

Naval War College Review

Volume 26
Number 3 *May-June*

Article 25

1973

The Village

L. W. Jackley
U.S. Army

F. J. West Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Jackley, L. W. and West, F. J. Jr. (1973) "The Village," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 26 : No. 3 , Article 25.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol26/iss3/25>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

a cross between such scholarly treatises as Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* and memoirs such as Lyndon Johnson's *Vantage Point* or Maxwell Taylor's *Swords and Plowshares*.

As a piece of scholarship, Rostow's book is quite sound, but it offers no new insights. The rationale for the diffusion of power in the international system has been well chronicled, and the book adds very little to the earlier memoirs of Eisenhower, Johnson, or Taylor or to the personal histories of the Kennedy era by Schlesinger and Sorenson. Nevertheless, as a personal memoir the author's viewpoints are interesting and informative.

The most valuable parts of the book are the sections that deal with Rostow's justification for the American intervention in Vietnam. Much has been published by the so-called doves, but, except for Taylor's *Swords and Plowshares*, very little has been heard from the other side.

Rostow regards Southeast Asia as critical to the free world because of its size and location, i.e., it dominates the sea approaches of the Southwest Pacific and the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean and it is a critical buffer between China and the Indian Ocean. He feels that Vietnam is important to Southeast Asia because of its size and location and because of the domino theory. Moreover, Rostow is of the opinion that China was working with Hanoi (and Djakarta) to take over Southeast Asia.

One cannot but admire Rostow's intellectual honesty and consistency. Many of those who agreed with Rostow's position and gave similar advice to Kennedy and Johnson have become *post facto* doves when the situation in Vietnam turned sour.

On the other hand, one cannot but be dismayed by Rostow's own logic and his apparent unwillingness to confront reality. Even if one can leave aside such obvious considerations as "proportionality," America's moral leadership, and

the desires of the people of South Vietnam, Rostow's own acknowledgment of the fact of the "diffusion of power" and the split in the Communist movement makes it senseless to talk about losing Southeast Asia for the free world. Moreover, given the historical enmity between the Vietnamese and the Chinese, the buffer between China and India that Rostow seeks can be best brought about by a strong Vietnam united under the control of Hanoi. The fact of the matter is that the Communists are the only group presently capable of bringing about such unity.

Eric Goldman has written of *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*, and John B. Henry and William Espinosa have described the "Tragedy of Dean Rusk." (*Foreign Policy*, Fall 1972), but it has been left to Rostow to write his own tragedy. For, in this *magnum opus*, Rostow's regret is not that we became involved but that the United States did not intervene earlier and more decisively.

LAWRENCE J. KORB
U.S. Coast Guard Academy

West, F.J., Jr. *The Village*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. 288p.

March 1965 ushered in the intensive ground combat phase in Vietnam for the Americans, a war the Vietnamese had been enduring for a decade. The Americans pursued search-and-destroy operations with considerable success throughout the following year—if measured by the fact that South Vietnam was not sliced into pieces by North Vietnamese Army divisions combined with main force Viet Cong (VC) units. The war of attrition, from the viewpoint of the senior U.S. military headquarters in Saigon, appeared to be heading toward one of those ever elusive tunnel lights.

At the village and hamlet level, however, the war had a different cast. Vietnamese Government leaders down through the hamlet bureaucracy worked

and traveled only in relatively secure areas and often slept in different houses each night. Their fears were well justified as the VC infrastructure—a euphemism for a pervading, cellular-like organization complete with its military arm—controlled the hamlets by night and disappeared into them and the surrounding area by day. The Americans attacked and pursued the VC military units, with occasional success, in an attempt to provide time for the village government to strengthen and take hold. Day and night patrolling outside the hamlets provided the Americans considerable exercise and a few fire-fights, when the VC had the tactical advantage. The effect of these operations on the political struggle for the hamlets was minimal. The VC roamed the area at will—terrorizing the farmers, collecting taxes and food, and punishing the people they believed to have collaborated with either the Government or U.S. troops. This situation prevailed unabated in the village of Binh Nghia for despite the fact that the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) was only 4 miles away at Chulai, Binh Nghia belonged to the VC.

In June of 1966, Lt. Gen. Lewis W. Walt, commanding III MAF, agreed to assign a dozen combat experienced marine volunteers to live with the people of Binh Nghia; they would share their food, their problems, and their battles. The marines were to form a combined action platoon (CAP) with the Popular Force (PF) element in the village, thus capitalizing on the PF's knowledge of the area and the marines' aggressiveness and combat experience. The PF's were a motley, unmotivated group, armed usually with World War II carbines. They had a propensity to whistle loudly on patrols so that they would not unnecessarily surprise the VC, and as one might expect, their operations were not characterized by intense firefights.

The mere presence of the marines in

Binh Nghia and the activities of the CAP in and around the village not only interrupted the flow of VC activities but served as a factor of psychological support for the village government. In effect, the CAP served notice on the VC leaders that the United States was seriously challenging them on their own "turf." The VC were apparently quite concerned about their loss of prestige as well as their diminished operations; they also were quite insulted. The reaction was ferocious. The CAP was engaged in firefights virtually every time it ventured forth from the village gate. In the course of these combined nightly operations, the PF's became more aggressive and professional, and the CAP began to perform like an integrated unit. The intensity of combat operations escalated with each passing week.

The level of combat activities around Binh Nghia was quickly brought to the attention of General Walt, and he dispatched a marine staff officer to find out why. The officer was Capt. F.J. (Bing) West, Jr., who assumed temporary command of the CAP in Binh Nghia and then revisited the village on a continuing basis during his tour in Vietnam. Each following year, until 1972, Bing West traveled to Vietnam as a research analyst with Rand Corporation. Binh Nghia became a Rand research project and Bing West its historian. The culmination of this research and personal experience is *The Village*—a moving, human, historically accurate and tightly written story about a few dedicated marines and their Vietnamese proteges fighting desperately to keep Binh Nghia alive.

Although based partly on personal knowledge, *The Village* is written as a research effort. Bing West has expertly concealed his own role in the book and has concentrated on the personalities of the marine enlisted men, their PF counterparts, the village politicians and bureaucrats, and the ageless farmers and fishermen who were trying only to

106 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

survive the war in their own small part of the world. And survive they did; although for nearly a year it was a moot issue. A main force VC battalion did finally succeed in wiping out nearly all the marine squad and their PF's in one night-long battle. That the surviving marines refused to leave Binh Nghia and stayed to reform their CAP may well have been the deciding factor in the continuing existence of the village under Government control. The next attempt to overrun Binh Nghia was repulsed almost before it got under way. From then on, combat operations diminished steadily as the VC avoided contacts. Binh Nghia slowly began to look like a village removed from the war. Inevitably, it was declared to be "secure," and the marine element of the CAP was redeployed to start over again in another village.

Binh Nghia was a microcosm of village life in Vietnam during a period of constant war, but it was not a microcosm of the war itself. Bing West has fortunately avoided the pitfall of generalizing from this one experience. Both the experimental nature of the operation and the proximity of marine forces and a major headquarters made it something of a showcase. The CAP concept soon spread, however, to become a significant operational effort in the III MAF area, with more than 100 villages hosting the marine squads. A specialized school was started in Danang for prospective CAP marines, and operations were hierarchically organized with higher headquarters located at district and province towns. Continued success in the hamlets, however, did not necessarily follow the precedent set at Binh Nghia.

The Village is strongly recommended not only for the professional military reader but for anyone who enjoys a well written combat narrative and a glimpse into the grassroots life of the Vietnamese themselves as they struggle for

survival. One caution to the reader: start the book early in the evening.

L.W. JACKLEY
Colonel, U.S. Army

Whaley, Barton. *Codeword Barbarossa*.

Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973. 376p.

"Modern historiography," we are told by Russian activist R.G. Colodny, "has tended to overlook the role of police and intelligence sources in the great social movements of history." Not so in this remarkable primer on intelligence and cover and deception operations. The war is a familiar one—World War II—the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany. This impressive re-counting of intelligence and counter-intelligence maneuvers across the chancellories and high commands of Europe (and the United States) reads like a mystery story, as, at one level, it is. For here codified in English for the first time is the documented case study of strategic surprise, one practiced by Hitler upon Stalin culminating in the fateful attack of 22 June 1941. The research, analysis, and painstaking intelligence work exhibited in this work should warm the hearts of intelligence officers the world over. What Professor Whaley discovers is a massive failure in Allied intelligence analysis despite 84 warnings of the coming invasion coupled with clever German deception operations and an unbelievable, cumbersome Soviet military and political bureaucracy which, despite early warnings (consistently misread) and later acceptance of the imminence of war, did nothing to counter the initial "surprise" assault. It would be difficult to underestimate the value of the research put into this book. His building of a critique of "strategic surprise" challenges Roberta Wohlstetter's brilliant model of surprise based on the Pearl Harbor Japanese operation. It deals with the famous five options open to Hitler