

VIET NAM'S STRATEGIC HAMLET: DEVELOPMENT AND DENOUEMENT

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF

TECHNOLOGY

August 1969

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As in most research, there are certain individuals who contribute to a study but do not appear on the title page. I am personally indebted to many individuals for their contributions throughout my period of study at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology. There are certain individuals to whom I wish to extend my personal appreciation for their efforts to aid me not only in the writing of this thesis, but also in the completion of my academic program. Professors William W. Kaufmann and Donald Blackmer greatly assisted me in my development as a student of political science. Colonel Marshall O. Becker has relieved me of numerous responsibilities, to the burden of my fellow staff members, in order that I might complete this study. Mrs. Ruth Longhenry of the Army War College, Colonel Richard H. Moore, Director of Foreign Area Studies of The Center for Research in Social Systems, and Lieutenant Colonel Rufus C. Lazzell in the office of Special Assistant For Counter-insurgency and Special Activities, Department of Defense, responded unselfishly to my numerous questions and requests. In the final analysis, this endeavor must end on the typed page. To the debts of my two typists, Sandy and Elana Prentice, who suffered my daily tirades, I owe my deepest appreciation.

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Submitted to the Department of Political Science on
18 August, 1969, in partial fulfillment of the requirement
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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the efforts of the Government of Viet Nam to establish peace and security in the rural areas of South Viet Nam. The focus of the study is upon the development, concept, implementation, and collapse of the strategic hamlet program.

Beginning in 1955, President Ngo Dinh Diem initiated measures aimed at controlling the rising influence of the Viet Cong in the countryside and at gathering in the support of the rural peasants. These measures failed. By the fall of 1961 Viet Cong aggression in Viet Nam had accelerated to the point where the war was rapidly being lost. The serious proportions of the deteriorating situation caused a reappraisal of United States assistance programs and their reorientation toward those efforts considered more immediate to winning the war against the insurgents.

A major new strategy based on the British experience in the Malayan Emergency was developed. This strategy was termed the "strategic hamlet program."

The introductory chapter presents the roles that population and village defense play in insurgency and counterinsurgency warfare. Chapter Two provides the physical setting with an analysis of some of the problems peculiar to hamlet defense in the Viet Nam environment, and Chapter Three outlines those methods initiated by the Diem government in its attempt to stem the unfavorable tide developing in the countryside with particular emphasis on those pacification measures involving villages

and hamlets. It further provides an analysis of the involvement of the United States and the efforts of the United States Government in developing a method of engendering popular support from the rural masses by providing them with social and economic benefits, government services which formed the basis for an improved standard of living, and a means of protecting and insulating the peasant from the guerrillas' threats and use.

Chapters Four and Five direct attention to the strategic hamlet program as the Vietnamese Government's all-encompassing solution to the needs of Viet Nam, and to the concept of the program as it was developed by the Diem regime.

Chapter Six considers the primary reasons why the hamlet program failed. It describes the program's birth in "Operation Sunrise," set in a mold of optimism, and then outlines the decline in the overall security condition of the country.

The final chapter presents the unravelling of the program as the increasingly successful Viet Cong attacks against the numerically small, minimally-trained hamlet defenders caused the total collapse of the program and its formal abandonment. The study closes with a commentary on the program and a discussion of some basic principles required for a more responsive and flexible system.

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There is a difference between us
French and Don Quixote. Don
Quixote rode against windmills
believing they were giants, but we
ride against windmills knowing
they are windmills but doing it
all the same because we think there
ought to be someone in this
materialistic world who rides
against windmills.

Colonel Wainwright
(quoted in)
B. Fall
Street Without Joy

INTRODUCTION

Role of Population in Guerrilla Warfare

The path of recent history has been heavily marked by insurgency warfare which has given birth to a core of currently accepted doctrine about insurgency. Contrary to classic Marxist revolutionary dogma -i.e., that the only genuine source of revolutionary power is the working class--this core has ascribed a dominant role to popular attitudes, loyalties and support in the process by which insurgent movements emerge, gain momentum, and erupt in "liberation wars."¹ Although fully realizing the subsidiary role of military factors, external assistance, and international politics in the guerrilla equation, analysts of insurgency warfare have made requisite to the success of a modern guerrilla movement the support of the local population.

One of the leading proponents of this thesis, and oft-times the most quoted, is Mao Tse-tung.² Mao wrote in 1934 that "...revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them."³ Mao states further that 'the most abundant strength in war' lies in the masses and that 'a people's army organized by awakened and united masses of people' will be invincible 'throughout the world.'⁴ Pursuing his now-famous

analogy of the people as water and the guerrillas as fish, he states in On the Protracted War: "With the common people of the whole country mobilized we shall create a vast sea of humanity and drown the enemy in it."⁵ In reviewing the failure of the Chinese Communist Party's activities in the 1920's Mao emphasized two main errors: first, insufficient emphasis had been placed on the role of the peasant and second, there had been insufficient emphasis on armed struggle, especially as waged by the peasantry.⁶

Many practitioners of guerrilla warfare have extended and reiterated this doctrine using experiences in China, Cuba, Viet Nam, and South America to reaffirm Mao's assertions. Giap, who acknowledges the Viet Minh's theoretical indebtedness to Mao's precepts, in his own popular book People's War, People's Army, claims that the people are to the army what water is to the fish, that "Guerrilla war is the war of the broad masses," and that "Our resistance war (was) the work of the entire people. Therein lies the key to victory. (The) war proceeded in a backward agricultural country where the peasants,..constituted the essential force of the revolution...,"⁷ Che Guevara, who emphasized "the tremendous role of rural people" in the Cuban revolution, declared that "guerrilla war is a fight of the masses,..(and) popular support is indispensable!

In his 1965 dictum "Long Live the Victory of People's War," Lin Piao explicitly restates Mao's earlier theory to the effect that "The peasant constitutes the main force of the national-democratic revolution against the imperialists and their lackeys,"⁹ Bohannan, Debrary and others have used similar phrases and metaphors to describe and analyze insurgency.¹⁰

These are also the terms in which this doctrine is formulated by at least some social scientists, such as Peter Paret, John Shy, David Galula, and Bernard Fall.¹¹ Fall in Street Without Joy clearly delineates how the Viet Minh had advantages in communication and intelligence over the French forces because they commanded the support of the population, and, conversely, that French tactical intelligence was often faulty because of the Communist-created isolation of the French forces from the population in which it operated.¹²

According to this doctrine, the primary activating force behind insurgency movements lies in popular attitudes and animus, the weakening and crumbling of mass support for established institutions, and the gaining of popular support and commitment by the insurgents. The population represents the new ground of combat and the guerrilla's operations focus upon it. Whereas in most ordinary wars the objective is to destroy the enemy and occupy his territory, the guerrilla's aim is to control the population. If the insurgent manages to dissociate

the populace from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically and to get its active support, he will win "because in the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population, or, at worst, on its submissiveness,"¹³ It follows then that the primary objective of the insurgent force is to drive a wedge between the mass of the population and the incumbent government while concomitantly instituting controls over that element of the population successfully separated from the incumbent government's control. As Mao did not write from a military point of view but in terms of the total environment¹⁴-- social, political, economic, cultural, and military--so the insurgent relies primarily on paramilitary and non-military techniques in order to grow and gather momentum among a population.¹⁵

These above quotations and comments reflect a style of thinking and a pattern of belief about insurgency that have been easily carried to those analysts viewing the problem of and prescribing the remedies to insurgencies. Insurgent movements require popular support in order to conduct successful military operations. Similarly, according to the theorist and practitioner of counterinsurgency, acquiring popular support by the government is essential if counterinsurgency operations are to be successful. This contention usually engenders various types of economic and social programs

designed to prevent the loss of popular support for established institutions, and for the government, or to win popular support away from the insurgency. This is done in numerous ways: by the improvement of the image of the incumbent through propaganda in an effort to gain the support of an apathetic mass population, by strict population control techniques designed to separate the insurgent from the population from which it receives its critical sustenance, and by direct military action. Each of these methods for combating the insurgency is important and they are often simultaneously interdependent.

Yet, a system of population control is highly objectionable to an average citizen, even under the best circumstances. Recognizing this problem, the program must be administered with scrupulous regard for the rights of the people and their dignity, or it will become an intolerable expansion of authority and defeat its own end.¹⁶

This doctrine was clearly expressed by a senior official of the Agency for International Development in hearings before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in testimony on the Foreign Assistance Act of 1964:

The (counterinsurgency) concept essentially rests on the assumption that this kind of war depends heavily upon the psychology of the peasant, his attitude toward his future. If we can quickly demonstrate to him the prospect of improvement in his livelihood, in his

children's future then he will not be vulnerable
to the propaganda and terror of the insurgent. 17

An editorial comment on the Viet Nam War in the Bulletin
of the Atomic Scientists observed that:

It is a guerrilla war, and the winning of such
a war requires the allegiance, or at least the
passive support of the population. This has
been conspicuously absent for the obvious
reason that South Vietnam has not and is not
getting a government in contact with its people. 18

Former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara in an
address before the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation
in Chicago, February 17, 1962 referred to those means needed
to ensure or gather in the allegiance of the population (military,
paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, civic
action) as "the third challenge." 19

Yet, in review, very little is offered beyond broad
formulas which are sound enough as far as they go. Formulas
such as "Intelligence is the key to the problem," or "the
support of the population must be won" exist a hundred-
fold. But how does one turn the key? How does one win the
support of the population? This is where an exercise in
frustration often begins.

One note should be added to the above discourse. There
is a small nucleus of individuals who disagree with the notion
that popular support is needed by the guerrillas for a successful
insurgency or by the incumbent government for a successful
counterinsurgency. Ithiel de Sola Pool in two studies, Village
Violence and Pacification in Viet Nam and Village Violence

and International Violence, terms it a "cliche," and Charles Wolf in Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: New Myths and Old Realities calls it "mythology."²⁰

The cliché that the people support the rebels is, of course, part of the ideology of guerrilla movements. It helps a guerrilla's morale for him to believe that he is the spokesman of the people. The Maoists and their followers have turned this into a self-fulfilling prophecy. They have promulgated the notion that the guerrillas are as fish and the people as the water and that the life of the guerrilla depends upon this hospitable environment. This ideological cliché, whose lack of foundation we must insist upon, serves many useful purposes. It helps the rebels' leader to impose on their fractious terrorist followers, discipline and the maintenance of good public relations toward the populace. It provides a polite and correct behavior that avoids the enmity of the local population. In that way the rebels limit their confrontation to a rather narrowly defined enemy whom the movement chooses to engage rather than the broad public. It is a familiar fact that in Viet Nam today, as in China earlier, the Communist troops show more discipline in their treatment of the peasant than do the regular armies. This provides a show of evidence for the theory of the fish and the water for it is to some extent a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even if the population is not ideologically for the rebellion, they may recognize that the rebel troops are less to be feared than the more poorly disciplined government forces.²¹

Similarly, Wolf states:

From the operation point of view, what an insurgent movement requires for successful and expanding operations is not popular support, in the sense of attitudes of identification and allegiance, but rather a supply of certain

inputs (e.g., food, recruits, information) at reasonably cost, interpreting cost to include expenditure of coercion as well as money. These costs may be "reasonably" without popular support for the insurgents; and, conversely, the costs may be raised considerably without popular support having been acquired by the government. ... The point to make here is simply that the emphasis on popular support in the syllogism may be misleading.²²

I do not wish to take up the arguments presented by Pool and Wolf. Much of the difference may hinge on the meaning or nuances of meaning of the word "support." If it is interpreted to mean actions caused by the use of coercion, there may be little or no argument; if it is construed to mean loyalty and the operational aspects flowing from this, there is a difference.

Role of Village Defense in Anti-Guerrilla Warfare

One of the most perplexing dilemmas facing the modernizing nation is the problem of the relation of the village to the state.²³ The existence of traditional social structures and diverse economies, generally isolated by poor communication systems or arrested in development by internal strife, presents governments with both opportunities for material and political support as well as the dangers inherent in organized opposition and pressure group politics.

On the one hand, governments in the modernizing polities tend to seek a monopoly of power through the use of political and military means for their own preservation, and generally do so in the name of political and social order.²⁴ On

the other hand, it is very difficult to bring traditionally autonomous regions of the countryside under complete central or national government control. These autonomous communities, whose isolation the topography and perhaps events enforce, persist as tightly knit, cohesive social and political structures, though they may never have had the opportunity to participate in government at the national level.

To understand the basic element of the spiritual and physical conflict called the battle of villages, it is most important to see the villages, and not merely the nations as depicted on our maps...It is essential to realize that in Southeast Asia...there is no pervasive national spirit as we know it.

These new "nations" are struggling toward maturity, toward freedom, and toward democracy. But in the villages of these nations, men live isolated from the men in the next village, as their fathers and grandfathers before them have lived for thousands of years. They...are not connected by any mass communication...They are almost never in close touch with their national government; often they...feel no deep loyalty to (the) government.²⁵

Pragmatically speaking, the incumbent government can deal with such villages by either denying them any form of political participation and self-government at the national level, or, it can seek to balance the danger of opposition with the possibility of gaining popular support. As Janowitz points out, the village community, for its part, can indeed become a center of rural opposition, or it can, through the development of bases for political accommodation, function

as an important mediating unit in the process of economic development, social mobilization, and political institutionalization.² "It is not surprising that in regard to these issues...violence is frequently resorted to,"²⁷

Since many of these villages are often essentially divorced from the centers of tangible incumbent strength (either military or police) by difficult terrain and a poor system of communication, the insurgent government assumes de facto control over these villages while the national government retains de jure control.

Many times the insurgent and the incumbent share de facto control over outlying villages or hamlets. The incumbent dominates during daylight hours and the insurgent at night. This peculiar situation occurs because the central government cannot station or maintain strong force contingents in every remote region or settlement. In addition, most underdeveloped nations' armies are normally restricted to daylight operations by virtue of a limited mobility capability. Therefore, whenever the insurgents assemble superior concentrations of strength during hours of darkness, they assume control because of the inability of the army or police to respond.

Since insurgency and counterinsurgency are fought more for people's support than for pieces of territory, the actions of the government must be oriented primarily at gaining and maintaining popular support. Defending villages against attacks by the guerrillas is a necessary ingredient of that

effort. As we review the common threads fundamentally important to revolutionary warfare which link Mao's and Lin Piao's "masses," Guevara's "rural people," and Giap's "peasants," we note that each comprises an indigenous rural population located in a village environment from which the insurgent can gain support. A second thread is that these rural masses can and must be mobilized in such a mode as to constitute the manpower source and support base for waging insurgency warfare. In this context, the rural peasant is not only "involved" to the extent that the sphere of action is waged primarily in his proximity, but also because he is one of the most important actors in the sense that the insurgency would not be possible without his active participation.

A majority of the population supports not necessarily the side presenting the most appealing program or ideology, but rather the force it perceives to be the stronger and expects ultimately to prevail. Many guerrilla activities such as propaganda lectures, village raids, assassinations, and mining of roads are often intended as much to demonstrate the insurgents' strength and the government's weakness as to achieve the apparent objective.²⁸ A strong and effective defense against such guerrilla activities creates the opposite image, thereby discouraging much of the support given the guerrillas as well as physically preventing it. If the defense is coupled with actions to make the indigenous population want a government victory, then this support can be recruited

for the government.²⁹

Even if the population favors the government, the present and future local security situation must permit them to translate this attitude into action safely. They must not fear a danger of reprisal or terror if they pass intelligence to the government, and they must be constantly insulated from the guerrilla's demands for taxes, food, medicine, recruits, clothing, and equipment.

By severing the link with the population, the government can severely handicap the guerrilla and the insurgency. With fewer sources of intelligence, the insurgent is less able to counter or avoid government military operations. He must raise and prepare more of his own food or develop an external and costly logistic system, and must commit precious and oft-times limited manpower resources to this effort. He must supplement his forces more through external infiltration since his recruiting efforts have been debilitated and his ability to kidnap replacements diminished. This forces him to use personnel who are less familiar with the terrain or less knowledgeable concerning local cultural mores and institutional officials. He may face interception by local border patrols and may have a higher probability of risk in the performance of his missions.

The desirability of a village defense is thus limited only by its cost and by its ultimate feasibility. If offense and defense require the same resources and if these are

limited, then an allocation to defense must be examined closely. The Malayan, Franco-Viet-Minh and Philippine campaigns all demonstrated the crucial importance of an effective offense in a counter guerrilla war. Often, however, the defense can use resources and personnel that might not otherwise be applied in an offensive role. These include defensive materials (e.g., mines, moats, logs, barbed wire), minimally trained personnel, and weapons of minimum range or capability.

Village defense systems must meet the requirements imposed by the threat and must also operate effectively within the constraints imposed by the total environment. Village defense is not always feasible. The attitudes of villagers toward defense range over a broad spectrum. While some will actively participate in the defense, most will passively cooperate; that is, they will permit others to defend them, but since they probably perceive no personal threat, they will do nothing positive to assist. Other necessary actions, such as offensive operations, and economic, social, and political measures are often far more important to the individual villager than the physical defense of villages, and village defense becomes meaningful only if carried out in conjunction with these others.

At the extreme end of the spectrum are those who actively oppose the defense and act to subvert it from within. In an environment such as Viet Nam with large-scale active

opposition and the associated internal subversion of the defense, intensive internal control and policing becomes necessary, and no real defense is possible without it. Defense becomes feasible only if the village population is, at worst, passive or neutralized. A primary function of the defense system will be to assure the villagers that they can be defended, and thereby to encourage them to assist in their own defense. Demonstration of an effective defense may convince some passive villagers that they may lose more by not participating in the defense and so many convert them to active defenders.

The level of defense that can be provided is always limited. Hence it is essential that the village defense have a quick internal and external reaction capability and sufficient flexibility and ready alternatives to counter the enemy's offense initiative and intelligence advantages. It must be of an adequate size, ready to meet most likely threats. However, a sufficiently large and determined attack can overcome any defense. If such an attack on a village is launched, the local defenders must be prepared and must have adequate combat support (artillery, etc.,) to hold out until reinforcements arrive.

Scope

The inability of the South Vietnamese Government and armed forces to secure and safeguard the peasants and the

government officials, the hamlets, and the villages in the countryside may be considered as a major portion of the basis for all counterinsurgency failures in Viet Nam to this time. Many believe that if the guerrilla pressure is eliminated from the rural scene "by means of demonstrative and determined military actions on the part of the Vietnamese Army (ARVN) and its auxiliaries, the humble village will support the government campaign against the Viet Cong."³⁰ As Douglas Pike has noted, organization is crucial to mobilizing support in rural Viet Nam, both for the government and for the insurgent:

The organization weapon promises the communists victory. Only the counter-organizational effort can turn back this tide. This means the creation of viable organizations that reach from the capital to the village, organizations that provide a payoff to the villagers, either in material or non-material benefits, organizations which once established legitimately, can be used as channel of communication.³¹

The strategic hamlet program was one solution adopted by the Vietnamese Government as the key counterinsurgency measure to the rising influence of the Viet Cong.

The basic concept of the program was in accordance with existing counterinsurgency doctrine and principles--the physical and psychological isolation of the insurgent from loyal, or at least acquiescent, rural population, in order to deny him access to food, intelligence, arms, and recruits. Furthermore, rather than using regular military

units, the development of local militia forces to defend relatively isolated areas was an attempt to resolve the classic insurgency dilemma: (1) A concentration of military forces in a few locations--with the resultant loss of unprotected territory to the insurgent forces; or (2) A dispersal of regular forces to prevent the loss of strategic territory, with the consequent inability to launch major attacks and the exposure of scattered forces to piecemeal attrition by locally superior insurgent units.

From the end of 1961 through 1963 the strategic hamlet program was the main scheme by which the Vietnamese sought to gain control of the rural areas and to develop the support of the indigenous peasants. This program failed. The reasons for that failure cannot be wholly subdivided from each other; they are numerous and multifaceted. The failure should and must be seen as a compounding total environmental collapse upon the program. History, traditional attitudes toward land and ancestors, religion, racial bias, security, over-centralization of authority, fear, problems of resettlement, geography, the Viet Cong, cadre motivation, implementation, and lack of funds can be cited as elements contributing to that collapse. The focus of this thesis, which takes into account the development and denouement of the program, is upon two of the primary contributing factors, security and over-extension.

This paper seeks to present the setting for the hamlet program and its development in Viet Nam. Additionally, it seeks to document some of the commentary on the strategic hamlets and to give import to the influence of the United States in its development. The tone is one of a quick success for the Government of Viet Nam in the insurgency campaign and of overriding optimism, which leaves one with the uncomfortable feeling that too many decisions regarding the program were made on the basis of hope and supposition rather than on the basis of a careful study and analysis of the available facts. This hope and optimism was translated into a program of action which led to the strategic hamlets being build at a hurried pace throughout the length and breadth of Viet Nam. In so doing, the system collapsed and security deteriorated to the point that the life of the incumbent regime and the existence of the entire government of Viet Nam was at stake.

The reader ought to be aware of certain key problems. First, much of the information concerning the strategic hamlets is still classified; hence, there are obvious source limitations. Second, the failure of this and other pacification measures has given birth to a wealth of studies concerning most of the provinces, many districts, and numerous villages

and hamlets in Viet Nam. Although this is very beneficial to the student of Viet Nam, one must critically question their value to the present study. Do the influences, interviews, data available in 1965, or 1968, or now, have relevance to the period being studied? This, not all strategic hamlets failed in their goals or fell to the Viet Cong. Many individual hamlets, as certain government operations, were successful. These successes, however, did not prolong the life of the strategic hamlet program beyond its chief benefactors' deaths in November 1963. Lastly, some people call or refer to the insurgent as the Viet Cong, or "VC," others say "the Front" and even more Vietnamese villages use the pronoun "they" to describe the authorities on the insurgent side. In Tay Ninh Province "they" are called "the Communists." Some say "cadres" and the list goes on. I have not attempted to distinguish between the North Vietnamese operating in Viet Nam, the regroupées, or the local guerrillas. I have cemented them into the one Americanized agglomeration that most of us have come to know--Viet Cong. This includes all the guerrillas and their organization.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

1. Charles Wolf, Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: New Myths and (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1965), P-3132-1, p. 1.
2. Mao repeatedly emphasizes this point in his writings but particularly in On Guerrilla Warfare, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961).
3. Mao Tse-tung, "Be Concerned With the Well-Being of the Masses, Pay Attention to the Needs of Work," Selected Works, Volume 1 (Peking: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1954), p. 147.
4. Robert C. North, "Two Revolutionary Models: Russian and Chinese," A. Doak Barnett, editor, Communist Strategies in Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Governments and Parties, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), pp. 34-60.
5. Mao Tse-tung, On the Protracted War, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1954), p. 76.
6. Cyril E. Black and Thomas P. Thorton, Communism and Revolution, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 65.
7. General Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War People's Army, (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961), pp. 43-44.
8. Che Guevara, On Guerrilla Warfare, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), p. 6.
9. Lin Piao, "Long Live the Victory of People's War," Peking Review, Peking, Volume 8, Number 36, September 3, 1965, p. 24.
10. See, for example, Napoleon D. Valeriana and Charles T. R. Bohannon, Counter guerrilla Operations, The Philippine Experience, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), and Regis Debray, Revolution in the Revolution?, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967).

11. See for example, Peter Paret and John W. Shy, Guerrilla's in the 1960's, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), pp. 44-45, and Bernard B. Fall, Street Without Joy, (Harrisburg: The Stackpole Co., 1961), and David Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), p. 7.
12. B. B. Fall, Street Without Joy, op cit., p. 15
13. Galula, op cit., p. 7.
14. Perhaps Mao's perception of guerrilla warfare as a function of the total environment comes from his appreciation of the role of the Chinese peasant in social change. China's war, to Mao, is a people's war. He staunchly maintains that the rich and fundamental source of power comes from the masses. During the war with Japan, he once said, "Only through arousing and organizing ninety percent of the workers and farmers can feudalism and imperialism be crushed down." Later, during what he called the Communism all front insurrection against the Juomentang, he said that the party should try every possible means to ally itself with the nation's population. Furthermore he states, "Because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation." Asian People's Anti-Communist League, A Research on Mao Tse-tung's Thoughts on Military Insurrections, (Taipei: APACIROC, 1961), p. 7.
15. John L. Sorenson and David K. Pack, Applied Analysis of Unconventional Warfare, (China Lake: U. S. Naval Ordnance Test Station, 1967), p. 1.
16. Paret, op cit., p. 46.
17. Foreign Assistance Act of 1964, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, April, 1964, p. 208.
18. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, April, 1965, p. 2.
19. Robert S. McNamara, "Address before Fellows of the American Bar Association," Chicago, February 17, 1962. Reprinted in Department of the Army, Special Warfare, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington D. C., 1962, pp. 12-13. Mr. McNamara's reference was in reaction to Soviet Premier Krushchev's categorization of war into three types: world war, local war, and wars of national liberation. Krushchev stated that wars of national liberation

would be supported by the Soviet Union concurrently within its policy of peaceful coexistence. Said Krushchev: National liberation, civil and other popular wars...are just, liberating, and revolutionary..." Marshal V. D. Sokolovski, (editor) Military Strategy: Soviet Doctrine and Concepts, (New York: Prentice Hall, 1963), p. 178. In a 1963 speech in Hanoi, the president of the People's Republic of China, Liu Shao-chi confirmed his countries adherence to the third challenge of Communist revolutionary doctrine, "Peaceful coexistence must not be used to abolish the Socialist countries duties of supporting the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed nations and people. Quoted in San Francisco Examiner (Associated Press), May 13, 1963.

20. Ithiel de Sola Pool, "Village Violence and International Violence," Pease Research Society: Paper IX, Cambridge Conference, 1968, p. 1; Ithiel de Sola Pool, "Village Violence and Pacification in Viet Nam," University of Illinois Bulletin, (Urbana: Department of Political Science, 1968), p. 11; Charles Wolf, Jr., op cit., p. 3.
21. Pool, Village Violence and International Violence, op cit., pp. 1-2.
22. Wolf, op cit., p. 5.
23. Harumi Befu, "The Political Relation of the Village to the State," World Politics, XIX, July, 1967, pp. 601-20.
24. Black and Thorton, op cit., p. 12.
25. Roger Hilsman, "Forward" to Giap's People's War, People's Army in the F. A. Praeger version, New York, 1962, p. vii.
26. Morris Janowitz, Community Political Systems, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1961), p. 13.
27. Black and Thorton, op cit., p. 12.
28. Theodore Draper, Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), pp. 11-15. George A. Kelly, "Revolutionary Warfare and Psychological Action" in Modern Guerrilla Warfare, edited by Franklin Mark Osanka, (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), pp. 425-438; W. P. Davidson, Some Observations on Viet Cong Operations in the Villages, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1968), RM 5267/2 ISA-ARPA.

29. John S. Pustay, Counterinsurgency Warfare, (New York: The Free Press, 1965), pp. 83-115 and pp. 136-154; Peter Paret and John Shy, Guerrilla's in the 1960's, op cit.
30. Napoleon D. Valeriano, International Police Services Incorporated: South Vietnam Survey March-April 1964, (AID/Fe (Vietnam) n.d. p. 5.
31. Douglas Pike, Vietnam: Communication Factors of Revolutionary Guerrilla War, (Cambridge: Center for International Studies, MIT, May, 1965), p. 8.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING¹

Environmental considerations in South Viet Nam must be taken into account in the study of the strategic hamlets, for both the physical and the cultural settings will significantly affect the defense, the roles and the capabilities of the government, the defenders, and the insurgents. Terrain and climatic conditions will not only affect the personnel operating in an area but, furthermore, the equipment that they use and the support that is provided them. Equipment performance, physical characteristics, cultural values, and technological skills are essential considerations for both planner and executor.

The Population

Gerald Hickey concludes that a great deal of Vietnamese sociopolitical complexity is rooted in regionalism which has persisted throughout the history of Viet Nam.²

Regionalism was perhaps an inevitable development given the strong village orientation of Vietnamese society and the historical nam tien or "advance to the south" which took place over a thousand-year period and carried the Vietnamese population from the Red River delta, along the physically segmented coastal plain into the delta of the Mekong River. Significantly, many of the historical conflicts among the Vietnamese were inter-regional, and regional divisions formed the basis for French control in establishing the protectorate of Tonkin and Annam in northern and central Viet-Nam and the colony of Cochinchina in the south.

Strong regional sentiments also have been a source of some disruption and strife in recent Vietnamese history. The hundreds of thousands of northern Vietnamese who came south following the Geneva Accords in 1954 have only partially integrated in southern Vietnamese society. As one Vietnamese observer put it, "They (the northerners) continue to be a nation within a nation." This has resulted in a northern-southern dichotomy that cuts across social and political lines from the street vender to the highest echelons of the government.³

The population of South Viet Nam during 1962-1963 was approximately 14 million people. Of these, approximately eighty percent or 11 million lived in the rural areas. They dwelled in an estimated 14,000 hamlets which were isolated to a large extent not only from each other but from the presence of central government authority, administration, and leadership. In many areas the only viable evidence of governmental presence had been an occasional military unit passing through or local officials who showed up often enough to collect taxes but not enough to provide services. In other areas it was a matter of conflicting interests.

Since the establishment of the republic in 1955, the ministries in Saigon have had an increasing role in village education, public works, agricultural programs, financial affairs, justice, and civil order. But the peasant is as yet far from identifying himself and his interests with the central government. In his eyes, it has not changed greatly since colonial days. He regards it as the source of frequent interference in village matters, and of frustrating bans on gambling, plural marriage, concubinage, and other cherished institutions.⁴

Because of the geographic regionalism, internal communication difficulties, and the social structure inherent in Vietnamese village life, the peasants, most of whom live in villages or hamlets, have no well developed sense of national identity. The small Vietnamese village is generally autonomous by tradition and self-sufficient by economic necessity."⁵ The peasant's commitment is first to his family and then to the council of elders who govern his village. The tradition of attentisme and the cultural emphasis on adaptability permits the Vietnamese peasant to adjust his attitude to the situation. For this reason, the peasant's attitude toward the South Vietnamese government and its forces, the United States forces, and the Viet Cong tend to vary with the influence each of these elements exerts over his daily life.⁶

Though there are pro-Viet Cong and pro-government factions in the villages, most peasants do not actively take sides. They are paying a higher price in casualties and property damage than any other Vietnamese group. But they have come to understand that to refrain from alliance with either side is the best way to survival, and they passively comply with whichever side is in control of their area at any given moment.⁷

Community solidarity is the exception not the rule in Viet Nam. Even traditionally a Vietnamese is far more loyal to family than to community, let alone to any political or social unit even more remote. With the weakening of traditions, mores,

and social forms under the impact of modernization and war, individual Vietnamese social and psychological moorings to the status quo do not hold very strong against propaganda or pressure.

Motivation to participate in government sponsored organizations or activities may be varied. This is particularly true when the villager's perception of the threat to his survival is far less than the government's perception, particularly since the Viet Cong take great pains to convince the populace that they are in no danger and will not suffer as long as they help the guerrilla and do not cooperate with the government.⁸ The Viet Cong effectively demonstrate this claim by specifically directing attacks against those who do participate in defensive actions.⁹ Thus, a villager could easily have a greater perceived threat by taking part in a defensive action than if he merely ignored the conflict.

Physical Conditions

The physical structure and surroundings clearly affect the nature of the defense configuration of a village. Hickey's anthropological study Village In Vietnam succinctly delineates this problem.

The six dispersed administrative hamlets that constitute the village of Khanh Hau encompasses a variety of settlement types, all of which can be found throughout the Mekong River delta. They include clustered settlements, string settlements along systems of communication such as streams, canals, roads, and footpaths, and isolated farmsteads.¹⁰

He continues:

The dispersed character of the settlements that make up the village of Khanh Hau present a greater problem of internal than external communication. The national highway segmenting the village is a major line of communication from Saigon to the south, and no farmstead in Khanh Hau is more than 3 kilometers from it. One can always leave the village by any one of the many public carriers that use the highway. On the other hand, to go from far-removed parts of Ap Cau or Ap Nhon Hau (two of the six hamlets of the village) to the Council House in Ap Dinh-A (a third hamlet) necessitates a trip of at least 5 kilometers. Within the village the best way to get about is on foot, which is arduous in the mud of the rainy season and uncomfortable under the brazen sun of the dry months.¹¹

Hence it becomes necessary to survey the physical environment in the various topographical sections of Viet Nam for it is obvious that linear villages, for instance, would be defended differently than cluster villages. Villages surrounded by dense jungle would call for a different defense system than the village surrounded by rice paddies. Villages in the mountains may be physically easier to defend than those in the valley regions or in the delta area, and yet they may be harder to supply or reinforce. Because of the basis of subsistence agriculture in Viet Nam, as Sir Robert Thompson has pointed out, there are few all-weather roads making the dispersed populated areas even more inaccessible. For instance, in the Mekong

Delta, transports moving to and from the heavily populated areas must depend entirely on waterways.¹²

A. Terrain and Climatic Conditions

One correspondent covering the war in Viet Nam has described the terrain in these terms: "This is a country that seems to jump suddenly from rugged mountains to endless marshy swamps; it looks as if it were designed by some guerrilla general for his own war games."¹³

Along its crescent apex South Viet Nam is about 700 miles long, about 150 miles wide at its widest point, and covers an area slightly less than the state of Washington, about 65,726 square miles. South Viet Nam is not a homogeneous nation, and may be divided into four geographic regions: the Central Highlands, the Mekong Delta, the Coastlands, and the Interior Plain. Each will be discussed separately in this section.

1. The Central Highlands

This, the largest and most formidable military geographic region of Viet Nam, consists primarily of intermediate to rugged jungle-covered mountains deeply dissected by ridges, separated by deep valleys and interspersed with high undulating to rolling hill areas.

The Central Highlands is covered by more than

three-fourths with rugged jungle-covered mountains, with open jungle in the rolling hills dotted with scattered open grassy areas and broad savannas. Trees in this thick jungle are often 70 to 100 feet high, from two to four feet in diameter, clear of branches near the jungle floor but having a high, thick canopy 25 or more feet thick.

The vegetation undergrowth varies from a thick mat of low ferns and shrubs in the virgin jungle to a dense tangled mass of vines, tree ferns, tall bamboo thickets, and small trees intermingled with thorny shrubs and buffalo grass in the second-growth jungle. In the rolling terrain areas, such as Dalat, broad savannas are covered with buffalo grass, three to five feet high with sharp edges and pointed fronds.

Rainfall varies from 50 to 150 inches, depending upon exposure and elevation. Violent thunderstorms and heavy rains occur during the period from May to October.

2. The Mekong Delta

The Delta is probably the most significant region from the viewpoint of village defense. The data available indicate that most of the Viet Cong incidents take place there. The Delta is a flat, low plain, with elevations generally below 50 feet above sea level. It has extensive rice paddies, large areas of swamps and marshes, and dense networks of canals and ditches which

connect the meandering tributaries of the Mekong, Bassac, Vaico, and the Saigon rivers. Vast areas of the region are inundated throughout the high water period, from early June through December. From mid-January through April, the rice fields are generally drained.

Dense evergreen mangrove swamps form strips from 100 yards to 20 miles wide along the coasts. Mangrove trees produce an abundance of aerial roots, as much as 5 to 6 inches in diameter, forming an almost impenetrable maze of dense undergrowth. Savannas, covered by grass 3 to 5 feet tall, and some forests are located in better-drained areas.

Dikes, 2 feet wide and from 1 to 2 feet high separating rice fields, are often spaced less than 100 feet apart and in irregular patterns. Numerous small canals and ditches are used for irrigation, transportation, and drainage. The major canals range from 50 to 2000 feet in width and from 5 to 10 feet in depth, while ditches approximately 5 feet wide and 4 feet deep drain the rice fields.

High temperature, humidity and heavy seasonal rainfall characterize the Mekong Delta. Nighttime tempera-

tures average approximately 70°F and afternoon temperatures average 90°F all year; relative humidity ranges from 75 to 90 per cent throughout the year. The rainy season, during which 80 to 90 per cent of the annual rainfall is received, extends from May through October; annual totals range from 90 inches in the extreme south to 75 inches in the northern part of the region.

3. Coastal Plains

A series of small coastal plains extends south from the 17th Parallel to Ca Na, a small village about 25 km southwest of Phang Rang. These plains, ranging from 2 to 25 miles in width, are separated by rugged mountain spurs forming bold headlands along the coast. For the most part, the plains are predominantly level and characteristically rolling on inland margins with isolated local hills and ridges. Low passes or corridors connect adjoining plains. Sand dunes, 10-60 feet high, are common along much of the coast.

This distinctive area is bisected by many short streams, tidal channels and lagoons (paralleling the coast), which are connected by canals and ditches. The area is drained by many short rivers that crest and inundate the flats during the rainy season. Sandbars frequently obstruct the stream mouths that empty into coastal lagoons or tidal channels which parallel the coast. These are generally

separated from the sea by a narrow sandy belt. In places, tidal channels extend inland as much as ten miles. During the flooding season, (mid-September through early January), bottom land may be continuously inundated. Principal rivers, many canals, and tidal channels and lagoons are unfordable throughout the year. Local marshes and swamps border the streams. Small discontinuous areas of marshes and mangrove swamps are scattered along the coast. In many instances, river and canal banks are typically lined with nepa palm, plantain, bamboo and banana plants.

About 75 per cent of the area is under cultivation, with rice the predominant crop on the lowlands and terraces inland near the highlands and on the local hills. Irrigated crops such as corn and sugar cane are often grown after harvest of the rice crop. Large areas of open jungle cover parts of high inland margins; dense evergreen broadleaf jungle may be found on mountain spurs, outliers, and on some high terraces. The sand dunes are barren, with sparse grass patches and scattered shrubs.

Rainfall varies from place to place; during the rainy season, (September through December), it may be as much as 200 inches at some stations, or as low as 50 inches. temperatures are high and uniform. Visibility during crachin

weather (January to April) is poor, but improves rapidly from April to June. Occasional typhoons occur late in summer and autumn and bring high winds and heavy rains, often with severe flooding.

4. Interior Plains

Extensive areas of gently rolling to hilly plains and large areas of low-lying to gently rolling plains characterize three-fourths of this grassy savanna region. Open virgin jungle is most common, but areas of dense jungle such as "D" Zone in Phuoc Thanh Province, are scattered throughout the region.

Dense bamboo thickets and trees entangled with vines 1 to 9 inches thick occur in strips 100 feet or more wide along streams and rivers.

B. Village Configurations

The heterogeneity of hamlets is physical as well as social. Geometrically the hamlets vary greatly, but typologically they can be classified into three categories; compact, diffuse, and linear. All three types share a topography that gives the insurgent access to them from almost any quarter.

The compact hamlet, found mostly in the central coast provinces and central highlands, have well defined perimeters. They often are surrounded by a fence (barbed wire, pickets, usually not more than 2 kilometers in perimeter) with one or two gates. Most are somewhat isolated.

The diffuse hamlets, which are scattered throughout the coastal plain, have houses spread without apparent pattern among trees or other vegetation. Adjacent hamlets are often not well separated. The boundaries between hamlets are hard to see and do not necessarily depend on significant topographical features. Their perimeters, while not readily definable, average about 4 kilometers. Approaches to the hamlet are often masked partly or completely by vegetation and visibility within the hamlet is often no more than 50 meters.

The linear hamlet predominates in the Mekong Delta region, where the houses are built alongside canals. Sometimes these hamlets are on only one side, sometimes on both sides. During the monsoon season, large land areas in and around the Delta hamlets are flooded. Adjacent hamlets are often continuous with each hamlet being up to 3 kilometers long.

The physical configurations of the villages or hamlets to be defended dictate the character and size of the defense required. These configurations vary with the region, the terrain, and the manner in which the hamlet or village was organized, the local occupations, and the density of the population. Maps provided in the rear, show the province and general population configurations in South Viet Nam.¹⁴ Table 1 indicates average population for each province.¹⁵

The average hamlet contains about 250 families and 1,000 people. The size varies considerably, however, with some hamlets near Saigon or in populous parts of the Mekong Delta containing as much as 5,000 people and some isolated hamlets containing no more than a few hundred people.

The dispersed distribution of houses within diffuse and linear settlements makes them vulnerable to undetected penetration by intruders. Furthermore, the few ties between neighboring communities increase the probability of unhindered access to their perimeter from outside; and the normal work activities of most of the rural population take them to points in and around their hamlets where enemy attacks or contacts can easily take place.

1. Central Highlands

Two important types of villages appear in the Central Highlands; the Montagnard villages inhabited by the mountain tribes and resettlement villages established by the Vietnamese government in the late 1950's.

The settlements inhabited by the Montagnard tribes are generally located in valley flats, often within about 1/2 kilometer from a stream or river. The houses are normally organized into a cluster which is usually surrounded by a fence, and separated from the fields by bush. Access to the village is normally by trail or dirt

road, with poor visibility on each side. The houses are made of thatch and sit off the ground on heavy wooden pilings. The houses are not normally set close to each other, and the size of the area of greatest population density can be estimated by assuming about .08 to .10 hectares per capita, roughly a square 1/2 to 1 kilometer on a side.

The isolated resettlement villages are ordinarily organized into a grid pattern, with cleared fields surrounding the housing area, leading into the wild bush of the highlands. The area of dense population can be estimated by assuming .06 to .08 hectares per capita, and might be roughly a one kilometer square. The fields might extend for another 1 to 2 kilometers beyond.

2. Mekong Delta

In the area comprising the twelve provinces southwest of Saigon, linear villages are the most predominant type. These differ somewhat, depending on whether they are strung out along a road or along a waterway. In villages along a road, the houses tend to be set somewhat apart from each other, and do not line the roadway in neat array. There is generally little heavy growth of grass or underbrush around the access to the village, particularly if the village is along a main road. Most houses are surrounded by a thicket or a thorn fence, which encloses a garden plot, fruit trees,

and sometimes a fish pond or an animal shed. About 80 to 90 per cent of the houses are constructed of thatch or wood. A typical home plot encompasses about 10,000 square feet or more. The land area of the village, including its inhabitant's rice fields and garden and homes plots can be estimated by assuming 1/3 hectare per capita, which would be about a square mile per hamlet for typical populations in South Viet Nam West. The area of greatest population density can be estimated by assuming about 0.1 hectare per capita and this might be distributed in a shape typically 600-900 feet wide and 1 to 3 kilometers long.

In ribbon villages, whose main access is by water, the linearity is more pronounced than in the villages lying along a road. Houses are usually lined up only one deep along the stream or canal, and are normally surrounded by thicket fences. The foliage around these villages is usually much heavier than around the villages along a road, making for less visibility along the approaches. Water palms, which are grown as thatch for houses and provide an important source of income, are particularly prevalent. The area of the villages can be estimated similarly to the ones along a road using the same factors of 1/3 hectare per capita for total area and 0.1 hectare per capita for the region of high population density. A typical village might be 33 to

400 feet wide and 1-1/2 to 3 kilometers long.

About 10 per cent of the population live in refugee villages located primarily in the dry rolling country north and east of Saigon and in the extreme southern and western parts of the Delta. In these, the houses tend to be closer together than in the linear villages, are usually smaller and more uniform than in other villages, and are less likely to be separated by fences. The villages tend to be settled mainly on one side of a road or canal, and are usually only one house deep with little tree cover when located along a canal. The area of greatest population density is normally more compact than in the ribbon villages and can be estimated by assuming about .06 to .08 hectares per capita, or typically about 300 feet wide by 1 to 2 kilometers long. The fields, located behind the houses, may extend for 1 to 2 kilometers from the road or canal.

In general, in South Viet Nam West, a villager's fields are not located immediately adjacent to his house and he may have to walk an average of 1/2 to 1-1/2 kilometers to his field.

Each administrative village contains a Village Council house near which is usually located a guard post, in the main hamlet of the village. These are also usually near the major access (e.g., crossroad or bridge) to the

hamlet. If an administrative village has a marketplace, it usually has only one market, often not located in the center of population and separated from the next nearest market by about 6 to 10 kilometers.

The delta village is an agglomeration of hamlets, which often are far apart, and neither the community dinh (temple) nor the Council House adequately function as a focal place for all members of a village. The villager's sense of solidarity, therefore, tends to be restricted to his hamlet or, even more narrowly, to his residence group (a cluster of farmsteads within a hamlet, often composed of related families). He is willing to trust and help his immediate neighbors, but he is wary of mutual-aid agreements at the village level, as was shown in the failure of an attempt at a village-wide cooperative not long ago.¹⁶

3. Central Lowlands

The villages in the Central Lowlands are typically compact, with the houses located close together, and are usually surrounded by a natural fence or thicket. In the area of dense population, there is about .06 to .08 hectares per capita, making a typical village roughly a square 1 to 2 kilometers on a side

Border Aspects

One other geographical aspect that must be considered is South Viet Nam's very large borders. Its land borders are about 900 miles in length and the ocean borders are about 1200 miles.

The problem of preventing unauthorized border traffic has plagued countries since time immemorial. In the Philippines and Malaya the border and coastal accesses were effectively controlled by the government forces. In these two insurgencies the government forces were victorious. In Algeria and Cuba the aid received by the guerrilla from outside the country was substantial and in both these cases the insurgents were victorious.¹⁷

The border traffic has plagued Viet Nam also. Through 1963, it was estimated that 10 per cent of the material requirement of the Viet Cong came from outside Viet Nam.¹⁸ Vital supplies reaching the insurgent have included medicines, maps, and propaganda equipment in addition to arms and ammunition and personnel.¹⁹

South Vietnam today lacks the means to close its remote far flung borders. It cannot eradicate bases in 'neutral' Laos; retaliate against the 'Democratic Republic' at Hanoi; compel Cambodia to expel Viet Cong bands.²⁰

Approximately one-third of Viet Nam's border abuts Laos and is almost all heavily forested, rugged and very mountainous. The remaining 600-700 miles of the border are with Cambodia. With the exception of about 150 miles, this border passes through terrain that is essentially flat or gently rolling to hilly. This section is interdicted with heavily forested mountainous area with the last 250

miles to the South China Sea being flat delta country of the Mekong River. Much of this area is inundated seasonally.

If clearing operations were to take place, approximately two-thirds of the border would require deforestation. The 250 miles of flat delta country would require very little clearing, but would present a special problem because much of it is covered with 5 to 15 feet of water almost half of the year. Due to sparse population along the border there are few roads and trails, and inadequate or destroyed roads and rail systems and bridges hamper movement, especially in the northern half of the country.

Identification of unauthorized border traffic is severely hampered by virtually a complete lack of means of border surveillance. Even if considerable resources were committed, the effectiveness of surveillance and control would be low. In the northern sections, handicaps include rough terrain, heavy cover, poor visibility, a sparseness of population, and an uncooperative attitude by certain Montagnard tribes.²¹ In the Mekong Delta, one major difficulty is the large number of suitable crossing points.

Manning the border is a practical impossibility and yet strategic hamlets require area security. This tactical dilemma is related to the more basic goal of achieving area

security for Viet Nam and helped contribute, as will be seen, to the over-extension of the strategic hamlet program. The diffusion of infiltration requires that essentially the entire border be controlled. Attention to a few strategic points is neither adequate nor mutually supporting, and this factor contributed to the hamlets being overrun by the Viet Cong and to their eventual downfall.

Comment

In reviewing this chapter one might conclude that any type of hamlet security program was better suited for the central coast regions and for the highlands than for the Mekong Delta. In these coastal and plateau regions the peasant lives in small, clustered villages which lend themselves to the type of defense proposed in the strategic hamlet program. There was little need for relocation; withholding food from the enemy was more feasible because of the limited resources of each of these regions; and communal use of the land was traditional because of the limited amount of rice acreage. Furthermore the Vietnamese Government had placed a major effort in these regions because the Ngos were more interested in them.

Both American advisers and Vietnamese officials should have recognized the inherent differences in the Delta. In this area the guerrilla found it easy to live off the land. Even more important is the fact that the population of the Delta

is not clustered into convenient little groups; it was spread out over the rich Delta soil. All too often this meant relocating people from an area where they lived, worked, and held for generations to a region for which they cared not at all. This very act of relocations due to the physical conditions of the area resulted in thousands of peasants turning against the Government.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter II

1. This chapter, especially the area and hamlet physical characteristics, is based primarily on information extracted from George L. Harris, et al, Area Handbook for Vietnam, (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1962), Frederick P. Peterkin, "The Land: Vietnam," Infantry, Volume 55, Number 5, September-October 1965, pp. 48-53; Cyril D. Sterner, "South Vietnam: Progress in the Shadow of the Dragon," Infantry, Volume 50, Number 4, August-September, 1960, pp. 68-71; Jonathan F. Ladd, "Behind the Vietnam News," Infantry, Volume 54, Number 4, July-August, 1964, pp. 14-18; also from talks with fellow officers who have been in Viet Nam and from my own experiences there.
2. Gerald C. Hickey, Accommodation in South Viet Nam: The Key to Sociopolitical Solidarity, (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1967), RP 3702, p. 2.
3. Ibid, pp. 2-3. It is interesting to note how this dichotomy affected certain government resettlement programs as seen in a later chapter.
4. Gerald C. Hickey, Notes on the South Vietnamese Peasants of the Mekong Delta, (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1964), RM-4116-ISA, p. viii.
5. Bernard B. Fall, Viet Nam Witness, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 87.
6. Andrew Nathan, "New Life in Vietnam," Far Eastern Economic Review, XLIV, Number 4, April 23, 1964, p. 201; Sorenson and Pack, op cit., p. 18.
7. Gerald C. Hickey, Notes on the South Vietnamese Peasant of the Mekong Delta, op cit., p. ix.
8. See, for example, Douglas Pike, Viet Cong, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), Chapters 14 and 15; Douglas Pike, War, Peace and the Viet Cong, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), Chapter 3.
9. Daniel Ellsberg, The Day Loc Tien Was Pacified, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1968), P-3793.

10. Gerald C. Hickey, Village in Vietnam, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 19.
11. Ibid, p. 22.
12. Sir Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 18. This makes it very difficult to conduct military operations. Malcolm Browne writes of one unit going to the defense of an attacked hamlet (Dan Doi) having to use a canal to get to the village. Obviously, the Viet Cong know where the reinforcements are based and the routes they can take, which makes it extremely dangerous for any relief force. Malco Browne, The New Face of War, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 170-182.
13. "Raid in Vietnam", The New York Times, January 7, 1963, p. 10.
14. The Vietnamese government has created new provinces and shifted some villages and districts from one province to another which has caused some confusion in American advisory circles.
15. These figures reflect the data available through July 1963, the period of time we are concerned. The reader should be aware that these data undergo frequent change. J. A. Wilson and M. J. Penzo, South Vietnam Political Division Tables and Maps, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1964), RM-4254-ARPA (Part 1).
16. Gerald C. Hickey, Notes on the South Vietnamese Peasant of the Mekong Delta, op cit., p. vii.
17. Adrian Jones et al, Internal Defense Against Insurgency, Six Cases, (Washington, D. C.: American University, 1966), p. 115.
18. Bernard Fall, "South Viet Nam 1956 to Nov. 1963," in D. M. Condit's Challenge and Response in Internal Conflict, Vol. I, The Experience in Asia, (Washington, D. C.: American University, 1968), pp. 331-373.
19. U. S. Department of State, A Threat to Peace: North Vietnam's Effort to Conquer South Viet Nam, Publication 7308, Part II, (Washington, D. C., U. S. Department of State, 1961) p. 1. Jay Mallin writes: "In 1959 and 1960, at least 1,800 men moved into South Viet Nam from the North. The flow increased to more than 3,700 in 1961 and to at least 5,400 in 1962." From what source Mallin received this information is not stated. Jay Mallin, Terror in Viet Nam, (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand & Co., 1966), p. 39.

20. G. C. Reinhardt, Guerrilla Combat, Strategy and Deterrence in Southeast Asia, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1964), P-2706-1, p. 11.
21. William Nighwoonger, "Quang Nam Province," War Without Guns: American Civilians in Rural Vietnam, George R. Tanhan et al, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p.96.

HISTORICAL SETTING

The Emergence of the Concept

The position of the government of South Viet Nam has been a precarious and unstable one from its inception in 1954. The government which Ngo Dinh Diem inherited in October, 1955, began in just about as total an organizational vacuum as is possible¹ for there existed within Viet Nam a fragmented sociopolitical structure and a disorganized government without sufficient leadership skills faced with numerous socio-politico-economic problems caused by years of war, the pull out of the French and the French civil service, a Confucian system of rule, diverse ethnic groups, religious divisions, and the conservative nature of the existing rulers.² In the countryside itself, there was little government other than the traditional village structure.

The following factors are of particular historical significance in regard to the above:

1) Social, cultural, and political factors have continued to make loyalty to the nation-state a difficult concept for the average Vietnamese³

2) There exists now, as well as traditionally, a fundamental divergence between the peasant and the urban elite.⁴

3) Within Vietnamese society, there is a general desire to adapt to circumstances--to be supple in and to adjust to the situation.⁵

4) The Viet Cong have aggravated societal dislocation and unrest to further their own aims to the detriment of government programs.⁶

In any country with a history of war and chaos such as that of Viet Nam in the 20th century, there are bound to be many disaffected people, deeply established habits of violence, and a great deal of difficulty in establishing a central government based on consent of the people. The Viet Cong have recognized this from the beginning and are skillful in linking their political-military efforts to the exploitation of popular grievances. Diem was also aware of this and attempted to mitigate it.

As a nation-builder, Diem was a man in a hurry. He knew he had to be. He was an idealist with enormous revolutionary ambitions for the transformation of his country. But he was also aware of the older revolutionary intentions of the communist regime to the North.

When the insurgency was renewed after a period of comparative quiescence 1954-1957 the government's nation building effort was placed under increasing pressure. The race was on for the loyalty and

control of whole communities in the rural areas and the communists had a head start. Some of the problems faced by Diem in his Titanic political contest were inherited; others were created by the regime itself...

As a pattern, the movements of the regime were toward ever-enlarging programs, demanding more and more time from peasants and officials, but achieving little in the way of security or prosperity. There was much talk of revolution, democracy, and the dignity of man, but the behavior of the regime towards the citizenry, and particularly minority political leaders, was often the opposite of the edifying words.⁷

At the end of 1954, President Diem issued a national security directive, placing all "insecure" provinces under military authorities. Those provinces in zones being evacuated by the Viet Minh, specifically Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh in Central Viet Nam, the Camau Peninsula, the Plain of Reeds, and Xuyen Moc area east of Saigon, were also included in those to be administered by the military. This operational plan, known as "pacification," provided for the phasing out of military authority as civilian administrators became available and capable. The Vietnamese were advised on the pacification operations by French and United States officers in the combined Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM), under the United States Chief of the Military Advisory Assistance Group.⁸ General (then Colonel) Lansdale, the United States counterinsurgency expert, who was one of President Diem's primary advisors during the early years of his reign, comments:

The two largest pacification campaigns were undertaken in the early months of 1955, in Camau in the far south and in Quang Ngai-Binh Dinh provinces of the central coastal region. The first used military forces of about brigade strength, while the second had forces about the strength of a corps...Essentially, these operations were march-ins by the troops and the establishment of free government in the area...Troops for these campaigns were given special training in courtesy towards the civilians, (including how to answer to communist propaganda), in disbursing aid, in construction, and in administrative procedures...

Similar pacification measures were taken in actions against rebellious sect forces in the western regions and in the jungle-foothill regions north of Saigon. The latter operation experimented with building a force around a small Army cadre (used for central administration and for patrols into the further reaches of the jungle), and making use of civil police forces and civilian administrative teams...⁹

Lansdale considered the first operation a success whereas the pacification measures were not and had to be strengthened with more troops.¹⁰ By the end of February, 1955, according to reports by the French, the Viet Minh, prior to their withdrawal to the north, were "masters" of 60 to 90 per cent of the villages in the South, except for those areas under the control of the various sects.¹¹

Bernard Fall wrote that some members of the new Diem government were aware of the danger of an unchecked insurgency in the rural areas, and it was at their insistence that

a small Self-Defense Corps (Dan Ve) was organized in 1955 at the village level. A civil guard (Bao An), whose job was to maintain lines of communication and protect roads and bridges, was also organized under the Presidency and later transferred to the Department of the Interior.¹² However, these units, in these early days of the insurgency fought "without adequate training or equipment and even without medical aid."¹³ Hickey writes (reference the Mekong village of Khanh Hau):

The Dan Ve or Self-Defense Guards numbering around 15 were stationed in the military stockade, and the Hamlet Guard maintained watch posts through the village, but after dark the area of security dwindled as it did during the Indochina War to the barbed wire enclosure around the Council House, dinh, and stockade.¹⁴

In his attempt to consolidate the power of his government throughout Viet Nam, Diem attempted to eliminate what he saw as a challenge to his authority--the nationalistic appeal of the Viet Minh. Mass meetings were organized throughout the countryside to promote allegiance to his new government, and villages were called upon to condemn the Communists.

President Diem felt his power and authority threatened by the Communist Party members and therefore launched a campaign to identify and control them. The campaign by which he sought to neutralize the Viet Minh networks included instructions to local officials to classify the population

into three categories, which would permit the screening out of his enemies.¹⁵ "Category A was for Party Members considered the most dangerous; Category B, for Party Members of lesser importance; and Category C, for loyal citizens."¹⁶

Though this policy apparently was conceived in Saigon as a means of separating active Viet Minh agents from the population, in its implementation it avalanched into what the former Viet Minh, and other segments of the population as well, perceived as a "campaign of terror" against anyone who had once been associated with the Resistance. Not only the active members, but large numbers of the inactive, whether or not they were still loyal to the Viet Minh, were harassed, persecuted, arrested, and in some cases executed. In many areas this local oppression also included the so-called "Viet Minh families," that is to say, those who had sons among the regroupees in the North or relatives who were involved in insurgency activities in the South. Not only were local officials and police agents frequently incompetent at singling out the active Viet Minh agents, but many were also arrogant and venal in the execution of their tasks, and by their offensive behavior generated sympathy for the Viet Minh.¹⁷

This first attempt at population control by Diem failed, but this did not prevent him from instituting a similar concept in 1959.

The first pacification effort initiated by Diem was referred to as "Civic Action." Using his armed forces, led by civilian cadres, Diem moved Civic Action teams into former

Viet Minh areas using the "three withs" program--"eat, sleep and work with the people"--worked out primarily by Colonel Edward Landsdale, his American counter guerrilla advisor who had been closely associated with Ramon Magsaysay's successful counterinsurgency program against the Hukbalahap movement in the Philippines.¹⁸

Dressed in the traditional peasant black pajama clothing, 1800 cadres moved into these recently vacated areas and began a variety of political, economic, and social programs intended to stimulate self-help and implant a sense of unity between the national government and the peasant.¹⁹

Examples of some of the activities reported as achieved were:

- distributing medicines and giving inoculations
- teaching personal and public hygiene
- digging wells and irrigation canals
- explaining agrarian reform and legislation
- forming a village militia or self-defense group
- conducting political meetings
- teaching children in school by day and anti-illiteracy classes at night
- repairing and enlarging local roads
- building schools, maternity hospitals and information halls
- census taking and surveys of the physical needs of the village.²⁰

The early successes of Civic Action led to a typical Diem regime syndrome--over-extension. The government tried to enlarge the program by using regular civil servants from other agencies. The result was a diminishing of experience and education, a squabble between agencies with their own specialized cadres and the Civic Action trained cadres, mass resignations, and eventually total abandonment of the effort.²¹

The United States Mission in Viet Nam assisted the pacification effort of the Civic Action cadres through funds and equipment. The United States Overseas Mission's Field Service Division, which had representatives in most provinces where aid was being administered, initially provided provincial authorities with direct programs of aid, but the Diem government later channeled it through a Civic Action Directorate.²²

The population exchange provisions of the Geneva Accords of 1954 resulted in an influx of some 860,000 refugees from the North into South Viet Nam--principally into the Saigon area. The relocation and economic rehabilitation of this large group was a major problem facing the new Saigon government of Ngo Dinh Diem.

Starting in 1955, the Diem government attempted to relocate these refugees in the Mekong Delta area south of Saigon -- principally in the Trans-Bassac region--and in the Central Highlands. This movement of ethnic Vietnamese into traditional tribal areas in the Highlands had more serious implications than the program in the Delta provinces. Resettlement in the Delta involved only the putting back into cultivation of land abandoned as the result of war dislocations. The establishment of ethnic Vietnamese villages in the Highlands, however, represented a departure from the established policies and practices of the former French colonial government regarding the Montagnards. In an effort to develop the "public lands"

in the Central Highlands, the Diem government moved Vietnamese into regions which the Montagnards looked upon as their traditional agricultural and pasture lands.²³ These new "Land Development Centers" were concentrated largely in the towns of Ban Me Thuot, Pleiku and Kontum. Begun in 1955 as part of the program for resettlement of refugees from North Viet Nam, they were continued later as a system for settling Vietnamese from the over-crowded lowland coastal regions.²⁴

As the insurgency grew and the security situation worsened in the Highlands, the government, after 1958, began strengthening these centers and giving the inhabitants the means of self-defense. Many of these were later incorporated into the strategic hamlet program. The relevance of these centers to pacification lay in Diem's strategy of placing a "human wall" of new settlements along the western border of the Highlands to obstruct communist infiltration.

Reports indicate that more than 100 new villages of 100-500 families each--predominantly Catholic and northern refugees which created resentment because of religious and regional fractionalism--were established in the Central Highland plateaus during the first two or three years of the effort. These villages or "Land Development Centers" were constructed with the land area brought under cultivation totaling some 220,000 acres.²⁵

Following these early land development and resettlement projects, which were largely directed toward the achievement of economic and social goals and represented President Diem's approach to four basic concerns--national security, overcrowding in the coastal lowlands, exploitation of virgin soil, and the introduction of new crops--²⁶ the Viet Nam government shifted the emphasis of such efforts to that of countering the growing insurgency threat of the Viet Cong in the rural areas.²⁷

"American opposition to the program on technical and administrative grounds delayed USOM participation for a time. No objection by the Americans to the strategic concept of spreading communities over a vast wilderness area was raised, but later the difficulties of supplying and defending these isolated and loyal communities became very serious.²⁸ This fact was to be raised again in the strategic hamlet era.

One unexpected political problem developed at this time--the expropriation of Highlander tribal lands by the Vietnamese--which caused severe resentment between the tribes and the settlements.²⁹ This obviously served the propaganda interests of the Viet Cong.

Former AID official Milton Esman also mentions one other aggravation caused by the government's excessive preoccupation with the many needs of the newly settled groups vis-a-vis the total population. The approximately two per cent of the

population resettled received fifty per cent of all governmental agricultural aid.³⁰

As the insurgency intensified, the Diem regime turned away from its emphasis on land reform. Land reform funds were diverted to finance stronger security programs at the very moment that stronger land reform measures for popular support were needed. The regime, instead, chose stronger control programs.³¹

By 1959 the security situation in the rural area deteriorated to the extent that the Diem government took steps to control the villages by cutting them off physically from the Viet Cong operating in the countryside. In conjunction with this the government also issued on May 6, 1959, Law No. 10/59, ordering the death penalty for acts of sabotage and other insurgency crimes, setting up military tribunals and "reeducation centers" to handle the cases.³² The "denounce communist" campaigns were also accelerated. As Malcolm Browne so clearly delineated in his chapter on "Terror and Counterterror," the law had little effect except to alienate more people from the Diem government.³³

The first regrouping of peasants under another new program began in February, 1959, in the area southwest of Saigon; but due to opposition on the part of the peasants, it was discontinued

a month or so later. Poorly conceived and poorly executed, the plan called for a relocation of families into two types of centers--one, the qui ap, for supposedly loyal families in indefensible areas to protect them from Viet Cong propaganda and attacks; the second, the qui khu, for Viet Cong related families or those whose families who, because one or more of their members had moved to North Viet Nam with the 90,000 or so Viet Minh who went North in 1954-55, were considered favorably disposed, or at least vulnerable, to Viet Cong propaganda, infiltration and recruitment activities.³⁴ Zasloff terms this program as apparently a "bare-bones" military effort, devoid of economic or social considerations.³⁵

The overriding consideration behind these regroupments was a security one, but loyal families felt themselves wronged. In a number of cases families of senior government officials were grouped with the suspect families because of having relatives in North Viet Nam.

The protests which followed this measure brought a Government reassessment and a report on the situation by (Colonel) Pham-Ngoc-Thao...In his report Thao stressed the need to combine resettlement with appropriate economic and social measures. He warned against separating the population into 'loyal' and 'disloyal' groups, noting that in his own case he had relatives in North Viet-Nam. He also argued that resettlement zones should be established in areas where living conditions were suitable for the maintenance of the resettled population.³⁶

Following the failure of this short-lived effort, still another program was initiated by the Diem government in July 1959.³⁷ Announced as a plan to improve the standard of living and the security of its rural people through the creation of "prosperity and density centers" (Khu tru Mat), it called for the establishment of some 80 "agrovilles" and about 900 smaller communities (Ab tru Mats) each containing some 400 families or between 2000 and 3000 persons.³⁸ The original idea, perhaps suggested by the Chinese commune or the Soviet collective farm, was that the agroville would be the tool for the economic development of the rural areas and for the social revolution of the countryside.³⁹

In a letter sent to officials within the Presidency on 13 April 1959 President Diem called for the selection of localities for the construction of 'key rural agrovilles' with the aim of improving the village standard of living, and of carrying on with success the Government's cultural, social and security program. The officials of the Presidency completed their initial planning by July 1959. Because of the existing resettlement schemes, the plan called for development which made use of the resettlement already instituted. In its planned form the 'key rural agroville' scheme envisaged that by 1963 between 300,000 and half a million persons would have settled in agrovilles.⁴⁰

Though the government described them as part of its "social revolution," the agrovilles were defensive positions. They coincided with the building of more defensive forts throughout the country--small, bamboo and sometimes concrete structures

manned by the Civil Guard or by the Self-Defense Corps units.

According to Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, a key official in the development and execution of the agrovillage program, the plan itself was part of a larger basic security plan for the country, involving four elements: (1) regrouping of the population into agrovilles, linked by a new strategic route system; (2) development of competent cadres for village councils and administrative posts; (3) improvement of village self-finance resources, especially the development of public lands; and (4) the formation of a vigorous youth movement.⁴¹

As with the later hamlet program, the implementation of the agrovillage plan had the characteristic syndrome: "The pilot agrovillage by Vy Thuan had been constructed with brutal rapidity, yet the work pattern there served generally to guide other construction. Saigon applied the Vy Thuam model throughout the southern region, with no adaptation to local conditions."⁴² Vietnamese lawyer and economist, Vu Quoc Thuc, who aided Dr. Eugene Staley in the development of the strategic hamlet plan, denounced the agrovilles as overly ambitious in light of Diem's 1957 5-Year Plan. Judging by the standards set in the 5-Year Plan, Thuc considered the 147 agricultural development centers planned, involving more than 300,000 peasants, as an "over-investment" of the limited Vietnamese personnel and resources in a single project.⁴³

Another primary problem was the maintenance of security during the implementation of the agrovilles. The Viet Cong burned and sacked agroville sites when possible.⁴⁴ They also maintained a virulent propaganda campaign against the program, and officials responsible for building the sites were constantly threatened. Joseph Zasloff cites two cases regarding a district and a province chief:

The district chief, Nguyen Huu Tri, of Caisan, the agroville under construction about thirty miles from Tan Luoc, told us that the Viet Cong had issued orders to the peasants not to appear at Caisan for work, and then backed up their order with several attacks. The agroville maintained a constant guard of 100 men. The chief also reported that he received a threatening letter from the Viet Cong every day. To reach his home, about 10 kilometers from the agroville, he felt required to change his route daily, often taking the 50-kilometer road in order to confuse attackers.

The province chief, Mr. Ba...concurred with the district chief on the tremendous danger involved in travelling to the agroville. He had sent his family to Saigon a few weeks previously. Speeding up the work at Saigon's demand would be his death warrant, he predicted, since regular inspection trips to the two sites would make him an easy target for the Viet Cong.

One week following this interview, Mr. Ba made an inspection visit to Caisan. He had come to the agroville in a convoy accompanied by armed bodyguards and a heavily-armed jeep. On the return trip, the convoy ran into a roadblock laid by a

Viet Cong ambush; the convoy's guards were isolated, and Mr. Ba was shot. After receiving a lecture from the attackers, the others were set free. It was clear that the Viet Cong had chosen to assassinate the head man of the province because he had the primary responsibility for implementing the agrovillage program.⁴⁵

Joseph Zasloff points out that those who were resettled usually did so reluctantly since resettlement resulted in their being removed some distance from the land they worked.⁴⁶ In an attempt at countering this problem, the Government provided, at least in theory, assistance in the construction of the new homes, cash incentives and the prospects of better services within the agrovilles.

Almost all the peasants who were moved to the agrovilles deeply resented having to leave their old homes, where in many cases their families had lived for generations, and the assistance the government gave them was negligible-- about five dollars and a small loan to help pay for the acre and a half of new land each farmer got. Furthermore, each peasant was supposed to build his own house after tearing down his old one and lugging the material with him to the agrovillage.⁴⁷

However, to construct the agrovilles involved the draining of land, the building of roads and canals, and the erecting of houses. To accomplish this the labor of local peasants was required, a fact which aroused resentment.⁴⁸ They had to prepare the sites, without pay and often providing their own tools, which

meant building access roads, digging wide surrounding canals and interior lacing canals, and distributing the vast amount of earth thus removed so as to provide raised foundations for houses and other buildings. At the Vi Thanh agroville site, located in what was then part of Phong Dinh province, 20,000 peasants from four neighboring districts were brought in to begin construction. At the Thanh Thoi agroville, in Kien Hoa province, 3,000 Republican Youth from eight southwestern provinces joined with 2,000 other Republican Youth of the province to help the local population in their efforts. Since the number of people who could be moved into the total number of planned agrovilles did not exceed 500,000, it was obvious that most of those forced to work on the sites would not profit from their labor.⁴⁹ One Vietnamese official, Nguyen Khac Nhan stated:

Removed from their plot of ground and their habits the transplanted families found themselves living deprived of everything in an unknown place, often far from the land which they had been working. Some help, often inadequate, was given them and it was left to the initiative of the local authorities.⁵⁰

Fishel claims that both the agrovilles and land developments centers were "crash" programs and that much peasant resentment was incurred during the process of regroupment as a result of rigid, clumsy implementation of presidential directives by ambitious and insensitive local administrators who coerced peasants into construction work on the new settlements at harvest time, and otherwise showed ineptness in dealing with those who should have been satisfied beneficiaries of a forward-looking policy.⁵¹

The application of the agroville program made enormous demands on the peasants involved: Corvee labor well beyond the established ten day assessment, and long commuting distances to their new fields, which were often inadequate in size and soil quality. The Viet Cong peppered the agrovilles with propaganda relevant to the numerous resentments of the relocated peasants.⁵²

The Viet Cong reaction to the agroville is stated simply in Australian Communist journalist Wilfred Burchett's analysis of the Western Highlands center of Ban Me' Thuot

The "agricultural settlements"...were part of a crazy plan worked out by Diem and his U. S. "advisors." They were aimed at killing a number of birds with one stone: first to exile "suspects" or potential "trouble makers" from the plains, second, to set Vietnamese and the tribes people at each others throats as the "agricultural settlements were formed by bulldozing minority villages out of

existence and driving the tribes people off their hunting grounds; third, to provide cheap labor to transform the fertile Tan Nhuyen lands into coffee, tea, and rubber plantations and fourth, especially in the case of B. M. Thuout, to fill in the gap of the protective human edge around the strategic center. But it did not take long for a skilled propagandist like Minh (Tranh Dinh Minh was the leader of the leader of the Viet Cong in the area) to prove to the Vietnamese exiles and the minority peoples had they not seen it themselves, that their miseries came from one central origin, the U. S.-Diemist regime in Saigon.⁵³

Although President Diem referred to the scheme as designed 'to build a new society founded on social justice and brotherhood,'⁵⁴ in two years only 23 agrovilles were inaugurated.⁵⁵ In 1961 the plan ceased to be promoted and the Government's efforts were transferred to the strategic hamlets.

Viet Cong Build-Up

Government administrators and non-cooperating village and hamlet chiefs had often become the victim of Viet Cong assassinations and kidnappings. As early as 1957 it became obvious that the assassination of youth leaders, policemen, teachers, police commissioners, and village heads had reached such proportions that the fabric of the local administration on Viet Nam was threatened.

Until early 1959 the main thrust of the Viet Cong program was constituted in propaganda activities with the

main focus of their efforts being in the Camau Peninsula, and the southwest coastal strip extending to the Cambodian border, although their agents were also active in the Tay Ninh area northwest of Saigon. These were also the areas in which the Viet Minh influence had been strongest during the Indochina War. However, to mark the festival of Tet in 1959, the Viet Cong put on a large-scale raid, and a group attacked the outpost of Trang Sup near the city of Tay Ninh in strength.⁵⁶

The dominant political activity of the Viet Cong was the control of the rural areas, and the fight to isolate the government from the villages and hamlets. Following their control of the villages the Viet Cong sought to isolate the district towns, which usually range between four and seven to a province. Methods included indoctrinating peasant inhabitants of the villages and involving them, wherever possible, in actions against the legal authority, and assassinating or intimidating into silence those who remained loyal to the government. The Viet Cong further crippled the operations of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense forces by driving them from strongly-infested areas or by keeping them bottled up in district towns or fortified outposts. By doing so they compelled the government to thin out its forces which were then often decimated in piecemeal attacks.

The newspaper of the main governmental party in February 1959 acknowledged that the situation in the countryside was "rotten" and that the Viet Cong had set up cells in every village. These cells were trusted with collecting "taxes," as well as rice, and with conducting espionage against the incumbent government. In isolated villages away from province and district authority, the Viet Cong possessed administrative and military committees which ruled the local population through instructions received from regional and provincial guerrilla organizations.⁵⁷

The Viet Cong became increasingly bolder in 1960 inflicting a serious setback on the Vietnamese Army by overrunning on January 25, 1960 a regimental headquarters in Tay Ninh and carrying off a large quantity of weapons. This bold attack was followed by a series of assaults in other parts of the Mekong Delta, especially in Kien Hoa Province, where six of the eight districts for a period of several months were severed from any ground communications with the chief provincial town in the Camau peninsula area and the provinces adjacent to the Cambodian border. At the same time, increased activities occurred in the central highlands.⁵⁸

In the highlands of Thua Thien province, the Communists had established during 1958 an organization extending down to

the village level, and it appears that similar actions were being followed in other parts of the highlands. Also, the infiltration of agents and troops into the highlands, and into safety bases on the Laotian side of the frontier, increased in late 1959 and during 1960. One major military action took place, a two-pronged attack of nearly 1,000 Communist troops in the Kontum-Pleiku-An Khe area, which began on October 21, 1960, and in which the attackers overran several government outposts before they had to withdraw under counterattack by regular army units. The government stated that the attack was part of an attempt to create a Communist base in the highlands, and it claimed that North Vietnamese army units were involved in the action.⁵⁹

The Viet Cong buildup continued throughout 1960 and into 1961 with estimates placing the regular and regional guerrilla troop strength at about 16,000 in October, 1961. This spiral was exemplified in the striking Viet Cong military successes, frequently in large-scale mobile operations, using as many as 1,000 men in a single attack.

Although a month earlier, in October, officials in Washington had reported that the forces of President Diem, supplied by the United States and trained in new jungle warfare tactics, had assumed the initiative in the war, the Viet Cong launched an impressive seizure of the capital of Phuoc Thanh province, located about 55 miles northeast of Saigon. The guerrillas captured the town of Phuoc Vinh, held it for several hours, burned and ransacked several government buildings, killed the province chief, his deputy,

and a large number of civil guardsmen, and wounded fifty others. Withdrawing before relieving forces could be dispatched, they released a large number of military and political prisoners, and took with them a large quantity of arms and ammunition.⁶⁰ Earlier in the month, two battalions of Viet Cong launched savage attacks against two government posts in Kontum province and seized them.⁶¹ The Highlands, once considered secure nationalist territory, now began to totter.

The serious proportions of the deteriorating situation in the rural areas caused President Diem in a letter to President Kennedy to request "further assistance if we are to win the war now being waged against us."⁶² President Kennedy promptly responded to this request by increasing United States assistance "to help the Republic of Vietnam to protect its people and to preserve its independence."⁶³

In line with this, all aspects of United States assistance, including military and civilian, technical and advisory, financial and materials in kind, were stepped up. Furthermore, all United States supported activities in Viet Nam were analyzed and redirected, where appropriate, to ensure a maximum direct contribution to the counterinsurgency efforts of the Vietnamese government. Previously, a large proportion of United States aid had been directed to the

support of longer range economic development projects and to the training and equipping of the Vietnamese army against overt, conventional warfare.

Several significant steps were taken by the government of Viet Nam, assisted by the United States, to improve efforts toward winning the war against the growing insurgency. These included a major effort to win the Montagnard tribal highlanders to the side of the government, steps to improve the offensive combat capabilities of the armed forces, and the strategic hamlet program.

Push From The United States

It is widely understood that many American officials misread the nature and extent of the insurgent threat between 1956-1960. An indication of this blindness to the military situation was the comment in the summer of 1959 by United States Major General Samuel Meyers, deputy chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, who said, referring to the Viet Cong by the name used during the French Indochina War, "the Viet-minh guerrillas, though constantly reinforced by men and weapons from outside, were gradually nibbled away until they ceased to be a major menace to the government. In fact, estimates at the time of my departure indicate that were a very limited number of hostile individuals under arms in the country. Two territorial regiments, reinforced occasionally by one or two Army regiments were able to cope with their depredations."⁶⁴

In late September of the same year two Government battalions, searching for an estimated forty guerrillas southwest of Saigon, were ambushed by two enemy companies. Twelve of the Government regulars died; the remainder surrendered their weapons.⁶⁵ The fighting side of the insurgency had begun. The American push was about to begin as the dichotomy grew between official optimism and unofficial pessimism, or better yet, "cautious optimism."

In 1961, Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr, commander of the United States military mission in Viet Nam stated that he doubted that there were as many as 18,000 guerrillas in South Viet Nam. However, in the next six months, Washington and Saigon both estimated that nearly 18,000 of the enemy had become casualties,⁶⁶

In the next two years, as fighting increased, numerous high ranking military and government officials cited the high rate of Viet Cong casualties and claimed that this was proof that the war was being won. In reality it appears simply as a sign that the war was being lost and that the Vietnamese Government was losing control of the war and the population.

The United States commitment to the Diem regime changed drastically in late 1961. President Kennedy was seeking a way to arrest the rising Viet Cong strength and influence which

in 1959 "began seriously to challenge the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem."⁶⁷ Through the years 1954-1961, the United States had provided over 1.5 billion dollars in economic aid, (See Table 2)⁶⁸ in order to establish a viable regime; however, the Vietnamese Government was plainly losing the war in the rural areas. "The battle in Vietnam was obviously not along the frontier (as the U. S.-Vietnamese efforts had been geared to expect) but in the villages"⁶⁹; however, "Diem seemed unwilling or unable to undertake the programs of rural reform designed to close the gap between the president's palace and the people in the villages. Most likely the whole conception of seeking 'popular support' seemed to him, one of those Western delusions with no relevance to life in Asia,"⁷⁰

Kennedy was well aware that the Viet Cong under the National Liberation Front and the Communist Party newspaper had announced on May 1, 1961 that the rate of progress in the guerrilla war would enable them to take over the country by the end of the year.⁷¹ He was also aware of the November, 1960, abortive military coup d'etat which had seized control of the palace and then lost it.

Radio Hanoi had further broadcast in late 1961, in a claim which does not appear to be too much inflated, that the National Liberation Front had 'liberated' 1,100 of 1,290 villages in the delta region of Viet Nam and 4,000 of 4,400 hamlets in the central highlands.⁷² The problem before

President Kennedy was, in essence, the problem that faced President Eisenhower in 1954. What should the United States do to stave off a complete collapse in Viet Nam?

A prelude to future developments was an article in The New Republic by Denis Warner calling for the diverting of United States aid funds first to the agrovilles, their defenses and improvement, and second to economic development:

As the British and Malayans discovered in the Communist insurrection in Malaya, the resettlement of isolated peasants into villages and their separation from the guerrilla is a priority task. It is one that can succeed, however, only with the cooperation of the peasants. They must be convinced that their living conditions, economically, and in terms of security, will be improved; and they must be encouraged (by all means, including secret payment for information) to be primarily responsible for their own village defenses.⁷³

Three missions were sent to Viet Nam in order to determine how Kennedy should proceed. The first was Vice President Johnson who visited Saigon in May 1961. At the close of his visit on May 13, 1961, Vice President Johnson issued a joint communique with President Diem:

Both Governments recognize that under the circumstances of guerrilla warfare now existing in free Viet Nam, it is necessary to give a high priority to the restoration of a sense of security to the people of free Viet Nam. This priority, however, in no way diminishes the necessity, in politics and programs of both Governments, to pursue vigorously appropriate measures in other fields to achieve a prosperous and happy society.

The following measures, agreed in principle and subject to prompt finali-

zation and implementation, represent an increase and acceleration of United States assistance to the Republic of Viet Nam. These may be followed by more far-reaching measures if the situation, in the opinion of both Governments, warrants.

First, it was agreed by the two Governments, to extend and build upon existing programs of military and economic aid and to infuse into their joint actions a high sense of urgency and dedication.

Second, it was agreed, that regular armed forces of the Republic of Viet Nam should be increased, and that the United States would extend its military assistance programs to include support for an additional number of regular Vietnamese armed forces.

Third, it was agreed that the United States would provide military assistance program support for the entire Vietnamese civil guard forces.

Fourth, it was agreed that the two Governments should collaborate in the use of military specialists to assist and work with Vietnamese armed forces in health, welfare and public works activities in the villages of free Viet Nam.

Fifth, it was agreed that the assistance of other free governments to the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam in its trouble against Communist guerrilla forces would be welcome.

Sixth, it was agreed that, to achieve the best possible use of available resources, the Vietnamese and the United States, in prosecution of their joint effort against Communist attacks in Viet Nam, a group of highly qualified economic and fiscal experts would meet in Viet Nam to work out a financial plan on which joint efforts should be based.

Seventh, it was agreed that the United States and the Republic of Viet Nam would discuss new economic and social measures to be undertaken in rural areas, to accompany the anti-guerrilla effort in order that the people of Viet Nam should

benefit promptly from the restoration of law and order in their villages and provinces.

Eighth, it was agreed that, in addition to measures to deal with the immediate Viet Nam guerrilla problem, the two Governments would work together toward a longer range economic development program, including further progress in the fields of agriculture, health, education, fisheries, highways, public administration, and industrial development.

These longer range plans and programs would be developed in detail after further consideration and discussion.

Their goal would be a Viet Nam capable of a self-sustained economic growth.⁷⁴

Upon his return Johnson reported to President Kennedy:

"The basic decision in Southeast Asia is here. We must decide whether to help these countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel and pull back our defenses to San Francisco...I recommend that we move promptly with a major effort to help these countries defend themselves."⁷⁵ He also stated that Viet Nam "can be saved...if we move quickly and wisely."⁷⁶ In this, he favored a reorientation of the Vietnamese military effort along with programs of political and economic reform.⁷⁷

The Johnson trip was followed by a second mission, headed by economist Professor Eugene Staley of the Stanford Research Institute. Although publicly described as an economic mission, the main objective of the Staley visit, according to Vu Quoc Thuc, who served jointly as head of the team, was the restoration of internal security in the villages.⁷⁸

On May 29, 1961, the New York Times carried a report that United States officials (not named) had stated that the South Vietnamese Army, "with the help of American military advisors, was setting up a system of village-based operations against the Vietnamese Communist guerrillas moving in through the Laotian corridor from North Vietnam," and furthermore, that "United States officials...expressed cautious optimism that the new anti-guerrilla operations in South Vietnam would prove effective. Encouraging progress has been reported in the first phase."⁷⁹ The new system called for the use of units specially equipped for counter-guerrilla fighting and "for the mobilization of the population against Communists" in an operational plan "worked out by the United States in cooperation with the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem."⁸⁰

Announced by Vice President Johnson as a follow-up fact finding mission to determine what operational programs would be placed into effect,⁸¹ the Staley visit was considered by some to be the most important of the three missions.

Appearances to the contrary, the second of these missions was the most important. After a stay of six weeks in Saigon, with the help of the Vietnamese economist Vu Quoc Thuc, a law professor at Saigon, and under the direction of Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem's brother and "political advisor," Staley worked out a war doctrine and an action plan that was to be applied in Vietnam for two years--and more.

The "Staley Plan" is known particularly by the "strategic hamlets" formula it advocated. But the project was much more ambitious; it defined an entire war policy. On the military plane Staley and Thuc recommended placing emphasis on the village militias that would be supplied with modern weapons and on the Garde Nationale, whose effectiveness would be doubled. They also recommended that the 170,000 men of the regular army be trained in jungle fighting...

On the social and economic plane the "agro-city" experiment, already tried three years earlier, was to be resumed...and the plan proposed to boost that figure to over a hundred in the course of a year. Around those agro-cities the strategic hamlets were to be set up, surrounded by bamboo hedges and supplied with guard towers able to receive villagers returning from the fields at night. In this fashion peasants working during the day in the agro-cities could, according to the plan, always find protection in the strategic hamlets at night. The latter, it was calculated, would be able to offer protection and shelter to over eight hundred thousand inhabitants of a rural population of eight million...⁸²

Buttinger takes the issue one step further by saying that the Staley mission was "largely responsible for the misguided zeal with which the strategic hamlet program was tackled."⁸³ Announcing that the study headed by Dr. Staley had recommended an increase in aid both for military measures and for economic and social development, President Diem added that the Staley Committee considered 'measures which could restore security within eighteen months.'⁸⁴

Kahin and Lewis spread the blame among all the American advisors in Viet Nam who were "highly enthusiastic over prospects of the 'strategic hamlets' because of the success of the British a decade earlier in the resettlement program in Malaya,"

but they had "little knowledge of the social and political conditions governing the Malayan experience" and, hence, "jumped to the quite mistaken conclusion that what had worked in Malaya ought to work in Viet Nam."⁸⁵

In October 1961, President Kennedy sent General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow on a three-week mission to South Viet Nam "to determine what the United States could do to assist the Diem regime."⁸⁵ The effect of the mission was to step up the commitment of the United States to a point just short of combat in an attempt to support President Diem through a large scale program of counterinsurgency.

In effect, the Taylor mission reported that the war could be won, and could be won under the existing government...provided that a huge retraining program oriented the Vietnamese military away from conventional warfare to new concepts of flexible counter-guerrilla warfare. The study called for greater mobility of the Vietnamese army by giving them helicopters and amphibious personnel carriers. It recommended aid programs designed to break through the frustrations of Diem's overly centralized and personalized government and to bring aid down to the peasants. It suggested a series of reforms: broadening the base of the government; taking non-Ngo anti-communist elements into the government; making the National Assembly more than a rubber stamp; easing some of the tight restrictions on the local press.⁸⁷

The Taylor and Rostow report also recommended that the American advisory effort be increased by about 10,000 to conduct combat operations for self-defense and perimeter

security.⁸⁸ The United States advisory and support efforts multiplied at this time from six hundred advisors to over sixteen thousand and boosted its economic aid to one and a half million dollars a day.⁸⁹

By December 1961, the first American helicopter unit, the 57th Transportation Company, arrived in Viet Nam, and in the following year the American commitment in men and material was significantly increased. On February 8, 1962, the United States Military Assistance Command Viet Nam was set up under the command of General Paul D. Harkins, who remained throughout the rest of the Diem period.

In a somewhat uncritical analysis of the role of the Kennedy staff, Schlesinger summarizes the effects of the three missions:

The result in 1962 was to place the main emphasis on the military effort...When the social and economic program developed in Washington in 1961 encountered the usual resistance in Saigon, it was soon dropped. In place of a serious attack on the central problems of land taxation, the regime announced a number of marginal and largely meaningless reforms to placate the Americans and did very little to put even these into effect. The appeal to the peasants was concentrated in the so-called strategic hamlet program, launched by the regime in April...

Ngo Dinh Nhu made the strategic hamlet program his personal project and published glowing reports of spectacular success... One might have wondered whether Nhu was just the man to mobilize the idealism of the villages; but Nolting (United

States Ambassador Frederick Nolting) and Harkins (General Paul D. Harkins, the MAAG Commanding General) listened uncritically to his reports and passed them back to Washington, where they were read with elation.⁹⁰

In a February 12, 1962 interview, Secretary of State Dean Rusk stated that the purpose of United States assistance to the Government of South Viet Nam and its armed forces was to deal with the problem of "20,000 guerrillas who have been supported, have been supplied, and have been furnished leaders by the North Vietnamese."⁹¹ He continued, "this means help not only in the military field, in terms of transportation, mobility, and equipment, but it also means economic help for village programs that will make it possible for the Vietnamese Government to win the battle of the villages as well as the battle with the armed elements of the Viet Cong guerrillas."⁹²

The United States at this time recognized that in the final analysis this type of war would not be won by force of arms alone.

The Kennedy Administration, in trying to obviate what appeared to be a probable collapse in Saigon in 1961 and 1962, stressed political popularization, local administration and rural development, and called for an effort to organize

counterinsurgency for dealing with village and local security.⁹³ This parallels Kennedy's June 1956 statement: "What we must offer (the Vietnamese people) is a revolution--a political, economic, and social revolution far superior to anything the Communists can offer--far more peacefully, far more democratic, and far more locally controlled."⁹⁴

It was generally conceded that the outcome of our counterinsurgency effort in South Viet Nam would be determined by the extent to which we would a) isolate the Viet Cong and destroy his control over the rural population, b) provide security for the villagers against the attacks of the enemy, and c) win the support of the peasant in destroying the infrastructure of the Viet Cong.

Even though a cursory historical examination quickly leads to the conclusion that the primary problems were not military and would not be solved by force, it was equally apparent that solutions must be found to the military problems, particularly of internal security, before significant gains could be made in other areas.

A closer linking of President Diem's government to the peasant, who constituted over 80 per cent of the nation, was needed.⁹⁵ In furtherance of this primary

objective, on January 4, 1962, the United States and the Viet Nam government issued a joint communique which announced an Eleven Point Program aimed at providing all Vietnamese with the means for improving their standard of living using American economic assistance. Education and health facilities were to be established throughout the nation. Road communication and agricultural facilities would also be developed to bring increasing prosperity to the people.

More specifically, the eleven points of the program were: first, training facilities for village officials were to be set up to improve administration where the government had the closest contacts with the people.

Second, the rural health program was to be expanded to achieve full coverage of the nation. A nation-wide immunization program against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough would be started. These programs were to concentrate in areas relatively free of Viet Cong control and were to be expanded to other areas as the Viet Cong were suppressed.

Third, the education program was to be expanded. Public primary schools had increased from 1191 in 1954 to 4668 in 1961, and student enrollment had climbed from 330,000 to 1,100,000 during this same period. It was intended that every village in the country would be provided with a primary school. As with the rural health facilities, the schools would be established in areas as they become free

of Viet Cong interference.

Fourth, a village radio communications net would be developed whereby villages could communicate with their distant headquarters on emergency matters--such as requests for emergency medical aid, as well as being able to receive broadcasts over the national radio system.

Fifth, rural communities were to be linked by new roads with main highways and in turn with provincial and national centers. This program would serve to make it easier to ferret out the Viet Cong guerrilla and would, also, improve the economic potential of the rural people.

Sixth, funds would continue to be made available to support and extend credit in the field of agriculture in order to increase farm production and income.

Seventh, a widespread insect and pest control program would be launched, especially in central Viet Nam where the rice crops had been ravaged in 1960 and in 1961.

Eighth, special efforts would be made to assist the Montagnard population in the highlands, to improve their income, health, education and communications in new resettlement villages which would be built where they would be free from Viet Cong pressure.

Ninth, in the flood stricken region of the Mekong Delta the people were to be regrouped into new villages to

which health, education and communication benefits would be extended. Road and canal construction in this area would also be undertaken.

Tenth, programs in public works would be initiated to relieve unemployment.

Eleventh, increased aid for industrial development would continue. In the field of cotton textiles a further investment of six million dollars would provide a living for increased thousands of workers and would go far toward making Viet Nam nearly self-sufficient in the supply of cotton cloth.⁹⁶

FOOTNOTES

Chapter III

1. Douglas Pike, Viet Cong, op cit., p. 58
2. Ibid, Chapter 3, and Dennis Warner, The Last Confucian, (New York: The McMillian Co., 1963), p. 108.
3. George L. Harris, et al, op cit., and Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution: The U. S. in Viet Nam 1946-1966 (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 142
4. Shaplen, Ibid, pp. 1-4.
5. Ibid, pp. 97-98.
6. George A. Carver, "The Real Revolution in South Viet Nam," Foreign Affairs, XIII, April, 1965, pp. 387-388.
7. Willian Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965, (Washington: American University, 1966), p. 22.
8. Memorandum by Colonel Edward G. Landsdale, (Anderson-Southwest Asia Subcommittee of the Draper Committee), "Civic Activities of the Military Southeast Asia," USAF Counterinsurgency Orientation Course Selected Reading, Volume 2, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, 1962, p. 0-2-5.
9. Ibid, pp. C-2-5 to 0-2-6.
10. Ibid, pp. 0-2 to 0-2-6.
11. Robert Scigliano, South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964) p. 134.
12. Bernard Fall, "South Viet Nam (1956 to November 1963)" op cit. The Civil Guard, according to Floyd Singer, was almost identical with the traditional Chinese militia system in that its function is entirely one of safeguarding the village with a supplementary role of maintaining internal order. Floyd L. Singer, Population Control in China and Viet Nam: The Pao Chia System Past and Present, U. S. Naval Ordnance Test Station, China Lake, California, 1964, p. 28.

13. Ibid.
14. Gerald C. Hickey, Village in Viet Nam, op cit., p. 10
15. Joseph J. Zasloff, Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960: The Role of the Southern Viet Minh Cadres, (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1968), RM-5163/2-ISA ARPA, p. 10.
16. Ibid, p. 9.
17. Ibid, p. 10. Also see Jean Lacouture and Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled Volume II, Vietnam at War (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 976.
18. William A. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965, op cit., pp. 13-14.
19. Ibid, p. 48.
20. Ibid, pp. 48-49.
21. Ibid, pp. 49-50.
22. John D. Montgomery, The Politics of Foreign Aid: American Experience in Southeast Asia, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 180.
23. Douglas Pike, Viet Cong, op cit., pp. 61-63.
24. William Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in South Viet Nam: 1962-1965, op cit., p. 53.
25. Harris, et al, op cit., p. 361.
26. Wesley R. Fishel, "Political Realities in Vietnam," Asian Survey, Volume 1, Number 2, April, 1961, p. 18.
28. William Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965, op cit., p. 53.
29. Ibid, pp. 53-54.
30. Ibid, p. 54.
31. Ibid, pp. 52-53.
32. Luther A. Allen and Pham Ngoc An, A Vietnamese District Chief in Action, (Washington, D. C.: Agency for International Development, 1961), pp. 69-71.

33. Malcolm W. Browne, op cit., pp. 167-202.
34. William Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965, op cit., pp. 65-66.
35. Joseph J. Zaslogg, Rural Resettlement in Vietnam: An Agrovillage in Development, (Washington, D. C.: Agency for International Development, n.d.). p. 9.
36. Milton E. Osborne, Strategic Hamlets in South Viet Nam: A Survey and Comparison, (Ithica, Cornell University, 1965), p. 22: Colonel Thas was a key official in the program.
37. Robert Shaplen, op cit., p. 42. The French also built special villages called "agrovilles" in Viet Nam. They were built on the perimeter of "Liberated" zones and equipped with quasi-urban amenities calculated to attract peasants away from the hardships and fear prevailing in the "free" zones. Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 186.
38. Joseph J. Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Viet Nam: The Agrovillage Program," Pacific Affairs, Volume XXXV, Number 4, Winter 1962-1963, pp. 327-340.
39. John C. Donnell, "The War, the Gap and the Cadres," VietNam: Anatomy of a Conflict, Wesley R. Fishel (editor) (Itasca Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc. 1968), p. 365.
40. Osborne, op cit., pp. 22-23. It is interesting to note this comparatively restrained figure when compared with the later strategic hamlet program which was to cover the entire population in a shorter period. Even though the scale of resettlement was smaller, it is apparent that many of the problems which were later to plague the strategic hamlet program were experienced during the development of the agrovilles.
41. J. J. Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Viet Nam: The Agrovillage Program," op cit., pp. 331-332.
42. Ibid, p. 339. V. Thanh was completed on March 12, 1960, Fishel, "Political Realities in Vietnam," op cit., p. 18.
43. Vu Quoc Thuc, "National Planning in Vietnam," Asian Survey, Volume 1, Number 7, Setpember 1961, p. 4.
44. J. J. Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in Vietnam: An Agrovillage in Development," op cit., p. 26.

45. Ibid, pp. 21-22.
46. Ibid, p. 336.
47. Robert Shaplen, op cit., p. 143.
48. Joseph J. Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South VietNam: The Agrovillage Program," op cit., pp. 333-332.
49. Scigliano, South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress, op cit., p. 179.
50. Nguyen Khac Nhan, "A Policy of Key Rural Agrovillages, " Asian Culture, Volume III, July-December, 1961, Number 304, p. 33.
51. Fishel, "Political Realities in Vietnam," op cit., pp. 17-18.
52. Denis Warner, op cit., pp. 146-147; George K. Tanham, Communist Revolutionary Warfare: From the Viet Minh to the Viet Cong, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 123-124.
53. Wilfred G. Burchett, Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerilla War, (New York: International Publishers, 1965), p. 155.
54. Ibid, p. 29.
55. Ralph Smith, Viet-Nam and the West, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1968), p. 157.
56. Phillippe Devillers, "Ngo Dinh Diem and the Struggle for Reunification in Vietnam," Vietnam, Marvin E. Gettleman (editor), (New York: Fawcett World Library, 1965), p. 224.
57. Scigliano, South Viet Nam: Nation Under Stress, op cit., p. 138.
58. Ibid, p. 140.
59. Ibid, pp. 140-141.
60. "Vietnam Rebels Burn City in Raid," The New York Times, September 5, 1961, p. 9.
61. "Saigon Army Killed 302 Reds in August," The New York Times, September 19, 1961, p. 4.

62. "President Responds to Request from Viet Nam for U. S. Aid," Department of State Bulletin, Volume XLVI, Number 1175, January 1, 1962, pp. 13-14.
63. Ibid, p. 640.
64. David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire, (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 63.
65. Ibid, p. 63.
66. Browne, op cit., p. 101n.
67. William W. Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy, (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 261-262. Kaufmann reports that in the span of those few years of open fighting, the "guerrilla forces have grown to more than 23,000 full-time military personnel and 100,000 local auxiliaries." p. 262.
68. Extracted from George M. Kahin and John W. Lewis, The United States in Viet-Nam, (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1967) p. 73.
69. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1965), p. 453.
70. Ibid,p. 455.
71. Theodore Sorenson, Kennedy, (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1965) p. 328.
72. Robert Scigliano, "Viet Nam: A Country at War," Asian Survey, January, 1963, Volume III, Number 1, p. 48.
73. Denis Warner, "Diem's One-Family War," The New Republic January 30, 1961, p. 8.
74. Quoted by Frank N. Trager, Why Viet Nam? (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 172-174.
75. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1968, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 21.
76. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, op cit., p. 455.
77. Ibid,p. 455.
78. Thuc, op cit., p. 8.

79. Seymour Topping, "U. S. Acts to Bar Raids on Vietnam by Reds in Laos," The New York Times, May 29, 1961, p. 1.
80. Ibid, p. 4.
81. "U. S. Maps Mission to South Vietnam," The New York Times, June 10, 1961, p. 3.
82. Lacouture, op cit., pp. 64-65.
83. Buttinger, op cit., p. 991.
84. Quoted by Robert Trumbull, "Ngo Says Struggle with Vietnam Reds Is Now a 'Real War'," The New York Times, October 2, 1961, p. 17. (emphasis mine)
85. George McTurnan Kahin and John W. Lewis, op cit., p. 140n.
86. Kaufmann, op cit., pp. 262-263. Ironically, another Presidential general envoy, General Lawton Collins, was sent by President Eisenhower to Viet Nam. He argued strongly against supporting Diem claiming he was aloof, obstinate, suspicious and unwilling to accept American advice.
87. Halberstam, op cit., p. 62.
88. Schlesinger, The Bitter Heritage, op cit., p. 22.
89. Halberstam, op cit., p. 33.
90. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, op cit., pp. 459-460.
91. "Secretary Rusk Interviewed on 'Washington Viewpoint'," The Department of State Bulletin, Volume XLVI, Number 1184, March 5, 1962, p. 363.
92. Ibid, p. 363.
93. Kenneth T. Young, "United States Policy and Vietnamese Political Viability 1954-1967," Asian Survey, Volume VII, Number 8, August, 1967, p. 512.
94. Quoted in Joseph Buttinger, op cit., p. 936.
95. Phil G. Goulding, "Riddle in Asia--U. S. Looks at Viet Nam with Cautious Optimism," Congressional Record, Volume 108, September 12, 1962, p. 18154.
96. "U. S. and Viet Nam Expand Economic Development Programs," Department of State Bulletin, Volume XLVI, Number 1178, January 22, 1962, pp. 141-142.

A Solution: The Strategic Hamlet Program

By mid-1961, the government of South Viet Nam began to appreciate fully the seriousness of the insurgency threat to its very existence. The Diem Government realized that its programs in the rural areas (especially Ordinance Fifty-Seven, 1957-1960; the agrovillage, 1957-1961; and the land development center) had not succeeded in meeting the growing strength of the Viet Cong in the rural areas and that it would be necessary to initiate a national effort directed towards combating what the government of Viet Nam considered to be its three enemies: communism (the Viet Cong), discord, and underdevelopment.¹

Basically, this required a strong national policy which would focus and direct the military, political, social, economic and manpower resources in a coordinated and concentrated effort toward a common goal. This common goal was expressed by President Diem in his message to the National Assembly on October 1, 1962, as "the building of a democracy, made of courage, imagination, and heroic fraternity."² The basic and major element in Diem's national strategy for doing this became the strategic hamlet program.³

Under the new Strategic Hamlet Scheme started in March 1962, Government activities are centered on the Hamlet. The villagers' needs are met through direct contact between them and the authorities. All means are used to give the Hamlet direct assistance and to bring it into the orbit of the nation. The aim of the scheme is to make the hamlet residents realize their rights and responsibilities, to provide them with the means for active participation in the reconstruction and defense of the country, to give them equal opportunities of fulfillment of their rights and of enjoying the benefits the nation can afford.⁴

According to Diem, the military advantage of the program would be to reverse the military tactics presently employed, making the supplemental local forces the principal defenders, thereby releasing the regular military forces for mobile offensive operations of a larger scale against the regular guerrilla troops. In the past regular military units were tied down extensively in static local missions such as defending villages, province and district headquarters, bridges, industrial plants, and other key facilities. A significant number of separate Ranger companies, which were especially trained and equipped for offensive missions against the guerrilla base area in the jungles and swamps, had been used extensively for static protective missions. Furthermore, Diem explained, the "guerrilla" tactics employed by local forces in the system of hamlet defenses force the Viet Cong into an "improvised" counterguerrilla

type action. Thus, the strategic hamlet concept was considered militarily revolutionary; it turned the guerrilla tactics of the Viet Cong back against them. The enemy, according to Diem, was forced into the disadvantageous position of having to adopt conventional "counterguerrilla" tactics.⁵

On April 17, 1962, the National Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution which declared the Strategic Hamlet Program to be a national policy⁶ and on April 20, 1962 they pledged full support to President Diem's plan to establish thousands of strategic hamlets in the Viet Cong-infested Delta during the current year.⁷ Exactly one year later on April 17, 1963, the National Assembly unanimously adopted an anniversary resolution reaffirming the Assembly's total support of the program. In his anniversary message to the Vietnamese people on the same date, President Diem described the strategic hamlet program as "the quintessence of our truest traditions and the pure emanation of our ancestral values."⁸ He further acclaimed the progress as "our principal reason for existence" and hailed those who had contributed to the success of "our great national revolution" and urged them to continue their sacrifices now that the moment of victory is near," for "this movement has upset all the subversive maneuvers of the enemies of the nation."⁹

The extent to which Diem became committed to the strategic hamlet program as a major effort and focal point for solving the nation's diverse problems was brought out in his address to the National Assembly on October 1, 1962.

If your assembly has ever gathered at a time filled with stirring events and dramatic episodes, it is surely today, as the year 1962 which is drawing to an end, has clearly assumed an aspect which the annals of history will record forever--that of a dynamic, general expansion of our national resistance... Who can doubt that the era of Strategic Hamlets has not opened one of the most decisive phases of the history of Viet Nam?"¹⁰

Furthermore, the President explained that the strategic hamlets which began as a defense system against the Viet Cong had become a "crusade" in which the original objectives had "spontaneously become the objects of the Nation itself."¹¹ In his view the strategic hamlets had developed into a political, economic, and cultural revolution which formed the basis for the total development and benefit of the whole community, and as well a "pattern of essential revolution for all underdeveloped countries."¹²

Again, referring to his October address to the "vast movement of strategic hamlets," and their contributions to the national goals, President Diem stated:

There will soon no longer be room for doubt that the preorganized and fortified agglomerations are realizing the threefold political, social, and military resolutions of an underdeveloped country rising toward the light. This must be said once and for all and I want particularly to emphasize

it here with solemnity. This vast movement born in the heat of war is our pre-emptory reply to the Communist challenge. It brings us along with the certainty of victory, the pride to live as free men today and tomorrow.¹³

Hence, President Diem, together with his brother Nhu and the Government of South Viet Nam, became firmly committed to the strategic hamlet program as the primary vehicle for solving the nation's problems. The goals of the nationwide program focused far beyond the primary objective of separating and protecting the rural people from the Viet Cong.

The larger purpose was to build a new image of the government in the minds of the people, by increasing the services of government--providing better schools, health workers, agricultural assistance--at the village level. The people were encouraged to express their will to the election of their own Hamlet Committee and in the choice of a self-help project to benefit the whole community... In short, the hamlet program was supposed to produce a genuine transformation in rural life, a revolution bringing social, economic, and political fulfillment.¹⁴

FOOTNOTES

Chapter IV

1. Milton E. Osborne, op cit., p. 25-29. Diem's brother Nhu, who saw the strategic hamlets as a process of stopping Communism, illustrated this point: 'Communism is not an abstract ideology. It is a continuous action. Once the action is interrupted the whole process breaks down. That is what we are doing in the strategic hamlets.' Quoted by Michael Field, The Prevailing Wind: Witness in Indo-China, (London: Methuen and Company, 1965), p. 314
2. "Address of President Ngo Dinh Diem to the National Assembly (October 1, 1962)," USOM Provincial Representatives Guide (Saigon: Office of Rural Affairs USOM, January, 1963).
3. John Mecklin notes that "it was characteristic...that Diem and Nhu came up with the term "strategic hamlet" for the program... rejecting terms like 'new villages' which the British had used for a similar program in Malaya. There is no single word meaning "strategic in the Vietnamese language. The concept is formed by two words meaning 'fight' and 'plan'...The peasant thus were invited to support the 'fight-plan hamlets,' which was just as meaningless to them as it sounds to an American. John Mecklin, Mission in Torment, (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1965), p. 36.
4. Director General of Information, Viet Nam, Viet Nam's Strategic Hamlets, (Saigon, 1962), p. 6.
5. "Excerpts from the Address of Ngo Dinh Diem to the National Assembly," in The Year of the Strategic Hamlets, (1962) Saigon: The Times of Vietnam Magazine, Volume 4, October 28, 1962, p. 40.
6. Osborne, op cit., p. 32.
7. Marcus G. Raskin and Bernard B. Fall, The Viet-Nam Reader, (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 487. (Underline mine)
8. American Embassy, Saigon, First Anniversary of the Government of Viet-Nam's Strategic Hamlet Program, April 18, 1963, Incl. 2, pp. 1-2.

9. Ibid, p. 2.
10. "Excerpts from the Address of Nho Dinh Diem to the National Assembly," op cit., p. 1.
11. Ibid, p. 1.
12. Ibid, p. 1, and William A. Nighswonger, "Quang Nam Province," in War Without Guns: American Civilians in Rural Viet Nam, op cit., p. 101.
13. "Excerpts from the Address of Ngo Dinh Diem to the National Assembly," op cit., p. 1.
14. Nighswonger, "Quang Nam Province," op cit., p. 101

The Strategic Hamlet Concept

The Diem Government in late 1961 attempted to meet the growing insurgency problem with the inauguration of the nationwide strategic hamlet program. Aimed at the complete control of the population and resources in the rural areas, this effort was a distillation of earlier, more limited, resettlement and rehabilitation plans, and drew from the experience of similar projects in other countries and a number of security and political measures adopted by provincial and district officials acting on their own initiative to meet the steady deterioration of security conditions in the rural areas.¹

The national government's role as director of the program was not explicitly revealed during the first few months, although it was generally known that the impetus came from "the presidency." The main thrust in getting the program started was probably the British Advisory Mission, which arrived in September 1961, headed by Sir Robert G. K. Thompson, who served in a capacity comparable to minister of defense in Kuala Lumpur during the Malayan Emergency. After its acceptance by Diem and the assurance of American support, the real driving force behind the program was the President's brother and political

advisor, Ngo Dinh Nhu.

Nhu became chairman of a special inter-ministerial committee on strategic hamlets which became the most effective instrument inside the government. United States Ambassador Nolting then created a parallel American inter-agency committee to the Nhu Committee, as it was called, headed by Deputy Chief of Mission William C. Trueheart.²

Some of the great reliance placed upon the program was partly a result of the earlier success of the project of resettlement in Malaya during the period of the Emergency there. In the large-scale village resettlements in Viet Nam, the Malayan experience was seen by many observers both as an example and as an assurance that resettlement would answer many of the basic dilemmas raised by the insurgency. For, in Malaya, the defeat of the Communist guerrillas was indeed closely linked with the relocation of Chinese squatters in new villages where they were brought under government control and protection.

Unfortunately, the Viet Nam environment lacked most of the essential elements which contributed to the successful British counterinsurgency campaign. Among these factors were: (1) an easily-identifiable insurgent who could be segregated from the rest of the population; (2) geographic isolation of the insurgent from outside assistance; (3) a well-trained military establishment and civil police organization; (4) a limited food supply that could be effectively denied the insurgent; (5) a viable

government which continued to receive the support of a large majority of the population; and (6) the ability of the British Government to formulate and execute counterinsurgency plans directly rather than through advisory relationships.³

It should be noted also that the Malayan plan was primarily military-motivated whereas the scope and objectives of the strategic hamlet program were said by its promoters to range far beyond the military field. As stated by President Diem, "the essential role of the strategic hamlet is not military. It is primarily political, economic, and social. Under the strategic hamlet program, we aim at bringing an overall solution to the big problem of underdevelopment, that of technical backwardness, including the political, economic, and social backwardness that is the common lot of underdeveloped countries."⁴

The strategic hamlet program was conceived as a nationwide rehabilitation and security plan, with the objective of physically and ideologically separating the rural peasant from the Viet Cong, and winning him over to the government by the provision and combination of adequate physical security and the initiation of civilian programs at the hamlet level designed to provide for social, political, and economic development. By this combination of actions it was intended

not only to deny the Viet Cong access to the rural population, but at the same time to get this majority element of the population to support willingly and actively the government's counter-insurgency effort.⁵ The four main goals behind the strategic hamlet concept were: first, to provide rural people with security; second, to provide these same people with a better life with more social services; third, to deny access of Viet Cong to information, recruits, and support from the villagers; fourth, to destroy the "Mystique of Success," that has given the Viet Cong psychological strength.⁶

The goals and objectives thus were to consolidate government authority in pacified areas through a defense system and reorganization at the hamlet level. To accomplish this, the program encompassed the following:

- a. The provision of security to the rural population by isolating and protecting them from the Viet Cong;
- b. Participation of the population in its own defense;
- c. The provision of basic social and economic needs by the injection of new life into the economy at the hamlet level, and, with the assistance of the government, new or improved medical care, education, sanitation, and agricultural programs.
- d. The creation of a viable political life at the hamlet level through the election of hamlet councils and officials.

It was also thought that an effective functioning hamlet system, supported by aggressive paramilitary force action would release regular forces from static defense duty and make them available for offensive operations against the Viet Cong. In

this fashion, successful hamlet, or point, defense would contribute to the achievement of overall area defense. By this same token, establishing viable defensive hamlets in areas cleared of insurgents by regular military forces could eventually help to consolidate gains toward an eventually secure Viet Nam.

As originally planned, the program was to progress in stages. The first stage included the fortification of existing villages wherein the people would depend upon the regular army, the civil guard, and the self-defense force for their security. This, the "secure hamlet" stage, was to give way to the second, the "strategic hamlet" stage where the people would construct a fortified hamlet under the direction of the civil guard.

A hamlet was supposed to meet six established criteria before it could be designated as a "strategic hamlet." Subject to a multitude of interpretations, these simple yet extremely nebulous criteria were:

1. the hamlet has been cleared of Viet Cong;
2. the classification and organization of the people into the various socio-political groups had been completed;
3. family groups had been organized and work responsibilities of the people for improving the hamlet had been assigned;
4. fortification had reached an acceptable state of completion;
5. the people knew what to do when attacked and had practiced their duties; and
6. a Hamlet Administrative Committee had been elected and a hamlet charter established.

Two types of strategic hamlets were planned. One, in Viet Cong areas, would involve the removal of the peasant population to fortified village units both smaller and closer to

the fields than the agrovilles. The other, in more secure areas, would be based on the original villages and would not necessarily entail the total destruction of the home villages, except possibly for the most outlying structures.⁷

Aside from the defense works of sharpened bamboo spikes, moats, barbed wire, and land mines, the plan called for improved educational facilities, a dispensary, and improved sanitation facilities, as well as agricultural land reform, and, eventually, the free election of village officials.⁸ This concept would further provide for a convenient grouping of the population for the propaganda activities of the government civic action teams, while simultaneously depriving the insurgents of their sources of food, supply, materiel, and recruits from among the peasant population. That is, such an assembly of the population would facilitate food rationing aimed at starving out the insurgent forces, resource control, and also security measures to hinder his methods of recruitment which would otherwise require vast numbers of regular army troops for its enforcement. The observation has been made by Bernard Fall, however, that perhaps the "Social, economic, and political amenities with which the strategic hamlets will be furnished (good schools, clinics, waterworks, unfettered elections of village officials) take second place to the government's urgent drive to insulate the Viet Cong from its civilian support environment."⁹

Parallelling the "trained and armed" self-defense force within the strategic hamlet, security precautions included enforced curfews, identification cards for all the residents, and security checks on the inhabitants.

In each hamlet, the military basis of the system comprised a Self-Defense Corps (SDC) unit that might number anywhere from five to twelve men, an auxiliary warning and/or guard force composed of members of the Republican Youth, and more or less extensive fortifications. In addition, the program involved the political and social organization of the inhabitants in a way that would permit close surveillance of their political activities, their social participation in such government-controlled mass movements as the Republican Youth, and the government-sponsored Communist Activities Denunciation Campaign (To-Cong),¹⁰ and their contribution to labor projects for community development. Once these programs were established, the system was further designed to serve as a basis for wider programs of rural economic reconstruction including agricultural credit and extension services.

Recognizing that the effectiveness of the program depended, in large part, on local initiative and response, the national government placed responsibility for detailed planning and implementation of the strategic hamlets in the hands of the province chiefs.

Despite the national character of the strategic hamlet program, the government continues to recognize that the effectiveness of the program depends largely on local initiative and response. Since July 1962, therefore, direct responsibility for planning and implementing the strategic hamlet program has been placed officially in the hands of local committees composed of civil and military officials and operating within each of Vietnam's 41 provinces. These committees draw up detailed plans for strategic hamlets, and then submit them for approval by the central government. Since the program is largely locally initiated, it does require local support contributions above those made by the central government.¹¹

The central government undertook to provide the central funding, and certain technical and administrative skills. A considerable amount of material assistance would be provided by the United States with local distribution and coordination a function of the United States Operations Mission's Office of Rural Affairs Provincial Representatives, under the direction of Rufus Phillips.

In regard to local administration, it should be noted that the strategic hamlet program took the smallest Vietnamese unit of population--the hamlet--rather than the smallest administrative unit--the village--as the basis for administering the program. This was in accordance with President Diem's attempt to extend central government control beyond the district and village levels where the traditional administrative structure had stopped.¹² Modified very little

by the French colonial administration, the Vietnamese village has stood as a more or less autonomous unit, ruled by a village head and a council of notables elected by the villagers themselves.

The Viet village in contrast to Western communities tends to be a little world to itself. It is highly structured in its internal relationships. It has traditionally been a closed society, which one enters by being born or by marriage. One cannot "run away" to another village, because it too, is its own microcosm, and the stranger is strictly an outsider. This maintaining oneself in the good graces of his community and his family, is a strong motivation for the peasant. The influence of the village community on its individual members can, therefore, play a vital role in the motivation and control methods of insurgency and pacification.¹³

In 1956, through a series of governmental decrees, Diem abolished the practice of elective village officials, and made the positions appointive by province and district chiefs, subject to review by the Ministry of the Interior. This policy of centralization was extended even below the hamlet level, with the appointed hamlet chiefs attempting to organize families into groups of 25 or so households (khom), headed by an appointed leader. These khom, in turn, were further subdivided into smaller units of five families each (lien gia), again headed by an appointed chief.¹⁴

Thus, at a period of time when there was an acute shortage of administrative talent needed to establish a new government structure at the national level, and a lack of trained personnel at the province and district level,

President Diem apparently set out to build a tightly-controlled, monolithic governmental structure extending from his national office down to small household units.¹⁵ Whatever theoretical merits this goal may have had, it contributed to the administrative difficulties which attended the various rural security, pacification, and rehabilitation programs.

The immediate security objectives of the program were two--first to sever Viet Cong communication and control lines to the rural populace and thus deny them the local resources (manpower, food, intelligence, and weapons) necessary for their operations, and second, to develop a nationwide self-defense effort at the local level by providing the peasant with weapons and other defense facilities for village and hamlet security.¹⁶

(A) fundamental problem common to Vietnamese peasants is physical security--for the safety of life and limb. This drive for preservation of self and family takes precedence over all other concerns, and determines, to a great extent, the nature of the peasant's response to both sides of the conflict. As the fighting in village areas has escalated, the search for survival has consistently shown its priority over political and other values. Generally, the peasant will support or oppose one side or the other as the situation requires in order to survive.¹⁷

Although Ngo Dinh Nhu stated that the "strategic hamlets seek to assure the security of the people in order that the success of the political, social, and military

revolution might be assured by an enthusiastic movement of solidarity and self-sufficiency,"¹⁸ one of the aspects of the "military revolution" embodied in the strategic hamlets by the government apparently, or at least officially, was that the hamlets should become self-sufficient in their own defense. They envisaged that the government would "lend weapons to the hamlets for six months," after which the hamlet defenders would "have to count on arming themselves by taking weapons from the enemy" and the government would supply only ammunition.¹⁹ Whether this statement was intended to encourage the hamlet defenders to greater zeal in the defense of their homes, or whether it was official policy is not known. In any case it represents an extremely dangerous proposal, which, if pursued, presented the unenviable possibility of leaving a hamlet defenseless after an initial period of resisting the Viet Cong.

The immediate political objectives were to create the desire and will to resist Viet Cong appeals and, at the same time, strengthen the popular image of the Government by providing the peasant with improved political, social, and administrative services in the hamlets.

A document published by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Strategic Hamlets explained the procedures originally established by the Vietnamese government to implement the

strategic hamlet program. At first it was necessary for the government "to make a clear delineation of the regions under dispute between us and our enemy, the regions under enemy control, and the regions transformed into war zones or into combat villages. It is necessary to estimate the potential forces of our enemy in each region, and to understand the strategy and tactics there..."²⁰ Second, in those regions under Viet Cong influence, the government "must conduct military operations, assemble the people, and establish fortified hamlets, as stipulated in the Thompson report."²¹ Third, "An important phase of the strategic hamlet plan is to conduct a series of supporting military operations designed to drive our enemy out of the regions, provinces, and districts, in order to guarantee security."²² Fourth, after the Strategic Hamlet Operational Team had organized the hamlet, "it is important to conduct a mopping up operation and to establish a system of control to ensure that no Vietnamese Communist agents are planted there."²³ In response to the socio-politico-economic aspects, "a basic action of the Strategic Hamlet Operational Team in each hamlet is to establish civic organizations, for example, associations of old people, youth, women, and children."²⁴ In cases of

emergencies, the document called an "important requirement" the need of the hamlet to "organize a system of emergency alarm and speedy liaison"...with the view that "our mobile forces for military operations and our Strategic Hamlet Operational Teams may become the victims of enemy guerrilla attacks and ambushes."²⁵ As for the actual implementation the following statement is singularly enlightening:

It is necessary at first that this policy be applied only in the regions under dispute between us and the Communists. But, in their war zones (D, Duong-Minh-Chau, Dong-Thap, Ca-Mau, U-Minh), or in regions where our enemies have established control by organizing their combat villages, we need to apply another policy...Of course, our primary wish at the present time, is to organize strategic hamlets to ensure the security of the people in rural areas. Those who are directly responsible for this work are the district chiefs...Therefore, during the period of time necessary for the local district chief to carry out the plan of organizing strategic hamlets in his entire district (for instance, 6 months, 8 months, or a year), all other orders must be considered of secondary importance. We cannot reproach him during the indicated period of time, for the fact that taxes are not collected; that funds loaned by the Agricultural Credit Office are not fully recovered; that land development centers are destroyed; that notables in scattered villages are assassinated; and that paddy cannot be harvested. The duty of higher authorities is to study, revise if necessary, and approve the plan for the establishment of strategic hamlets submitted by the district chief, and then, they must help him execute the plan within the scheduled time. After achievement of this plan, the district chief will carry out objectives of secondary importance.²⁶

The plan also called for the checking of existing facilities, rather than ideal ones, with the province chief employing these "directly."²⁷ The enemy situation was to be carefully scrutinized with the strategy being "to drive out the enemy."²⁸ The plan assumed that with the available forces at the regional level, "thanks to the successive military operations, he (the regional commander) launched..."²⁹ "the enemy would definitely not be able to concentrate a strength of more than two companies to harass different provinces under his command."³⁰ Officials at the province level did not have to worry or contend with a large insurgent force "since the region has assured ...that the province does not have to cope with an enemy strength of more than two companies." Each province chief could, therefore, assure the different district chiefs in the province of the fact that they would not have to cope with an enemy strength of more than a platoon.³¹ To do this the province chief had at his command one regular battalion and one company of civil guards or rangers which would be used as the mobile operational forces.³² To quiet any potential fears, the plan optimistically stated:

Some people may be afraid of the fact that the enemy will face the situation by concentrating a stronger force (for instance, more than a battalion) to clash with the mobile force of the province chief or to attack a certain locality or agency in the province. Let him remember that the commander of the region has assured the province against such an event.³³

A key role in establishing the hamlets was given to the district chief who again played a part in the security mission, having had under his command an average force of 300 men of whom only about 200 were armed.³⁴

The program was actually implemented in one of three different but overlapping ways, depending on the nature of the area where the program was to be introduced and the extent and type of military participation required. These general types of operations were: "Province Rehabilitation," "Clear-and-Hold," and the "Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program."

"Province Rehabilitation" consisted of those province-planned civil-military operations which were conducted based upon a nationally approved plan in support of the strategic hamlet program, and upon which the allocation of funds, materiel, and military resources to the province were based. Normally, military operations were small in scale and were conducted by the province chief using his own assigned paramilitary Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps and regular resources immediately available to him. These operations extended outward under the "amoeba" principle from the more secure to the less secure areas.

The second type of military operation was the "Clear-and-Hold," conducted in direct support of province rehabilitation activities under the strategic hamlet program. The mission was to clear the Viet Cong from the area and hold it against their reentry while strategic hamlet development proceeded to the point where local forces could provide security. This type of operation allowed for more rapid expansion of the program in areas than would otherwise be possible. Military units would provide protective security to the people by conducting extensive small-scale coordinated operations against the Viet Cong around the area being developed. This would prevent the Viet Cong from being able to form up for attacks in strength. Since regular forces were deployed in strength and for an extended period of time, the type of operation was normally commanded by the regular force commander with the province or district chief acting as his deputy for political, social, and economic matters and administration of the program.

The third operation, the "Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program," was directed toward securing and controlling people living in the more remote and inaccessible areas. Under this program, operations were designed to provide security and assistance in maintaining at least a subsistence level of food supply. Operations were conducted by the Vietnamese Special Forces who were advised and assisted by United States

Special Forces teams. They utilized primarily local inhabitants who were trained and armed. As these remote areas became accessible to regular military and civilian agencies, the Special Forces were phased out and the province in which they were located assumed full responsibility for integrating them into the strategic hamlet program.

In theory, the following procedures for implementing the program at the hamlet level would be used. A Strategic Hamlet Operational Team under the command of a district chief would actually occupy one of the villages selected for a strategic hamlet. Depending on the size of the village the chief would estimate how long the team would be allowed to organize the hamlets within the village. For a medium-sized village up to a month was allowed; for a larger village, the period of time was a month or, if sufficiently large, it might be increased to two months.³⁵

After the village has been occupied, the "civil guard team, well briefed on the operation beforehand, immediately undertakes the defense of the village (according to local terrain). The civil guard will cooperate with the village militiamen to take turns on patrol, set up guard posts, build gun pits, dig shelter pits, and establish a system of alarm and liason" in order that the Viet Cong would not be able to penetrate any of the defense networks of the hamlets of the entire village while the team was there."³⁶

In the hamlet, the teams developed a terrain organization plan which was broken down in three phases. The first phase, which lasted one week, included a reconnaissance of the terrain, terrain organization planning, and organization of the people to implement the plan. This last element contained instructions for the people concerning their duties and preparation of equipment and material. The second phase, which also lasted a week, was the construction of the fortifications and defense network as had been planned. The last phase, which was dependent on the people's spare time and was permanent after the first and second phase, was the completion and strengthening of the fortifications. The plan contained a program for building fences and fortifications, establishing guards, constructing uncovered communications trenches and underground systems.³⁷

The individual strategic hamlets were not organized as a fort, but were primarily a perimeter established around a community of houses, with the occupants capable of conducting to some degree their own defense. The number of entry points was limited to facilitate the control of movement into and out of the hamlet, and was to be capable of being completely and securely closed at night. The number of entry points was to be adequate not to inconvenience people unduly in going to and from their fields of work. The construction of perimeters varied considerably. There were one or two fences

made of bamboo, poles, or barbed wire. A moat, lined with sharpened bamboo stakes or nail boards, was sometimes provided as was a parapet which was used for protection from small arms fire and to make penetration into the hamlet more difficult.

The construction plan itself appears overly optimistic as was the opinion of some district chiefs who felt that the purging and control in a medium-sized village of four hamlets including from five to six thousand inhabitants, "may" be achieved within three weeks.³⁸ These same chiefs opined that if any Viet Cong infiltrated into the hamlets or villages, it would be easy to unmask them.³⁹

The implication of this appears to be that these district chiefs did not understand the full implications of the plan nor did they appear to understand the capabilities of the insurgent.

Other province and district chiefs complained about the large quantity of documents relating to the program being sent to them from all sides.

In a study of one district headquarters, it was found that, in addition to his many other duties, the district chief in the space of one week received about one hundred

instructions and other communications from the province chief and submitted a similar number of answers and reports to his superior.⁴⁰ One chief complained:

We have no time to read them all. Even when we read these documents we do not understand them. We do not know where to begin and where to stop.⁴¹

Within the framework of the strategic hamlet project, it was absolutely forbidden to force people to leave their homes and lands and go to establish new strategic hamlets.⁴² In theory, no hamlet would be relocated except in rare circumstances. "In general, the defenses were to be put around existing villages" and the "one or two" that had to be regrouped were "the exception, not the rule."⁴³

In a program of this magnitude, some opposition on the part of the peasant would be unavoidable during the developmental stages of a strategic hamlet. However, such opposition need not be lasting, too vociferous, or a matter of serious political concern to the government, if the relocations were limited and the population, construction, and new farming operations were efficiently organized, and the responsible province authorities fulfilled their commitments to reestablish and expand regular administrative services and economic reconstruction projects in the new settlements.

In any case, however, the resettlements were "justified" by the ruling family under the guise of Personalism, or

phan-vi, the official doctrine of the pro-government political groups. This doctrine, which lays main emphasis on "an attempt to harmonize the material and spiritual aspirations of the individual with the social needs of the community and the political needs of the state, and seeks a middle route between capitalist individualism and Marxian collectivism,"⁴⁴ was enunciated by Madame Nhu in 1962 when she asserted a religious overtone to the hamlet program: 'Christian Personalism shall underline, in opposition to religious individualism, the collective character of the Christian faith and life, which has been too much neglected over the past two centuries.'⁴⁵ This "collective" aspect permitted Diem and Nhu to emphasize that the regroupment of the people, both in the prior agrovilles and in the strategic hamlets, was "an expression of our Personalist views."⁴⁶ The religious connotations to the program had other practical implications for the Catholic population was often exempted from the necessary physical labor in the building of the hamlets. This proved to be a source of aggravation to many of the sects and especially the Buddhists.⁴⁷

FOOTNOTES

Chapter V

1. One excellent example is Father Agusten Nguyen Lac Hoa and his "sea swallows." See Malcolm O. W. Browne, The New Face of War, op cit., and Denis Warner, The Last Confucian, op cit.
2. See Lucian W. Pye, Guerrilla Communism in Malaya, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), and Sir Robert Thompson, op cit.
3. In a November 1962 interview with John Meklin, the USIS head in Viet Nam, Nhu volunteered candidly that the strategic hamlet had become a personal raison d'etre. "'Until this task,' he said, 'I had been drifting never sure how best to use my energies.'" These unexpended energies were to reach their potential in the hamlet program's development. Mecklin, op cit., p. 45.
4. Quoted in The Times of Viet Nam, February 7, 1963, pp. 2-3. President Diem here seems to have played down the military aspects of the program although it was originally conceived as a military weapon against the Viet Cong. It was later developed into an over-all program for the economic, political, and social development of the rural areas.
5. William W. Kaufman,, op cit., pp. 263-265.
6. Homer Bigart, "U. S. Role in Viet Nam," The New York Times, April 1, 1962, Section IV, p. 5.
7. William Smith, Jr., "The Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam," Armed Forces Chemical Journal, Volume XIX, Number 3, September 1964, p. 48-49.
8. Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet Nams: A Political and Military Analysis. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 375. The Vietnamese Director General of Information stated that "hundreds of new school rooms are to be built in strategic hamlets in 1963" and "rural dispensaries, to be established during 1963... will service thousands of hamlets." Director General of Information Viet Nam's Strategic Hamlets, op cit., pp. 12-13.
9. Fall, Ibid, p. 377.

10. G. Hickey, Village in Vietnam, op cit., p. 205. The Republican Youth was organized by Nhu in 1953 and was discontinued, as were the Women's Social Solidarity Movement and the planned women's paramilitary organization, by General Khanh after the coup d'etat in November, 1963.
11. U. S. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Strategic Hamlets, Washington, D. C., Research Memorandum, 1 July 1963, (SD OIR RM RFE 1963-58). p. 4.
12. For the purposes of civil administration Viet Nam is generally organized in descending order on the basis of province, district, village, and hamlet units. (The canton, an administrative unit between the district and the village used by the French principally in the Highlands, has little significance now). The village (XA) has functioned as the smallest administrative unit of government, while the hamlet, several of which comprise a village, is the smallest social or population unit. Nguyen Thai, Is South Viet Nam Viable? (Manilla: Carmelo and Bauerman, Inc. 1962), pp. 37-40.
13. W. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965, op cit., pp. 13-14.
14. Gerald Hickey, Village in Vietnam, op cit., pp. 178-232
15. Nguyen Thai, op cit., pp. 227-284.
16. U. S. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, op cit., p. 2.
17. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965, op cit., p. 15.
18. Director of Information, Viet Nam's Strategic Hamlets, op cit., p. 7.
19. Ibid, p. 12.
20. Inter-Ministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets, Viet Nam, Free Strategic Hamlet to Secure Village, Saigon: July 24, 1962, (MAAG V 55 SHSV) P. 1.
21. Ibid, p. 1.
22. Ibid, p. 1. (emphasis mine)
23. Ibid, p. 1.
24. Ibid, p. 2. Ellsberg cites the example in which the Strategic Hamlet Operational Team came into the hamlet, informed the people into which group they belonged, and then did nothing further. Ellsberg, op cit.

25. Ibid, p. 2.
26. Ibid, p. 2-4. (emphasis mine)
27. Ibid, pp. 4-5. (emphasis theirs)
28. Ibid, p. 8.
29. Ibid, p. 7.
30. Ibid, pp. 8-9.
31. Ibid, pp. 10-11. (emphasis mine)
32. Ibid, p. 11.
33. Ibid, p. 12.
34. Ibid, p. 12.
35. Ibid, p. 16
36. Ibid, p. 17.
37. Ministry of the Interior, Viet Nam, Strategic Hamlet Defense and Organization of Terrain, Saigon: December 18, 1962, (MAAG V55 SHD) p. 3.
38. Inter-Ministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets, op cit., p. 17.
39. Ibid, p. 22.
40. Luther A. Allen and Pham Ngoc An, op cit., p. 53.
41. Ibid, p. 2.
42. Ibid, p. 24.
43. Roger Hilsman, "A Report on South Viet Nam," Department of State Bulletin, Volume XLVII, Number 1215, October 8, 1962, p. 531.
44. Robert G. Scigliano, "Political Parties in South Vietnam Under the Republic," Pacific Affairs, Volume XXXIII, Number 4, December 1960, p. 330.
45. B. Fall, The Two Viet Nams, op cit., p. 247.
46. Ibid, p. 247.
47. Shaplen, op cit., p. 192.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Numbers Game:

To this date more than 8,600 strategic hamlets have been built, in which more than 10.5 million inhabitants are united in their struggle for a life more just, more free, more prosperous and more brotherly. In the construction of the strategic hamlets, we have held firm to the criterion of speed rather than of solidity: in building, rapidly and simultaneously, a wide network of hamlets, we count on anticipating the predictable reactions of the enemy--notably to counter his "sword and shield" tactic, by which he pushes before him women, children, and the aged to overwhelm the defenses of the hamlets.

No perfect solution was open to us. The solution we have adopted has proven to be the most effective, even though it may seem less rational. At the end of 1963, almost all the hamlets planned will have been built, thus bringing to an end the first phase in which our effort will have primarily been directed at achieving political and military objectives. In the second phase--that of consolidation, finishing and development--the emphasis will be on economic, social and cultural development.

(From the address of President Diem to the National Assembly on October 7, 1963)

The strategic hamlet program was well underway by March 1962. By the end of June it was reported that there were more than 2000 such hamlets with dozens more being established every week.¹ By mid-August the number was estimated at about 2600.² By October 1, 1962, the total number of people brought in under

the program had reached over 7.2 million and by the end of the year, with an average of 600 strategic hamlets established each month, the number would reach 9,253,000 people.³ As of mid-December the Vietnamese Government reported that 39 per cent of South Viet Nam's population was living in strategic hamlets and that of 11,182 strategic hamlets to be built, 4,077 had been finished, indicating that a remarkable rate of progress had been achieved.⁴ According to the New York Times of December 15, 1963,

The greatest advance in the hamlets has been psychological...for the erection of barbed wire and bamboo fences has given a sense of unity and identity to the peasants. Establishment of hamlet councils has linked many of these communities to the national Government for the first time. Where three or four armed Viet Cong troops could formerly enter a hamlet, recruit a few youngsters and terrorize one or two residents, they now have to attack the whole community...The guerrillas have grown wary of making frontal assaults in some areas because of increased resistance by hamlet guards armed by the Government with carbines, shotguns, and grenades. Another factor contributing to improvement of hamlet defenses has been the establishment of 1,500 radio transmitters in villages... These transmitters permit residents to call immediately for military help. The security of the strategic hamlet has encouraged the Government to reinstate a program of credit to farmers. Formerly, Viet Cong terrorists squelched menaced farmers who accepted Government loans or tried to pay them back.⁵

Official reports on the implementation of the strategic hamlet program gave glowing accounts of steady progress in the number of hamlets completed and in the other

aspects of the program. These statements came not only from the Viet Nam Government, but also from those governments which were supporting the Vietnamese effort. Both Americans and Vietnamese boasted loudly, in what seemed to be a willing partnership of self-delusion, that the program was far ahead of schedule and that it would be completed sooner than expected.

Celebrating the first anniversary of the approval given by the National Assembly to the hamlet program, President Diem admitted to his critics that earlier settlement programs had not been entirely successful but those who had criticized Viet Nam had failed to take into account the "creative genius" of the South Vietnamese.⁶ He continued:

After only one year, the irresistible movement of strategic hamlets has already gone far beyond the original tactical objectives. In constant progression this movement has upset...the enemies of the nation, and it has, in addition strongly shaken the foundation of their very organization.

At the same time that general security grows the foundation of the personalist revolution takes root in the countryside bringing the certainty of victory for the Just Cause.⁷

The United States in September 1962 tried to multiply American assistance to the expanding program through direct dollar purchase of 10,000,000 dollars worth of Vietnamese piastres, enabling the immediate release of funds to urgent projects instead of the long delay associated with the usual USOM financing. However, the rate of activity and expansion in the program and the desire of President Diem not

to wait for the allocated funds, materiel, and specially trained cadres caused the full burden of the program to fall upon the peasants and the regular civil servants, thereby nullifying the political, social, and economic ends of the program.⁸ Table 3 gives a broad accounting of the resources financing the construction program.⁹

The amount of funds earmarked for the construction of strategic hamlets for fiscal year 1962-1963, according to unofficial sources, was two billion piastres of which the United States contributed one billion and the rest was from Vietnamese sources.¹⁰ However, a joint United States-Vietnamese survey conducted in Long An and Binh Hoa Provinces, two of the provinces receiving a major effort in the program, indicated that more often no monies were ever received by the people for resettlement.¹¹

By February 1, 1963, Secretary of State Dean Rusk praised the program by saying, "There are some definitely encouraging elements: the ratio of casualties between Government and Viet Cong forces, the ratio of arms captured or lost between the two sides, the steady extension of the strategic hamlet program, the increasingly effective work of the Montagnards along the border areas. All these indicate some turning in the situation."¹² Army Chief of Staff, General Earle G.

Wheeler was quoted on 4 February, 1963 as stating, "More than 4,000 strategic hamlets were completed in 1962 alone. This program was instrumental in bringing an additional 500,000 people under control of the government."¹³

On April 8, 1963, U. Alexis Johnson, the Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, in a speech before the Economics Club of Detroit, stated that "to date about half the population--nearly 7 million people--live in about 5,000 strategic hamlets. Another 5,000 strategic hamlets must be organized before the program is complete even in the first, essentially military phase."¹⁴ Continuing he says: "We are satisfied that we have a sound strategy; progress is being made."¹⁵ He then closed using President Kennedy's State of the Union message, "The spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in South Viet Nam."¹⁶ The optimistic numbers game by this date had reached all levels.

Again in April, Secretary Rusk commented that the strategic hamlet program was "producing excellent results...The Communists are no longer, in Mao's figure of speech, fish swimming in a sea of peasants. Every bush is no longer their ally. They are getting hungrier. To the Vietnamese peasant they look less and less like winners."¹⁷ In another press conference in mid-1963 Rusk again spoke of the expanding hamlet program as if it were an indicator of evidence of success, although

by this time many government officials, both civilian and military, were expressing increasing doubts about it.¹⁸

As late as July, 1963, the United States Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research sent the following memorandum to the Acting Secretary:

On balance...the strategic hamlet program has been a success. Much of the concern and hesitation originally shown by the peasants has disappeared, partly because of the Vietnam Government's improved public information program but also because of the security and other benefits the peasants have received once they moved into the hamlets. The hamlet militia is exhibiting both the desire and the capability to fight, and there are increasing reports of peasants volunteering intelligence on the Communists and of welcoming the strategic hamlet program because it has freed them from Communist intimidation and "taxation." Commerce has been considerably revived in the countryside, and there has even been a spurt in the construction and reconstruction of dwellings. More than one hundred thousand Montagnards or tribesmen have voluntarily left the Communist-controlled mountain areas in large groups and have asked for asylum in strategic hamlets. Finally, the strategic hamlet program has already reduced the total area and population under Communist control or influence and has weakened Communist strength and logistics capabilities. Communist guerrillas are reportedly experiencing morale problems and shortages of food and supplies in many areas, and have resorted increasingly to outright theft and harassment of the peasant in order to gain supplies and recruits. These tactics will only serve to decrease still further the Communist base of operation.

The conclusion that the strategic hamlet program has been successful is further supported by the very efforts the Communists

are making to subvert it. Intelligence reports clearly indicate that the Communist insurgents regard the program as constituting one of the most serious threats to their continued operations and are now attempting to develop a strategy of their own to counter the strategic hamlet. The Communist propaganda line that the hamlets are "concentration camps" is obviously part of this strategy. Of course, the Communists fail to note that the "internees" are provided weapons. Admittedly, bamboo and barbed wire fences exist, but these are to keep Communist guerrillas and terrorists out rather than the villagers in. Identity cards have been issued to hamlet inhabitants, but these are to identify Communist agents rather than to control peasants. There is thus a degree of regimentation, but the Vietnam Government is faced with a grim, prolonged war. Thus some form of regimentation is unavoidable and indeed desirable.¹⁹

Vietnam Press, the Vietnamese newspaper, contained a continual listing of new hamlets planned, constructed and inaugurated. The two most striking features of these reports and those contained in other semi-official government releases were the obvious inconsistency in exactly the correct numbers of hamlets planned and constructed and the percentage of the total population housed in hamlets and, secondly, the apparent rapidity with which hamlets were constructed. These facts were later emphasized by the revelation of poorly fortified hamlets and falsification of the numbers of hamlets completed. Tables 4 and 7 extracted from the Times of Viet Nam,²⁰ Table 6 from official government sources²¹ and Table 5 from Viet-Nams Strategic Hamlets,²²

published by the Directorate General of Information in Saigon, give an excellent delineation of this problem. One can easily note the blatant discrepancies in overall figures within each of the various tables.

Since it had become "national policy" to construct strategic hamlets, province officials could not afford to lag in reporting their goals of completed hamlets. Nighswonger reports that "sycophants" in the government learned to report the accomplishments of programs planned but never completed.²³

The desire of officials at national government levels to keep this figure continually and rapidly increasing led subordinates at the field operation level to hastily complete strategic hamlets in disregard of the prevailing circumstances. One such technique was to surround a village which was militarily not tenable with barbed wire rather than to take the time required to relocate it into a tactically defensible area.²⁴

In Quang Nam Province according to Nighswonger, an ambitious young division commander rapidly revised his timetable to impress President Diem, slicing the projected six months completion time down to three and, finally, to two and a half months.²⁵

Province chiefs competed with one another over the number of hamlets they could build. The more they could build, the more they were in favor with Nhu and the more U. S. aid they received; consequently one problem for the American mission was the tendency of Vietnamese officials to divide a hamlet in half and count it as two, thereby getting twice the aid. Each chief engaged in a mad scramble to build hamlets faster than the next. "If you stand still long enough down there, they'll throw a piece

of barbed wire around you and call you a strategic hamlet," one American said.²⁶

A frank report by the Agency for International Development in 1964 stated, "From the very inception it was apparent that many of the province officials did not fully understand the concept and were so frightened by the pressures from the President and his brother that they would employ any measures, from forced labor and confiscation to false reporting, to achieve the quantitative goals set."²⁷

One exception to this appears to be Kien Hoa Province where the province chief understood the real meaning of the program. Yet here too the Viet Cong were able to subvert his implementation by the successful development of an infrastructure within the villages. The Viet Cong were able to recruit two thousand men and to form and equip two new battalions of six hundred men each, besides expanding to full strength the single battalion which had previously operated in this province.²⁸

Often province chiefs realized that the program was over-extended but the national government persisted in its demands that the provinces organize and support more strategic hamlets. For example, AID official W. Robert Warne, the Provincial Representative for Vinh Binh Province, reports that Major Le Hoang Thao, the Province Chief, reported 451 strategic hamlets existing in the province in June 1962, although Thao personally listed only 307 hamlets as having armed militia and

only 300 of the 451 as adequately organized and defended.²⁹

Furthermore, Presidential trips to the countryside were elaborately staged to give the showcase effect of successful efforts. "The objective of local officials became control of the population, not genuine support from it,"³⁰ In an interview with Stanley Karnow Diem said, "We must control territory and defend everything under the sun,...We must suffocate the Communists. This job can't be done drop by drop."³¹

Sir Robert Thompson, in September 1963, reported to President Diem that the program had gone too fast, with the consequence being a "dispersal of effort and a scattering of hamlets over too wide an area...as a result of this haste, and because there had been no clear strategic direction of the programme, we were in a situation in which the available provincial forces were overextended, the Viet Cong had been presented with a number of soft and vulnerable targets and the government had been unable to achieve any really secure base area. In many provinces the situation was serious..."³² Thompson cites the following figures to show the overextension and haste especially in insecure and low priority areas.³³

<u>Month</u>	<u>Total Completed Hamlets</u>	<u>Monthly Increase</u>
July 1962	2,559	-
August 1962	2,661	102
September 1962	3,089	428
October 1962	3,225	136
November 1962	3,550	325
December 1962	4,080	530
January 1963	4,441	361
February 1963	5,049	608
March 1963	5,332	283
April 1963	5,787	455
May 1963	6,226	439
June 1963	6,872	646
July 1963	7,220	348
August 1963	8,095	875

The rate at which they were being built prevented them from receiving proper construction and, at the same time, the number erected was too great for the hamlets to be given adequate protection.

Hamlet defenses often fought well when attacked, but the training of hamlet militia lagged behind the construction program. The local militia forces were also expanded beyond an acceptable training and equipping rate in an effort to attain quickly a combat readiness status. Prior to 1962 these forces consisted of around 50,000 Civil Guard (Bao An), poorly armed and rudimentarily trained, and a negligible number of Self-Defense Corpsmen (Dan Ve), most of whom were not armed. Within a year each force had increased to over 100,000.³⁴ Unfortunately, manpower was not the primary problem facing the armed forces of Viet Nam. "Basically it...(was) a problem of acquiring training, equipment, skills, and organization suited to combating the type of aggression that menaces their country."³⁵

By analyzing the geographical and settlement characteristics of Viet Nam and, especially, of the Delta, one readily sees that the success of the program depended largely on the strategy of building hamlets slowly, starting with one secure area and then slowly branching out and gathering other hamlets into a protective umbrella, never diminishing area security and thus creating a sense of mutual protection

through the interlocking units. But this type of implementation never took place and hamlets peppered the area without any Viet Nam-wide plan of implementation or priorities. This process was not only self-defeating but also a vast number of troops, who should have been on mobile clearing operations, were tied down to building and defending hamlets. Eighteen months after General Taylor had outlined the desperate need for a higher percentage of mobile troops more troops were found in static positions than ever before. Hence, the Viet Cong were not separated from the source of their manpower and, especially in the Delta, were not denied food nor did they need to prey off the villagers for their supplies.

Gerald Hickey's study of Khanh Hoa epitomizes these developments:

In Long An province three villages, one of which was Khanh Hau, were selected as models for the program. It was decided that Ap Dinh-A, Ap Dinh-B, and Ap Moi would be the first hamlets fortified. Provincial military authorities estimated that this would entail the construction of ditches and earthworks some 4,000 meters in length, enclosing an area of 80,000 square meters.

By May 1962, a ditch had been dug around the perimeter of Ap Dinh A-B, and in some sections the earthwork had been completed. To avoid sacrificing valuable paddy land, the fortification was constructed close to the farmsteads and some villagers...were speculating about using the ditch for irrigation. Gates were constructed at the spur road, and several watch towers were built on the edge of Ap Dinh-B. According to the plan, barbed wire supported by

concrete posts would be strung along the top of the earthworks, and both the earthworks and the ditch would be studded with bamboo stakes. Isolated farmsteads were to be relocated within this enclosure.

The province was to supply the barbed wire, but the village was held responsible for providing other construction material and labor. All able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 20 were required to labor one day on the fortifications and a second day if that should prove necessary. Well-to-do families were asked to donate cash while poorer ones contributed material and labor for the concrete posts...

By the end of 1962, a fortification consisting of barbed wire fencing (about 4 1/2 feet high) and shallow ditches had been arranged around Ap-Dinh-A and Ap Dinh-B (the earthworks had not been extended and the bamboo spikes were not used). In the months that followed, similar defenses were erected in the other hamlets of the village. Isolated families were brought within the fortifications...Relocated families were supposed to receive 2,000 \$ VN, but some complained that they received no compensation and others reported that they received only part of the expected amount.

The fortifications presented no barrier to the Viet Cong, however, and their patrols simply cut through the barbed wire to enter the hamlets. Sometimes they demanded food and cash tribute, and often they moved through the hamlet, cutting the wire on the other side to make their exit. There were no reports of clashes between these patrols and village defense units. No deaths occurred during the period, and the only unusual incident was the kidnapping of the village chief.³⁶

Thus there was a combination of poor construction and unsatisfactory protection, facts which must have made the task of persuading a peasant to participate in the program even more difficult.

An excellent example of what was happening occurred in the Delta when the Viet Cong struck a major outpost of Camau called Bien Nghi, in An Xuyen Province. This small outpost was outside artillery range was established in an area completely dominated by the Viet Cong. U. S. Advisors had argued against the post because of the difficulty in defending it without artillery, and because it could serve no political purpose, gather no intelligence, could not protect the peasants, and was extremely difficult to keep supplied. But President Diem had personally ordered the outpost built for "he was flaunting his flag deep in enemy territory."³⁷

On April 21, 1963, Bien Nghi's one hundred and fifty-five defenders were overrun by nearly six hundred enemy using heavy mortars, recoilless rifles, and other heavy weapons. The Viet Cong slaughtered the defenders and shipped some of the dead down a canal on a barge in view of neighboring hamlets and villages to multiply the propaganda value of the Government's defeat. Reinforcements to the post were, of course, prudently delayed.³⁸

In this same province of An Xuyen the Viet Cong controlled almost all of the strategic hamlets, and in Long An and Dinh Tuong Provinces, just south of Saigon, they controlled between eighty and ninety per cent of them³⁹

In the months prior to the November 1963 coup, numerous USOM Rural Affairs officials had become quite concerned over reports submitted by their field representatives in the Delta that the hamlet program was neither being thoroughly executed nor correctly reported to the Vietnamese Government. Situation estimates from USOM and MAAG advisors in this area often had opposing conclusions. Rufus Phillips had made a personal visit to President Kennedy in early September 1963 giving the estimate of Rural Affairs that the Delta was falling under Viet Cong control in areas where pacification was supposedly complete. That same month, in contrast, Kennedy received the report of Secretary of Defense McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor's visit of late September, 1963, which led to the October 3 announcement that most of the military advisory effort would be complete by 1965.⁴⁰

In this same Mekong Delta that Phillips was so worried about the guerrillas achieved their greatest successes during 1963. Their regular battalions had increased in number, size, and firepower; and their activities, including attacks by groups of 1,000 men, had brought about a significant deterioration in the government's power outside the provincial

cities and district towns.⁴¹

The administration of the program in the highlands was often as bad as that in the lowlands due to the technique of Nho Dinh Nhu for implementing the program there and to the nation-wide overextension which caused shortages of money and materiel. A well-conceived document written in 1963 and published by the Office of Rural Affairs pointed explicitly to the problems of the strategic hamlet program as it was being administered at that time.⁴² Charles Joiner reported that "villages were uprooted, forced labor was commonplace, severe punishment was meted out to those who withheld cooperation, crops went unharvested, material assistance was slow in coming from Saigon and frequently did not arrive at all, and protection against the Viet Cong was not available due to over-expansion of available resources. In short, the job directed by Political Counsellor Nhu was botched."⁴³

Because of these factors, many tribesmen turned against the Saigon government and entire villages disappeared from newly established concentrations. One group of tribesmen trained by United States Special Forces was so disenchanted that they attacked the hamlet of Plei-Mrong in December, 1962.

Although the planned total of hamlets was between 11,000 and 12,000 which the government claimed would house and shelter the entire population, it is exceedingly difficult to analyze

the hamlet program during its various phases of development because of the difficulty created by the way in which the Diem government presented its statistics. Frequently the references to completed hamlets were linked with statistics for hamlets "under construction" or "nearly constructed."

As an illustration of the difficulties involved in trying to work from South Vietnamese Government statistics on the hamlet program the following instances may be cited. In June 1963 Vietnam Press reported that 289 strategic hamlets had been completed in Gia-Dinh province, while in July the same source reported that the figures for completed hamlets was 266. On 1 October, 1962, President Diem stated that 7,267,517 persons were sheltered in hamlets which had been completed or were in the process of completion. On 11 October 1962 the Minister for the Interior reported that 4,322,234 persons were sheltered in hamlets. It is also interesting to note that the same number of hamlets were reported as completed in April 1963 as was given for the following July suggesting either a sudden stop in the erection of strategic hamlets or a previously inaccurate report. These inaccuracies and the evidence which has subsequently become available must make all the official figures on the strategic hamlet open to severe doubt.⁴⁴

In an address at Cornell University on 20 May 1964, Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao, who followed his appointment with the previous agrovillage program with a similar one for the strategic hamlet plan, indicated that, after an initial success as a result of the new hamlet policy, the central

authorities had pressed for the rapid erection of hamlets so that they were built at a rate which jeopardized the whole program and caused its ultimate collapse.⁴⁵

In October 1963, Lieutenant Colonel Elzie Hickerson headed a team of civilian and military investigators which reported that the hamlet program in the Mekong Delta region was being conducted too fast and that it was in danger of being over-extended. In fact, the method and rhythm of the establishment of the hamlets became one of the many causes of bitter disputes between the palace and American advisors.⁴⁶

With reference to the economic and social self-help projects that were to demonstrate the government's role in helping the people of the hamlet, one of these programs took nearly a year to implement because the government lacked trust in the people's ability to construct their own projects.⁴⁷ In Phu Bon Province, where 147 hamlets were planned, the provincial technical services officials and workers--health, education, public works, etc--did not receive their salaries for a period of over three months because Saigon, which had created the new province in September, 1962, had not provided the province chief with any funds to administer it.⁴⁸

Thus, to the detriment of the entire strategic hamlet program, and to the weakening of the entire pacification effort, Diem and Nhu both pushed the program beyond its

pragmatic boundaries and beyond the capabilities of his own government and of the United States to respond. Pacification and population control were in terms of territory and not of the people who would eventually cause the program to collapse.

Operation Sunrise:

Based on recommendations of the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group, it was decided in December 1961 to make a special effort to clear an area of the guerrillas and to hold it in an effort to determine what would be required to regain control of the rural areas and the people. The province of Binh Doung was selected as the province for this first test of the implementation of the strategic hamlet program. If successful, this would demonstrate the value of fully coordinated and integrated operations of this type in systematically winning control of the countryside. As this was the first major United States-supported counterinsurgency operation in Viet Nam, this type of operation, based on the strategic hamlets, became a major and vital component of the overall counterinsurgency effort by providing the potential basis for exploiting and increasing the capability of the armed forces and at the same time winning or maintaining the people on the government's side while denying the Viet Cong his means of supply and recruitment.

The strategic hamlet program first concentrated on three provinces near Saigon with the ultimate plan of extending to ten provinces northeast of Saigon. The area which was selected as the pilot area in the hamlet program was, perhaps, prophetic of future deployment practices of the Diem regime for it had been more or less under Viet Minh/Viet Cong control since 1945 or earlier.

The "clear and hold" operations were the most sensible government effort. They were based on the "spot of oil" theory, which the British had used successfully in Malaya wherein the government would move into an easily defended position, usually on the coast, and then expand its authority outward on a permanent basis by establishment of strategic hamlets. The idea was that in such areas the arrival of government troops would mean the end of Viet Cong penetration forever.⁴⁹

Unfortunately War Zone C was not the coast, nor was it an easily defended position, nor was the authority expanded on a permanent basis. Designated as "Operation Sunrise,"⁵⁰ the mission encompassed the thoroughly guerrilla-infiltrated provinces of Binh Duong, Tay Ninh and Phuoc Tuy, and was intended to separate the Viet Cong's main base in the rubber jungle and swamps immediately north of Saigon from the Capital.⁵¹

The southernmost district of Cu Chi in Binh Duong Province, directly north of Saigon and lying athwart Highway No 1,

"had been at least partly cleared (of Viet Cong) in an arduous seven-month campaign beginning in August, 1961; but the Ben-Cat district, surrounded by a vast network of rubber plantations and wild forests, had become a redoubt for two active and well-trained Communist battalions, 55 and 300. In the view of the Saigon authorities, the Ben-Cat district constitutes the keystone of what is referred to as the 'arc of insurgency' isolating Saigon on both the southwest and the northeast."⁵²

According to government claims, planning and cadre training began in August 1961, with the program being officially inaugurated by Ngo Dinh Nhu on April 7, 1962.⁵³ The actual beginning, which took place in March 1962,

was almost Operation Sunset for the strategic hamlet concept. Without warning, preparation, or consent, peasants saw their homes and often their belongings burned before them. They were uprooted...and planted down in new areas which had not been prepared to receive them.⁵⁴

To add to the misfortune of the numerous villagers, they were often not settled in their own farming localities but were moved considerable distances. This drastic action meant that they lost not only their homes but also their lands. Coercion was used to move them; no compensation was provided, as had been done in Malaya, to soften the harshness of the actions.⁵⁵ Money was provided by USOM's Rural Affairs to assist the families

but often did not reach the hamlet occupants. Furthermore, the cost of the new homes that were to be built was deducted from the money each was to receive, although the government had destroyed the homes of those being resettled.⁵⁶ One official estimated that 500,000 rural families would be moved by this and subsequent operations⁵⁷ even though earlier plans stated that whenever possible existing villages would be fortified which would minimize the need for the mass relocation of families. Originally, only isolated settlements incapable of defense would be burned and their inhabitants moved voluntarily or forcibly to new locations.⁵⁸ Pham Chung reported that, in reality, a great number of peasants were relocated, especially in the Delta where the peasant's homes were scattered over their farmlands, and in the high plateau where most Montagnards were regrouped.

Thus in Long An Province alone, more than 80,000 peasants either voluntarily or forcibly were moved into the strategic hamlets. In the highlands, more than 150,000 mountain tribesmen were regrouped in development centers. The homes of the regrouped were abandoned and destroyed. Since the average peasant's home costs more than 20,000 piastres to build (about 200 U. S. dollars), the cost of the cheapest being about 6,000 piastres, and the relocation allowance granted them for new homes in the strategic

hamlets was only 2,000 piastres, this constituted a loss of more than 18,000 piastres for the average peasant. In many places, relocated peasants did not receive the full allowance. Some received about 1,000 piastres, some even less because part of the allowance was pocketed by the local officials.⁵⁹

Brigadier General Van Thanh Cao, who planned the operation and had it approved by Ambassador Nolting and United States Secretary of Defense McNamara,⁶⁰ was advised by a four-man British team headed by Sir Robert Thompson and two Americans, William L. Osborne and Carl Schaad,. The Vietnamese forces under Cao's command had as their immediate objective "to break the threatening arc of guerrillas in the forests less than 30 miles from Saigon."⁶¹ The operation was to progress in stages with the first phase being a clearing operation of the jungles which was to last for three months. The second stage involved the building up of government services by the civic action cadres. This phase was to last three to four months and included the establishment of schools and rural medical clinics, assurance of agricultural credit, provisions for wells, roads, and electric power, and a psychological welfare program. The final stage was the establishment of normal governmental services after the civic action cadres had completed their work.⁶²

Although the United States had provided \$300,000 in local currency to help move 1,200 families into three new strategic

hamlets, serious problems developed with the new program, for the Government was able to persuade only seventy families to volunteer for resettlement while 135 families were herded forcibly from their homes into the new settlements.⁶³ This harsh method was approved because it worked so well for the British in Malaya. An important difference existed, however, in the matter of compensation.

In Malaya, the British paid compensation on the spot for anything the farmers left behind. Here, the money is withheld until the resettled families indicate they will not bolt to the woods.

So far little of the \$300,000 in local currency provided by United States Operations Missions has reached the farmers.⁶⁴

More important aggravations also existed. No homes were built for the people who were "herded together with only a flimsy barricade of their own household furnishings thrown up to afford a spot of privacy"⁶⁵ and many had only the few possessions they could carry for their old homes and possessions had been burned by the Government. Also a desperate food shortage existed because of the relocation and the loss of the farmers' fields.⁶⁶ Homer Bigart recalls one example:

A young woman stood expressionless as she recounted how the troops had burned the families' two tons of rice. She was overheard by a man in black peasant garb who had identified himself as an army psychological warfare lieutenant. He cautioned the woman's listeners that she was "very bad" and that the burned rice was probably Viet Cong stores.⁶⁷

The first hamlets, which were hastily or inadequately planned and quickly and clumsily built, were open to Viet Cong attacks.⁶⁸ For example,

the pilot strategic village of Ben Tuong, with which the whole program was inaugurated... was so far from the nearest market town, Bin Cat, that the farmers had to pay the prohibitive sum of \$2.85 per person for a motor pedicab ride into town. Bin Tuong turned out to be a mistake in other ways as well: too deep in Communist-held territory, it was overrun in 1963 along with many other ill-planned hamlets.⁶⁹

One Operation Sunrise hamlet, Cu Chi, became a show piece for President Diem. It had an elaborate complex of defenses, miles of walls commanding ditches and moats, and dozens of watchtowers protected by barbed wire and bamboo stakes. The effect of this display on visitors was especially gratifying to the Diem regime, but the effect on those who lived there was juxtaposed.

Americans who knew Cu Chi said they heard complaints from farmers. These farmers said they had had to work six to eight weeks without pay on fortifications of the hamlet and they had not been supplied with food. They also said they had to contribute bamboo, a crop they usually sell only when they have a bad year. They were further annoyed by having been ordered to buy flags (to display for visiting officials and dignitaries) and then having to buy more flags because the first set was not the proper size.⁷⁰

By mid-May, 1962, divergencies of opinion as to which way "Operation Sunrise" was going emerged among the British, American, and Vietnamese planners. Sir Robert Thompson thought that the original plan had been watered down or modified to the extent where its original theme was jeopardized, whereas American advisors thought that the Vietnamese were dragging their feet and that the chain of command was muddled.⁷¹

In terms of statistical accomplishments, Tu-Do, a Saigon newspaper controlled by the government psychological warfare services stated on May 13, 1962, that of the 38,000 inhabitants of the Ben-Cat district, 60 per cent must be reckoned as "Communist-intoxicated," and that after six weeks of operations, only 2,769 inhabitants (7 per cent) had moved voluntarily or by force into Ben-Tuong and the smaller hamlets of Dong-So and Ban-Bang. Obviously, "Sunrise" had not yet succeeded in depriving the Communist forces in the area of their civilian support environment. This was eloquently proved when Communist guerrillas in full daylight ambushed an eleven-vehicle convoy of the ARVN on June 16, 1962, near Ben-Cat... The ambush was carried out to perfection, thanks to the fact that the civilian population--thoroughly intimidated or willingly cooperating--failed to notify the local ARVN posts of the impending attack, and also did its share in sabotaging the roads leading to the ambush area so reinforcements did not reach the convoy until afternoon.⁷²

As a result of "Sunrise," the Military Assistance Advisory Group and the United States Operations Mission founded a counterpart committee to the Vietnamese Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets in order to furnish the

type of material support which could best assist the Vietnamese to establish "more" strategic hamlets and supporting programs. This committee, termed the U. S. Interagency Committee for Province Rehabilitation, was designed to work closely with the Vietnamese Committee in ensuring the most efficient commitment of U. S. resources in support of the strategic hamlet program.⁷³

One of the outcomes of Operation Sunrise, which many consider a serious tactical failure, was the fact that "it stimulated U. S. interest in the strategic hamlet program and a recognition of the need for military support in areas where strategic hamlets were to be built."⁷⁴

In early April 1962, General Paul Harkins approved the so-called "Delta Plan" which called for the pacification of the ten provinces surrounding Saigon. It is sufficient to note that this was approved prior to any study or analysis of the effects of "Operation Sunrise" in separating the peasant from the Viet Cong and gathering in the peasants support.⁷⁵

Security:

The hallmark of the strategic hamlet campaign was the bamboo fence and spike-lined moats of the earlier period, before American support had provided wire and pickets. The drain on peasant resources in time and money was considerable, particularly in the poorer central coastal provinces. Fence perimeters

as large as five kilometers were found in Quang Nam, necessitating far more than the two militia squads allocated for protection if adequate fire cover were to be provided.

Although many bamboo fences were tall enough and sturdy, they deteriorated rapidly because they were rarely properly treated against insects. Barbed wire fences were never over five feet high and often were poorly strung. There had been no allowance for barbed wire aprons to add breadth to the obstacle...At some points, the moats would disappear to accommodate the effect of a typical cattle fence in the American midwest. Peasants often cut through the fence where it had interrupted a favorite pathway.

(Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965, pp. 169-170).

Unless the people were given a reasonable degree of security in their villages and hamlets by the government's military or paramilitary forces, or by their own local Civil Guard, along with the passive security measures provided by fortifications and other defense measures, they could not be expected to support the government. As Diem stated in his October 1, 1962 address, "as security is restored by the defense system of the strategic hamlets and the careful screening of the local enemy elements, democracy and the guarantee of the law can be implemented."⁷⁶ The people could not be expected to owe the government their loyalty unless they had a reasonable assurance that they would not be committing suicide by doing so. Therefore, the first priority and the first step in the strategic hamlet program was to insure the protection of the people.

A number of...important disagreements between Washington and Saigon were related to the problem of security. One of the most vexing concerned the mission (and hence the size, organization, and equipment) of the civil guard, which the Americans looked upon as essentially a rural police, while the Vietnamese saw it primarily as an auxiliary military police for counter-guerrilla activity on the countryside. Another was related to Diem's pet project for resettlement of the central highlands. From his point of view, the object of the resettlement program was primarily to inhibit Communist infiltration through South Vietnam's thinly held frontier area in the highlands, while the Americans criticized the program largely on grounds of economic infeasibility, inadequate planning, and hasty implementation. Later the strategic hamlet program also gave rise to bitter disputes with the Vietnamese focusing almost exclusively on the military aspects of the problem, and the Americans arguing for much greater attention to the political, economic and social development of the defended villages. There were also endless quarrels over administrative practices which reflected an inveterate tendency to equate RVN security with survival of the Diem regime. All too often personal loyalty to the Ngo family rather than professional ability, was the essential criterion for military (or civil) preferment. Diem also maintained tight control over the movement of military units and the conduct of military operations in order to minimize the possibility of coups directed against his regime. All this was perhaps understandable; but the result was a tragic loss of military efficiency, and the Americans found it hard to take.⁷⁷

For the hamlet populace to feel safe essentially all Viet Cong force must be excluded from the hamlet. Thus, to "secure" a hamlet population it is necessary to keep all armed Viet Cong out of the settlement and to reduce considerably the power of threat implied by the presence of an infrastructure. To nullify the Viet Cong covert structure an in-hamlet policing system is absolutely essential to the success of any hamlet defense system for that "element of the Viet Cong that will remain effective the longest after the main forces have been increasingly battered in combat will be those cadres who have built a political base in their own village."⁷⁸

The Viet Cong were well aware of the influence that terror, whether actual or implied, brings about and concentrated their attacks on government officials at all levels.

The absence of government authority in the hamlets at night made the people easy prey of the Viet Cong. In a community filled with spies, it was suicidal to try and cooperate with a regime whose police protection ended at 6 PM. At the very least it was unrealistic to expect the simple illiterate peasant in the hamlet militia to give battle to a superior Viet Cong force when they knew that there was little hope of help until dawn...Most of all the villagers knew why they were abandoned this way. They knew that the government troops were afraid, reluctant to meet the Viet Cong...The people tended to bestow their loyalty accordingly.⁷⁹

During 1960 and 1961 assassinations and kidnappings were reported at 3 to 5 a day.⁸⁰ President Diem had reported in

October 1957 that, during the preceding year, 412 persons had been killed by the Communists⁸¹ while, at the same time, U. S. Assistant Secretary of State Walter S. Robertson reported that assassinations had averaged about 25 per month during the past six months of that year.⁸²

Communist terror was highly selective, and, although in many cases it was directed against the innocent, it was primarily guided by clearly defined political considerations. The aim of Viet Cong terror was to paralyze the Diem administration by killing or kidnapping government officials and by interrupting all contact between the administration and the countryside. The means of communication and economic resources, which were often defended by government forces, were destroyed only in regions where the Viet Cong failed to set up their own administration.

In the killing of officials, the Viet Cong concentrated largely on the corrupt, since this was likely to gain them the sympathy and support of the people. However, honest and able administrators of strong anti-Communist convictions were also killed or kidnapped, the latter fate being reserved chiefly for medical officers and teachers, whom the Viet Cong hoped to convert and use in zones "liberated" from Saigon control.

The killing of officials started in 1957 as the Viet Cong became more overt in their activities. The Saigon

Government claimed that during this first year of systematic Viet Cong terror, more than 700 officials were murdered. The number of these murders continued to rise, and was said to have been 2,500 in 1959, and 4,000 in the period from May, 1960, to May, 1961. Bernard Fall believes that by 1963, perhaps as many as 13,000 Saigon officials had been murdered, and some 1,200 teachers kidnapped, of whom some were probably killed.⁸³ But Fall also reports the amazing cases in which "the very Dan Ve (Civil Defense) guards who are supposed to protect the village officials handed them over to the Viet Cong."⁸⁴

Within each village there was little a villager could turn to for protection or support outside of the military. Decree No. 45-NV of 1963, which established the composition and administrative responsibilities of village councils and hamlet administrative committees, authorized one police member per village. This member was selected by the village governing council from among themselves on the basis of who was considered the most qualified for the job. Though this individual was selected as the most qualified, this did not mean that he had had any police training or experience whatsoever. Secondly, there was no direct relationship between him and the National Police,⁸⁵

According to Article 10 of the Decree, it was the duty of the police member to "take charge of administrative and judiciary police action in the village, deliver summons and

notifications of the court, and maintain order and safety in the village."⁸⁶ The presence of one elected official to carry out such responsibilities, especially when a village may or may not have a representative of the National Police in residence, must have provided little toward the feelings of government adequacy in the protection of the villagers--the prime source of intelligence.

The hamlet administrative council elected a single security member to perform the police role at this basic unit level. His responsibilities were to "assist the (village) Police Member and maintain safety and order in the hamlet."⁸⁷ Thus internal security along police lines seems highly inferior and lacking. Table the dilemma faced by the local populace.⁸⁸

As Charles Joiner has clearly pointed out, accommodation between local leadership and the insurgent organization was an entirely logical outgrowth of conditions prevailing in village society. "Village elites are likely to take such steps as they consider necessary to pacify those who threaten the community. Such a tactic...is simple logic when neither local leadership nor its constituency has any commitment to the lawful national government...(The threat) of imminent destruction by physically present insurgents as opposed to potential retribution from an occasional visitory is rarely conceived as involving a terribly difficult decision."⁸⁹

Like the French before him had tried to do in Viet Nam and Laos, Diem compounded the problems of building, defending, and providing reinforcement and area security for his hamlets by insisting that they be maintained in areas dominated by the Viet Cong. Like the French, Diem wanted to maintain the government's presence in such areas, even though this was little more than flying the flag and defending only the ground on which the forces actually stood. The Viet Cong attacked and overran these indefensible outposts (indefensible in the sense of the capabilities provided them) seemingly at will and used them to supply their own forces.

The government's attempt to build up defenses of critical areas tended to tie down more and more forces to static position defense, thereby reducing its own capability to seek out and destroy the enemy. Government operations were usually confined to daylight operations and the Viet Cong, having the complete freedom of movement at night, could attack these weak outposts at will, overrun them, and be gone before the Government reinforcement arrived, especially if the reinforcement waited until daylight hours to begin its movement. The government positions being static only compounded things, for the Viet Cong usually knew from where the reinforcements would come. Their frequent ambushes of relief columns multiplied the diverse fears of both commander

and soldier.

Mecklin points out that the radios issued through AID funds in 1962 to help the hamlet militia call for help were somewhat discredited by the fact that calls for help were so rarely answered, or answered so slowly as to be useless.⁹⁰

The key factor in the military activities of the Vietnamese Government in its interaction with the Viet Cong appears to be the provincial defense system. Within this system, the province chief, usually a military officer selected directly by the President, was responsible for the defense of his province. To accomplish this task he had the provincially-based Civil Guard and the village-based Self-Defense Corps under his direct control. In addition, he could call upon assistance from the regular military unit commanders in his area, but he had no control over them. These provincial soldiers or militia were the units most frequently attacked by the Viet Cong. They suffered the preponderance of casualties. In one province, the southern province of An Xuang at the tip of the Indochina Peninsula, there were only 200 civil guardsmen to protect the 280,000 people in the province.⁹¹

The level of Viet Cong activity also affected the heads of the provinces, as the trend within the regular government structure was toward increased militarization.

By 1958, 13 of the 36 province chiefs were military officers; by September 1960, there were 21 military and 17 civilian province chiefs, and by August 1962, the ratio had expanded to 36 military officers and only 5 civilians in the 41 provinces.⁹² Significantly, according to Scigliano, four of the five civilian province chiefs were assigned to the central lowlands, the area least disturbed by the guerrilla activities.⁹³ The effect of this policy was to weaken the administration of the program for it emphasized the military aspect of the officer's duties to the neglect of the administrative aspect, and this was one of the prime causes of the disturbances that made the military aspect important.

It is necessary to remember that, almost without exception, the militia patrolled only in areas that were relatively close to their home hamlets, except where villages or hamlets were so close and numerous that the patrolled areas overlapped. A region a few hours' march from a hamlet might be a relatively safe assembly point for the Viet Cong. The major difficulty was that these militia patrols would be unable to prevent or even detect and report the assembly of large guerrilla units beyond their range of surveillance.

Because of the difficulty of moving troops into the hamlets

at night even by foot, it appears that no hamlet defense system could be viable which was based on rapid troop reinforcements, either by air or by surface means during the hours of darkness. Hence, primary reliance must be placed on hardened defenses at the hamlet and quick firepower, either artillery or aircraft or both.

James Farmer cites, as an example, the province chief of Gia Dinh who understood the importance of quick reaction and attempted to develop quick reinforcement of any of the hamlets or villages attacked by the Viet Cong within his province.

In 1962, he reported complete frustration. Regardless of how short his reaction time was, the Viet Cong always cut off their attack a few minutes before reinforcements occurred. Thus in the beginning when reinforcements took six hours to arrive, the Viet Cong would have control of the village or hamlet for most of the night. When this time was reduced to several hours, the Viet Cong were able to mount an attack for that period of time. When the Province Chief reduced his reaction time to one hour, the Viet Cong still dispersed before reinforcements arrived.⁹⁴

The combat activities of the regular military forces were generally large-scale operations of at least a battalion strength. These operations were usually conducted in the daytime and consisted of massive sweeps with helicopter, air and artillery support. Most often they were of marginal value in making contact with the Viet Cong and, due to their "noisy" character, usually warned the Viet Cong in sufficient time either to avoid contact or to ambush the

government forces. The frequent failure of these operations to engage the Viet Cong can also be attributed to the understanding that operations that resulted in appreciable casualties would prove prejudicial to the future career of the commanding officer. An attitude of politically inspired caution permeated thoroughly the command structure.

One of the primary reasons for physical as well as psychological setbacks was this lack of reaction by the Vietnamese Army. Often hamlets were attacked and destroyed by the Viet Cong more than once, and often they were rehabilitated and reoccupied, for various reasons, after each attack with much USOM effort and expense.

The increase of village defenders armed with better weapons, and furnished with better defense materials (barbed wire, ditches, and other US-made obstacles) did not deter repeated Viet Cong attacks and capture. Examination of these incidents clearly revealed that ARVN authorities did not react properly, improve the security system of the locale or show any determination to prevent another Viet Cong repeat.

The psychological impact of Viet Cong prowess, affecting large sectors adjoining the victimized hamlet or village, was heavily felt by the people. In consequence, even ARVN elements were progressively cowed to their current posture of static defense... In all cases studied, no military lessons were learned or exploited by ARVN authorities.⁹⁵

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It also seems that the accelerated expansion program of the strategic hamlet concept although militarily inspired at the outset have outpaced the overall capability of the

GVN military and police forces to insure security. Somewhere along the "selling" of the idea of the strategic hamlet, it is strongly suspected that nothing was mentioned to VN leaders that the British experience in Malaya clearly pointed to the fact that to prove the efficacy of the strategic hamlet, the British had to carry the fight to the guerilla, i.e., seizure and unrelenting maintenance of the initiative.⁹⁶

In Phu Yen Province, which was considered relatively pacified in comparison with other provinces, some general observations were made which are typical of all Viet Nam. Government operations were active during the daylight hours but ceased when military traffic was suspended just after sundown. No ARVN patrols were encountered in the outlying villages and hamlets, although Self-Defense Corps, Civil Guard, and other militia elements were seen with the local inhabitants. ARVN units were noted to be concentrated in the towns and thickly populated communities. Great reliance was placed on the use of man-made obstacles to effect the security of habitated points, and having these impediments covered by defensive fires furnished by local armed elements.⁹⁷ These were often ineffective. Valeriano notes:

Because the over-all security concept, which is really defensive and passive in nature, by the maintenance of these strong-points during the hours of darkness, there is conceded to the VC the intervening areas between these fortified points during the period. Therefore, the VC is afforded movement with demonstrated impunity thus further accentuating the guerilla's basic advantage of mobility, rapid concentration, and dispersion for cover. On the other hand, GVN forces "holed up" for

the night are immobilized, very vulnerable for ambush actions by the VC, and in general will remain "blind" about the enemy in all cases...ARVN reactions to succor, reinforce, or ignore threatening points, will only play into VC hand unless the ARVN will have initially dispersed strong roving patrols that can also quickly concentrate on the threatened point and advancing on the objective from all directions.⁹⁸

Too often the hamlet defenders were the only source of Vietnamese action. Due to Diem's emphasis on "prudence of action," his selection of politically-minded staff officers as division commanders, compounded with emphasis placed on the need of avoiding casualties and the risk of defeat in battle, resulted in the hamlets many times receiving no area security, and no reinforcement when attacked, One division commander, Colonel Huynh Van Cao of the Seventh Division, was called personally before Diem to explain the reason for his casualties even though he had achieved victory in his fights with the Viet Cong. The result was the entire momentum of the Seven Division in the guerrilla-infested area of the Delta came to a halt

Cao's prudence was also phenomenal; in fourteen division operations, from the time of his October meeting with Diem to December 22, 1962, when he was duly rewarded for his loyalty and obedience, only four of Cao's regular troops were killed. During this same period hundreds of Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps (village, local or militia) troops were lost while defending troop positions.⁹⁹

Often a province chief's political relationship with the palace had a direct bearing on the number of troops he received. "Long An, for instance, a heavily populated province immediately south of Saigon, in which the majority of the Viet Cong incidents had taken place, had fewer troops than Kien Phong, a thinly populated province in the Plain of Reeds, which had less than ten per cent as many incidents. As a result, by the end of October 1963 the Viet Cong were virtually in complete rural control of Long An."¹⁰⁰

Often operations were mounted in the field by President Diem, his brother Nhu, or his immediate staff "more often by whim and hunch than by planning and coordination with the various corps commanders. Some of President Diem's favorite division commanders or province chiefs were able to persuade him to approve of actions that simply suited their particular needs or their egos."¹⁰¹

Any feasible hamlet security system will yield before a sufficiently large mass of Viet Cong fire and manpower; hence it becomes necessary to reduce the capabilities of the Viet Cong to move freely in areas between the villages while preparing for the attack. The hamlet security system requires a system of area security sufficient to prevent most large scale attacks on defended hamlets. Military operations that include patrolling and ambushes are a prerequisite to prevent the enemy's massing sizeable forces.

Small units (hamlets) were not expected to fight when outnumbered. The preferable tactic was for the hamlet soldiers to withdraw to the village or, if there was no escape route, to use a fortified position until reinforcements arrived.

The (hamlet defenders) were, as a result, dependent upon prompt reinforcement. Morale consequently corresponded to the reliability of the village and district to respond quickly and drive off large Viet Cong attacks.¹⁰²

There also must be sufficient forces available in the hamlet to protect it, either by fending off small force attacks or by holding until reinforcements arrived. Yet many hamlets were undefended, and many consisted of only a squad or a platoon of ten to forty men.¹⁰³

Due to their small size and inexperience many of these units were easily overrun. Soldiers sometimes ran out of ammunition and often lacked the necessary funds to construct their defenses.¹⁰⁴

FOOTNOTES

Chapter VI

1. Homer Bigart, "Vietnam Reds to Step Up Drive on Regime's Strategic Hamlets," The New York Times, June 24, 1962, p. 4.
2. Robert Trumbull, "Glimmer of Hope Seen in Vietnam," The New York Time, August 12, 1962, p. 28.
3. Sorenson and Pack, op cit., p. 114.
4. "Saigon Opens Drive in Rice Delta," The Washington Post, December 30, 1962, p. A10.
5. December 15, 1963 edition, quoted by Anthony T. Bouscarin in The Last of the Mandarines: Diem of Vietnam, Dusquesne University Press, Pittsburg, 1965, p. 75. The transmitters were supplied by USOM.
6. Osborne, op cit., p. 32.
7. Quoted In Osborne, op cit., p. 32.
8. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965, op cit., p. 84-85.
9. Pham Chung, Analysis of the Long-Range Military, Economic Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam, (Albuquerque: Department of Economics, University of New Mexico, 1964), p. 30.
10. Ibid, p. 31.
11. U. S. Information Service, Viet Nam, Rural Opinion in Binh Hoa Province, July 2, 1964, M-437-64. The survey includes these two typical quotes: "All moved families signed papers relating to their grants but none recieved any money." In the whole village (Long Phuoc) there are 86 families which moved into the strategic hamlet since 1962 and so far they have signed the papers twice in connection with their resettlement allowances." p. 2.
12. "Secretary Rusk's News Conference of February 1," The Department of State Bulletin, Volume XLVIII, Number 1234, February 18, 1963, p. 238. (my emphasis)

13. Viet Nam's Strategic Hamlets, op cit., p. 44.
14. U. Alesis Johnson, "The United States and Southeast Asia," Department of State Bulletin, Volume XLVIII, Number 1244, April 29, 1963, p. 641.
15. Ibid, p. 641.
16. Ibid, p. 641.
17. Dean Rusk, "The Stake in Viet-Nam," Department of State Bulletin, Volume XLVII, Number 1246, May 13, 1963, p. 730.
18. "Secretary Rusk's News Conference of August 16," Department of State Bulletin, Volume XLIX, Number 1962, September 2, 1963, p. 359.
19. U. S. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligent and Research, p. 6. (my emphasis)
20. Times of Vietnam, October 28, 1962 and April 21, 1963 editions. The figures in parenthesis are for the latter date.
21. From varous official sources including the Viet Nam Press, The Viet Nam Interior Department's Nationwide Strategic Hamlet Report, and Viet Nams Strategic Hamlets, op cit.
22. Director General of Information, op cit., See also maps in rear.
23. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Vietnam: 1962-1965, op cit., p. 23.
24. A. Jones, op cit., p. 125.
25. Nighswonger, "Quang Nam Province," op cit., p. 102.
26. Halberstam, op cit., p. 186.
27. Ibid, p. 187. One might easily wonder why these same officials did not see the problems so clearly a year earlier.
28. Ibid, p. 188.
29. W. Robert Warne, "Vinh Binh Province," War Without Guns: American Civilians in Rural Vietnam, George K. Tanham et al, op cit., p. 34.
30. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Vietnam: 1962-1965 op cit., p. 23.

31. Stanley Karnow, "The Edge of Chaos," The Saturday Evening Post, September 28, 1963, p. 34.
32. Thomposn, op cit., p. 138.
33. Ibid, p. 138.
34. Chung, op cit., p. 111n.
35. Department of State, Publication 7724, Viet Nam: The Struggle for Freedom, Washington, D. C, U. S. Government Printing Office, 1964, p. 2. Quoted in B. B. Fall, "Viet Nam in the Balance," Foreign Affairs, Volume 45, Number 1, October 1966, pp. 2-3.
36. Hickey, Village in Vietnam, op cit., pp. 53-54. (my underline).
37. Halberstam, op cit., p. 180.
38. Ibid, p. 180. The Viet Cong also captured 8 rifles, 60 carbines, ten automatic rifles and several machine guns and mortars.
39. Ibid,p. 180.
40. Robert Scigliano, "Viet Nam: Politics and Religion," Asian Survey, Volume IV, Number 1, 1964, p. 672.
41. Ibid, p. 672.
42. Office of Rural Affairs, Notes on Strategic Hamlets, (Saigon: USOM, 1963).
43. Charles A. Joiner, "Administration and Political Warfare in the Highlands," Vietnam Perspectives, Volume 1, Number 2, November 1965, pp. 30-31.
44. Osborne, op cit., p. 35.
45. Ibid,p. 36.
46. Field, op cit., p. 355.
47. Warne, op cit., p. 53.

48. Earl J. Young, "Phu Bon Province, " in Tanham et al, op cit, pp. 76-77.
49. Mecklin, Mission in Torment, op cit., p. 93.
50. The launching of the program in particular areas had been given various names such as "Sunrise," "Hai Yen," and "Phuong Hoang," but each was a part of the overall program.
51. Denis Warner, The Last Confucian, op cit., p. 34.
52. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, op cit., pp. 377-378.
53. New York Times, April 8, 1962.
54. Warner, op cit., p. 34.
55. Milton Osborne, op cit, p. 37. In Malaya during the Emergency new settlements were planned so as to permit the villagers to continue to make a living on the same plantation, on the same mine, or cultivating vegetables for the same market. See Guy J. Parker, Notes on Non-Military Measures in Control of Insurgency, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1962).
56. Homer Bigart, "Vietnam Village Builds and Hopes," The New York Times, April 8, 1962, p. 3.
57. Homer Bigart, "Vietnam Sets Up Fortified Towns," The New York Times, April 1, 1962, p. 3.
58. Homer Bigart, "Harkins Sees Gain in Vietnam Drive," The New York Times, April 7, 1962, p. 5.
59. Chung, op cit., p. 204.
60. Homer Bigart, "U. S. Role in Vietnam," op cit., p. 5.
61. Homer Bigart, "Vietnamese Open a Drive on Reds," The New York Times, March 27, 1962, pp. 1, 5.
62. Ibid, pp. 1, 5.
63. Homer Bigart, "U. S. Helps Vietnam in Test of Strategy Against Guerrillas," The New York Times, March 29, 1962, pp. 1, 3.

64. Ibid, p. 3.
65. Homer Bigart, "U. S. Role in Vietnam, op cit., p. 5.
66. Homer Bigart, "Vietnamese Open A Drive on Reds," op cit, p. 5. Also Chung op cit., p. 205.
67. Homer Bigart, "U. S. Helps Vietnam in Test of Strategy Against Guerrillas," Op cit., p. 3.
68. Field, op cit., p. 335.
69. Fall, The Two Viet- Nams: A Politcal and Military Analysis, op cit., p. 377.
70. Homer Bigart, "Vietnam Sets Up Fortified Towns," op cit., p. 3.
71. Homer Bigart, "U. S. Prods Saigon on Resettlement," The New York Times, May 9, 1962, p. 3.
72. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, op cit., pp. 381-382.
73. William A. Smith, Jr., op cit. p. 47.
74. Ibid, p. 47.
75. Homer Bigart, "Harkins Sees Gain in Vietnam Drive," op cit., p. 5. The provinces include Dia Dinh, Binh Duong, Long An, Tay Ninh, Phuoc Thanh, Binh Long, Bien Hoa, Long Khanh, Phuoc Long, and Phuoc Tuy.
76. Quoted in U. S. Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, op cit., p. 4.
77. William Henderson and Wesley R. Fishel, "The Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem," in Wesley R. Fishel's (editor) Viet Nam: Anatomy of a Conflict, (Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 216-217.
78. Ithiel de Sola Pool, "Political Alternatives to the Viet Cong," Asian Survey, Volume VII, Number 8, p. 556.
79. Mecklin, op cit., p. 98.
80. James B. Hendry, "Economic Development Under Conditions of Guerrilla Warfare: The Case of Viet nam," Asian Survey, June 1962, Volume II, Number 4, p. 9.

81. Roy Jumper, "Sects and Communism in South Vietnam," Orbis, Volume 3, Number 1, April 1959, p. 93.
82. Ibid, p. 93n.
83. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams: A Military and Political Analysis, op cit., pp. 359-361.
84. Ibid, p. 361.
85. E. H. Adkins, Jr., The Police and Resources Control in Counter Insurgency, Public Safety Division, United States Operations Mission to Viet Nam, 1964, p. 26.
86. Ibid, p. 26.
87. Ibid, p. 27.
88. Bernard Fall, The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis op cit. p. 370. A more conservative estimate is given by the Armed Forces Information Service.

Civilian Victims of Viet Cong Terror

Year	Assassinated	Kidnapped
1958	200	250
1959	200	350
1960	1,500	700
1961	500	1,000
1962	1,700	9,500
1963	2,000	7,000

None of the above figures is considered entirely accurate. However, inasmuch as the most common error made by local authorities is failure to report many specific acts of terror, the true figure would be higher than those shown here. This is a positive statement. One must also keep in mind that it may have negative nuances, i.e., some of those reported kidnapped may have gone over to the V. C. side, especially during the years of high V.C. strength and effectiveness. Armed Forces Information Service. "Viet Cong Terror Tactics in South Vietnam," Vietnam Review #5 Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Printing Office, November 1967, DOD VR-5, p. 3.

89. Charles Joiner, "The Ubiquity of the Administrative role in Counterinsurgency," Asian Survey, VII, August 1967, p. 546.
90. Mecklin, op cit., p. 67.
91. Robert Trumbull, "Vietnam Province Fights Night War," The New York Times, April 6, 1961, p. 10.
92. Scigliano, South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress, op cit., p. 166.
93. Ibid, p. 166. Duncanson says that few officers gained sufficient experience in public administration before they were reassigned, and there "was a tendency to make the most of a limited tenure by pocketing the cash or furthering family and factional interest, without the restraint of having to live with the consequences of wrong action that tends to deter the professional civil servant from abuse," Duncanson, op cit., p. 237.
94. James Farmer, Counterinsurgency: Principles and Practices in Viet-Nam (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1964) P-3039, p. 29.
95. Napoleon Valeriano, International Police Services Incorporated: South Vietnam Survey March-April 1964, op cit., p. 5.
96. Ibid, p. 6.
97. Ibid, pp. 4-5.
98. Ibid, p. 5.
99. David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire.
100. Ibid, p. 175.
101. Robert Shaplen, op cit., p. 103.
102. Warne, op cit., n. 52.
103. Ibid, p. 51.
104. Ibid, p. 51-52.

Denouement

On its first anniversary, December 20, 1961 the National Liberation Front, as a spokesman for the Viet Cong, issued a list of "immediate action" demands to supplant an earlier-issued Ten-Point Manifesto. These demands, directed at Saigon and Washington, included the withdrawal of all United States military personnel and weapons from Viet Nam and abolition of the Staley Plan.¹ Translations of captured documents further show that the Viet Cong had set forth the destruction of strategic hamlets as the most important mission of all its members.² This goal was reiterated in a speech by Nhu, who quoted a Communist Central Committee's policy statement calling for the elimination of the strategic hamlets, "as a total struggle in which the whole population and the whole army must participate--a long and uncertain struggle."³ The armed struggle of the Viet Cong had now become as important as their political struggle, focusing at the point of least resistance--in the peripheral or isolated communities less subject to government control.

With the destruction of the government's presence in the rural areas and the substitution of the Viet Cong's control in one village after another, the guerrilla-controlled areas could

expand toward the centers of government power. Thus, the heart of the Viet Cong effort became a two-fold political-military drive directed toward the isolation and destruction of the government's presence in the hamlets and villages, and the substitution of the Viet Cong as the local operating government.

The methods used by the insurgent to take over a hamlet or a village, either with or without the help of organized military forces, varied; but the result was the same" "the annihilation of the government presence through destroying the image of its capability in the minds of the peasants and by effecting a paralysis or withdrawal of its apparatus in the rural areas. With this destruction accomplished, the way... was...paved for the second phase: the substitution of Viet Cong administration."⁴

The level of intensity of the Viet Cong attacks against the strategic hamlets indicates a wide range of tactics applied to various provinces and within various provinces. The Viet Cong threat against hamlets embraced all possible social, economic, and military activities within their power, ranging from covert to overt and from nonviolent to violent.

In some provinces such as Ninh Thuan and Tuyen Duc- Viet Cong activity has been limited to propaganda efforts, agent systems, and occasional attacks on

peripheral hamlets. In the Delta, provinces such as An Xuyen are Viet Cong occupied areas, some parts of which have never been penetrated by government forces. In provinces such as Quang Nam (Central Viet Nam), the political and propaganda activities continued at a steady but low level until 1964... In some contested regions there is "shift-control." The government rules by day and the Viet Cong by night.⁵

The village and hamlet, on their own, were now pitted against the coordinated overt and covert activities of the Viet Cong, and through the year 1962 nearly all casualties in the war were village soldiers.⁶

The following section is a partial chronology of events occurring from September 1961 through the end of 1963. It is intended to serve as a device for exemplifying that the hamlet program was indeed overextended beyond the military capabilities of the Saigon regime. It serves to demonstrate that the overextension multiplied the problems of security, weakened hamlet and area security, and led to the hamlets' downfall and the eventual debilitation and collapse of the entire program. It is in no way a complete history of the events that occurred in Viet Nam during this period, nor should it be construed as a listing of all hamlets attacked during this time frame.

Chronology

On September 22, 1961 the Viet Cong besieged an outpost in Darlac Province which was guarded by a company of Civil Guards. The Viet Cong overran the post, annihilated the

guardsmen, and then ambushed another company which had been dispatched as a relief force.⁷ These and other compounding events led Admiral Harry D. Felt, the United States SEATO representative, to term the situation in Viet Nam as "dangerous."⁸

By October 1961 the Viet Cong began attacks of up to 1,000 men. On the fourth of October they attacked, in strength, the hamlets of Phuoc Minh, Dak Ma, and Ban Me Thuot.⁹ At mid-month they overwhelmed the Civil Guard garrison at Dato in Quang Ngai Province near the Laotian border, killing the security chief and civil guard commander,¹⁰ and, on October 30th, they destroyed the military outpost at Minh Duc in the Mekong Delta.¹¹

The increasing successes of the Viet Cong led American advisors to suggest to the Vietnamese the withdrawal of several mud fort outposts, in Kontum and Quang Nam Province along the Laos frontier, which were impossible to resupply or reinforce quickly.¹²

In September the outpost of Kon Brai was hit and overrun. The nearest reinforcements were in Kontum, 23 miles away. The Vietnamese decided, however, to rebuilt it.¹³

Instead of one defense platoon, there are two. More barbed wire has been strung up, and there are more mines and fields of sharpened bamboo stakes. The radio had been placed inside a blockhouse that cannot be knocked out by a single mortar shot. A large dog has been added to bark the alarm.

Nevertheless, the fort remains dangerously exposed. There are few trenches. Almost every movement can be watched from the near-by hills. The tortuous dirt road from Kontum winds through a forest that might conceal an ambush at every turn. From an ambushcade, a handful of Viet Cong with grenades could delay a relief convoy for hours.

Lacking sufficient troops to patrol the surrounding forest, the Kon Brai garrison is a sitting duck for another surprise attack and probable engulfment.¹⁴

Often the poorly trained civil guardsmen were used on operations in which regular army units should have participated. In one case, 130 civil guardsmen were sent to an extremely vulnerably area near a site which intelligence had shown to be infested with Viet Cong. The force, dispatched on a relief operation to assist another unit, was ambushed. The local government was not notified until eight hours after the attack had occurred and, even then, the regular army could not participate because it was "committed."¹⁵

Even though the Viet Cong appeared to be increasing their efforts toward and succeeding in the destruction and neutralization of the government's hamlet campaign, the United States pressed for early action on a comprehensive pacification plan for the Mekong Delta. This pressure developed prior to any systematic evaluation of the newly launched "Operation Sunrise." This operation would involve the relocation of thousands of families in

areas now controlled by the Viet Cong and the Viet Minh prior to them. General Harkins was impatient to get this plan started, as was the United States Operations Mission which planned to divert a considerable portion of its funds toward bolstering up this area. On the Vietnamese side, however, Nhu had his own plan which called for the impossible task of establishing 12,000 strategic hamlets throughout the entire country in a period of only six months.¹⁶

United States officials were, at this time, more openly impatient over the slow application of the approved plan for the Delta region. Secretary of Defense McNamara, who visited Viet Nam in May of 1962, became similarly dissatisfied with the slow rate of growth of the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps.¹⁷ However, at a later Saigon airport news conference, McNamara reported that he was optimistic over the security situation based on the effectiveness of the strategic hamlets that were springing up all over Viet Nam.¹⁸ In reflection, these two related statements appear totally disjointed.

On May 19, 1962, guerrillas attacked the Xom Ngot hamlet at the southern tip of Viet Nam and inflicted heavy casualties on the defenders.¹⁹ On June 4th they continued their assaults, raiding the district headquarters in the town of Thanh Tri

in Ba Xuyen Province, killing 15 of the 40 defenders, kidnapping the government officials residing in the town, and burning the government buildings. On the same date they also raided Binh Minh in Vinh Long Province.²⁰

On the 23rd of June Radio Hanoi broadcasted orders to the Viet Cong to intensify their struggle against the strategic hamlets. Hanoi was well aware that Diem's main hopes of pacifying the country rested on the strategic hamlets, Hanoi called for the people of South Viet Nam to join together to "destroy the United States-Diem strategic hamlet and free the people detained therein."²¹

Partly on the basis of the lessons learned from Operation Sunrise, the government launched another broad plan to create strategic hamlets in the province of Phu Yen. The combined Vietnamese and American plan was called "Operation Sea Swallow," and had as its ultimate objective the creation of two hundred seventy-four strategic villages in the province.

Sea Swallow got off to a good start. In the first phase, government troops blocked off the prosperous rice and fishing areas near the town of Tuy Hoa, on the coast. A triple row of bamboo and cactus fences was erected along a ten-mile stretch, and within this zone the first few villages were made secure and their inhabitants were indoctrinated by civic action teams. In the second phase of the operation, the

security plan was to be extended farther inland into the prosperous river valley toward the base of the low mountains; in the third phase, the Viet Cong were to be pursued into the hills. The Americans, who helped plan the operation militarily and who supported it financially, tried to obtain permission from the government in Saigon to make agreements directly with the province chief of Phu Yen, so that immediate needs for help could be met in the villages. The Diem government fought against this for many months, and finally, with considerable reluctance granted limited approval, still insisting on its right to countersign any agreements. This dispute over freedom for the Americans to operate in Phu Yen slowed down the operation and it was not long before the Viet Cong struck back, in fact, Sea Swallow never did get much beyond its first phase. What looked like a successful venture turned sour within a matter of months.²²

The scattering of hamlets across the countryside continued in step with the increasing level of Viet Cong success against them. United States officials continued to promote the Delta Plan and the establishment of construction priorities, but the Diem regime scattered thousands of hamlets across the entire nation, even though there was not enough money, materiel, or resources available to make them viable.

During the second week of July, the Viet Cong assaulted, overran, and captured quantities of arms in three strategic hamlets, a principal town of a district and a number of military outposts in the three provinces of Quang Ngai, Vinh Binh, and Binh Long.²³ On 11 July they overran an outpost

140 miles southwest of Saigon, killing three defenders and capturing the remaining eleven with all their weapons.²⁴ On July 14, the hamlet of Ba Rang, eighty miles west of Saigon, was destroyed with the fate of the twelve defenders listed by the government as unknown.²⁵

A thousand Vietnamese soldiers in mid-July 1962 launched an operation 35 miles north of Saigon in a drive that was said to be political as well as military. The objective of the mission was to round up the area's inhabitants, many of whom supported or had relatives among the Viet Cong, and to confine them to two fortified hamlets.²⁶ One, at this time, might pose the following questions: What type of police system would effectively rid the village of the Viet Cong sympathizers? How many police would this take? How many defenders would be needed to protect a village in which many of the residents might subvert the defense system? From where would the defenders be selected? Who would administer to the village? Or, in the final and most important analysis, how long in reality would the government actually maintain its presence or control over the village?

American officials, especially at the lower operation levels, became increasingly frustrated by the little hamlet defenses which dotted the countryside. More exasperating were the combat outposts--three-sided, mud-walled forts,

undermanned, isolated, and virtually indefensible--which were a serious drain on manpower and resources. 2,500 of these forts existed in the Southern lowlands alone.²⁷ Seventeen such posts were attacked and overrun by the Viet Cong in a twenty-six day period in one area during mid-1962.²⁸ There was little defense for the six to ten man posts and, of course, no patrolling to aid them or give them warning, Jacques Nevard reported that one such post was wiped out so quickly that two battalions of the Vietnamese Army nearby did not learn about it until the attack was over, while the Viet Cong had killed all six defenders of the post and took away with them six carbines and a rifle.²⁹

While the regular army continued to conduct massive sweeps of the jungle, the Viet Cong concentrated on isolating the people from the physical security of the Saigon government. During one ten-week period ending July 15, 1962, the guerrillas attacked 46 strategic hamlets.³⁰ Although some of these jungle sweeps had temporary successes, there was no sign that President Diem nor the province administrators had planned to convert these limited military gains into political advantages. No political advisors nor cadres were sent into these areas, although in many provinces the regular forces had operated there for long periods of time, nor were any military units left behind to consolidate the

military gains and to protect the villagers that had been organized into strategic hamlets. Operations of this nature, for example, "Operation Binh Tay" (Pacification of the West which began on 16 August and was conducted in the extreme south in An Xuyen Province,³¹ were short-lived and non-productive with the long-term effect resulting in poorer security and living conditions for the peasants.³²

At this time General Taylor returned to Viet Nam to inspect the war front. He stated after his two and a half day visit that he was particularly pleased with the progress in building strategic hamlets. "The plan," he said, "has grown far beyond our hopes of a few months ago."³³ When told that 5,000 hamlets were fortified or were in the process of being fortified, he termed the figures "very impressive."³⁴

During the first week in October a militia post in Phuoc Thanh Province fell after someone inside had betrayed it to the attackers³⁵ and on November 27th, an estimated battalion of Viet Cong struck the three strategic hamlets of Lai Khe, Long Cau, and Ben Dong so, created during "Operation Sunrise," overwhelmed the defenders, and inflicted heavy casualties,³⁶

At the same time as the Viet Cong were waging their successful assaults against individual hamlets, the government continued to conduct massive jungle sweeps. Such

sweeps as An Lac meaning "Peace and Goodwill," carried on in Darlac Province in the highlands³⁷ and "Operation Boondodge" in Zone D north of Saigon during this time were resounding failures.³⁸

The first week in December saw no let up to the Viet Cong campaign. On the first day of December they seized an outpost only 20 miles from Saigon, destroyed its block-house defenses and killed eight of the civil guards,³⁹ On December third they overran an outpost in Quang Ngai Province, killing thirteen defenders.⁴⁰

On December fourth, "Operation Boondodge," which was scheduled to last for a month or more and included 2,000 men on the jungle sweeps. ended without an official announcement after only two weeks with a total of three Viet Cong killed.⁴¹ At the same time David Binder reported in The New York Times that because of the progress made in the construction of strategic hamlets (the fact that more than 3,000 had been built) unnamed authoritative sources had stated that the Viet Cong advance had been halted and we would now say that the Viet Cong were no longer winning control of the countryside.⁴²

On December 27th the hamlet of Pho Sinh, 140 miles southwest of Saigon in the Mekong Delta, fell to the attackers. The statistics show three defenders died in the assault, three

were wounded and 21 militia and 2 government officials were captured along with 19 weapons.⁴³ 1962 ended with the Viet Cong having averaged 100 attacks per week throughout Viet Nam.⁴⁴

The new year did not bring welcoming news to Saigon and Washington, as the well-publicized government defeat at Ap Bac brought new and amplified criticism of Diem and his American-trained Army. Renewed criticism also developed over the small combat outposts which protected much of the northern regions. Repeated requests by American advisors were being made for the establishment of outposts in which the defenders would have, at least, sufficient strength to patrol and expand the government base.⁴⁵

On January 3, 1963 the guerrillas attacked the training camp of Pleim Rong, inflicting 39 fatalities and seizing 94 weapons. Many of the villagers and trainees aided the attackers, served as their porters, made litters for them, and did not warn the camp when the Viet Cong came through the village. Thirty-five members of the strike force and sixty-five trainees defected along with eleven other members.⁴⁶ On the sixth of January the Viet Cong continued their attacks by striking a strategic hamlet in the highlands and inflicting heavy casualties on the defenders.⁴⁷

During this period there were only two Vietnamese divisions assigned to the Mekong Delta, even though this

was the scene of most of the Viet Cong incidents and where the highest number of people lived. For the five most critical Delta provinces only one division was assigned to protect the inhabitants and search out the guerrillas. The remaining seven divisions were scattered throughout Viet Nam. Often the only patrolling in the Delta was done by the Civil Guard or the Self-Defense Corps, and this met with disastrous results. For example, during the first week in February, three companies of the ill-trained, poorly-equipped local militiamen were ambushed on the Camau Peninsula near the village of Thoi Binh. One entire company was lost in the onslaught.⁴⁸

On February 20th, the Viet Cong stormed the two outposts of the strategic hamlet of Xom Dinh in Chuong Thien Province and inflicted severe damage to the defenders and the hamlet.⁴⁹

Yet, with the Viet Cong continuing to amass an incredible number of victories while government forces achieved little success and were forced to defend more and more static positions in order to survive, Secretary Rusk stated on March 9th that the war against the Viet Cong was "turning an important corner...Government forces clearly have the initiative in most areas of the country."⁵⁰

In a region in which the Saigon government controlled at best a few of the larger towns, the Viet Cong attacked a strategic hamlet near Cai Nuoc of which 11 defenders were killed and 9 were wounded. Sufficient "modern American-made weapons to arm a platoon of enemy troops," were captured.⁵¹

Three times in the last six months Saigon launched operations in the area. The first two attacks resulted in bloody fights. The third time the Government troops went in and found no one there.

Then the Government decided to build a hamlet there. It did so knowing that the local people were hardly the stuff of which anti-Communist strongholds are built. But high Vietnamese and Americans both believe that most of the people in Viet Nam are politically undecided, that they were with the Viet Cong simply because the Viet Cong were there.⁵²

At Pham Thiet, 95 miles north of Saigon on 30 March, another Civil Guard company was mauled, losing 28 men, five radios, 3 light machine guns, 9 automatic rifles, and a large number of submachine guns, rifles, and carbines.⁵³

April 15th brought four attacks against hamlet defenses in Chuong Thien Province⁵⁴ and against 10 points in Quang Nam Province, a traditional Viet Minh-Viet Cong stronghold along the northern coastal plain. The main attack was at a strategic hamlet fifteen miles south of Quan Ngai where two squads of defenders were hit by a unit of company strength.⁵⁵

The attacks were apparently an attempt to hold ground for some political purpose. Speculations were that if the Viet Cong could hold a major part of the province, they would have attempted to declare a government and obtain recognition for it.⁵⁶

In April, The New York Times' correspondent in Viet Nam, David Halberstam, reported that the Vietnamese Government lacked the strength to control the four provinces of Kien Giang, An Xuyen, Ba Xuyen, and Chuong Thien.⁵⁷

The Government controls a few of the major villages and district capitals, a few outposts and strategic hamlets, and the points that its troops occupy at a given moment.

In much of these four provinces there is an acute manpower shortage and some of the authorized quotas for the Self-Defense Corps cannot be filled.⁵⁸

During mid-April well-armed Viet Cong overran two strategic hamlets and routed one company of regular Vietnamese troops and one company of Self-Defense Corps, and on the 23rd they assaulted another hamlet at U Minh Thuoc at the tip of Viet Nam.⁵⁹

The Minh Thoug area, where the Vietnamese have set up eight strategic hamlets in former Viet Cong territory is being bitterly fought over by the Government and the Communist forces.

Six of the hamlets are bunched together and can assist one another in mutual defense. But two are somewhat isolated and out of the reach

of the others. Because the area is so dangerous, these are regarded as "combat" hamlets and have regular troops to defend them. Two companies were assigned to the complex of six hamlets and one company was assigned to the two isolated settlements.

The source said the Viet Cong attack began with a diversionary assault on four hamlets... These ended when air support for the hamlets arrived... (The) plan evidently was to make officials in the two other hamlets think the Viet Cong had been driven far back and would not try any further attacks. Then early the next morning the Communist forces attacked the two isolated hamlets with heavy weapons and superior manpower. The regular army company... was badly battered... A large number of weapons are believed to have been lost and the two hamlets evidently were wiped out.⁶⁰

The relief force sent to assist the defenders took 60 hours to reach the stricken hamlets, a distance of only fifteen miles. A full regiment was based in the vicinity and helicopters were available to them. The force had started out the second day after the attack but returned for "fear of being ambushed."⁶¹ In the meantime the Viet Cong hit two more outposts in the area on the second day after the attack and one more on the third day.⁶²

Halberstam noted the following:

In the Mekong Delta,... where the pace of the war is much faster,... there is... considerable concern about the hamlet program there. Part of this is the complexity of the area itself, vast reaches of rice land where no legal government has extended its authority and which pose immense physical as well

as social problems. But there is a familiarity in the other problems: a lack of planning from province to province, uncertainty over whether to commit weapons to certain areas, in all a subtle feeling that the population has not yet really committed itself to the hamlet idea.

Nothing is more important at present than the hamlet program. Americans see it as a basic answer to all rural ills, and any question about peasant problems is answered by noting that the program is just the answer. Right now this is the major impact of the program. Americans frankly acknowledge that they have few alternatives if it fails to cure present ills.⁶³

This concern was disputed by the program's chief planner, President Diem's brother Nhu, who continued to push the program at its breakneck pace. Considering himself the only real practitioner of counterinsurgency doctrine, Nhu asserted that the first thing to do was to develop strategic hamlets so that the guerrillas were forced into sanctuaries and, second, to attack their supply lines. Upon these ideas, the program was directed.⁶⁴

The attacks against the hamlets continued in March 1963. On the 23rd, an outpost in An Xuyen Province was overrun with 34 defenders killed or missing.⁶⁵ The next day this was followed with more attacks directed against hamlets north and south of Saigon.⁶⁶ These and past events, however, did not destroy United States Ambassador Nolting's optimism when he appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and stated that he was convinced that the Saigon Government had a "winning program" for its war against the

Viet Cong,⁶⁷ and, upon his return to Saigon, concluded that Viet Nam was on its way to victory over the insurgents,⁶⁸

Two more hamlets were destroyed on July 21st and of the 40 militiamen acting as defenders, 37 were reported as missing.⁶⁹ At the end of the month the Viet Cong attacked and overran 5 hamlets of Montagnard tribesmen in the central highlands, capturing an estimated 100 weapons.⁷⁰

At this time advisors in the Delta were expressing five grave concerns: the overextension of the hamlet program, the growing strength of the well-equipped Viet Cong, the Vietnamese tied down to static position defenses, the reluctance of Vietnamese field commanders to risk casualties, and their overreliance on air power and artillery rather than close combat. An estimated fifty weapons per week were being captured by the Viet Cong in this region. The strength of the insurgent and the size of his forces had increased from approximately 250 men per unit to 600 to 1000. Twenty one or more battalions were reported in the Delta with many unidentified units also being employed against the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps. Furthermore, attacks were now being conducted against regular army units. Vietnamese losses were up by 33 per cent while Viet Cong losses went down by the same figure; Vietnamese loss-of-weapon rates increased by 20 per cent while Viet Cong dropped 25 per cent. The

loss of heavy weapons by government forces rose 30 per cent as the Viet Cong's declined to less than 15 per cent.⁷¹ In Vinh Long, where President Diem had hoped to establish the first "secure" area at a point contested by the Viet Cong, a target date of mid-August was set. However, the situation had deteriorated so badly by that time that, in the center of the province, the Viet Cong had established more than 30 combat hamlets of their own.⁷² The hamlets and the static defenses had not stopped the tide in the Delta, and in fact appeared, in some cases, to have made it easier for the guerrilla.

As these acrimonious reports were coming out of the Delta, Secretary of State Dean Rusk made a special point of emphasizing the improvements in the military situation in order to refute these statements that the situation, especially in the Delta, had taken a turn for the worse.⁷³

On August 11th, the Viet Cong stormed the hamlet of Thanh Phu, killing 6 militiamen and leaving 19 missing in action.⁷⁴ On the 19th they easily overwhelmed the show-place strategic hamlet of "Operation Sunrise," Ben Tuong, which Defense Secretary McNamara had visited in April, 1962.⁷⁵ The New York Times account of the attack follows:

Military sources said the Viet Cong guerrillas struck Ben Tuong early in the day apparently met no resistance. They

burned 137 of the 200 homes in the hamlet...

Military sources said that only a squad of local militiamen defend the Ben Tuong hamlet. They were away preparing an ambush when the attack came. The sources said only 2 militiamen were in the hamlet at the time of the attack and they ran off to give warning to the nearest outpost...

Reconstruction of the hamlet was reported to be underway with U. S. aid to replace the possessions lost in the fire.⁷⁶

One note of irony was added to the above account. The hamlet residents of this "showplace" were considered generally sympathetic to the Viet Cong.⁷⁷

On August 21st, Saigon reported a total of 811 small unit actions during the previous week and the fall of hamlets in the provinces of Kien Phong, Quang Tin, and Chuong Tien.⁷⁸

In An Xuyen Province on September 10th, the district headquarters at Cai Nuoc fell to the Viet Cong, who captured the district chief and killed his assistant, and the headquarters at Dam Doi, where the district chief was killed. By the time the relief forces arrived the Viet Cong had disappeared. Supposedly the government forces held the district capitals in the province, but in both cases the Viet Cong overran the headquarters with a force of one battalion in each attack. At Dam Doi alone, there were 90 dead and wounded defenders. In conjunction with these attacks, the Viet Cong assaulted another hamlet on the western side of the province, mined the Camau-Bac Lieu road, and made three probing attacks against other

outposts, Although the attack at Cai Nuoc began at 1 AM, the relief force did not arrive until 5:30 PM, sixteen and a half hours later. In the Dam Doi attack the relief force only took eleven hours to arrive.⁷⁹ Advisors in this particular area had recommended four months previous to the attacks that the construction of strategic hamlets come to an immediate stop and further suggested that the few viable positions that the government held in the peninsula be strengthened. They also called for a complete revision in the government's attitude toward the use of its regular forces and a change in its tactics. The situation was considered so serious to the Americans that eight months previous to this they had suspended the \$100,000 share of the strategic hamlet fund already allocated to An Xuyen Province.⁸⁰ One advisor even commented that "even when we have hamlets the Viet Cong continue to control them!"⁸¹ Americans had also tried to persuade the government to tear down 70 small and frail outposts but to no avail, even though most of the people in the province were considered to be Viet Cong or Viet Cong sympathizers and the Vietnamese forces, including the district units, were too small to be effective.⁸² Most commanders were "hesitant to do any patrolling lest they incur VC wrath."⁸³ However, the pressure from above to create Combat and strategic hamlets continued.⁸⁴

Two days after the Cai Nuoc attack a platoon-size outpost six miles from Cai Nuoc was hit.

There was absolutely no resistance from the 30 defenders. The outpost was burned down by the Communists. But, according to the American sources, the post will be rebuilt.

The Government controls about 20 points on the peninsula, such as district capitals and a few outposts, and Communists control the countryside.

The people pay taxes to the Viet Cong, send their children to Viet Cong schools, and their young men into Viet Cong military ranks.⁸⁵

Dean Rusk, only four weeks previous to the new attacks, had praised the program as "moving forward," as did high-ranking military and CIA officials in Viet Nam who saw it was "eminently successful."⁸⁶

By September there were rumors that a third division was being sent to the Delta to assist the two maintained there, that the strategic hamlet program would be cut back and that existing ones would be consolidated. On September 16th, "at least" four hamlets in the Delta were overrun.⁸⁷ However, General Harkins reiterated his optimism, categorically stating that we were winning the war not only in most areas of Viet Nam but particularly in the Delta. He flatly denied the reports that the program was losing ground. When questioned about the possibility of overextension in this region he said, "There is some overextension of the hamlet program in the Delta, but not too much."⁸⁸ On the 22nd, the Vietnamese Ninth Division was shifted from the central coastal region to the Delta to help the Seventh and Twenty-First Divisions stem the unfavorably tide of events.⁸⁹

The President's brother Nhu, in an interview with Joseph Alsop during this time, referred to himself as the "unique spine" of the counter guerrilla struggle and as "the originator and prime mover" of "this gigantic program." Noting that he was "the only serious modern theorist in guerrilla war," Nhu said, "Even if you Americans pull out,...I will win the war here at the head of the great guerrilla movement which I have prepared."⁹¹ His optimism was joined by that of Arthur Sylvester, the Assistant Secretary of Defense, who accompanied Mr. McNamara and General Taylor on one of their periodic fact-finding visits to Saigon. Sylvester stated that the military situation was "getting better and better, rather than worse and worse" for the Vietnamese Government was "rapidly approaching" militarily to the point where "the goals set will be reached relatively shortly."⁹² After the McNamara-Taylor visit, Washington openly hinted of a 1965 pull out of all American troops, with 1,000 men scheduled to depart in December, 1963.

The razing of hamlets continued through October and into November,

Many district and province advisors became increasingly disturbed about the development in the hamlet program in the Delta and increasingly vociferous in their denouncements. For Lieutenant Colonel John Vann it became a totally frustrating experience not only as an advisor to the Vietnamese Seventh Division

but also in voicing his thoughts and suggestions to his optimistic American superiors, Colonel John Cushman, whose Vietnamese 21st Division had the impossible task of securing and safeguarding six provinces of 1.5 million inhabitants, which included the guerrilla-infested province of An Xuyen, Ba Xuyen, Choung Thien, and Phong Dinh, reported that "virtually every hamlet not immediately under the control of government forces had a Viet Cong squad" in it, and "there was usually a platoon in each village."⁹³ In his sector the hamlet program had been launched at the end of 1962. From January 1963 through the summer over 700 hamlets were "completed" or placed under construction in only four provinces. Terming this a "virtual explosion," Cushman considered in his report of September 1963, that only one-third of the hamlets met the standards required.⁹⁴ Lieutenant Elzie Hickerson headed a joint military-civilian study group which investigated these acrimonious reports coming from the Delta. His study, received with little enthusiasm by higher officials, found the hamlet program completely overextended and called for a total reexamination of the program due to the following factors:

- a) the sizeable Viet Cong build-up and their aggressive tactics;
- b) hamlets and homes were too scattered;
- c) the number of hamlets made the defenders weak;
- d) too many troops were on static security

e) troops were required to build the hamlets and, therefore, the number of regular unit operations decreased; and, lastly

f) there was little or no patrolling in the area.⁹⁵

By November 1963, when the faults of the program were finally openly admitted, hardly 20 per cent of the hamlets were considered by the new government as viable.⁹⁶ In An Xuyen Province, they were practically all under the control of the Viet Cong, while in the key Long An and Dinh Thuong Provinces south of Saigon they were 80 to 90 per cent controlled by the Viet Cong.⁹⁷ Only in some small area of central Viet Nam was the program executed in a more rational manner, and here the strategic hamlet did make a notable contribution to local security. Even these were lost, however, when, in the absence of strong Government regular units providing area security, the Viet Cong began concentrating on these villages.

The fall of the Diem government in November of 1963 did not stop the Viet Cong from engaging in more attacks against the strategic hamlets. On the 7th of November the Viet Cong issued its first post-Diem policy statement, a list of eight mandates of which one demanded that the new Saigon government "destroy all strategic hamlets and quarters and other disguised concentration camps."⁹⁸ On November 13th, 42 Vietnamese were killed, another 50 wounded and 20 missing with a loss of 56 weapons while rushing to the aid of hamlet under attack.⁹⁹ November 16th brought news of 23 Vietnamese killed in an outpost 55 miles south of Saigon¹⁰⁰ and

November 26th the crushing of two highland hamlets, Dak Rode and Polei Kobay. At Dak Rode, 550 tribesmen and 57 weapons were missing and at Polei Koby 522 tribesmen and 25 weapons were reported missing in the action.¹⁰¹ One December action was termed a "success" by the government due to the fact that it took the Viet Cong six hours of fierce fighting to overwhelm the defenders. Forty-two Civil Guardsmen died along with approximately 20 family members, 15 were wounded, and 3 were missing in this success. Twenty weapons were also lost to the attackers.¹⁰²

With the end of 1963 came the termination of the strategic hamlet program as General Khanh, the new head of the government, accounced in January a "new" village pacification scheme.

Summary and Conclusions

The failure of the strategic hamlet program in Viet Nam is an established fact. Explanations of that failure are given greater clarity through the foregoing examination of the program's implementaiton, which resulted in overextension and a crumbling of security conditions. The program may be colloquially stated as having "taken off on the wrong foot" for many of the affected peasants had already experienced abuse and suffering during the prior agroville and prosperity zones period and did not differentiate too well between the new scheme and the previous ones.

Beyond the security aspects of the program, there was a real lack of emphasis for civic action in the pacification effort by

both Vietnamese and Americans. The average Vietnamese soldier considered it to be nonmilitary matter and did not grasp the vital importance of popular support in the overall struggle against the Viet Cong. Beyond this lack of understanding, there existed a timidity, if not outright resistance on the part of the Vietnamese Army to participate actively or be identified with United States supported civic activities. On the American as well as the Vietnamese side there seemed to be a general lack of command emphasis from the top echelons in developing good military and civilian relations to the benefit of the affected masses. This was particularly true in the manner and method of resettlement.

A detrimental effect to any pacification program is that Vietnamese officials, both military and civilian, only made ephemeral sallies into the countryside from the security of their bases in the cities. The Strategic Hamlet Operational Teams, whose real concerns were their own homes and families in some other tenuous location, were only transitory groups living within the hamlets. The Viet Cong, on the other hand, come not from the cities but from the same milieu as the rural population or from the jungle. Their cadres were usually drawn from these same people, and they lived, worked, and remained in the countryside.

The terms "civic action" and "pacification" were abused and oversimplified by numerous American officials who have arrived at the counterinsurgency theory of "force and persuasion" as expressed in terms of large-sixed pitched battles and massive jungle sweeps,

and that persuasion is expressed in terms of flooding the countryside with United States supplies and equipment. Oft-times goods and services inundated an area, heralding the social and cultural revolution, without a logical scheme of implementation and a total lack of complete understanding as to the future implications of these efforts. Numerous studies and investigations have shown where hundreds of bags of cement were left in the open or in warehouses to harden and become useless; where school houses were built when there were no teachers; rural dispensaries established without medical personnel to staff them; where cement sidewalks were built when wells were needed; roads constructed which stopped the flow of water for rice paddies, and of grade schools established with no high schools considered as a natural followup; thereby, in reality, giving the rural peasant no chance to better himself and raise his standard of living.¹⁰³

There was a lack of recognition that civic action is a basic component of counterinsurgency warfare; that it must be highly selective and qualitative; that there must be an opportunity to conduct it; and, most important, that it must not be interfered with by the enemy.

The execution of pacification in Viet Nam has meant first clearing an area of the Viet Cong, next making it secure from attack, and only then instituting programs to improve the life of the peasant and assure his greater loyalty to Saigon. In this alone there are two very questionable assumptions: 1) It has been assumed

that there exists greater loyalty to the government than to the insurgent on the part of the rural peasant; and 2) It has been accepted that security is possible before development can take place.

With a proper method of implementation the strategic hamlet program may have been successful, but I have doubts that the planners of the program realized the full implications in terms of resources when they considered fortifying 14,000 hamlets.

Understanding that each hamlet varies in size, location, and interaction with the Viet Cong, and each requires an individual analysis to determine its specific defensive needs, one might posit, on a rough order of magnitude, the actual manpower requirements of a hamlet defense system. The first question to be answered is what, in terms of manpower, would comprise an adequate defense force for a hamlet? Obviously the number stated in the original plan (seven to twelve men) was not sufficient to deter the Viet Cong from attacking hamlets nor preventing them from being successful in their assaults. I here consider that a platoon of approximately fifty men could provide a reasonable defense. If this figure were considered adequate, then the 14,000 hamlets would require of themselves 700,000 men for their defense.

A hamlet defense cannot be considered sufficient by itself and requires that an adequate reinforcement capability be available at the district and province headquarters to prevent the destruction of hamlets in cases where the Viet Cong attacked in

sufficient strength. In the actual program each district and province was authorized one battalion plus one company. If this force level is arbitrarily set at 300 men, then the 41 provinces and 233 districts in Viet Nam would require an additional force of over 83,000. If the manpower of the Vietnamese units were equivalent to the organizational strength of American units, the figure would rise to approximately 220,000 men.

The third figure to be considered is the manpower requirements necessary to provide area security around the hamlets, to perform patrolling missions and gather in intelligence, to provide for fixed point defense of the numerous static positions, for palace guards, divisional forces, installation security and the headquarters staffs at all the various levels and the manpower required to provide support for these hamlets and their defenders. The figure is surely beyond the capability of a country such as Viet Nam, with a population of 14 million, to provide in the eighteen months that President Diem set as the goal for the strategic hamlet program. The requirements are upwards of a million men and then does not take into account naval and air forces, nor does it include the thousands of policemen and government officials, and the quantity of lay people necessary to provide the social and cultural services written into the program.

The above is an oversimplification of the manpower problem for there existed a method of implementation that could have given the program a reasonable degree of success. This method was

initially considered and written into the plan, but was not utilized, The strategic hamlet program may have succeeded if the program had been initiated in secure regions and then expanded in a slow, methodological manner with no loss of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the program in the new areas nor any loss in the previously established areas. Furthermore, there should be no depreciation of whatever goods and services the government was providing to regions not falling within the first phases of development so as to insure a minimal amount of alienation in these areas. Such a program would be extremely costly in the short run, but, in the final analysis, would have been cheaper provided that the peasant did prefer the national government and its potential benefits and services over those of the Viet Cong, and that the infiltration from North Viet Nam did not increase to an overriding level.

Other prime ingredients include the assurance that participation in the hamlet program would not result in the loss of land, homes, and belongings, or, if resettlement was required, that new homes and prepared lands would be provided at no cost to the participant.

The hamlet defenders must not be left to their own means to insure their safety. Position defense must not be relief upon as the sole means of defeating the insurgent. A secure condition, created by regular, mobile forces, must exist in the areas

contiguous to that which is being defended by the people. These elements of the total defense system cannot be planned in isolation, for each element must provide mutual support within the established system. There cannot exist a viable defense when a dichotomy develops between regular and paramilitary forces, in which regular forces will not come to the assistance of hamlet defenders. In the eyes of both forces, the ultimate goals should be the same. At each echelon, the military, paramilitary, and civil command lines must be combined and controlled by a single leader who is able to utilize all the resources within the system.

The hamlet defense cannot fit a particular mold and must be adopted to meet local conditions. The number of militiamen required for a hamlet or village cannot be fixed at ten or fifty. However, serious deliberations should be given to the consideration of the installation of defense forces of less than platoon strength (forty to fifty men), for they will be subject to piecemeal defeat. In all cases, hamlets must be mutually supporting and have adequate intelligence area security, and reinforcements capable of early commitment, day or night.

Last, the local militia are basically village and hamlet defenders and should not be employed outside their base areas whether as a reaction force or as a relief force. Such operations should be left to the better-trained and equipped regular army units.

The factors which have been presented as important to the development of a viable hamlet defense system clearly point to the difficulty of the task that was undertaken in Viet Nam. In order to succeed, the Saigon Government needed to provide the peasant in the rural areas with safety and protection from Viet Cong threats and attacks, indications of a genuine desire to meet their problems and the evidence of a political system which took into account their interests and aspirations. This form of government interest would undoubtedly have had to be linked in some form of military-political action. The strategic hamlet program sought to attain that goal and failed. In the field of speculation it does seem possible to have envisaged the development of protected hamlets under a much slower and less ambitious program than was ever considered under the strategic hamlet program. That the program did not reach this goal must be closely linked with Nhu's insistence on quantity rather than quality in hamlet construction and development. This over-extension was indeed the denouement.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter VII

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TABLE 1

<u>Province</u>	<u>Area Km²</u>	<u>Population</u>
1. An Giang	3,780	832,602
2. An Xuyen	5,033	240,076
3. Ba Xuyen	4,803	605,895
4. Bien Hoa	2,276	266,652
5. Binh Buong	1,662	299,659
6. Binh Dinh	9,005	832,522
7. Binh Long	2,266	78,026
8. Binh Thuan	4,142	237,084
9. Binh Tuy	3,919	53,928
10. Chuong Thien	2,720	269,514
11. Con Son	70	Not available
12. Darlac	10,091	103,406
13. Dinh Tuong	2,190	738,480
14. Gia Dinh	682	703,845
15. Khanh Hoa	5,794	278,102
16. Kien Giang	5,310	328,038
17. Kien Hoa	2,082	551,546
18. Kien Phong	2,537	279,128
19. Kien Tuong	2,285	52,429
20. Kontum	8,714	90,252
21. Lam Dong	4,528	57,056
22. Long An	2,248	475,806
23. Long Khanh	2,930	108,162
24. Ninh Thuan	3,381	125,918
25. Phong Dinh	1,584	386,189
26. Phu Bon	4,663	50,769
27. Phu Yen	4,766	341,991
28. Phuoc Long	4,527	44,583
29. Phuoc Thanh	2,622	47,221
30. Phuoc Tuy	1,905	116,995
31. Pleiku	6,618	144,369
32. Quang Duc	5,412	31,300
33. Quang Nam	6,453	555,816
34. Quang Ngai	5,915	581,490
35. Quang Tin	4,738	350,439
36. Quang Tri	4,261	252,632
37. Tay Ninh	3,902	283,342+
38. Thua Thien	5,353	446,598
39. Tuyen Duc	4,363	119,679
40. Vinh Binh	2,578	538,641
41. Vinh Long	1,819	555,561

TABLE 2
 Cumulative Assistance
 (Aid and Public Law 480)
 1954-1963
 (in millions of dollars)

U. S. Fiscal Year	Economic Aid ^a	Public Law 480 ^b	Total E Economic Aid
1954	-	0.1	0.1
1955	323.6	2.2	325.8
1956	202.0	14.3	216.3
1957	258.3	22.8	281.1
1958	182.4 ^c	9.7	192.1
1959	200.6	6.5	207.1
1960	196.0	11.5	180.5
1961	132.6	12.0	144.6
1962	110.7	32.5	143.2
1963	133.2	64.3	197.5
Total	<u>1,712.4</u>	<u>175.9</u>	<u>1,888.3</u>

- a) Included loans and grants on obligation basis
- b) Total of Title I sales (less U. S. Uses portion)
- c) Included a loan funded from regional funds

TABLE 3

CASH RESOURCES FOR THE FINANCING OF THE
STRATEGIC HAMLET CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

	Amount in Millions of \$ V.N.
Appropriations from the National Budget (Fiscal Year 1961-1962)100
Contributions of private citizens and organizations	45
United States Aid (Fiscal Year 1961-1962)	730
Counterpart fund for operations "Binh-Minh" (Sunrise) and "Hai-Yen" (Sea Swallow) and aid to strategic hamlets in provinces damaged by Storm Babs	<u>58</u>
Total	933

Additional funds (1962-1963) National Budget (Fiscal Year 1962-1963)	300
Australian Aid	90
German Aid	<u>131.25</u>
Total	471.25

TABLE 4

Province or City	Population	Population in Strategic Hamlets	Strategic Hamlets Planned	Strategic Hamlets Completed	Per Cent Completed	Strategic Hamlets Under Construction
An Giang	812,027 (732,001)	242,944 (448,072)	533 (495)	181 (289)	31.25 (.58)	168 (128)
An Xuyen	276,650 (232,160)	51,316 (50,246)	48 (96)	15 (39)	33.95 (.405)	22 (26)
Ba Xuyen	659,242 (537,547)	198,758 (85,767)	646 (565)	162 (59)	25.38 (.12)	154 (153)
Bien Hoa	263,600 (235,468)	32,620 (153,868)	100 (180)	26 (114)	26.00 (.657)	63 (65)
Binh Dinh	822,746 (784,766)	228,156 (519,884)	675 (675)	180 (452)	29.62 (.67)	52 (223)
Binh Duong	302,654 (302,654)	94,094 (135,662)	319 (154)	46 (83)	14.41 (.525)	229 (46)
Binh Long	57,560 (59,003)	14,528 (23,422)	65 (67)	9 (19)	13.84 (.283)	24 (36)
Binh Thuan	281,541 (234,264)	62,005 (202,370)	230 (180)	64 (153)	27.82 (.855)	76 (27)
Binh Tuy	45,728 (56,153)	17,065 (208,211)	47 (63)	20 (35)	42.55 (.555)	26 (10)
Chuong-Thien	284,500 (269,921)	19,243 (59,368)	54 (127)	17 (65)	31.48 (.511)	15 (17)
DaLat	55,885 (49,574)	5,588 (49,574)	42 (42)	8 (42)	19.00 (.100)	5 (0)
Da Nang	110,630 (134,000)	2,282 (109,975)	27 (69)	2 (54)	7.40 (.783)	4 (15)
Darlac	180,792 (176,243)	63,684 (63,684)	314 (316)	12 (100)	38.20 (.322)	70 (116)
Dinh-Tuong	668,409 (694,433)	293,842 (350,400)	259 (472)	65 (145)	25.10 (.306)	65 (52)
Gia Dinh	687,943 (705,309)	157,748 (517,019)	291 (295)	87 (207)	29.89 (.70)	92 (88)

TABLE 4

Province or City	Population	Population in Strategic Hamlets	Strategic Hamlets Planned	Strategic Hamlets Completed	Per Cent Completed	Strategic Hamlets Under Construction
Hue	106,102 (102,505)	0 (80,302)	22 (54)	0 (49)	0 (.909)	7 (9)
Khanh Hoa	271,753 (221,718)	169,808 (184,265)	281 (301)	202 (214)	71.88 (.708)	3 (67)
Kien Phong	274,711 (246,343)	123,049 (164,257)	189 (189)	73 (128)	38.62 (.678)	55 (47)
Kien Tuong	57,940 (56,034)	29,984 (30,891)	67 (66)	59 (59)	88.00 (.895)	7 (7)
Kontum	94,849 (102,261)	10,079 (61,433)	105 (242)	23 (130)	21.90 (.537)	30 (112)
Lam Dong	62,290 (61,162)	18,769 (32,539)	268 (203)	26 (50)	9.70 (.247)	44 (22)
Long An	494,012 (492,946)	51,128 (109,490)	691 (400)	147 (117)	6.80 (.292)	38 (40)
Long Khanh	95,118 (108,158)	- (75,582)	95 (118)	20 (57)	21.00 (.483)	55 (18)
Ninh Thuan	136,739 (134,375)	106,288 (132,731)	125 (127)	105 (122)	84.00 (.96)	10 (2)
Phong Dinh	348,000 (395,437)	92,200 (205,278)	324 (204)	34 (96)	10.49 (.471)	32 (54)
Phu-Bon	332,545 (49,545)	- (9,600)	- (147)	3 (31)	- (.212)	14 (74)
Phuoc Long	44,324 (44,729)	5,443 (27,981)	69 (93)	14 (49)	20.00 (.528)	54 (20)
Phuoc Thanh	19,414 (49,414)	6,669 (16,325)	111 (28)	8 (8)	7.20 (.285)	11 (13)
Phuoc Tuy	143,100 (136,977)	17,389 (85,567)	162 (162)	24 (89)	14.81 (.549)	64 (55)
Phu Yen	345,622 (331,092)	221,889 (276,777)	351 (242)	153 (209)	43.58 (.864)	81 (27)
Pleiku	174,059 (153,058)	18,454 (47,199)	86 (229)	13 (55)	15.11 (.25)	39 (47)
Quang Duc	30,158 (30,158)	9,682 (9,161)	82 (56)	8 (9)	9.75 (.161)	1 (31)
Quang Nam	572,975 (573,742)	118,134 (175,101)	537 (537)	89 (145)	16.57 (.25)	140 (179)
Quang Ngai	651,016 (648,353)	383,395 (541,416)	400 (410)	263 (386)	65.75 (.925)	85 (4)

TABLE 4

Province or City	Population	Population in Strategic Hamlets	Strategic Hamlets Planned	Strategic Hamlets Completed	Per Cent Completed	Strategic Hamlets Under Construction
Quang Tin	348,724 (348,724)	43,703 (188,994)	134 (309)	48 (201)	35.82 (.652)	60 (80)
Quang Tri	274,690 (272,686)	203,710 (263,992)	498 (518)	357 (450)	71.68 (.87)	46 (30)
Saigon	1,275,000 (1,275,000)	261,470 (974,192)	433 (430)	105 (285)	24.24 (.662)	115 (90)
Tay Ninh	289,489 (288,184)	77,504 (198,569)	336 (180)	37 (141)	11.01 (.782)	83 (12)
Thua Thien	456,021 (451,821)	115,100 (276,421)	350 (432)	27 (145)	7.71 (.335)	117 (38)
Tuyen Duc	57,463 (32,981)	2,962 (9,750)	33 (69)	10 (28)	30.30 (.405)	14 (7)
Vinh Binh	537,677 (537,677)	369,328 (387,974)	570 (570)	364 (379)	63.86 (.664)	15 (26)
Vinh Long	536,671 (536,671)	332,235 (375,483)	247 (247)	155 (168)	62.75 (.68)	20 (34)

TABLE 5

Strategic Hamlets Planned, Completed, or Under Construction
(as of January 16, 1963)

Province or City	Number of Strategic Hamlets			Total Population of Province or City	Population of Strategic Hamlet
	Planned	Completed	Under Construction		
An Giang	495	246	138	732,001	345,055
An Xuyen	-	-	-	-	-
Ba Xuyen	565	58	154	573,547	201,838
Bien Hoa	180	53	65	235,468	70,997
Binh Dinh	675	353	45	784,766	418,542
Binh Duong	151	51	46	302,654	98,696
Binh Long	67	17	27	59,003	21,777
Binh Thuan	180	136	28	234,264	189,966
Binh Tuy	45	8	34	56,153	22,509
Chuong Thien	235	59	6	269,921	52,630
Dalat	42	36	6	49,574	31,002
Da Nang	27	18	8	110,630	36,826
Darlac	316	48	102	176,243	86,518

TABLE 5

Strategic Hamlets Planned, Completed, or Under Construction
(as of January 16, 1963)

Province or City	Number of Strategic Hamlets			Total Population of Province or City	Population of Strategic Hamlet
	Planned	Completed	Under Construction		
Dinh Tuong	424	82	64	694,433	309,316
Gia Dinh	293	146	65	705,309	395,112
Hue	24	-	7	106,102	-
Khanh Hoa	281	202	3	221,718	174,987
Kien Giang	246	89	61	354,476	95,526
Kien Hoa	582	74	50	537,343	105,389
Kien Phong	189	80	49	246,343	132,663
Kien Tuong	66	59	7	56,043	29,984
Kontum	242	76	166	102,261	26,336
Lam Dong	203	42	22	61,162	25,933
Long An	400	70	35	492,946	73,906
Long Khanh	99	50	25	108,158	71,922
Ninh Thuan	124	116	3	134,375	131,920
Phong Dinh	169	66	53	395,437	130,920
Phu-Bon	147	11	72	49,545	4,102
Phuoc Long	69	32	37	44,729	5,443

TABLE 5

Strategic Hamlets Planned, Completed, or Under Construction
(as of January 16, 1963)

Province or City	Number of Strategic Hamlets			Total Population of Province or City	Population of Strategic Hamlet
	Planned	Completed	Under Construction		
Phuoc Thanh	28	5	11	49,414	16,325
Phuoc Tuy	162	23	83	13,977	18,697
Phu Yen	242	175	61	331,092	259,763
Pleiku	229	26	61	153,038	31,741
Quang Duc	56	9	20	30,158	16,602
Quang Nam	537	102	127	573,792	133,011
Quang Ngai	414	347	15	648,353	527,225
Quang Tin	309	79	60	348,724	95,646
Quang Tri	498	411	34	259,849	227,942
Saigon	430	223	99	1,275,000	661,086
Tay Ninh	173	80	61	288,184	60,106
Thua Thien	432	98	137	451,821	145,926
Tuyen Duc	69	16	10	32,981	9,750
Vinh Binh	570	367	15	537,677	379,502
Vinh Long	247	162	25	536,671	362,621

TABLE 6

SOME SELECTED PROGRESS FIGURES ON THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS

Gia Dinh Province		
March	1962	68 hamlets under construction
April	1962	6 hamlets completed
January	1963	146 hamlets completed
June	1963	289 hamlets completed
July	1963	266 hamlets completed ^a
Binh Tuong Province		
March	1962	6 hamlets completed
April	1962	28 hamlets completed
May	1962	36 hamlets completed
August	1962	64 hamlets completed
January	1963	82 hamlets completed
June	1963	165 hamlets completed ^b
An Xuyen Province		
May	1962	4 hamlets completed
January	1963	no figures available ^c

Overall Totals:

Total population in hamlets:

Total Hamlets:

7,267,517 housed in hamlets. Figure given
by President Diem on October 7, 1962.

...

4,322,234 housed in hamlets for the end of
September. Figure given by an Interior
Department spokesman in Times of Viet Nam,
October 28, 1962.^d

3,235

TABLE 6

4,322,034 reported in the same issue of the
Times of Viet Nam as being housed in hamlets.^e 3,226^f

January	1963	4,121
February	1963	4,124 ^g
April	1963	5,917 ^h

8,150,187 housed in hamlets. Figure given
by President Diem on July 7, 1963. 5,917ⁱ

8,737,613 housed in hamlets. Figure given
by Viet Nam Press, July 14, 1963.^k 7,205^j

Proposed Total Number of Hamlets:
(taken from Viet Nam Press)

April 14, 1963	11,143
July 14, 1963	11,270
October 13, 1963	11,864

- a) Note the disparity between the last two figures
- b) The increase seems disproportionate to previous construction figures for the province
- c) This province was one of the most severely affected by the insurgency and the failure of the province chief to submit figures for the month of January, 1963, is probably an accurate indication of the difficulties experienced
- d) A discrepancy loss of approximately 3 million people housed
- e) A discrepancy loss of 200 over a month period
- f) A gain of only 1 hamlet in a month period
- g) A gain of only 3 hamlets in a month period
- h) A gain of 1,793 hamlets constructed in a one-month period
- i) No gain in hamlets constructed in a two-month period
- j) Probably a gain of 1,288 from the month of April
- k) A gain of 587,426 people housed in hamlets in a week period

TABLE 7

(From Oct. 28, 1962 Issue of Times of Viet Nam)

Saigon	433	105	115	1,275,000	261,470
Eastern Provinces	1,595	291	501	1,986,049	423,060
Western Provinces	4,728	1,236	702	5,841,658	1,874,790
Delta	3,630	1,490	682	4,378,559	1,654,244
Highlands	<u>930</u>	<u>103</u>	<u>217</u>	<u>988,041</u>	<u>108,244</u>
Total	11,316	3,225	2,217	14,432,188	4,322,034
Percentage of hamlets completed	28.49				
Percentage of the nation's total population in hamlets	33.39				

(From April 21, 1963 Issue of Times of Viet Nam)

Saigon	430	285	90	1,275,000	974,192
Eastern Provinces	1,340	802	363	1,986,049	1,332,206
Western Provinces	4,206	1,809	696	4,238,049	2,945,932
Delta	3,863	2,576	701	4,238,049	2,945,932
Highlands	<u>1,304</u>	<u>445</u>	<u>409</u>	<u>654,985</u>	<u>282,940</u>
Total	11,143	5,917	2,259	13,813,066	8,150,187
Percentage of hamlets completed	53.10				
Percentage of nation's total population in hamlets	59.0				

TABLE 8

Viet Cong Operations
1957-1963

Year	Total Incidents	Terror Acts	Military Acts	Killings of Officials	Kidnapping of Officials	Killings of Civilians
1957-1960	5,500	N.A.	N.A.	1,700	2,000	
1961	5,000	N.A.	N.A.	1,300	1,318	10,000
1962	19,000	20,000	5,484	1,118	1,118	10,000
1963	19,500	25,280	3,735	827	1,596	7,200

PROVINCES OF VIET NAM

PROVINCE CAPITAL

33 An Giang	16 Lam Dong
40 An Xuyen	28 Long An
38 Ba Xuyen	19 Long Khanh
35 Bien Hoa	15 Ninh Thuan
33 Binh Duong	37 Phong Dinh
8 Binh Dinh	10 Phu Bon
12 Binh Long	11 Phu Yen
21 Binh Thuan	17 Phuoc Long
20 Binh Tuy	18 Phuoc Thanh
39 Chuong Thien	26 Phuoc Tuy
1 Con Son	7 Pleiku
9 Darlac	12 Quang Duc
1 Dinh Tuong	3 Quang Nam
4 Gia Dinh	4 Quang Tin
4 Khanh Hoa	6 Quang Ngai
16 Kien Giang	1 Quang Tri
12 Kien Hoa	27 Tay Ninh
0 Kien Phong	2 Thua Thien
9 Kien Tuong	13 Tuyen Duc
5 Kontum	35 Vinh Binh
	34 Vinh Long

1. Quang Tri	21. Phan Thiet
2. Hue	22. An Loc
3. Danang	23. Phu Cuong
4. Tam Ky	24. Gia Dinh
5. Kontum	25. Bien Hoa
6. Quang Ngai	26. Phuoc Le
7. Pleiku	27. Tay Ninh
8. Qui Nhon	28. Tan An
9. Banmethuot	29. Moc Roa
10. Hau Bon	30. Cao Lanh
11. Tuy Hoa	31. Mytho
12. Gia Nghia	32. Truc Giang
13. Dalat	33. Long Xuyen
14. Nha Trang	34. Vinh Long
15. Phan Rang	35. Phu Vinh
16. Bao Loc	36. Rach Gia
17. Phuoc Binh	37. Can Tho
18. Phuoc Vinh	38. Khanh Hung
19. Xuan Loc	39. Vi Thanh
20. Ham Tan	40. Quang Long
	41. Con Son

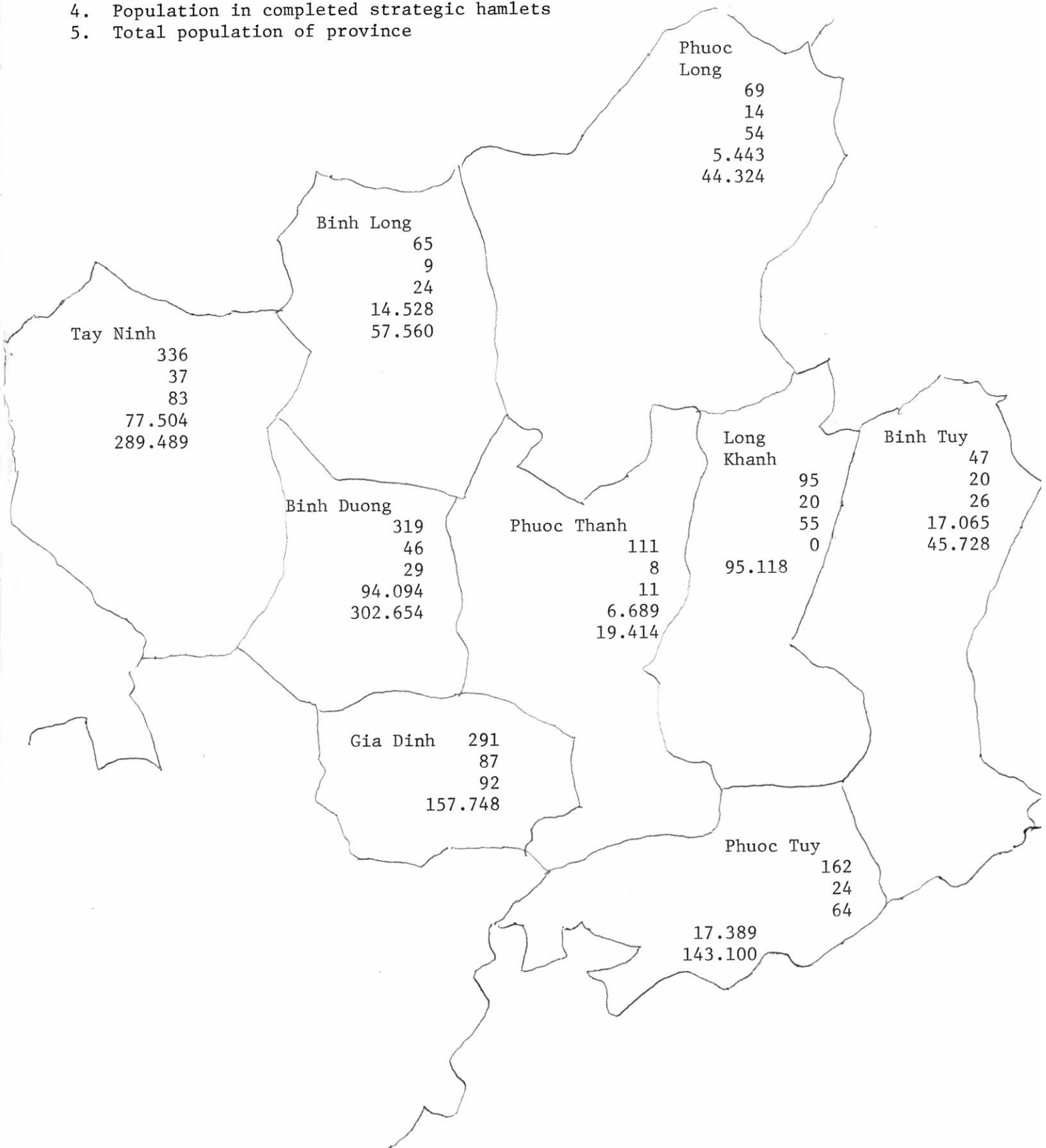


South Viet Nam

East

LEGEND

1. Total of strategic hamlets planned
2. Total of strategic hamlets completed
3. Total of strategic hamlets under construction
4. Population in completed strategic hamlets
5. Total population of province



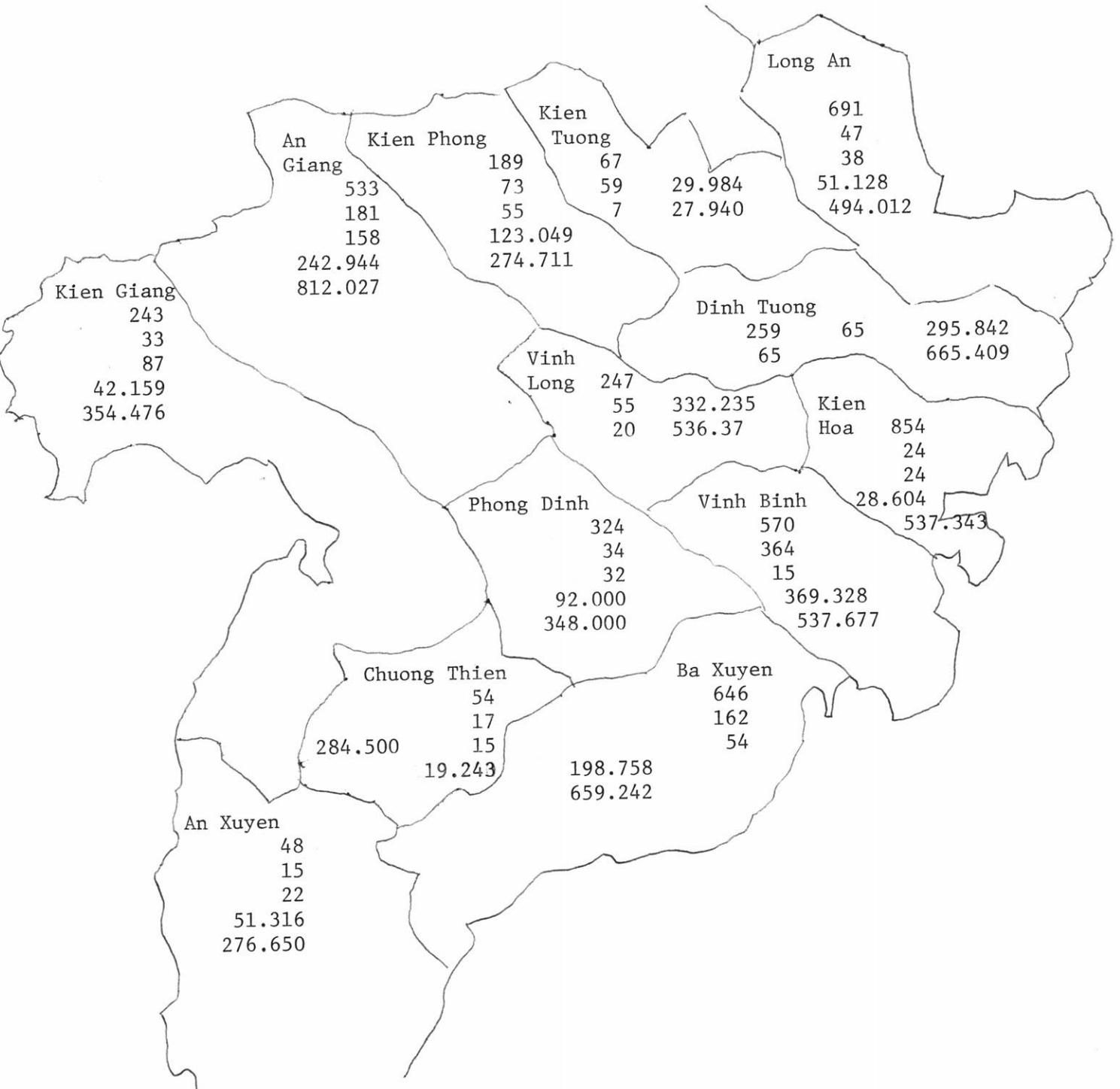
LEGEND

1. Total of strategic hamlets planned
2. Total of strategic hamlets completed
3. Total of strategic hamlets under construction
4. Population in completed strategic hamlets
5. Total population of province

REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

South Viet Nam

West



Kontum

Central Viet Nam

Highland

LEGEND

1. Total of strategic hamlets planned
2. Total of strategic hamlets constructed
3. Total of strategic hamlets under construction
4. Population in completed strategic hamlets
5. Total population of province

105
23
30
10.076
94.849

Plecku

80
13
38
18.454
174.059

Darlac

314
12
70
42.713
180.792

Quang Duc

82
8
1
9.582
30.158

Lam Dang

260
26
44
18.769
62.290

Tuyen Duc

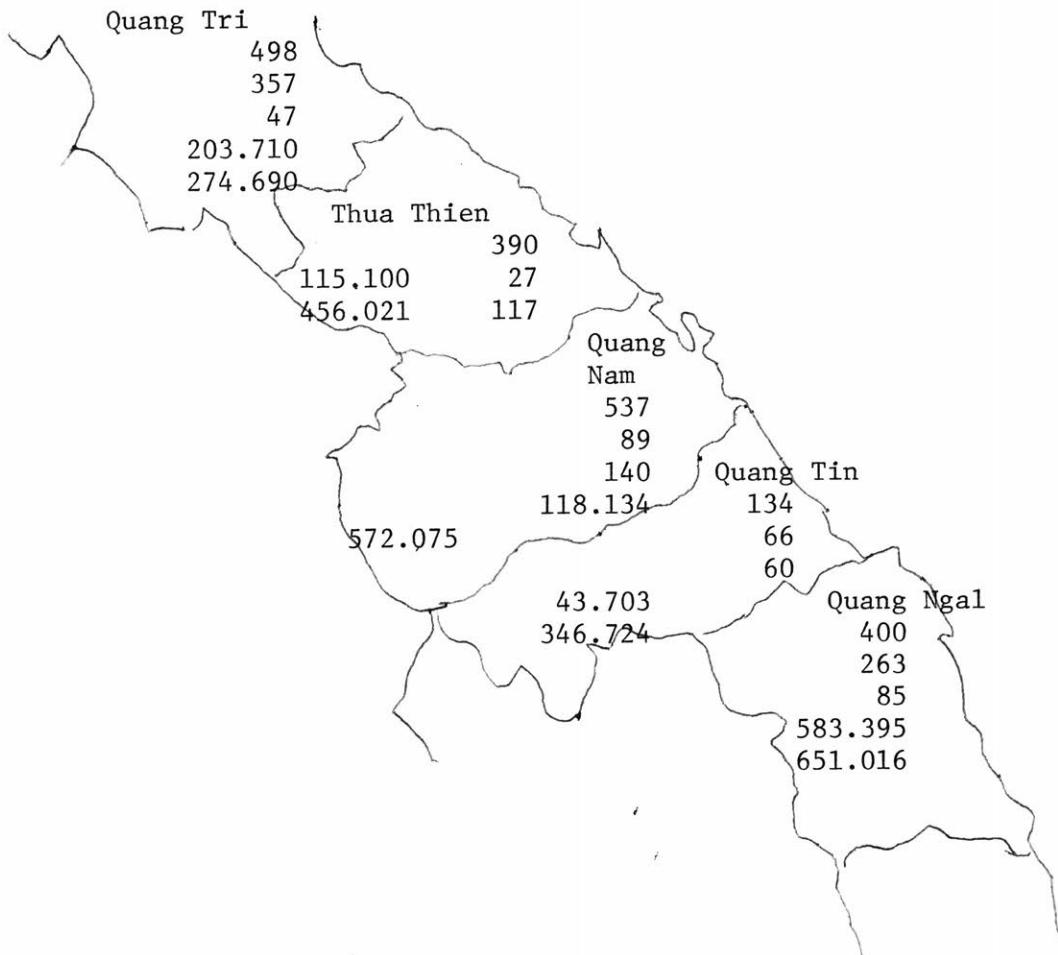
33
10
14
2.962
57.463

LEGEND

REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

Central Viet Nam Lowlands
(Northern Section)

1. Total of strategic hamlets planned
2. Total of strategic hamlets completed
3. Total of strategic hamlets under construction
4. Population in completed strategic hamlets
5. Total population of province

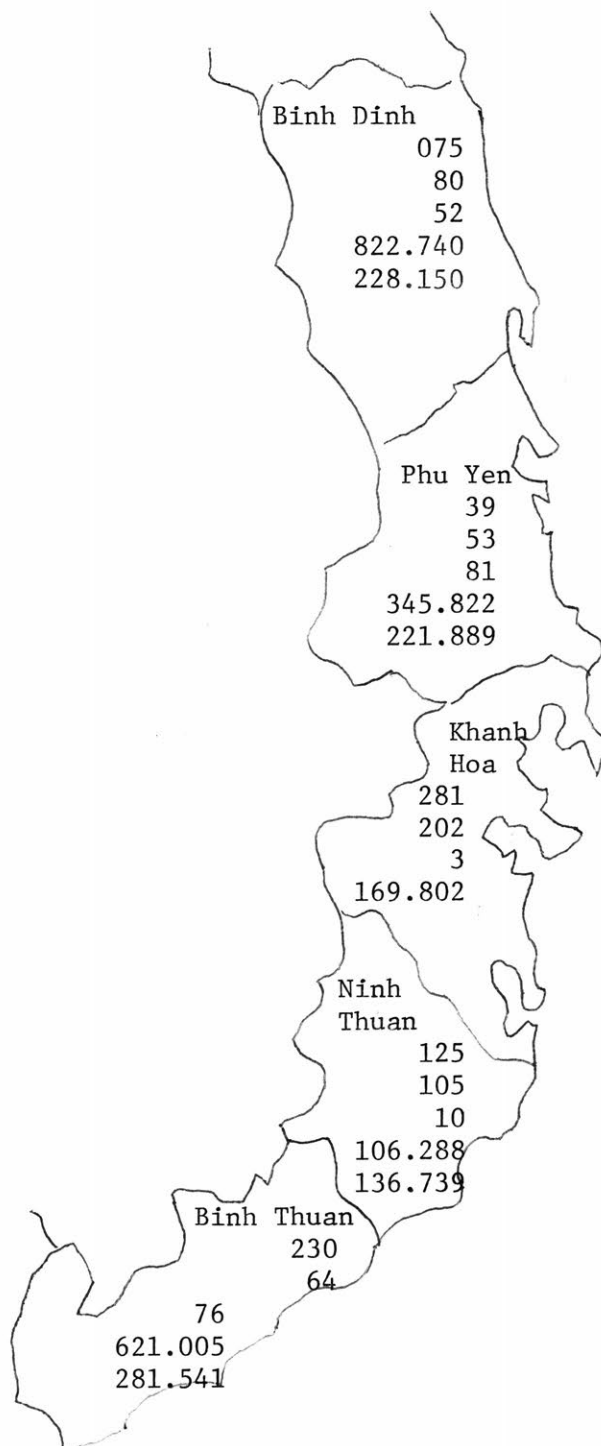


LEGEND

1. Total of strategic hamlets planned
2. Total of strategic hamlets completed
3. Total of strategic hamlets under construction
4. Population in completed strategic hamlets
5. Total population of province

REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

Central Viet Nam Lowlands
(Southern Section)



VIET CONG BASES IN SOUTH VIET NAM

1963



Figure (X)

X From Information supplied by
B. Fall in Condit, et al
Challenge and Response in Internal
Conflict Vol. 1 The Experience in Asia
Amer. Washington D. C. 1968

APPENDIX 1

December 24, 1962

To: Committee on Province Rehabilitation

From: Assistant Director USOM/Rural Affairs

Subject: Proposed Revision No. 1 for Binh Dinh Rehabilitation

U. S. local currency release agreement No. 1 dated September 20, 1962 provided a total of 27,710,000 piasters for equipment and training, per diem, salaries for civic action cadres, relocation of Montgnards and Vietnamese and establishment of self-help cadres.

This proposed revision No. 1 will carry the Binh Dinh release agreement into Phase II and will increase the total amount to 41,053,650 piasters.

Phase I of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Binh Dinh Province called for the construction of 337 hamlets: of this number, 266 had been completed by November 24 and the total of 337 are planned for completion by the end of December. Some damage has been caused by the floods in late October and the rainy season has slowed some of the work but hamlet construction is proceeding well. 672 civic action cadres were trained and have been active in the hamlets since training. Clothing and equipment was purchased and issued. As of November 30, 26 self-help projects have been approved and 56 others are under consideration. Great interest has been shown in these self-help projects shown by democratic principles in the hamlets. However, the amount of 20,000,00 piasters per hamlet project is believed to be insufficient and it is planned to increase the amount to 40,000,00 piasters.

The amount of 1,500.00 piasters per house for construction has been found to be inadequate and at least 2,000 is required for construction alone in this Province.

Morale is excellent throughout the Province and Vietnamese and Montgnards have shown willingness and cooperation in constructing houses and defenses.

Four relocation centers are under construction and are now in the process of receiving people. In addition to the relocation centers, there have been people received in all districts of the Province and processing is being accomplished locally. At the present time it is estimated that there are a total of 64,316 people (34,646 families) requesting to move into hamlets.

The hamlets in Binh Dinh Province are established with a maximum of 50 families per hamlet and a minimum of 10 families per hamlet. When a hamlet is completed and all requirements are met, elections are held and a 5 man hamlet committee is selected (Hamlet Council members). These members hold the offices of: Hamlet Chief, Deputy Chief of Security, Deputy Chief of Economics and Deputy Chief of Political activities. This committee is trained in its functions in the District by the District Chief and his staff for a period of 8 days. During this training period they receive 20 piasters a day.

During Phase I it was planned to train 1,174 Hamlet Militia Leaders. The 257 combat hamlets are to have 3 militia leaders per hamlet and the 403 strategic hamlets are to have 1 militia leader per hamlet. This training was accomplished in three periods in the following manner:

01.	Strategic Hamlet Construction/Civic Action Teams Per Diem: 160 men x 30\$VN x 90 days	432,000\$VN
02.	Strategic Hamlet Council Training: 72 SH Council Members x 25\$VN x 15 days	27,000\$VN
03.	Hamlet Militia Training	270,000\$VN
	a. Military: 360 men x 25\$VN x 15 days	
	b. Psy/Idoc: 360 men x 25\$VN x 15 days	
04.	Resettlement of 2,690 families	3,071,060\$VN
	Rice: 15 kg/family for 3 mos. x 8\$VN	968,400\$VN
	Corn: 10 kg/family for 3 mos...Food for Peace	
	Bulgar: 10 kg/family for 3 mos...Food for Peace	
	Oil or Shortening: 1 gal/family for 3 mos..Food for Peace	
	Salt: 1 kg/family for 3 mos. x 2\$VN	16,140\$VN
	Dried Fish: 2 kg/family for 3 mos. x 18\$VN	290,520\$VN
	Seeds: 100\$VN/family	269,000\$VN
	Tools: 300\$VN/family	807,000\$VN
	Housing Relief: 2,000\$VN x 20 houses/hamlet	720,000\$VN
05.	Self-Help: 18 Hamlets x 20,000\$VN	360,000\$VN
06.	Provincial Training Center	500,000\$VN
07.	Road Construction and Completion	2,000,000\$VN
08.	Miscellaneous	800,000\$VN

APPENDIX 2

5 February 1963

TO: COMMITTEE ON PROVINCE REHABILITATION

FROM:

SUBJECT: Proposed Provincial Release Agreement Amendments
for BINH DUONG and TAY MINH Provinces

This is a proposed ammendment of IAD Release Agreement No. 22, Activity Title: Binh Duong Province Rehabilitation, dated 26 December 1962, and AID Release Agreement No. 25, Activity Title: Tay Ninh Province Rehabilitation, dated 31 December 1962. Both ammendments were requested by the Commanding Officer, 32nd DTA and the province chiefs concerned. They provide normal and special funding for the establishment of twenty-two combat type strategic hamlets and one agroville in Security Zone C areas of Binh Duong and Tay Ninh Provinces. The hamlets are planned in conjunction with 32nd DTA operational plans. Establishment of the agroville was directed separately and funding of major items for this, including land clearing and relocation has been provided for directly by GVN; therefore, only minor items for the agroville such as training and self-help are included in this proposal.

The original Binh Duong release agreement provided funding for 138 strategic hamlets to be completed by 31 March 1963. This proposed ammendment, if approved, will increase the number funded to 154, including 15 new combat hamlets plus the previously mentioned agroville. Construction of the new hamlets will be carried out in four phases with five to be completed by 31 March 1963, five (including the agroville) by 31 May, three by 31 July and three by 30 September 1963. This will necessitate an extension of the original agreement from 31 March to 30 September 1963. Relocation, training, hamlet self-help and miscellaneous funding proposed in the ammendment follow the same formula as that included in the original agreement except for the following items. One time clothing and equipment allowances for new Strategic Hamlet Construction Team cadresmen have been increased from 900\$ to 1200\$ piastres, based on provincial cost experience; operational allowances for the same cadresmen cover the

projected eight-month period of the operation; and training subsistence allowances for hamlet officials and militiamen is for 15 days (as opposed to 10 days for Zone A hamlets).

Two new items have been incorporated in this amendment. The first is piastre funding for the operating costs and maintenance of twelve bulldozers (on loan from Land Development) for a period of four months - - an item considered essential by the province chief to the success of the operation in these Security Zone C areas. The second item is the provision of one-time economic/agricultural funding for the five new "Sunrise" hamlets located on National Route #13 between Phu Cuong and Ben Cat. These funds of 100,000\$ per hamlet will enable the III Corps Civil Affairs/Civic Action Mobile Training Team #3, on duty in Binh Duong Province, to assist the people of the five hamlets in the needed initiation and development of horticultural, livestock, and home improvement projects, considered essential to the economic development of these new communities. Full coordination will be effected with all interested GVN and US agencies in the development and implementation of projects.

In respect to Tay Ninh, the original provincial release agreement provided funding for 173 strategic hamlets to be completed by 30 June 1963. This proposed amendment, if approved, will increase the total to 180 by funding seven new Zone C combat hamlets. Since the seven new hamlets are to be completed by 31 March 1963, no change in the period covered under the original agreement is required. Also, no change in the manner of funding for these seven hamlets over that contained in the original agreement is contemplated. The one new item included is similar to that mentioned above for Binh Duong Province. It will provide one-time assistance funds for hamlet economic/agricultural improvement projects and will be monitored by a full-time USOM/Rural Affairs representative in Tay Ninh working in coordination with appropriate USOM divisions and GVN agencies.

Upon completion of hamlets covered in original agreements and these proposed amendments, over 70% of the Binh Duong provincial population (302,916) will be housed within strategic hamlets and approximately 85% of the Tay Ninh population (288,184) will be similarly housed.

Following are the proposed non-military budget increases recommended as amendments to Binh Duong and Tay Ninh Provincial Rehabilitation Plans. Committee approval of this proposal is recommended.

BINH DUONG PROVINCE

Original Agreement	7,240,800\$
Proposed Increase	<u>7,636,200\$</u>
New Total	14,877,000\$

TAY NINH PROVINCE

Original Agreement	13,235,000\$
Proposed Increase	<u>2,597,000\$</u>
New Total	15,832,000\$

PROPOSED BUDGET INCREASES

(In 000's of piastres)

<u>Item</u>	<u>Binh Duong</u>	<u>Tay Ninh</u>
01 Relocation (families x 4400\$ x 25%) Binh Duong (3,390 families Tay Ninh (1,286 families)	3,729.0	1,414.6
02 Training, outfitting, operating allowances for 8-men strategic hamlet and construction teams Training (cadresmen x 15 days x 20\$) Equipment (Cadresmen x 1200\$) Allowance (Cadresmen x 240 days x 30\$)	9.6 38.4 230.4	0.0 0.0 0.0
03 Training: hamlet militiamen Binh Duong (16 hamlets x 20 militia x 15 days x 20\$) Tay Ninh (7 hamlets x 30 militia x 20 days x 20\$)	96.0	84.0
04 Training: hamlet officials Binh Duong (4 off. x 16 ham. x 10 days x 20\$) Tay Ninh (4 off. x 7 ham. x 15 days x 20\$)	12.8	8.4
05 Hamlet Self-Help (hamlets x 20,000\$)	320.0	140.0

06	Miscellaneous	700,0	250,0
(NEW)	Land Clearing - - Opn & Maint, of 12 Bulldozers (4 mo x 500,000\$)	2,000,0	0.0
(NEW)	Economic/Agricultural Project Fund		
	Binh Duong (5 hamlets x 100,000\$)	500.0	
	Tay Ninh (7 hamlets x 100,000\$)		700.0
		<hr/>	<hr/>
	TOTALS	7,636,2	2,597.0

APPENDIX 3

February 7, 1963

TO: Committee on Provincial Rehabilitation

FROM:

SUBJECT: Approval of Proposed Release Agreement Budget for
PHU BON Province - a revision of Agreement No. 6,
Phu Bon Operation - Refugee Relief and Resettlement

The situation in this Province has matured to the extent that the Provincial strategic hamlet program, Phase I, has been initiated. Essentially this calls for the establishment in strategic hamlets of the 18,000 refugees which have come into reception centers as a result of the Phu Bon operation.

Originally 147 Strategic Hamlets were planned for this Province, however the Sector Advisor, Province Chief, and USOM Representative, have all stated that 100 hamlets are all that are possible and required. This agreement, therefore, supports the establishment of 100 hamlets to be initiated or completed by June 1963.

In the original release agreement for a Special Montagnard Operation dated 26 November 1962, it was found that some of the planned activities could not be carried out, largely because of lack of personnel in the Province. They therefore have been dropped or modified to fit the circumstances.

The above is related to the fact of Phu Bon's existence as a new province without the normal community and governmental resources available. This also accounts for the sizeable salaries of the Civic Action cadres who will have to be recruited largely from outside of the Province. Another activity particular to this province is the training of Montagnard to provide services to the hamlets which cannot be provided by the Province, this is the key to self-sufficiency of the people in this Province, most of whom must be resettled.

The Self-Help construction of a provincial hospital will be supported by matching funds from the GVN per agreement with the Department of Health.

It is recommended that this budget be approved so that the Strategic Hamlet program in the Province can be supported through revision of the existing Release Agreement.

TCL:c

APPENDIX 4

TO: Committee for Provincial Rehabilitation
FROM: Assistant Director for RURAL AFFAIRS, OSOM
SUBJECT: Supplement to U. S. Special Account Release Agreement No. 42-Pleiku Province.

This is a revised release agreement budget proposal for Pleiku Province. It provides a total of 3,071,060\$00 piasters for relocation of an estimated 12,950 people or 2,690 families, who will be relocated into 18 new strategic hamlets. Training of Strategic Hamlet Construction Teams is not included since they are already trained, but a per-diem allowance for a 90 day construction period is included. Funds for the training of 72 strategic hamlet council members are provided. Hamlet self-help projects for the 18 additional hamlets are included, as well as funds for the construction of a Provincial Training Center which will be used for the training and retraining of Hamlet Militia, Republican Youth, SDC and for agricultural training of Montagnard youth from the outlying areas of the province. Allowance is made for the usual 15 days of military training for the hamlet militia, and provision is also made for another 15 days of psychological indoctrination for these same militia before they receive their military training. This additional training has been given to a small number of Montagnard from the Dak Bot area who have just come under GVN control, and has proved to be very valuable. A request for funds to be used for the construction and completion of critical roads that give access to some of the newly opened strategic hamlet areas is included, with the understanding that an equal amount will be forthcoming from GVN/PW. The total proposal is 7,460,060\$00 piasters including an approximate 10% miscellaneous fund.

In essence the plan is a supplement designed to cover the construction of 18 new strategic hamlets which will come into being as the result of increased military activity of the 22nd. DTA. It will increase the number of hamlets to be built within Pleiku province from 162 to 180. Of the original 162, 107 have been completed and are being furnished MAP equipment which is just starting to arrive in province.

The request for housing relief is based upon instructions given to the Province Chief by the Inter-ministerial Committee. The request for relocation relief is for only 3 months because the villagers have, for the most part, been moved into new locations and are now planting their rice fields.

APPENDIX 5

TO: Committee for Provincial Rehabilitation
FROM: Assistant Director for Rural Affairs
SUBJECT: Supplement to U. S. Special Account Release
Agreement No. 41-Kontum Province

This is a revised release agreement budget proposal for Kontum Province. It provides a total of 5,363,712\$00 piasters for relocation of some 12,984 people or 2,619 families who will be moved into 30 new hamlets. Since they will be coming from areas newly freed from V, C. Domination, it is expected that they will have very little food with them, hence relief is planned for six months. Strategic Hamlet Construction per-deim for a 90-day period is included. Funds for the training of 120 hamlet council members are provided. Allowance is made for training 720 militia.

APPENDIX 6

TO: Committee on Province Rehabilitation
FROM: Assistant Director, USOM/RA
SUBJECT: Proposed (QUANG DUC Provincial Agreement Amendment

Reference A.I.D. Release Agreement No, 40, Activity Title: "Quang Duc Province Rehabilitation," dated February 5, 1963. The referenced agreement provided funding for an aggregate 60 strategic hamlets to be established and/or completed during the period 1 January to 30 June 1963.

On 15 May 1963 representatives of IC/SH, MAAG and USOM/RA met with the Quang Duc Province Chief, Colonel Ho Nghia, for the purpose of reviewing the provincial strategic hamlet program. Colonel Nghia reported that all hamlets were either completed or under construction; that the program for constructing 60 hamlets should be completed by 30 June on schedule; that 91.28% of the provincial population was now in hamlets under provincial control and protection; and, that by 30 June the population within strategic hamlets should be 97% leaving only 1,061 Montagnards for resettlement. (These Montagnards presently are in scattered Viet-Cong influenced areas of the province and apparently forced to remain in place). Colonel Nghia also presented a new plan for 16 additional hamlets to be completed by 30 September 1963. Upon completion, the strategic hamlet establishment phase for this province will be concluded.

This proposal provides for funding the establishment of the 16 additional strategic hamlets. Thirteen of the new hamlets will be formed by sub-dividing existing oversize hamlets; three are to be established within new land development centers. The sub-dividing is considered desirably for improved security organization and hamlet political integrity.

Additional funding requested includes the relocation of twenty families not otherwise provided for; training per diem for a 260 man increase in hamlet militia; training per diem for the new hamlets' councilmen; self-help funds for each of the new hamlets; and an increase in miscellaneous funds. In the 42 Montagnard hamlets existing and currently under construction, need

will continue on a decreasing scale for foodstuffs, clothing, and other commodities normally furnished in kind; therefore, a separate request for this commodity resettlement assistance will be initiated by the province.

Following the proposed non-military budget increase recommended as an amendment to the Quang Duc Provincial Rehabilitation Plan. It will provide funding for Phase IV covering the period 1 July to 30 September 1963.

Original Agreement	5,409,500\$00
Proposed Increase	550,800\$00
TOTAL:	<u>5,960,300\$00</u>

APPENDIX 7

TO: Committee on Province Rehabilitation
FROM: Assistant Director, USOM/RA
SUBJECT: Proposed TUYEN DUC Provincial Agreement Amendment

Reference AID Release Agreement No. 37, Activity Title: "Tuyen Duc Province Rehabilitation," Dated January 21, 1963. The referenced agreement provided funding for an aggregate 69 hamlets to be established and/or completed during the period 1 January to 30 June 1963.

On 17 May 1963 representatives of IC/SH, MAAG and USOM/RA met with the Tuyen Duc Province Chief, Major Ngo Nhut Bich, for the purpose of reviewing the provincial strategic hamlet program. Major Bich reported that 34 of the programmed hamlets are now completed and the other 35 under construction. No significant difficulties were foreseen in meeting the target date of 30 June for the completion of the 69 hamlets. Major Bich then presented his plan for the second half of calendar year 1963. It provides for the establishment of an additional 67 hamlets for a provincial total of 136. Work has commenced on four of these hamlets as of this date and all will be started by 30 September; however, completions may be extended on several until the end of 1963. Upon completion, 97% of the population will be afforded the protection of strategic hamlets. This will conclude the provincial strategic hamlet establishment phase.

The proposal contained herein provides for funding the establishment of these additional 67 strategic hamlets. Thirty-two of the new hamlets are to be situated in Security Zone A, 22 in Security Zone B, and 13 in Security Zone C areas.

Additional funding, tentatively agreed to by Major Bich and the ICSH/MAAG/USOM committee, aggregates 6,879,100\$ piastres. All items except hamlet self-help were computed on a basis similar to that contained in the original agreement. Self-help was increased for all 136 hamlets to 15,000\$ per hamlet. The original plan envisaged a total number of hamlets exceeding 200 -- considered abnormally high for the provincial population of 65,752 people -- and it was for that reason that the relatively low figure of 10,000\$ was used. With the determination that that total number of provincial strategic hamlets will be 136, an increase of self-help assistance per hamlet to 15,000\$ is believed justified.

APPENDIX 8

TO: Committee for Provincial Rehabilitation
FROM: Assistant Director for Rural Affairs USOM
SUBJECT: KIEN TUONG Release Agreement

The Provincial Rehabilitation Committee respectfully submits a budget of 5,025,250 for the second quarter of 1963.

The committee estimates that 1,150 families will have been relocated by the end of the strategic hamlet construction program. The most significant aspect of the program is presently occurring in the Tri Phap area which was formerly under the control of the V. C. Since 1 May the province has carried out a successful clearing operation resulting in the return of many families to the Government side. Relocation is also planned in Tuyen Binh, Tuyen Nhon and Kien Binh districts.

Since 20 teams of construction cadre have been trained during the first quarter it is necessary to request only per-diem for 10 teams for 90 days,

The Province has trained 200 combat youth the entire number allocated in the first quarter. Since 37 hamlets will have been allocated MAP supplied through September and militia for 10 hamlets have already been trained the committee requests hamlet militia for 27 combat hamlets.

Heretofore there were no self-help project starts. Other than discussions concerning possible programs little has been done in this area due to the slowness in the strategic hamlet program. As hamlets are established and the concept of self-help is understood by the people, the Committee feels that headway will be made in this field.

At the present time 116 hamlet chiefs and committeemen have been trained and 116 more are undergoing training in Moc Hoa,

Kien Tuong is one of the poorest provinces in Vietnam. At flood time life is even more difficult since the province is under water. When the flood recedes the soil is acid, farming therefore is difficult and not very productive.

The people remain in need of substantial assistance especially in the category of the means to earn their own living. Since their livelihoods are divided between farming and fishing the Provincial Committee urges that the three items essential to life in the Plain of Reeds be given to the people: sampans, farm tools and fish nets.

APPENDIX 9

The following is a translation of a captured South Viet-Nam Liberation Front document dated 5 August 1963, from Tay-Ninh province. It is believed to have been prepared by a provincial committee of the Front for transmission to both higher and lower echelons. It is of interest that the document expresses some concern for the progress of the strategic hamlet program at a time when there was general deterioration in the implementation of the program. The document is reproduced as translated irrespective of syntax.

MEMORANDUM No. 58/CV

F. 99
5 August 1963

TO: F. 95

On the occasion of July 20th (Anniversary of the 1954 cease fire) efforts will be made to counter the herding of people and construction of Strategic Hamlets.

I. Since the 1st of the year, the enemy has concentrated all his efforts, engaged all his forces and employed the most savage methods to herd the people into Strategic Hamlets. He has obtained some results in extending his control, consolidating part of the areas under his control and causing more difficulties to our activities. Supported by the concentration camps, Strategic Hamlets, the enemy carries out more effectively a number of plans, such as drafting, pillaging, oppressing, terrorizing the people, confusing their morale, conducting economic blockade, appealing to surrender, etc.....

Our movement of struggle in the recent past has partly hampered the execution of above plans. It has limited his activities, loosened his control and caused an unquiet situation. In some areas the installations which were previously driven out have been re-installed. In others, the installations have been developed, consolidated and are capable of causing many difficulties and embarrassments to the enemy. But, generally speaking, we have not yet stopped or shoved back these enemy plots; on the contrary they are progressing rapidly. Such a situation has discouraged a number of cadres and Party members because the enemy has many capabilities of concentrating his efforts and terrorizing savagely in order to carry out these plots. But the main cause still rests in the deficiencies of our leadership, in our failure to fully realize the enemy plot, in our lack of efforts to concentrate forces, increase sabotage, intensify guerilla warfare, strengthen counter -- mop up activities for his attrition, employ in maximum the rudimentary weapons, employ the armed forces in countering the enemy herding of people into Strategic Hamlets.

In parallel with our developing movement of armed struggle, the movement against the herding of people into Strategic Hamlets was also intensified and obtained a number of considerable successes. In several areas, sabotage was conducted in series against 5 or 7 Strategic Hamlets and political, military and troop proselyting means were employed to initiate the people to sabotage 20 or 30 other Hamlets. Elsewhere, our guerrillas built their secret caches and attacked the enemy right in Strategic Hamlets. Or we set up cells and proselyted the SDC, Combat Youth, Republican Youth to turn their weapons against the enemy, kill his troops and loosen his control. In particular, in some areas, the masses violently opposed their herding (into Strategic Hamlets) with all legal and semi-legal means and employed troop proselyting methods to embarrass the enemy and cause more confidence for the people. In spite of his efforts, the enemy is encountering many obstacles and showing many important weaknesses. More than ever, he is politically isolated. The morale of his troops and civil servants is sagging because of the heavy losses they have suffered. Most of the troops sympathize with and support the struggle by the people against the construction of Strategic Hamlets. The more Strategic Hamlets he constructs, the less capable the enemy will be to defend them because he is short of troops. If he disperses them, it will be easier for us to attack them with troop proselyting and to destroy them....

So, the weaknesses and difficulties of the enemy are our strengths and advantages. With our experience and countering methods, we will be capable of co-ordinating the political, military and troop proselyting actions to sabotage the concentration zones, Strategic Hamlets and to intensify the Movement if we have good determination and leadership.

II. To intensify strongly and rapidly the movement against Strategic Hamlets, we should restudy our plans and their execution. Following are some points to be reminded:

1) It is to be realized that the enemy plan to concentrate the people into Strategic Hamlets is due to his inability to control the people and the people's 'revolutionary tide'. For this reason, he must employ the military forces to imprison the people for his control, to isolate the people from the Revolution. This plan is part of the long range plot of MY DIEM's aggressive war; it is a matter of life or death for their regime. So, as long as they survive, they will be determined to carry out this Plan. In addition to their main efforts in the military field, they employ all their political, economic and cultural capabilities as well as all the measures of violence, bribery, cheating, appeal to surrender.... They have many capabilities and facilities, such as weapons, money, forces. In carrying out their plot, they encounter many unsolvable contradictions and the more efforts they make the more contradictions they will show.

2) Since the enemy plot is a long range military plan, it must be countered by a violent and long lasting people's guerrilla war. In the sabotage of Strategic Hamlets, the role of the people's armed forces is decisive while the masses of political forces are the backbone of the armed forces. The important role of Troop Proselyting should also be developed.

For the Plan against the construction of Strategic Hamlets, the following requirements should be met:

- In our base area, we should be determined not to let the enemy herd the people.
- In the strong areas, sabotage will be conducted from small scale to large scale until complete destruction and transformation of Strategic Hamlets into Combat Villages and Hamlets.
- In enemy controlled areas, we should loosen his control, raise the masses political movement, develop and build up the installations inside (the Strategic Hamlets) to ensure and preserve the outside activities. The secret self defense forces inside will be only employed to follow up the enemy situation, to eliminate secretly the cruel enemy elements and to co-ordinate their activities with the armed forces outside.

3) Because of above requirements, different methods will be applied for different areas:

- In our base areas, we should develop guerrilla warfare and anti-mop up actions against enemy herding of the people into Strategic Hamlets. For the existing Hamlets, determined efforts will be made to sabotage them.
- We should plan to sabotage in series the Strategic Hamlets in one area at a time. We should avoid the meaningless harassment which only makes the enemy more alert. A plan should be available to prepare the sabotage actions. When the concentrated forces are needed, careful planning should be made like for an attack on post in order to ensure the success. When sabotaging the hamlets one by one or in series, the first objectives in the hamlet should be rapidly secured for use as stepping stones for other actions. At the same time, preparation will be made against a possible enemy operation.

- In the areas where our forces are still weak, efforts should be made to eliminate the enemy village and Hamlets Council members, spies, and to destroy the Strategic Hamlets fence. For this latter mission, coordination should be made between the forces outside and inside the hamlets in order to ensure its success. Preparation should be adequately made for the forces inside the SH's until they are strong enough for the task!

In the areas where the enemy does not have troops, we should build up Combat Villages. In the areas which the enemy can reoccupy we should have a number of secret installations ready to operate within the enemy ranks while the outside forces should be prepared for action. In the areas where the enemy organizes and equips Combat Youth, Self-Defense Corps and Armed forces, we should make efforts to proselyte these forces to turn against the enemy and to Destroy the SH's.

For the elimination of Montagnard Village Council, actions should be carefully planned according to the masses aspirations and approved by the Province Committee. Efforts will be concentrated to attacks the armed 'nests' and seize their weapons for the Front, for the countering of SH construction. Our present mission also consists of helping the people's life, production and the defense of their interests.

Province, District and Village Committees will base on their past experiences to carry out successfully this Plan. They should concentrate all their efforts to destroy in series the Strategic Hamlets. This mission must be given first priority. The more he is defeated, the more the enemy will bang on this plot of his. Under any circumstances, we should never under-estimate him: the more success we obtain, the more efforts we will make to overcome the difficulties, to destroy the enemy plot, and to force him into a position without a way out until his total collapse in South VIET NAM.

Translation of document captured in Tay Ninh Province, 15 August, 1963.

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