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REPORT ON POPULAR FORCES/CIVIL DEFENSE/POLICE ORGANIZATION

LONG AN PROVINCE

15 December 1964

I. Conclusions

1. The burden of the war in Long An falls chiefly upon the 3,568 men in the Popular Forces. They have the most frequent contact with the enemy and suffer the greatest number of casualties.

2. The PF receive the lowest pay, the least amount of training, the poorest weapons and are placed in the most exposed positions of any military force in the province.

3. Two thousand PF are garrisoned in 94 widely scattered watchtowers and posts throughout the province. They average about twenty men per post.

4. All former Combat Youth (trained and armed since January 1, 1964) have been integrated into the PF. They total 255.

5. The integration of former Combat Youth has met with success and enthusiasm in the province. Local interest in joining the PF has shown definite increase due to:

- a. draft deferment;
- b. increased pay;
- c. opportunity to remain in native hamlet or village as a member of the integrated Combat Youth.

II. Summary

1. Mission and Employment - A careful distinction should be made between the assigned mission and the actual employment of the Long An Popular Forces. The Popular Forces (PF) were established to protect hamlets and villages against enemy attack. Recruited generally within the district in which they were stationed, the PF are under the command of the district chief. From their very beginning in 1955, the Popular Forces (previously called Self Defense Corps) have been fragmented into a hundred small outposts and watchtowers throughout the province. Visits to some of these posts and talks with the men assigned there give the definite impression that during the past eighteen months the survival of the post itself has become the chief objective. As the situation deteriorated the soldiers became increasingly reluctant to

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leave their positions in forays against the enemy. With true Asiatic stoicism, these men and their families wait in fear night after night for the Viet Cong attack which must inevitably come.

Two thousand of the Popular Forces are garrisoned in some 94 posts. As long ago as 1962, the American military sector advisor suggested to the province chief that this was not the most efficient employment of his forces. From personal experience, I know the last three sector advisors have submitted detailed studies of the feasibility and usefulness of the Popular Forces posts to a total of five province chiefs. The sector advisors have recommended a reduction in the number of posts and the employment of personnel thus made available in more effective counter-guerilla operations. No material change has resulted.

2. Training, Equipment and Leadership - The most significant factor in evaluating the performance of the Popular Forces is comparison--comparison between the effectiveness of the PF and their Viet Cong counterparts at the hamlet and village level. Intelligence indicates that the VC structure in Long An's eighty-one villages is about the same as that in other Delta areas. Each hamlet contains a Viet Cong cell of three to seven persons, generally unarmed. Their basic function is to organize the hamlet through infiltration of local groups. They also provide intelligence, storage space and "safe-houses".

The militant side of the VC operation is conducted by the village squads, usually one or two in number. This unit is responsible for road minings, tax collection, minor ambushes and as a warning force for larger VC units. It performs the nightly harassment of Popular Force posts and the kidnapping or execution of persons in the hamlet or village creating difficulty for the VC. This squad is usually made up of men native to the area. They are mobile in the best sense of the word, travelling throughout the village area by day and night. The members of this squad are subject to constant political and psychological training and can be used interchangeably with members of the hamlet cells. Their equipment is inferior to or just equal to that of the Popular Forces. However, their motivation, strict discipline and good leadership more than compensate for any deficiency in weapons. The Popular Forces receive little if any political indoctrination (a total of two hours is proposed by MACV for future courses). And by virtue of their isolated assignments, the Popular Force squads receive very little supervision. In many instances in Long An Province, a major military operation must be mounted to get through to the PF post or watchtower on payday. There are no Popular Forces officers; the Regional Forces (former Civil Guard) provide commissioned personnel. It can be readily assumed that the Regional Forces do not assign their best officers to command Popular Force units.

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In short, given low pay, poor living conditions, isolation, little supervision and not much reason for motivation except basic survival, the Popular Forces are confronted by an enemy surpassing them in every respect except pay.

3. Integration of Former Combat Youth - The 255 former Combat Youth integrated into the Popular Forces generally retain their old identity. They have become, in fact, paid Combat Youth.

This situation is considered to be favorable. The many special Long An survey reports made in December 1963 through April 1964 in newly pacified and as yet unpacified hamlets indicated that one major complaint of the hamlet people was the unpaid status of the Combat Youth. Then, as now, the American community attempted to apply Western values and philosophy to Vietnam, with the result that we anticipated Vietnamese reaction to the war situation to be the same as American reaction under the same circumstances. This leads to gross miscalculations. Pay has greatly increased the enthusiasm of those already willing to fight, and is serving as a strong incentive to those still wavering.

Long An was authorized to induct all Combat Youth into the Popular Forces, as long as the maximum authorized PF strength of 3,786 was not exceeded. According to province officials, no additional Combat Youth will be trained as such, all personnel going directly into the Popular Forces and the six weeks training program. According to an organization chart drawn by the Chief of the New Life Hamlet Bureau, the Village (Xa) Chief for Youth and Civil Defense will command the village platoon of Popular Forces. The Hamlet (Ap) official for Youth and Civil Defense will command the hamlet Popular Force squad. The line of authority from village to hamlet goes, however, directly from village chief to hamlet chief, not from Civil Defense Chief to Civil Defense Chief at hamlet level.

The table of organization shows 38 men in the village platoon, and 18 men per hamlet. In addition, the province chief has organized a special "commando" platoon of Popular Forces in each district. They appear to be military in nature rather than political action cadre.

4. Civil Defense - There has been no implementation of the new Civil Defense program at hamlet, village or district levels. Provincial officials are chiefly concerned with the recruitment and employment of the Regional and Popular Forces.

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