

THE MYTH OF THE VILLAGE:
REVOLUTION AND REACTION IN VIET NAM

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Samuel Lewis Popkin
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Signature of Author.....
Department of Political Science, February 13, 1969

Certified by.....
for

Accepted by.....
Chairman, Departmental Committee
on Graduate Students



BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

NAME:

Samuel Lewis Popkin

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH:

June 9, 1942 Superior, Wisconsin

ACADEMIC DEGREES:

B.S.,	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1963
Ph.D.,	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (expected)	Feb. 69

PREVIOUS POSITIONS:

Lecturer Political Science	Yale	67-68
Project director, researcher Simulmatics Corp.		65-67

PUBLICATIONS:

BOOK: Candidates, Issues & Strategies:
A computer Simulation of the
1960 and 1964 Presidential Elections
(with Ithiel Pool & Robert Abelson)
MIT Press, 1964.

ARTICLES: "Simulation of a communications System,"
American Behavioral Scientist, May, 1965.

"A Postscript on the 1964 Presidential
Election", (with Ithiel Pool &
Robert Abelson) American Behavioral
Scientist, May, 1965.

"Village Authority Patterns in Vietnam,"
Journal of Conflict Resolution, 1969.

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Samuel Lewis Popkin
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Pacification is the term commonly used in Viet Nam to refer to efforts of the central authorities to assert or restore control over villages.

Rather a different such explanation is sought, an exploration in the realm of politics, specifically the links between peasants, local leaders and the national government. The problem is unsolvable with money or force because it involves questions of the distribution of power and more specifically the need to replace the traditional model of village government. The failure of pacification was the failure to provide local institutional arrangements which satisfied the needs of both village and state. The Mandarin model of the autonomous, viable village is shown to be inadequate and to lead to an even larger gulf of mistrust between peasant and government. This lack of trust is shown to account for much of the Viet Cong success, through their use of techniques which are here called political judo.

This thesis, through an analysis of the military aspects of pacification, attempts to explain why so many men and so much money failed to provide effective rural security. This thesis argues that pacification requires effective local organizations. A detailed assessment of the Government of Viet Nam's two major local organizations, village and hamlet officials and the village militia, or Popular Forces, underscores the inadequacies of traditional explanations for the non-viable nature of peasant organizations. The study provides illustrations of techniques which have turned conventional weaknesses, such as "amoral familism", inadequate childhood socialization, fatalism, and localism, into strengths.

After 1965, the rural organizations suffered a massive dislocation as a result of several related developments: an

economic boom, search and destroy operations, and refugee flows. Although these developments helped to bring more population under government control, the local system itself was often weakened in the process.

Nevertheless, significant organizations can be developed: an analysis of more effective platoons of Popular Forces shows that the family is the key to commitment and village identification the key to effective military action. Analyses of the operating methods of these units suggest that the keys to pacification are security, trust, justice and rural development. It is shown that the family orientation, poverty and localism of the PF make it relatively economical to motivate them to perform within the village.

It is also suggested that the general problems of pacification could have been solved if the rural development program, village elections and PF were integrated into a coherent framework.

This thesis concludes that security for peasants and a concern for their welfare have never been items of high priority for any Saigon government. It is suggested, however, that if the war had been fought as though protecting the peasants were more important than killing Viet Cong the result would have been far less favorable to the Viet Cong than the peasant strategies have been.

Thesis Supervisor: Ithiel de Sola Pool
Title: Professor of Political Science

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with the response of the governments of the United States and the Republic of Viet Nam to the problem truly crucial to their war effort, that of rural security -- the pacification of the countryside.

Pacification is the term commonly used in Viet Nam to refer to efforts of the central authorities to assert or restore control over villages. In its effort to aid the government of Viet Nam in this task the United States has invested an extraordinary amount of military force and economic resources since the year 1954. Militarily, the returns have been less than ideal. If the military side of pacification has not been a total success, the established powers have only demonstrated that money and force cannot solve a problem that is political in essence.

The central problem of pacification is the translation of economic resources and military force into village control, clearly a political and not a technical problem because it concerns the distribution of authority among various elements of society. Specifically, it

derives from the inability of the central authority to develop formulas for successfully linking itself to the village in such a way that the ends of both the village and the state can be served. Even more narrowly, it implies the problem, never successfully resolved by any Saigon government, of finding a replacement for the traditional model of village authority that could satisfy the needs of the state and still be accepted within the village.

Central to the problem is the fact that neither the use of collective punishment nor economic growth is enough to ensure the development of village organization which can meet the needs of war. Organization can only be created by developing links of trust from peasant to government through local leadership acceptable to both. Neither force nor money are sufficient.

As we will show, war, especially collective punishment, does not of itself draw a people together. Sometimes, when massive force is applied to a population, solidarity, cohesion and the ability to perform complicated communal tasks increases -- but only where there are accepted and trusted leaders around whom the citizens can rally, as in the Battle of Britain. The experience of war can also be

profoundly disorganizing, atomizing not integrating society. A Londoner upon leaving a bomb shelter could turn to a trusted figure for advice and consolation. A Vietnamese peasant whose village has just been bombed, however, finds no one who can explain why or help him to reconstruct the damage or avoid further attack. He may find, as indeed happened in Hue, that the persons whom he expected to aid him are looting his home, the doctors he expected to help him fleeing with their families and the provincial authorities in hiding. The fear of mass attack is a unifier only if there is a meaningful alternative to the horror of war and someone to rally the people, someone who can be trusted.

If a military threat cannot weld a people together and gain their compliance for the demands of national survival, then neither can the strategy of the carrot, the massive distribution of economic resources without the development of organization. This economic "bribery" can make the state more tolerable or acceptable than any alternative states, but there must still be some one with the authority behind him to risk enforcing necessary but unpopular decisions locally, and more essential, to provide the protection for prosperity to flourish. Even a rich man alone in Central Park at night is vulnerable, no matter how

much money there is in his pocket; and in a whole community of well-to-do peasants someone must be willing to "tie the bell around the cat's neck." Only the support of an organized higher authority with open channels of communication can bear him out. In the end, of course, the force of the state must be behind him.

Raising the standard of living may be essential before the GVN can develop any interest or willingness to organize within a village, but no one may be willing to join or lead such a local organization unless it has some control over the distribution of the nation's resources, both economic and military. In fact, local organizations are viable only to the extent that they are not autonomous but instead have some link with the national government.

Despite their policy of pacification as security plus development, those in power in Saigon, according to a special United States report by John Vann, have tended to ignore a hamlet once it has been considered pacified. "The village government, which is elected by the people, is not readily accepted by the district and provincial government, which is basically a military government."¹ The inevitable conclusion is that Saigon has lost sight of

¹As quoted in Roberts, op. cit.

the need to link village authority with the national government.

Organization is crucial to mobilizing support in rural Viet Nam -- both for the Viet Cong and for the Government of Viet Nam. As Douglas Pike has noted:

The organizational 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 personal benefits, organizations which once established legitimately, can be used as channels of communication.²

The Saigon government does, in fact, have organizations reaching from village to capital. This thesis will show, however, that they are not viable. With the exception of the villages totally under the control of the Viet Cong, virtually every community has had a village chief responsible to Saigon acting as the head of a village council and in addition one or more platoons of soldiers recruited locally, militia men known as the Popular Forces.³

² Douglas Pike, Vietnam: Communication Factors of Revolutionary Guerrilla War. Cambridge, Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, May 1965, p. 8.

³ In the future, the Popular Forces will be designated by the abbreviation PF, the Regional Forces by RF, and the special Revolutionary Development team by RD. ARVN will stand for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the national force; GVN is the Government of South Vietnam.

The dealings of the Saigon authorities with the councils has consistently harked back to the days of the mandarins. Add to this their misunderstanding and mismanagement of the Popular Forces and it becomes clear just why all the contested villages are in fact contested, why 500,000 Americans, 600,000 Vietnamese soldiers, and millions of dollars in aid have not, even mobilized enough strength to neutralize their recruitment, propaganda and intelligence operations.

The basic techniques and policies of the Viet Cong have been well documented,⁴ but much less has been written about the village operations of the Government of Viet Nam and the ways in which they have contested control of the villages with the Viet Cong. This has contributed to a distorted view of the Viet Cong. That the Viet Cong are a remarkable organization with extraordinarily ability and even genius is not to be disputed here. It must be pointed out, however, that the misguided efforts of a state backed by over 500,000 American soldiers and billions of dollars in aid must be at least somewhat responsible for the success of the Viet Cong. It is rare for the flyweight champion of the world to do so well against even an average heavyweight.

⁴See the bibliography for work by Burchett, Pike, Conley, Joiner, Davison and Zasloff.

The problem of creating viable local organization has been poorly understood and poorly solved by the GVN pacification program. The implementation of pacification, 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. ⁵

Two assumptions implicit in this program have been the source of its limited success. First, it has been assumed that the problem has been one of greater loyalty to the government on the part of the villagers, and second, it has been accepted that security is possible before development.

Loyalty to the government on the part of the peasants is a rather meaningless phrase because in an internal war loyalty to a nation in the absence of trusted local officials through whom the loyalty can flow is of no avail. The problem is best put that the government has not been loyal to the peasants. It has given them inadequate defenses and then destroyed the village when the Viet Cong entered. It has given unresponsive officials and provided no channels for redress of grievances.

⁵Gene Roberts, "Broad Changes in Pacification Urged," New York Times, May 24, 1968.

Nor can security occur without development. The basic security system was not capable of generating the information flow or military coordination to keep an area secure.

Because it has failed to understand the true state of affairs in the countryside and the hopes and frustrations of its peasant population, the Saigon government has been unable to transform a city state into a nation. Historically, the peasant looked to the capital and the emperor for direction. Even today, it would be a mistake to believe that his allegiance has been wholly captured by the Viet Cong movement; for the most part the peasant waits, he is "attentiste". It is obvious that looking up to the mandarins is no longer the kind of loyalty that can insure tranquility and order in a modernizing state. Before the peasant can be loyal to the nation of Viet Nam he must have someone to whom he can be loyal, someone he can trust. For pacification to succeed, a bargain must be struck which will bind the villagers to the nation and put them, in fact, more under national control than any set of military-administrative directives. This has seldom happened because village organizations have seldom been capable of generating enough trust in the village to provide the government with a basis for an integrated strategy.

The explanations advanced in the literature on political development to account for the inability of peasants in particular, or developing nations in general, to achieve effective and adaptive organizations usually are phrased in terms of inadequate childhood socialization, peasant fatalism or "amoral familism". This thesis suggests that these general explanations need not be hindrances to effective organizations and that the failure is not cultural, but political.

Explanations of organizational failures involving socialization generally consider childhood socialization the key to the ability to enter into the kinds of agreements and relationships modern organization requires.⁶

Explanations of the failure of peasant organizations stressing "amoral familism" suggest that family loyalty and an unwillingness to trust anyone outside of the family are the cause of failure.⁷ This is also sometimes stated in terms of society being a "zero-sum game" namely that peasants do not cooperate because they fear that anything one man gains another man loses.

⁶Lucian Pye, Politics Personality and Nation Building. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963, p. 51.

⁷Banfield, E.C., The Moral Basis of a Backward Society. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1958.

Explanations of organizational failure voiced in terms of fatalism usually stress that peasants are passive, apathetic, pessimistic, acceptant, pliant, evasive, and conservative. ⁸

Childhood socialization cannot explain the problems of the RF/PF for their basic value system emphasizes dependence and the group over the individual. Furthermore the exceptional PF units demonstrate that later socialization can be effective in overcoming the family orientation of the peasant and developing a public orientation.

Nor can fatalism explain the problems of organization for as Hendry has shown, Vietnamese peasants are conservative with respect to risk not change.⁹

Nor is amoral familism sufficient. Even in Banfield's village, there were two peasant organizations--a burial society and a recreation association. One has only to notice the complex infrastructure of the Viet Cong in order to realize that civil war can be an equally viable catalyst to peasant organization.

⁸Niehoff and Anderson, "Peasant Fatalism and Socio-Economic Innovation", "Human Organization", Winter 1966.

⁹Hendry, op. cit.,

Each of these general basic explanations is inadequate to account for the general passivity and defensiveness of village soldiers because it fails to give sufficient credit to the fact that the Vietnamese peasant, what ever else he may be, is extraordinarily flexible--at least to the extent that he can endure or be a part of widely varying organizations. As the scattered successes of effective PF platoons demonstrated, peasant are easily manipulated by those who understand the priorities of peasant existence and have the political power to meet these minimal requirements.

In this thesis it is suggested that the failure of the pacification program was a failure of politics, a failure to provide institutional arrangements which could have satisfied the requirements of both village and state. The thesis thus focuses on the operation of the institutional machinery designed to utilize the superiorities of force and material resources to achieve military victory and produce a unified national state. Chapter II discusses the formal design and operational elements of the Saigon and Viet Cong military systems. It seeks to show the manner in which institutional arrangements reveal the widely different conceptions of the war in Saigon and among the Viet Cong. Chapter III analyzes the village as it was viewed by Ngo Dinh Diem and his successors. Basically,

Diem's view of the village was based on the traditional model of the village as it was established before the French came to Viet Nam. In Chapter III we discuss the original mandarin model of government and suggest that the essential conditions which gave the system what viability it once possessed were no longer present. The growth of cities, strong central government, and individual taxation led to conditions in which village government had no real political power and autonomous villages were unable to command the allegiance of peasants. The village was merely a geographic entity and not a community with the ability to mobilize the peasants.

In the early years of the war the misconceptions about the viability of the traditional village led to a situation in which the Viet Cong were relatively unimpeded when confronting autonomous villages with no meaningful links to outside authority. Chapter IV emphasizes that the Viet Cong were able to grow largely by exploiting the inability of the government to react to them without aiding them, a situation that could not be prevented because village soldiers stood alone against the Viet Cong, peasants were unprotected from the government, and the reaction of government officials beyond the village to the possibility of personal betrayal

tended to leave the peasants more and more distant from the government. Each government official acted in a fashion that minimized the chance of personal betrayal by subordinates. This caused the local base of support to narrow steadily. The linkage of trust between peasant and government steadily weakened.

Chapter V identifies the basic operating characteristics of the village security system after the American buildup in 1965, showing that the security system was lacking in the capacity for strategy and was in a defensive posture where the Viet Cong could be impeded but not stopped or made to retreat.

Chapter VI explains the basic problems causing the weakness of the system by showing that the military system was not congruent with the realities of marginal men, the miserably poor, landless, family oriented men who were the only peasants willing to suffer the abuse from all sides that befell village soldiers. Chapter VI explains in these terms why these men were unable to provide the military prerequisite to pacification.

Because the rural security system was not viable large Viet Cong units could intrude into the populated

areas. This brought large numbers of American, Korean and ARVN soldiers into contact with villagers and created large flows of refugees and a war boom of considerable proportions. Chapter VII discusses how the excesses and brutalization of the large units when combined with the economic boom produced a situation in which the basic rural security system was drastically weakened by the destabilizing effect of these displacements.

Finally, Chapter VIII discusses the requirements of pacification in light of the lack of commitment to security from the government and establishes that marginal men could become effective only when their basic values were taken into account by the military. The reasons why the RD program and the village election made so little impact on pacification is discussed in light of the process via which some leaders were able to achieve pacification.

War is not a popularity contest or an election in which the victor can be predicted from opinion polls. Nor is war solely a matter of force in which the victor is always the belligerent with the most military strength. Potential support can be mismanaged; force without information is inefficient. And even with information a meaningful understanding of society and an empathy for its people may still be needed.

Americans often forget the British experience in the American Revolutionary War. When the Redcoats first arrived in force they found so many loyalists that they decided there could be only a few revolutionaries and dissatisfied men. Thus, at first the British ignored the loyalists, and when they finally realized that local participation was essential, it was already too late to make the necessary arrangements. In a paragraph all too reminiscent of Viet Nam, one historian has stated:¹⁰

In dealing with the loyalists, Britain made two palpable errors: she turned to them for assistance much too late, and then relied upon them much too completely. Basic ignorance of colonial conditions and sheer incompetence, to be sure, lay at the core of these errors. Equally, however, they were committed because government was not at any time entirely at liberty to conduct the war on purely military grounds. Thus foreign interventions, political

¹⁰Paul H. Smith. Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1964, p. 172.

pressures and poor intelligence led to adoption of a policy which had major limitations at best and grave defects at worst. Never free to wage total war in America, Britain inaccurately gauged the possibilities and limitations of the restricted warfare she was free to pursue. Only vaguely aware of these subtle limitations, she relied upon a series of inconsistent plans of which her loyalist policy was the least well managed. That confused policy stands as a monument to the hazards which inhere in the conduct of limited war.

The war had certainly numbed and disoriented millions of peasants, but the remarkable and tragic thing was how many peasants still cared enough to talk, complain, plead, or gossip. When this writer first arrived in Viet Nam, he adopted as his 'working position' the view that most peasants were pro- Viet Cong and that only massive American force was holding down 'the people'. Since most contact was to be with U.S. and GVN military, this view was adopted as a rather primitive check against too hastily assimilating the views of those groups. In the end, this writer's position was quite different from either of these extremes: it was that while the Viet Cong were remarkable and admirable in many ways, they did not have all the good men and they no longer had very much peasant support; nevertheless they would probably win - or at least endure - anyway, because the U.S. - GVN effort appeared so hopelessly far from being able to mobilize the

resources of peasant society. It seemed that if only trivial and small changes were made they could make extraordinary differences in a hurry. What looks like a 'small change', however, can often mean a total re-orientation - a 'technical' inch may be a 'political' mile. Freedom without justice can mean a good life, but it cannot draw a people together. Lasting peace can only be possible when private accommodations of fragmented groups merge into a single public policy.

Localism and family-oriented attitudes have simultaneously decreased the effectiveness of the GVN's village organizations and precluded the constructions of a unified society, but these are not merely symptoms of a general anarchism. The same cultural pattern which contains these views also holds an intensely communitarian strain. Family-oriented peasants can be made public-oriented as well, if the system seeking to co-opt them can only inspire their trust and dependence.

But for the larger system to make such an effort requires that its basic views include, in a position of high priority, the task of gaining peasant trust. There is little indication, in practice, that the Vietnamese government ever placed great emphasis on such a priority.

As a story from one peasant's TAT stated:

This is a beggar asking alms. And the other is well off but not charitable. He looks down upon the beggar. And the wife is suffering from the attitude of her husband.

Before, Viet Nam had been under many inequitable regimes, the population were then wretched, ragged but there were at the same time some who were too rich.

The beggar is thinking of the inequitable society. Human beings don't love human beings. The rich man is thinking how to chase the beggar. His wife, being a charitable woman, is suffering in seeing such a thing.

The beggar would leave them without receiving alms, because at the present time, there is still injustice.

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CHAPTER II

THE STRUCTURE OF RURAL WARFARE

Viewed in terms of formal organization, the political - military systems of the GVN - U.S. on the one hand, and the Viet Cong - North Vietnamese on the other, are strikingly similar. On paper, both systems are complex structures designed to meet the varied contingencies of a multilayered war. Power and responsibility for different phases of the war are theoretically delineated in much the same fashion by both sides. Yet, these formal similarities conceal basic and fundamental differences in the two structures, as well as differences in the way the two sides have seen the priorities of the war. To understand these areas of contrast, it is necessary to compare the manner in which the two systems evolved. While the GVN started from the top with a national army and only grudgingly came to recognize the need for effective local units, the Viet Cong began with small guerrilla forces and worked its way up to large military units. The Viet Cong were organized to fight a village war; the GVN, prepared for large scale warfare similar to Korea, have been unable to develop the organizational integration necessary to meet the Viet Cong challenge in the village.

The purpose of this chapter is simply to detail the elements of the two systems and explain the basic systems of corridors and bases necessary to both sides. This will make it possible in later chapters to concentrate on the interaction of the two systems in the villages without having to stop for explanation each time a new element is mentioned.

Elements of Government System

The military system developed after 1954 was better suited to face a Korean type invasion than an internal war against enemy units supported by guerrillas, liberated villages, and extensive local intelligence. Ever since, a major problem has been an unsuccessful adaptation to an internal war.

The Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) was always considered to be the key to South Viet Nam's defense and was supported from 1954 by the United States. At the time of the Geneva Armistice there were 200,000 Vietnamese under arms in support of the French fight against the Viet Minh, but the initial United States decision was that 85,000 men would be sufficient for South Vietnam's needs. In fact, with ultimate irony, the initial U.S. design, according to Lt. General John W. O'Daniel, head of the Army Advisory program for training was for the army to be "... a police force capable of spotting communist guerrillas and communist efforts at infiltration."¹

This initial decision was changed, and ARVN ultimately emerged not as a mobile rural police force but as a

¹New York Times, February 13, 1955, page 1, as quoted in William A. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Vietnam, Praeger Special Studies in International Politics and Public Affairs. New York: Praeger, 1966, p. 42.

150,000 - man army patterned along U.S. lines and prepared for a Korean type invasion.² While the move was certainly prompted at least somewhat by U.S. memories of Korea, where an 85,000 - man constabulary was quickly overrun, Diem's traditional attitude played a major role, since he considered a large army to be a symbol of prestige.³

At first no conscription of enlisted men into the national army was necessary, as the army's pay was sufficient to keep many of the original forces in the service and to attract enough more men. A draft for officers was needed even then, however, because other opportunities were available for the holders of the baccalaureat, the prerequisite for officer's training. If a number of men did in fact become career officers, they were likely to join when the diversion of more and more U.S. commodities to Army channels made being an officer a more lucrative position.

The original basis for ARVN was a colonial army which had tolerated, if not actually encouraged, officers to profit from their rank. As Jumper noted in 1956, the military profession in Viet Nam has always had "strong venal overtones," and "in the past, Vietnamese officers fought with the French for what they could individually get out of the relationship."⁴

²Duncanson, op. cit., p. 289.

³Ibid., p. 254.

⁴Roy Jumper, "The Communist Challenge to South Viet Nam," Far Eastern Survey, XXV (1956), p. 165.

From 1961 to 1967, ARVN grew to nearly 300,000 men. The army made virtually no use, during this expansion, of the more highly skilled and effective NCO's to expand the officer corps. ARVN thus remained primarily an army of peasants with inexperienced urban officers.

ARVN is, however, but half of the Vietnamese Armed Forces. The other half consists of the Regional and Popular Forces, each with about 150,000 men in 1966-67. The RF and PF were at least as active as the national army.

The Regional Forces developed from the French Garde Civile de Cochinchine, an all-Vietnamese corps organized in units directly controlled by the French province chiefs.⁵ Reconstituted as the Regional Forces under Diem, their size dropped to 40,000 in 1959 and would have dropped even further had it not been for the Viet Cong uprising. In fact, the RF reached a strength of 72,000 by 1963 and 150,000 by 1966.

The precipitous reversals in RF strength stemmed from unresolved differences among the Saigon leadership and their American advisors over the role of the RF. Diem wanted a potent counterweight to the Army, the CIA police advisors to the Michigan State University Advisory Group wanted a rural police force, and the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) opposed any force which might deflect men and resources from ARVN.⁶

⁵Duncanson, op. cit., p. 101.

⁶Duncanson, op. cit., p. 288.

Because of these disagreements over the RF's role, most U.S. aid was withheld; but Diem was not prevented from building a counterweight to ARVN, which he manned largely with officers and NCO's inherited from the national army itself. According to Scigliano, these men were of inferior quality.⁷ By 1959, the Michigan State Group had stopped working with the RF; and in 1960, under the public safety division of the U.S. Operating Mission (now U.S. Agency for International Development), a program was instituted to strengthen the RF and give them counter-guerrilla training. Before the program could be implemented, however, the RF were transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Department of National Defense concomitant with transfer of U.S. responsibility to Military Assistance Advisory Group. The RF were now to be a junior version of ARVN. Nighswonger reports "confirmed evidence" that the USOM efforts to create a rural anti-guerrilla force were "deliberately obstructed" by elements in MAAG and in the U.S. military command.⁸

The RF, then, became a junior version of ARVN, organized into companies generally controlled by Province and District Chiefs. Their national command structure and

⁷Robert Scigliano, South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964, p. 164.

⁸William A. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Vietnam, p. 44.

training remained separated from ARVN's until September 21, 1966, when all Vietnamese military commands merged under ARVN. While their pay and privileges were less than those of the national forces, most RF members had the advantage of serving their native provinces and districts.

The third major element of the Vietnamese Armed Forces is the Popular Forces - in effect, the little brothers of the RF. Organized on a platoon basis, the PF receive lower pay and fewer privileges than either ARVN or RF. PF units are always stationed within their home district, however, and usually in their home villages.

The PF developed out of diverse village and hamlet level defense groups, most of which were seldom armed with anything more than sticks and clubs. Originally the PF were "peasant by day, soldier by night" village defenders, but in 1961 they, too, were transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Department of National Defense, and a program was instituted to place them in full-time military service. In 1966, the PF and the RF were placed under ARVN command.

The years 1958 to 1967 saw the progressive militarization of local Vietnamese administration. Increasingly, province and district chiefs came to be chosen from among career officers of the national army. Only one district studied

in 1967, An Nhon in Binh Dinh, had a civilian district chief, and all 9 provinces studied had military province chiefs. District Chiefs controlled the RF and PF units in their districts and held nominal authority over all district-level administration. Although national RF/PF training centers were scattered throughout Vietnam, many RF/PF received their training within their own district.

As military commander, the district chief had great latitude in determining the type of training his RF/PF received, the military and political tactics to be used within his district, and the role to be played by religious and community leaders.

Parallel to the Vietnamese district and provincial system, a chain of American military advisors developed after 1961. At the district level, the American team typically consisted of two officers and three enlisted men. The two officers, generally a major and a captain, were in theory to work as advisors to the district chief and his assistant in charge of RF/PF. The enlisted men were usually a medic, a radio operator, and a local intelligence liaison. Depending on district needs and personal tastes, they acted variously as air and artillery controllers, logistics teams, checks on corruption, liaison with American units in the area, and evaluators of local security.

ARVN and RF had both been originally conceived as militia forces. When they were militarized, a police force to replace them was developed only in the large cities. Finally, in 1963, Washington agreed to support an increase of the National Police from 21,000 men to 72,000 and to extend it into rural areas. The police did not reach this strength, however, until 1967. By this time, in the aftermath of Diem's fall, ARVN had already brought the police under control and partially militarized them.⁹

After 1965, another important presence on the rural scene was the much-publicized Revolutionary Development Teams. These 59 - man teams, which for security often work in conjunction with an ARVN battalion or and RF company, spend several months in a single hamlet. The purpose of the teams is to improve the peasant's life, win his loyalty to the government, and improve security by moving villagers to defend themselves.

⁹Duncanson, op. cit., p. 258.

Elements of Viet Cong System

The element that has been central in the Chinese experience and in both Vietnamese revolutions has been that system of cadres usually called the infrastructure. The infrastructure is the elite of the revolution, the men who guide the masses, keep them involved, spread knowledge of the revolution, and administer the complex variety of functions that any shadow government must perform. In Viet Nam, the infrastructure "controls local guerrilla bands, collects taxes, orders assassinations, sets up organizations in villages, spreads propaganda, collects intelligence, recruits soldiers and provides guides for North Vietnamese units staging an attack in the area."¹⁰

Beyond the initial cadres, another need of the Viet Cong has been to develop an army, a control system, and a system of base areas and corridors. They have filled this need through their ability to work with and control peasants. Thus the second central conception of their strategy is the development of a "People's Army" needed to protect the revolutionary communities. The "People's Army," is radically different from an "army of peasants": the former stresses political education as well as military training and depends

¹⁰William Brucher, "Viet Cong agents 'Target of Drive'" New York Times, August 4, 1968, p. 8.

on service to revolutionary goals, on satisfying and rewarding relations between officers and men and on help for the peasants at home to build its dedication and effectiveness.

While the Viet Cong, later Viet Cong, and PAVN (People's Army of North Viet Nam) military system functions and meshes quite differently than the GVN - U.S. system, the units are roughly equivalent. Viet Cong main force units, local forces, and guerillas are the rough equivalent of ARVN, the RF, and the PF.

Before the Viet Cong organization was extended throughout the countryside into all villages, however, the main focus of the cadres was on villages in and around what were to become base areas and supply corridors. This differential treatment was a consequence of the fact that villages vary greatly in tactical importance. In general terms, the two most important kinds of villages from the standpoint of either side are villages in base areas and villages along supply corridors.

Both the Viet Cong and GVN military organizations have extensive transportation and logistics systems that must be kept open to allow free circulation of men, equipment and food for their war effort and for the basic economy of their area. The GVN must exert maximum pressure to keep certain

villages under its control because these villages lie along major highways. An Nhon district in Binh Dinh, for example, has been a high priority area for the government because the highway from Quinhon to Pleiku split the district in two. If the Viet Cong could gain control of this district today, they would isolate Pleiku and the American troops in the Highlands.

Similarly, the Viet Cong have their own routes that must be kept open to insure communication between their own strategic areas and to transport their men and supplies. Both sides are prepared to do incredibly brutal and bloody fighting to keep their corridors open. A token of their importance can be seen in the attitude of one PF outpost in Long An situated in a Viet Cong corridor. Its men quite simply refused to take their stations; and, although the district chief tried every punishment short of execution, he could not persuade them to face what they considered certain death.

Both sides have base camps that they will protect to the bitter end. Since neither side can hope to gain control of all the population at once, a base area is a necessity for a prolonged effort. Saigon is obviously the GVN's most important base, and it is easy to understand why Long An and Dinh Tuong were such important early targets for the Viet Cong: these two provinces control the roads and

waterways that give access to the delta from Saigon. Some of the bloodiest fighting of the war has gone into the Viet Cong base in Northern Binh Dinh. The base areas and supply corridors together constitute the vital system which either side needs to progress in an effort to control the population. For the Viet Cong:

The system functions in response to the needs of the three-tiered armed force. It provides lodging and rest areas for units in motion, cached supplies of food and munitions, routed communications, transit points, staging areas and medical facilities. In the more remote regions facilities for training, and for weapons manufacture and repair are included.¹¹

As the insurgency progresses, the base area system which the revolutionaries control begins to expand into populated areas, what the Viet Cong call the liberated areas.

At this point, a note of clarification is necessary. A certain amount of confusion about the local war in Viet Nam has resulted from the fact that the American news media, unfamiliar with the Vietnamese countryside, have failed to bring out a crucial complicating factor in the fight to control the rural order: the difference between the Vietnamese village and the hamlet. The Vietnamese hamlet is the living group most like the small

¹¹Lt. Colonel William J. Buchanan and Lt. Colonel Robert A. Hyatt, Counter guerrilla Operations. A special study conducted at the U.S. National War College, March 19, 1968, pages I-12.

face-to-face communities which the word village brings to mind for Americans, whereas the village is more like a township or a very small county containing an average of 6 hamlets in an area of about 4 square miles, which form a unit of national administration.

South Viet Nam consists of about 2,365 villages containing about 13,000 hamlets, the number varying as administrative lines change. The average hamlet contains about 250 families and 1000 people. The size vary considerably, however, with some hamlets near Saigon or in populous parts of the Mekong Delta containing as many as 5,000 people and some isolated hamlets containing no more than a few hundred people.

Because each village is composed of several scattered living areas, security and control varies greatly within a single village which may well shelter soldiers from both sides. Usually, in the areas studied, the GVN controlled the hamlet which served as village headquarters and the hamlets nearest to it. One or two hamlets farther from the village headquarters would often be controlled by the Viet Cong both day and night. Even when there were no hamlets totally under Viet Cong control, there were usually one or more hamlets to which they had easy access at night.

If a hamlet had once been under total Viet Cong control and then changed hands or at least fallen under partial

government control, declared Viet Cong cadres would be staying elsewhere, but the village would still harbor covert Viet Cong supporters and members of Viet Cong families. On the other hand, Viet Cong hamlets were usually not "homogeneous" either, often containing families with men in ARVN or RF/PF, even an occasional ex-village official, and many villagers who did not favor the Viet Cong.

CHAPTER III

THE MYTH OF THE VILLAGE

" . . . The world of the individual peasant is one of suffering and repressed dissent, reflecting the response of the average individual to coercive authority, the inefficient guidance and unchallenged power of elders, the prescriptive nature of peasant virtues, the severe character of rigid mores, and the confinement of standards based upon identification by kin affiliation."

Beqiraj, Mehmet, Peasantry in Revolution, Cornell Research Papers in International Studies - V, 1966, p. 1.

A fundamental failure of all pacification efforts in Viet Nam since 1954 has been the lack of development of a workable system for linking village institutions to those of the larger society. This failure is deeply rooted in Vietnamese traditions which emphasize village autonomy and village self-sufficiency. These traditions are unworkable in a modern national system. They were developed at a time when central government was weak, there were no cities and village problems were largely solvable within the village.

This chapter deals with Diem's model for organizing the village political framework and his fundamental misconceptions of the traditional system, especially his assumption that the traditional institutions worked in the past, and could work

in the present, on a basis of altruism, community spirit, and traditional legitimacy. Not understanding the impact on the village structure of changes taking place elsewhere in the country, Diem regarded the village wholly as an expression of the traditional system and values of the mandarin era. He believed, then, what is referred to here as "the myth of the village". By clinging to this traditional interpretation he destroyed the possibility of establishing a viable relationship between the central government and the village, thereby contributing to the internal disintegration of the village structure; he thus gave the Viet Cong the opportunity to establish their own system of control.

This thesis of the "myth of the village" will be explored in the remainder of Chapter II. We shall discuss village organization in three recent phases of Vietnamese history - the mandarin period, the period of French colonization, and the political system under Diem beginning in 1954. This discussion will attempt to show that the central government was successful in maintaining control of the village only when its authority over the village was based on power elements directly tied into the village economic and social system itself. When the central government tried to exert its authority through elements no longer integral to the village, the government failed but the village structure itself was irreparably damaged.

Villages in the Mandarin Period

Vietnamese village history is often interpreted as showing great altruism and community spirit. Existence of a primitive village welfare system, the ability to provide self-defense, and collective responsibility for building and maintaining irrigation systems are taken as evidence of great community spirit and village devotion. They have also led many modern Vietnamese to believe that the same village institutions and traditions could be successful today. The "last Confucian," Ngo Dinh Diem, had faith that "village traditions, if once reinstated, would of themselves expel the Viet Cong like natural antibiotics."¹ An examination of traditional village life illustrates, however, that this idyllic view was seriously inadequate.

Before the French colonization, the sentimentalists argue, the villages of Viet Nam were autonomous and viable. To a certain extent this description does hold true of the pre-colonial setting. At that time, Viet Nam possessed a very weak central government whose role was more to oversee than to execute the functions of government. Administration of taxation, welfare and public works was the affair of the village. The traditional elite of the village council controlled the formula determining individual shares of the village tax assessments; they determined the distribution of

¹Dennis Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1968

communal and cult land, the planning of irrigation systems, the storage of rice against famine, the maintenance of public ways and buildings -- in short, everything that comprised government in the village.

As for the imperial government, in the words of Paul Mus:

It was authoritarian, but it preserved a ritualistic distance between itself and its subjects ... The Vietnamese state kept aloof from too pressing material obligations by reserving for itself the right of verification and eventual repression, but not of execution ... The state was a coordinator. Its object was to prevent the smaller community from going astray and its chief ministers were a kind of high tribunal sitting in judgment before lapses from the Confucian model.²

The emperor based his legitimacy upon the "mandate of heaven," a polite expression for the identification of rightful authority with power, which provided no theory of succession or revolution. The winner of power was a king; the loser, a bandit.

The mandarinal examinations were the main road to status and power in pre-colonial Viet Nam, a country which lacked developed cities with their population of absentee landlords and their opportunities for the making of urban fortunes. As many as 5,000 aspirants would present themselves at these examinations, supposedly held triennially but more often

²Paul Mus, "Vietnam: A Nation Off Balance," Yale Review, Summer, 1952.

disrupted by war, palace coups or general instability.³ Those who passed them were accepted into the administration as mandarins and were sent out into the countryside as agents of the government.

Paradoxically, those who failed the exams were probably as important to the well being of the state as its regular servants. Those who failed and these were the majority - nevertheless returned to their villages with new prestige, and with tax exemptions for their families. They became the school teachers who provided the cultural continuity of the country and filled out the society of village notables. Nearly every village had a retired mandarin or a failure who knew how the affairs of government were conducted and how to talk to its representatives. Still more important, these failed candidates usually had successful friends from school days who might be able to smooth the way for some important business of the village. Today, by contrast, government officials are recruited from the bourgeoisie, live in urban areas, and enjoy the modern life befitting their respected position. As yet, no one has taken their place in the village. The village has, consequently, less linkage to central authority than under the mandarin system.

The mandarin system, understandably, emphasized the values of loyalty and tranquility, even at the expense of honesty, justice and harmony. As long as he suppressed

³Buu Duong, "The Role of Confucianism in the History of the Vietnamese Mandarinal System," Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Ph.D. thesis, 1958.

bandits, raiders, and rebels in his province or district, the mandarin was required only to deliver the taxes to the imperial administration, keeping what may have been as much as two thirds of the revenue for himself.⁴ Many villages regularly practiced tax evasion by falsifying their tax rolls. The behavior of the mandarins becomes more understandable, however, when it is observed that they probably received no regular salary before the year 1839,⁵ and that although he kept a large share of the taxes to meet his own expenses, he probably found it necessary to use another portion to make accommodation with the local village notables whose support was necessary to preserve the order and tranquility upon which his career depended. As long as the countryside was quiet, his communications with the emperor were less working reports than expressions of loyalty. Mandarins were left to their own resources to deal with local disturbances; and, although they were nominally only agents for the transmission and execution of the imperial ordinances, "In practice, ... they enjoyed a great deal of authority because even the most urgent communications between Hue [the capital] and the frontier provinces required a minimum of eight days."⁶

⁴Roy Jumper, Political and Administrative History of Vietnam, M.S.U.G., 1962, p. 53.

⁵Alec Woodside, "Some Features of the Vietnamese Bureaucracy Under the Early Nguyen Dynasty." Harvard Papers on China, 1964, p.22

⁶Roy Jumper, op. cit., p. 32.

Life in the countryside before the French, therefore, was a picture far from the tranquil pastoral ideal commune which some twentieth century Vietnamese still imagine it to be. The village was relatively self-sufficient and self-contained, but it may also have been a self-contained little world of seething resentment, frustration and rancor. Its harmony was, at best, superficial. Every peasant had "a place in the sun," but this usually meant not security, but dependence without recourse on the village notables who determined who would supply corvee labor, who would be drafted, and who would pay taxes.

Village closure, or self-containment, in fact, had been imposed on the villagers from above during the occupation of their land by the Chinese, who used the village as their unit of population control. Since families were not allowed to leave the village, their place in the village again represented a hidden form of coercion. A place in the village meant no chance to move.

Confucian values were meant to provide the restraint necessary to assure an equitable life for all; but in fact the members of the village council could be expected to look out for themselves first when deciding who would supply corvee labor, who would be drafted, and who would pay taxes. An example of the opportunities for petty corruption and exploitation on the part of the village elite appears in the court record of the early nineteenth century. Village

communal lands, held at the disposal of the landless in each locality, were co-opted by the village leaders of Binh Dinh province in the first years of the century to form large private estates. This abuse came to the attention of the court as early as 1803, but it was 1839 before any corrective action was taken.⁷

The absence of cities meant that landowners and men familiar with the mandarins from their school days lived in the village. Decentralized government and the leeway available to the mandarins meant that these upper class villagers could bargain and work with the mandarin to control their villages. Serious problems in the village could bring the aid of outside troops. More easily, however, their control of lands and individual taxation gave the village leaders great opportunity for organizing villagers to perform communal works. Recalcitrant villagers, for example, who might protest that the oligarchs were not paying their 'fair share' of taxes or aiding in maintaining irrigation systems might lose their land rental rights, or the village leaders might hire other peasants to subdue the protesters. The "oppressed proletariat" whether rural or urban, are not necessarily united. As Jay Gould once remarked in the U.S., "I can hire one half the working class to kill the other half."⁸

⁷Roy Jumper, Notes on the Political and Administrative History of Vietnam, M.S.U.G., Saigon, 1962.

⁸Mancur Olson Jr., The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups New York, 1968, p. 70

There was also an effective way for the mandarins to control the village leaders. Should the elite of a village fail to keep order or go beyond the bounds of propriety, rather effective sanctions were available to the mandarins in the form of collective punishment. A village that became the scene of a riot, refused to pay its taxes, or harbored even a single dead body was subject to destruction.⁹ Since there were no cities, and other villages were closed to the disobedient villagers, village destruction meant a long trek to new lands and starting life over. Everyone suffered, including those who had started the trouble.

Even in its most perfect form, then, the mandarinal government by the "morally just individual" did not always approximate the ideal. Just as important, however, was the fact that the system at its best was never adequate to the needs of a modern state. The mandarinal system was not oriented to the execution of policies. As in China, the mandarin class undertook and were accorded responsibility for specific governmental acts. They were accountable for the discharge of these government duties, but they were autonomous in their choice of means. Heaven, in the Chinese sense, was not a policy-making agency.¹⁰

⁹Duncanson, op. cit., p. 57

¹⁰Talcott Parsons, Societies: Evolutionary and Contemporary Perspectives, p. 75.

Villages Under the French

Under the French, the rise of urban centers, the influence of a stronger central government, and the introduction of a system of absentee landholding with its clientele of city landlords and money-lenders changed the life of the peasants considerably. The country was divided into new provinces and major social changes were wrought by the transformation of traditional Viet Nam into a colony of one of Europe's most rigidly centralized powers.

To streamline their administration, the French "destroyed the Confucian balance between ritualistic state and autarchic village."¹¹ Agents of the French usurped the functions of the local councils along a wide front: they created a regular system for registering births and deaths, for example, and they took control of the village budget so that the peasants became individual taxpayers instead of contributors to the collective village levy which had so often been the object of local manipulation. They even attempted to replace the traditional village council system of co-optation through the introduction of elections.

In large measure these innovations were successful. With the census and tax rolls subject to outside scrutiny and with matters of budget and taxation themselves under national control, the councils were stripped of the source

¹¹Paul Mus, "Vietnam: A Nation Off Balance," Yale Review, 1952, p. 11

of much of their former prestige which derived from the ability to protect the village, or some strata of it, against outsiders and their demands.

Yet the French did not ultimately succeed in setting the village entirely within a national framework: their plan to substitute elected, nationally responsible officials for the informal coterie which had held power in the village foundered on the opposition of the notables who took advantage of the political inexperience of their fellow villagers. The local influentials retained, informally, the power to select candidates for office, since even if outside authorities appointed the village officials, the new local government would be obstructed at every point if it deviated too much from the desires of the local, economically powerful elite. As Paul Mus has written, "Without coming forward themselves, the notables maneuvered other men into position and then conducted a veiled-opposition to all the measures recommended by the colonial administration."¹²

The French, then discredited the local councils and alienated their support, but they were unable to replace them as the controllers of the rural order. The embodied authority of the traditional village structure remained as before. The failure of the French to effect a legitimate

¹²Paul Mus, Sociologie d'une guerre, Chapter II, p. 5.

transfer of this power and authority to their own officials resulted in a continuation of the existing village structure and in the failure to develop a meaningful political identification with the central government.

This process of the weakening of the village was accelerated by institutional changes introduced by the French. The mandarin examinations were allowed to lapse and the whole of the mandarin system was finally abolished in 1915. The Chinese characters which had served as the medium for Vietnamese culture were replaced by quoc nu the romanized script developed in the early 1600's by Alexander Rhodes, a French Jesuit of sephardic lineage.

Land became an item of commerce, to be bought and sold in the money economy that was developing alongside barter in the countryside. Whereas the peasant had contributed labor to the irrigation system under the mandarins, he was now required to contribute through taxes. City administrators demanded taxes in money, not in kind, so the peasant was forced to deal with the middlemen who would trade a little of that scarce commodity - money - for the villager's rice. The rhythm of rice cultivation had always left the peasant periods of free time, thus making labor exactions relatively easy to fulfill: the money tax was thus a qualitative change from and a heavier burden than, corvee labor.

In short, faced with the loss of their local administration and their local intelligentsia, the villagers were left on their own to cope with social change.

French colonialism, then, did not simply replace the mandarins with French and Vietnamese personnel selected by colonial criteria. The French made fundamental changes in the administrative and social systems of Viet Nam which destroyed the conditions under which the village could be simultaneously mandarin, autonomous, viable and capable of mobilizing peasants for collective action. Strong central government and the rise of urban centers and towns meant a separation of the village from those who made the decisions affecting the villagers lives. Individual taxation and the rise of absentee landlords meant a further loss of bargaining power available to the village government. Urban centers also meant less personal contact and common experience between village and national officials, even further weakening the power relations which had helped account for what stability existed before the French.

Villages Since 1954

Two contradictory themes run through the literature about the history of South Viet Nam's villages since 1954. On the one hand, Ngo Dinh Diem is accused of destroying a 500 year old tradition of "village democracy." On the other hand, he is pictured as having done little or nothing to alter village life. As far as can be seen, villages that had remained fairly whole and unscarred by the Indochinese war were little changed by Diem, while villages in disarray were plunged even further into chaos.

Khanh Hau, the one village studied extensively during the Diem era, is revealing of the limitations of the Diem system of village government at its best.¹³ Although it was chosen as representative of the Delta, Khanh Hau was an unusual village in some respects: it was the site of a historic shrine of which the villagers were justifiably proud and of a new school built as part of a special pilot project. Despite these material advantages there seemed to be no sense of village solidarity, no strong bonds between the members of the community. There was no purpose that united them: the village council seemed to lack the desire or the ability to create either a feeling of national allegiance or a sense of urgency and dynamism among the villagers.

¹³See Gerald Hickey, Village in Vietnam, New Haven, 1964, and James Hendry, The Small World of Khanh Hau, Chicago, 1966.

Positions on the village council were bureaucratic drudgery, involving a staggering amount of paperwork and paying next to nothing. Council members were still expected to uphold their status by various forms of conspicuous consumption, such as throwing huge banquets. Thus only an upper class villager with both the time and the money to participate actively in the political life of the village could hold a council position. The council served the ambitions of the "haves," who consented to the indignities and inconveniences of serving a term on the village body only because it represented the road to the informal local oligarchy, the village Cult Committee.¹⁴ The "have nots" had no role in the direction of village life; and, as in most traditional societies, the young numbered among the have-nots. The only young person who was involved at all with the work of the Khanh Hau village council was a twenty-one year old boy who was hired to serve as clerk for the council members who were becoming increasingly irritated by the demands their positions made on their time.

Anyone who was young or held ambitions of a career with a chance for advancement had two choices before him: Saigon or the Viet Cong. In villages like Khanh Hau, Diem had done little for the institutional development of the village.

¹⁴The French had stripped the village council of its religious functions, but village notables kept the Cult Committee, responsible for certain communal ceremonies, functioning on their own.

Politics was still conducted as under the mandarins. The village oligarchy, who saw themselves as the judges of who should govern, tried to cushion the village from outside demands and powers. But they could not use the sanctions and instruments of control which were formerly their most effective weapons.

The tradition-oriented village leaders could rule only to the extent that their legitimacy was based on traditional values. As Hickey reported from Khanh Hau, "A group of older men, many of whom had served on the council, laughed heartily when one noted that the people used to be the servants of the Village Council, now the Village Council is the servant of the people."¹⁵ They had none of the options open to their pre-colonial predecessors because all taxation was uniform and large landowners were drifting away to the city. This meant that they could neither manipulate rental agreements to coerce a peasant into "voluntary" action or gain a peasant's gratitude by intervening on his behalf with the landlord. Nor could the old "punish-the-village" attitude work when everyone was not tied to the village. Now that there were in many villages groups or persons inspired by a powerful ideology who had come to owe primary allegiance to a community wider than the village and were willing to let the village be destroyed rather than to compromise their aims, "punishing the village" that harbored rebels needed to give way to the kinds of

¹⁵Hickey, 1964, p. 185.

participation in village life that could persuade the villagers that their homes were worth defending.

Nor could the occasional dedicated village chief necessarily develop a following if he chose to compete with the Viet Cong for local allegiances. Cities, absentee landlords, and strong central government meant that the most important influences on the peasant were beyond the reach and influence of village officials. Diem's model cast the village chief as representative of the government to the people, not as political representative of the people to the government. The village was less well represented than in the days when village notables had the real possibility of working out policy adjustments with the mandarins.

If the village was quiet, it was also stagnating. Diem could not move Khanh Hau with appeals transmitted through the old oligarchy. His nation building in Khanh Hau consisted of requiring more paper work from those aspiring to become venerables.

Villages in a great many areas of South Viet Nam did not fare even so well as Khanh Hau during the years of the Diem administration. Elsewhere, especially the areas controlled by the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects and in the old Viet Minh areas¹⁶ with a population of between two and three

¹⁶See Appendix B for a map of Viet Nam in 1953.

million peasants, the purpose of Diem's appointed administrators was to discredit rival local religious and political elites. In the areas of the sects or of Viet Minh strength, Diem often appointed administrators from outside the village. When they were not outsiders, they were often local influentials who had been discredited and humiliated by the Viet Minh. Forced once to flee their villages, they returned with predictable grudges and vendettas to settle. Since there was no check on their behavior they were, on the whole, corrupt. Loyalty to Diem, who styled himself a "leader of superior moral fiber," had nothing to do with service to the peasant population. The embezzlements of these new leaders became a pledge of loyalty to Diem; and, in fact, given the wait-and-see attitude of his compatriots in these areas, it is possible that Diem would never have filled his government, if he had not looked the other way at corruption.

In dealing with the supposedly stable villages, especially in the early years of his rule, Diem was conservative to a fault in relying on traditional institutions and where he did find himself forced to replace or destroy unacceptable organizations, extensive corruption resulted. Between the two of these policies, he succeeded in plunging all of Viet Nam into chaos. The traditional elite could produce no dynamism for national programs, and the arbitrary,

repressive officials whose job was to bring recalcitrant areas under control only put dynamite in the arguments and strategies of the Viet Cong. A striking example of the way in which "strong government" action often backfired for the national government is contained in the story of one defector from the Viet Cong:

In 1956-57 life was pretty easy, villagers had motorcycles. Then came law 10-59. Under this law Diem was given the right to cut off heads of persons suspected of being VC sympathizers. This actually happened in hamlets near mine. Many people were worried. In March 1960 there was a big football game between my team and another team. The two teams fought and were mad with each other. Because the families of some of the boys worked for the government, I really believed that they would take revenge on me. I was afraid and I tried to hide. I went home. The VC knew that I had won the game and they came to propagandize me. They said, "Look at you, you have got to hide, but you can't really hide. You have no arms. The people will catch you and hurt you." The VC dug a shelter for me to hide in ...¹⁷

Ironically, the areas that Diem did his best to destroy emerged from the Diem period as viable areas. The Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai, and the Viet Minh all survived his attacks. Khanh Hau, however, did not survive his benevolence. In March of 1967, three of its hamlets were totally under Viet Cong control and there was heavy fighting around the entire village.

Thus while the inhabitants of Khan Hau shared a common tradition they did not have the strong social bonds

¹⁷Studies of the Chieu Hoi Program: Interviews with the Hoi Chanh. Simulmatics Corporation. Sponsored by Advanced Projects Agency; Washington, D. C. 1966, Interview No. CH-24, pp. 5-6

or the sense of solidarity which Diem interpreted as intrinsic to the traditional village. As Hickey noted, solidarity or communalism could not be attributed to the village.¹⁸ The social and political system of the village, then, did not naturally and automatically provide as base for collective action.

The Government leaders, then, fell back on a sentimentalized picture of an ideal village Viet Nam and made themselves its guardian. They extolled the virtues of a Viet Nam which probably never was. While the Viet Cong took on the task of attempting to form a nation, Ngo Dinh Diem and his successors often have seemed to be walking backwards into the future. Many of them have attributed the decline of the traditional commune to the "corruption" of the French and the "evils" of city life. Many prominent Vietnamese still hold these view, though all evidence contradicts them. Less than a year ago, Ton That Thien, the new GVN Minister of Information, wrote that before his plan of pacification could be effective in the provinces, "these provinces should be all but cut off from the rest of the country to avoid the corrupting influence of the cities."¹⁹ Pacification and control was taken to mean a return to the pre-colonial situation in the villages, a return to the old, integral,

¹⁸Hickey, op. cit., p. 278

¹⁹Ton That Thien, "Town versus Country: A Basic Source of Tension and Conflict in Vietnam." Saigon, n.p. 1967. mimeo.

harmonious communes of the past, a past without cities or a strong central government, a past in which peasant problems were infact soluble within the village.

It has become fashionable to talk of the breakdown of the village and the loss of the qualities and virtues it once possessed. This is romanticism; this is the "myth of the village." Ways of life that may have existed only for lack of alternatives are extolled as virtues. Peasants who have nothing to wear and who go hungry are assumed to have a rich spiritual life. When a son sticks to his father for the sake of survival, this is called filial piety. When people in one village do not talk to their neighbors in another, this is called village solidarity. Somehow what might only have been the necessities and oppressions of one era seem to have become the traditional values of the next.

The success of the traditional institutions need not be attributed to solidarity or community spirit, but instead to the constraints governing the relation between the state and the village which made it possible for the village institutions to work: a weak central government, no cities, and a taxation system which assessed taxes upon the village and not the individual. These constraints, missing under Diem, produced the necessary incentives and sanctions for both leaders and peasants to make the village institutions work.

Villages under mandarin government may have been autonomous, but they were not, therefore, necessarily cohesive and organic. Autonomy, viability and organic solidarity are not interchangeable concepts. Even under the mandarins, when autonomy was glorified, solidarity and viability sometimes resulted from an outside cadre who brought the village viability and solidarity by breaking down autonomy, creating linkages to organizations transcending the village. As with latter day revolutionaries, the success of Portugese, Spanish, and Dutch Catholic priests from 1550 onward was at least partly due to the absence of organization within villages. The priests, working in the language and idiom of the village and with local cadres, brought about the organization necessary to meet the local problems:

... the chretiente offered the converts mutual support against bullies, extortionate moneylenders and the bailiffs of absentee landlords, in a land where the government could not yet be counted on to keep order or to uphold law, and it afforded that organization for mutual defense against both brigandage and abuse of authority ...²⁰

Diem, when he turned from city to country problems, behaved like a political "Jekyll and Hyde." A superb manipulator of those around him, he failed to understand that manipulation and bargaining were also essential for the

²⁰Duncanson, op. cit., p. 80.

traditional system he tried to impose on the village to work. He counted on traditional values and myths to legitimize rural government and ignored the need of men in the village to have some power or influence over the representatives of the state. In effect, he built a government that counted on all men to deal justly with those under them, without supplying the rewards necessary to motivate this kind of behavior.

At times his view of [that] society was revealed in manipulation of subordinates that went so far in making use of defects as to border on the cynical; at others he exposed himself to setbacks through a falsely idealized image of Vietnamese society. The logic of this distinction was that one standard of political action was appropriate to the life of the village-stronghold of tradition and all that was essentially Vietnamese and the proper care of the mandarin -- while the other developed as an accommodation to modernity and the corrupting intrusion of politics and economics which ... threatened to turn more and more Vietnamese villages into towns.²¹

To a great extent, this policy of the double standard and the chaos it produced still survive in rural Viet Nam. The plethora of tangled and conflicting agencies, an army that is often the peasants main problem, numerous non-cooperating military and intelligence units, endless corruption, and a belief that the next pacification program will work -- all these are still with the peasant who has not

²¹Duncanson, op. cit., p. 214

left for the city, who holds fast to his familiar farm and village. The problem that must be resolved in pacification, both for the GVN and the Viet Cong, is the fact that villages are not automatically cohesive, organic communities. The potential for "villagism" exists and is even increased by the brutalities of war, but the actual fact of villagism cannot be assumed. Indeed, as will be developed later, the task of developing villagism through communal organization is a key aspect of pacification. The model used by the Vietnamese government, however, was inadequate for the task.

Security and stability will not come from turning back history. A country which has started to modernize cannot be pacified by a return to the past. As Paul Mus noted nearly twenty years ago:

It is necessary to desist from efforts to pacify the country by reestablishing traditional village institutions as part of a political and military security network -- a concept which ... is economically and socially obsolete.²²

In fact, the successfully pacified areas have been able to transform themselves to meet the demands of a Hobbesian world by involving their own people in a search for a new life and new ways to govern. This has brought them security.

²²Paul Mus, "The Role of the Village in Vietnamese Politics," Pacific Affairs, September, 1949, p. 271.

The failure of pacification in the others may be blamed on the lack of patterns of communication, institutional participation and political coercion and bargaining that would bring the village community into the nation state of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICS OF DISTRUST: GROWTH OF THE VIET CONG

Diem's faith in traditional village institutions led directly to the success enjoyed by those Viet Minh cadres that remained south in developing a working civil-military organization throughout South Viet Nam. The GVN system failed to protect the peasants from GVN cadres and soldiers, its cadres from the Viet Cong, and, ultimately, its soldiers from the Viet Cong. The system failed because it was oriented at every level to satisfying the demands and fears of higher officials whose criteria did not meet the needs and realities of the village. It was based almost entirely on destroying the Viet Cong directly through force, as opposed to destroying the Viet Cong indirectly by competing with them in order to take away their strength. This attrition approach failed because it expressed military thinking that placed more emphasis on the Viet Cong military threat than on the Viet Cong political system. The system did more harm to the peasantry than did the Viet Cong, emphasized large units rather than anti-guerrilla tactics, and proved unable to develop effective intelligence.

Peasant communities in general are a valuable potential resource to any would-be revolutionary. If they can be mobilized, their economic situation and work habits allow

them to provide insurgents with large quantities of both material goods and human labor. Peasants, as conventional wisdom stresses, are very poor, very conservative, and very suspicious of outsiders. However, they can also be bored and frustrated: they can become the source of an extraordinary amount of labor and capital. It was Mao's genius to develop a systematic way to tapping and utilizing the potential resources of the peasantry in order to turn them into a revolutionary force.

Mobilizing the peasantry is by no means an easy matter, and to say that Mao, the Viet Minh or the Viet Cong "filled a vacuum" or "satisfied the needs" of the peasants is to underestimate the magnitude of the revolutionaries' task.

Needs are not fixed and invariant, and vacuums are theoretical constructs. The successful revolutionary must be able to convince the poor, down-trodden peasant first, that he is, in fact, poor and down-trodden, and secondly that there is a way for him to improve his situation. Peasants may be short of land, but it is not necessarily an easy task to convince a peasant that he could possibly own the land he needs. When Mao wished to mobilize the peasantry for participation in the revolution he first introduced them to a revolutionary ideology which explained the causes of their misery, drew out their resentments, excited their enthusiasm and directed this enthusiasm toward

the goals of the revolution. He then developed an organization to channel this mobilized peasant energy and placed strong emphasis on self-criticism and continued study in order to keep enthusiasm high and prevent a return to peasant passivity.

A peasantry which supports the revolution is willing to contribute money, produce, and labor to the cause. Once convinced, the peasant can be a remarkable source of support, especially if conditions are such that absentee landlords cannot exert immediate pressure on the peasant to ensure delivery of his dues. If a peasant pays 40-50% of his yield in rent, for example, then a single village of 3,000 people can produce a rice surplus which is easily large enough to feed at least 100 men for a year and give each peasant a much larger share of the yield than previously. Even if there are no absentee landlords on whom to capitalize, the peasants can produce an exploitable surplus for the revolutionaries by "putting the squeeze" on other outsiders. If the insurgents can force money lenders to charge lower interest rates, fertilizer merchants to charge lower prices, or rice merchants to pay more for the rice they purchase, the village can begin producing for the revolution.

Thus, as Duncanson has pointed out, "even when total VC strength had reached 300,000 men, their consumption of

paddy would still only be 30 percent of the annual surplus of Cochinchina normally exported overseas."¹

A better life for the peasants and an exploitable surplus for the revolutionaries can only be created if the latter can convince the peasant to act without fearing retribution from the "predators" whom the revolutionary seeks to control or remove from the village. The peasant clearly needs protection; but here again, an unexploited resource of the peasant community itself can provide all the military manpower needed. This resource is idle time.

Peasant life is hard, but for rice farmers the workload is concentrated at planting and harvest times. In South Viet Nam, for example, as much as 40% of the rural labor force has been estimated to be idle 8 months per year, as much as 20% idle for all but a few weeks in the planting and harvesting seasons.² Thus if the revolutionaries could redirect the traditional institutions of village life - ownership, finance and labor mobilization - large gains of manpower and other resources could be obtained with negligible capital investment. In short, the portion of rural production generally exported from the village to the

¹Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam, New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 408.

²John McDermott, "Is Nation-Building a Good Strategy?" University of Chicago, Adlai Stevenson Institute, June 4, 1968, p. 8.

city is large enough for the needs of both the revolution and the peasants, and their freed labor is more than sufficient to form an army, construct new buildings in the village, and even to produce weapons if the required tools are available.

Small arms production factories have been in operation throughout Viet Cong zones, producing grenades, mines, mortars and even ammunition. This local arms production did not end with the influx of arms and equipment from the North. A military sweep in Kien Giang uncovered a factory still functioning in August 1968.³ Nor were the rural factories limited to weapons production. They manufactured everything from pajamas for wounded soldiers to cloth for local consumption and fertilizer for increased cultivation of secondary crops.⁴ And the peasants' own methods of manufacturing these items can sometimes produce better results than more modern techniques. Some attempts to modernize this rural production have backfired, as occurred in Phu Thu district. Punji stakes for hidden traps on footpaths are usually made of fire-hardened bamboo; but in one hamlet PF on an operation discovered 1,500 punji stakes made from barbed wire. The wire punji stakes turned out to be incapable of penetrating a shoe when they were stepped on;

³New York Times, August 10, 1968, p. 4.

⁴Burchett, op. cit., Chapter I, "Of Arsenals and Hospitals," pp. 73-80.

they were vastly inferior to the traditional punji stakes. The revolutionaries, then, can do very well for themselves just by taking advantage of the hidden "natural resources" of the rural order; a mobilized peasantry was a rich potential prize for the Viet Cong.

These natural peasant resources presented themselves as an especially rich prize in view of the fact that insurgents possessing a fair amount of this labor and talent do not necessarily need universal public support in order to survive. How much and what kind of rural support is absolutely indispensable to the revolutionaries depends to a large extent on their strategy and on the ability of the government to work with people who never supported the revolution or who have become disillusioned with it. Revolutionaries can survive with support from only some of the peasants if the government cannot capitalize on the potential of the others.

A revolutionary war is not an election or a popularity contest. Without some popular appeal, neither side could last for long in a rural area, especially if, like the Viet Cong, they hope to inspire a sense of mission and dedication to a cause. Simply gaining "the hearts and minds of the people," however, cannot guarantee success to either side. People must be mobilized and organized to support a cause

effectively, and the great failure of Saigon in its attempt to transform Viet Nam from a city state to a nation has been its inability to effect such a mobilization.

When the revolution is nascent, still weak, only great popularity can ensure its survival. When the revolution has progressed, however, strategy may change; the revolutionaries may be just as able to strike a crippling blow with fewer villages in the revolutionary community than before. This situation has occurred. Although the Viet Cong controlled fewer villages in pre-Tet 1968 than they had controlled a year before, their villages still were well enough coordinated to form what served, in effect, as a highway into Saigon. According to the December 1967 map of village control,⁵ the Viet Cong villages, while numbering only about 25% of all Vietnamese villages, were so distributed that one could literally travel to any area of Viet Nam without ever leaving Viet Cong-controlled territory.

If insurgents can skillfully direct the peasant support which they do possess, they can provide themselves not only with peasant goods and labor, but also with the all-important resource of intelligence. If their information is good, they can compete successfully with the existing

⁵See Appendix B.

government even without widespread peasant support for the revolution. Food, money, men, weapons, can to a large extent be supplied from outside, if an intact infrastructure is available to guide, hide, and supply local intelligence.

With good intelligence and mobility the Viet Cong have survived for long periods in areas militarily dominated by Government forces either because the intelligence they had was often sufficient to kill or kidnap anyone who provided comparable information to the government or because GVN was too poorly organized to use any intelligence it received without innumerable delays and inter-agency frictions.⁶ Thus not only did the peasantry provide valuable natural resources for the Viet Cong; the insurgents did not even need a majority of peasant loyalties to fight a South Vietnamese army unable to make efficient use of its own intelligence. This situation made it even more crucial for the GVN to prevent Viet Cong mobilization of any sizeable portion of the peasant's talents.

Unfortunately, Diem's view of the village, which was discussed in the previous chapter, incapacitated him for the job of stemming the Viet Cong exploitation of the peasantry. As has been seen, Diem tried to retain old forms of village social organization without restoring to

⁶William Brucher, "Viet Cong Agents Target of Drive," New York Times, August 4, 1968.

these villages their pre-French links with and control over the central government. This combination of policies provided the Viet Cong with a large reservoir of potential young recruits and weakened government support among villagers in general.

Whether the Viet Minh, or Viet Cong, had always planned to re-emerge or whether the exclusion of former Viet Minh from all participation in political life under Diem was responsible, the insurgents had early and easy success in recruiting.

Whether village life is hard or easy, and whether villages are, in fact, cohesive or anomic, one thing is certain -- they are boring. Rice cultivation requires intense back-breaking labor for short periods of time. During the rest of the year, great numbers of men can be sitting around their homes with little or nothing to do. In Viet Nam this is especially so in the Mekong Delta where irrigation is accomplished mainly by rainfall and not manual labor.

When Viet Cong agitprop teams came to the villages, they were first welcomed more as a source of entertainment than of political education. Over time, of course, after numerous visits the talk would turn to politics and men would be recruited for Viet Cong organizations.⁷

⁷For elaboration of the entire organizational complex, see Pike, op. cit.

It was especially easy to recruit Vietnamese village youth in this way. The Viet Cong was the only organization offering both status and psychological security to the peasants. The youth were offered excitement and adventure, security and a chance to advance. They may have faced regimentation within the Viet Cong, but they were "freed from the freedom to perish in neglected and harassed social isolation."⁸ As one youth described "recruitment" to the revolution:

The Viet Cong taught me to sing songs. I enjoyed being with the Viet Cong at night because at night they had a group that would sing. It was a group of young people my age, about 12 years old. They would go to the temple. There a Viet Cong teacher would teach us to sing. They would sing a phrase and then the people would sing a phrase.⁹

What the Viet Cong emphasized, above all, was that the poor didn't have to be poor forever, that people didn't have to accept the rule of the mandarins and remain in their social stations. By simply interesting youth in careers and their own advancement, the Viet Cong undermined a village political system based on the acceptance of the status quo and rule by elders. As one Viet Cong remarked in

⁸Harry J. Benda. "Reflections on Asian Communism." Yale Review, LVI, 1 (October 1966), pp. 1-16.

⁹Studies of the Chieu Hoi Program: Interviews with the Hoi Chanh. Simulmatics Corporation. Sponsored by Advanced Projects Agency, Washington, D.C. 1966, Interview No. Ch-15.

an interrogation:

In the past the rich and the bourgeois used to tell us that the poor were simply those not blessed by heaven. But the Viet Cong worked very hard to change this. They said the people were poor because they didn't have any land to till; heaven had nothing to do with economics. So the people listened and decided that if heaven did not affect their economic life they did not have to go to the shrine and pray for a better life, and they stopped going ... ¹⁰

Thus the persistence of village structure offering little promise to the young was an important aid to Viet Cong advances. Just as important, though, as what Diem preserved of the mandarin system was the relationship he did not preserve: a connection between national force and village power. The absence of any such linkage has made it relatively easy for the Viet Cong to maneuver effectively in gaining control of and security within the villages. They used this control and security to accomplish what they saw as their primary task: educating peasants faith in the political possibility of challenging what the Viet Cong presented as arbitrary national rulings imposed on the villages from above.

The government possessed a national army, to be sure, but a national army is relatively powerless against assassinations; and the village notables, the way traditional culture defined their roles, did not often develop a strong enough local power base to resist.

¹⁰Quoted in David Halberstam, "Voice of the Viet Cong," January 1968, Harper's Magazine, p. 48, emphasis added.

During the Diem period, especially before 1961, there was very little attempt to involve the villagers in government; the participation of the masses as a style of politics was anathema to traditional Viet Nam. The place of the village council was to do the administrative work of government, not to make its decisions. Its members, the village elders, were more concerned with their status in the village than with the prospects for dynamic change. Too much activism on the part of the council might even have threatened their status, since it would inevitably break down village parochialism. Village government was mandarin, elite and passive:

The basic Chinese suspicion ... was that insurrection occurred when people got notions in their heads and became confused in their minds. The function of government, for the mandarin, was largely to keep people from endless scheming about life and calculations about how to improve one's life. Good government should train people to keep to their stations and to accept the structure of society. 11

The Viet Cong may have been popular in their early years, but they were still weak and could not operate openly without risking capture. There were no village police, however; and the Viet Cong were able to cut the district officials off from most intelligence by the assassination of village officials. It made no difference

¹¹Lucian Pye, "The Roots of Insurgency," in Harry Eckstein, Internal War (Free Press, 1964), p. 161, emphasis added.

whether the murdered official was upstanding or corrupt elected or appointed. The important fact was that an organized group with force behind it opposed the central government and that government did not, or could not, stop them. The village elites responded in the traditional fashion -- accommodation.

... when the incumbents were unable to respond to village needs for security, it was usually both convenient and advantageous for villages to come under the protection of political movements opposing the prevailing dynasty.¹²

Military officials in charge of province and district government could do little about the Viet Cong underground network because they were almost totally removed from what government intelligence there was. Intelligence services were purposely fragmented and kept separate from the military, so that no one chief could control all sensitive information, and so that the army could both be better spied on and controlled. The militarization of government thus did not protect the village officials or improve village services.

... no force existed that was willing to struggle for the allegiance of the local population and for the safety of the village chiefs and local officials being murdered in increasing numbers; the American and Vietnamese military refused to deal with the situation because it did not fall within the definition of "external aggression."¹³

¹²John McAlister, "Historical Context of Revolution in Vietnam," mimeo. p. 24.

¹³Bernard Fall, The Two Vietnams (Praeger, 1964), first revised edition, p. 326.

There was little pressure on military men from their superiors to protect the local officials, both because other considerations were more important to the army and because in many cases, even concerned district chiefs did not have sufficient intelligence to act against the Viet Cong. Thus the Diem government not only permitted the persistence of a non-action-oriented village leadership but failed to supply any additional support from the central government to protect the villagers. As a result, villagers learned that the central government could not be depended on as a counterweight to the Viet Cong. Little by little, then, with almost no opposition, the Viet Cong were able to undercut Diem's government and develop their own infrastructure.

This absence of effective village control over the central government also displayed itself in non-military areas. This lack of response has played its role, along with the inadequate military response, in alienating peasants. The Viet Cong could exploit this failure by encouraging peasants to make demands upon the government, then emerging as champions of the people when the government delivered its expected rebuffs to the villages.

In recent years, for instance, peasants have been encouraged to ask for protection from ARVN pillage; and when their requests have been ignored, the Viet Cong has had an opportunity to propose its solution: laying traps

around the hamlet so that while ARVN stepped around the hidden traps, peasants would have time to hide their ducks.

Viet Cong success has always been at least partially attributable to their ability to enforce and carry out GVN proclamations; it is ironic - or tragic - that so often only an illegal group has had the capability or opportunity to do so. Every social arrangement will give rise to legitimate grievances, and every society has some sort of an underclass. In Viet Nam, however, the government has had grave difficulty in either containing, crushing or diffusing dissent because of the shortcomings of its institutional arrangements.

Consider, for example, the execution of Diem's land reform. There is no doubt that the Viet Cong profited from the land problem; but they did not profit simply because Diem was a reactionary or oppressive ruler. They were able to use the land reform and transform it into a political issue, turning a seemingly arbitrary set of decisions which peasants did not feel morally obligated to accept into a question of politics. The problem is far more complex than the simple situation of the Viet Cong's giving everyone land, thereby gaining universal support.

The failings of the Vietnamese system of land tenure can be exploited in many ways. There are the problems of rent ceilings, market prices, interest levels, fertilizer

prices -- all of which can be manipulated so as to improve the welfare of an individual farmer.

Diem's policies for dealing with these failing were often sound ones: maximum rent ceilings, provisions for displaced persons, loan programs whose terms would not frighten peasants who had never borrowed from a government before. But even when he did, as in these cases, understand the subtle interplay of the factors involved, his mandarin notion of morally just administration precluded the possibility of effective enforcement mechanisms for his policies. For many peasants, therefore, the Viet Cong easily emerged as the champion of the just cause simply by exploiting the government's inability to do what it said it was doing, by encouraging peasants to test the government's policies and exploiting the disillusionment that resulted when the policies were not carried out as promised. This task was particularly easy for the Viet Cong in the early days of the insurgency because there were so many problems and issues that could be exploited merely through hard work and serious discussions: enforcing rent ceilings, helping the aged and infirm with heavy labor, or keeping away tax collectors.

As John McAlister has noted, "The real source of insurgent strength comes from exploiting those conflicts and cleavages within a society which cannot be resolved by

existing institutions."¹⁴ Insurgent strength does come from exploiting conflicts and cleavages, but what must be kept in mind is that the heart of Viet Cong strength lies in its ability in some sense to create such conflicts, that is, to turn traditional resignation or apathy into consciousness of a salient conflict or cleavage.

In insurgency, as in all political struggles, the key to a successful strategy is to maneuver into a position where the opposition, no matter what it does, strengthens your side. This is what is meant by political judo, the art of turning the opponent's force against himself, and this has been the continuing paradoxical result of the state's reaction to communism in Viet Nam.

This technique is not new to Viet Nam. In 1930-32, for example, Viet Nam was hard hit by economic depression, so hard hit that provincial authorities were given the right to cancel taxes on the peasantry at their discretion. Before the officials, whose communications with the peasantry were poor, could announce and publicize the new policy, communist party cadres in the Mien Tay area organized marches to protest economic conditions and demanded that taxes not be collected that year. The cadres in the Mien Tay area (on the coast between Rach Gia and An Xuyen) thus got credit with the peasantry for what the government had already granted.

¹⁴John T. McAlister, Jr., Review of Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam. By Sir Robert Thompson, American Political Science Review, September 1967, p. 773.

The next year other cadres organized the same move in Ha Tinh and Nghe An provinces of An Nam. To avoid the loss of prestige suffered by other officials the previous year, the government officials in this area refused to remit the taxes this time. The unrelieved hardship led to an uprising in which the first revolutionary communities were developed by the party -- the famed but short lived "Soviets of Nghe An."¹⁵

The Viet Cong were certainly popular with many peasants in the early years, but popularity alone cannot explain how they mobilized men to an active participation in the movement. Their success in mobilizing men lay very much in the fact that they exploited, and helped to create, the wide gulf of mistrust and suspicion between formal government authority and the peasantry.

A great part of Viet Cong recruitment came about through placing peasants in a position where they were afraid not to go with the Viet Cong. When Viet Cong were in a village, for example, they would renew contacts with old friends or make friends with a peasant, or even simply act like a young man they wanted was already their friend. Suspicion and mistrust between peasants and village leaders then did the rest. Once the government officials thought someone might be a Viet Cong, they treated

¹⁵Duncanson, op. cit., p. 136.

him like one. Given the arbitrary treatment the government accorded suspected Viet Cong, the peasant often literally begged the Viet Cong to take him.

In other words, while it is correct to say that the Viet Cong exploited the weaknesses of the government, namely lack of any true integration and trust between peasants and government, they also served to create the particular distrusts which aided in their recruitment by being friendly. If they had been brutal and arrogant when they entered villages and talked to people, it is doubtful that they could have turned suspicion and distrust to their advantage.

Later, according to interviews, the Viet Cong were aided in more coercive drafting of men by still being able to exploit peasant fear of the government. For example, the Viet Cong would frequently ask a youth to join the Viet Cong and then, if he refused, destroy his identification papers. The peasant then had to choose between asking for new papers, joining the Viet Cong or face potential arrest as a Viet Cong because he had no papers.

This situation most vividly illustrates the impossible bind a government is in when it tries to rely on formal rules rather than accurate intelligence or personal intermediaries trusted by both government and peasant. There is no way for the government not to be exploited in such a circumstance unless there is someone that the peasant

knows and trusts and who is also known and trusted by the government. Suppose, for example, that whenever a peasant came to the district administration and asked for new papers, they were politely issued. Then, Viet Cong would have an easy way of obtaining identification papers. They could simply buy or steal them from other peasants. On the other hand, if the government, to prevent this, always refused to issue new papers, the Viet Cong would still win because they would have gained a recruit.

The tangle is unraveled only when there is a way of taking motives and circumstances into account. This requires intermediary linkages of trust between government and peasant.

Such intermediaries, trusted by both government and peasant were and are seldom present in South Viet Nam. In their absence the consistent pattern of government officials has been to minimize the chance of being duped personally by the Viet Cong. The result has usually been far more disastrous to the state than if they had been willing to assume trust in the peasants and accept that occasionally they would be personally embarrassed.

The standard operating procedure of the government from 1954 through the present (with the partial exception of village elections discussed later) has been to try to maximize the relationship between the village leaders and their superiors at the expense of the relationship between

the officials and the peasants. This has led not only to the lack of trust between peasant and government but to the weakness and poor quality of government intelligence. Village leaders not truly a part of the communications system of the village have been hardly better than no linkage at all in being able to separate circumstances and motives in peasant behavior.

It appears that the dynamics of insurgency are such that any government not consciously trying to expand participation is apt to find that the base of popular support is constantly narrowed. The personal operating code of individual actors, such as district chiefs, will have the cumulative effect of increasing the distance between peasant and government. To guarantee that they will not be personally betrayed by village officials, district chiefs - consciously or unconsciously - have tended to rely more and more on village officials whose loyalty and/or incompatibility with the Viet Cong was assured. Men most likely to be least acceptable to the Viet Cong - hence least likely to be traitors - may also be the men least likely to be trusted by the lower bases of peasant society and the least likely to try and overcome the distrust. Village chiefs have tended to be Catholic, urban, old, conservative, landed or profiteers.

Maximizing the linkage of trust - or minimizing the

chance of personal betrayal - between district chief and village official, then, has tended to increase the gulf of effective communication and trust between peasant and governmental power, i.e. the district chief. Seeking village leaders closer to the peasantry and then learning to work with and trust them may be a far more productive policy for the state, but in the short run it has always appeared far more threatening to the life and/or career of any particular district chief or higher official. The less chance there is for a peasant leader or spokesman to personally betray the district chief, the more likely it is that the peasantry will be isolated from the government and be available to the Viet Cong.

Viet Cong exploit linkages to their advantage by building up local cadres ties. By making the local cadre the man you depend on as protection from the Viet Cong "system," they literally have been able to create situations where you hate the Viet Cong so much that you will do anything to satisfy the local cadre. A widow in one village who had fled the Viet Cong area gave a cogent example of how coordinated use of force could aid Viet Cong village cadres. Sometimes, a peasant would be informed that his Viet Cong taxes had been raised and would protest to the local cadre that he could not afford the increase. The local cadre would say he would take it up with his superiors. A

few days later the cadre would return saying he had gained permission to lessen the increase a bit, but that was all he could do. The peasant would end up paying a higher tax than before and the local grass roots cadre would appear as a man who had just done a constituent a favor because he had a voice at city hall. The widow, related this story as an example of how local cadres could do favors and not how the Viet Cong used the threat of force to enforce local demands, or how a local cadre tricked her. A great many peasants denounced Viet Cong policies but few ever complained about the individual cadres, while for the GVN the reverse was true.

The success of this mechanism, demonstrated time and again, depends on the peasant's view of the individual cadre. As long as the cadre himself is viewed as possessing superior virtue and moral fiber, in the peasant's eyes, he cannot be blamed personally for the policies he enforces. The peasant may hate the Viet Cong, and even actively hope the Viet Cong cadre is unable to enter the village, but that does not necessarily mean he wants the cadre eliminated. What is the key to the peasant's evaluation appears to be whether or not the cadre is personally corrupt and exploiting the peasantry or whether he appears as the trustworthy and virtuous representative of a tough, coercive and tyrannical government.

Thus in the civil sphere, both the distance of the central government from the peasant and the rigid conception of administration which this distance permitted opened an easy route by which the Viet Cong could establish their authority in villagers' minds in place of that of the government. Time and again, it has seemed that the Viet Cong needed simply to announce they were championing a cause or initiating a protest against a policy to close off the ability of non-Viet Cong to champion or protest a true grievance.

Village alienation from the government stemmed from more, however, than simply the lack of civil redress and military protection. In many cases the government troops were not only inadequate guardians but also appeared as marauders themselves.

In most of the rural Viet Nam government presence has traditionally meant little more than tax collectors, decrees and speeches. For the last few years, of course, the majority, if not all of the contact between peasants and GVN has been with soldiers; and the attitude and behavior of the soldiers is crucial both to the kinds of cooperations that develop between them and to the attitudes of peasants toward their government. Thus the behavior of soldiers cannot be overemphasized as a key political element in the Viet Nam war.

In general, the excellent behavior of the Viet Cong cadres and soldiers has been a major element of Viet Cong strength. It was possible for the Viet Cong to keep soldiers recruited in one village based elsewhere because their personal behavior did not alienate the population. In fact, Viet Cong soldiers, when in a hamlet, spent time helping the populace with small tasks.

The petty thievery and general roughhouse attitude of government soldiers was bad enough to make it worthwhile, in early days especially, for peasants to help the Viet Cong fortify their hamlets. A hamlet surrounded by punji stakes and pits might only slow the entrance of government soldiers by 10 or 15 minutes; this would be plenty of time, though, to meet the needs of both Viet Cong and peasants. While the peasants were using the few minutes to scurry around hiding their chickens, the Viet Cong would have time to hide in their secret tunnels. The soldiers' behavior also frightened or alienated some men enough to lead them into the Viet Cong. As one soldier noted:

People who followed the Viet Cong, most of them, were discontented elements; for example they have suffered the government's oppression, the soldiers' disturbance and pillage activities, therefore they were scared and followed the Viet Cong. (9334PF)

The Viet Cong were in trouble in 1966-67, when this study was made, because the pressures of war had forced them to raise their taxes higher than the taxes in GVN

areas; and this circumstance caused them to lose much, if not most, of their popular support. Even so, many peasants were still being alienated from the government by the way they were treated. As a peasant in Kien Giang stated:

The Viet Cong collect higher taxes but they know how to please the people; they behave politely so people feel that they are more favored. They behave politely and nicely to the people in order to make people like them. They do not thunder at the people like the government soldiers.

People like the government because of freedom, but there is no equality even though the taxes are lower than the Viet Cong's. The thing the people don't like in the government is their behavior. For example, the soldiers often arrest and oppress the people only because of revenge--in short it is banditry. (0319V)

By far the most important manifestation of the lack of village-central government links, however, was the lack of trust the government displayed toward the peasants. It was this lack of trust which kept the government constantly on the defensive, trying harder to protect itself against possible exploitation by the peasants than it did to involve the peasants in an effective self-defense effort.

In the early years the Viet Cong were very weak militarily. By the time the first guerrilla actions of the war occurred the precursors of the Popular Forces, today's village military, were being organized in villages around the country. The Viet Cong still were able to proceed with

their task and to extend their control. Establishing a small village force with no meaningful links to higher authority did not solve the problem for Diem, because exploiting the lateral social ties between villages gave the Viet Cong an advantage an autonomous village did not have.

Peasants aren't as fixed and rooted to their village as conventional wisdom implies. By a conservative estimate, about half of all peasants in Viet Nam probably had relatives or friends in other villages, even before the major displacements of the war. In Khan Hau, Hendry found that 44 of the 100 families in a random sample had a total of 67 relatives living outside Khan Hau.¹⁶ Similarly, a study of refugees in Phu Yen province showed that 54% of the natives of the hamlets in which refugees from Viet Cong areas settled had friends or relatives among the refugees.¹⁷

All these contacts could be of use to the Viet Cong in two ways: helping them to extend their own infrastructure and intelligence net and serving as an informal channel for disseminating news of their activities. The government may have had soldiers in every village, but the Viet Cong could still look the stronger. As Max Clos noted in 1961,

¹⁶Hendry, Small World, p. 27.

¹⁷Terry A. Rambo, Jerry M. Tinker and John LeNoir, The Refugee Situation in Phu-yen Province, Vietnam. (Abridged Version) McClean, Va.: Human Sciences Research, Inc., July 1967, p. 65.

The Viets are not very numerous, but terribly active. Several posts are attacked simultaneously. Then the bands move on and start their persecution seven miles further away. As a result, the population believes that thousands of Communist soldiers are engaged in many actions simultaneously throughout the province (Kien Hoa)."¹⁸

This situation arose because village soldiers were placed in an impossible situation that they could not deal with in the absence of outside aid. In 1960, the Viet Cong were dependent for nearly all their armament on what they could capture. This made it dangerous to arm the village soldiers adequately. As long as the Viet Cong were calling the shots so completely, they could mobilize a large enough unit in any area to overwhelm a single PF unit. The alternative to arming the PF adequately would have been to insure very good communications between PF and Civil Guard or ARVN. This course was even more dangerous, however, from ARVN's point of view, because radios were real prizes for guerrillas, increasing immensely their combat capability. The village soldiers, then, were usually poorly armed and had no sources of reinforcement if attacked. The village, on its own, was pitted against coordinated efforts of the Viet Cong; and through 1962 nearly all casualties in the war were village soldiers.¹⁹

¹⁸Max Clos. "Vietnam Threatened." In "Reports from Asia and Europe on Southeast Asia." Atlas I (1961), 12-16, emphasis added.

¹⁹Duncanson, op. cit., p. 305-6.

Until 1964 the village soldiers and civil guard, now PF and RF, were rarely admitted to ARVN hospitals.²⁰

Thus, the paradox! Trying to keep the Viet Cong weak, the village was also kept weak. And with the villages weak, the Viet Cong did not need to be as strong!

Here again, the ways in which individuals made certain they would not be exploited tended to narrow the basis of government strength by alienating the peasantry. Trying to minimize the flow of weapons to the Viet Cong the recruitment into local military units tended to favor those least likely to defect to the Viet Cong and this, according to the interviews, tended to fill local village forces with enemies of the peasantry - local thugs and bullies unacceptable to the Viet Cong. Of course, anti-Viet Cong soldiers without adequate intelligence may cause even more weapons to be lost. Failing to attempt broadening the base of the government again narrowed it.

Diem eventually did try to adjust his policies but by the time a real effort was mobilized against the Viet Cong in 1962, their infrastructure was well established and their traditional base camps, notably Camau, Plain of Reeds, and War Zones C and D were reopened and secured.²¹ By the end of 1961, all of the Delta was well enough provided with corridors and bases for groups of 50 to 100 men to be guided,

²⁰Ibid., p. 301.

²¹Ibid., p. 303. See also Appendix B for map of 1961 Viet Cong base areas.

fed and dispersed among the provinces. Thus the lack of trust which the government displayed toward the villagers made them incapable of preventing the Viet Cong from developing their infrastructure throughout the countryside.

Viet Cong growth, however, was not a story of continuous success. The 1962 strategic hamlet program was one act of government "oppression" with which they could not easily deal, and if it had not been for the urban problems that led to the Buddhist protests, the Viet Cong might actually have been stopped. The combination of strategic hamlets and helicopters was deadly, and according to Wilfred Burchett, a major chronicler of the NLF, "there was a period when Front leadership almost decided the price was too high, that resistance in the Delta should cease and regular Front armed forces should withdraw to bases in the mountains."²²

The strategic hamlet program consisted, in essence, of grouping the scattered peasants into tight population centers, heavily guarded and surrounded by barbed wire and fencing. The program was never well implemented or supported militarily, and it was unpopular with the peasants - forcibly uprooted and moved to what were often execrable living conditions.²³ Yet the program did hurt the Viet Cong, in the short run.

²²Burchett, op. cit., p. 193.

²³Milton E. Osborne. Strategic Hamlets in South Vietnam: Data Paper No. 55. Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.: n.p. April, 1965.

Diem's overthrow in November 1963 brought deterioration of GVN's rural structures as the strategic hamlet program, already over extended, fell apart and the Army turned evermore to politics. Viet Cong mass support declined temporally, but the breach between national force and village power widened, and while the new government may have been popular for overthrowing Diem and ending the excesses of the strategic hamlet program it was unable to stop the Viet Cong's progress in extending control. The contradictory demands of forestalling a coup and stopping a revolution made meaningful civil government or coherent military policy impossible.

By the end of 1964, the Viet Cong were able to operate openly in nearly all of the country as they extended their liberated zones to include large rural areas which cut into the heart of the GVN corridors themselves. According to the Los Angeles Times map of territorial control ²⁴ for December 1964, the Viet Cong were in control of a large portion of the countryside and could easily gain access to nearly every part of the country. Because U.S. Government maps and claims of population control are so often questioned, it should be noted that the 1965 Los Angeles Times Map, which is obtained from U.S. Government sources, agrees almost exactly with the 1965 map published in Hanoi. ²⁵ The only noticeable difference, in fact, is that the Hanoi map gives slightly more territory

²⁴See Appendix B.

²⁵See Appendix B.

in the central highlands to the GVN.

From 1965 on, the entire character of the war changed markedly as the influx of men and materials from Hanoi and Washington increased steadily in volume. The guerrilla war began to be eclipsed in the public eye by the ever mounting number of deaths, casualties, and refugees resulting from the growing number of search and destroy missions, as well as from bombing and defoliation. "Viet Nam was the arena of a new war, with new actors, new ground rules, new tactics and strategy, new definitions of victory and defeat."²⁶

As the scale of U.S. intervention increased it became clear that Viet Cong would not be able to win a military victory against the huge U.S. military machine. Yet a comparison of the yearly LA Times Maps from 1964 until 1968 does not indicate a very marked increase in areas under government control. The exodus of refugees from enemy areas left the Viet Cong with less population under their control than in 1965 but they still retained the ability to strike at the major cities and provincial capitals as they did during Tet, 1968. By 1965 when U.S. units began engaging in major battles against PAVN²⁷ units, the Viet Cong already controlled, or at least had extensive influence in the vast majority of South Viet Nam's villages and had a well developed cadre

²⁶Pike, op. cit., ix-x.

²⁷PAVN - People's Army of Viet Nam.

system and infrastructure. Viet Cong endurance and the lack of village security, must be credited to this system and not to North Vietnamese soldiers.

Whilst for purposes of public relations it might be asserted by the U.S. Government that this massive intervention by the DRV was responsible for the Viet Cong's domination of the countryside, the truth was that cause and effect were the other way around; it was the collapse of Ngo Dinh Nhu's security system, with all its weaknesses, that had put the Viet Cong organization into a position to receive, conceal, feed and deploy reinforcements from General Vo Nguyen Giap's Army ... ²⁸

Many of the PAVN units are based in Laos or Cambodia or across the DMZ in North Viet Nam and have their own separate supply systems. To do any damage inside South Viet Nam, however, they must still move from their base camp to populated areas. Whether their bases are in South Viet Nam or across the border, the units must still cross large stretches of territory to reach cities or densely settled rural areas. Government forces can deny the enemy the value of a base camp either by destroying the base, destroying the troops or by making their movements in and out of it more difficult. If the villages around a base had no Viet Cong infrastructure, soldiers leaving it would be especially vulnerable to roving patrols or randomly positioned and repositioned ambushes. The introduction and execution of such a strategy, however, would have depended

²⁸Duncanson, op. cit., p. 367, emphasis added.

on a substantially improved coordination of the attrition and pacification strategies and marked reforms in the RF/PF forces which already existed. Instead, attrition, pacification and economic development worked against the integrity of the RF/PF system and helped the Viet Cong viable.

CHAPTER V

RURAL WARFARE: BACKGROUND TO PACIFICATION

Even with more than 500,000 foreign troops in their country, the major day to day confrontation with the war, for most peasants, has come from the Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces and the infrastructure, hard core and irregular guerrilla units of the Viet Cong. These are the main units which have confronted each other in the villages in the struggle for control of the peasants: Viet Cong infrastructure and guerrillas against RF and PF.

Because this is obscured by attention given to large battles and to the special pacification teams, it should be noted that a major part of American fighting through 1967 was in the Central Highlands -- relatively unpopulated, or in I Corps, especially around the DMZ. Until recently, most extensive large unit ground action in and around villages has been in attempts to clear Viet Cong units out of areas they have controlled for as long as 20 years, such as Quang Ngai, northern Binh Dinh and Quang Nam, parts of Long An, Binh Duong and Hau Nghia provinces, and War Zones C and D.

At the end of 1967, in fact, the IV Corps area of Viet Nam, for example, contained 5.8 million persons and 4.9 million of the 10.7 million "rural" Vietnamese, rural being defined by the Hamlet Evaluation System as inhabitants

of villages with less than 20,000 persons. This area contained one 5,000 man U.S. Brigade, assigned to the waterways and canals, and three ARVN divisions.

Nor do the Rural Development pacification teams (RDC - also sometimes called Revolutionary Development) have the major impact on most peasants. At the end of 1967, there were less than 600 of these teams stationed in hamlets, and there are 13,000 hamlets.

Taken as a whole, ARVN, the RF and PF give GVN, on paper, a three-tiered security system parallel to that of the Viet Cong. In theory, while the U.S. engages the large scale PAVN units, ARVN deals with Viet Cong main force units, keeping them scattered and away from the villages, the RF deals with district and provincial guerilla units, and the PF protects the villages from the Viet Cong irregulars, part-time guerillas and cadres. Practice and theory have borne little or no relation to each other. What has happened instead is that the system has tended to work in exactly the opposite way. RF/PF have sometimes been used to relieve ARVN and protect the bigger units. More often they find that there is a big unit in their area against which ARVN is of no help because Viet Cong intelligence and mobility is so much better than ARVN's. Together, the RF/PF comprise about 49% of all GVN military personnel--during this study over 300,000 men--and consistently, year after year,

have taken a larger number of casualties than ARVN and have also killed more Viet Cong than ARVN.¹

Halberstam, for example, reported that in the period when John Vann was senior advisor to an ARVN division in the Delta, (approximately spring 1962 to spring 1963), 96% of the casualties in the division's area of responsibility were sustained by the RF/PF.² Duncanson has even suggested that one impetus toward the November 1963 coup was a stiff note from Diem to the ARVN generals demanding an explanation for such an imbalance in casualties and fighting burden between ARVN and the RF/PF.³

Even in more recent times this has been true. Consistently, month after month, there have been individual RF companies and PF platoons that account for as many Viet Cong casualties as entire ARVN divisions. The 25th ARVN Division, for example, lost more soldiers in 1966 through traffic accidents than it did in battle⁴ despite the fact that Viet Cong were exerting very heavy pressure against the RF/PF in its area.

¹Military Assistance Command Vietnam - RF/PF, information sheet, obtained May 1967, n.d., n.p.

²op. cit., p. 175.

³op. cit., p. 306.

⁴William Corson, The Betrayal, New York: Norton, 1968, p.98.

The much publicized battle of Ap Bac in 1962, for example, was a battle in which a dug-in, well-disciplined Viet Cong battalion badly punished a multi-battalion government force which had them surrounded, destroying several armored personnel carriers and helicopters in the process, and then completely escaped. Three months later 5,000 ARVN soldiers returned to AP Bac in search of the same unit. An RF company was sent ahead of ARVN as a combination scouting party and decoy and was ambushed by the same Viet Cong battalion. While ARVN hung back, the Viet Cong unit again escaped.⁵

As noted earlier, RF and PF in the early stages of their use were kept virtually immobilized by their lack of weapons and radios. Even when the PF were supplied by the U.S. Military Assistance Program, however, they -- and to a lesser degree the RF also -- were still resented, slighted and short-changed by both ARVN and the U.S. Part of the reason was ARVN's desire to neutralize any political counter-balance to themselves, part was the traditional disdain of the professional military man for less professional units, and part was the military's belief that local units hurt more than they helped.⁶

This reflects the shortcomings of traditional military dogma in an internal war. The attitude of Viet Cong cadres

⁵David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire. New York: Random House, Inc., 1965, p. 162.

⁶Based on interviews with Nguyen Ngoc Tho, vice president under Diem and Prime Minister after the November, 1963, coup, U.S. advisors to RF/PF central directorate and IV Corps Headquarters, and officers of RF/PF central di

toward the PF indicates their potential and the concern they create for cadres attempting to exert Viet Cong control in areas where the PF operate. As one defector stated:

... Although the nature of their organizations are different, the PF are considered more dangerous than the ARVN because their activities may have harmful consequences on our efforts in the provinces.

Q: In what ways are PF particularly dangerous to the Viet Cong?

The PF are dangerous in the eyes of the Front because of their daily contact with the activities in the province and the basic local area. The ARVN troops commit themselves in large scale operations only and upon completion of that operation they withdraw, but the PF remains within the village or hamlet all the time. And while the Front tries to exert a tight control or to win the hearts of the villagers, then the PF try to do the reverse, that is to break our local installation, and to do things that may break the unity between the Front members and the villagers.⁷

Although they are so often ignored, the RF and PF, constituting most villagers daily contact with the war and capable of dealing direct blows to the Viet Cong village organization, actually plays a major part in the war efforts of the South Vietnamese government. This research found that absolutely essential conditions for a village or hamlet to be pacified and kept secure was an aggressive, mobile and disciplined platoon of PF. Only where such a platoon existed could villagers be persuaded to place trust

⁷Studies of the Chieu Hoi Program: Interviews with the Hoi Chanh. Simulmatics Corporation. Sponsored by Advanced Research Projects Agency; Washington, D.C. 1966, Interview No. CH-5, August 1966. Emphasis added.

in the government for their own security and only where such trust existed would there develop the intelligence and information flow that was necessary to counter the Viet Cong permanently.

Gaining information and trust from the local population was especially important because of the Viet Cong's mode of operation. They generally operated through steady, low level activity rather than through open military encounters.

It was not an easy job for the Viet Cong to gain total control of a village guarded by even a moderately efficient platoon. To destroy or drive away a PF platoon required a bloody battle.

During this study, however, it did not seem that the Viet Cong were actively trying to place many more hamlets under their total control. It appeared instead that their major concern was to keep control of the villages in and around their network of bases and supply corridors so that their system remained viable and to keep the GVN from making any true progress of its own. This meant a steady war of nerves against villages in the contested category so that the village officials could not draw the population together. An occasional attack nearby or an assassination in the village was sufficient in most cases for the village security situation to benefit them.

Though the Viet Cong seldom risked open confrontation with the PF, nevertheless few areas were completely closed to them because of the numerous weaknesses in the GVN civil administration and the very poor coordination of RF and PF and the very poor intelligence, if any at all, that the PF in villages could expect to receive from outside sources. The Viet Cong could not control the area but the GVN, as will be seen, was often little more than an "Army of Occupation."

The Viet Cong were aided in this tactic by their system of intelligence. While the Viet Cong are generally thought of as insurgents, their strength is derived just as much from the fact that they are also excellent counter-insurgents. Once they gained control of an area they were generally able to establish a most effective covert intelligence net. This meant that even after they had left an area, no one could be sure they were truly gone. Or, if the guerrillas and overt cadres were hiding during a government operation, no one could be certain that it was safe to divulge their whereabouts.

The information available to the Viet Cong, moreover, must be carefully differentiated as to when it is received. Information can be obtained during the day fairly easily because there is so much movement of people into and out of any hamlet or village. People move into fields, go to

markets, transport goods via road and canals and generally have hundreds of opportunities to contact Viet Cong in person or leave hidden messages.

Daytime information flows, however, cannot with certainty tell the Viet Cong where and how to enter the hamlet or where the "people's enemy" will be after dark - either officials or soldiers. It can, however, tell how many soldiers are in the hamlet and identify informants or peasants who openly support the government.

Information obtained after dark, however, is most vital. First, via many simple signals such as a light in a window, a loud cough, etc., one person can signal whether or not it is safe to enter. Secondly, in the amount of time available after a few Viet Cong have entered a hamlet, what can be done depends on whether they have fresh information. With current information the Viet Cong can quickly locate specific targets - a hiding official, a rice cache or a potential recruit. If not, they must either make a slow and largely ineffective search or they can make propaganda and distribute leaflets.

This distinction is essential. It adds one more dilemma to the problems faced in securing a hamlet. Wide-ranging patrols and movement around the perimeter of an area can cover more territory - extending security - but if

there is signalling to the Viet Cong then wide patrolling not only may not cut intrusions but it may drastically increase the damage that can be done by any given intrusion.

Thus whether PF patrolling and mobility helps or hurts their village depends on how much help the Viet Cong are receiving from inside the PF's area: with no information flow to the Viet Cong, -or only a daytime flow- patrolling helps, but with an information flow it can actually hurt the hamlet or hamlets they are protecting. This makes the internal situation in their area most important because a wrong estimate can easily backfire.

This also recalls the earlier discussion of the linkages of trust between district chief and village (or hamlet) chief and from the local official to the peasants. The tendency of district and province officials to maximize their linkage leaves the local linkage most doubtful and further serves to increase defensiveness because local officials obviously are not going to encourage the PF to roam far if they feel a knife at their own back.

It is this counter-insurgency aspect of the Viet Cong that has made the lack of reliable government intelligence agencies so critical at the local level. Depending on information volunteered to them on operations meant that soldiers often got no intelligence at all. More and more

as this happened, they tended to adopt the attitude of "punish the village," using artillery on villages where any sniping took place. This tactic only aggravated the peasants' distrust.

Thus, the Viet Cong operated by keeping the government off-balance, even in areas nominally under GVN control; they succeeded because of the high quality of their information, the inadequacy of GVN intelligence, and the fact that peasants simply did not trust the government to provide them with long-term protection. If the RF and PF were to keep the Viet Cong out of the villages, they had to generate peasant trust and peasant information.

While this research found that security and pacification could not occur without aggressiveness, mobility and discipline it is not a priori clear that this should be so. The RF/PF system, in fact, was designed without any serious intention that the PF, or even the RF, would need to be aggressive or mobile, let alone disciplined.

The rural security network, on paper, was intended to keep the Viet Cong away from populated areas with little need for an offensive capability from the PF. The system was supposed to consist of approximately 1 PF platoon for every two or three hamlets, 1 or 2 RF companies to secure the district town and relieve beleaguered PF and, in areas with

small Viet Cong base areas, an RF company to be posted nearby. In addition about 10% of the PF platoons were placed in outposts where their job was to stop movement through Viet Cong corridors and inform the district chief whenever a large Viet Cong unit was near.

The plan was totally unworkable. The outposts became little more than hostages of the Viet Cong. A good portion of PF were moved from villages to protect bridges and roads, and the district chiefs were seldom able to reinforce any PF that were attacked because the risk was very real that the Viet Cong were waiting to ambush the RF, the strategy of "harass the outpost and annihilate the reaction forces." Further, the priorities facing the district chief from his superior were 1) don't let the district town be hit in an attack, 2) don't lose any bridges, and 3) don't lose any RF companies.

Many PF platoons were in outposts that could serve no function whatsoever--because they were isolated--other than that they had been outposts since the French were in Viet Nam. Province and district chiefs could not abandon these posts even when they were totally indefensible because such orders could only originate from the corps commanders.

Many of the outposts that were totally useless were in important locations and would have served an important function if they were linked to reaction forces and were generally tied in to a security system. To have done so, however,

would have meant centering the whole military system on the outposts and leaving the villages wide open. This actually happened in one district that was traversed lengthwise by both a highway and a railway line. The province chief was responsible to corps for every road and railway bridge in the district with the result that 350 of the 400 RF and PF in the district were defending bridges while the other 50 defended district headquarters. The province chief was even subject to a symbolic 8-day jail sentence every time a bridge was blown, the jail sentence meaning an automatic loss of six months seniority on the ARVN promotion list.

Even under such severe pressure, the province chief could not secure the bridges, for the PF and RF brought their families with them. The men would not disperse widely around the bridges because that would leave the outpost open to the Viet Cong, and the outpost was where the wives and children gathered. Why not order the men to leave their families behind in the villages? As one U.S. advisor who spent 3 years in Viet Nam said, "We never were able to successfully force the men to keep the families away from the 'outposts'." A major aspect of this was that the men could trust no one else to look after their families in their absence from a contested village.

When PF were placed in isolated outposts that Corps commanders wanted manned it not only did no good, but it wasted a platoon needed elsewhere. One platoon in an isolated outpost in one such province was in an impossible

situation. They were placed squarely in the middle of a major Viet Cong corridor through which battalions regularly moved on the way to attacks elsewhere. If the platoon put up a fight it was clear what would happen--they would never be able to leave the outpost without being ambushed. For several months this particular platoon had been sent to the outpost every evening to stop infiltration. Regularly, once or twice a week, they reported they were under attack and called for artillery fire. When, after three months, no Viet Cong dead had been produced, an American advisor flew over the outpost during an 'attack' to see what was happening. The platoon was over a kilometer from the outpost, safely encamped in a secure area from which they were calling for artillery. Not only was a platoon being totally wasted, but every platoon in the surrounding area had been waiting nervously for the attack they felt certain was pending because such heavy infiltration into the district had been reported.

In addition to RF and PF immobilized in indefensible or useless outposts there was a manpower shortage of about 30% for the other RF and PF units. Many RF companies, which should have had at least 120 men, had no more than 30-40 and virtually no RF/PF units were at more than 80% of reported strength. A conservative estimate would be that actual RF/PF strength, taking account of men in training, men on leave or wounded, etc., was closer to 225,000 than the 300,000 officially reported. Corruption, however, was

only part of the answer. The RF/PF could not compete successfully against the Viet Cong, ARVN and an inflated economy for manpower.

Besides the missing manpower, there were also a class of 'privileged' soldiers, young men who had paid their way into the RF/PF to escape an ARVN draft and who then paid someone to let them return home to work. This, at a very rough estimate, would total about 5% of the RF/PF. Overall then, an estimate would be that actual RF/PF strength during this study was probably 215,000 men, of whom no more than 190,000 were in meaningful positions. Thus, it was not only the Viet Cong which had manpower problems.

Because the RF/PF was far below its listed strength and because little was done on the ground in most areas to deny the Viet Cong their system of corridors and bases, every PF unit had to be prepared for both harassment from scattered guerrillas and an attack from a large, well-equipped Viet Cong main force unit.

As long as the PF even thought a large Viet Cong unit might be in their area, the cumulative consequence of each platoon's acting as if it were the only platoon in the area,⁸ destroyed the system and increased its own danger.

⁸with the exception of an area totally saturated with troops such as Binh Dinh to be discussed later.

A large Viet Cong attack in an area is generally accompanied by small, relatively harmless attacks by local guerrillas on all PF platoons in the area. These attacks are sufficient to draw the platoons in more tightly around their families and headquarters. This makes it easier for the big Viet Cong attack to proceed, since the large unit can then move unhindered through the areas that have been left uncovered by the actions of the small guerrilla units. At the same time if every platoon worries only about defense against the large units, small units of Viet Cong will not only do better, but will in the long run make the large units even more dangerous by increasing the precision with which any single platoon can be attacked.

Things that looked so illogical and wrong from the outside--to the district advisor, for example--were very "rational" to the PF's locally oriented point of view, especially when the PF had little trust in the district chief. It was especially frustrating to American advisors that PF often set up their ambushes in the same place very night. In fact, whenever this occurred there was always a strong suspicion that the PF were doing this purposely so as to avoid any unnecessary contact with the Viet Cong.

The PF logic often seemed to have been far more complex than simply trying to avoid all contact with the Viet Cong. If the only problem a platoon faced was a few

scattered guerrillas then it made sense to shift ambush positions every night so that the local guerrillas could be caught off guard. If, however, the PF felt there was any danger of a surprise attack by a large Viet Cong unit, then shifting ambush positions every night was very, very dangerous. It meant that on some nights PF would be a long distance from their post when they were suddenly confronted by a large force of highly trained Viet Cong regulars walking into their ambush, and a squad of PF would be no match--even in a prepared ambush--for 30 or more Viet Cong regulars. So the PF could not--from their point of view--use all possible ambush places on a random basis if they were to assume they were an isolated unit. An ambush position was only acceptable if the PF could safely get back to their fort should they suddenly find themselves confronted with a surprise attack. Yet, if they never moved, a big unit with intelligence from local guerrillas would have a much easier time destroying them. This tended to happen.

Once a platoon began to worry about the possibility of a big attack, the Viet Cong could bluff and didn't necessarily need many big attacks to get at the villages in an area. Once a platoon had adopted a defensive mentality, the Viet Cong, if they were daring, could make propaganda as often as they desired and then occasionally make a rice or manpower raid. Two quotes from one such platoon indicate how the process worked.

Once about every three nights the Viet Cong come to this hamlet. Usually they come to see where we are so as to make propoganda with the people. They did not collect taxes. They only told the people not to help the soldiers, not to live near the soldiers for fear of grenade. They came here last night. They shined a flashlight everywhere. We only took defensive measures and would fire if they came close to us. We did not fire because we feared that they could locate us when they were in the distance. (9459PF)

The Viet Cong, however, were setting the PF up for a grand bluff with this strategy. Not even sure how many Viet Cong were coming to make propoganda and being a generally poor platoon, the PF sat back to be safe. Once this pattern was established, however, the Viet Cong made a good raid on the other hamlet the PF were supposed to be protecting, when they were huddled at night in their watch towers:

About a month ago they raided the next hamlet for rice. Dogs barking, alternating with cries of 'Thief! Thief!' from the villagers alerted us. Knowing that it was the Viet Cong I led my men out to search the enemy... (9454PF)

These PF did react to the Viet Cong raid, but the Viet Cong knew that the men would be gathered around their outpost and it was easy for them to get the rice with minimal danger. Two guerrillas pinned down the PF while porters carted off the rice. "A firefight broke out when we were still 300 meters from the Viet Cong who withdrew a little later." (9454PF)

This stresses the absolute need for mobility, that is, extensive patrolling, because in order to secure their areas the RF/PF had to be able to keep the Viet Cong off-balance. They did not have the men to always beat off attacks. Patrolling and frequent movement in fact make it much harder for the Viet Cong to successfully stage an attack.

The traditional ARVN approach to guerrilla warfare is to find targets big enough to attack and destroy with battalions. Units like RF and PF are viewed as defensive forces to protect villages and bridges while the Army does the killing. What is necessary for security in the countryside, however, is not simply that large numbers of men or large units be destroyed, but that they be kept from forming out of widely scattered smaller groups, or that they be kept enough off balance so that the units cannot, with any certainty, develop plans for future attacks. As Clutterbuck has stressed, it is not simply how many enemy soldiers there are, but the size of the units in which they can operate⁹

From the point of view of security, keeping the Viet Cong off balance is almost as good as destroying them, and much less counter-productive than search-and-destroy missions.

The impression easily gained is that Viet Cong soldiers do more fighting and maneuvering than ARVN, RF/PF

⁹Richard L. Clutterbuck, The Long, Long War: Counter Insurgency in Malaya and Vietnam. New York: Praeger, 1966, p. 66.

or U.S. units. Far from true --- Viet Cong main force units generally are in battle about two days a month -- or even less -- except perhaps for intensive periods such as the Tet offensive of 1968.¹⁰ The rest of their time is spent planning, training and rehearsing the next operation.

Viet Cong military operations are as delicately choreographed as a ballet. For a large Viet Cong unit to attack, small units of men must disperse from a base camp, and pass via couriers and liberated villages to secondary rallying points where the large units reform to move on to their target.

After the attack the same complex movement must be performed in reverse. To move small units through an area safely and secretly requires countless bits of information from a wide area. Every time an area of potential danger is crossed information is needed as to which way to go.

Viet Cong attacks are so well planned and rigidly organized, moreover, as to be easy to unsettle. One American Colonel likened Viet Cong attacks to the mating of storks, "One wrong move and they have to start all over."

Because of their strict central control, Viet Cong operations can be thrown into confusion if they can be disrupted at the right time - between the time they leave a base and the time they reform and move to the attack. In

¹⁰William R. Corson, The Betrayal. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1968, p. 148.

this period the men can become easily disorganized and confused if caught in small groups. When this happens the Viet Cong unit must start the long preparation process all over again. This emphasizes the importance of mobility by government troops, especially RF/PF. When troops move frequently it is much more difficult for small Viet Cong units to move easily through an area to an attack point without detection. More information is needed by the Viet Cong, and their information becomes outdated more rapidly.

For example, to the extent that RF/PF units adopt a defensive posture geared mainly to the protection of their own families and immediate area, Viet Cong villages are not attacked. This relieves the Viet Cong of the need to expend much energy in system maintenance. Occasional bombings are not a good substitute because once the shelters are built, an airplane does not tie down soldiers in a defensive posture similar to that of the PF. Forcing the Viet Cong into a more defensive posture could be an extremely important factor in achieving military success. If RF/PF information is perfect and their own villages are secure, then RF/PF units could easily reduce Viet Cong attack capability by launching counter-attacks whenever the Viet Cong leave their areas

relatively unguarded to attack a GVN outpost or village. But if all of the RF/PF forces are constantly tied down by families, then a single Viet Cong unit can roam at will, hitting where it pleases, constrained only by the threat of air and artillery.

What can be done to reinforce a PF platoon once it is attacked depends on how much the Viet Cong know in advance about the location of the reaction forces. If the Viet Cong know where the reaction forces will arrive from, they can set up an ambush for them, thus effecting a strategy of "attack the platoon and annihilate the reaction forces." Once the Viet Cong have shown they can do this, there is no point in sending a reaction force to the aid of the beleaguered platoon and simply losing more men.

With aggressive and semi-mobile RF/PF there still could be other ways to gain something out of a Viet Cong attack that would decrease total damage in the long run. After an attack a Viet Cong battalion has to get back to its safe area before dawn, because as soon as it is light the battalion can be caught in the open by air and artillery. If every PF platoon between the point of the battalion's attack and its safe area could slow the battalion's retreat by 30 minutes with sniping and ambushes, battalions might be delayed long enough to be caught in the open. If the PF were skilled enough they could track the battalion's retreat,

calling in artillery each time the battalion crossed through an unpopulated expanse.

If the GVN started a tactic of "let the battalion hit but keep it from getting away," then the Viet Cong would have to use more local guerrilla units along the battalion's escape route to keep the PF units out of the way. But then either these guerrilla units could be attacked or the PF could take advantage of their absence to find their tunnels, lay ambushes for them or make propaganda in the Viet Cong hamlets. What might be done depends on the aggressiveness of RF and PF. What can actually be done depends on the quality of local intelligence and on the quality of communications between PF and the sub-sector. Therefore, given a situation in which it was rare for a PF platoon to ever be certain how many guerrillas were in its village, and in which there were PF platoons in every district with radios that weren't working, or platoons where the platoon leader could not read a map well enough to call in artillery in case of attack, the range of possible actions that could be taken to reduce Viet Cong strength and attack capability was narrow indeed.

The PF could not all leave their hamlets and villages, however, because there were guerrillas and cadres everywhere. Outside of An Giang, over 80 per cent of the PF estimated

that the Viet Cong regularly came within a mile of their headquarters at night; 65 per cent of them estimated the Viet Cong soldiers were within two miles during the day; less than 15 per cent said there were no Viet Cong within their villages; and less than 10 per cent said it was safe to walk half a mile after dark.¹¹

Just as significant is the fact that the PF in a platoon rarely agreed on exactly how many guerrillas and cadres were in their villages at any time. While less than 15 per cent said there were none in their village the estimates given in any one platoon were never very precise. The Viet Cong could move around well enough at night to make it impossible for most PF to know how many there were in their village. This did not mean that the PF did not receive any tips from villagers--it simply shows what a sophisticated and complex job it is to collate countless tips and turn them into a complete enough file to know how many guerrillas there are.

This stresses the importance of discipline, because police and military intelligence were very inadequate and

¹¹There are, of course, always the exceptions. In one very insecure area no PF and only one of 10 peasants interviewed was willing to leave the hamlet after dark: "One night I wanted some soup so I walked 12 Kilometers [a long way] for a bowl of soup. I sang all the way so the PF men would know not to shoot me." (8342V)

the PF, if they were truly to pacify their area needed a constant flow of intelligence. Whenever a large attack was pending PF were usually aware. Few peasants wanted a large battle in their hamlet and they were much more willing to report a pending attack than they were to keep in regular communication with soldiers that didn't have good discipline. Even when the soldiers were not alerted they could often tell an attack was imminent by the way peasants scurried around making sure their children were safe and away from danger.

There can be no doubt that discipline was essential in developing an information flow. One village in Long An had an exceptional PF platoon and was near a very poor RF company. The RF, when interviewed, admitted no one ever helped them. One peasant suggested part of the reason:

"The people here love the PF so if the Viet Cong come to attack suddenly the people go to tell them. If people don't love the soldiers the soldiers wouldn't do a good job. For example here they love the PF and they don't want them to die. When they see Viet Cong approach they signal with their eyes to the PF in order to protect them...

This PF unit doesn't bother the people here, they do a good job for people but only the RF company bothers people here. Last Sunday when people went to vote for local councilmen the RF company went to each home and stole food, rice and poultry. People live in dark misery because of war and now must also worry about avoiding the RF company. (8801V)

While the PF often caused little trouble in their own local areas, they seldom tended to be either very

aggressive or very mobile. As suggested above, the difference between a system where every platoon is mobile, aggressive and disciplined and a system where every platoon merely adopts a defensive posture is immense. The more platoons that fulfill the ideal, the less large Viet Cong attacks can take place, the fewer intrusions guerrillas can make into any area, and the fewer hamlets will become part of the secondary Viet Cong system within any small area.

Thus, this research found that a meaningful security system that made a continuous and sustained long-term effort at steadily reducing Viet Cong effectiveness was not possible when the RF/PF were pitted against an infrastructure backed by local guerrillas and occasional attacks by main force or even better provincial force units. The fact that RF and PF generally fought exceptionally well when attacked hid the fact that the system was essentially lacking in any true integration. GVN could not establish a more coherent system because PF could not be moved into a less defensive posture. This meant that the Viet Cong system remained coherent and viable - that the Viet Cong could move through the area, transporting men, supplies and ammunition elsewhere, helping them to keep their entire system functioning. While bombing, defoliation, and very high taxes may have been depopulating Viet Cong areas, they still had a working system. Even more important, when

when they chose to do so, they could move a battalion into every district studied - except Binh Dinh.

Yet, if one were to compare total GVN strength and Viet Cong strength for all these districts, the GVN would have had at least a 20 to 1 advantage in manpower. The Viet Cong could keep battalions (or reinforced companies) in very few of these districts on a permanent basis, but every district had a battalion sized attack at least once during the time of this study. This emphasizes the extent to which kill ratios, population secured, hamlets secured, and troop ratios may be of little true advantage in pacification unless there are mobile, aggressive and disciplined troops in an area, backed by the constant flow of information necessary for pacification.

In fact, few RF companies and PF platoons acted with enough aggressiveness and discipline to stimulate the level of trust needed for self-sustaining pacification. This failure stemmed from the fact that the RF and PF themselves received little trust or consideration from the government and themselves had low personal political motivation. To understand what kind of support these soldiers needed to perform successfully it is first necessary to know about their situation and their needs.

CHAPTER VI

MARGINAL MEN: REGIONAL AND POPULAR FORCES

Last year, when the VC attacked this hamlet the reinforcement forces came so late that our platoon was encircled. The assistant platoon leader Huong was hit by four bullets in the chest; and though the wound was serious he tried to take care of Xuan, a comrade in arms who was very seriously wounded. But toward the end Huong was too weak to do anything for him and so he let him die and left his own rifle as well as Xuan's behind. Yet when we got back to the district we were bawled out for leaving the dead and the weapons behind. Well, I know that the duty of a soldier is to fight off the enemy, but if by bad luck you get run over not only are you not comforted but you are scolded; it really is disheartening. In family you have the wife to comfort you, in the service there are the leaders. They do not encourage our spirit. They do not comfort us. They chew you out. It really is sad. (9335PF)

As chapter V showed, the RF/PF system was often little more than defensive. It could impede the Viet Cong and stop them from gaining control of more villages. It could also reduce the ease and frequency with which the Viet Cong could enter any area. But the majority of its energies were spent in a passive, defensive posture. What the system lacked was the capacity for strategy. To react to the Viet Cong successfully required more information and trust than the system could generate.

The problem, however, was not a lack of manpower and firepower as much as it was the incongruence between

peasant life and military life. The RF/PF failed not because they were peasants but because there was such a gap between their world view and prior experiences and the military system to which they belonged. They were expected to perform according to standards they could not meet and to follow leaders with whom they could not communicate. They were expected to act with discipline when they were without food and leadership. They had never absorbed their training because it had been little more than dry lectures. They never trusted in their support because it was so bad and they never were nice to others because no one had ever been nice to them!

To understand this it is necessary first to look at the characteristics of the men of the RF/PF and to see how their needs and values were left in conflict by the military system. Basically, the men who joined the RF/PF were those men whose prior life had been so unrewarding - by peasant standards - that the RF/PF, despite its abuses was tolerable in comparison. They were also men whose life experience made them ill-equipped for their military role.

Marginality

To comprehend the problems faced in developing the military prerequisites to pacification it is necessary first to understand the economic and social situation of the soldiers.

RF/PF, especially the PF, were miserably paid. The dire condition of the PF was so obvious, even to the other villagers, that when asked what the government should do to help the RF/PF with their mission, 65% of all villagers interviewed suggested they be given a pay raise.

The yearly income of a PF in 1966-67 was 16,800 piastres, raised in the spring of 1967 to 26,400 piastres. This was approximately half of what an ARVN or RF soldier would make with his higher base pay, rate differential and family allowances.

The economic straits of the PF and the poverty in which they lived can easily be shown. In 1964, before the huge American buildup and the resulting inflation, the average income of a rural household was 20,000¹ piastres. A PF in 1967, then, after the raise, was making 20% more than the 1964 household average. By the end of 1966, however, rice prices had doubled from their 1964 level!

¹Robert H. Stroup, Rural Income Expenditure Sample Survey. Department of State, U.S. Mission in Vietnam, 1965.

Using the 1964 price of rice at provincial rice mills as a base, the 1966 price was 210% higher in the Delta and 250% higher in Central Viet Nam.²

Another indicator of RF/PF poverty is the family landholding situation for the RF/PF in Central Viet Nam. In Central Viet Nam, family landholdings are a very good index of wealth since land pressure is so intense that profit levels per unit of land are relatively small even without subtracting rent payments. Therefore, a peasant who must rent a large proportion of the land which he farms is rarely able to accumulate any substantial amount of wealth.

In an analysis of RF/PF landholdings it was found that so few RF/PF owned any land of their own that it was necessary to ask how much land their family owned - as opposed to the individual RF/PF. A secondary analysis of the 1964 Stroup data³ by Anthony Russo indicates that only 18% of all households in Central Viet Nam own no land at all. Among the RF/PF the percentage of men coming from families owning no land is 43% in Thua Thien, 45% in Binh Dinh and 60% in Binh Thuan. The very poorest of peasants also

²Republic of Vietnam, Agricultural Statistics Yearbook, 1965, p. 113 and 1966, p. 109.

³Stroup, Rural Income Expenditure Sample Survey, op. cit.

appeared to be over-represented in the delta.⁴

The RF/PF was not attractive to young ambitious men. The median age of the PF studied was 29 years, and the median age for RF was only a year less. Fifteen per cent of the RF/PF in fact were older than 35. Just as noticeable among the RF/PF was that less than 1 of 10 were under 20 years of age. Young men were either in the Viet Cong or ARVN: in many cases it was the Viet Cong -- which directed its major appeals at the young.⁵

The only strong commitment or identification prevalent among the RF/PF was to their families. Eighty-three per cent of the RF/PF had wives and families, and 70% of them had at least one parent still alive. This family motivation was primary to most PF members. Their only reason for being in their village was that their family was there. When there was danger they cared about their family not their village and if they could protect their family better elsewhere, they deserted. In Long An, many PF

⁴Inadequacies in the questionnaire make a similar comparison impossible for the Delta. The meaning of land units, cong, sau, mau, etc., vary greatly within and between provinces and were not accurately distinguished on the study. In addition renters very often have a higher living standard in the Delta, (see Stroup, op. cit.) and no question was included about the amount of land rented by the family. From what partial comparisons were possible, however, and from an analysis of the reasons men gave for being in the RF/PF, it appears certain that the very poorest peasants were also over-represented in the RF/PF in the Delta.

⁵Pike, Viet Cong, op. cit., p. 243.

sent their families to live in nearby Saigon or Cholon, less than an hour by bus. Once this happened, however, their ties to the village were weakened and they had much less motivation to perform well. Instead they very often deserted to a better paying military branch.

RF/PF had little positive feeling for their government, their district officers or for ARVN. The one group about which they made the most positive statements was the Americans, both military and civilian. Attitudes toward Americans were very much a reflection of the shortcomings in the way they were treated by their own government and especially the support they received from it. Americans, and American troops, meant better medical care, better artillery support, the possibility of helicopters for the wounded, and better logistics. This was especially true for the worst of units, whose poor performance was very much a function of a nonworking support system.

This can best be summarized by looking at the overall percentages of soldiers (there were no differences at all in attitudes between RF and PF on these questions) who could say nothing positive about ARVN, local officials, American troops and American civilians (AID).⁶

⁶Throughout the general interviewing, a non-positive answer, such as "I am neutral" or "I cannot say" seemed more indicative of true feelings than just the per cent of negative responses. Only in the case of ARVN did many soldiers actually state a strongly negative response. On the cross-validation study, when interviewers were much better trained, and more time was spent on each question, the PF were much less reticent about expressing their feelings.

Per Cent of Interviewees with
Nothing Positive to Say About These Groups

Local Officers	ARVN	GVN	U. S. Troops	Americans (AID)
45%	50%	67%	24%	25%

There could hardly be a strong sense of what Viet Cong control of the nation would mean since the soldiers had so little sense of national identity or cause to begin with. When one platoon leader was asked what his concerns for the future of his country were his answer was, "I worry that the Viet Cong will come back to my village." In Long An, a few extra questions were asked of 12 squad leaders - specifically to say the first two lines of the national anthem and to draw the national flag. Three squad leaders did not know the national anthem and two of them could not draw the national flag. A local orientation, though, did not mean a local dedication, it simply meant that the only place the RF/PF cared about was the place where they and their families were located.

While some peasants felt that it didn't matter who won and that they just wanted peace, the soldiers were identified as partisans, albeit minimally, of one side and saw their future as tied to that side. That the RF/PF had relatively positive things to say about the

Americans did not mean, however, that they understood the war, or that reports of bombing, defoliation, and misbehavior by Americans were overstated. The RF/PF were in the war on a definite side and saw that side as better off with Americans present. At the same time they were aware of incidents between American troops and civilians and had great bitterness about such incidents, especially in Binh Dinh and Long An.

It was the Americans that held Viet Nam together in the minds of the RF/PF. When asked on the self-anchoring scale about Vietnam's position today versus Viet Nam's position five years ago the typical answer was the equivalent of "Five years ago the Viet Cong were winning. Now we have the Allies to help us," or "Five years ago we lived under Mr. Ngo, who was not a family man. Today we have many allies." What the RF/PF were saying, in effect, was, "our families used to hate the government, now the government has strong allies." In that light their acceptance of the Americans makes more sense and it also explains why some men could make very strong statements about American excesses and still be glad the U. S. was there.

The attitude of RF/PF, and RF/PF wives and villagers, was not "If the Americans go home the war will end." It was more often "If the Americans go home the war will get

worse (because each village will have another big battle or because the Viet Cong will win)."

One villager, a specialist in Chinese medicine, stated the situation the PF were in as soldiers and marginal men, recognizing their debt to the Americans:

The present government has done pretty well but they haven't resolved the troubles yet. There are still a lot of troubles because this general wanted to overthrow that general. Viet Nam only fears these men, they cause a lot of trouble for the people. . .

U. S. saw our country is small and that the communists oppressed us. They're afraid we couldn't resist alone so they arrived to help us. . .

The PF do a lot of work, but their wives and children didn't receive anything from the government. People should collect gifts for RF/PF like other countries have done. (0184V)

One thing the RF/PF agreed on was that none of them wanted to live under the Viet Cong. Their reasons were seldom ideological or political, however. It was rather that they didn't "like" the Viet Cong, and felt they would receive bad treatment after having been government soldiers. Most important was the fact that beyond knowing that Viet Cong victory would mean a "black future" for them, there was no sense of expectation that they would be better off because of any contribution or part they had played in the war.

None of the RF or PF ever saw the country as worse off than five years previous and themselves as better off. A good many men, however, did see a gap between changes in the

national posture and changes in their own position. In fact 15% of the RF/PF saw the country as better off than 5 years ago and themselves as worse off.

Past and Present Positions of Self & Country

	Self	RF Country	Self	PF Country
Worse (today)	27%	19%	32%	17%
Same	14%	4%	12%	4%
Better	53%	63%	50%	64%
Don't know, No answer	6%	14%	6%	12%

For some men in this marginal class being an RF/PF was better than anything that had come before. It is ironic to think of anyone being in the RF/PF as a job--especially the PF--because they were so mistreated, abused and poorly paid. Yet from the point of view of a peasant, a soldier has a uniform, he has shoes, he has a salary and he has a group of men to pass the time with instead of sitting around the house or working in the fields for another man. Some of the men could be called dedicated and were there to defeat the Viet Cong for a reason, but the majority of men, while they did not like the Viet Cong, were there for a job. Military service was their adjustment to war and to the opportunities available in their environment. When opportunities changed, they could desert.

It is most important to note that a local orientation in the way most RF/PF viewed the world did not mean that they had a community orientation and felt a personal responsibility to their village or hamlet. This can be seen in the reasons given for joining the RF/PF.

Reason for Joining Unit

	Drafted, Ordered No choice	Family Reasons	Patriotism, Duty	Fight Viet Cong	Protect Village, Hamlet	Other
RF	35%	14%	10%	8%	3%	30%
PF	26%	27%	14%	6%	5%	22%

The concept of joining is really too 'Western' and does not really describe what happens. It would have been much better to have asked 'how did you end up in your unit' because, as with the Viet Cong, recruitment is much more a matter of circumstances than motives.⁷ A random sampling of the answers indicates the variety of conditions which places men in the RF/PF, other than being near their families or being forced to join.

⁷Pike, Viet Cong, op. cit., p. 376.

Why in RF/PF?

It's better to be enlisted rather than living out of the army working hard.

I enlisted for some pay because I am poor.

I got enlisted because I like it.

I was threatened by some people, I joined to meet them.

Being young we can't live outside the army.

Live with the Viet Cong I cannot do, and here there are no jobs.

When out of the army I met many circumstances in which the soldiers committed acts of violence towards the innocent people. I don't like that.

If I am out of this unit the Viet Cong will force me to follow them.

For several years I have had many actions in resisting the communists therefore if I return home they will kill me.

PF were simply not made to feel a part of anything beyond their unit. They felt little identification with any person or cause; they expressed a pervasive sense of violated expectations and lack of recognition. When asked what the government could do to aid them, PF seemed more concerned about broken promises than anything but a salary increase to raise them from a starvation level. In almost every instance, what PF wanted were things they had been promised and never received, especially uniforms and shoes, or their

monthly ration of a few pounds of bulgar wheat and milk powder from Catholic Relief Services.

That so much emphasis was put on clothing by PF is especially significant. Uniforms and shoes were so important to the PF because they were a sign of status, something the other soldiers had. So important were these items to the PF that they sought them whenever possible on the black market.

These men were very status conscious, but individual rewards and honors, especially for PF, were seldom provided. When a PF made an important military discovery, he was sometimes promised a sum of money. Often, however, the money simply never came; and even when it did come, it was regarded as less desirable than a medal. One PF, for example, was responsible for killing the Viet Cong district chief for his area. He was given a reward equal to two months salary. Yet, he still would have preferred a medal. "I'm so poor anyway," he said, "that all I can do with the money is pay some of my debts and have a celebration with my platoon. Thus, the money is gone at once. If I had been given a medal or a paper I would have it to keep always and everyone would know what I had done."

This stated preference for medals and papers was not simply an individual case of false modesty, for it was repeated consistently:

One day we heard a horn sound and requested permission to go on a search mission. As a result we killed a Viet Cong and seized an M1 carbine. As reward, we got 1,000 piastres. But I thought even a single p, one piastre, would do because it was an honor reward. A medal or commendation certificate would have been welcomed with greater gratification. (9701PF)

About 7 months ago, while we were running to look for a place to stay away from the rain, we were able to capture two Viet Cong who were teasing the girls. There was no reward. . .

Another time I found a mine. . .and the whole platoon received a reward of 500 piastres. We felt joyful when receiving the reward, we did not think whether it was worth it. We were happy since we had made known the platoon and that was good enough. (9803PF)

PF did not even receive formal rank and insignia.

This omission was especially embarrassing when RF or ARVN units were nearby. When asked what he needed, one platoon leader in Long An replied, "With five children my life is very hard on such a small salary, but money is not what I want the most. The thing I want the most is a real insignia that shows I am a platoon leader. Now all I have is this piece of yellow cloth pinned to my uniform, and the insignia store in Saigon doesn't even sell this cloth. When I need a new insignia my wife must buy the cloth in the market and make it herself. When I go to formations with RF and the officials I am very ashamed because all I have is this little piece of cloth." (9706PF)

The PF could not even be sure of adequate medical care if wounded. Most of the doctors in the country were

assigned to ARVN and very, very seldom would treat wounded RF/PF, even when there were facilities and doctors available. Less than 50% of the PF thought they would get adequate medical care if they were wounded.

If they were killed, there was also a good chance - as they knew from experience -, that their widows would never collect the widow's benefits, equal to full salary for 12 months. Death benefits were often filed late so that district and province officials could collect extra pay, and even when payments began they were sporadic. The application procedures, in fact, were not even suited to rural reality. Before a widow could receive her pension she needed a marriage license. In parts of Viet Nam men often never obtained the licenses, either because there was no legal authority in residence because of the Viet Cong or because it simply was not the custom. Yet nothing was done to help new recruits obtain licenses for future use and widows sometimes didn't receive their pension as a result. Saigon bureaucracy conflicted with peasant tradition to such an extent that village officials attesting to the fact the woman was indeed the actual wife were not always accepted as a substitute for a license.

Trust and Dependence

Thus the soldiers crucial to GVN success in the villages were treated as marginal men in Vietnamese society; and, not surprisingly, they held only marginal loyalties to any unit of organization beyond that of their own families.

The lack of commitment to their units is reflected among the soldiers by the fact that less than half of them had been in their unit as long as two years and only 20% of them had been in their unit more than 4 years. This was not because these men were new soldiers, for 50% of them had been in other military units previously. The reasons for the lack of commitment lay in the nature of their support system.

RF/PF, in fact, saw their units very much in terms of families because of the nature of Vietnamese culture and society. With no meaningful agencies of socialization in most rural Buddhist areas, men learn and adapt to society through the family; there is no strong educational system, no religious organization or youth movements to gradually move them towards a less family-dominated socialization. The value system produced by this family socialization helps to explain the importance of non-military logistics to the PF and emphasizes the crucial role of the district chief in determining the immediate needs of the soldiers.

The importance of trust and support cannot be overemphasized for the RF/PF. They have been socialized in a value

system which emphasized interdependence and nurture the primary group values to which all must become oriented. Wolf⁸ has pointed out the general tendency for societies where food is accumulated periodically and then consumed slowly over a period of time--such as a rice society--to favor socialization techniques which render group members dependent on the socialization group. Dependence training aids in promoting repeated execution of routine tasks and it emphasizes that the total product of the group is more important than the workload of any individual. Peasants will often pay more for a piece of land than it is worth from a capitalistic standpoint because they have surplus labor in the family which can be used free of charge. Donaghue, for example, noted this in the Mekong Delta,⁹ where he found that a landowner could make more money by renting land than by hiring labor. This is because each laborer must earn enough to support his family. Renting the land means that the land owner is receiving all of one family's labor in return for supporting them whereas when he hires a laborer he supports a family and receives only one man's labor.

Harvest societies thus generally emphasize group dependence. The socialization pattern of extended families is even more dependency-oriented and places a great deal of

⁸Wolf, op. cit., p. 69.

⁹John D. Donaghue and Vo Hong Phuc, "My Thuan: The Study of a Delta Village in South Vietnam." Saigon: MSUAG: May 1961. mimeographed.

emphasis on oral gratification of the young¹⁰ --in effect identifying authority and power with support. There is a very practical reason for this because it is the children who will eventually be required to support the aged, who in peasant societies do not receive medicare and social security.

Richard Solomon has provided insights into the importance of trust and support in his analysis of Chinese culture,¹¹ which is very similar to that of the Vietnamese. Both societies have strong Confucian strains, similar harvest and family patterns, and a common cultural heritage reflecting the fact that Viet Nam was under Chinese control for 1100 years.

In Viet Nam, as Solomon's work on Confucian China suggests, there is a very strong desire for unity but also a very strong fear of conflict. This places emphasis on a leader strong enough to satisfy the individual's need for unity, a unity which is tested by seeing whether the leader can give the needed support and gratify dependency needs developed in childhood. To feel dependent is to feel secure. One is productive when immersed in a meaningful system. Dependence on the group overcomes personal passivity; one

¹⁰Wolf, op. cit., p. 69.

¹¹Richard H. Solomon, "The Chinese Revolution and the Politics of Dependence." Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, August 1966. mimeo.

fulfills group obligations via labor for the group. Autonomy leads to fears of isolation, a sense of helplessness, and passivity. To be used is to feel secure.

The RF/PF regard their military unit as a family unit. This sense of support and trust, intrinsic to the family unit, is essential to keep the RF/PF system going as a military unit. As can be noted time after time in the quotes, the RF/PF use family-oriented terms for their units. One RF, from a very good unit, who said he liked his company because "We know each other. We are locked together as brothers and will live and die together," offered further insight into the problem of support and solidarity with a TAT (TAT: Thematic Apperception Test) story about a Viet Cong defector. The story indicated the way that even the most dedicated anti-Viet Cong soldier is sometimes willing to accept and trust defectors, but more clearly it indicated the importance of group support and dependence. One leaves a group only if there is another group.

The father is scolding his son, the mother interferes, but she was scolded by her husband too, so she gets angry, and uses her hand to gag her mouth.

By the enticement of the Communist, this son took money of his parent to follow them. Presently he could not endure the hardship, so he returns to his parents. The son thinks of hating the communists, he hopes his father will absolve his fault so he may live with his family. Finally, the father forgives his son, and lets his son join the RF to maintain security for villages, hamlets. (770RF)

Hierarchy-and dependence-oriented men will tend to exhibit a sense of powerlessness and a lack of initiative before authority. They will show reluctance to criticize and a great desire to please those in power.¹² Yet, a forceful and especially a just superior will inspire trust, fulfill dependence needs, and hence inspire his subordinates to great effort on behalf of the group. This places a great responsibility on the man on top of the hierarchy--here, the district chief--for it suggests that RF/PF generally will not dare ask for what they have been promised and that they will wait to be asked what they need rather than initiate requests.

To a remote, isolated, military unit, knowing that one can count on artillery or reinforcements is all important. However, since there is no way to know for sure that support will come, one must simply trust. In Viet Nam the credibility of this trust is tested by seeing whether or not the authorities provide non-military care, and therefore sustain the dependence linkage required for a feeling of psychological (as well as physical) security, in the military unit. Thus, one way the PF would test their linkages to the district chief would be by seeing whether or not he assured their receipt of monthly food supplements of bulgar wheat and salad oil, as well as certain nonessential items promised to them

¹²Solomon, op. cit., Part II, "Confusion and the Need for Strong Authority," pp. 145-6.

such as mosquito nets, which PF often complained about even when mosquitos were entirely out of season. The problem here lay in the difference in attitudes about the importance of whether items arrived on time and as promised to the men. To the district chiefs, usually urbanites, delivery of the food supplement was perceived as a "big job for nothing" since the food was so bad that many PF didn't like it very much. But to the PF, it was the symbolic act of receiving the allotment, maintaining the dependence linkage, and knowing that the district chief cares which was so important. The loss of this dependence relationship, the support and guidance of a powerful superior is very threatening when there is a war.

The PF were very apprehensive about their support in part because they knew from experience that district personnel were frequently remiss in their duties. As one platoon leader said "Anytime the officer on permanent duty is absent no quick support is available. It may come 15 minutes later or 30 minutes later or sometimes it even comes after the battle has been fought..."

A short time before one unit was studied, it had been mortared by the Viet Cong. No one was wounded or killed but the attack still shattered the platoon. The men's confidence in the district's ability to support them was destroyed by a

few words over the radio. As one PF stated in his interview:

I wish to attend a NCO training course or to become a rural development cadre. The reason is that we are fighting alone and cannot live sufficiently on our salaries. I worry about fighting alone. I fear that my leader will not show a good understanding. For example, once the deputy district chief swore at us 'God damn' in his speaker (radio) and in that moment the VC were shelling the fort.

I live in such narrow circumstances that I want to join another branch. A lot of soldiers have deserted here to join other branches such as Division 25 of Infantry, Rangers, Marines. (1132PF)

One of the TAT's obtained from a squad leader in the platoon seems to contain further insights into the unsettling effect that a felt lack of support had on the men. Lack of consolation or care seemed to be justification for changing sides. When dependence needs are not fulfilled there is no obligation to remain with the group.

This man is a VC--this woman is his wife. He went out and was shot by our troops. The medic comes to put a bandage on him because he is wounded.

This man has fought against us, our troops have shot at him. He has no medic so we bandaged for him. Seeing that the husband is wounded, the wife is thinking why he didn't join our troops. He has followed VC and (she wonders) if there is a medic to take care of him. Later this man will fight against VC because he was wounded and VC didn't bandage for him or say something to console him. (1136PF)

In many instances, without the district chief's knowledge, the PF were abused by corrupt underlings on the district staff. In one instance, for example, the district chief specifically spoke of the food he had sent one platoon.

The platoon had been studied, however, and had only received a part of what had been sent.

Nor did hamlet or village chiefs encourage the PF very often. The village officials were appointed and responsible to the district chief - not the village - and it was very seldom that they ever helped the PF with any of their problems. One PF complained about the hamlet chief he was protecting:

Although the village had provided rice for sale at the hamlet the authorities here did not want to sell rice to the PF families.

As to family affairs, although I have been enrolled as a soldier and there aren't many people at home the hamlet chief still ordered my wife to do public works. If she refuses, he would bring her to the Discipline Council of the Village and fine her. (9687)

Yet when the PF were abused they were afraid to tell the district chief because of the fear that revenge would later be taken by the culprit. As another PF said:

The commanding officers help us to get our rice if we meet them. With regard to rice sometimes we get much sometimes we get little. Usually we have to sign a receipt to receive rice. Our officers would take action if they knew that sometimes we were forced to sign seven copies. (9701PF)

Nor could physical separation be always blamed. The above quote came from a PF stationed less than 500 yards from the district headquarters.

Another platoon in a different province had a very capable radio operator and several men who could read maps precisely and accurately. When the platoon moved from its post at night, however, they never brought their radio with them. Instead, they left it in their post--where it was useless--with three men to guard it. This platoon was

searching for and defending against local guerrillas with no use of a radio. If they spotted a guerrilla band moving towards another area it would be many minutes before they could notify the district. If the platoon were under attack from a large Viet Cong Unit - a life-or-death position - they would have their radio, but they were doing without the radio in their day to day work against guerrillas.

Three years before, according to the platoon leader, they had lost their radio in an ambush. Not only had the district chief beaten him, the leader said, but it had been six months before the platoon was given another radio. At the present time this particular district had a good district chief, but the platoon leader had not had enough contact with him to know this. The district chief, in turn, could not know of the platoon's fears of losing their radio, for there was no one on his staff who had been with the platoon when the incident occurred.

Nor were subsectors equipped to coordinate individual platoons. In one instance, four Viet Cong guerrillas were able to outwit four PF platoons for eight months because the four platoons, though in the same area, were managed and directed as four separate wars.

One village straddled a highway near the site of an important bridge. Because of the bridge there were four PF platoons located in the village. Each platoon was responsible for patrolling around the perimeter of one hamlet, both to

secure the hamlet and to prevent any Viet Cong unit from reaching the bridge.

The four hamlets were so close together that they practically formed a square, like four coins clustered together. The four Viet Cong, actually three guerrillas and a female nurse, lived in a totally concealed, impossible to notice, tunnel near a grave marker in the small open space between the four hamlets. Every few nights the guerrillas would scatter a few leaflets in one of the hamlets. Every time this happened, according to the village chief, it was assumed by each of the platoons that one of the other platoons had not been alert and had allowed the guerrillas access to the hamlets. It was eight months before anyone realized the guerrillas were already in the four hamlet cluster and then they were uncovered only because someone spotted their accomplice, apparently the only man in the village who knew of the tunnel's location, with some Viet Cong leaflets he was carrying to leave near the tunnel with some food.

These few guerrillas could do no physical harm to the bridge or the populace without being uncovered, but they could still make everyone in the four hamlets think he was being watched. According to the American advisors, in retrospect it seemed that if anyone had been collating and cross-checking the incidents from the four hamlets with

reports from the four platoons on their activities the guerrillas would probably have been found within two months at most.

The fact that the PF were so dependent on the district and yet so open to abuse from its personnel was sometimes more injurious to the district chief than to the PF. As illustrated in the last chapter, PF faced with assignments which to their minds were impossibly fearful tended to try to avoid potential wrath by hiding their predicament. The empty outpost was far more dangerous when no one knew it was empty. There were many similar, but less serious instances noted during the study. PF who had been berated or abused for dereliction of duty tended not to report all the Viet Cong incidents in their hamlets, a situation far more dangerous to anyone seeking to assess the current military situation. Thus, abuse which threatened the PF's link to the district resulted in the PF avoiding confrontations in a way that was far more serious in the long run.

Given the distance, both physical and psychological, between PF platoons and the district, competent platoon and squad leaders were an absolute requirement for effective units. There were, however, few incentives available to offer platoon leaders. Platoon leadership was a dead end in the PF. A platoon leader could be the best platoon leader in the country, clear 100 Viet Cong from his village, capture

the infrastructure intact, win the love of all, and he would still be a platoon leader. There was no promotion beyond platoon leader, and it was very rare, if ever, that a PF was even honored with so much as a minor military award.

Despite the lack of real incentives, however, many PF were so hungry for any recognition or status that they very much wanted to be leaders. There were also, in fact, many PF who had been well trained in elite units such as the Rangers or Marines and had deserted to the PF to be with their families. The promotions tended to go, however, to the highest bidder or to a relative of the platoon leader or village official.

According to me, the government must choose those who are capable, having anti-communist fighting spirit, willing to help their comrades-in-arms, having good behavior and virtue.

Then there are many men who had had experience in the other units and who long for a training course, but because they are not accustomed with the PF office cadres in the district they have not been selected for training. Many times they felt rather sad, because they have made efforts but the superior did not pay attention to them and did not help them. (9333PF)

Everybody could attend training course if he is in the platoon leader's relatives. According to me the way of promotion should be based on the seniority in service. We can't stand the fact that people who just joined the army could attend a training course just because they were well-connected. (9104PF)

Bad leadership tended to perpetuate itself because it was seldom that an incompetent leader was ever replaced.

One platoon which was studied had not received a casualty in over a year despite the fact that Viet Cong regularly came to their village to draft men and collect taxes. The men in the platoon were for the most part terribly satisfied with their personal relationships, and well they should have been, because as one interviewer noted in jest, "The Viet Cong would be crazy to attack them. They might kill the platoon leader by mistake!" The platoon leader, in fact, was 53 years old. Only one man in the platoon was below 30 and half of them were over 40. It was more of a rest home than a platoon, a good example of what could happen with inadequate leadership incentives.

All of this was compounded by the poor quality of the leadership training course and the fact that graduation from such courses was automatic.

The reason, for example, that some platoons had poor artillery support was that they had no one who could use a radio or read a map properly. In fact, some men had been platoon leaders for as long as 5 years and had still never been taught how to spring ambushes or read maps. As one PF squad leader said of his platoon leader:

Our platoon leader is a man with much experience and virtue. He is fair and just in distributing awards and he seeks to enlist our aspirations. Truth to tell, though, I can only rate him as an average leader because now he is old (43) and his eyes are very poor. He cannot read the map when it is dark and he has much trouble with the radio. Perhaps if he had some money for the glasses he would be outstanding, but now he does not let the other men use the radio or read the map because he is ashamed about his eyes. (9708PF)

No one in the district headquarters could know if this particular leader was capable of reading maps accurately and using the radio well. No one receiving his messages could know how long it had taken him to get the radio working. Furthermore, if a radio message had been sent to the platoon a slow response would have suggested a problem, but this platoon and many others kept their radio off when they were not using it because they very seldom had a reserve battery on hand and most district chiefs professed worry about batteries falling into Viet Cong hands. Similarly, no one could know, when he did call for supporting fire or to report a Viet Cong troop movement, whether or not the Viet Cong were where they were reported to be.

Further compounding problems was the fact that training was very poor, militarily and motivationally. At best it amounted to six weeks of lectures and some rifle practice. Thirty percent of the PF had had no real training at all and 70% had had less than two months. With the high turnover rate in soldiers there was often little or no time to send men to training. As one soldier noted, "I was not trained. The commander gave me a rifle, told me to fire it and when I could fire he gave it to me." (1114)

Peasant logic is no substitute for military training and tactics. The best example of this is how well and poorly trained squad leaders dealt with two military problems that were given to a small group of squad leaders in Long An and Binh Dinh.

The two problems given the squad leaders were concerned with how to bring their squad safely across a stream and what to do in an ambush.

When a squad of soldiers comes to a stream that must be crossed the approach of the poorer leaders was to cross the stream first themselves with three of the men while the other soldiers guarded them. Their logic was that the squad leader should go first at all times so the others "would know that I am brave." Unfortunately, if there were any Viet Cong waiting to shoot at the men the squad leader would either be killed or separated from the other men. A good leader spends his time leading, not going first. As one PF, with 8 years experience in the Rangers before joining the PF said of such a leader, "When we have a fight he spends all his time fighting when he should be directing the other men." (945PF)

Even more striking is the difference between the "natural" and the "trained" approach to ambushes. In a typical ambush of a squad walking along a path the Viet Cong will open heavy fire from one side of the path only. The other side will be mined or manned with heavy weapons so that if the soldiers try and avoid the first fire they receive by jumping into a ditch they will be destroyed instantly. The only way to beat a good ambush is to attack straight into it--but untrained natural logic says the opposite.

Dedication and spirit are simply no substitute for good training, but as noted before 30% of the PF received

no training at all and what training there was included no night training at all. Nor did American advisors provide the needed training: they were forbidden to go on operations of less than company size!¹³

What is truly extraordinary is the fact that in 1967, 6 years after the sending of American advisors to Viet Nam and 13 years after the United States assumed responsibility for the training and equipping of ARVN, the night belonged to the Viet Cong. There simply was very very little aggressive and roving night patrolling by the U.S., ARVN or the RF. Some RF companies, some U.S., and ARVN units, and some PF platoons were active at night, patrolling over wide areas to keep small Viet Cong units from being able to form for attacks; but when they did so it was because of an exceptional and inventive unit commander and not because of any general policy. A study of the problems submitted to MACV in August 1967 stated:

It is only by a full scale, direct confrontation of the Viet Cong during the time they are active that the degree of security essential for pacification to succeed can be established.¹⁴

¹³R. W. Apple, Jr., "U.S. Study Calls a Night Army Essential for Victory in Vietnam." New York Times, August 6, 1967, p. 6.

¹⁴Apple, op. cit., Even sometimes when PF were mobile at night it was to avoid trouble and not to be aggressive. As one PF in a very poor platoon said, "I like to go on night ambush patrols because it is more dangerous inside the fort." (1133PF)

There was little effort made to motivate PF, even though the opportunity for training was available. Generally the PF only behaved well when they were in their home village, subject to the sanctions and social pressures of families and friends.

"The PF should be kind toward the villagers. Formerly, because the soldiers of some other branches had come to plunder and oppress them the villagers became very suspicious. So we must try to win their confidence. As for the PF soldiers in this area, they are the children of the people so they are much nicer."
(8339PF)

Away from their village PF were generally no better behaved than any other soldiers. Several platoons were observed that were away from their home area or away from their families. These men engaged in the same kind of small scale chicken stealing and bad behavior as the larger ARVN or RF units. Said a peasant of one platoon away from home:

"out of the 4 platoons here, only that of Mr. _____ is sort of undisciplined. For example, the day they encamped in _____ they lifted the villagers vegetables and plundered the gambling den. The local people were greatly chagrined. As I know, the 3 other platoons behave very well toward the people except for that of Mr. _____. To put the trouble right, the higher authorities should transfer that platoon to another area and give them some more training to please the people."
(8148V)

Their low pay, in fact, gave them little alternative:

". . . About the conduct of the soldiers here in the hamlet. They are good fighters but because their salaries are so low that sometimes they will try to make some more money by gambling. It doesn't matter if they just gamble, but when they lose money in gambling they will go to rob from the people. This had happened once after the TET New Year. A PF soldier robbed a man of his money, but this man has a son who is a soldier in the ranger force so he called his son in for revenge. They has a fighting, at the end the PF shot and wounded this man's son. That was all because of gambling.

In this hamlet, the soldiers' conduct is pretty good but in other hamlets, the soldiers rely on their guns. They are arrogant toward the people so the people are very afraid of them." (8115V)

That the social sanctions of family and friends was generally necessary for good PF behavior makes it very difficult to have a balanced system, because it is often true that the only way to secure one hamlet is by pacifying a different hamlet, i.e. some hamlets are crucial to a whole area. In addition it is also usually true that the hamlets that need pacifying the most are the hamlets where it is hardest to recruit local PF, such as hamlets where everyone has joined the Viet Cong.

This poor behavior of GVN soldiers away from home is also one of the reasons why it is so difficult for GVN to reclaim hamlets from the Viet Cong, or gain allegiance when they are in control. As long as officers can't control their men, it

is hard to convince peasants to work with the GVN in pacifying their hamlets. That home-based soldiers were the ones who most often had good relations with peasantry highlights a major fault of the entire military control system. Either some district chiefs and ARVN officers did not care how their soldiers behaved with peasants, or they were unable to control their own troops. As one villager said, when asked what should be done in order to have a closer relationship between the soldiers and the people:

"As for the RF soldiers, they should go to learn more of soldier's conduct and virtue. Punish those soldiers who are haughty toward the people and there should be a change and reorganization from the leaders down, the soldiers must behave and dress properly and they should be forbidden from drinking and gambling. The soldiers should do something to help the people and treat the people like they do to their parents. Now the soldiers' clothes are topsy-turvy, we can't tell which branch of arms they belong to, their hairs are messy and they don't have any conduct at all; people are very much afraid of them. Furthermore when they get drunk, they swear and break the tables and chairs. And when they lost money in gamble, they will go to rob from people.

[The PF] were also like this before but now they are better. We can't blame them, it is their leaders, the sergeants and the second lieutenants [on the staff] who should be blamed." (8115V)

At least part of the blame is definitely due to lack of concern by district personnel because there were opportunities available for indoctrination which were largely unused.

One of the reasons soldiers away from home steal food is because it appears that peasants would rather be thieves than beggars. Away from home GVN soldiers are often without any supply system to sustain them or any organized means of obtaining food. ARVN supply lines are terribly jumbled and leave the soldiers to provide their own food in the field. RF and PF away from home are usually so poor and broke that they can't afford to buy food. To a peasant's natural sense of logic the two answers to the problem that seem to occur are either to beg or to steal the needed food.

Marginal men can still have pride. Among the RF and PF studied there was a great deal of shame associated with the need to beg. Begging is humiliating and to be turned down is even worse. This reveals the tension in a society that stresses dependency. One expresses autonomy via stealing so as to avoid the more dreadful fear of being rejected in a dependency relationship. A frequent theme on the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) was begging and the stories told by the soldiers indicate their sensitivity towards begging. In the picture about which these two stories were told, a young man is shown talking with an older man, while a woman stands in the background.

A disabled man comes to beg a richer and the wife of the richer is near.

This man is disabled because it is his destiny so he has no work and he must beg the money to live.

The beggar is thinking of his destiny and asks himself why he is poor and hard; the richers cannot spend all their money and as for him, he has no money. The richer wonders whether he can help the poor men to obtain blessings for his children.

In the future, this richer will still be rich, and and his children will also be rich, and the poor will be poor forever. (0348PF)

The poor man comes to beg from the big capitalist. This man looks down at the man who's come to beg. The daughter sees that the father's neglecting the poor man and she pities him and she cries.

Our country has been ruled and exploited and people become poor and had to go to beg. Together with this, the rich men also exploit the poor workers.

This poor man begs for food, he also hopes that the country will have peace so it can be equal with other countries and people's life will not be so miserable and they might have happier living. The daughter has a pitying heart, she hopes that from now on, no poor man will come to beg and get scolded by her father. As for the father, he hopes no poor, dirty beggar will come to beg and mortify his house.

The poor man will become a soldier and help the government to destroy all the traces of feudalism. This rich man hopes to become richer, but since the government is destroying the vestiges of feudalism and corruption he is put in prison and all his properties are confiscated. (0168RF)

Training and indoctrination play an important role in shaping the relationships between soldier and peasantry and the PF Motivation Improvement Program (MIP), significantly improved the relations and behavior of those platoons that received the training.

Begging and stealing are not the only resolutions to the problem, and good training or indoctrination can teach soldiers an approach which is more acceptable to all concerned. The successful resolution to the problem--keeping soldiers fed and protecting villagers from pillage--was to teach the soldiers the importance of having good behavior and developing common sympathies with peasants they have not known previously.

The MIP program was designed to teach the PF the value of good behavior and diplomacy, the value of working with peasants so as to develop common sympathies with them. It was successful in as much as the behavior of PF platoons trained by MIP groups was generally better than that of other PF platoons. As one peasant commented on a platoon that had just received MIP training:

The Viet Cong are unhappy. However knowing much of politics they can win the people's sympathy. The PF men have just begun to imitate them by learning about the psychological warfare. Previously they beat the people where they met them. (8229)

Teaching soldiers that good behavior and good deeds can win sympathy and result in a free meal when needed is not sufficient, however, to produce consistently good behavior unless the leadership also accepts the importance of good behavior and reinforces rather than undermines it. The program only reached 60% of the PF studied, however, and was not well received by some district chiefs.

The value of the MIP training was seriously diluted by the lack of commitment to the program at the district level. As the program worked, teams of national cadre trained a few platoons in every province and in the process also trained a provincial team to carry on the program in the same fashion so that each district would ultimately have its own training team. At every level the program became diluted and altered as each official tended to use training teams as added soldiers who in reality did little more than act as military reinforcements in many instances. The units that actually received the training, however, were substantially improved in their performance according to the interviews.

In the absence of any checks on incompetence, with poor training and apprehensive about support, it is not surprising that the RF/PF system was basically defensive. The absence of trust and support can prove crucial for the soldiers are dependent on the organization to satisfy their needs.

The Shils and Janowitz analysis of the Wehrmacht in WW II¹⁵ found similar variables relating to military effectiveness. Their research showed that a soldier's ability to resist was a function of the capacity of his unit

¹⁵Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II." Public Opinion Quarterly, XII (Summer 1948), pp. 280-315.

to avoid disintegration, and that the main ways in which units could be disrupted are through: 1) separation, 2) communications breaks, 3) loss of leadership, 4) depletion of personnel, and 5) major breaks in food and medicine.¹⁶

Furthermore, as Shils and Janowitz note, it was necessary for structural integrity that the group possess leadership with which the soldier could identify¹⁷ and officers and NCO's be effective because of their consistency with the personality system of the individual soldier. The Vietnamese military system effectively guaranteed that a great number of men could not identify or have personalities consistent with their men because all district officers were regular army officers, many of whom were urban, educated, middle to upper class and indifferent or even contemptuous of their men.

In the RF/PF, communications breaks were frequent, there was inadequate leadership, personnel were depleted and there were often major breaks in food and medicine. In every case the major reason for this--more than the Viet Cong--was the inherent working of the Vietnamese military system. Leadership was often inadequate because of leadership selection practices. Major breaks in food and medicine often occurred because RF/PF equipment and

¹⁶op. cit., p. 281.

¹⁷op. cit., p. 284.

supplies were controlled by ARVN and often diverted to other uses, including the black market where many PF bought their uniforms. Communications breakdowns were frequently due to negligent officers who didn't bother to communicate. Personnel were often depleted because sons of rich men were allowed to buy positions in the PF to avoid the draft and then were not required to fight and because desertions were often not reported by provincial authorities who collected the money for the missing men.

How much separation could occur before PF felt abandoned, and how much of a communications break could occur before a unit felt cut off, certainly had a lot to do with how much faith and trust the RF/PF had in the district officers. What seldom happened, however, was the development of the good personal relationship (as occurred in Hoa Hao and Viet Cong areas) through identification with common goals and frequent interactions, ritualized in the Viet Cong through self-criticism or in Catholic and Hoa Hao areas through religious ceremony.

Scarcity could even become an advantage to development of such a system if the right climate of trust was created. Early Viet Cong literature, for example, often cited the importance of earning through one's own efforts the tools of revolution and not depending on handouts, as in the story of "Mother Carbine," the rifle that grew into thousands of rifles.¹⁸

¹⁸Burchett, op. cit.

Similarly Hoa Hao youth groups were often purposely kept short of rifles and made to earn them by showing that they deserved them and would care for them, even though the Hoa Hao stockpile had many weapons.

On the other hand, one unit in another province called for supporting mortar fire during an attack and was told "Mortar shells cost 5000 piastres, we can't waste them." Or in still another province a district chief explained why he did not give a light machine gun to an outpost in a very precarious position. "I dare not risk it," he said, "because the outpost may be overrun and then the Viet Cong would get the weapon." Scarcity can make for ritual and increased solidarity, but it certainly doesn't have to! 19

It was not always the district chief's fault that RF/PF were short-changed, but if the district chief did not talk with them and explain the situation, there was little way for the men to distinguish between scarcity and exploitation. A quality PF's found highly desirable in officers was that they should attempt to "enlist the aspirations of the men" to sympathize with, and try to help the men with their problems. Instead, what happened was that the favored position for "protected soldiers"

¹⁹See Chapter IX, "Ritual in Social Movements," in E. J. Hobsbawn, Primitive Rebels. New York: Norton and Co., Inc., 1959.

became the psy-war (information) cadre. As one soldier in Long An stated, "We never see our psy-war cadre. Doesn't the government ever have anything to tell us?" (1118RF)

CHAPTER VII

PROTECTION FROM WHOM?

"I have fears for the poisonous gas from the bombs. Even the trees are destroyed by this so I am worried for my child's health." (8116V)

"The PF here can do nothing more for our security. Hundreds of platoons would remain ineffective against the airplanes and artillery." (8342V)

"Mr. Nguyen Bay, the hamlet chief, was killed about two months ago. It was said that the VC killed him but actually it was the soldiers from ARVN who killed him. The soldiers came to rob money and then killed him...he went to someone's house to gamble. They met him outside and killed him." (8112V)

As the RF/PF system was constituted, localism, a family-oriented defensive outlook reinforced by poor training, a lack of trust in the support system, and inadequate intelligence served as divisive influences that tended to separate villages and hamlets rather than drawing them together in a balanced system. The result of each platoon suboptimizing its own values in this situation was to make it easier for Viet Cong main force units to operate and to increase the ability of the infrastructure - aided by small guerrilla bands - to operate.

The prospects of long-range pacification were made worse by the short-run problems created by the lack of coordination with search-and-destroy operations, large

numbers of refugees, the presence of large military units, and the frequent failure of Americans to understand the importance of the Viet Cong infrastructure. Even when there was no heavy fighting in an area, large-scale economic growth, sometimes coupled with the presence of large U.S. - GVN military units and poor police, helped the Viet Cong cadres maintain themselves.

The district chief could not protect the peasants from the brutalization, rape and pillage of the large military units. The PF were protected from neither the large units nor from inflation. Nor could the PF always protect the peasants from the police that were being sent into rural areas. The result tended to be a situation in which the Viet Cong controlled less population and could move less large units into an area while large units of ARVN, U.S. or Korean troops were present. At the same time, however, their local infrastructure could adapt and even strengthen itself while the RF/PF local security structures tended to show little improvement, and even eroded, during the time large military forces were present.

Attrition and Security

At the same time that the RF/PF were fighting the Viet Cong infrastructure and local guerrillas and attempting to provide day-to-day security, large units were seeking to destroy Viet Cong main forces. Lack of coordination between the "big war" and the "little" - or village-war decreased success in both wars and gave the RF/PF who were to be present before, during and after the search-and-destroy operations little better prospects of keeping their area secure. The problem was as much a lack of coordination and failure to control non-combat violence as it was the consequences of battle itself.

Search-and-destroy operations generally did not affect the Viet Cong infrastructure because the large search-and-destroy units employed on these missions often stayed in any given hamlet or village only for a day or less before moving on. Viet Cong cadres could hide nearby for that short a period, returning when the soldiers left, or they could stay in a tunnel, the whereabouts of which no one else knew or dared to disclose.

Search and clear operations, however, aggressive, do not achieve the dual purpose of killing insurgents and destroying their infrastructure...[do] not put the government forces into the same element as the insurgent forces opposed to them. As a result, it does not force insurgent units to fight in defense of their organization and infrastructure, because it does not threaten these at all. ¹

¹Sir Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency. London: Chatto and Windus, 1966, p. 117 (emphasis added).

When large military operations did not destroy the infrastructure, the losses to the government sometimes far outweighed the gains. One especially graphic instance is sufficient to illustrate this self-defeating strategy. In one district which was studied GVN daylight control consisted of district headquarters and one of the 53 hamlets in the district -- and even the single hamlet containing the district headquarters was not entirely secure during the day. Once, while the interviewing team was in the hamlet, a squad of seven Viet Cong entered it 200 yards away from headquarters to distribute leaflets. (That day someone warned the PF at once and the interviews were not interrupted.)

The district chief was an extraordinary man -- fearless to the point of lunacy, he had the absolute loyalty of his men and seemed totally dedicated to his district.²

That the district chief had a local alias, Vietnamese for fox, signified his stature in the district as a result of his military exploits. He was honored with that pseudonym by Viet Cong and PF alike. Not only was he the only district chief studied who was held in such esteem by the villagers, he was the only officer observed of low birth who had ever become a district chief. This district chief, who could not even read and write well, had been appointed only because

²The information in this example was based on an extensive talk with district chief and was later validated by cross checking with the U.S. advisors, the province chief and the interviews obtained in the district.

the district's problem was sheer survival and his past experience marked him for the job. A soldier for 27 years, he had fought at various times for the French, the Japanese, the Viet Minh and ARVN and had campaigned in Burma, Laos, Thailand, India, and China.

The district chief had his deficiencies as a leader. He ignored or scoffed at problems of defense, led attacks personally when he should have been coordinating battle plans, and never learned how to delegate authority. However, he did have a plan for the district.

During his tenure, the RF/PF often carried out local operations that appeared to be fruitless, inefficient and even cowardly. They sometimes moved very superficially through Viet Cong hamlets, giving the local Viet Cong plenty of time to avoid them. But the district chief explained that he was slowly removing PF families from Viet Cong areas and using his maneuvers to keep informed of local Viet Cong activities and operations. Using the pretext of stealing a chicken or threatening to beat a peasant, he would get a minute alone with him and find out what was happening.

The plan was to slowly gather all RF/PF families where they were safe from retribution, complete his knowledge of the Viet Cong infrastructure and where they hid, and then pick them all up on one detailed operation. Whether or not this was a good plan, and whether or not he was a good district chief, the plan at least made sense.

Three months before the district was visited, however, a regiment destroyed in one operation what he had been developing for two years.

In the Viet Cong areas of the district, death was the standard punishment for any peasant who gave any information to GVN. The government regiment moved through the district in search of a Viet Cong battalion dispersed there. The soldiers spent 24 hours in each hamlet taking pigs and chickens to eat and threatening to stab anyone who interfered with them. During the night they stayed at one of the villages where seven of them raped the widow and daughter of a PF. They also abused PF and their families and caused, at the district chief's estimate, one million piastres (about \$10,000) worth of damage - as much money then as 60 PF's earned in a year. The senior American advisor -- killed one month later -- found that in the hamlet where the rape had occurred all the remaining men had cut off their trigger fingers as an enduring protest. While the regiment was in the district, the district chief and the province chief had both tried to intercede but the regiment was under outside control and could not be influenced by local considerations. The district chief and his RF/PF actually picked up and moved to avoid unnecessary association with the rampaging government soldiers.

Perhaps the regiment was right and the district chief wrong. A complete analysis would require fuller knowledge of what the regiment accomplished - it did not find the battalion - and why it acted as it did. But while the study team was present the mother of one PF and the sister of another were killed by the Viet Cong. The PF said that this was in retaliation for the pillage of the regiment. In March, 1967, 250 Viet Cong overran the district, killing 31 of the 37 Vietnamese and 3 of the 4 Americans present (the district chief survived); and while no causal connection can be proven, the search mission of the Government regiment had done little to bolster the district's formerly strong will to resist, or to cause warning to be given. Intelligence in the district, according to the district chief, did dry up substantially after the regiment's visit.

This not only shows how local relationships could be destroyed by military brutalization on the part of the government, but also how the Viet Cong on the other hand could use force effectively to back up their demands, and actually gain in the process. They claimed, without anyone's being able to prove otherwise, that the regiment had come because someone had betrayed their battalion's presence and that this justified their strict penalties for talking with RF/PF. Even the PF could understand the logic of this, especially because the Viet Cong battalion was probably never in the hamlet being brutalized anyway!

Force simply does not encourage unarmed peasants to try and stop the Viet Cong, nor does the threat of force always bring people together. The peasants needed someone who could protect them and as long as the Viet Cong had their infrastructure they still had some trumps.

From 1954 until the present, then, the relationship between government force and the village has been a major factor for the Viet Cong to exploit instead of a force to bind the village to the nation. From 1965, the military emphasis was mainly on destroying large units of Viet Cong instead of containing them, often neglecting the Viet Cong infrastructure and allowing the Viet Cong to profit from the excesses of the large operation.

These operations may or may not have been winning the larger war. But while the civilian toll, both refugees and casualties, was immense, less than two percent of all U.S. offensive operations produced any contact with Viet Cong.³

Thus, as was noted by Brigadier General Richard M. Lee, former Deputy Senior Advisor to II Corps RVN hit-or-miss efforts "only operate to make the entire VC infrastructure stronger" in the areas of GVN military operations.⁴

³Corson, op. cit., p. 147.

⁴Lee, B. G. Richard M. "A Program Against the VC Infrastructure," July 27, 1967, quoted in Buchanan and Hyatt, op. cit., p. I-31

Another result of the large scale search-and-destroy war was the dislocation of hundreds of thousands of peasants. These huge population movements (morally justified or not) placed a large strain on local government which it often could not withstand.

Not all these displaced persons were "voluntary" refugees. Often attempts were made to move large numbers of people from Viet Cong areas so that the Viet Cong would be denied their labor. This drove some people into the Viet Cong who otherwise would have been government supporters. They sometimes went out of hatred stemming from the bombing, but more often simply because a very poorly run refugee program was unappealing and no jobs were available. One peasant in Binh Dinh stayed with the Viet Cong when they took over his hamlet because as a refugee:

I could not earn my living. In order to work for the Americans I would have needed some powerful man to help me. Since my children are so many I have to stay here to live on agriculture. (8228 V)

A PF also recognized that the government had to provide for people if relocation was to work.

There are many reasons (why a man follows Viet Cong). For instance, those nurturing griefs against village officials follow the Viet Cong to have the opportunity to revenge on them. In general, those who follow the Viet Cong were not lured by Viet Cong propaganda into doing so. Up to 80% of those who followed Viet Cong did because it was the fault of the government authorities. The government failed to arrange in advance shelter areas for the villagers in case of Viet Cong

raids. Many had no other alternatives than to follow the raiders. (9570 PF)

At the same time, the simple fact that the government has had to move people may be interpreted as a sign of weakness and can generate great hostility. As the refugee study in Phu Yen found:

For a people as pragmatic as Vietnamese peasants, the message implicit in refugee movement is a clear one -- The GVN is not able to protect even its supporters from the insurgents so one had best withhold making any overt commitment to the government.

The existence of such an attitude was manifest in many refugee camps where the population, despite a stated hostility to the Viet Cong, refused to participate in local self-defense forces.⁵

Perhaps even more critical were the repercussions the refugee situation had on the more secure villages, where there was frequently the same hostility by the refugees. As noted before, Viet Cong contested and secured hamlets are often located very near each other. Many refugees never went farther than a few kilometers from their homes, hoping to wait it out in nearby hamlets as best they could. There they often became a source of great strain and tension as they increased the demands on security, and the drain on communal land and jobs. When they were rebuffed or poorly treated by local officials they created great distrust and suspicions among the villagers who feared they might be Viet Cong. This was reinforced in many cases by the

⁵Rambo, Tinker and LeNoir, op. cit., p. 63. emphasis added.

attitude of the PF who often made little or no effort to overcome the hostility or to protect refugees.

These large-scale operations, then, often had result of decreasing the intelligence flow to the district chief, driving some men into the Viet Cong, and increasing the strain on more secure areas, while often not even destroying the Viet Cong unit being pursued.

The problems were exacerbated because American officers frequently did not comprehend the Viet Cong system. The American military system emphasized destruction and attrition of main enemy forces and often completely misunderstood the non-traditional roles assigned to large Viet Cong units, and the importance of cadres. As Buchanan and Hyatt note:

In late 1966 a VC/Lt. Colonel defected from the 5th VC Division then located in Phouc Tuy province. His interrogation report listed the primary mission of the division as intensifying the revolutionary struggle. Secondary missions were to harass government outposts, interdict routes of communication, etc. The MACV intelligence analysis which followed the interrogation did not mention the division's mission but instead analyzed the military and therefore more understandable, tasks. In another instance in Viet Nam, regimental size NVA and VC units were described as "hiding among the population." It could be argued that an appreciation of enemy missions is necessary to the process of assuming enemy capabilities and intentions.⁶

In one province, despite the lack of a competent local intelligence system, an American intelligence advisor was

⁶Buchanan and Hyatt, op. cit., p. I-27, emphasis added.

still able to obtain detailed information on the infrastructure of several villages from documents captured in a large U.S. operation in the central highlands. When he brought the detailed listings to the American advisor in one district, the advisor's comment was "There couldn't possibly be any VC in those villages! I've walked through them without ever being shot at and all the peasants tell me there are no VC there."

Problems were often even more complicated when large units of ROK (ROK: Republic of Korea), U.S. or ARVN troops were situated in an area on a more permanent basis. The district chief was usually without any means to control the actions of these troops and the "punish-the-village" style of these units was frequently exploited by the Viet Cong.

In Binh Dinh, for example, there were sometimes entire companies or even battalions of Korean or ARVN troops within one or two hundred yards of villages where Viet Cong operated daily, disseminating propaganda and collecting taxes. This happened not because the peasants were all supporters of the Viet Cong, but because they were more afraid of the ROK or ARVN troops than they were of the Viet Cong.

There was one village in particular where the peasants were faced with a dilemma. A Korean unit was stationed about 300 yards away, and the peasants were terrified that something might provoke them to enter the village. There was a rumor about the Koreans making the rounds in the village:

Koreans are people speaking a different language from ours. The population is excessively afraid of them, because they could not tell the VC from innocent people. In Phu Hung, one day, the Koreans herded some 70 people into a trench and shot them all to death. While on operational mission the Koreans shot to death every people they encounter, no matter it is a woman or child. (8461V)

In the same village that story was told several times. As far as could be determined, it was seven not seventy people in a mass grave and it was not certain that the Koreans had definitely killed them. What counts, however, is that the peasants thought they had. There are, however, recorded instances of Korean brutality in Rand Corporation interviews: one refugee from Phu Yen indicated that "all the people in the village, including the [Viet Cong] village cadres, were so afraid of the Korean troops that most of them left the area to take refuge in Tuy-Hoa City." ⁷

In this particular village, what mattered was that the Viet Cong could use peasant fear of the Koreans to collect taxes. If any peasant complained, the Viet Cong could simply shoot at the Koreans and bring them in to punish the village as they already had done several times elsewhere. But the Koreans were not the only ones who would brutalize peasants:

The thing I fear is that the VC will shoot at the soldiers of Division 22 (ARVN) when they walk by. When that happens the soldiers come and beat the people.

⁷Rand Corporation, Studies of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, No. AGR-56, Saigon, 1966, p. 26, as quoted in Rambo et al., op. cit.

So great was the peasant's vulnerability to outside soldiers that in one area it literally seemed as if the level of terror would not have been significantly lowered had there been no Viet Cong in the area at all. At least six different killings officially listed as Viet Cong terrorism were thought by some of the peasants interviewed to have been the result of ARVN soldiers killing local officials who tried to stop their marauding, as the quote at the beginning of the chapter suggests. Nor were the American soldiers always free of suspicion.

To speak frankly, these Americans are helpful to us. What I do not like is their intercourse with our women. But this is to be blamed on our women's eagerness to run after them for money. I heard that [sic] one day some time ago the Americans raped a girl to death. They abandoned the victim's body in the mountains. I prefer the Vietnamese soldiers. Because for all the help they are giving us, the Americans are a foreign people. (hamlet chief)

American officers were generally concerned about discipline and behavior among U.S. troops, but problems of correcting and stopping pillage are even harder with Americans if you don't have access to an interpreter who will tell their officer.

The Koreans are very strict here though there are only a few cases of their rascalities and raping women. The conduct of the Americans is very bad. When they are riding on a car, they often grasp the hats or radios of the pedestrians who happen to be near to their car. Sometimes they drive in close to the people's houses and take away the lamps that are hanging in front of the houses. They have done many very wicked things. Three or four guys used to fool around with bar girls. And the soldiers who are responsible to search the

men who work for Americans. Once they searched my pocket and saw the lighter that I had bought in the open-air market and a pack of Salem cigarette they took it away. If we have money in the pockets, they will take some away for going to the bars. If we want to go to the office to ask the interpreters for interference, the soldiers will point the guns at us and chase us away.

Even when Americans were disciplined and "punished" there were still problems. In one district the contrasting ways in which two different large American units coordinated with PF illustrates even more subtly how these large units can affect the little war.⁸ In the district both American units had programs for helping the local district in its day-to-day war, although the major mission of both units only indirectly involved the district. They both meant well, but the difference in practice was striking.

The first of the two American units (unit 'A') arrived in December 1966 and remained until February 7, 1967. Before it arrived, unit A's brigade and battalion commanders paid a courtesy call on the district chief, to which they did not invite the American district advisors, but let the district chief himself make the invitation. They requested the help of the district chief in keeping out prostitutes, controlling inflation, providing barber and laundry services, detailing a policeman to control traffic near the local schools so no

⁸Based on interviews in March and April 1967, with District Chief and Assistant District Chief, American advisors, one colonel and one major from each U.S. unit, PF and peasants in three villages, and direct personal observation of the second unit.

one would be hurt, and they asked his advice in selecting and gaining permission to obtain specific land for the unit to occupy.

Every time a change in plans was made the unit informed the district chief and they held a daily briefing to keep him posted. In addition, a battery of the unit's artillery was made available to the district, and all of the unit's patrols and operations were conducted with local RF and PF units so that there would be no mistaking of friend for foe. This, according to the district chief, his advisor, and the units themselves, was a great help to RF/PF. It increased their local prestige since they associated with the powerful Americans, protected the local population from problems of mistaken identity, and gave the units on-the-job training in skills they had never before been taught.

The commanders of the second unit (unit 'B') also visited the district chief before coming to the district. This time, however, the purpose of the visit was to inform the district chief of already formulated plans, and, although nothing happened on schedule, the district was never advised of the changes. No one came to visit after the introductory call. As the unit arrived whores and bars followed close behind. At first the prostitutes were jailed and the bars were closed, but the district chief, who had no

requests from the new unit's commanders and no rationale for his policy was ordered to let the prostitutes and bars operate--after bribes were paid to his superiors, according to the interviews.

Part of the district had no potable water and was supplied by a district water main. Without asking permission or informing anyone, the unit turned off the water whenever they couldn't supply their own needs, and eventually left part of the district completely without water for two weeks because they broke the pump.

When officers from the second unit were interviewed they were asked what kinds of coordinating activities they intended to carry out or were carrying out in the area. They did, in fact, have plans and very good ones in as far as they went. Unit B assigned two medical teams to work in the villages, both of which were very popular and well received. What the unit never did, however, was to link their soldiers in any way to the RF and PF forces. They sent their patrols out alone because they saw no positive advantage in working with the local men. For this reason they aroused great anxiety among soldiers and civilians alike about the possibility of mistaken identities. The result was that after three different patrols from unit B walked through PF and RF ambushes without knowing it, RF and PF drastically reduced patrolling for fear that they would be shot by Americans.

Here, to illustrate the contrast between the two American units are quotes from Vietnamese soldiers and peasants about their differences:

All of us liked ["A"] because when they go to operations they bring RF or PF so as not to make a mistake.

(PF company commander)

Unit ["B"] frightens the people because when they go on operation they tell villages they will kill all if there are any snipers.

(Another RF company commander)

Unit B are not friendly or diplomatic with the people. The people here have fear because they worry how can Americans know to distinguish VC.

(PF platoon leader)

Unit A was very kind, sometimes they even pumped water for people. Unit B sometimes takes away all the water.

(Hamlet chief)

It would be a mistake to say that Unit B made an entirely negative impression on the district. Their medical units, for example, were very popular.

Unit B brings doctors here and the people are very pleased.

(RF platoon leader)

Unit B does many nice things here. They even give toothpaste to the children.

(Hamlet chief)

Yet, in spite of unit B's good actions, their military style left gaping holes in the local security system that allowed Viet Cong cadres much easier movement than before unit B arrived. A Viet Cong squad distributed leaflets and

collected taxes in one hamlet less than 300 yards from the unit's headquarters one night. Apparently the Viet Cong, knowing that everyone feared being misidentified by the unit, used good intelligence to walk into an unguarded area. The usual practice of neglecting to cooperate with local soldiers, despite the best of intentions, had made all the difference.

In another district RF and PF on guard duty seldom checked the identification of unfamiliar soldiers when they passed by the sentry post at the gate to district headquarters. They had stopped challenging people, they said, because three times in recent weeks they had been beaten or humiliated by soldiers from the national army when they challenged them at the gate. One day a soldier wearing a uniform with no insignia walked through the gate carrying a submachine gun and six grenades. Walking up to the district chief's office he entered and said "I'm a Viet Cong and I want to defect." He could just as well have been on a suicide mission to kill the district chief, for when this occurred the district was under severe pressure from the Viet Cong.

Prosperity and Decay

Mao's doctrine, and its extension by General Giap and Truong Chinh,⁹ assumed that a disciplined, perfectly behaved people's army and infrastructure could not alienate the masses. Their doctrine could not anticipate that so large a force would be pitted against the revolutionaries for so long a time that forced drafting would be necessary, that revolutionary taxes would be higher than those of the landlord, or that the revolutionary communities would be subject to massive doses of artillery and defoliants, or to heavy bombing. It could not foresee that the peasants might develop a strong "pox on both your houses" attitude or that the construction of huge numbers of foreign facilities could create an artificial -- but still real -- war boom.

Mao's doctrine and its extensions tacitly assume, in fact, that the quality of life and the quality of government are identical and that the superior organization and quality of the revolutionary cadres will be reflected in a better life for the peasants under them. The peasants often preferred freedom, corruption and prosperity to justice, bombing and poverty.

Inevitable or artificially sustained, there was extraordinary growth of non-agricultural occupations as a

⁹General Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War - People's Army. New York: Praeger, 1962, and Truong Chinh (pseud.). The Resistance Will Win, in Primer for Revolt: the Communist Takeover in Viet Nam, facsimile edition, New York: Praeger, 1963.

result of the war, and there was also an increase in military pressure against Viet Cong areas. The combination of these factors, resulting in a boom in economic activity which competed with agricultural production, and at the same time, in huge refugee flows, hurt the revolutionary communities badly.¹⁰ But this was not always reflected in a corresponding growth in the GVN's ability to improve security by destroying the Viet Cong infrastructure or improving the RF/PF.

Perhaps most ironic is that that even before a large American unit entered an area, local intelligence capabilities were often rendered less adequate, RF/PF strength was decreased, and Viet Cong recruitment made easier. This could all happen before a single shot was fired or a single bomb was dropped, so poor was the coordination of large scale units with local needs. The relationship between the big and little wars can be so delicate that even the preparation for the arrival of large units themselves can markedly impair local conditions.

Before a large American unit can base itself in a province a considerable amount of local manpower will be required simply to build facilities for it. Just providing the manpower needed for this task can overload a local security system or even undermine the local military.

¹⁰Samuel P. Huntington, "The Bases of Accommodation," Foreign Affairs, (July 1968), 642-656, and Frank Harvey, Air War - Vietnam, New York: Bantam Books, 1967. and Jonathan Schell, The Military Half, Vintage Books, New York: Random House, 1967.

In Binh Dinh Province in 1966, for example,¹¹ the large American and Korean buildup in the province required large numbers of local laborers to build airfields, warehouses and other facilities. Before they could be hired all employees had to get clearances from the security intelligence system of the province which, according to one U.S. advisor, was barely established and functioning in the countryside. American generals placed so much pressure upon the intelligence service to get men cleared for construction work that for six months no effort at all was made to keep track of members of the local infrastructure - a task just as important to the security of the bases in the long run.

According to the intelligence advisor in the province, the already weak intelligence system was based on an informant net created by two ARVN officers who never once left the provincial capital, but depended instead on men they could recruit there to send out for information. Once the demand for personnel became so acute, all efforts were made to clear prospective employees because there was a very large profit involved in the selling of clearances, many of which were never checked anyway.

¹¹This example based on extensive interviews in 1968 with former U.S. Intelligence advisor in the province.

In 1967 the pressure of getting facilities built for Americans was still impairing the functioning of the rural security system by depleting the ranks of its soldiers and by undermining its organization and esprit de corps.¹²

One American contractor having trouble finding enough manpower to complete a facility on time was recruiting men from local PF units by offering them substantially higher pay than they normally received. To get new identification cards for them so they would not be punished as deserters he had bribed a local village chief to go into the business of obtaining counterfeit identifications. Once this had started, of course, there was no reason why Viet Cong could not obtain papers in the same way, either by threatening to expose the fraudulent operation or by posing as deserters.

The economic growth from military spending and numerous AID economic development programs led to many peasants moving to the more secure district towns and nearby villages, but the problems of local pacification were not solved because in some areas prosperity eroded local structures for control faster than it undermined the Viet Cong. The same economic boom that led peasants to abandon Viet Cong villages for new jobs also caused much higher desertion rates among RF/PF, and led to more problems with police and their treatment of suspected Viet Cong, and alienation of peasants through their treatment at the hands of soldiers.

¹²Based on interviews with American Advisors in two districts and verified with interviews of ARVN officer in charge of an RF/PF training center in Binh Dinh.

As the economy grew and large units appeared in their areas RF/PF were given opportunities for jobs in which they were subject to less personal risk, and could better support their families. With no commitments to anything but their families, and after years of enduring abuse when they had few other opportunities, they deserted in ever larger numbers. In one province, in fact, the desertion rate was over 40% and there were some units in which the turnover reached 80%.

There were also large-scale desertions from ARVN units in the same area, as some men, tired of being away from village life were willing to join the RF or PF. The result was a constant large scale turnover of manpower which made it hard for any unit to remain stable enough for the men to develop the ability to function as a unit.

In such instances the lack of coordination between ARVN, RF and PF worked against all. ARVN, RF and PF were fighting against each other for manpower. Everybody wanted able-bodied men so badly that they would take anybody they could who stepped forward and said he wanted to fight--whether he was a deserter from another branch or not. This put such a big escape hole in the system that it was terribly difficult to assign missions to many units. If a soldier didn't like the job he was given, or if he decided that he might like to get a pay raise he could, if he wished, simply join another unit or even go off and buy a job with the Americans.

If controlled and regulated, the flow of men between RF, PF and ARVN would have been beneficial to the military system. Men could get their introduction to military life at home, gain confidence and perhaps come to desire a more lucrative job in another branch. The option of a higher paid position in ARVN or RF could have been an important incentive for ambitious PF. Or, men who gained extensive combat experience in the better ARVN units could have been given a chance to return to their homes, assuming leadership positions in platoons that drastically needed better leadership.

As noted in Chapter VI the very weak contacts between the district staff and most PF platoons, often reinforced by the lack of commitment to the local area among the district staff which was largely composed of men on temporary assignment to the area, resulted in a leadership selection process that was largely inefficient and frequently corrupt. When new men with wide experience and competence were not given positions as leaders, an opportunity to upgrade weak leadership was lost. In addition, it was also found that when men of superior training and skill joined PF units with weak leadership the performance of the units sometimes actually declined.

For a platoon to perform as a well-coordinated unit, observation showed that it was necessary for platoon and squad leaders to work with their men, giving them the training

they had never received and meeting with them in frequent discussion, where problems were discussed, errors pointed out and recalcitrants chided.

It was observed that units in which many men felt that the person best qualified to be leader -the "natural leader" - was not the formal leader, less frequent training and discussion sessions were held. This was true at both the platoon and squad level. In one case, for example, after a man with eight years experience in ARVN entered a squad, the squad leader drastically decreased his work with new men and held less frequent group discussions. It was suggested by the PF that he was embarrassed to talk in front of the new man who clearly knew more than he. Similarly, it was noticed that poorly qualified platoon leaders were reluctant, when they had the opportunity, to recommend men as squad leaders who could out perform them and be a threat to their legitimacy.

Nor would PF approach new men with competence and experience on their own to ask for guidance and advice, for they were clearly reluctant to upset their relations with the formal leader. Thus, when formal authority and natural leadership are out of alignment the value of the natural leadership may be lost in a desire to satisfy the man with formal authority on whom sustenance depends.

Lack of a coordinated and enforceable manpower policy was made even more self-defeating by the localism and lack of commitment or positive identification out of their own immediate world among RF and PF. This aided the Viet Cong in solving their draft problems because in most areas ARVN was given first call on young men, and due to the GVN's weakness, and its loose structure, even a mandatory military draft was not always possible to enforce. The most frequent reason encountered in both Binh Dinh and Long An for boys joining the Viet Cong was to avoid the national draft. ARVN service meant long years away from home and some young peasants were afraid of this separation. As one hamlet chief stated:

The Viet Cong told the young men that if they were afraid of the six-pockets [paratroopers] the Viet Cong would let them come with them. They said that the six-pockets would take them far from home but that the Viet Cong would only take them to the hills for six months.

Given the need for the GVN to draft men and to have men serve away from home, several compromises could have been made which might have worked. One such compromise would have been to make ARVN service more appealing and less threatening to young peasants. Another would have been to do as the Viet Cong did in early years, let everyone start military service in local, village-based forces and recruit soldiers for national service from among the

local soldiers so that the two transitions, from peasant to soldier and from local to national service, could have been faced separately. A third way would have been to develop a more powerful--and harder to avoid--method of drafting the young peasants attempting to evade national service.

The third way, in fact, was attempted in some areas and did not work very well because it also required more effective linkages between the PF and district chief than existed. In some areas district and province chiefs were under orders to produce a given quota of men from the villages to serve in ARVN. To do this they had to order local Popular Forces to arrest and detain all local draft dodgers hiding in their area. In at least one case, the men simply did not carry out the orders with more than the slightest effort. Concerned with the defense of their village, it was more a threat to them to force boys who were doing no harm to the village to serve in the national army which the PF and the villagers often disliked and considered useless. Trying to send reluctant boys to ARVN meant doing more harm to their area than leaving them at home and risking an undermanned national army, because they knew many boys would sooner go to the local Viet Cong.

Finally, to produce the needed quota, the province chief had to conduct an operation with outside soldiers in the district where the draft dodgers were hiding. In one

day 450 draft dodgers were found and taken for military duty.¹³ In this one instance part of a district was totally safe from Viet Cong intrusions so that draft dodgers did not join local Viet Cong. Otherwise, at least some of them would have gone with the Viet Cong.

In Binh Dinh, ARVN recruiting problems were eased somewhat because the heavy military pressure on the Viet Cong from U.S. and Korean soldiers had temporarily made local Viet Cong service look far more threatening than ARVN duty. Military officers interviewed on the subject, both at the district and provincial level, admitted that they strongly suspected that once the heavy U.S. military pressure was lifted in the area, some young men would find local Viet Cong service more attractive than service in ARVN. In fact, interviews with two American officers who were in Binh Dinh in June 1967 when 5,000 American troops left Binh Dinh to support Khe Sanh indicate that this is exactly what did happen.

The increased flows of traffic and commerce gave the Viet Cong new opportunities to exploit for sustaining their own system while waiting for the large military units to depart. The Viet Cong were clearly alert to this possibility, for as Pham Ngoc Thuan, of the National Liberation Front, told Jean Lacouture:

¹³Personal interviews with province chief and assistant province chief for military affairs.

We were very clumsy primitives. We tried to oppose the colonial system and its Vietnamese allies with a "counterstate" with its own administration, currency, and educational system... But our successors, wherever they could, have made a great deal of progress and utilized our experiences and our failures by choosing another way: they make every attempt to infiltrate the state and utilize it. Rather than systematically oppose the existing legal framework, they prefer to use it, in order to substitute another one for it. In simple terms, I would say that in the old days, we were cutting roads to intercept vehicles. They prefer to step into existing automobiles... ¹⁴

In one village outside a major highway with heavy bus traffic, a PF explained that someone in his platoon always watched the comings and goings of the buses because the PF felt that there was something 'suspicious' about the behavior of the bus drivers. They did not report this to district headquarters, however, because they were reluctant to initiate discussion of problems not strictly assigned to them. A week later, it was learned at the district headquarters that the police had just discovered the Viet Cong had been using the bus drivers for over six months to transport their documents and pamphlets between villages.

¹⁴Jean Lacouture, Vietnam Between Two Truces. Translated by Konrad Kellen and Joel Carmichael. New York: Random House, 1966, p. 174. (emphasis added)

The Residue

If every district in Viet Nam could have been permanently saturated with a large military presence, then the problems discussed in this chapter would have been largely irrelevant. It would be unnecessary to consider the long-range impacts on the RF/PF system that resulted from search and destroy operations, poor refugee programs, fear of foreign troops, economic growth, large scale turnovers in manpower, poor intelligence and the brutalization of the peasantry.

The fact is, however, that every district was not saturated at the same time. Therefore, the impacts on the basic local structures that needlessly impaired the long-range ability of so many districts to develop security systems are central to understanding the full range of problems confronted in security and pacification.

On paper there was supposed to be consideration of local needs, there was supposed to be an adequate refugee program, there was supposed to be control against large scale desertion, there was supposed to be adequate intelligence, and there was supposed to be no possibility of American soldiers pillaging.

Any governmental system too fragile to prevent an extensive insurgent movement from establishing itself, however, can hardly be expected to have enough structural integrity to

control and coordinate the massive dislocations and excesses of the injection--almost overnight--of millions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of foreigners.

The basic problem which remains to be discussed, then, is whether or not it was and is possible to introduce local stability and create a system with the capacity to sustain government control in the aftermath of the problems created by the big war and economic booms (and the now pending withdrawal of foreign troops).

This problem can only be considered in the light of the peasantry and all that they had endured and their feelings about the GVN and the Viet Cong "after the battle" moved on. For that reason it is instructive to look at the differences of opinion and the personal ambivalences of peasants interviewed after they had been through the impacts and shocks discussed in this chapter.

While it was generally true that peasants no longer expected the Viet Cong to win the war, that did not mean they had given their loyalty to the GVN. The grapevine that once helped a small force appear to be thousands of men had spread word of the massive U.S. presence throughout the country; but force does not automatically translate itself into popular support and/or security. As one peasant said,

"If the nationalist regime is exactly what the government told at the radio, I prefer it. But now although we were miserable with the VC we were less oppressed by them." (8239V)

It is important to remember that most of rural South Viet Nam had been under Viet Cong control or strong influence at some time before 1965. This meant that the contested areas had once been governed or organized by the Viet Cong. Largely unaffected by the big war, their secret cadres and contacts could still give them a trump. As a PF said, "The people fear that the VC would come to assassinate them, therefore they can only help us furtively, the VC will kill them if they know." (9201 PF), or as another PF said, in an area rated pro-GVN:

"We want the villagers to have a clear-cut stand. As long as we are in the area, there is no trouble. But as soon as we leave the area the villagers shift their loyalty if the VC come again. This is the reason why you can't eliminate the VC once for all. In Hung Thanh and Mien Hai hamlets the VC cadres come often at night to disseminate propaganda unimpeded." (9689 PF)

And, of course, once a village had been under Viet Cong control or influence it wasn't always safe to trust even the villagers who seemed friendly.

"Villagers do nothing to help us actually. This area was a VC controlled area until two months ago. Although the population shows sympathy towards us, we suspect they are not sincere." (9454PF)

Some peasants did conform to the old mandate of heaven pattern, just going along with the local powers.

"As to the non-aligned elements, they found that the VC are cruel and the government cadres are corrupt. So they don't know which side they have to follow and would remain with the stronger." (8603V)

"As a matter of fact my life would not be affected if this area were occupied by VC or government." (8578 V)

There were, however, large numbers of people in the same villages who did care who won.

"The VC use good words and are very good at politics. The people are forced to work hard for them but are very pleased when hearing them talk. I don't think people regret their wealth if they have to give it to them. PF are inferior to VC in politics." (8579 V)

"VC were very good to people but forced them to participate in struggle movements. After life under VC, government is now preferred." (8226 V)

"The Viet Cong and the Government are quite different, because we're right and they are wrong. Besides, the VC don't keep their promises." (8225 V)

"We (GVN) talk a lot and do nothing. Even in case we did something it is not very practical. Our policy is excellent but its executioners are clumsy. As for the VC they didn't have a good policy but the way they performed it was very skilled. (GVN and VC are) quite different because GVN brings back freedom to the people, for example, we can freely express our opinion, while the communists fettered us. We dared neither to eat nor to dress ourselves. Everybody has to act their way." (8339 V)

Sustaining the peasant's fear was the fact that literally every hamlet had had at least one assassination, and in the same hamlet one could find many opinions as to the virtues of the deceased. As three men in one hamlet stated:

"According to me the VC murder victim must be a loyal servant of the government having rendered many services detrimental to the VC. So they murdered him for revenge." (8581 V)

"Those who are killed by the VC are corrupt and overbearing. The VC would not kill them if they work correctly." (8579 V)

"These people were serving the national cause despite VC warnings. This was the only reason for the murders." (8582 V)

As a man in another hamlet put it about the victims in his hamlet:

"If they are people who volunteer for the service of the people their assassination fills us with deep resent for the communists. If they are persons who oppress the people they deserve being slain." (8345 V)

Thus, not all peasants were so numbed by war that they had ceased to care about the outcome. In fact, many peasants seemed to feel that a GVN victory would be to their advantage. While by no means did all the peasants want the GVN to win, the GVN certainly had a large potential base of support. The problem of utilizing the support, however, was not trivial because there were few peasants for whom the outcome of the war was a life or death matter. As a Catholic refugee from North Viet Nam stated, "If the Viet Cong win I couldn't live for my self and my family, but I might be able to live for communism." (0179 V)

The problem, then, was how to mobilize peasant support in the face of possible terror and assassinations, where open support could mean death. Risk is a function of trust and could substantially be reduced when the PF had the confidence of the people.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE

The previous chapters have suggested that there was, in fact, very little concern or interest shown for the protection and security of peasants by the GVN. Economic programs, to be sure, had made many peasants prosperous but they were often more abused by the government and its allies than by the Viet Cong.

The government's only true and consistent interest militarily was in crushing the Viet Cong. To do this required two inputs from the village: manpower and information.

National economic progress and powerful allies are not enough to actually make peasants into soldiers and to get an adequate information flow from the villages.

Peasants only become effective soldiers to the extent that the government commits itself to their families.

Peasants only provide an adequate information flow when the PF guarantee their security and satisfy their sense of justice.

PF only provide security and satisfy the peasants sense of justice when they are changed from marginal men with no place in society into men who see themselves as a

part of the village and are themselves concerned with the future welfare of its inhabitants.

In each district of Long An and Binh Dinh where extensive personal observations were made it was possible to find at least one hamlet or village where local security conditions were much better than any other place in the area, where peasants were unmistakably confident in their PF and where PF were firmly committed to their village. It was also possible to find instances where poor, defensive and totally inadequate PF had been transformed into units with the same success as noted above.

The techniques and sequences of events used were similar enough to be presented as a composite. It was necessary to stabilize the platoon, commit the PF to the welfare of the other peasants, give them the needed training, convince the peasants that the PF were unwilling to be driven out of the village, get the peasants to support the PF with information and encouragement, and prove to the peasants that their own sense of justice would not be violated.

The reason that this happened so rarely is that the sequencing was so crucial. When a platoon was outstanding and had proved its ability peasants were glad to encourage and aid the PF, for so many peasants desperately wanted security and an end to the fighting. Similarly, once a

platoon had established security, it gained local stature and desertion became almost nil. Similarly, once a platoon became outstanding, district chiefs tended to treat the unit much better than other units. In other words, once a platoon established trust with both the district chief and the peasants there was little problem sustaining the trust.

The problems were: how do you commit family men to a military unit; how do you get peasants to give information and trust to a unit before it proves itself; how does one get 'marginal men,' the occupants of the lowest rungs of society, for whom no one has ever done anything, to care about anyone outside their family or unit; especially how does one get men with no strong feelings for their country or for anyone outside their immediate world to make the immense extra effort that is necessary to go from a village that is nearly secure - a village where the Viet Cong can occasionally make just enough presence felt to keep everyone worried and where the Viet Cong can easily pass by the outlying perimeters of the village to attack elsewhere - to a village where the Viet Cong cannot enter without severe risk?

All that was necessary was to take account of the men's low status, family commitment and local orientation. One 'merely' decreases the conflict between the state and

the soldier by committing the state to the care of his family, takes advantage of localism and marginality by helping the PF earn status in the eyes of other villagers and getting him to judge the progress and future prospects of his country by something tangible and concrete that any peasant can observe - the progress of and future prospects for the village in which he lives.

Family Care and Peasant Soldiers

As noted in Chapter VII, one of the results of the tremendous competition for manpower among ARVN, RF/PF, the American contractors and the booming economy, to say nothing of the Viet Cong, is that RF/PF can desert their units almost whenever they so choose. This means that aggressive and competent military leadership is not sufficient to force men in any particular unit to perform the much heavier work load that is required for an adequate security system. Since everyone is literally free to desert, the commitment to the unit must be made by the individual soldier. No amount of force can make a soldier respond to force or remain in his unit if deserters are welcome elsewhere.

The fact that RF/PF are family men with no national commitment does not mean that such a personal commitment is impossible. Family commitments are not incompatible with military effectiveness, either for RF or PF. In fact, the key to stable military in which the men identify with the unit personally and remain with the unit, is to use the family to advantage.

Stabilizing the army through the family is not a new idea. In An Giang, for example, soldiers of the Hoa Hao

cited as an example of why they liked being Hoa Hao soldiers - the care given to their families when they were away from home. In the Viet Cong, careful consideration is given in the redistribution of the "revolutionary surplus" to families of soldiers. This, of course, is "patronage," but it does not in any way imply that the Viet Cong are less revolutionary because they look after the families of men fighting for them. As William Hinton noted of the Chinese Revolution in Longbow Village:¹

The biggest problem in recruiting for the army was not to overcome fear of enemy bullets or the hardships of campaigning, but to convince the men that their families would be well cared for and their livestock and crops well tended. The village government undertook to see that this problem was solved by organizing a "Preferential Treatment Committee" which set up a system of taikung or "substitute tillage," . . . It was preferential treatment for soldiers' families that really made possible a volunteer army in the first place and gave such a solid base to morale in the field.

When a peasant identifies his family's welfare with his role in a particular unit, then the leader has a meaningful sanction for making the soldier respond to his commands, for leaving the unit hurts the family. Hard work is not what makes peasants desert, it is family responsibilities that conflict with military duty.

¹William Hinton, Fanshen, New York: Vintage Books, 1968, p. 192 emphasis added.

No 'objective' measure of the danger and risks confronting and RF unit or the workload it assumed could directly explain from which units desertions would occur. If anything, the opposite was true! Units capable of facing risks and able to shoulder heady workloads were units that held their men. There is a very strong relationship in the RF between aggressiveness in battle, the ability to keep manpower in the unit, and the ability to recruit new men, the key to which is the family.

Contrasting bad, average and good RF companies,² the bad companies are less able to obtain recruits or retain their men even though they were paid the same, fight less than the men in good companies and 'objectively' face less danger because they are seldom used anytime success at a difficult task is required. In the bad RF units, less than half the men stay in their unit more than 6 months while more than half the men in good units have been there over two years, despite their much heavier battle load.

Comparing bad, average and good units, the percentage of married men living with their families rises sharply from 55% of married men living with their families in bad units, to 75% in average units to 90% in good units. And ironically 25% of the men in bad units are bachelors and only 20% are bachelors in average and good units. A married

²Ratings based on interviews with peasants, RF/PF, district staff and American Advisors - who were much more knowledgeable about RF than PF.

man with a secured family is a better soldier than a bachelor, at least in the absence of any national identity.

Effective military leadership is still needed, but no leader can hold the men together long enough to train them and gain their trust without somehow being able to stabilize manpower. As the data showed no matter how light the work load of a unit may be, men seldom remain in the unit for long unless they identify their families' welfare with the unit.

A comparison of two RF companies in the same district can clarify this point.

The two RF companies being compared were both stationed at district headquarters. 'A', a very good company,³ was always given the most dangerous missions or operations.

'B' was a different story altogether. In battle the men often refused to follow orders and were generally cowardly and negligent, so they were no longer used for anything but defense of the district headquarters.

³The district advisor, who had previously been an advisor to two different ARVN battalions and had also seen numerous U.S. units in action felt that 'A' was as good as any company he had seen in Viet Nam. One of the NCO advisors, who had been personally awarded one silver and one bronze star for his own exploits, agreed. 'A' was a good company.

In the last 18 months 22 men from unit 'A' and 110 from unit 'B' had deserted, mainly to join one of the other units in the province, which contained ARVN and Ranger units as well. Virtually none of the new men received any training before joining the unit. In 'A', however, each new man was given two days a week of training by the company itself, while 'B' did nothing. In 'A' the new men judged to be the best were put in the worst squads and some of the poorer recruits were put in better squads where they could be more closely watched and guided. In the other company new men were simply put into squads haphazardly with no training and no attempt made to balance the squads and platoons.

An idea of the problems in the bad company can be obtained by looking at a TAT story told by a squad leader in 'B', one of the three original squad leaders who had not yet deserted. Even he seemed to be considering desertion, being held back only by the thought that he would be caught in a deserter roundup and put in another unit.

I see a civilian standing with two people who are harvesting rice, with 4 houses and a banana plantation. The civilian does farming. The civilian is looking at the plantation and 2 people are harvesting rice.

This is war time and the draft age cannot farm. This person joined the army but he deserted and so he cannot farm because he is afraid that he will be captured. This person was deserted because he could not stay with the shortages, not enough food, no clothes, so he deserted.

The deserter is thinking to return back to his unit, because it is not safe out here, and cannot work.

The deserter will report himself, return to the military life.

This man will be punished, for example, he will be put in tiger cage. (1110RF)

The key difference between the two companies, however, was not shortages of food and clothing--it was families. The good company's men were housed in a dependents compound at the district headquarters while the bad company had not yet received dependents' quarters. The bad company had been scheduled a year previously to receive dependents quarters, but 'somehow' the material never arrived. This was a key: without leadership the men will not fight, but without families they will not even stay!

If the families are cared for, however, the men will endure immense punishment and abuse without deserting even if they lose their leader. A third RF company was attacked by a Viet Cong battalion. The ensuing fight lasted four hours but an ARVN regiment less than one mile away gave no support. Even though over half the men were killed or wounded, including the leader, there were no desertions. The men returned to their government housing. They were dispirited and would not fight; but they were still there. The government had a claim on their loyalties

and could slowly rebuild the unit. Stability is necessary for improvement.

This was also true for the effective, hard working PF units. In each case someone committed himself to their families when they were away from home. Making each man's private problem into a public issue stabilized the units. This is more successful as a strategy than simply counting on all other officers to be honorable and stop taking deserters because in the case of an agreement among officers it is each man's interest to be the one person who breaks the rules. In the case of family care, the men who broke the rules and took care of families were the ones who benefited. Once a PF unit was well taken care of not only did desertion decrease, but the men actually spent less time with their families than in less effective units. In addition, the units with family care often attracted men who deserted from other districts just to join a unit where they could feel their families were secure--even though these men had to then work much harder than in the defensive units.

One of the very worst of platoons, in fact, was stabilized and transformed by reaching the PF through their families. This platoon had been so bad that it had been little more than a protective association for its members. Three of the nine

men interviewed from the platoon went so far as to state that they had joined the unit only to avoid being drafted by the Viet Cong. As one man stated, his life was better as a soldier than as a civilian because "...as a civilian I was more menaced by the Viet Cong." (916PF) So bad had the situation become in the village that noone would take the position of village chief or platoon leader--it was just too dangerous.

In five months one man changed the entire situation, making a band of cowards and draft dodgers into one of the best platoons in the province and almost totally securing the village. The first clue that there was something special about the platoon came during the interviews when the PF were asked how many Viet Cong there were in their village. The PF responded by saying "There are three left in the village and we're going to get them too!" So unusual was it to receive such a precise and optimistic answer that it was first assumed that the platoon had been 'coached' on what to say, but the visit to the platoon had been a total surprise because the decision was conveyed to noone who could have informed the platoon of the visit.

What had happened was that because the situation in the village was so bad that no leaders could be obtained, a national policeman had been sent to the village to become both village chief and platoon leader for the time being. This produced the rarest of all villages, a village in which police, military and civil government were coordinated, and actually integrated. At first the new leader 'appeared' to be doing little to indicate his abilities. Quietly and covertly beginning to put together an intelligence network he was simultaneously siphoning AID materials to the PF platoon so that they could build housing for their families in a secure spot. This stabilized the platoon: deserting now meant having to move one's family to new housing and facing the social sanctions of the other families and the leader. The standard excuse for desertion, and family trouble, was no longer valid. Within the next few months, all the Viet Cong cadres (in residence) and 12 of the 15 guerrilla had been killed or captured. By staying himself, the leader was even able to keep his entire platoon on duty over Tet. The platoon spent most of their Tet visiting the Viet Cong who came home to see their families assuring them that they would be welcome in the village if they defected and stayed out of trouble.

One advisor objected to securing families in military housing because he felt that it would tie down the soldiers and make them unwilling to fight elsewhere. As he noted, it was generally true that when PF had their families with them in isolated outposts, the outpost then became "their village" and they would defend the outpost, defeating much of the original purpose of the post. The difference is that in the outpost, if the men wandered far, the families would be left without protection.

RF/PF are good family men by Vietnamese standards which emphasize assurance of family continuity, welfare and security. When their families are fed and sheltered and they have produced an heir they are free to roam and play as much as they like. There can be no doubt that many RF liked going on operations or to difficult posts--if the families were secure. Going away from the unit's camp meant danger, but it also meant a chance to have a second or third wife, or at least an occasional affair.

When wives are secured elsewhere by the government, even the most dangerous outposts could be used very effectively by ingenious PF. One unit, all of whose wives were safe in the

district headquarters, boobytrapped their outpost every night before going on patrol. Twice in one year Viet Cong were killed sneaking into the outpost. Thus it was not always necessary to go as far as actually building housing for PF, but in every case of a platoon that made the extra effort stability resulted only when the men's families were provided for in their absence. In two cases leaders helped wives get jobs in local markets so that the families would not starve, which also served to stabilize bad units. The crucial factor in all of these examples is that some attention was paid to providing for the security of RF/PF families by the government. It is this security which is the first prerequisite for transforming self-interested peasants into effective soldiers of the state.⁴

⁴ As noted in Chapter VI, when the soldiers themselves sent their wives to a more secure area, they tended to desert soon afterwards. It is the link between the family and the government that counts for the marginal man.

'Barehands' Civic Action

True progress could still not be made without gaining trust and cooperation from other peasants. As noted, observation showed peasants were willing to help once an area was secured and the platoon had proven its long range commitment, but the essential dilemma was: no cooperation without security, no security without cooperation.

In a contested area where there has been extensive activity by opposing forces the natural action of PF platoon is to close in on itself, to stay in large groups near its posts so as to provide themselves with the best possible defense against an outside attack. The PF's primary instinctive action is, after all, to protect that which is his world -- himself and his family.

At the same time, the natural, rational way for a peasant to act is to stay away from the PF as long as there is any chance that going to the PF with information or encouragement may be seen and perhaps remembered by any covert agents. PF acting in an instinctive manner and allowing peasants to do the same could not totally secure an area.

What made a difference was what could best be called barehands civic action-numerous small favors for a great number of villagers which kept the PF in constant contact with the population. It required a committed and strong leader, and in practice it improved the self-image of the soldiers, broke down barriers of suspicion between peasants and PF, and generated a better information flow to the PF.

PF could achieve 'confidence of the people' only by using a combination of carrot and stick. In fact, a well used carrot, in the presence of a stick, made any use of force unnecessary. The initial carrot for the PF units who won confidence was barehands civic action. It was the most efficient and effective method observed for making the transition from an area with little Viet Cong activity to one with no Viet Cong activity and no popular support for Viet Cong.

Barehands civic action was simply continuous contact between PF and all families in an area. It meant PF spending a large part of every day making the rounds from house to house and helping people in small ways with their work. It appeared to be no more than PF acting like boy scouts, helping people clean away rubble, helping widows carry water, or visiting with children.

Simply the fact that there was continuous, PF-initiated contact with all people provided much more information than could be obtained otherwise. No one could know who gave information to the PF and no one could later be punished for collaboration and consorting with the enemy. PF carry guns and that could always be the peasant's rationale for not resisting them when they came by.

But continuous contact without the added aspect of helpfulness was not very effective. If everyone were friends, it might be possible for PF to just 'make the rounds' and give everyone a chance to volunteer information. In any village or hamlet, though, especially one that is contested and thus usually somewhat fractionalized, everyone is not friends and many people never talk with each other. It is to break through the traditional distrust that helpfulness is required. Helping with chores and making small talk establishes identity and commonality and breaks through the layers of reserve.

Platoons in continuous and friendly contact with villagers were also a much more credible force to peasants. Security is certainly one of the primary factors a peasant considered in giving his allegiance to one side or the other. In calculating how secure he is, a peasant is influenced by

how strong a PF platoon appears to him. Personal relations with the platoon seem to be an important part of the calculation. If the peasant knows and likes the platoon, he will credit it with more deterrent value.

A platoon's effectiveness depends in large part upon its ability to work closely with the peasants and to inspire their confidence. Especially important is gaining the trust and confidence of people close to the Viet Cong and people who most hate the government. These are the people with the most important information and they can be won over only if they truly trust the PF to protect them from both Viet Cong and GVN.

'Confidence of the people' really meant winning over of neutrals and the neutralization of covert Viet Cong support, and the establishment of a high degree of population control which generated an active, continuous flow of information to the PF from peasants who supported them.

'Confidence of the people' does not necessarily mean winning love, adoration or positive effect for one's side -- although it does not rule these out. It does mean, above all else, information and neutralization.

The slow patient approach was often more productive and effective than the military logic displayed by the U.S. or ARVN. A comparison of similar incidents involving

a particularly outstanding PF platoon and an American unit illustrates how resisting the temptation to rely on an initial use of force enabled the platoon to escalate an accommodation with Viet Cong sympathizers into a situation where the Viet Cong communications system was jammed, distrust was sown among the Viet Cong and previous Viet Cong sympathizers found themselves in a situation where it was to their advantage to cooperate with the GVN.

On September 9, 1968, after finding uniforms and equipment from a North Vietnamese unit hidden in the homes of peasants in a village north of Saigon, and after discovering that the inhabitants had been sending signals to the Viet Cong by moving around lamps which they had placed in their windows, an American unit destroyed part of the village and some livestock in retaliation, and to "deny" the Viet Cong use of these homes again.⁵ A far more effective strategy would have been to take the uniforms and equipment and thank the villagers for their help. That, as one ingenious platoon showed, would have hurt the Viet Cong far more.

The PF platoon being discussed here was in a similar situation to the American unit. They were stationed in a remote hamlet with numerous Viet Cong in the

⁵New York Times and Boston Globe, September 9, 1968.

area. The village had just been reclaimed from the Viet Cong a few weeks previously, and less than thirty families out of an original 300 were living at home that night.

After the platoon had rebuilt their headquarters they made daily rounds of every family in the village, entering each home, and always acting helpful. Anyone observing such an encounter could not tell, without overhearing the actual conversation, whether anyone had said anything about the Viet Cong to the PF or not.

A few nights later the PF spotted a lantern being moved from one window in a house to another window in the same house. The PF did not beat the man who did this, nor did they order him to put out the light. Instead they took advantage of the fact that they knew a signal had been sent to the Viet Cong, moved all their ambush positions and dispersed their squads in three man cells into a wide net over the area around the man's house.

Within an hour a single Viet Cong walked through the outer ambush cells without observing the PF--he had, after all, received a signal. The PF did not act on his presence immediately, however, because he might have been the advance man for a very large unit, in which case the PF would have used their prearranged plans to pull back into a tighter defense position.

The man was alone, however, and while he was in the house, the PF called the district and asked to have artillery illuminating rounds ready so that they could be fired immediately on request. It was an easy job for the platoon to know just where the illumination was wanted because they had plotted coordinates in advance during the day. When the Viet Cong left the house, and was out of the hamlet, the PF called for the flare round. When it came, a hidden PF called on the Viet Cong to surrender. Instead of surrendering the Viet Cong ducked into a hidden tunnel and escaped out of a different exit.

The next day the PF required each family in the hamlet to hang a lamp in its window so that they would be better able to check on its safety at night. They did not in any way divulge that they knew the Viet Cong had visited one house after a signal.

A few nights later a second lamp appeared in a window of one house. Rearranging their positions the PF, having now discovered the tunnel system, were more successful, killing one Viet Cong and capturing another.

The PF were not only able to jam effectively the Viet Cong communications system, they were also able to create a situation in which the Viet Cong, it would seem, were the victims of mistrust and suspicion. Eventually the PF were able to obtain very effective cooperation from the villagers.

Because the PF moved constantly at night, no signal given during the day at a market, for example, could tell the Viet Cong where the PF were to be found. Because the only signalling that could be done at night was simple yes-no signals from lamps, and because any signal would have to be sustained long enough for the Viet Cong to see it, the PF could also see the signal and react. No one could tell whether or not someone was tipping the PF and no one could tell whether or not the captured Viet Cong had talked.

The PF, in effect, created a situation in which the Viet Cong were forced to devote large amounts of energy to pattern maintenance, and worrying about who was reliable, or what a captured prisoner had divulged to the PF. Whether or not he had divulged anything, the local Viet Cong could not know for a long time.

In developing a strategy based on the fact that there were bound to be either Viet Cong or Viet Cong accomplices in the village, the PF had acted outwardly, as if they trusted everyone and had thereby given no one any reason to believe that they were another group of "bandits". They had also demonstrated that they would not use force except as a last resort, because they had first called for the Viet Cong to surrender.

If the Viet Cong were to come back to the village every accomplice's life would be in jeopardy because no one could tell whether or not anyone had said something to the PF, and who might have said it. Therefore, in order for the Viet Cong to alleviate the fears of their accomplices and reinstate themselves in an operational way, they would have to appear to know who the informer was. This would require a show trial, and the murder of the alleged "informer" in order to reestablish control.

The PF, however, refused to say whether or not there were any villagers helping them. They would say only that they moved lamps and that there were people sending signals.

The PF were only willing to pass information beyond themselves that could do them or the villagers no harm. To say anything about whether or not anyone had talked would create a more dangerous situation for all in the village, by giving the Viet Cong useful information and by impairing the villagers' trust in them. Even if they had bluffed, giving the interviewers the wrong answer, it would have compromised them with the villagers.

It is important to note that while the PF considered it prejudicial to divulge anything about interpersonal communications, they did not consider it dangerous to tell outsiders that there were accomplices in the village. They

seemed to assume that anyone--even an American--would know that complicity with the Viet Cong was impossible to avoid in such a situation.

What these PF were doing, in effect, was aggregating the diverse interests of every person in the village into a situation which provided, simultaneously, for an overall accommodation with the Viet Cong at the hamlet level, and a transference of individual dependences onto the PF. If the PF left the village or divulged information, the villagers would be at the mercy of the Viet Cong. The signallers might have been underground Viet Cong agents, Viet Cong families cooperating for the sake of their sons, people who needed access to the Viet Cong areas for their livelihood, or refugees from Viet Cong areas who were afraid to do anything that would prejudice their ability to return home in the future. To the PF, however, the precise reasons for accommodation were not relevant. What was important was to recognize the fact of accommodation and adopt their strategy so as to take advantage of it. Therefore, the PF, without forcing anyone to go over his own personal threshold for risk, made the hamlet into a community.

This PF platoon was ruthless, because it put peasants in a very dangerous situation--but the danger was more from the Viet Cong than from the platoon itself. They had co-opted

the peasants by a cold and calculated manipulation of the Viet Cong without ever giving any one a reason to believe that they were being forced to do anything. No one watching that village could possibly know whether the peasants were all Viet Cong or not. No one could tell if it was PF strategy or peasant information which was responsible for the deflection of the Viet Cong threat.

This was, in effect, using the Viet Cong's principal weapon in the early years--using personal contact and friendliness to sow distrust and suspicion among the enemy.

More important, it was creating a collective situation in which it was much harder for the Viet Cong to play off villagers against one another. As time went on these PF, as their past successes indicated, would be able to develop strong positive relations with the villagers. They had foiled the Viet Cong without driving anyone into the Viet Cong or making personal enemies. They had established their intention to be a permanent part of the hamlet and had made it easier for the peasants to work with them.

PF platoons that strengthened their relations with villagers were able to gain significantly better intelligence than other PF. That villages resources are seldom tapped to the same extent by the government intelligence nets as by the good PF units is easily shown. In the good PF units less than 1 of 6 men considered the official

intelligence services of use while in other platoons more than half of the PF rated the government intelligence services their prime source.

The PF with a goal, who were willing to help other peasants and could thus establish trust had sources of intelligence to take advantage of that were often not open to others. One such prime source were the refugees in their hamlets. While other PF ignored refugees and while most village officials profited from them by charging heavy fees to process their applications for relief payments the resourceful PF took care of the refugees helping them with housing. This gave them a source of information about Viet Cong hideouts and Viet Cong cadres in the surrounding areas. As noted earlier, refugees were generally hostile toward the Viet Cong, one reason being they were afraid of being killed or punished for leaving their area and leaving the Viet Cong short of manpower. Here, then, was one group with a clear interest in seeing the cadres cleared out, and with intelligence other villagers did not have.

Just as noteworthy was the fact that the good PF were the most committed to the Chieu Hoi program and expressed to all in their villages a willingness to let Viet Cong sons return home, if they behaved. This made it possible for the PF to establish their credibility with Viet Cong families and to bargain with them, agreeing not to

kill the sons when they came home to visit if the PF were notified in advance of the visit. This cut Viet Cong traffic to the minimum allowable without turning anyone against the PF. And when sons did visit they would try peacefully to convince them to defect.

Before the PF could enforce such rules with Viet Cong families they needed bargaining power, specifically they had to establish the fact that there was a good chance they would find out the son was home without the families cooperation. This required the assistance of the family's neighbors and could only be obtained if the PF established that they would not violate the sanctity of this trust by using the information to unnecessarily kill someone's son.

A willingness to receive defectors into the village was a sign of strength to the other peasants for it showed them the PF were confident of their own ability. What the PF did was to get other peasants to keep an eye on the defectors - decreasing risk by increasing communication and intelligence.

Another significant result of bare-hands civic action was the change it produced in the attitudes of the PF. When PF were educated to develop a community orientation it had a marked effect on their self-image and attitudes about their country. This change was borne out by the experiences

of Frank Scotton of the U.S. Information Agency who worked in Viet Nam with PF motivation programs. As he stated it, "The PF found that helping people was fun." ⁶

This aspect of self-help cannot be overemphasized. The importance of winning the peasants is emphasized in writers such as Mao Tse Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, Che Gueverra, but the emphasis is often interpreted in terms of the effect on peasants. The effect on the soldiers themselves is also very striking and immediate.

This same effect was observed in Malaya, where an even more tenuous situation existed in Chinese villages. The policemen were Malayan, not Chinese, and there were obvious tension and suspicion between the two races. In order to improve the attitude of the Chinese toward the police, a propaganda campaign was initiated emphasizing that the police were the friends and not the enemies of the Chinese. The immediate effect on the Chinese was nil -- they still distrusted and disliked the Malayan police. But the campaign gave the police a better self-image and a more friendly bearing toward the Chinese. These two changes, in turn, ultimately helped improve the attitude of the Chinese toward the police:

⁶Personal Interview, April 1968. See also William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam*, New York: Praeger, 1966, pp. 136-137.

"The campaign's effect was less on the Chinese villagers than on the constables whose morale improved when they saw themselves as friends, not enemies, of the villagers." ⁷

Some of the American advisors in Viet Nam had been exposed to the 'hearts and minds' approach to revolutionary war. 'Hearts and minds' to these advisors, however, meant something very different and far less meaningful than 'confidence of the people.' The American approach to the problem is best expressed as civic action. In practice this meant getting as many PF platoons as possible to build things for their hamlets, such as schools, bridges, markets or infirmaries. Such projects were nice, and were well thought of by the peasants, but they did not make any noticeable contribution to security and they made very little, if any, contributions to stronger ties between PF and peasants. Often, in fact, such projects had a negative effect, for PF platoons resented being used as laborers for programs which benefited themselves only indirectly if at all, as long as they had no commitment to the village.

The key was to begin not by putting the PF to work building roads and schools, but by first getting the PF involved with other peasants. If they were not initially

⁷Richard Clutterback, The Long, Long War: Counter-insurgency in Malaya and Vietnam. New York: Praeger, 1966, p. 85.

involved personally with others, such construction was looked on as little more than heavy labor and was resented by the PF. It was only after an initial low-key approach to the peasantry that the large projects were useful. Once the PF were committed to the village and had a long range viewpoint, they took on the larger projects willingly as an affirmation of their local status and commitment.

Separating PF platoons into good, average and bad categories on the criteria of aggressiveness, discipline and provision of security ⁸ gives a further indication of the importance of a civic orientation for the very best PF platoons. The platoons which made the immense extra effort to go from moderate, defensive security to a true, self sustaining clearing of their area, were PF more interested in helping peasants than in killing Viet Cong, although in the long run these men actually did more fighting.

Two differences between bad, average and good platoons give an important key to the way in which the local community and national identity legitimacy are related for peasants. First, men in good platoons are much less concerned about Viet Nam's future and second, they are much

⁸Ratings based on interviews with peasants, PF, district chief, district advisors, and subjective impressions of interviewers and team leaders.

more interested in the revolutionary development (rural construction) program. In the good platoons, the platoons that make the effort to really clear their village as opposed to passively defending it, only 30% of the men are concerned about Viet Nam's national status in the future; in the average platoons it rises to 37% and in the bad platoons to 45%. At the same time these men are much more interested in being RD cadre than they are in being either ARVN soldiers or police.

Would You Like to be in:

Platoon Rating	ARVN	RD	POLICE
Bad	35%	31%	23%
Average	20%	23%	15%
Good	23%	39%	18%

The outstanding leader gives his men a meaningful goal orientation towards society, provides a sense of identity for men in good platoons, goes beyond what is required of himself and identifies with and helps other peasants, and thus gives to the PF an orientation they can find meaningful. It is the outstanding man who had learned for himself and taught his men to break through the seething distrust and resentment of village life; who has taught men for whom no one else has ever done anything that helping others is good for PF and peasants alike; who gives PF a sense of future for themselves and their country.

Elections, RD cadres and PF

The success of the properly motivated and led PF suggests that similar results could have been obtained in many more villages if the local elections conducted in 1967, the PF and the revolutionary development program had been integrated. Together they could have served to develop a large base of support for the government.

Channeling the RD program through the PF, giving local officials the ability to protect the peasants from rape and pillage, and giving local officials the authority to guarantee the peasants justice were all that was necessary in most villages to produce local security and give the district chief the intelligence he was so badly lacking.

Whereas the national elections in Vietnam received all the attention, it was the local elections that were most significant to the peasants, who had been living for years with appointed officials whom many of them did not know or trust.

The pressures of war had made village and hamlet officials terribly important to the peasants. The official were responsible for countless papers and permits and handled numerous AID programs including fertilizer and rice seeds. The net effect of all the programs and papers was to give the local officials, despite the dangers involved in their jobs, opportunities to become wealthy men. Whether or not a peasant liked the GVN and whether or not he wanted them to win the war, a friendly local official was a definite asset.

For this reason alone there was great interest in the elections in every village visited during the pre-election period.⁹ Most peasants knew the names of the candidates, the number of persons running and had definite ideas about what they expected of the new officials.

In some cases, in fact, the elections even brought corruption which served as an integrative force in the village. In one hamlet all but a single-person--from among 10 PF and 10 villagers--was very enthusiastic about the elections. The other peasant suggested why:

⁹Interest strong enough to truly shock the interviewers compared with the apathy displayed towards most GVN programs.

All the officials think about now are the elections. They give the persons who come to the village office wine and cigarettes. They help the refugees to get their votes. They spend all their time trying to win the votes. (8342V)

The elections, in fact, were very much more than Sir Robert Thompson's opinion would suggest:¹⁰

Americans seem to have a traditional view, that if you elect the sheriff, you fix the outlaws. The sheriff fixed the outlaws not because he was elected, but because he had a gun and was faster on the draw.

What Thompson has ignored is that being faster on the draw is more productive with good intelligence, and that an elected sheriff may be far more trustworthy and successful because he is not as fast on the draw as a sheriff that was appointed.

The main hope for the new officials in contested areas, in fact, illustrates how wrong Thompson was in this instance. The peasants main concern in insecure areas was with the fast gun and bad justice. As discussed in Chapter IV, taking account of circumstances and motives by district officials required strong linkages of trust with the peasantry. The elections brought forth a local resource that no outsider could ever supply--long years of contact and knowledge of

¹⁰Sir Robert Thompson, "Can the U.S. ever win in Viet Nam?", London Evening Standard, reprinted in New York Times, September 10, 1967.

the situation of the hamlet, and a local natural leadership of considerable importance to the peasants. Even in cases where the same officials were re-elected, there was optimism from peasants because the fact that they had participated in the process of selecting them signalled their rights to make approaches to them: the officials now belonged to the peasants. These high expectations created by the local electors soon collapsed, under the weight of the unchanged realities of village power distribution.

The elections may have given the officials local legitimacy but they still could make a contribution to security only through the local PF or through the district chief.

They could not make an impact through the PF because they were given no say at all in the use of the PF by the district chiefs.

The local officials could still have made a contribution if they had been allowed to protest the peasants from the kinds of excesses that stopped information flows to the district chief. However, while the committed PF could guarantee justice in many cases because they had the guns,

the new officials could only provide justice if the district chief let them. The failure to change the dependence of local leaders on the district chief undercut the possibility that improved government relations with the peasants would result from the elections.

As with the elections, the concept of Revolutionary Development was very well accepted and popular. The individual teams were also relatively well received. But the cadres were lacking in several important areas: they did not have the deep trust of the peasants; they failed to increase the legitimacy of the village government; they did not succeed in weeding out infrastructures; they did not produce any noticeable long-range effect in the village; they did not have intimate personal contact with the villagers; and they did not in anyway improve the local PF.

In the eyes of the PF and villagers, RD teams were work forces to help rebuild the hamlets. Perhaps even more than that, they were a welcome addition to village security. In fact, many villagers gave military presence as the main reason they liked to have RD teams in their hamlet.

I like them because they are helpful to the people. They help the people in hygiene works. For example, they help to keep the people clean. The trash must be dumped into holes, the fences must be put up neatly. (8111V)

For me the RDC are not necessary because I see they could not do anything. If the government wants to construct houses for us, they just have to give us the money and we will build the houses by ourselves and chiefly because we know what are the most necessary things to be done. However, I do like their presence here because we can get more security forces. But frankly speaking, it is the same whether they are here or not. (8339V)

Yes, because when they are here it looks as if we have an additional PF platoon. But in reality, no help is to be expected from them. (8345V)

Physical reconstruction and security were very relevant in reclaimed villages and some respondents seemed to feel that RD work would attract many more refugees back into their villages. Respondents also recognized that RD teams had better access to higher authorities and, hence, to materials than did either village officials or PF.

I like it very much. Their presence is helpful for us. With them, we can have roofing sheets, market as in old times. The days they came they helped the villagers to do anything they could, for example, enclosing the fence, weeding, building roads for the people. (8465V)

Besides hoping that village officials would know who was innocent and who was guilty peasants when discussing the elections also hoped that they would now have some say, through the officials, in what projects were done in their villages.

The RD teams generally disappointed them for local officials were seldom consulted by the Cadres. That the cadres had better outside access than the new officials in fact decreased their legitimacy. The PF were also ignored by the cadres, who tended to downgrade them as being of an inferior status.

The origins of the RD program in fact had been in experiments performed in central Viet Nam using local PF as cadre. These experiments were extended and "professionalized" by using well trained mobile cadre who moved from village to village. Changing the program in this fashion removed its main benefits for it no longer served to bring PF and villagers together in common cause, which was essential for long range pacification.

In fact the only effects RD had were inside the village and as has been emphasized throughout the thesis pacification is a matter of integration and linkage. No hamlet was encountered anywhere where an RD team had made the changes necessary to give PF a long range commitment to their village.

Thus cadres came to the village, security improved while they were present, materials appeared, work got done and the cadres left. But no technical or organizational skills were transferred to the local population, and when they left, no personal institution in the village had gained new strength or enhanced support.

Attitudes of the peasantry toward the RD program showed that rural development and security were important everywhere, but while outside cadres rebuilding a village may have made peasants look with favor upon the national government the RD program did nothing to give a new orientation to the PF. When the village was rebuilt by outsiders the marginal men remained committed only to their families with no greater commitment to the village than before. It was only when the PF themselves did the work and became a true part of the village that long range improvements resulted.

Thus the dominance of military logic over peasant reality severely limited the effectiveness of the two programs with the most promise of extending the successes achieved by committed PF.

The elections may have cut corruption and the RD program may have convinced peasants of the essential good will of the national government, but neither succeeded in establishing the kind of system so desperately needed to integrate village and national governments. As the successful PF showed, the crucial necessities were justice, rural development, security, trust and patience.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Those who are ignorant about government say: 'Win the hearts of the people.' If order could be procured by winning the hearts of the people, then even the wise ministers...would be of no use. For all the ruler would need to do would be just to listen to the people...

Han Fei Tzu

Every Saigon government since 1954 has tried to work against the Viet Cong with highly centralized command. To the extent that the governments have succeeded at pacification in isolated instances, however, the result has been due to a decentralized approach that emphasized working within the lowest levels of society in the village.

Logically, the more centralized the coordination over the war the better the results should be. However, this ignores the realities of an undeveloped society with weak and ineffective institutions and almost no trust between peasants and urban, upper and middle class army officers.

In the context of guerrilla warfare these realities mean that pacification is as much a political problem as it is a military one. Rural security can only be

achieved by building strong local institutions which by fulfilling peasant needs would also be capable of producing the outputs of manpower and intelligence necessary for GVN military success against the Viet Cong.

The various governments of Viet Nam have never been able to make a bridge to the peasant because the leadership they worked with inside the village has seldom been responsive to the peasants and the government at the same time. The local organizations required to deal with the Viet Cong can only be successful in so far as they are a bridge between the peasant and the state. Neither village elders, marginal men, nor appointed village officials have been allowed to make that bridge very often.

In every case, weak powerless village organizations have been expected to deal with the war locally. The result has been favorable to the Viet Cong because their ability to work between villages has always given them an advantage against weakly organized villages required to deal with the insurgency on their own. If the local organizations been given control over the use of force and the maintenance of justice then the strategy could have worked. Local organization in Viet Nam, however, has meant organization totally dependent on the district

chief and not strong local organization that could handle their own problems as did the good PF who dared to take the initiative upon themselves.

The system designed by the Saigon government could not succeed because it had no capacity for strategy. It could not deal with the Viet Cong because the Viet Cong were a political threat and as such were basically not a challenge that could be met adequately by any village organizations the government has normally developed.

Village elders could not deal with a political threat because the very definition of their role required that they be aloof from the peasants and act as a buffer between village and state.

Appointed officials often could not deal with a political threat because they were chosen so as to maximize their closeness to the district chief and thus were unable to gain trust from peasants.

Marginal men were seldom a threat to the Viet Cong for they were the lowest of the society and had no personal motivations nor military incentives to be anything but an impedence to the Viet Cong.

Elected officials could not be a threat to the Viet Cong because they had no ability to control force and dispense justice on their own. They could only

succeed if they could control the local PF or intercede on the peasants behalf with the district chief.

RD cadre could not defeat the Viet Cong for their impermanence in the village could not assure peasants of long term security and protection.

The only group that could ever compete with the Viet Cong were the few PF platoons who identified with the village and saw their personal future and the future of their country tied to its progress. The PF platoons which succeeded worked mainly within the village in accordance with the reality and experiences of the particular peasants they were trying to protect. These platoons satisfied local criteria of justice and gave peasants no fears about the need to deal with their problems outside of the village.

What is significant is that these PF were not only successful at security and pacification but that they were also able to obtain significantly better intelligence than the formal intelligence services.

In a situation where every communication up the hierarchy is fraught with problems of distrust and suspicion the decentralized approach is more successful.

The irony is that the men who were the most successful in pacification-the good PF platoons-were the

most marginal of all men, landless, poor and family oriented. It was these very men, however, to whom local status, a trusted leader and a home for their family were sufficient incentives.

The most effective way to build a good army from peasants is to build a society around them. A peasant with a goal and a commitment that has meaning to him is more likely to work hard and fight well. Such a peasant can provide a better, more accurate flow of information by helping refugees and Viet Cong families than can official military intelligence officers who take a short run view of their job treating suspects in such a way as to alienate peasants.

A peasant who makes an effort to give potential Viet Cong the benefit of a doubt often discovers many Viet Cong are suddenly only penitent accomplices glad for security.

A peasant told to build things for the village where he resides is still a marginal man. A peasant who sees the RF cadre rebuild his hamlet is still a marginal man. When a peasant who has begun to identify with fellow villagers through personal contact then builds schools and roads he is an integral part of a community.

At the village level the Saigon government has been mainly on the defensive because its village representatives

always dealt with the war in such a way as to leave each peasant to deal as best he could with the Viet Cong. The only times the Viet Cong were truly stopped in a village were when an unusually dedicated leader taught marginal men that there was a benefit for them in working with the other peasants and bringing together all their diverse accommodations with the Viet Cong into an accommodation at the village level. What they did in effect was to create a village by giving the peasants someone they could trust.

This is the final irony of the "myth of the village." Most Westerners assume that peasants are devoted to their local area. When told that the RF/PF take more casualties and do more killing (per capita) than ARVN the standard answer is "of course, they are fighting for their village." This is nonsense for very few PF were in fact fighting for their village. PF had to be taught to fight for their village by showing them it was to their benefit to fight for their village.

The RF/PF fight "better" than ARVN is more a reflection on the incompetencies of ARVN than an indicator of active primordial sentiment. When local soldiers fight more and behave better than a "National" army it may be the sign of a weak state, not strong villages.

The government in fact, was never able to make the basic concessions to peasant values necessary to build an army capable of dealing with the Viet Cong although this thesis suggests that few inputs were actually necessary to do so. The costs involved in upgrading all PF platoons would have been negligible, for as shown the marginal man is so marginal that village status, a steady job and a home for his family satisfies him.

What is important to PF is the small noticeable improvements they can see. This was also true for most of the peasants. As one peasant said:

"The Viet Cong propagandas is close to the people, they propagandize on the small things. They only promise the small things and then they will fulfill their promise. They are not like the Government propagandists who can promise people many big things and then they can't do according to their promise. The Government's propagandists are not close to the people. They talk about great and beautiful but not practical things... (8116 V)

Security for peasants and a concern for their welfare have never been items of high priority for any Saigon government. What this thesis has suggested, however, is that if the war had been fought as though protecting the peasants were more important than killing Viet Cong the result would have been far less favorable to the Viet Cong than the present strategies have been.

APPENDIX A.

Study Plan

This thesis is based on a study of the Vietnamese village soldiers, the Popular Forces, and of their big brothers, the Regional Forces, conducted between October, 1966, and June, 1967, in nine provinces of Vietnam.¹ Senior Director of the project was Dr. Phillip Worchel of the University of Texas, and co-workers included Richard McWhirter and Joseph Jackson, both also from Texas, and Douglas Braithwaite of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Conducted for the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the U.S. Department of Defense, the purpose of the project was to investigate the needs, aspirations, expectations and frustrations which characterized the RF/PF. Using Vietnamese interviewers recruited from the middle class milieu of Saigon and trained for six weeks, three field teams were formed, each of which spent approximately two weeks in each of six different districts of rural Vietnam. A second follow-up study was conducted with the six best interviewers to probe further into the most critical areas uncovered by the study.

¹Phillip Worchel, et al., Simulmatics Corporation, Final Report: A Socio-Psychological Study of Regional/Popular Forces in Vietnam. Parts I & II. Cambridge, Mass., September 1967.

In each province two districts were selected for study. An attempt was made to visit a district considered as secure and a district considered average in each province. It was assumed that any district considered poor would be too dangerous to study. As it turned out, however, the provinces had such varying conceptions of what good meant that the widest possible variety of districts was actually studied. When Phu Thu district of Thua Thien province was visited, for example, it was impossible to go more than 200 yards unarmed -- at noon -- from the district headquarters, the only secure piece of ground in the district. Soon after the district was studied, in fact, it was totally overrun by the Viet Cong. Thirty-one of the 37 Vietnamese and 3 of the 4 American advisors stationed there were killed. While there was sure to be some bias toward the better secured areas, those studied are certainly representative of at least 60% of rural Vietnam, possibly even of 80% of the countryside.

Two provinces, Tuyen Duc and Ba Xuyan were finally limited to one district for study so that a retest could be made in Kien Giang and Binh Thuan provinces of districts studied earlier. In each case, at least 10% of the soldiers studied 6 months previously had been killed in the interim.

The Number of Respondents in the RF/PF Project²

PROVINCE	DISTRICT	RF	PF	WIVES		VILLAGERS		TOTAL
				RF	PF	MALE	FEMALE	
Thua Thien	Vinh Loc	23	26	02	03	14	01	69
	Phu Thu	15	29	00	06	07	05	62
Binh Thuan	Ham Thuan	24	20	11	01	07	07	70
	Hoa Da	20	24	05	09	09	08	75
Kien Giang	Kien Tan	25	22	08	09	12	04	80
	Kien Thanh	26	21	08	09	10	06	80
Binh Dinh	Binh Khe	18	24	05	06	04	02	59
	An Nhon	12	21	02	09	06	03	53
An Giang	Thot Not	27	26	09	08	22	04	96
	Cho Moi	27	27	06	06	21	02	89
Tay Ninh	Phu Khuong	20	25	06	08	11	06	76
	Hieu Thien	23	25	07	08	08	05	76
Long An	Thu Thua	19	19	01	04	20	03	66
	Ben Luc	21	19	01	04	23	04	72
Tuyen Duc	Don Duong	22	22	08	00	06	09	67
Ba Xuyen	My Xuyen	23	23	07	09	09	08	79
Total		345	373	86	99	189	77	1169

For the cross-validation study, 6 squads (3 "poor" and 3 "good" squads) consisting of 46 troops, and 57 villagers in Binh Dinh Province were interviewed with a revised set of instruments.

²Colonel Bui Quang Trach of the GVN Command Development Test Center, Mr. Douglas Pike of JUSPAO, Captain Jack Little and others of the RF/PF staff were consulted about the selection of provinces.

The nine provinces selected for study were chosen to represent the diversity of rural Viet Nam and to provide the wide variations in rural security discussed above. The nine provinces were:

1. Thua Thien: Central Viet Nam. (Northeastern South Viet Nam). The capital of Thua Thien is Hue, the center of considerable Buddhist unrest in recent years, in earlier times the seat of the Imperial Vietnamese capital.

2. Binh Thuan: Representative of coastal Viet Nam and the home of two small minorities the Cham, who until 1500 controlled most of South Viet Nam, and the Nuong, of Chinese descent. The capital of Binh Thuan is Phan Thiet, a major fishing port.

3. Kien Giang: Selected for its typical Delta environment and culture and for the groupings of northern refugees and Cambodian Vietnamese found here. Parts of the province have been in Viet Cong hands almost continuously since 1946.

4. Binh Dinh: A central coastal province of Viet Nam which, with a population of one million, is the country's second largest province. It was also selected because of the year long presence of U.S. and Korean soldiers in the mountainous areas of the provinces and the large numbers of

refugees from areas of heavy fighting. Binh Dinh was an area of high recruitment and control for the Viet Minh before 1954 and much of the province has been under Viet Cong control for extended periods.

5. Tay Ninh: Representative of the rubber plantation lower plateau area and also heavily Cao Dai religiously. The headquarters of the Cao Dai Sects, once the most powerful in Viet Nam, is in Tay Ninh City. The large wooded area of the provinces also contains a key Viet Cong base, War Zone D.

6. An Giang: Once very insecure, An Giang is now the most secure province in Viet Nam and the province where the most development programs have been conducted. It is heavily Hoa Hoa and, at different times it was the scene of fighting which pitted Hoa Hoa armies against the French, the Viet Minh, the Viet Cong and Ngo Dinh Diem.

7. Tuyen Duc: A highland mountain province with a population composed largely of Montagnard tribes. Dalat, the capital, is the center of the Vietnamese vegetable growing "truck" farms which places high priority for the residents on traversible, secure roads.

8. Long An: Previous anthropological, economic and political studies done there by the Michigan University Advisory Team, the Rand Corporation, and the Joint US Public Affairs Organization (JUSPAO) make available a large amount of background data on this heavily populated Delta province near Saigon. It has been designated as a priority area for an extreme effort by both the South Vietnamese government and the Viet Cong because it controls approaches to Saigon for the delta region.

9. Ba Xuyen: Typical of the lower delta and containing large groupings of Cambodian-Vietnamese.

In each district interviews were obtained from 6 squads of soldiers, 3 composed of Popular Forces and 3 of Regional Forces. Interviews were also obtained by the Vietnamese interviewers with some of the soldiers' wives and with villagers. When possible village records were used to approximate a random sample. In insecure areas or areas where soldiers were far from the village office, quota sampling was used in an effort to get a cross-section of villagers.

Each soldier's interview lasted approximately 3 hours and covered personal background, military training, political

attitudes, relations with officials and population, personal relations, local Viet Cong performance and certain standardized tests, TATs and the Cantril Self Anchoring Scale.³

Interviews were also obtained from American advisors, district chiefs, Province officials, and village officials. The American team leader lived with the interviewers in whatever room could be found at district headquarters, (which meant a temporarily empty morgue in one case), and was thus able to spend evenings debriefing interviewers about their observations developing more intimate contacts with individual soldiers and observing more closely the district chiefs and their advisors.

Working with the Vietnamese interviewers, in fact, was perhaps the most revealing aspect of the entire project, for it, more than anything else, revealed the extraordinary gulf between urban, westernized Saigon and Vietnam's villages. In time, however, it was possible to develop in the interviewers a fair ability to gain rapport with the peasants and to elicit good quality information on most subjects. The biggest problem

³See Hadley Cantril, The Patterns of Human Concerns, New Brunswick, N.J. Rutgers University Press, for patterns and methods of coding.

was not the villagers' suspicion as much as simply training the interviewers to draw them out in conversation.

Peasants were quite frank, often brutally so, about their attitudes towards Saigon and local officials. Most candid and most bitter were the soldiers' wives - so that it is certainly very difficult to assume that hatred of GVN necessarily means support for the Viet Cong. When asked about the VC, however, peasants and soldiers would be willing to estimate how many were in the area, how close they came to the soldiers and what the general security conditions of their area were. Any time that a question seemed in the slightest designed to find out the names of any particular Viet Cong - the answer was silence; this was not to be told outsiders. This lead helped (generally) to develop an understanding of the relationship of peasant and VC in contested areas and to understand why peasants were so reluctant to help remove the VC infrastructure on some occasions. As properly indirect questions were developed, however, it became clear that in every contested village studied there were still boys -- how many cannot be estimated -- deciding to go with the Viet Cong. It was also generally the case, again especially in the key provinces of Binh Dinh and Long An, that peasants and soldiers alike were more familiar with Viet Cong propaganda than with that of Saigon.

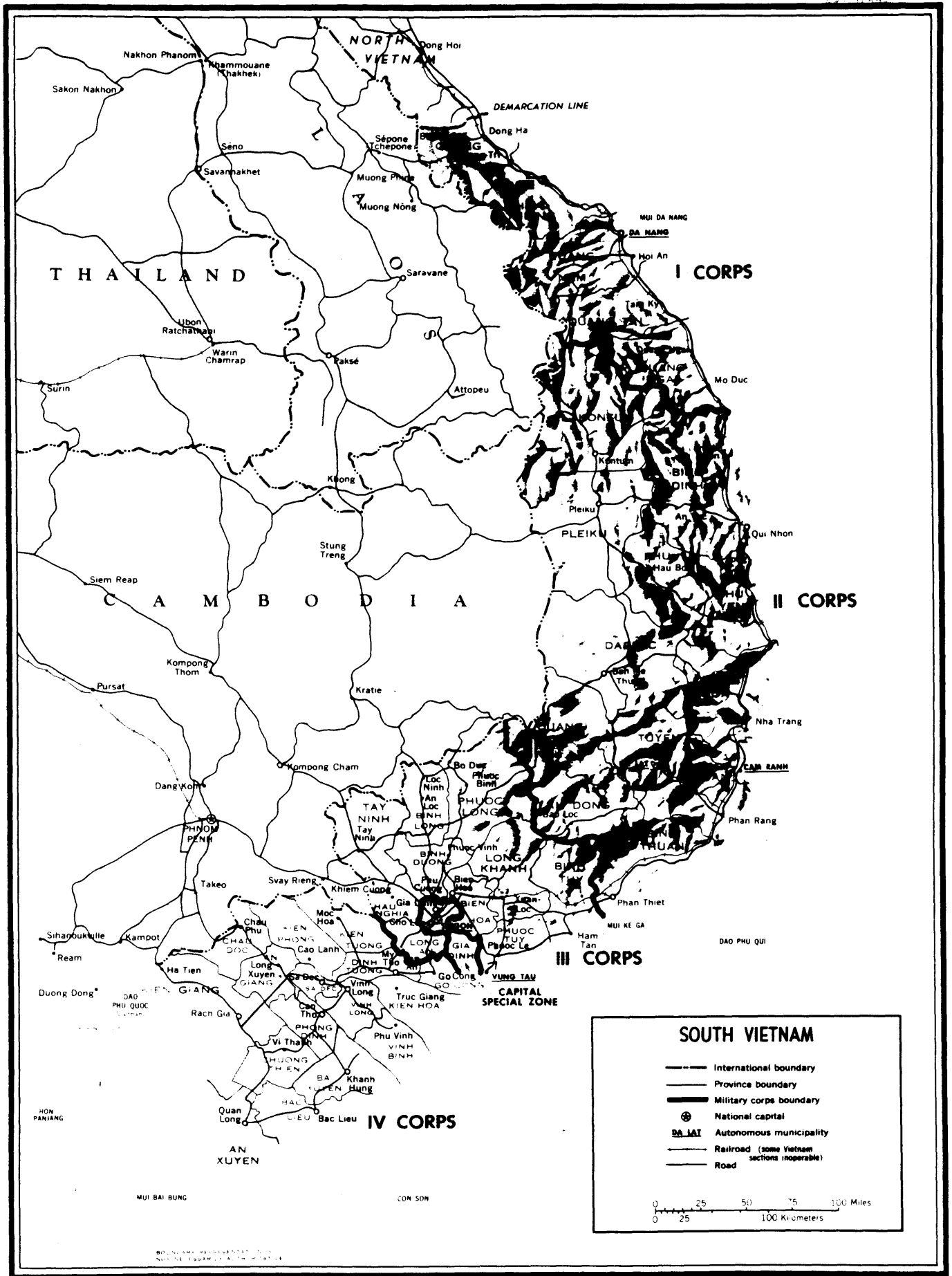
The conclusions of this thesis are based on computer analysis of the coded interviews with RF/PF, wives and villagers, and on reading of the approximately 300 interviews which were translated entirely into English and of all the interviews with advisors and district officials. It relies most heavily, however, on information from the provinces which the author visited personally: Thua Thien, Long An, An Giang, and Binh Dinh. Long An and Binh Dinh were areas of strong Viet Cong concentration and hence in many ways given a much less favorable picture of the war than other provinces. However, because of their strategic importance these two provinces were the scene of some of the most extensive priority programs initiated by the U.S. and the GVN. For this reason, the failings of these measures in these provinces, perhaps most clearly illustrate the struggle between political revolution and reaction in Viet Nam, and show why the seemingly small and obvious changes needed to produce a cohesive GVN system were really so difficult to achieve.

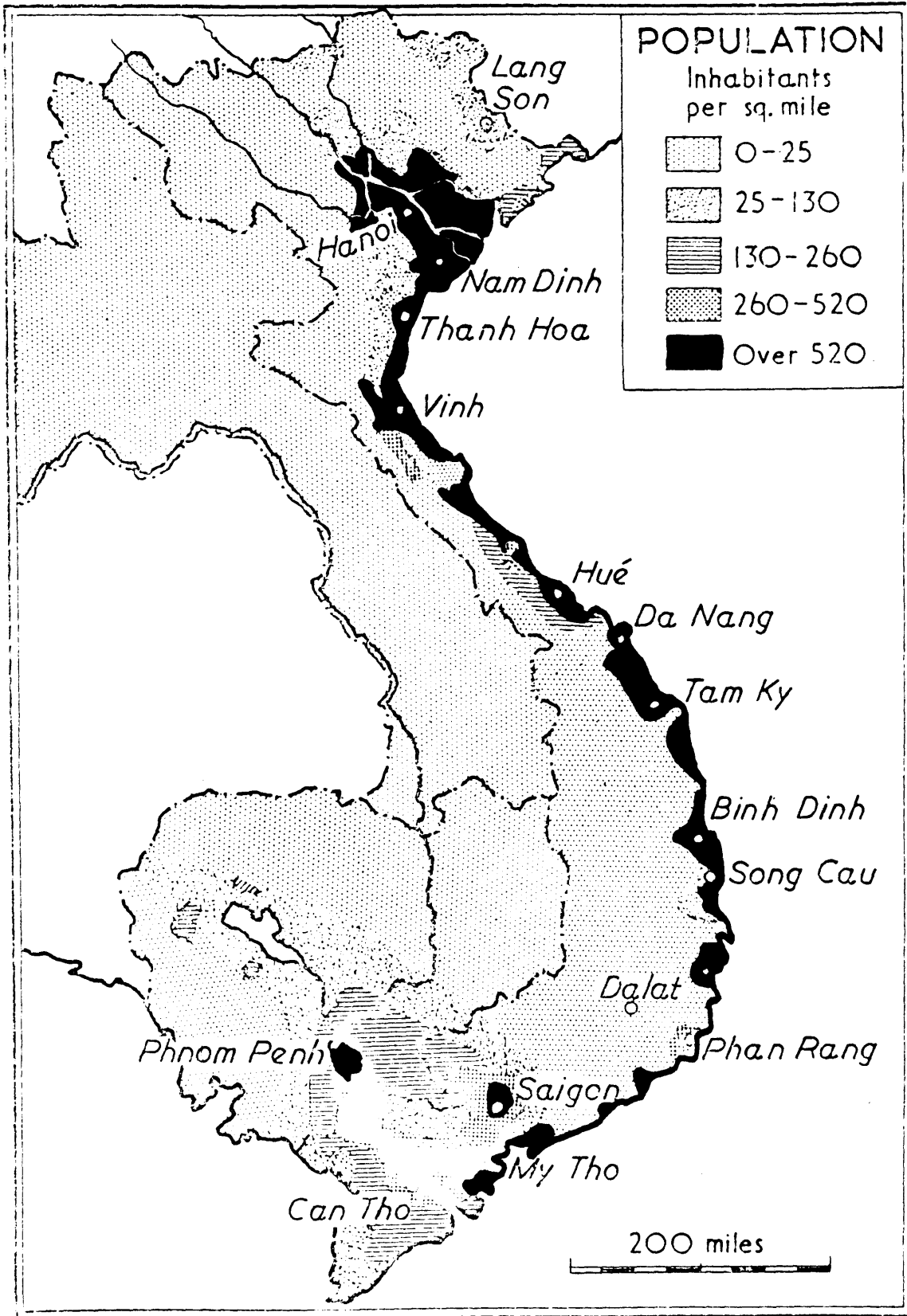
Appendix B - Maps

1. South Vietnam: Administrative Divisions. South Vietnam - Provincial Maps, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Basic and Geographic Intelligence, September 1967.
2. South Vietnam: Geographical and Topographical features. South Vietnam - Provincial Maps, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Basic and Geographic Intelligence, September 1967.
3. Vietnam: Population Density. Robin Murray (ed.). Vietnam, London, 1965, p. 13.
4. Vietnam: Vegetation. Robin Murray (ed.). Vietnam, London, 1965, p. 14.
5. The Defeat of the Navarre Plan: Viet Minh/French territorial control, 1953. General Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War - People's Army, New York: Praeger, 1962. Facsimile of 1961 Hanoi edition, page 195.
6. Infiltration Routes and Bases of Viet Cong in South Vietnam from Republic of Viet Nam, Communist Aggression against the Republic of Viet Nam, Saigon, July 1964, appended.
7. -- 1961. Vietnamese Studies, No. 8, South Vietnam 1954 - 1965, Hanoi, 1966, p. 155.
8. The 1964 Situation in Vietnam: Territorial Control. Los Angeles Times, Sunday, December 26, 1965.
9. The 1965 Situation in Vietnam: Territorial Control. Los Angeles Times, Sunday, December 26, 1965.
10. 1965: Liberated Zones and Government Controlled Territory. Vietnamese Studies #8, South Vietnam 1954-1965, Hanoi, 1966, p. 168.
11. The 1966 Situation in Vietnam: Territorial control. Los Angeles Times, Sunday, January 8, 1967.
12. The 1967 Situation in Vietnam: Territorial control. Los Angeles Times, Sunday, January 14, 1968. Note: the negative is included here because black and white reproductions of the original LA Times Map (which was in color) do not show the villages as clearly.
13. Invincible Strength: Comparison of 1967 and 1961 Liberated Areas. "Vietnam", No. 123, December 1967, Hanoi.
14. Districts visited during study.

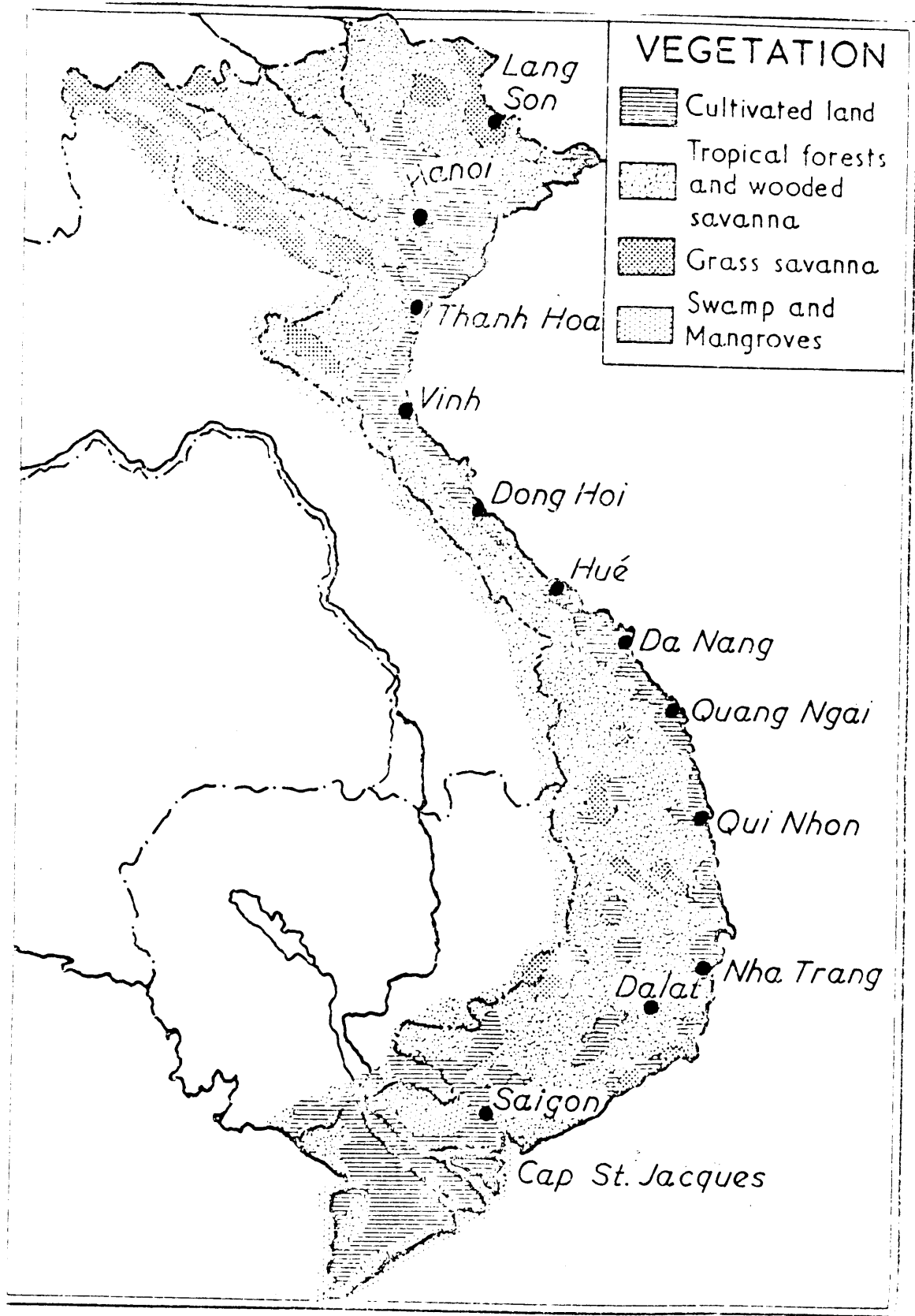
SOUTH VIETNAM ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS



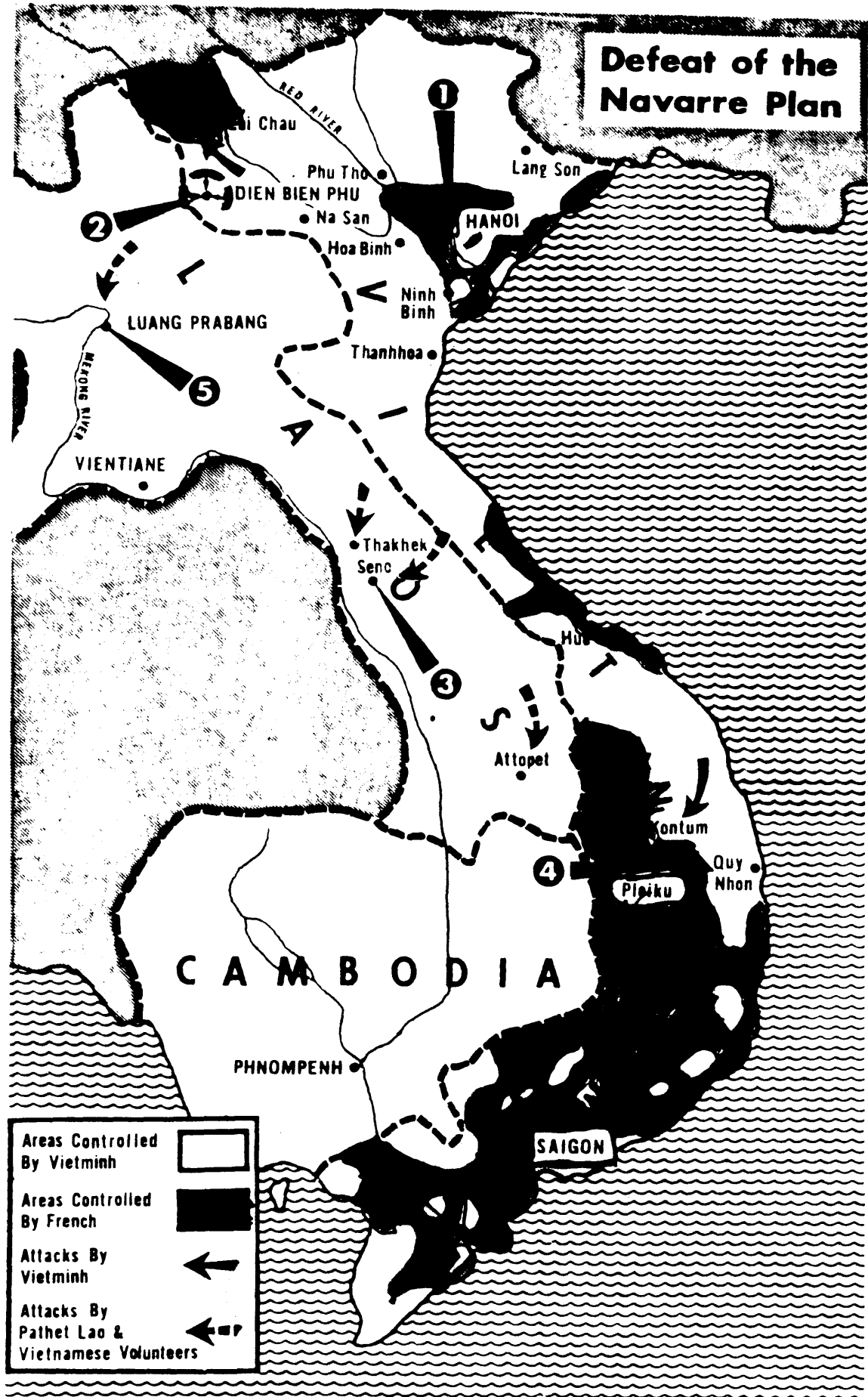




Map No. 3




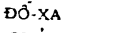
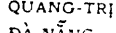

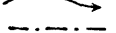
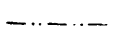

Map No. 4

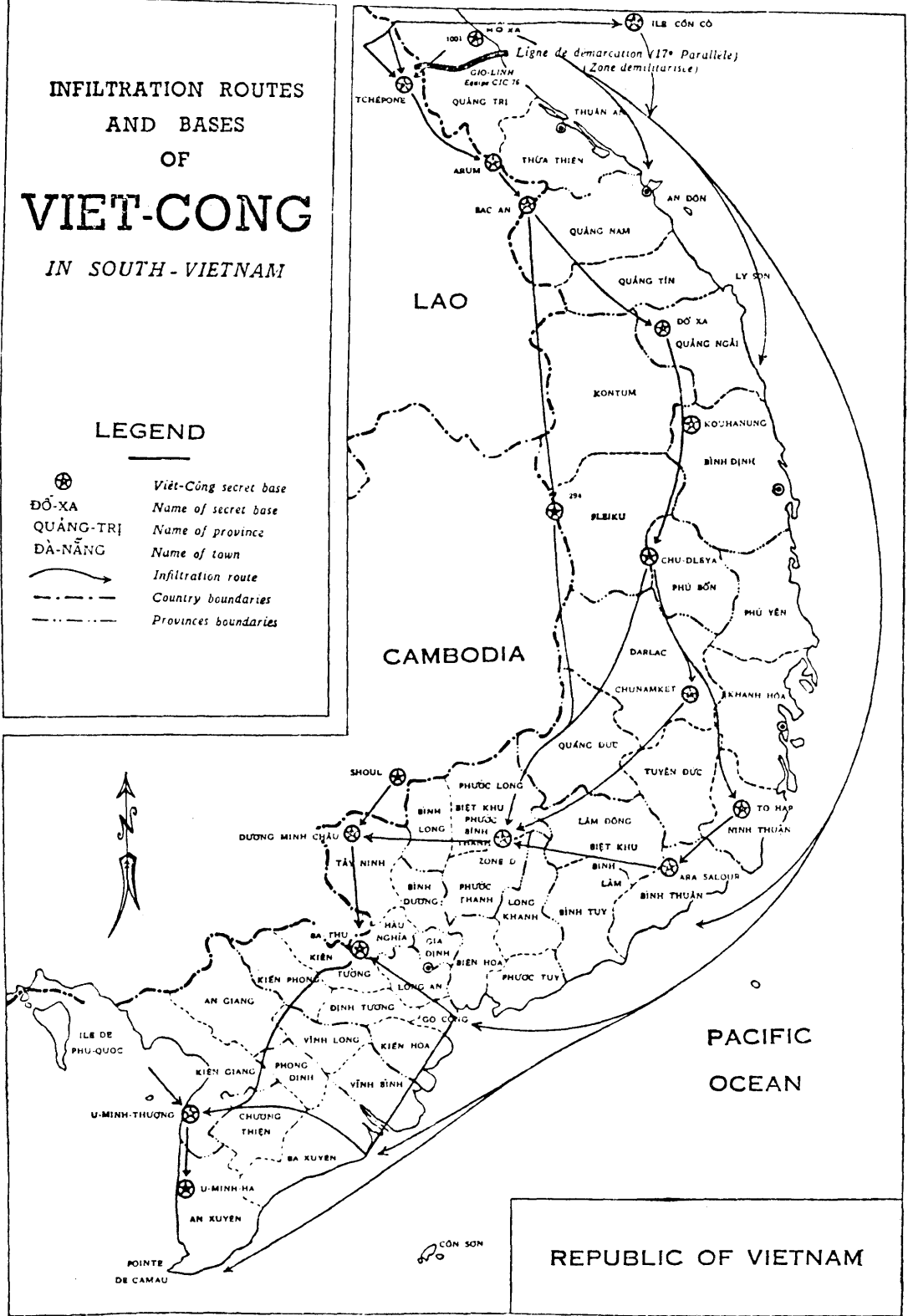


Map No. 5

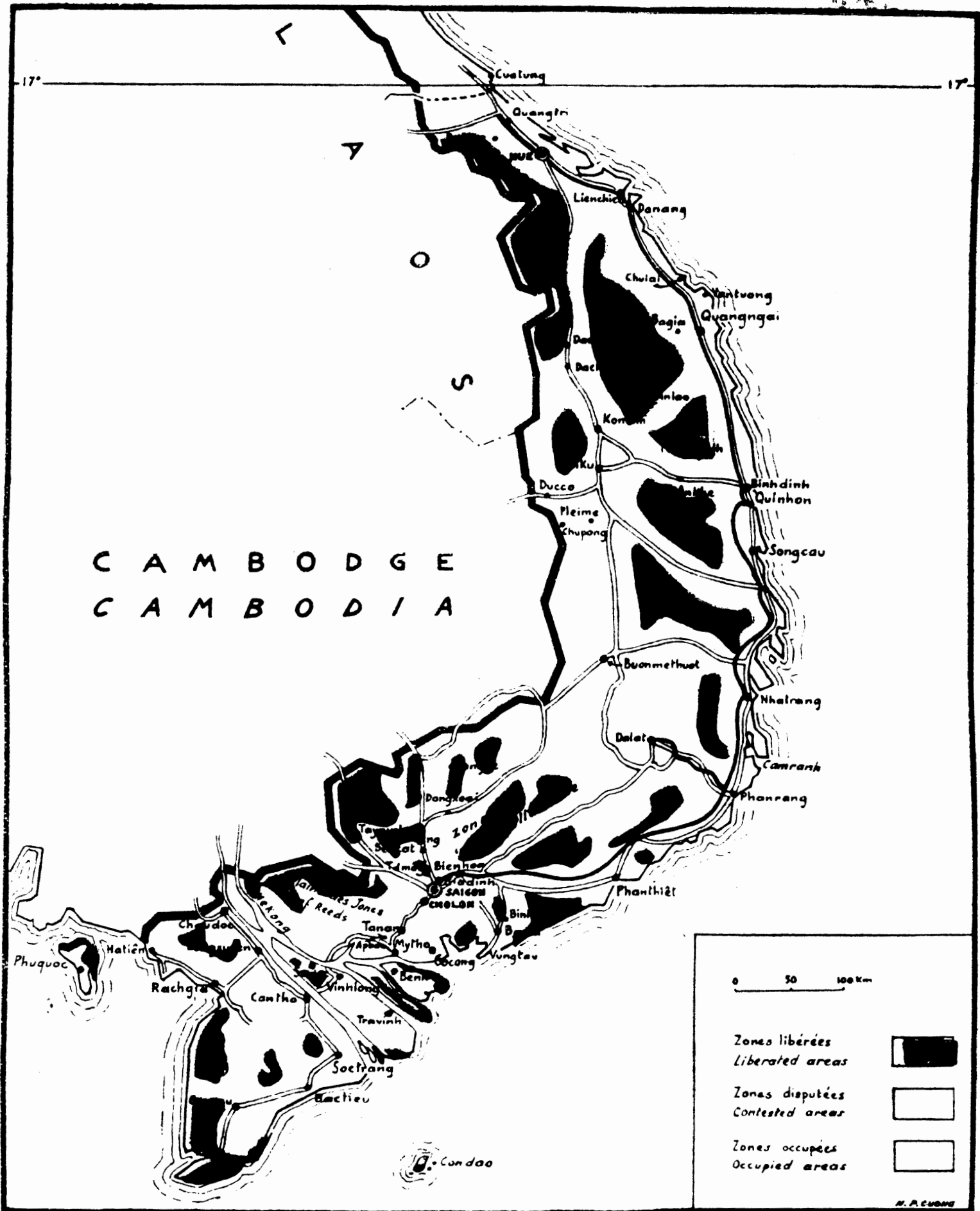
INFILTRATION ROUTES AND BASES OF VIET-CONG IN SOUTH-VIETNAM

LEGEND

-  Viet-Cong secret base
-  ĐỒ-XA Name of secret base
-  QUẢNG-TRỊ Name of province
-  ĐÀ-NẴNG Name of town
-  Infiltration route
-  Country boundaries
-  Provinces boundaries



Map No. 6



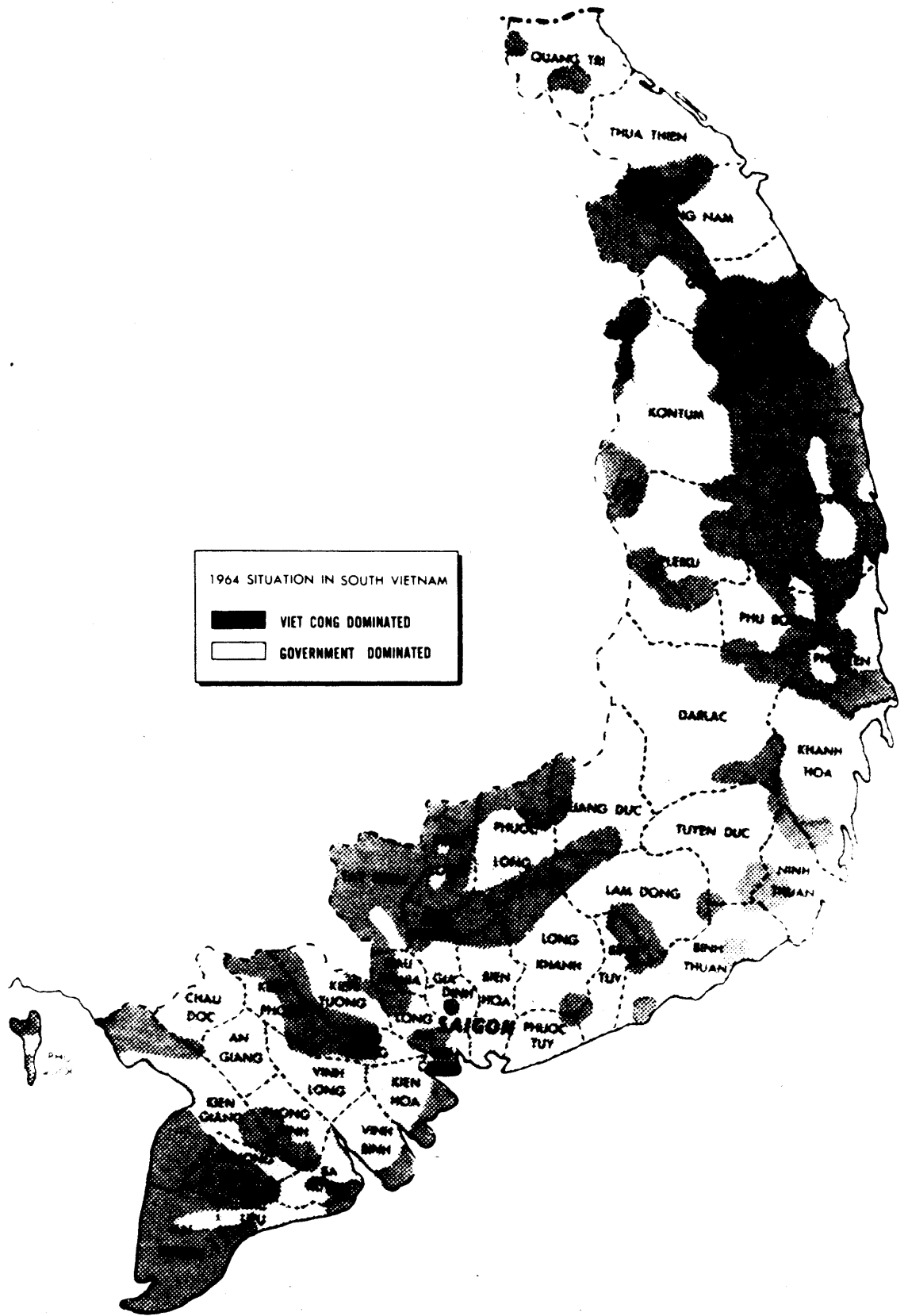
C A M B O D G E
C A M B O D I A

0 50 100 km

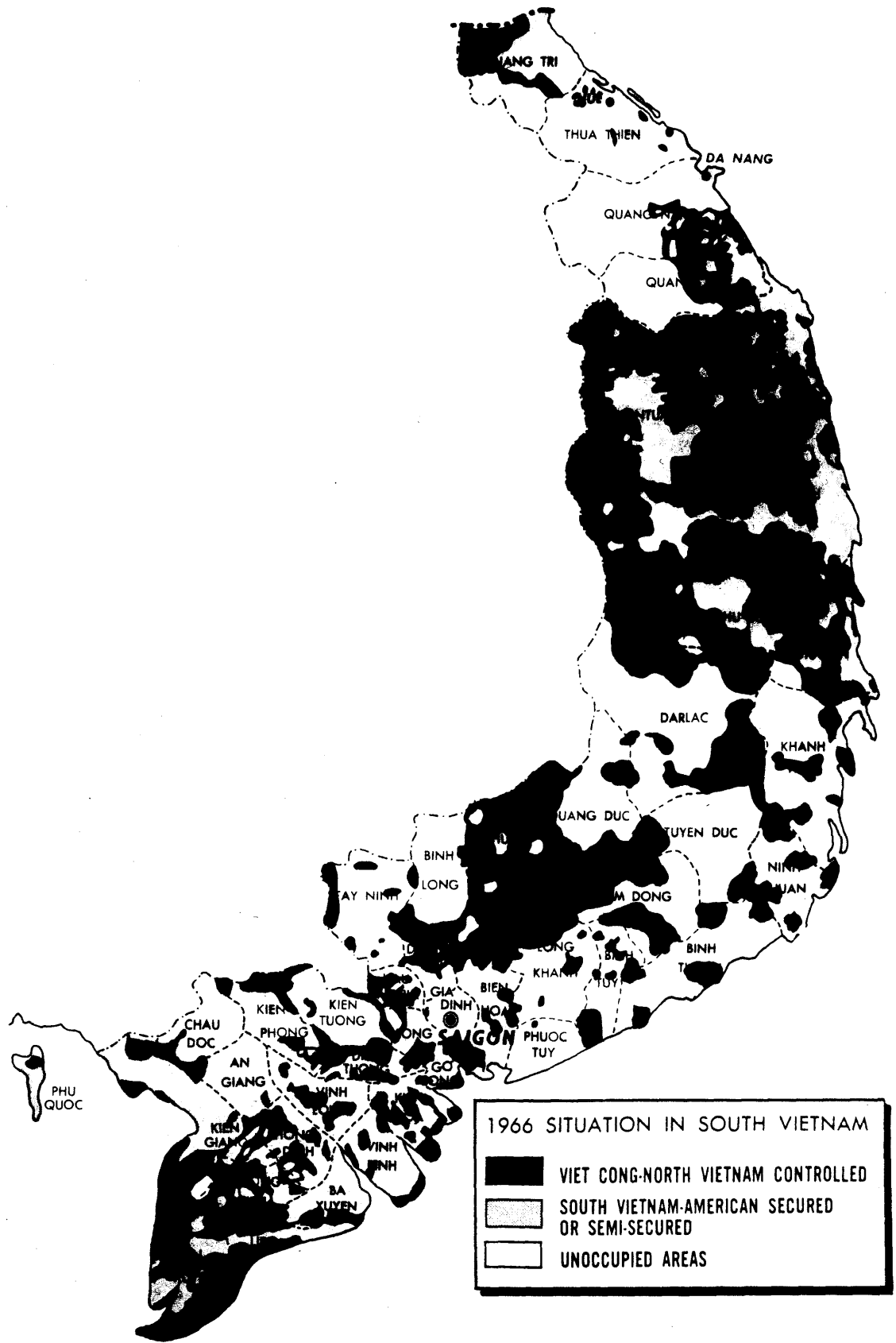
- Zones libérées
Liberated areas
- Zones disputées
Contested areas
- Zones occupées
Occupied areas

M. A. CUONG

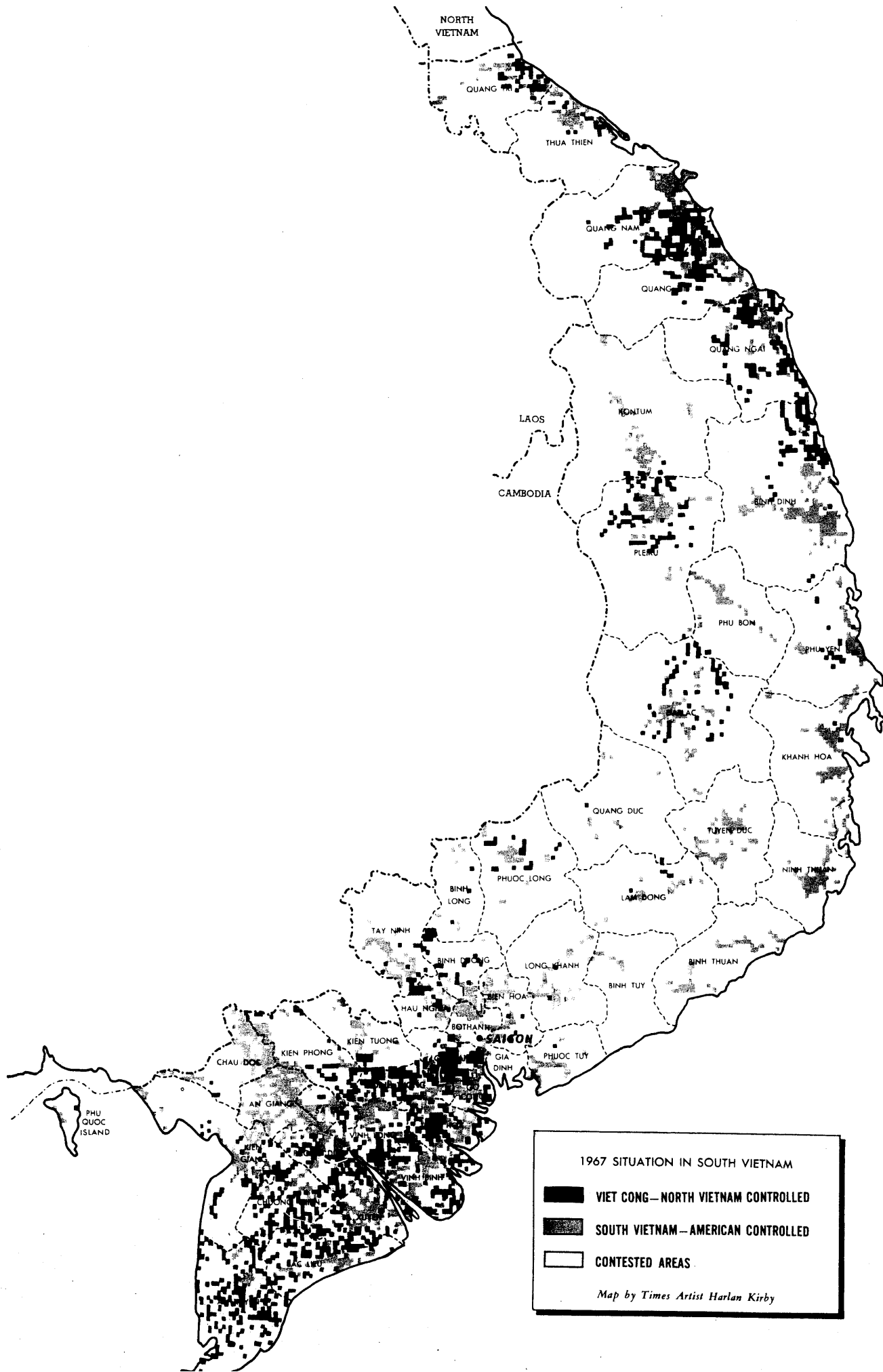
Map No. 7



Map No. 8

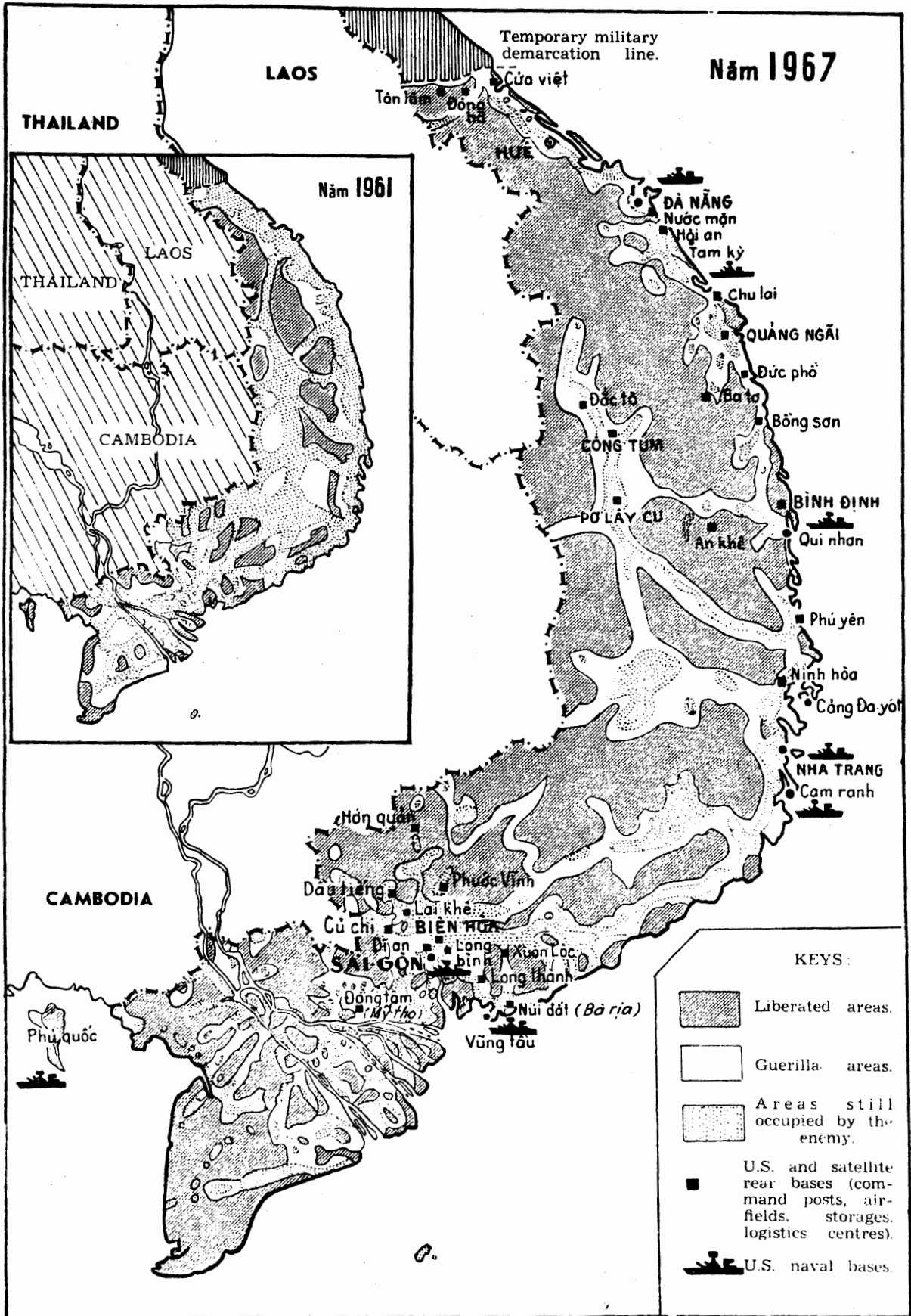


Map No. 11



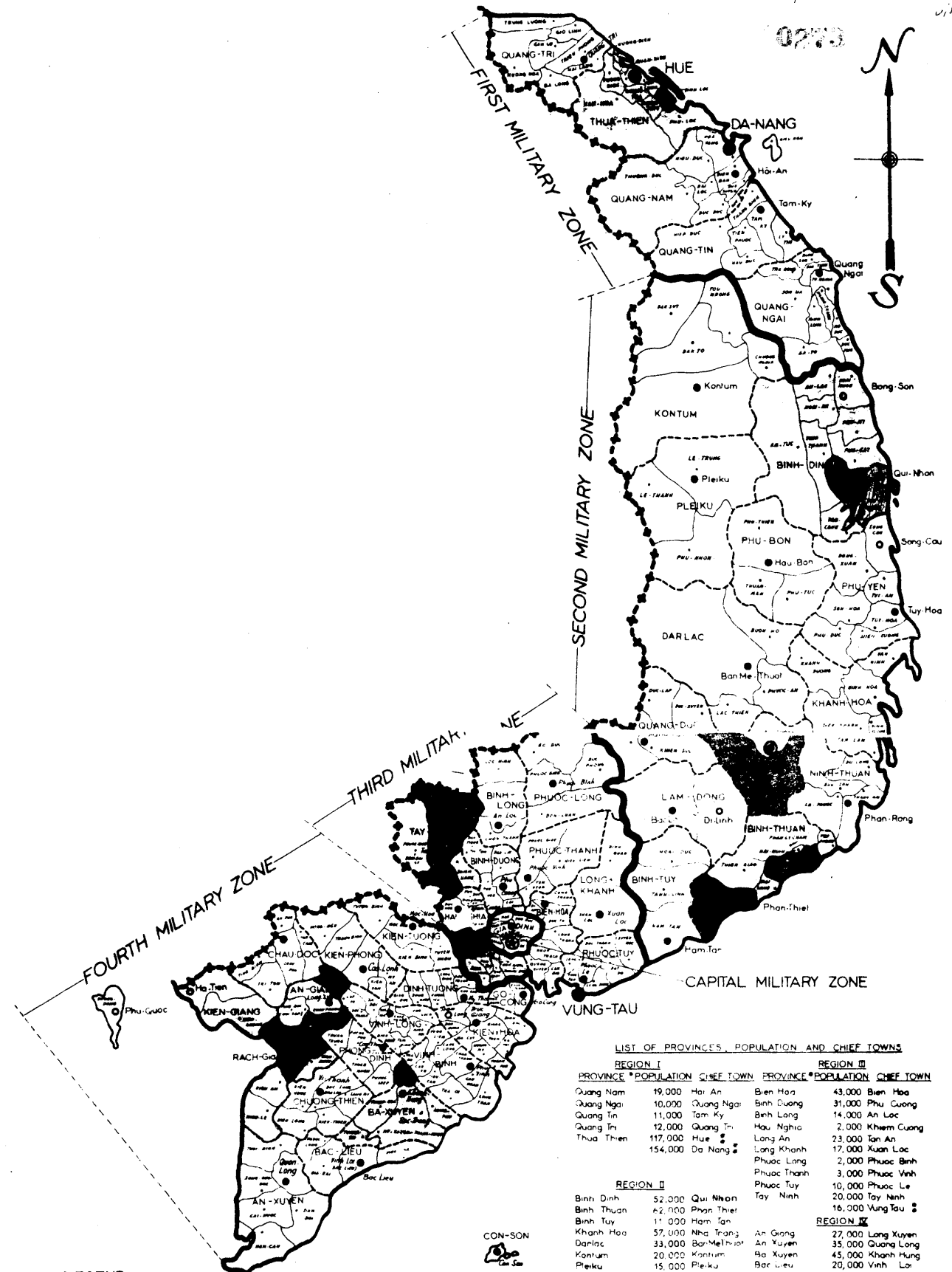
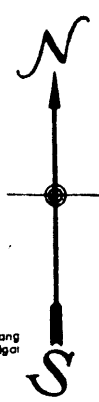
MAP OF THE LIBERATED AREAS OF SOUTH VIET NAM
IN 1967, COMPARED WITH 1961

02772



Tuy Phuoc also named vitit

0273



LEGEND

- NATIONAL BOUNDARY
- REGIONAL BOUNDARIES
- PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
- DISTRICT BOUNDARIES
- NATIONAL CAPITAL & AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE
- AUTONOMOUS CITY
- PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OR CHIEF TOWN

LIST OF PROVINCES, POPULATION AND CHIEF TOWNS

REGION I		REGION III			
PROVINCE	*POPULATION	CHIEF TOWN	PROVINCE	*POPULATION	CHIEF TOWN
Quang Nam	19,000	Hai An	Bien Hoa	43,000	Bien Hoa
Quang Ngai	10,000	Quang Ngai	Binh Duong	31,000	Phu Cuong
Quang Tin	11,000	Tam Ky	Binh Long	14,000	An Lac
Thua Thien	117,000	Hue	Hau Nghia	2,000	Khem Cuong
	154,000	Da Nang	Long An	23,000	Tan An
			Long Khanh	17,000	Xuan Lac
			Phuoc Long	2,000	Phuoc Binh
			Phuoc Thanh	3,000	Phuoc Vinh
			Phuoc Tuy	10,000	Phuoc Le
			Tay Ninh	20,000	Tay Ninh
				16,000	Vung Tau
REGION II		REGION IV			
Binh Dinh	52,000	Qui Nhon	An Giang	27,000	Long Xuyen
Binh Thuan	62,000	Phan Thiet	An Xuyen	35,000	Quang Long
Binh Tuy	11,000	Ham Tan	Ha Xuyen	45,000	Khanh Hung
Khanh Hoa	57,000	Nha Trang	Bar Xuyen	20,000	Vinh Loi
Darlac	33,000	Bar Me Thuat	Shau Duc	11,000	Chau Phu
Kontum	20,000	Kontum	Huong Thien	3,000	Vi Thanh
Pleiku	15,000	Pleiku	Can Sen	2,000	Con Son
Lam Dong	11,000	Bao Loc	Dinh Tuong	67,000	My Tho
Ninh Thuan	25,000	Phan Rang	Go Cong	18,000	Go Cong
Phu Bon	3,000	Hau Bon	Kien Giang	48,000	Rach Gia
Phu Yen	25,000	Tuy Hoa	Kien Hoa	18,000	Truc Giang
Quang Duc	3,000	Gia Nghia	Kien Phung	5,000	Cao Lanh
Tuyen Duc	57,000	Da Lat	Kien Trung	7,000	Mac Hoa
			Phong Dinh	77,000	Can Tho
			Vinh Binh	20,000	Phu Vinh
			Vinh Long	33,000	Vinh Long
CAPITAL MILITARY ZONE					
Gia Dinh	78,000				
Sai Gon	1,541,000	Sai Gon			

UNOFFICIAL AS OF NOV 29, 1964
FROM PUBLIC ADMIN DIVISION

* Projected to 1 July 1965
● Autonomous City

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 AID - Agency for International Development.
 MSUAG - Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group.
 USOM - United States Operations Mission to Vietnam.
 NIA - National Institute of Administration.
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