November 1962 to 153 by August 1963. A completely new market place is almost finished, constructed of permanent materials. The increase in business establishments - particularly two saw mills, a brick kiln, and a concrete block and tile manufacturing concern - mirror the belief of the local people that the government is in Phu Bon to stay, and the VC threat is passing. Over 145 former VC have defected to the government under the Chieu Hoi program.

In summary, the refugee resettlement problem has been met and overcome, the strategic hamlet program is a success and the people of Phu Bon are solidly against the VC. If hamlet economic development is continued, they will so remain.

5. Kontum

Substantial progress continues in Kontum under the leadership of an extremely capable province chief. Hamlet establishment has proceeded virtually as planned. Approximately 240 strategic hamlets have been organized containing 70 to 80 percent of the population. A spirit of hamlet resistance definitely exists and appears to be growing stronger, given teeth by 3000 armed militia. The pace of hamlet economic-social development is beginning to quicken. In addition to the caliber of the province chief, the basis of success has been close civil-military cooperation and a relationship of mutual respect between GVN officials and the Montagnards.

6. Pleiku

The program is steadily gathering momentum. The pace of hamlet establishment is not fast but the quality of the 130 hamlets completed is high. The province chief is proceeding on the theory that the first requirement should be to help the people in strategic hamlets build a better life, and that the physical security of the hamlets is the second objective. While there is good reason that pursuit of both goals be concurrent, it is more important and extremely heartening to see this overriding concern for the people on the part of the province chief. Much more work in all phases of the program is necessary but the main prerequisites for success have been met. It is believed that the new province chief, Major Dinh, will keep up this work.

C. III Corps

1. General Observations

All counter-insurgency programs in the III Corps Region continued to show progress, undramatic for the most part but steady. Progressively increasing effort was made in most provinces to complete as many strategic hamlets as possible by 30 June. The period since has emphasized consolidation, slowed by crop demands and preparation for the National Assembly elections.

Some diminution in Viet Cong activity was evident in most provinces; however, several widely separated well-planned and executed actions were initiated by obviously well-trained and directed enemy units. The main VC effort continued to be in the Phuoc Thanh - Binh Duong - Tay Ninh area with repeated attacks and incidents occurring throughout the period.

Chieu Hoi results for the period were generally good, some 2000 Quicanh (returnees) having come in since the program began. Most provinces were slow to realize the value of this program and but few sufficiently exploited its intelligence, and other opportunities. Now, however, most provinces tend to emphasize it, seeking a greater yield in both intelligence and in better, more productive citizens.

Provincial interest in hamlet economic development has been slow, most preferring to leave this to the second major phase of the program. Only 12 of the seventeen provinces in the Region have approved formal hamlet self-help project requests which were financed under the initial USOM release agreements. However, at district, village and hamlet level the people themselves in some instances are providing for their own public needs indicating the emergence of community spirit and cooperative action. Even though there has been little provincial action to assist hamlet economic and social development, most province chiefs are preparing to enter the hamlet development phase with the same sense of purpose that marked the establishment phase.

One evidence of this is the interest being shown in provincial strategic hamlet demonstration/training centers. Darlac, Tay Ninh, Tuyen Due, Binh Long, Long Khanh and Lam Dong have centers started; Quang Due, Binh Tuy, Phuoc Tuy and Phuoc Long have designated areas and will soon start; and the others are expected to open centers in the near future, some in conjunction with the Chieu Hoi operation.

Province chiefs and officials evince increasing concern for the economic potential of each hamlet. Where individual land holdings are only at subsistence level, there is an effort to allocate additional (uncleared) land, thus promising better living standards. Also, much thought and some

action is being given to establishment of hamlet industries. The Region's own pig program now has about 100 pigs in the provinces, with an increase of 60 per month. Soon it hopes to add livestock, chickens, rabbits and goats and eventually make the program self-supporting within provincial demonstration/training centers.

First phase elementary schools and teacher training are progressing satisfactorily. Several provinces have already commenced teacher training and school construction without waiting for formal approval. Several hamlets have financed and constructed their own schools without outside aid. Other public facilities, including health stations, wells, public halls, roads, bridges, etc., are being provided both under formal programs and by the people themselves. This progress, however, is spotty and definitely the exception, not the rule. Most new hamlets in the Region lack some, if not all, of the essential public facilities.

All present province chiefs in this Region appear competent, effective, and dedicated. Most are keenly concerned with their civil as well as military responsibilities, an attitude usually reflected by the people. With some exceptions, district chiefs appear to be dedicated, competent and usually well-informed of popular needs and desires. As a generalization, the first area of real weakness is found among the provincial technical service chiefs and their subordinates. There are many exceptionally competent individuals but they are too few. Most seem to know their jobs but lack aggressiveness and flexibility.

Provincial committees, composed of the province chief and his MAAG and USOM/RA advisors, operating under policies and procedures established at higher levels, have become an integral part of the provincial counter-insurgency program. Their decisions have usually been sound, considerably lessening the time between plan and action.

In sum, much has been accomplished in this Region, and much remains to be done. The future is bright, if the pace continues.

2. Bien Hoa

Of the planned 207 strategic hamlets in Bien Hoa 180 are completed and the other 27 under construction for the most part lack only MAP support and USOM funding. Security in the province is substantially improved and reaction time by provincial forces to VC incidents and sightings is good.

The province has entered its social development phase of the strategic hamlet program and will move into a formal hamlet economic development phase (to last about one year) in late October. The provincial school program,

financed by Asia Foundation, is proceeding satisfactorily. A number of informal hamlet self-help projects have been undertaken and completed by the people. The province which maintains a Chieu Hoi Center in the capitol, has to date received 148 Qui Chanh.

The forceful, energetic province chief, Major Tran Van Dinh, age 32, is one of the best administrators in the Region. He is assisted by a responsive staff and good district chiefs. His undertakings are thoroughly planned and well executed.

3. Binh Duong

Hamlet establishment in this province continues against determined, heavy enemy resistance. Virtually all hamlets north and west of the chief town of Phu Cuong necessarily require "clear and hold" operations and the semi-permanent commitment of ARVN, CG, or SEC forces. Premature arming of hamlet militia has resulted in substantial losses of weapons. The ARVN 5th Division has assumed full responsibility for pacifying some areas, including the establishment of hamlets. Militarily these efforts have been successful, though costly. The troops, too, often lack true understanding of the importance and meaning of military civic action, merely performing specific construction tasks under orders. These, although helpful, do little to cement the understanding between military and civilians which results when operations are conducted by forces close to the people and under the province chief with his combined civil-military mission.

Though resistance is strong and friendly command control divided, substantial gains are being made in the strategic hamlet program. Of the 205 hamlets planned, 103 are carried as completed and 50 under construction. Population included is 209,944 out of the provincial total of 302,655. Social and economic development, including a few formal self-help projects, is being conducted in selected hamlets with no provincial programs in effect. These significant hamlet level programs include a self-help school, health stations, agricultural and livestock programs, all well-received by the people. Some 383 Qui Chanh have rallied and a gradual change in popular attitudes in some previously hostile areas is observable.

Province chief Major Tran Van Minh, is steady and dependable. His is probably the most difficult province in the region due to the concentration of military action, both friendly and enemy, and the resultant civil problems. His provincial staff seems below average but he has several able district chiefs. Progress in this province is not spectacular but is steady.

4. Binh Long

This province leads the Phuoc-Binh Thanh Special Zone in its rural rehabilitation programs. Of 95 strategic hamlets projected, 89 are completed or under construction, accounting for over 96% of the 81,102 provincial population. Concurrently, the province is moving ahead rapidly with social and economic development programs. School and hamlet health station construction, teacher and health worker training have started and planning for expanding these programs continues. A number of formal hamlet Self-Help projects has been started and some hamlets have undertaken others of their own initiative. In two areas where individual land holdings were too meager, the province has encouraged self-help clearing of land for distribution among the people. An excellent provincial demonstration/training center established in June 1963 now offers agricultural training to the people. Provincial officials actively participate in this program.

Viet Cong activity is sporadic, sometimes intense, in this province which is an important enemy communication route and borders the Viet Cong "Zone D" (Phuoc Thanh) and Duong Minh Chau (Tay Ninh) base areas. There is a VC concentration nearby in Binh Duong Province. The VC initiated several significant actions during the period. More are to be expected, although the province has a good intelligence system and maintains reasonable security in most areas. Only 420 hamlet militia have been trained (193 armed) of the 1620 authorized. Upon completion of militia training, the posture of the province vis-a-vis the Viet Cong should be substantially improved. Sixty-four VC have voluntarily returned to provincial control. It is believed that the current low returnee rate is due to Viet Cong movement of recruits to Cambodia for training.

Province Chief, Major Le Van Hy, age 41, former deputy to Lieutenant Colonel Dien in Phuoc-Long Province, is an energetic, aggressive officer and competent province chief. Responsive to the desires of the people, he has a keen understanding of the capabilities and needs of the approximately 20,000 Montagnards in the province. He is assisted by an able deputy and about average staff and district chiefs.

5. Binh Thuan

By June 30th Binh Thuan Province had completed 180 hamlets (20 more than planned) which now contain about 99% of the provincial population. The hamlets to a high degree meet the IC/SI criteria, having elected councils, trained and armed militia and generally satisfactory defenses. Several Hamlet Self-Help projects are underway and more planned to include all hamlets. Elementary school teachers have been trained and 33 USOM-sponsored hamlet classrooms under construction are to be completed during September. Provincial concern with hamlet public facility improvement and economic development has resulted in new wells, dispensaries, road repair, market place construction, school repair, etc. Significantly, this province was selected to pilot the second (hamlet social-economic development) phase of the National Strategic Hamlet Program. It will be the first province visited by a joint VN Interministerial/USOM economic development team.

Militarily, much of Binh Thuan remains insecure. The VC still have a substantial strike capability in curving areas and harassing capability in all areas. A divisional operation designed to clear the Binh Tuy-Lam Dong border stronghold is underway. The province chief is waiting only for USOM-IC/SN approval for additional Chieu Hoi and relocation funding to start "Clear and Hold" operation in the Le Hong Phung coastal strip. During this operation the active Chieu Hoi program (729 returnees so far) will be expanded and heavily emphasized as a means of attracting the estimated 2470 provincial residents still with the VC.

Province chief, Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Quoc Hoang, about 34 is an aggressive and able administrator. Three years in his post have made him thoroughly familiar with it and with the needs and desires of the people. Having a rural background, he quickly grasped the possibilities of the Strategic Hamlet program. He often sits with the hamlet officials and people, listening to their problems and acting on them on the spot. His own ability and quickness of decision work against delegation of authority to his provincial staff, but have a less detrimental effect on his seven district chiefs, four of whom are capable and fully qualified (Captain Phung of Thien Giao District exceptionally so) and three mediocre.

6. Binh Tuy

The Strategic Hamlet program in Binh Tuy has entered a consolidation period. Of the 63 hamlets planned, 47 are completed. The remaining 16 are land development centers with housing arrangements and defenses under construction to meet the criteria for strategic hamlets.

Most Viet Cong strength is in the border areas, especially near to Binh Thuan Province. A divisional operation, now going on, may relieve the tension in this area denying an important salt route and croplands to the VC. Except for one well-coordinated multiple action against the railroad, a hamlet and a road ambush, Viet Cong incidents have been generally minor. The province which has a good intelligence system recently captured a large communist inter-hamlet cell. The Chieu Hoi program was started early with 143 Qui Thanks total, 57 since 17 April. The Chieu Hoi Center is adequate.

Plans for hamlet economic development are being made and the province chief has designated an area for a provincial strategic hamlet demonstration/training center, soon to be opened. Thirty-seven formal self-help projects have been approved.

7. Derlac

Stepped up VC activity, high-lighted by a synchronized six-hamlet attack on 24 July, and including other attacks, ambushes and harassing actions showed weaknesses in hamlet defense organization and militia training which the province is attempting to rectify. One weakness was the lack of exterior patrolling by hamlet militia, which has now been ordered. To secure improved hamlet alarm systems some hamlets have placed geese and dogs between their outer and inner fences. Militiamen to be armed are more carefully chosen, preference being given

to members of the Republican Youth. The recent Viet Cong activity does not indicate deteriorated security, although the rate of hamlet completions slowed while existing hamlets were being reevaluated and some hamlets remain vulnerable to VC attack.

Darlac Province has combined its Chieu Hoi Center with its new strategic hamlet demonstration/training center to excellent advantage. The center, probably the most advanced in the country, is being equipped to provide a wide variety of training. Of 110 Qui Chanks, 68 have received a month's agricultural, sanitation, and other training at the Center and returned to their homes. A second class for the other 42 will start soon.

All but 16 of 316 planned strategic hamlets are completed. The 16 are under construction. Self-help has proceeded slowly, but the province now appears ready to enter hamlet economic development.

The province chief, Major Hoang Thong, age 30, from Central Vietnam, is competent but unduly cautious in exploiting his resources. More emphasis should be placed on the needs and desires of the Montagnard population. His insufficiently responsive staff may account for many of the deficiencies noted. On the whole, weaknesses in administration seem more than offset by accomplishments. The rate of progress of Darlac compares favorably with others in the region.

8. Gia Dinh

Gia Dinh Province has completed establishment of its total 307 hamlets and is now preparing to enter the hamlet economic development phase. Intermittent Viet Cong harassment in the southern and western border areas adjacent to Long An Province is not considered serious. The province does not use ARVN forces, employing only hamlet militia augmented by SDC and CG in its defense. Qui Chanks returning to provincial control aggregate 249 of whom 165 have returned since 17 April.

The province, composed of urban, suburban and rural hamlets, and the largest provincial population in the region (741,206), had many unique and complex problems in implementing earlier counter-insurgency programs. That all of the population is now in hamlets and the entire province is relatively secure is much to the credit of the provincial officials.

The province chief, Major Nguyen Duc Xich, is an able administrator, well known and respected in the province, particularly by the rural population. His district chiefs are competent and his staff at least average.

9. Khanh Hoa

Khunh Hoa Province has established about 240 out of its planned total of 286 Strategic Hamlets. Few hamlets have been attached in the province and an adequate evaluation of the quality of the hamlets has yet to be made.

Some hamlet development is being accomplished. More than 20 hamlets have completed Self-Help projects. However, overall progress in hamlet construction and development has slowed in the last two months due mainly to the Buddhist problem. Maintaining control over the young Buddhist monks at the Buddhist College in Nha Trang and over pro-Buddhist sympathizer has occupied a major portion of the Province Chief's time. He has accomplished this without noticeable violence.

A large 23rd ARVN Division operation during June was totally unsuccessful in establishing control with the Montagnards in the southern part of the province. A subsequent province-directed, two-company operation brought 356 Roglai Montagnards voluntarily out of the mountains west of Nha Trang.

A number of valleys and large mountainous areas of this province, containing reportedly sizeable VC concentrations, remain untouched. The final outcome of the Strategic Hamlet program in this province will probably not only depend upon getting into the mountains but also upon assisting the Montagnards to defend themselves in place rather than total evacuation and resettlement near the coastal strip.

The province chief, Major Le Tap, is an aggressive and active individual; however, he has demonstrated on occasion a degree of callousness towards the welfare of the population, particularly the Montagnards, which makes questionable the depth of any popular support for the GVN in this province.

10. Lam Dong

This province, after a poor start, has surged ahead in recent months in both hamlet establishment and socio-economic development. The previously non-existent provincial committee (Province Chief, Sector Advisor, USOM Representative) now meets regularly and now is a most important instrument for implementing provincial counter-insurgency programs. Earlier, often unwarranted, attacks by insufficiently informed people hindered the earlier operations, but now appear to have subsided.

The relatively few Viet Cong in the province, sporadically harass communication arteries and some hamlets. VC ambushes usually are well planned and boldly conducted. Most of the Viet Cong in the province come from other areas, so there have been Qui Chanh. Exploitation of returnees for information is satisfactory and their political reorientation and retraining is well done.

International Voluntary Service personnel have been active in developing a base for agricultural, public facilities and other improvements in the hamlets. This, combined with a provincial strategic hamlet demonstration/training and Chieu Hoi Center now under construction should facilitate the economic development phase.

Of the 101 strategic hamlets planned, 62 are complete and 26 more will be completed in September. The remaining 13 are Montagnard combat hamlets which must be coordinated with military "clear and hold" operations. Refugees resettled number 6,658 with an estimated 3,000 Montagnards remaining scattered in Viet Cong dominated areas. A definite improvement in the quality of hamlet construction and refugee resettlement is apparent.

The province chief, Major Nguyen Van Tai, age 36, a Marine officer, is a dedicated, considerate individual, ably assisted by Mr. Thanh, and Captain The. The provincial staff and district chiefs are above average. Key personnel appear to have a grasp--both in concept and execution--of the counter-insurgency programs.

11. Long Khanh

The Strategic Hamlet program in Long Khanh Province is proceeding steadily against generally minor Viet Cong resistance. The few VC based in Long Khanh are mostly along the Binh Tuy and Phuoc Tuy borders. However, transient VC crossing the province make most areas unsafe.

The province has now completed 77 hamlets and has 24 more under construction. The population affected is 94% of the 113,767 total. Quality of most hamlets is high by IC/SH criteria although arming of hamlet militia is proceeding slowly.

Although few Viet Cong come from the province, there have been 81 Qui Chanh. Major Du is quick to exploit information from Qui Chanh and other sources which helps to explain the province's relatively low incident rate,

The province is just now starting in the hamlet economic development phase. An excellent provincial strategic hamlet demonstration/training center has been started. Scheduled for the second phase of the elementary school construction program, the province expects to start immediately seeking to speed teacher training and completion.

The province chief, Major Huynh Van Du, age about 37, a Buddhist, is a good leader of proven competence and considerate of the people. He has had good district chiefs and a staff of varying quality. Both district chiefs are said to have recently been reassigned.

12. Ninh Thuan

This province continues as a pacesetter for the strategic hamlet program. All of its 127 planned hamlets have been constructed, have elected and trained hamlet committees, have trained and armed hamlet militia, and have commenced hamlet development programs. In addition the USOM financed elementary school program is nearing completion with 30 classrooms under construction and all teachers trained. The province participated in the USOM sponsored fertilizer program distributing over 1200 tons of commercial fertilizer, which should reduce the 3,000 tons annual rice deficit. Self-Help projects have been proposed by all hamlets with some started in each of the four districts.

The overall provincial military situation remains good. Only two or three VC companies operate in the province and few significant actions are reported. Security is adequately maintained with CG and SDC plus hamlet militia. Due to the quiet military situation, the Caiue Noi program has produced only ten Qui Chanh.

Chief of province, Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Kim Khanh, is an experienced, able and cautious administrator. He has been in the province for three years and is well-known by the people. Conservative by nature, he delegates authority well to his provincial assistants and district chiefs.

13. Phuoc Long

A marked improvement in the quality of new strategic hamlets followed the VC action against five Montagnard hamlets early in 1963; high quality defense perimeter construction and improved defense organization still continues. Existing hamlets have been little improved and little interest shown in hamlet economic development.

The province chief, Lieutenant Colonel Do Van Dien, age about 30, also Phuoc-Binh-Thanh Special Zone Commander and province chief of Phuoc Thanh Province, is preoccupied with more pressing tasks in Phuoc Thanh, the Viet Cong Zone D stronghold. This often has slowed Phuoc Long counter-insurgency progress. For example, hamlet economic development, is largely left to the Land Development Agency which tends to favor Vietnamese hamlets. Implementation delays occur in matters needing the province chief's approval.

In his absence the province is administered by competent, dedicated Major Hoang Don Than, Deputy Province Chief, ably assisted by Mr. Huynh van Ngai, Deputy for Internal Security and Strategic Hamlets. Mr. Ngai is well informed on programs, reasonably resourceful, steady and conscientious. The provincial staff is considered average. Of the district chiefs, two are above and two below average. One (Dien Yen, Phuoc Binh District) is a Stieng Montagnard.

There are about 3,000 Montagnards along the northeastern and northwestern border areas of the province who are not under provincial control, and presumably forced to aid the Viet Cong to some extent. There has been only sporadic Viet Cong activity during the period. The border area adjacent to Quang Duc province is a known enemy supply route and other areas from time to time contain transient VC. There have been only 14 Qui Chanh.

14. Phuoc Thanh

Phuoc Thanh has made considerable progress since Lt. Col. Do Van Dien, Phuoc-Binh-Thanh Special Zone Commander, assumed the additional duty of province chief. Although no hamlets have been completed, 41 of the 44 planned are under construction and should all be complete by the end of December. Except for such items as elections and hamlet militia, 16 of the 41 meet most of the IC/SN criteria.

Most of the population has long been under Viet Cong control. The important Viet Cong "Zone D" base and training area occupies approximately four-fifths of the province. Strategic hamlets are sited along the western and southwestern borders in an effort to interdict VC communication routes to Binh Duong, Tay Ninh and the Delta. The VC frequently penetrate these hamlets which, due to the questionable loyalty of the population, must be defended by provincial SDC, Civil Guard and ARVN units. Despite these enemy advantages, Colonel Dien is progressively improving hamlet defense structures and organization, while using his forces to harass the VC deep within their base area. The VC still retain a substantial offensive capability.

Lt. Col. Dien, an exceptional individual and an able provincial administrator, is particularly effective in counter-guerrilla and other military operations, naturally tending to emphasize these at the expense of social and economic considerations. The provincial Chieu Hoi program is proceeding slowly with plans for greater exploitation in the near future.

The Strategic Hamlet program in this province was poorly administered by the previous chief. Today a concentrated effort is being made to bring the hamlets up to desired standards and to afford adequate protection for their inhabitants. Measured against past performance, progress has been exceptional in hamlet security, only satisfactory in hamlet social-economic development.

15. Phuoc Tuy

Of the 162 hamlets planned, 135 are completed and 26 under construction accounting for 98.5% of the 137,891 provincial population. Recently completed hamlets have much improved defenses, indicating recognition of their importance. Trained and armed hamlet militia now number 1212, about two-fifths of the total authorized. Of the 810 authorized hamlet officials, 765 have been elected and trained, and all but one of the completed hamlets have submitted Self-Help projects for approval.

Viet Cong activity in the province usually is conducted by a number of small, well-entrenched units. These are being gradually reduced and apparently not replaced, resulting in a general improvement in security. There have been 83 Qui Chan since 17 April.

The province is pushing teacher training and some classroom construction. One large new school in Bat Do District has been completed, financed completely by the people. In addition, plans are under way for a provincial strategic hamlet demonstration/training center and hamlet-level economic development.

The province chief, Major Le Qui Do, is an able administrator who delegates effectively to his district chiefs and provincial staff, most of whom are excellent civil servants. The province chief and his staff have personally participated in hamlet defense construction and in other ways set an example.

16. Quang Duc

This is a relatively new province with some 10,000 resettled coastal Vietnamese and approximately 20,000 Montagnards regrouped into strategic hamlets. Since both people and hamlets are new to the area, greater than usual assistance has been needed in the development of roads, resources, industries, agriculture and public facilities. Much of this has been done by the offices of Land Development and Public Works; also, substantial assistance has been given by such agencies as CARE. The province chief, Colonel Ho Nghia's military background has been evidenced in the Strategic Hamlet construction program. The province was on schedule with 60 completed strategic hamlets by 30 June. It is now engaged in constructing three additional hamlets and subdividing others for a new provincial total of 76. All hamlets markedly meet the IC/SH criteria. Security considerations and the economic potential of areas selected were included in hamlet placement. In many respects, this is one of the best organized provinces in the region.

The Viet Cong maintain few regular forces here. For about five months, enemy contact occurred only during operations by provincial forces. Since mid-summer, however, VC have initiated some actions. The security situation seems generally good, with 644 trained and armed hamlet militia, about half those authorized. There have been 44 Qui Chanh, of whom 37 have been returned to their homes. Montagnard refugees who have come under provincial control over the past year number 16,774, with an estimated 20,000 remaining in the border areas of the province not yet under provincial control.

Colonel Nghia has selected sites and submitted plans for four provincial demonstration/training centers and it now awaiting IC/SH action before construction and proceeding with other hamlet economic development plans. Noteworthy, the D/T center sites selected are on land recently vacated as "farmed-out" by Montagnards. The province chief is seeking dramatically to prove the value of land revitalization to the Montagnards.

17. Tay Ninh

Measured against established formal criteria of the Strategic Hamlet program, Tay Ninh Province is making only acceptable progress. But if measured against the overall national counterinsurgency effort, Tay Ninh probably stands among the first in its region. The sparsely populated northern half of the province with its 211 kilometer Cambodian border for many years has been under virtually complete Communist domination and contains the important Dong Nai Chau Vietcong war zone. The southern half, previously controlled by Cao Dai sect armies, has for the past several years been, and outside the strategic hamlets still is, under strong VC influence. VC strength approaches a division and since the first strategic hamlet was completed in September 1961, the VC have actively resisted the program. Probes and harassment of hamlets occur regularly. The province chief, mostly using CG and SDC forces, has nevertheless maintained a kill and captured rate over the VC in excess of seven to one; weapons losses by each side have been about even. Few of the hamlet probes have resulted in significant penetrations. There are increasing indications that many of the people now support the strategic hamlet program. The people are giving intelligence, trained and armed militia, positively defend their hamlets, and there is voluntary relocation into strategic hamlets by individuals and communities.

The province chief, Major Vu Duc Huan, North Vietnamese, about 37, is a competent leader who delegates effectively to his staff and district chiefs, but is overly cautious when dealing with higher authority. Recent changes in the provincial staff should benefit rural rehabilitation and other counterinsurgency programs.

Slow but steady, the strategic hamlet construction program has proceeded slowly but steadily. The province has concentrated effort on consolidation of hamlets planned from 199 to 157. There has been much useful effort to improve existing hamlet defenses and defense organization. There are 102 completed hamlets and 23 more will be completed by November.

The provincial Chieu Hoi program seems well above average in number of Qui Chanh and program quality. Qui Chanh numbered 465 by mid-August; including 48 in July.

The province, slow to start, is now a corps leader in plans for hamlet economic development. A provincial strategic hamlet demonstration/training center is well underway. It is designed to demonstrate and train in agriculture, public works, public health, etc., under the auspices of the provincial technical services. The amended USOM release agreement enabled a start on economic development which is proceeding satisfactorily in seven critical hamlets.

18. Tuyen Duc

Provincial rehabilitation is being accelerated and effectively "brought to the people" by the province chief. When feasible, weekly provincial committee meetings are held in a hamlet, with the local elected committeemen invited to participate. The hamlets are well constructed and well planned to allow for future public facilities, as well as immediate needs. Also, the adequacy of previously constructed defenses is being checked and permanent live fortifications encouraged. Of the planned 136 strategic hamlets, 105 are complete and another 17 under construction. There are 731 trained and armed militia.

Except in the An Lac area, VC activity in the province is relatively minor. The Vietnamese population element is strongly anti-communist, so Viet Cong recruitment has been ineffective. As a result, the Chieu Hoi program has been of little benefit and there have been no Qui Chanh.

The youthful province chief, Major Ngo Nhu Bich, is an intelligent and dynamic individual. His senior staff is capable. Civic leaders of Dalat and Tuyen Duc have been active and helpful in useful programs for community betterment. Also, with the assistance of Asia Foundation and International Voluntary Services, the province was one of the first to achieve a provincial (agricultural) demonstration training center. Asia Foundation is now financing the provincial school program.

D. IV CORPS

1. General Observations

Developments in the Delta over the last quarter present a disturbing picture. The Strategic Hamlet concept appears at present unsuited for the Chuong Thien-An Xuyen area and parts of Ba Xuyen and Kien Giang. Provinces where the program's progress had appeared good--such as Long An and Vinh Binh--now show that hamlet construction was extended beyond provincial capability to administer, and with insufficient military coordination, resulting in excessive vulnerability to the V.C. Successful resistance (as in Kien Hoa) hides the potential danger that several decisive enemy triumphs over hamlets may damage morale more than a number of probing attacks, successfully resisted, raises it. The validity of the hamlet militia program in the Delta is still being tested.

A mechanical approach to the Strategic Hamlet program continues in many provinces due to unrealistic central pressure, and to officials' lack of understanding of the program and their insensitivity to the population. Notable exceptions are Kien Hoa, Kien Phong and Vinh Minh.

2. Long An

Progress in Long An has been severely hampered since early June. Viet Cong activity has greatly increased, much of its terrorism directed against the hamlet program. A serious troop shortage has been evident and is further aggravated by large commitments to static defense positions. The hamlet militia have responded poorly--lacking troop support and confidence, they have offered little resistance to attacks. In many instances they have retired from patrol and guard before midnight, permitting easy VC penetration in the early hours.

It now appears that the large relocation and hamlet construction efforts of March through May have overextended provincial capabilities, both in formal troop support and in militia training.

It is hoped that the presence of more troops on mobile assignment to Long An (and Dinh Tuong), emphasis on consolidation rather than on expansion, the training of additional hamlet militia, and the recommended introduction of high calibre civic action cadre to work in completed hamlets will reverse the recent deterioration in Long An.

Major Nguyen Ngoc Xinh, who replaced Major Thanh as Chief of Province in early July, appears to be of lesser military skill than his predecessor, but a better administrator and more responsive to the feelings of the population.

3. Kien Phong

The Strategic Hamlet program continues to be slow in this poor and sparsely-populated province. Rains have brought seasonal complications, with much land under water and farming difficult. Few hamlets are completed to date, and a fraction of planned militia trained. Some relief activity is underway and there are prospects for a modest increase in the hamlet program.

as well as in related activities such as self-help. The one bright spot in the province remains the Tri Phap area, which is, however, vulnerable militarily should the VC decide to concentrate their efforts against it.

The Chief of Province, Major Nhut, continues through his high connections to maintain a position for which we feel he is totally unqualified.

4. Dinh Tuong

VC emphasis on Dinh Tuong has been heavy since June, with much activity directed with considerable success against the hamlet program. As a result the hamlet construction program has moved more slowly than originally planned. The urgent necessity for consolidating the hamlets already constructed, thus securing the progress already made, dictates an even slower rate of new-hamlet construction in the immediate future. The hamlet militia training program is also behind schedule. Too many of the available troops are necessarily tied down on hamlet defense. Reports indicate that this province has suffered an even greater number of successful VC attacks than Long An.

5. Kien Hoa

Kien Hoa continues to be an encouraging area in IV Corps. Strong VC presence and numerous attacks against hamlets have elicited a good response from the hamlet militia, who have offered constant and largely successful resistance. Intelligence has been good, permitting successful operations against VC bases. Security has steadily improved, and optimism and pro-government commitment are growing among hamlet residents. However, the number of VC overruns of Strategic Hamlets, despite the successful resistance offered against probing attacks, remains disturbing. Hamlet defence plans obviously need improvement. Relocation appears to be well planned and executed. The hamlet program continues to emphasize quality rather than pace. A number of communal projects of the public works type have been built. Self-help activity, slow in getting underway, shows promise for the near future.

Lt. Col. Chau, an outstanding official, was replaced as Chief of Province in early June by Major Le Huu Duc. Major Duc is more military-minded than his predecessor, but is cooperative and intends to follow closely the programs of Col. Chau. He is sensitive to the feelings of the population. The picture in this province is still encouraging.

6. Vinh Binh

Although the Strategic Hamlet program has continued to improve in numbers in Vinh Binh, the security situation deteriorated in July and August. The removal of a recently introduced ARVN battalion damaged the effort, and a change in leadership inevitably dislocated projects underway, particularly the Nhieu Long clear-and-hold/relocation/hamlet-building effort, which in July gave promise of pacifying a VC stronghold and securing the communication route to Vinh Long. Nhieu Long has been severely threatened in August, the route to Vinh Long is again insecure, and the operation will require constant attention if it is to be successful.

Elsewhere, the hamlet program appears to be overextended and, with insufficient troop support, is under serious threat in former VC strongholds. Security in southern-most Long Toan District, the province VC haven, continues to be very poor. Hamlet militia response to attacks has generally been encouraging, but there is an immediate need for well-trained cadre to improve intelligence and identify weaknesses in the hamlets.

Major Thao, an extremely competent leader, allegedly charged with inflated statistics was replaced as Province Chief in late July by Major Nguyen Duy Bach. Major Bach claims real concern for the success of program, and has indicated a preference for consolidation rather than pushing ahead to meet unrealistic time schedules. His appointment probably will considerably reduce the existing official province statistics on the hamlet program; statistics which reflect the intensive pressure of the government rather than any desire by the former chief of mislead. Whether Major Bach can win the support of the people to the same extent as Major Thao remains to be seen.

7. Vinh Long

Although most signs indicate fast and determined progress that should soon lead to the numerical completion of all hamlets planned, an evaluation of Vinh Long remains largely an evaluation of Lt. Col. Phuoc, Chief of Province. Col. Phuoc is a strong personality and a military leader whose ideas had previously led him to construct through corvee labor kilometer after kilometer of useless walls, and whose insensitivity to the population had led to considerable popular antipathy and wide disagreement with Saigon and USOM. An apparent change of attitude has taken place. Cooperation is good, and Phuoc now says that the Strategic Hamlet is a state of mind rather than a fortification. Phuoc's sincerity and commitment to the program's goals are still problematical, however, as is public acceptance of him and the program. The lasting quality of the hamlets in this province is therefore difficult to evaluate and open to question. Some pessimists feel that this may well prove, as a result of Phuoc's actions, the most difficult province in the Delta to pacify.

8. Kien Phong

Progress continues to be good in this province. Physical construction is on schedule, and support from hamlet residents is strong. VC attacks have been successfully met by hamlet militia. Prospects are good for future self-help and economic development activity.

A contemplated "Three Province Plan" envisages connecting hamlets and agrovilles at the borders of Kien Phong, Kien Tuong and Dinh Tuong and a mobile battalion to patrol the three contiguous districts of these provinces. The plan's goals are security and economic development.

9. Kien Giang

There has been appreciable progress, although the situation is still far from satisfactory. The number of hamlets completed is approximately the number originally planned for the province, and a new

plan for additional and much needed strategic and combat hamlets should soon be approved. The two southernmost districts, adjacent to An Xuyen and largely VC controlled, are still largely excluded from existing hamlet construction plans. Hamlet militia training, lagging during the past quarter, has picked up, but the number of militia is still far from sufficient. Relocation has not been well planned and deserves more attention from the Province Chief. Self-help activities now getting underway show good promise for the future.

10. Chuong Thien

The Communists still control most of the people and land in Chuong Thien, one of the most remote and under-developed provinces in the Delta. Rehabilitation efforts in the last three months have centered on relocation of an estimated four to six thousand families along the main road network. Apparently movement, to a large degree, either was compulsory or based on promises which so far have not been kept. U.S. officials were informed of the magnitude of the effort after it had taken place. The new province chief, Major Binh, has been evasive and has shown no desire really to cooperate. This large relocation effort has consumed much of the time and energy of the provincial administration and risks loss of the province to the VC because the people involved have been alienated. Fewer but more carefully established strategic hamlets would have accomplished as much toward the objective of greater road security with less use of provincial forces.

11. Ba Xuyen

Shortcomings in the implementation of the hamlet program, as well as a lack of confidence in the province chief, Lt. Col. Chieu, have led to the recall in late August of the USOM Provincial Representative and possible unofficial suspension of USOM support in Ba Xuyen. In an effort to build statistics, the province has constructed a number of vulnerable and non-viable hamlets. There has been wholesale forced relocation, insufficiently justified, poorly financed, and known only after the fact to the chief of province. Costly and unnecessary projects have repeatedly been proposed. The attitude of province officials toward all aspects of the hamlet program reveals a lack of interest and understanding. The province chief has either given poor guidance to his subordinates or been grossly deceived by them. Numerous occurrences have convinced us that there is venality (probably gross stupidity or childish credulity in the province administration) and lack of good faith.

A new province chief (not presently in prospect) might permit progress in this rich and important area. Emphasis should now be on consolidation of the hamlets which have been built rather than further expansion in their numbers. A major effort to gain popular support for government is needed in this, as in many other of the Delta provinces.

12. An Giang

Largely through the determined and often ruthless commands of Major Minh, Chief of Province, An Giang has made rapid numerical progress in the hamlet program and reports the highest percentage of population in the Delta located in strategic hamlets. Although the province government's popularity is low, anti-communist spirit in An Giang is strong due to historical reasons; e.g., Hoa Hao presence. Tri Ton and parts of the Cambodian border continue to be VC areas, but the province as a whole has had few Communist incidents. USOM working relations with province officials have improved during July and August. Self-help activity is making slow progress.

13. An Xuyen

The province remains under Viet Cong control with the exception of a handful of widely separated government strongpoints and Hai Yen Special Sector under command of Father Nguyen Lac Hoa. An Xuyen, comprising much of the enemy's main Delta power center, is a primary source of men, money, and supplies for the Communists. The Strategic Hamlet program has not succeeded. Under present conditions, given the scarcity of GVN forces and the deeply entrenched Viet Cong shadow government, it cannot be expected to. The recommendation has been made to consolidate defenses and economic-social aspects of existing strongpoints and carry out an intense intelligence-psychological warfare effort in conjunction with mobile operations by existing forces to keep the enemy off balance and soften up the Province. So far, GVN has demonstrated little interest in this approach. The new province chief is energetic, but apparently the government does not plan major changes in a situation which is unnecessarily bad. USOM/RA, in conjunction with other U.S. agencies, has long been preparing, and will soon begin to implement in this area, an approach which emphasizes consolidation of existing hamlets and a coordinated psychological-intelligence-para/military approach to the large areas which have known only the VC government for many years.