

TO: Charles T. Bohannon, Consultant

FROM: John O'Donnell, USOM Representative, Kien Hoa Province

SUBJECT: Comments on "Comments on the Strategic Hamlet Program."

1. This memo is being written in the MAAG Detachment in Kien Hoa after completing your "Comments on the Strategic Hamlet Program." The thoughts to follow are simply meanderings of a interested mind stimulated by the ideas expressed in your paper and reinforced by the sense of loss engendered by the sudden reassignment of Lt Col Tran Ngoc Chau, Province Chief, to the position of Administrator of Danang. Lt Col Chau's approach to the problems of curbing and eventually eliminating the Viet Cong insurgency has, in many ways, been a conversion of your thoughts into action. I thought that you might be interested in hearing again some of the programs that he has initiated and some of the comments of a non-bystander, imbued with the attributed characteristics of Rural Affairs, i.e., "dynamic inexperience"; ~~knowledgeable~~ ~~but~~ ~~inexperienced~~ ~~but~~ ~~dynamic~~ ~~inexperience~~

2. Col Chau expressed the view many times that the two most important ingredients of the ~~strategic hamlet~~ campaign to eliminate the Viet Cong and the causes for the Viet Cong were Public Relations and Economic Development. Military harrassment and destruction of Viet Cong troops and provision of security to ~~the~~ ~~rural~~ ~~population~~ are essential, mechanical ingredients but are not and can not be end-all measures. He shared the conviction that the ultimate goal is not the physical destruction of the enemy, but the winning of the hearts of the people. But what is important about this conviction is the imaginative and well-planned manner in which he converted this belief into practical action. Let's take a look at the two essential ingredients and the action programs which have been initiated to date:

a. Public Relations:

(1) Demonstration of the sincerity and integrity of government officials: Kien Hoa has had its full share of firm administrators, among them Lt Col LeRoy who is still well-remembered, and major and minor corruption and mismanagement on the part of major and minor provincial officials. Col Chau felt that one potential which the GVN possesses at this time, which is not available to the Viet Cong, is the provision of an efficient ~~govt~~ provincial administration sincerely interested in understanding the aspirations of the rural population and ~~equipped~~ ~~for~~ ~~assisting~~ ~~the~~ ~~rural~~ ~~population~~ ~~in~~ ~~realizing~~ ~~some~~ ~~of~~ ~~these~~ ~~aspirations.~~ ~~St~~ ~~etermining~~ ~~the~~ ~~aspirations~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~rural~~ ~~population~~:

Actions taken: 1. Procedures established at hamlet level for interviewing privately all hamlet citizens to determine their problems, criticisms of the government and aspirations.

2. Procedure established for encouraging all residents of the province to write directly to the province chief, bring up any complaints against government officials, recommendations for improvements to be undertaken by the provincial administration, etc. (Special envelopes were printed and distributed throughout the province, provisions made for the delivery to the province chief, establishment of a bureau to review all such letters and prepare recommendations for action by the province chief, establishment of a group of agents throughout the province who could investigate

all complaints and assist with implementation of corrective actions ordered by the province chief.)

3. After investigation, immediate corrective action taken —
reprimand ~~xxxxxx~~, reassignment or relief of ~~xxx~~ officials ~~xx~~ determined to be dishonest, overbearing or grossly inefficient; development of action program in line with suggestions received, etc.