

16 July 1971

## PROVINCIAL INTERROGATION CENTERS

### DESCRIPTION:

There are 42 Provincial Interrogation Centers (PIC) presently maintained throughout South Vietnam. These Centers were built between 1965 and 1967 at a cost of \$50,000 each\*. Their purpose was to provide a central facility in each province where civilians suspected of VC connections could be screened in an orderly and uniform manner for both intelligence and judicial processing purposes. They were not intended nor have they served as detention facilities. The GVN Ministry of Interior Director General of National Police Directive (18 September 1969) which governs administration of the PICs defines their mission as follows:

"A. Exploiting all political prisoners, particularly those prisoners belonging to VC infrastructures and members of the People's Revolutionary Party in order to collect intelligence information concerning the organization, policies and plans of the evening as well as to determine their capability to carry out plans and plots aimed at destroying national security.

"B. Debriefing Hoi Chanh to uncover underground organizations and to exploit them for information mentioned above; at the same time, develop promising leads to assist the Special Police Bureau to establish penetration operations.

"C. Receiving and satisfying intelligence needs of the Special Police Bureau, particularly in support of the Phung Hoang Plan."

The PICs have the additional mission of carrying out the instructions of the Chief of the Special Police Bureau concerning the task of establishing the judicial papers (offenders records, statements, etc.) in order to send offenders before the Provincial Security Committee.

The use of the PICs has been steadily decreasing. In 1969 the monthly flow through the PICs averaged 2,700. This dropped to 1,750 in 1970 and to 1,060 in 1971. This decrease is due to the decline in military actions, particularly sweep and search operations. Because of this decline in use, the Director General of National Police approved on 3 July 1971 a reorganization plan calling for the closing of the provincial PICs. (The buildings would be used for Special Police offices.) The PICs would be maintained in the four regional cities and Saigon.

#### ADMINISTRATION:

The PIC program is administered by the Management Bloc of the National Police Command. This Bloc furnishes logistical support\*\* to the PICs, i.e. gasoline and spare parts for the generators, administrative supplies, water pump maintenance, clothing used by prisoners and food.

The Special Police Bloc staffs the PICs with interrogators and administrative personnel.

#### SUPERVISION AND U.S. ADVISORY PERSONNEL:

The GVN PIC Chief checks the PICs daily. The Province Special Police Chief visits on an average of once per day. The Inspectorate of Special Police Regulation Service checks each PIC on a quarterly basis (Special Police personnel assigned to the PICs are aware that they are vulnerable to prosecution for prisoner maltreatment.) The PICs are inspected on an average of three times per week by U.S. employees of the Pacification Security Coordination Division of MACV/CORDS. At present 26 American civilian positions are assigned to the advisory effort connected with the PICs. Current plans call for American advisors to be out of the provincial aspects of the PIC program by the end of FY 1972.

#### PROCESSING:

Prisoners are treated in accordance with standard procedures which govern the National Police Command's management of the PICs. These procedures call for prisoners to be confined one to a cell. The cells are concrete and in a

standard PIC measure 1.5x2 meters and are ventilated. Each cell contains a Vietnamese style commode. Prisoners are issued locally procured straw mats for sleeping and a set of clean black pajamas upon entering the PIC. They are fed twice a day. Regulations call for a trained medic to be assigned to each PIC. Sanitation is good by local standards.

The PIC initially has five days in which to prove that a case exists against a detainee. After five days the PIC must obtain the written permission of the Province Chief for an extension of time to detain an individual and prepare the case against him. The total time during which an individual can be held in a PIC is 30 days from the time of capture. American advisory personnel regularly check the PIC registration logs to see that detention limits are not violated.

The legal basis for processing prisoners through the PICs and subsequent detention of prisoners is the An Tri Legislation, i.e. Article 19 of Decree Law 004/66 dated February 1966 which states: "Those persons considered dangerous to the National defense and public security may be interned in a person or designated area or banished from a designated area for a maximum period of two years which is renewable: the interment and banishment shall be ordered by Arrete of the Prime Minister issued upon the recommendation of the Minister of Interior."

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**SECRET****DR. MARJORIE NELSON'S CHARGES CONCERNING QUANG NGAI PIC  
AND QUANG NGAI PRISON**

In July 1970 the Sullivan Committee received a letter written by Dr. Marjorie Nelson to the American Friends Service Committee. Dr. Nelson worked as a physician in Quang Ngai from October 1967 to October 1969. She described the poor conditions then prevailing at the Quang Ngai PIC and prison, citing her personal experience in treating prisoners who had been tortured at the PIC.

The Vietnam Station investigated these charges and reported as follows:

"Records tend to bear out first of Dr. Marjorie Nelson's allegations of brutality (April 1969). A large cordon and search operation was conducted by elements of the III Marine Amphibious Force and ARVN in Batangan Peninsular area of Quang Ngai province in early 1969. The PIC was used on emergency basis as part of a combined holding and interrogation center to support the operation. This combined center was manned by personnel of several Allied units and agencies. A total of eleven thousand people were processed by the center of whom more than a thousand were confined to province jail and taken from there to PIC for interrogation. After the operation, a special team of SP interrogators had to be assigned from Danang to the PIC for two months to help with the backlog of prisoners. In his monthly report submitted April 1969, POIC Quang Ngai stated that although beatings had not been witnessed by Station advisors to PIC, prisoners in province jail with black and blue marks had told visitors they had been beaten at PIC. Station rep also noted similar reports from 'a Quaker doctor', who doubtlessly is identical with Dr. Nelson.

"The Province SP Chief, Ho Anh Triet, clearly was aware of brutality and did little to stop it. When the Station officer learned of this brutality in the PIC he confronted Triet, who took defensive attitude, played it down and stated this was an internal matter. On one occasion Station advisor and the Provincial Senior Advisor personally observed incident of brutality (although not in PIC) and protested to Province Chief, Colonel Ton That Khiem, warning him that if newsmen learned of this it would create very bad press reaction. Col. Khiem shrugged off report. Station officer's written report

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on incident concluded that basic problem appeared to be frustration of newly trained interrogation staff failing to produce under pressure.

"Triet was transferred out of province shortly after incident and his present whereabouts unknown. Col. Khiem also was transferred and now is Province Chief Quang Tri.

"The Special Police Advisor to Quang Ngai at the time of the incident furnished the information on which the above report is based. He has furnished the following statement on the incident:

'Operation run in early 1969 was Bold Mariner, also called Russell Beach, or Lin Kit 9 in Vietnamese. Operation was Cordon Operation cutting off Batangan Peninsula. Persons inside Cordon were flown to holding center, processed and assigned either to an innocent civilian camp or to province jail. More than 10,000 persons were taken out of Batangan. Of these more than 1,000 went to jail. While in jail, suspected VCI were taken to PIC for interrogation. During operation, the SP Advisor, the Provincial Senior Advisor, and I spoke to Police urging them to avoid beatings. It was after the operation that I recall hearing from Mr. Burke that Dr. Nelson had visited jail and treated prisoners. She then complained to Burke that they showed evidence of beating and had told her they were beaten in PIC. I spoke to Special Police Chief Triet and advised him of the complaint. He didn't like it and indicated that he would handle it with the Province Chief.'

"Monthly report from Station rep Quang Ngai province in Aug 1969 stated that PIC effort was outstanding and working relations with PIC Chief could not be better. Senior Station personnel inspected PIC 12-16 Aug 1969, 13-18 Oct 1969 and 3 March 1970; all inspection reports indicated smooth operations. Senior SP officers from Saigon also inspected PIC in Nov 1969 and May 1970. Both inspection reports indicated better than average operations and Nov 1969 report commended PIC for outstanding performance.

"The PIC advisor reports that PIC is in excellent shape. There have been no allegations of brutality since at

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least May 1969 when his tour began. Due to the general winding down of military activity, the PIC is almost empty and has been so for months. The PIC advisor spends an average of one to two hours daily in PIC and reports prisoners eat the same food as the guards, cells are adequately ventilated and prisoners are exercised twice daily. PIC prisoners are credited locally as being treated too leniently."

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