

JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM
IDENTIFICATION FORM

AGENCY : NARA
RECORD NUMBER : 176-10036-10080
RECORD SERIES : National Security Files
AGENCY FILE NUMBER :

ORIGINATOR : CIA
FROM :
TO :
TITLE : Program to sample peasant attitudes and opinions
DATE :
PAGES : 3
SUBJECTS :
DOCUMENT TYPE :
CLASSIFICATION :
RESTRICTIONS :
CURRENT STATUS :
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 9/10/2000
OPENING CRITERIA :
COMMENTS : National Security Files, Box 196: Vietnam, 9/62. Box 2

[See Sanitized Version NLK-93-10]
1 NW 02-327

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Mr. Forrestal 10

Vietnam

CURRENT RESULTS OF [] PROGRAM TO SAMPLE PEASANT ATTITUDES
AND OPINIONS

The following is a summation of the results of the first five months of a program designed to sample peasant attitudes and opinions in South Vietnam:

The Government of Vietnam (GVN) The peasants attitude towards the GVN varies considerably from village to village, depending on the amount of control exercised by the government and/or the Viet Cong. Even in those areas under complete GVN domination, however, there is feeling that the GVN lacks a loyal, honest cadre capable of helping and leading the people at the local level. The GVN has failed to eliminate corrupt elements in the middle and lower echelons of the Government, despite the fact that there is still indication of respect for President Diem's motives and honesty.

Strategic Hamlets Certain resentment has arisen over the construction of strategic hamlets particularly those to which villagers are moved forcibly. There has been evidence of official corruption in the execution of the Strategic Hamlets program and much resentment exists toward forced labor and forced financial contribution to the program. The basic peasant desire is security. Next is to be left alone by both the GVN and the VC. In cases where the GVN has been able to provide security the peasant has tended to be pro government.

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Americans On the positive side, Americans are generally well regarded by the Vietnamese armed forces for their contributions in the form of military aid, road construction etc. Some Vietnamese peasants, on the other hand, are inclined to believe the Americans have come to replace the French. This is perhaps a manifestation of the fact that the Vietnamese, by nature, are often deeply prejudiced against foreigners. Very little evidence of American aid has as yet reached some peasants who are exposed to communist propaganda and control.

Armed Forces Morale has much improved in the Vietnamese army over the past six months, as increased American military aid has begun to convince the army that it can win. Peasant opposition to the Self-Defense Corps (SDC) runs high due to the fact that the SDC is poorly paid and has a tendency to "live off the land", stealing food and women from the villagers. In addition, training and morale in the SDC remain low. The Civil Guard stands somewhere between the army and the SDC in morale with a proportionate decrease in peasant resentment of the Civil Guard. These opinions are in direct proportion to the equipment, pay scales and degree of discipline of the three services.

Viet Cong The strength of the Viet Cong can best be

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explained by the lackadaisical attitude of the peasants toward both the VC and the GVN. In areas where both sides exercise control over a village (the VC at night and the GVN during the day) there is a tendency to fear the VC, pay their taxes, and do their chores, but to have more respect for the GVN program which is more often constructive rather than destructive.

Montagnards The tendency has been for the Montagnard tribesmen to swing toward opposition to the VC and attempt to accept arms to defend themselves against them. On the other hand the Montagnards do not care for the Vietnamese ethnic group as a whole, be they communist or otherwise.

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