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STUDY OF THE VBI IN THE FIELD
CAN-THO PROVINCE

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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Vietnam Advisory Group

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DATE: April 19, 1956.

INTERVIEW: Mr. Huynh Quang phuoc

Position: VBI Commissaire,
Can Tho Province

PLACE : Can-Tho

INTERVIEWER : Ryan

I. GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING CAN THO PROVINCE:

The Province of Can Tho is located about 165 kilometers (100 miles) southwest of Saigon. It takes its name from the city of Can Tho, which is the seat of the Provincial Government there, and which is also considered to be the "Capitol" of western Viet Nam. The land area of this Province comes to 45,000 square kilometers. The total population of the Province is approximately 800,000, of which about 80,000 reside in the city of Can Tho.

The city of Can Tho is located on the west bank of the western branch of the Mekong River, a distance of about 100 miles from Saigon. In order to reach Can Tho, both branches of the Mekong River must be crossed by ferries, which operate only from 0700 to 1900 daily.

The Province of Can Tho is the seat of Catholic diocese. It is considered to be one of the most important rice producing areas in southern Viet Nam.

All French military forces have evacuated Can Tho with the exception of a small naval detachment which is still based on the Mekong River.

It should be noted that the city of Can Tho is the second largest city in South Viet Nam.

II. GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE VBI IN CAN THO PROVINCE.

According to Mr. HUYNH QUANG PHUOC, Commissaire of the Sureté at Can Tho, a total of 50 men are assigned to this Province. These people are assigned as follows:

Administrative Personnel

- 4 Typists
- 2 Drivers
- 5 Complaintmen or interrogators
- 3 Guards
- 2 Records clerks
- 1 Chief clerk (ADJUTANT)
- 2 Cell Block guards
- 1 Mail Courier

Field Personnel

- 15 in the city of Can Tho
- 5 On stand-by duty in Can Tho
- 2 at Cai Rang (7 kilometers from Can Tho)
- 2 at O Mon (30 kilometers from Can Tho)
- 2 at Tra On (70 kilometers from Can Tho)
- 2 at Cau Ke (30 kilometers from Can Tho)
- 2 at Phuong Hiep (32 kilometers from Can Tho)

Commissioner Phuoc is 43 years old, and has had fifteen years of service. His adjutant is one Mr. Nguyen-van-Hien.

On the average, between 50 and 60 arrests are made monthly by the VBI in this Province. 90 % of these are for political activity against the Government, whereas close to 10 % are for criminal activity. According to Mr. Phuoc, the VBI in Can Tho carries an average of between 100 to 125 investigative cases, with an average opening and closing of about 200 cases per month. Persons arrested

by the VBI here are lodged in the Provincial jailed at Can Tho, although a cell large enough to house some fifteen individuals is maintained at VBI headquarters.

Mr. Phuoc Pointed-out that in his opinion, less than 2 % of the total population of the Province of Can Tho were either outright communists or communist sympathizers. He explained this extremely low figure as being the result of the relative well being of the citizenry, especially in terms of available food supply.

III. COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

The only communications equipment available at the VBI field office in Can Tho consists of one telephone whose operational value does not extend outside of the city of Can Tho. Absolutely no radio equipment whatsoever is immediately available in the field office. VBI personnel request the Vietnamese National Army to use their radio equipment in dispatching urgent messages. There are no means of communication between the field office and its vehicles or its out-field-offices, which they refer to as annexes.

Messages to and from Saigon are usually sent by public telegraph. This means of communication is entirely unreliable as occasionally two days are required in order to get a message to or from Saigon via public telegraph, a distance of only about 100 miles.

In the opinion of the writer, the communications situation in this field office can best be described as pathetic.

IV. TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT

The vehicles assigned to the Can Tho Field Office of the VBI consist of one old American Jeep and one old U.S. weapons carrier, both of WW II vintage, and both in poor condition. According to

Mr. Phuoc, one or the other of the two vehicles is usually inoperative for mechanical reasons, the result of hard driving over rough roads with a very minimum of maintenance and care which is done by the nationally owned and operated garage. The Can Tho VBI Field Office is allocated a total of 600 liters of gasoline permonth, which is bought from a local gasoline dealer and charged to VBI Headquarters for Southern Viet Nam in Saigon.

In case of a need for extensive vehicle repairs, a letter requesting permission to have the vehicle repaired in Saigon is forwarded to Mr. TRAN BA THANH, Director of the VBI in the Southern Region of Viet Nam. Minor repairs are made either out of pocket or by the Public Service Garage people as a kindness to the VBI. All VBI vehicles in the field are detached from Saigon.

Inasmuch as there are only two vehicles at the disposal of thirty investigative personnel, most of the necessary traveling in the Province of Can Tho is done by bicycle. Lack of proper transportation facilities greatly hampers the operations of the VBI in Can Tho.

V. ARMS AND AMMUNITION

The weapons available to the Can Tho VBI Personnel are :

- 1- 30 automatic pistols and revolvers of various makes and sizes and various stages of poor repair.
- 2- 2 U.S. Browning Automatic Rifles - fair condition.
- 3- 26 rifles of various makes, many of which are unsuable.
- 4- 10 Sten guns in fair condition.
- 5- 6 German machine pistols in fair condition.

6- 20 Handgrenades - no tear gas whatsoever.

Approximately a total one thousand rounds of ammunition is available, most of which is rifle ammunition. Mr. Phuoc stated that most of the ammunition is old and cannot be relied upon. He stated that mis-fires are frequent.

A total of 10 rounds are fired by each agent as part of a per month so-called firearms training program. Nearly all of this training consists of pistol firing. By comparison, each American VBI agent fires an average of 150 rounds of revolver ammunition per month under the supervision of well trained firearms experts.

VII. BUILDING AND OFFICE EQUIPMENT

The Can Tho VBI Field Office is situated in a two story building which houses four offices on the main floor. On each side of this central structure, located inside the fenced surrounding the area, are two one story buildings which are divided into eight units. These units are used to house prisoners pending interviews, to house firearms and ammunition, and as interrogation rooms. The second floor of the main building consists of a four room apartment for the Commissaire and his family.

The office equipment consists of eight old desks, four ancient French typewriters, and five old wooden file cabinets which contain some 20,000 records. This field office does not have a safe for classified documents nor a stand-by electricity generator.

The general appearance of this field office or brigade was neat and clean, the result of the Commissaire's interests in this regard. Improved lighting and interior decoration would no doubt add to the efficiency of the personnel as a whole.

VIII. ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Phuoc pointed-out that he is responsible solely to Saigon and not to the Province chief. Each specific need in terms of personnel, transportation, arms, ammunition, gasoline, office equipment etc. is called to the attention of the VBI Director for the Southern Region of Viet Nam in writing. The Director, Mr. TRAN-BA-THANH makes the decisions regarding the fulfillment of such orders. All operational costs of the VBI in the Province of Can Tho are borne by the National VBI Budget.

Office needs such as ink, paper, typewriter ribbons, etc., are supplied to their Field Office on a three-months basis. A detail of agents is sent to Saigon, every three months with a written order for various office supplies, which is either fully or partly filled, depending upon the supply situation in Saigon. Mr. Phuoc declared that sometimes crucial needs for such items are met by the Province Chief on a purely cooperative basis.

On about the 27th of 28th day of each month, a Vietnamese Government pay-order is forwarded by mail in an official sealed envelope from Saigon to the Can Tho Post-Office. This pay-order is made payable to the Commissaire and is an amount sufficient to pay the Commissaire and each person assigned to the VBI in this Province. The check is cashed by the Commissaire at the Provincial Office of the Vietnamese Treasury located in Can Tho. All personnel are paid in cash, and each employee is required to sign a pay-roll sheet. The payroll sheet is returned to Saigon by mail upon its completion. The payment of all salaries is the personal responsibility of the Commissaire, any losses are paid by the Commissaire himself.

For acting as paymaster, the Commissaire is paid 0.05 % of

the total payroll as an indemnity which must not exceed 3,000 piasters. Mr. Phuoc, who is married and has five children, earns about 10,000 piasters per month. It should be noted that where a commissaire (special agent in charge) in the VBI earns over 10,000 piasters per month, his salary is paid by separate check and is forwarded directly to his bank account in the city in which he resides or to which he is assigned. Where there is no bank, he receives a Government pay-order which is separate from the one including the salaries of the Field Office Personnel.

IX. MONTHLY REPORTS.

According to Mr. Phuoc, a monthly report is furnished the Director of the VBI for the Southern Region of Viet Nam at Saigon by the 23rd day of each month. This report covers the following information and is classified by the Vietnamese as secret :

1. Administrative investigations - applicant cases, etc....
2. Political activity - without party designation,
3. Criminal matters - the number of cases opened, closed, pending - the number of arrests and convictions - and General information regarding criminal activity.
4. Activities of political parties - HOA HAO, BINH XUYEN, CAO DAI, DAI VIET (Kuomintang Vietnamese), VIET MINH, Dissident CATHOLICS, and Chinese COMMUNISTS.
5. Foreign national activities - American, Indian, Chinese, Cambodian, Thai, Laotian, English, Philippine, Japanese, and French.
6. Internees - the number of arbitrary sentences to concentration camps in cases of threat of violence and the overthrow of

the Government. Due process of law does not apply in these cases; the accused are not brought before a court of law.

7. LES DESIDERATA - this section deals exclusively with the matter of public thought. It covers the wishes and hopes of ^{what} the people think of various Government officials, etc.

8. A section dealing with information of General Interest.

X. NEEDS

Mr. Phuoc asserted that his greatest needs were about one hundred additional agents; 7 weapons carriers, 7 jeeps, and 3 sedans all radio equipped; a fixed radio transmitter and receiver at the Field Office and in each resident Agency (Annex); 38 caliber Colt or S and W revolvers for each agent; 30 Thompson sub-machine guns, 50 semi-automatic rifles, and 5 tear-gas guns; 6 steel file cabinets, a good safe, and five new typewriters.

In addition to equipment, which he claimed was his most pressing need, Mr. Phuoc stated that a sound training program was badly needed for his agent personnel. He also pointed-out that the 2,000 piasters he is allowed per month to pay informants was ridiculously low; he recommended that this figure be increased at least to 20,000 piasters monthly.

In the opinion of the writer, the morale of the agents in Can Tho Province was indeed very high in spite of their lack of training lack of proper organization and administration, and lack of equipment; Mr. Phuoc and his staff were friendly and cooperative at all times and clearly gave evidence of appreciating the importance of their work in terms of the internal security of the Republic of Viet Nam.