

The Revealing Reports of U.S. Advisers in Vietnam

By Jacques Leslie

Saigon

"Officials in areas of doubtful security appear to be stepping up their level of corruption and alienating the population," an American adviser in South Vietnam's An Xuyen province complained to his superior. "In reaction to this, the province chief has ordered complete investigations not of those accused, but of the accusers!"

This commentary on South Vietnamese government corruption is one of dozens of revealing anecdotes in monthly reports filed by province-level civilian American advisers.

Reports for the month of March from all provinces in the southern half of South Vietnam — altogether about 100 pages — were made available to the Los Angeles Times. All are unclassified but have been unobtainable by journalists until now.

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The reports not only cite instances of corruption of South Vietnamese officials, but also of forced relocation of villagers from Viet Cong-controlled or contested areas into government-controlled areas, of an economic situation that in many provinces is constantly becoming more serious and of falsification of computerized evaluations of the government's strength in the countryside.

The tone of the reports varies from determinedly optimistic to bitterly discouraged. Considered together, the reports suggest that the political and economic situation in South Vietnam is far more complicated and considerably less cheering than public pronouncements by high-ranking American officials indicate.

The advisers who wrote the reports work under George D. Jacobson, now special assistant to the ambassador for field operations.

CYNICISM

The reports reflect discouragement and even cynicism about the cease-fire. Because of the high level of combat, one report refers to "the almost non-existent cease-fire." Another winks at a questionable cease-fire tactic used by a government official:

"Hoai Duc's district chief, Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Van Think, carried out a unique program of commitment to the RVN (Republic of Vietnam) side during the month, taking the pictures of each family that doesn't like the Communists," approvingly wrote Robert S. McCandliss, an inter-provincial representative in Binh Tuy province 60 miles northeast of Saigon.

"The pictures are not only a check on the makeup of each family, but also provide Lieutenant Colonel Think readily available evidence of the sympathies of his constituents for the RVN side. His albums are already prepared to show to the ICCS (International Commission of Control and Supervision set up in the cease-fire agreement) whenever they come to Hoai

Duc."

SPREAD

This practice became widespread in South Vietnam after the cease-fire. Family members faced arrest or punishment for not allowing their pictures to be taken with an anti-Viet Cong banner and, in addition, were required to pay for the photographs.

The reports also document instances of tampering with the government Hamlet Evaluation System. The system assigns letters to each hamlet, based on its degree of security.

"The HES continues to be inflated with new district chiefs susceptible to meeting goals, whether logical or not," wrote inter-province representative Robert M. Traister about Vinh Long province in the Mekong delta.

A related practice being carried out in the Mekong

delta is the forced relocation of villagers into government-controlled areas. Traister wrote about Vinh Long province: "The forced movement of people from one location to another in order to better control them for security purposes continues. American aid has now been requested to assist these people. The major objective of the program appears to be achievement of the HES goals assigned by Saigon."

Some observers thought that after the cease-fire the government would let villagers return to their abandoned homes, even if they were in contested or NLF-controlled areas, but these reports indicate that in the Delta at least, the contrary is happening. The government is trying to consolidate the population and, in turn, its own control, still further.

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