

New Drives Swell Number Of Vietnam War Refugees

By TAD SZULC MAR 13 1971

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WASHINGTON, March 12—The number of war refugees in South Vietnam has risen dramatically—perhaps by as many as 150,000—since new allied operations in Indochina were begun late last year, Congressional informants said today.

The Administration made this estimate available to several members of the Senate this week in reply to inquiries, but it was not made public. It was based on reports from the United States Mission in Saigon.

Until last fall, the number of refugees in camps or on relief was calculated at more than 500,000. The cumulative totals since 1965 are about 5 million refugees. Between last October and February, the monthly number of new refugees has reportedly increased more than five times.

The increase in refugees began last November with the advent of the dry season and reached its highest point last month as the allies began preparing the current South Vietnamese thrusts into Cambodia and Laos.

Secret surveys conducted by joint American-South Vietnamese teams in refugee camps before the latest movements indicated that "only a minority" of refugees supported the Saigon regime, most were "politically neutral," and "large numbers" were Vietcong sympathizers. These surveys have been given to Senators in recent days.

Officials familiar with the refugee situation in South Vietnam said that the new displacements were the greatest

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since the enemy's offensive at Tet, the lunar new year, in 1968. Congressional sources acquainted with the reports on the refugees and the conclusions of the "public attitude" surveys said they appear to be raising again the question of the effectiveness of pacification programs in South Vietnam.

The new refugees have either been forcibly relocated from their villages by the South Vietnamese army to clear their areas for impending military operations or been made to flee their homes by United States bombings or ground fighting.

A secret report from the refugee division of the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support Organization, known as CORDS, emphasized last year that "it is sometimes only after relocations have been completed or are well under way that they come to the attention of CORDS staff."

CORDS, which is directed by the United States, is responsible for helping Saigon care for the refugees.

The Congressional sources said that in preparation for the current American-supported operations in Cambodia and Laos by the South Vietnamese army some 40,000 members of the Bru tribe of Montagnards were evacuated from the border areas to Kontum and Pleiku provinces to the east.

This evacuation was reportedly ordered before the intensive United States air strikes in northwestern South Vietnam that preceded the thrusts into Cambodia and Laos.

Refugees From Pacified Area

Some 38,000 new refugees reportedly were forced out of the U Minh Forest area in the Mekong Delta between the middle of last December and the first week of February as a result of B-52 bombing raids and South Vietnamese operations against enemy forces. The Mekong Delta is considered a pacified region.

The sources said that while refugees in South Vietnam were increasing at a rate of 4,500 last October, the level rose to 27,000 monthly since November and has remained constant. Most of these refugees are from the northern section of South Vietnam and from the delta, but the monthly totals do not include the Bru Montagnards.

The over-all figure of new refugees is estimated at close to 150,000 since last November.

A classified survey conducted last April by teams of the Pacification Attitude Analysis System in 12 refugee camps in Military Region I concluded that "there was a clear correlation between forced relocation and a high degree of pro-Communist sympathies."

The survey said that in six camps where refugees had arrived "voluntarily," 44 per cent favored the Saigon regime, 40 per cent were "neutralists" and 16 per cent "pro-Communist."

In six camps where refugees were forcibly relocated, the survey found 27 per cent were pro-Saigon, 44 per cent were "neutralists" and 29 per cent "pro-Communist."

Self-Support Lacking

As of last May, there were nearly 230,000 refugees in camps in Military Region I in the north and a CORDS report commented that "most of them do not have adequate opportunities for self-support."

The teams' survey concluded that "economic conditions are bad in all the camps" and that in Military Region I "cutbacks in the number of United States forces have been felt economically in some camps, and the refugees are worried that future withdrawals will only increase their hardships."

"Disease is a serious problem in many camps, and epidemics could easily break out at some sites," it said.

The survey also concluded, "Most refugees are disgruntled and the Government of Vietnam apparently cannot aid them economically or protect them militarily."

It said that in many camps "Vietcong cadres operate with few checks placed upon them by the Government of Vietnam."

Men Confronted in Slaving