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The use of combat troops to construct roads, buildings, and other projects of social and economic importance has had a long history in human affairs, beginning in Biblical times. This function of combat forces is today vital for counterinsurgency operations. As a result the soldier of the future may well be as sensitive to human needs as he is proficient with a rifle.

MILITARY CIVIC ACTION

A lecture presented at the Naval War College

by

Major General Jonas M. Platt, U.S. Marine Corps

One of the problems in studying the subject of counterinsurgency is that the scope and complexity of our actions are often outstripping the vocabulary we have to describe them. I believe this is at least partially true in the case of military civic action.

Here is an abbreviated version of the JCS definition of military civic action, approved in 1962:

Military civic action is the use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population—contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of military forces with the population. (U.S. forces may at times advise or engage in military actions in overseas areas).

This is a good definition as far as it goes, but it gives two questionable impressions. First, the emphasis on indigenous

forces and the parenthetical, almost afterthought, that U.S. forces “may” engage in military civic action does not reflect the realities of today in the United States or Vietnam since U.S. forces in both places engage in widespread civic action. Second, the definition gives the impression that civic action must be in terms of concrete projects. It overlooks the possibility that the attitudes of the forces performing civic action may be even more important than the projects themselves.

Here is a definition used by General Lansdale: “Civic action can be a simple act of politeness to civilians by troops manning a roadblock; it can be a job of construction too large for the local people themselves to undertake.”

Dr. E.B. Gliek, in his book *Peaceful Conflict*, defines it even more broadly as “The non-military use of the military.”

My approach to civic action is to consider it in broad terms, to recognize that U.S. forces are heavily engaged in it, and to recognize that whenever

troops are engaged in it, their attitude toward the people is fundamental to civic action success. Thinking in these terms then, let's develop the subject of military civic action in this way:

First, I'll briefly touch on some pertinent history.

Second, I'll rapidly survey the scope of civic action performed by armed forces of nations other than our own.

Third, I'll examine U.S.-conducted military civic action within the "I Corps" area of South Vietnam.

And fourth, I'll offer some suggested lessons learned in the "I Corps" area in 1965-66 which I believe to be applicable to civic action conducted anywhere.

My purpose then is twofold: First, to give you a broad appreciation for the scope and variety of civic action. Second, to offer you some rather concrete general conclusions which I hope will be helpful in your study of counter-insurgency.

The History of Civic Action. Historically, military civic action is a very old practice indeed. Biblical armies built roads and public buildings; Incan soldiers built roads and irrigation systems in ancient Peru; Roman legions did all this, and more. Our own U.S. Army performed many engineering, medical, and agricultural activities in opening up the West. And that same Army helped attack the social and economic problems of the 1930's by building and running 1,455 "Civilian Conservation Corps" camps containing 3 million unemployed men. All these are historical examples of military civic action defined as the nonmilitary use of military resources. There are myriad other historical examples involving military forces of many other nations. In most of these instances, these nonmilitary tasks were done by the military for the simple reason that the military forces were the only organizations capable of

doing the jobs—and in many cases, this is still true today.

What is perhaps new about modern civic action is the concept that armed forces may be deliberately utilized in nonmilitary ways to improve their standing with the population as well as to improve the social and economic development of a nation. In this context the encouragement of allied military forces to conduct civic action had its genesis in 1958 when President Eisenhower's Committee to Study our Military Assistance Program suggested that, as a matter of policy, we encourage the use of the armed forces of underdeveloped countries as a major "transmission belt" of socioeconomic reform and development.

In 1961 President Kennedy related civic action to the various stages of subversion. National Security Action Memorandum # 119 contained this significant passage:

1. In countries fighting active campaigns against subversion, civic action is an indispensable means of strengthening the economic base and establishing a link between the armed forces and the populace.

2. In countries threatened by external aggression, forces should participate in military civic action projects which do not materially impair performance of the primary military mission.

3. In countries where subversion or external attack is less imminent, selected indigenous military forces can contribute substantially to economic and social development, and such a contribution can be a major function of such forces.

In his message to Congress on the Foreign Assistance Act of 1965, President Johnson said,

This . . . new act will provide . . . general emphasis on civic action programs. We shall give new stress to civic action programs through which local troops build schools and roads, and provide literacy training and health services. Through these programs, military personnel are able to play a more constructive role in their society, and to establish better relations with the civilian population.

Thus, in the early 1960's we find that military civic action was re-recognized at the highest levels as a proper and potentially promising employment of armed forces overseas, with particular emphasis being given to it as a significant means to counterinsurgency movements.

In the late 1960's we find a further re-recognition. We find under both Secretary McNamara and Secretary Laird a strong commitment to use the resources of the Department of Defense to help attack the urgent domestic problems of the Nation. This has been called "domestic action." In fact, it is domestic civic action.

Civic Action by Other Nations. Now let's briefly consider the scope of military civic action undertaken by some nations other than our own.

In Latin America, most countries have fairly well-established civic action programs. The main thrust of these programs is in the fields of engineering and construction, health and sanitation, and literacy and vocational training. Nearly half the total number of countries whose civic action programs are currently U.S. assisted are in Latin America.

The most common kind of civic action is military involvement in preventive medicine, disease control, and environmental sanitation. In some areas, the first doctor the people have ever

seen is a military doctor. In some areas, military medical facilities are made available to civilians. In others, military transport is used for medical evacuation. In Brazil, Peru, and Colombia, navy river boats serve as floating dispensaries serving the needs of people living along large rivers. Brazil's air medical unit service has, since it founding in 1956, taken well over 1 million X-rays and given more than 4 million treatments in the interior. In Bolivia, the army has built rural community water systems.

After medicine and public health, education is the most practical civic action activity. Great stress is laid on literacy training. The Colombian Army tries to give its soldiers the equivalent of a third-grade education. Peru requires draftees to learn to read and write. In Honduras, military units build schools. Many armies stress vocational training.

Practically all Latin American nations use their armed services to support and expand civilian transportation and communications. The air forces of Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil all fly passengers and cargo to remote and therefore commercially unattractive regions. The navies of five countries perform a similar transportation function. In numerous countries, army engineer units build roads and bridges.

The variety of civic action extends to other areas. Some armed forces promote the breeding and raising of horses, mules, and cattle. Others have farms to train soldiers for civilian farming. The Nicaraguan Guardia Nacional provides its junior officers agricultural training so they can be of some help to the peasants in remote sections.

These are but some examples, but they serve to give you an appreciation of the scope of civic action activities in Latin America. Some of these activities I have described are supported by U.S. dollars; some are not. In some of these activities, U.S. military personnel have served as advisers or occasionally as participants; in many others, we have

not. In any case, it is easy to see that the use of military forces for non-military accomplishment is rather widespread in Latin America.

In the Near East and Africa the United States has supported civic action programs in 15 countries, with the biggest recipients to date being Iran, Jordan, Guinea, and Senegal. In the Far East, we have furnished funds to support civic action in Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Before turning to a more detailed look at U.S.-conducted civic action in Vietnam, I do not want to leave you with the impression that the only countries with military civic action programs are those who have been recipients of our U.S. dollars or encouragement. Far from it. The armed forces of Spain, Cuba, the United Kingdom, Communist China, France, Russia, Turkey, and Algeria all participate in military civic action, and there are many others. Israel has the most highly developed civic action program in the world. She is also second only to the United States as the biggest "exporter" of civic action help abroad. And one might easily conclude that military civic action as practiced in Israel hardly detracts from her soldiers' ability to fight.

U.S. Civic Action in Vietnam. Now let us turn our attention to military civic action in South Vietnam, focusing on that conducted by U.S. military forces in the northernmost corps area, since I know that area best.

When did the Marines in the "I Corps" area get started in civic action and why? We started very early in the game in 1965 for reasons which were both altruistic and pragmatic.

From an altruistic standpoint, it was most hard to view the plight of the Vietnamese people and not offer the traditional American hand of help. From a pragmatic standpoint, there were about 100,000 Vietnamese within

81 mm mortar range of the Danang airfield. Whatever we could do to develop a friendly cooperative attitude toward Marines in that civilian population would obviously help us carry out our military mission.

There were other pragmatic reasons. Our job was to help the Government of Vietnam in nation-building, and when we added to the social or economic betterment of the people, we contributed to that end. With this in mind, we tried to be careful to see that much of the credit for our civic action went to Vietnamese officials.

Now let us briefly consider some of the kinds of activities which are included in the civic action program of the 3d Marine Amphibious Force (i.e., 3d MAF). One of our most widespread activities is the provision of medical treatment to Vietnamese civilians. In a country where the ratio of doctors to civilians is 1 to 36,000, this meets a crying need. Do you know what the ratio is in the United States? It is 1 to 700. Our doctors and corpsmen are hardly competing with the Vietnamese in working at this aspect of civic action. In the 4½ years that the 3d Marine Amphibious Force has been in Vietnam, we have provided well over 4 million medical treatments. Additionally, our medical people have trained about 9,000 Vietnamese in medicine at the junior corpsman level.

There's a lot to be done to improve public health in Vietnam. As one contribution to public health, we have distributed almost 350,000 pounds of soap and taught its value and use. We have also used our helicopters and vehicles to evacuate 19,000 ill or injured civilians to Vietnamese hospitals and to our own.

Our second area of emphasis is aimed at getting the children back in school. General Walt stressed the importance of this from the outset. Since the Marines' arrival we have supported the return of over 117,000 students to Vietnamese schools. We have done this by assisting

the Vietnamese in the construction of many schools and additional classrooms. We have also provided educational materials to the students we support.

When you are fighting in populated areas, one of the major problems is the provision of adequate care for refugees. Our contribution to meeting this problem is the emergency provision of food and clothing. Since our arrival we have provided almost 13 million meals and have distributed over 400,000 pounds of clothing.

Many other activities are included in the civic action program of 3d MAF. We have provided the materials for the construction of wells in the form of concrete pipe. Our engineers have helped the Vietnamese set up an earth-brick factory where many of the bricks used in the construction of schools and other buildings are manufactured by refugees. We've built and repaired many bridges. We've built dams and helped the Vietnamese repair irrigation ditches. All told, we have participated in over 4,800 construction projects of all types since March 1965.

We have even gotten into animal husbandry by sponsoring pig farms. And twice a year we join with the Vietnamese Army in protecting the rice harvest in areas threatened by the enemy.

Let us consider for a minute where the material support for Marine civic action comes from. Some of it comes from military supplies. Much of it comes from USAID in the form of food (such as bulgur wheat, rice, and cooking oil), and construction materials (such as cement, reinforcing bars, and tin). But this does not fill all the need. For that reason, and to give the Commanding General, 3d MAF, an organic capability to provide additional help rapidly, we have what is known as the Marine Corps Reserve Civic Action Fund. Organized in 1965, our Marine Reserves furnish and campaign for funds for the program, and CARE (Co-Operative for American Remittances to Everywhere)

provides the organization and expertise.

Here are some of the things this program has supported. Almost 320,000 self-help kits have been distributed. Designed by CARE, these include sewing kits, carpenter kits, and blacksmith kits all providing familiar means of helping the Vietnamese help themselves. There is even a midwife kit. Some of the funds have been used to purchase emergency food for battlefield refugees. Sewing machines and the machines used to make bricks were purchased through this fund. Large quantities of school supplies have been purchased and distributed. The fund was used to purchase materials for the construction and repair of more than 300 classrooms. Showers, blackboards, bulletin boards, pumps, and seeds are other items that have been financed.

Through this fund the Commanding General, 3d MAF, has the flexibility needed to finance civic action projects on a very short-term basis where and when needed. This is not as easily accomplished with appropriated dollars. It also, I might add, gives the Marine Corps Reserves an opportunity to participate in the Vietnam effort. To date, we have collected and solicited over \$751,000 for the fund. We are very proud of this effort.

The Ingredients of Effective Civic Action. So much for the scope of the Marine civic action program in "I Corps." What have we learned from this effort that would be applicable to civic action when it is used to combat insurgency in other areas of the world?

Let me offer you five characteristics of effective civic action:

First—Effective civic action meets the needs of the people and involves the people. Civic action is not a giveaway program. It should be based on a real need, preferably one expressed by the people themselves. Whenever possible most of the work should be done by the

34 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

people themselves with the military forces providing materials, advice, and assistance.

Take the case of a school. We can easily go into a village that has no school and erect one ourselves in short order. But this becomes our school and a likely target for an enemy torch. If, on the other hand, the villagers themselves build the school, it becomes their school—not ours—and the enemy may think pretty hard before they destroy it.

Americans are naturally action oriented. We are doers with all too little patience with the ways of others. In civic action this trait of ours often causes us to do far more ourselves than we should. The whole idea of civic action is to help the people help themselves meet a real need that they desire.

Second—Effective civic action involves local government officials. Local leaders should be in on the planning and the execution of any project, and they should get much of the credit. Remember that the basic aim of civic action is to win the support of the people for the government of their country. When we don't work with the local officials, we are detracting from that purpose. Unilateral U.S. projects may look good on statistical reports, but they rarely constitute good civic action. There have been a few schools in Vietnam without students because they were built without coordination with local government officials as to the provision of teachers.

Third—Effective civic action is coordinated with other U.S. agencies and with the Vietnamese. Today, in Vietnam, the entire U.S. governmental effort in support of pacification—which includes civic action—is under one head. It was not always thus. Let me tell you of our experience in "I Corps" in 1965.

Soon after his arrival in Vietnam, General Walt perceived the need to coordinate his civic action efforts with both other U.S. agencies and the Vietna-

mese Government. Through his efforts there was formed the "I Corps Joint Coordinating Council." This council brought together, once a week, top United States and Vietnamese officials for the specific purpose of better coordinating our efforts and exchanging ideas on how to improve our support. Membership on the U.S. side consisted of General Walt's Deputy and his Chief of Staff, the top U.S. civilian officials from the U.S. Agency for International Development, from the U.S. Information Service, and from our Embassy, as well as senior U.S. Army and Navy officers. Originally, Vietnamese representation was just a colonel two levels down from the corps commander. Eventually, and after some persuasion, the Chief of Staff of the Corps and the senior civil servant in I Corps both became members, as well as two deputy chiefs of staff. This balanced the membership on the Vietnamese side.

Early in the game the council established functional committees which brought together on a periodic basis all the United States and Vietnamese leaders in the fields of public health, education, commodities distribution, refugees, roads, and agriculture. The need for such an approach is readily apparent when it is realized that 15 U.S. private relief agencies were represented in I Corps alone. When one of these agencies sat with the commodities distribution committee, they learned what the others were doing. We could avoid having an excess of aid going to one orphanage, for example, while another 15 kilometers away was ignored.

Going back to the council itself, what made it really successful was the top-level nature of its membership. Let me give you an example of how we operated. In 1966, several months before I left, Marc Gordon, the senior aid official in I Corps, tabled a problem. He said he had a shipload of vitally needed fertilizer in Danang, but that he had no means available at that moment to get it

down to Quang Ngai and Quang Tri Provinces where it was urgently needed. Admiral Weschler, who commanded Naval Support Activity, Danang, spoke up and said he could arrange to ship it to Chu Lai. Colonel Nghi, Chief of Staff of I Corps, said he would furnish ARVN trucks and soldiers to get it from Chu Lai to Quang Ngai and Quang Tri. I spoke up and said that if Colonel Ngai did not have enough trucks, the Marines would be glad to help out. Thus, in weekly face-to-face meetings, key officials could solve major problems as they occurred, and we developed harmonious working relationships that played a major role in developing a team approach to the problem.

This then, was the approach we used to coordinate civic action in I Corps. I feel strongly that a similar approach is basic at any level and in any locale to achieve success.

Fourth—Effective civic action has command attention at all levels. This may be obvious but it needs to be said. Civic action is viewed as a relatively new activity for military forces in the present age. The commander may have to “sell” it. He most certainly must demonstrate by word and deed that he really believes in it.

Finally—and most important of all—Effective civic action is based on respect for people as people. It is not enough to provide widespread tangible help to the people in the form of projects. Basic to effective civic action is that we make it obvious to the people by act and attitude that we respect their basic worth and dignity as persons—that we truly believe that every man, regardless of race or creed, has a God-given right to be treated as a human being and have some say in how he is governed. The best civic action program in the world can be negated by the contemptuous or unthinking actions of an officer or a few troops.

Unfortunately, we have people who are automatically contemptuous of others because they are poor or dirty or have different beliefs than we. This contemptuous attitude manifests itself in many ways and is all too obvious to the local people.

Here's what a friendly Okinawan said in an interview: “After over 20 years, do you still have to act like conquerors?”

Here is what a prominent Vietnamese had to say: “Do not scorn the people. Respect our customs.”

This communication of contempt for others not only undermines civic action in wars for people, it costs us American lives. Morally or pragmatically, we have got to get over the unthinking approach.

This means a number of things. It means an intensive practical effort to give our men a general understanding of the way other people live and why their

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Maj. Gen. Jonas M. Platt was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1940 and subsequently served in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters aboard the U.S.S. *Washington* and later with the 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division, on the assaults on Peleliu and Okinawa. Following World War II he organized and commanded the Provisional Marine Guard at the United Nations Headquarters in New York; served on the faculty at the Marine Corps Schools, Quantico; commanded the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, in the Korean conflict; commanded the Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C.; and served as Assistant Division Commander of the 3d Marine Division at Chu Lai, Vietnam.

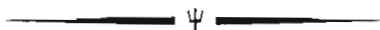
Major General Platt did his undergraduate work at Norwich University in Vermont, holds a master's degree in psychology from Ohio State University, and is a graduate of the National War College. He is presently serving as Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps.

36 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

practices are different from ours. It means a continuing effort in a specific country like Vietnam to help our troops understand the Vietnamese, their customs, and particularly their "taboos." It means that commanders at all levels must truly believe in such a program and let it show—that they practice what they preach. The Marine Corps has an active program to achieve these goals called the Personal Response Program.

Created in Vietnam, it is now an integral part of our training system.

In sum, insurgency and counterinsurgency actions are basically wars for people—particularly people in underdeveloped countries. Whoever is to succeed in these wars must recognize that there may well be times when the fighting man's attitude toward people may be as important as his proficiency with a rifle.



If historical experience teaches us anything about revolutionary guerrilla war, it is that military measures alone will not suffice.

*Brigadier General S.B. Griffith, USMC:
Introduction to Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare, 1961*