

TO: RHS

FROM: WRF

SUBJECT: Recommendations for Further Study of Highlands Resettlement Potential

1. General observations on plateau region.

Covers some 57,000 sq. km., including wooded and mountainous areas. Published data indicate that only 106,175 hectares of this land were cleared under the French regime (apart from ray cleared by tribespeople). Since 1957, the land development program has resulted in the clearing of an additional 12,000 hectares, with a possible expansion to a total of about 52,000 hectares in the settled areas.

a Vietnamese

Settled areas include 43 villages, with/population of 52,000. ~~One must keep in mind the tribal population of the big~~ Added to existing centers of Vietnamese population, the total is in the neighborhood of 100,000 persons. To this figure, one must add a tribal population estimated ~~variously~~ to range from 400,000 to 677,000 (depending on who is estimating and what provinces he includes).* The actual number will not be known until a method is devised

*Some of the confusion stems from the absence of a statistically reliable census figure for the tribes: each province chief has, up to now, been responsible for estimating the number of tribespeople in his province. More recently his estimates have been supplemented by those coming from the Commissariat General for Agricultural Development. In addition, the Director of Social Action for the Highlands has offered his own population figures. The latter are broken down as follows: for the tribal peoples

Midlands, Central Vietnam	275,211
Highlands, Central Vietnam	367,019
Four Provinces, South Vietnam.	<u>34,679</u>
TOTAL	676,909

However, President Ngo Dinh Diem insists these figures are highly exaggerated. His ~~own~~ personal estimate of the tribal population is "no more than 500,000."

for conducting a reasonably accurate census of these shifting populations. It is possible at this time, however, to note the following pertinent facts. The Director of Social Action for the Highlands claims to have created 38 villages, comprising some 39,539 persons, on 13,525 hectares of land. He also claims to have trained 355/cadres for social action work among the tribes. tribal

Presumably the bulk of these persons were trained at the Hue Center.

Much of the plateau area is not cultivable, being mountain and forest. Furthermore, much of that which might be cultivable is too steep for cultivation, given Vietnamese methods. (Which is to say that if the Vietnamese were Japanese and accustomed to terracing steep hillsides they might be able to cultivate many additional hectares.) Nevertheless, Col. Nguyen Cao, Chief of the Resettlement Service for the Hauts Plateaux du Centre, estimates that some 1,400,000 hectares of the region are cultivable. This estimate has been drawn from some field surveys, but principally from map and aerial study. Most of the region has never been explored by Westerners or Vietnamese in recent times.

necessary to accommodate the increasing population, and to satisfy its needs.

~~It must be accepted as a premise that~~

One must add to any consideration of this situation the political and economic aims of the Government of Vietnam. ~~It must be accepted that~~ The settlement of some 52,000 persons in the highlands region has not been haphazard, nor has the selection of sites been random. Involved at all times has been a consideration of the necessity of, and methods for, stopping Viet Cong infiltration into the Republic's territory. Corollary to this has been the desirability of erecting a human wall along the Laotian and Cambodian frontier areas ~~to reduce their~~ in order to strengthen this vulnerable flank and reduce its violability. ~~It~~ Then too there has been the psychological (and political) value of opening new areas to Vietnamese settlement, and thereby broadening the horizons and giving freer range to the ~~unrestrained~~ popular imagination. Finally, there ~~is~~ is the avowed intention of the Government to develop the plateau region into one of industrial crop production. The economic value of such a program to the Vietnamese promises to be extremely high, and, given the limited avenues of development open to a small country such as this, warrants careful evaluation.~~by~~

Whatever developments occur in this highlands region should, it seems to me, be carefully planned and prepared for by both the Vietnamese and ourselves. To this end, the first logical step would seem to be to dispatch a team of ~~excellent~~ first-rate specialists to explore the region systematically, and with a view to determining its

potential for both resettlement and for economic development. There seems to be general agreement that three principal specialties should be represented on such ~~general agreement that~~ a team: soils, geology, and commercial crops. The task of the soils expert would be to determine which areas are susceptible of profitable cultivation. The geologist would have as his primary ~~task~~ mission the location of adequate ~~supply of~~ water resources underground which could be tapped for irrigation purposes. The commercial crops specialist would be charged with deciding what crops might best be cultivated in particular areas. (One might also profitably involve a mineralogist and a forest products expert at various points in this inquiry.)

The vastness of the unexplored portions of the plateau indicates that a technical survey ~~task~~ such as is hereby proposed cannot be considered a short-term endeavor. ~~It is extremely doubtful~~ The difficult terrain, and the nature of the land during the rainy season in particular, make travel slow. This would be especially significant if, as is likely, the survey team carries certain heavy equipment (e.g. well-drilling rigs, technical instruments) ~~with which to make its investigations~~ to facilitate its investigations. In short, I do not believe a ~~useful~~ really worthwhile study can be made if it does not involve at least one full year of ~~field~~ research in the field. I do not, ~~however~~ propose that the ~~study~~ study mission should comprise more than the three experts specifically noted above, for ~~it~~ in my opinion it should be possible to secure auxiliary specialists and technicians from the USOM/Vietnam staff, and from the staff of the Government of Vietnam.