

STUDY OF THE VBI IN THE FIELD
TANAN PROVINCE

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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Vietnam Advisory Group

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DATE : April 23, 1956.

INTERVIEW: Mr. Phan Van Son Chief of Position: VBI Commissaire,
PLACE : Tanan. Brigade, Tanan Province,
INTERVIEWER: Ryan.

Introductory Information

The city of Tanan, the seat of the Tanan Provincial Government, is located some 30 miles southwest of Saigon. The total population of this Province is approximately 160,000, of which about 52,200 reside in the city of Tanan itself. Tanan Province has a land area of about 368,756 square kilometers, with 263 kilometers of roads and about 200 kilometers of canals and rivers.

According to Mr. Phan Van Son, Chief of Brigade (Commissaire) of the VBI in Tanan province, this particular province can be considered to be a relatively poor one productively. This probably accounts for the estimation that some 60 % of the total provincial population is pro-communist.

The VBI in this province does not maintain any resident agencies (Annexes).

The total number of VBI agents assigned to this Province is 16, including the Chief of Brigade. Four of the men hold the rank of inspector, while the others are all probationary agents. Mr. Son has had 17 years of experience with the VBI and has not had a promotion in over 6 years. He is 39 years of age, while the average age of

his men is 23 years. The average experience of the agents in this Province is three years. According to Mr. Son, his men lack training although they have all completed two-three months of on-the-training in Saigon.

Mr. Son receives a monthly salary of 6,140\$ per month. He is married, and has three children, all of whom reside at the VBI Field office. The inspectors are paid 2900 piasters monthly, while the probationary agents are paid a meager 1900 piasters.

In spite of the low salaries and poor working conditions, the morale of the men was found to be very high. In addition to their duties as investigators the agents of this Field Office also act as typists, guards, and janitors.

Buildings and Office Equipment

The Tanan Field Office is housed in a small one-story building located in the city of Tanan. It has four small offices in which are found one desk and six tables. The Field Office lacks proper space for storing recovered property or evidence; it has no file cabinets, it has no safe for the safeguarding of confidential records; and, finally, the building was found to be dirty, improperly lighted and poorly maintained.

Because of a lack of a safe, Mr. Son is required to keep his confidential files in the bedroom of his quarters which are located behind the Field Office. The office is equipped with one old typewriter. In order to adequately handle the volume of required reports Mr. Son has been forced to rent two additional typewriters at the rate of 900 piasters per month, which sum he pays out of his own pocket since his requests for additional office equipment have been denied in Saigon. This Field Office does not have its own emergency electricity generator.

Transportation Equipment

The only piece of motorized transportation equipment assigned to this Field Office is one old wornout Willys jeep of WWII vintage. An allotment of 300 liters of gasoline is received each month, regardless of case load or the operational situation. Most investigations are conducted on bicycle, foot, or horse-cart. No boats are available for use on the canals and rivers. It is necessary for agent personnel to hire a boat to get from place to place in the canal and river areas.

Communications

The only communications facilities available to the VBI in Tanan are the telephone to Saigon, a field phone connected to a nearly military organization, and the public telegraph service. No radio equipment whatsoever is available.

Firearms and Ammunition

The firearms and ammunition available to the VBI at Tanan are as follows:

Rifles (Old French models)	6	200 rounds
Heavy Machine Gun	1	300 rounds
Machine Pistols (German)	7	300 rounds
Automatic pistols (French)	10	200 rounds

A supply of handgrenades was on hand, the fruits of a recent raid on a communist group. No tear gas was available in any form. An inspection of the above weapons revealed that they are being maintained in fair condition. It is to be noted that there are not enough sidearms to permit one being assigned to each agent. Maintenance of these weapons is entrusted to one of the agents, who is not a trained gunsmith. Each agent is allowed to fire ten rounds per month as part of the VBI firearms training program.

Records and Reports

Mr. Son stated that all reports emanating from this Field Office do so over his signature. An average of 70 cases are closed per month while the case load remains static around one hundred. The greatest source of work at the present time are the cases forwarded from Saigon having to do with subversive activity. A full 80 % of all investigative activity has to do with subversion, while the remaining 20 % is concerned with applicant or background investigations and criminal activity.

An antiquated system of indices is maintained which consists of writing or printing the subjects name and aliases in longhand on the cards. Brief data is also added to these cards in the same manner. Reports are filed by number on wooden shelves. The security of these files is completely lacking.

Needs

Mr. Son declared that his greatest need was adequate transportation and communications. He believes that he should be furnished with an additional 30 agents in order to handle the assigned work. In the opinion of the writer, better personnel management and an efficient training program would eliminate the need for an additional 30 men.

Mr. Son asserted that the Tanan Field Office should be furnished with at least four new typewriters, new steel file cabinets, and a good safe. He believes that each agent should be equipped with an American .38 caliber revolver and that the rifles and sub-machine guns be standardized. He declared that his men are in great need of training in all police matters. In conclusion, Mr. Son pointed out that the standard of living of his men should be raised through increases of salary and greater fringe benefits.