Coordination and Cooperation with Other Agencies (MAAG, etc.)

Coordination with MAAG continues to be good; Sector Advisor and Intelligence Advisor keep USOM representative well posted on current military situation and Viet Cong activities.

**Administrative:** I plan to rent a house in Kien Hoa which will serve as an office and area to entertain Vietnamese officials.

**Other Comments:** On June 6, Lt. Col. Tran Ngoc Chau, province chief, was reassigned to Danang as mayor of that city. Major Le Huu Duc, deputy province chief for security, was designated Acting Province Chief. Major Duc is more militarily oriented than Col. Chau but assured me that he intended to follow closely the programs established by Col. Chau. Major Duc has been extremely cooperative and has demonstrated an understanding of the importance of civic action/people-oriented programs.

Other indicators of progress were captured Viet Cong documents which reported that the Strategic Hamlet Program was hurting them badly in many ways—young men were defecting to their native villages, intelligence agents were being arrested,
tax collections were falling off, travel from base area to base area was becoming more difficult and more dangerous. On the other side, government tax collections and the National Agricultural Credit Organization loan repayments were increasing.

The program was apparently beginning to succeed and not because a massive amount of financial and material aid had been provided to the province. The total value of the funds and USOM and MAP materials allocated to Kien Hoa during the six month period from December 1962 to May 1963 was approximately 1 million dollars or the equivalent of $2.00 per person. (At that, only approximately half the total allocation was used.) There is no doubt that the "hardware" helped a great deal, but more important, the people were beginning to believe in the sincerity and honesty of their own government and their own ability to resist the Viet Cong. In other provisions which had as much or more financial and material support and which had been initially less critical than Kien Hoa, the situation was much worse, e.g. Long An Province.

Although progress was being made throughout the province, the degree of progress in any given area depended to a great extent on the ability, honesty and sincerity of the local officials, e.g., the district chief and in even more direct contact with the rural population, the village chief and the commander of the local security forces and the catalyst hamlet establishment cadre.
If these officials were responsive and fair, the program moved forward—even in the areas most heavily infested with Viet Cong political cadre, soldiers and supporters.

An outstanding example of a successful leader of this type was Capt. Huynh Anh Hoa who was the district chief in Binh Dai, at one time the worst district in the province. Capt. Hoa was a native of Kien Hoa and had been involved in the struggle against the Japanese, French and Viet Minh. He was a short, slightly chubby, happy looking man who showed several teeth missing when he smiled.

Riding with him in his battered jeep was an instructive experience in applied counter-insurgency techniques. Men, women, and children would wave as he drove by. He would stop occasionally to chat respectfully with an old man or woman, to speak seriously with a shabbily dressed hamlet militia man, or to fire a few questions at a passing bus driver. As we drove away, the people he had talked with would be smiling and would wave until we were out of sight. Capt. Hoa was a dedicated and capable and brave man, but above all, he understood the people of Binh Dai, their needs and aspirations and how to lead them.
One day in March 1964 when he was returning from a trip to resupply the men in a post that had been attacked the night before by a band of Viet Cong soldiers, the road erupted in back, under and in front of the bus in which he and his men were riding. A murderous cross-fire from the sides of the road poured into the bus. Hoa jumped out and began to rally his men for a counter-attack when he was dropped by a bullet through the forehead. By that time, most of the soldiers were dead or badly wounded—the Viet Cong moved up to the bus and asked one of the wounded men to point out Hoa. They gave the dead body a kick, talked briefly among themselves, and then moved back into the coconut groves, their mission accomplished.

A new district chief was appointed immediately, but the program in Binh Dai began to sag. The new man was considered by the Americans in the province to be the best military planner on the provincial staff. He had also proved his courage and ability in several battles. When he arrived in Binh Dai, the Viet Cong followed up Hoa's murder with a vicious military campaign. They hit hamlet after hamlet, post after post, the road was mined more and more frequently. The new district chief tried his very best, but he did not have Hoa's ability to motivate and lead people. Morale dropped, intelligence decreased and defections decreased. When this writer left the province in August, 1964, Binh Dai was still considered one of the more secure areas
in the province, but things were definitely not going well.

There are others just like Capt. Hoa in Vietnam, but their number is decreasing with each passing month. A good district chief who does his job well becomes a marked man. He can anticipate death by a land mine, a snipers bullet. He becomes a number one target for the Viet Cong for he is their number one enemy. Other district chiefs who do not do their jobs, or use their positions as a means to line their own pockets, survive, and they aid the insurgents' cause.

The real hope for defeating the Viet Cong rests with the Capt. Hoa's of Vietnam, not, with all due respect, with the military experts, nor with the road and dam builders, nor even with economic specialists. They are very important extensions of the program, but Captain Hoas are the heart of the program. The military experts and others can become Hoas, not by simply going through the motions of wearing a constant vacuous smile, but by developing a deep appreciation of the needs and aspirations of their people. With this appreciation, a rapport can be established which will allow them to lead the Vietnamese people in a struggle for the attainment of those ideals which motivate the Chaus and Hoas of Vietnam as it did our own (U.S.) revolutionary leaders a little less than 200 years ago.
The deterioration of the situation in Binh Dai was actually slower in coming than in the rest of the province, where a downward trend had started several months earlier. In June of 1963, Lt. Col. Tran Ngoc Chau was summoned by President Diem and was sent as mayor to Danang in Central Vietnam, to quiet the Buddhists who had begun to agitate against the Government. It was supposed to be a temporary assignment and his military deputy was named acting province chief.

Major Duc was pleasant and well liked. He took over Chau's office and began to meet the other two members (U.S.) of the provincial rehabilitation committee. Chau had outlined those things he wanted done during his absence and Major Duc began to carry them out. As time passed and Chau did not return, Duc became more and more unhappy with his difficult assignment and wanted to return to something he knew well—leading troops into battle. Decisions on new problems were needed and he hesitated to make them. The program began to slow down. The repercussions of the suppression of the Buddhists in Saigon and Central Vietnam were beginning to be felt in subtle ways. The civil servants at provincial level were disturbed by what was happening, their work was affected and the program slowed down. Then came the November coup d'état which overthrew Diem. With the change in government things still did not improve. The central government was in complete confusion, the generals were attempting to
consolidate their power. The Viet Cong took advantage of the confusion and greatly benefited by intensifying the pressure. It became increasingly apparent that something would have to be done or else all of the progress achieved during the first part of the year would be totally lost. Some programs staggered along, primarily because of the existence of a decision-making body at the provincial level (the provincial committee) with the authority and means to act.

The Government called for submission of new "pacification" programs for establishment of "new life" hamlets. Some of the wrongs of the Diem program, such as forced relocation, forced labor, and forced contributions were now outlawed. The programs submitted were, in most cases, technical improvements over the original plans. The Vietnamese and Americans had learned a great deal about the mechanics of the program during the past year. However, there was a disturbing emphasis on "control" of territory and "control" of movement and provision of more "hardware," which seemed to lose sight of the original concept of influencing people and bringing about a commitment to a cause.

Rumors of coups and counter-coups persisted and morale began to falter—the Viet Cong continued to take advantage of the situation to intensify their activities. On January 30th, 1964, the day General Khanh carried out his coup against the
other generals, a reinforced Viet Cong company broke through the weakened defenses across the small river from the provincial capitol at 6:30 in the evening and fired mortars and automatic weapons into the town and then withdrew. This was the first time that this had happened since the days of Lt. Col. Thao (see page 6). Exactly one week later, but this time at 6:00 in the evening, the Viet Cong attacked again, but this time with a heavier mortar barrage. Morale spiralled downward—officials moved their families to Saigon, wealthy businessmen and landowners moved into the provincial capitol from the district towns which had also been hit by mortar attacks. Local security forces were defecting to the Viet Cong at an alarming rate.

And then, in February, 1964, a very unusual thing (for Vietnam) happened. Lt. Col. Chau was reassigned to Kien Hoa. When he returned he was shocked to find how badly the situation had deteriorated. He immediately took off on an inspection trip of every district—repeating the same evaluation study that he had made when he first assumed direction of the province. What he found was very discouraging. He determined that he would have to pull back many posts and withdraw from several strategic hamlets to regroup his force to reinforce those villages, hamlets and posts which were still viable. He then put together another excellent program which was an improvement over the original one.
because he had had time to evaluate his previous efforts during his absence from the province.

The downward spiral slowed down and then gradually the program began to move forward again, but much slower and more difficult this time. The central government was still in a state of complete confusion. Supplies were not moving out of Saigon. Many of Chau's best men had been killed. There was wrangling over the allocation of funds to the provinces. But despite all these obstacles things began to move. By August, 1964, morale had picked up, intelligence was once again coming in, and the Viet Cong were again condemning publicly and complaining privately about the "American puppet" Chau.

The Vietnamese and Americans in the field have learned a little bit about insurgency—what causes it, how these causes are exploited by the Communists, how to combat it, and, hopefully, how to prevent it from developing in other countries.
CONCLUSION

The Strategic Hamlet program, as conceived by the central government and carried out in Kien Hoa Province, came close to meeting the requirements for defeating a Communist war of national liberation and achieving the political stabilization which would allow economic and social development to proceed in a well-ordered manner. However, there were several weaknesses which limited the effectiveness of the program. A few of the more important weaknesses and suggestions for improvement are listed below:

A. The progress of the program depended too heavily on the attitude and ability of a few individuals. If these removed from the scene, the program did not move forward and often moved backward. This suggests three possible improvements:

(1) The entire program should have been spelled out much more precisely, in simple language, so that individuals at all levels would have come to understand and believe in the program. Once equipped with this understanding and belief, a constant flow of encouragement, reaffirmation of purpose, simple guidelines and instructions should have been passed on to them, to help them keep their eye on the objectives of the program.

(2) Continuing attention should have been paid to careful selection, thorough indoctrination and maintenance of
morale and motivation of all individuals involved in carrying out the program.

(3) The development of means by which the governed could prod the government into responsive action should have been encouraged. Further, this basic concept should have been translated into realistic action programs.

B. As more experience was gained, it became increasingly apparent that there was too much emphasis on physical accomplishments. Hamlet residents were provided social and economic facilities, e.g., schools, health centers, newspapers, which are found in successful rural communities in other areas of the world and then were expected to commit themselves to the government. Too little emphasis was placed on solving those problems which were really bothering the rural population such as mistreatment by government officials, the lack of a simple system of justice, insufficient land, high land rentals, and high interest rate charged by money-lenders.

The Vietnamese government had attempted to meet some of these problems through laws and programs which limited land rentals, guaranteed the rights of tenancy for three to five years, provided agricultural credit at reasonable rates, etc. These programs, although quite good in theory, were not translated into realistic action programs. This failure can be
traced to the poor calibre and low motivation of those charged with the responsibility for administrating the program at the province, district, village and hamlet level. Also, the mechanical procedures were too cumbersome to provide meaningful response to the needs of the people.

In areas where the basic problems of land, justice and truly responsive government were handled well by the local officials, the people were willing to commit themselves to the government. In these areas, hamlet residents demonstrated their confidence in the government by providing the social and economic facilities they needed through their own efforts with a minimum of outside assistance.

The shortcomings of the Vietnamese Strategic Hamlet Program might have been overcome by carefully applying the following broad concept of development which is based on our own (USA) successful experience. 7

A. The preparation and continual proclamation of a statement of the aims and ideals of the government to which all citizens can rally and for whose preservation they would willingly risk their lives. We have such a statement in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution, strengthened and reaffirmed by the words of Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and others. The Vietnamese people have a good
constitution (Fall 1963: appendix II), and a rich tradition of heroism and sacrifice for country which could serve as the basis for a declaration of aims and ideals which, if properly presented and faithfully observed, could become the rallying point for all the divergent interest groups, including many of the present Viet Cong supporters.  

B. The designers of the U.S. constitution and government were well aware of the necessity to create an atmosphere in which struggle (between haves and have-nots, management and unions, black and white, etc.), could take place with a minimum of violence. Such an atmosphere allows and encourages citizens to present their aspirations and grievances with the knowledge that they can be satisfied under a system of law and without resort to violence. The Vietnamese government attempted to implement this concept when it included provisions for free elections of local officials, formation of social and economic action groups within the hamlets and majority selection of self-help projects in the Strategic Hamlet Program. These measures were carried out fairly well in some areas, such as Kien Hoa Province, but much more emphasis should have been placed on translating this concept into practical, effective action programs.
The Viet Cong in Kien Hoa Province and in South Vietnam in general, were far ahead of their opponents in understanding the political and psychological nature of the struggle and exploiting the grievances and aspirations of the peasants. The images they presented to the people were not those of a theoretical Marx, a dictatorial Stalin or a power-hungry Mao; but more those of an inspiring Patrick Henry, a brave Robin Hood, or a just Abraham Lincoln. These statements of ideals and aims which they had prepared had great popular appeal among the rural population (see Fall 1963: appendix IV).

Once they had seduced the people with inspiring slogans, they then maintained and strengthened their hold by continuous indoctrination, firm discipline and the application of terror as needed.

Discussions with former Viet Cong leaders (Communist party members) revealed that they knew very well that they would have to seduce the people by presenting themselves as the champions of their aspirations and grievances. But once they gained complete control they fully intended to turn South Vietnam into a Communist state.

This duplicity, carried out so well by the Viet Cong leaders, has resulted in the real commitment of a substantial
percentage of the rural population. This belief and spirit cannot be defeated by military measures alone. The Viet Cong can be killed individually by bombs, machine guns and artillery, but more will come forward to replace them as long as the people can be seduced or coerced to support the Viet Cong.

The people of Kien Hoa who had never lived under Communism were vulnerable targets for Viet Cong propaganda; those who had experienced Communist control, such as the resettled Catholic refugees from North Vietnam, resisted the Viet Cong fiercely. More emphasis should be placed on explaining the workings of and conditions in a Communist state such as North Vietnam, in terms that can be understood and believed by the peasants of Kien Hoa.

U.S. participation in the Strategic Hamlet Program was a major departure from conventional A.I.D., MAAG and U.S.I.S. programs and should provide valuable lessons for future development programs.

The major features of the program were:

A. Decentralization of responsibility and authority.

B. Close coordination between U.S. government agencies and the Vietnamese government at central, regional (ARVN Corps—the country is divided into four corps areas) subregional (ARVN division—a tactical area composed of several provinces,) provincial (ARVN sector comparable to U.S. state) and, in some cases
district (ARVN subsector—comparable to U.S. county) levels. 9

C. American follow up of downward and upward governmental communication which resulted in the breaking of many bottlenecks and the expediting of all aspects of the program.

D. The immediate and continuing availability of substantial amounts of money, (P.L. 480) foodstuffs, and materials with sufficient U.S. participation in administration to:

(1) Serve as a check on misuse of the support provided.

(2) Provide a legitimate reason for offering advice on the use of the support provided.

The presence of Americans at the lower levels was an essential ingredient in any success the program achieved. Fighting a centuries old tradition of tight central control, they gave confidence to local leaders and encouraged the central government to proceed with a decentralized program. The Americans, both military and civilian, played many roles in the provinces:

First— they were observers and students—taking a graduate course in a people's war and in broader terms in political/economic/social development in general.

Second— they were friends and supporters—encouraging their Vietnamese allies.

Third— they were reporters—helping to shape U.S. understanding of the complex struggle.
Fourth—they were watchdogs—(as much as a foreigner can be in an alien culture)—as much for the GVN as for the U.S.

Fifth—they were advisors—occasionally in guerrilla warfare and the political and psychological struggle, but more often in those things that Americans know best—hardware, procedures, bookkeeping, etc. The Americans were all of these things and more and, as such, served as the catalyst which started and maintained the momentum of the program.

A people's war and a people's army cannot be fought from the Capitol of the country alone. Responsibility and authority must be decentralized. Sufficient flexibility must be allowed at the lower levels of government to provide rapid and adequate response to local needs. Trust must be placed in carefully selected leaders. Mistakes will frequently be made but the structure of government will be strengthened rather than weakened through this process.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Mao Tse Tung has pointed out two obvious areas for research in the political/social/economic field: "Know your enemy. Know yourself."

Free world research in this field might be improved by approaching the problems in an underdeveloped area in the same way:

A. Know your enemy:

(1) Obtain all available anti-government propaganda to receive a continual flow of newly developed propaganda. Analyze the propaganda and identify those aspirations and grievances which the anti-government forces intend to exploit.

(2) Make a study of the political, psychological and military tactics of the anti-government group to determine their strengths and vulnerabilities.

(3) Make an attempt to determine whether the anti-government groups are foreign-dominated. If they are not, determine the chances of the movement succumbing to foreign domination and what policy or programs might be developed to prevent this takeover.

B. Know yourself:

(1) Undertake an in-depth study of the problems which
the anti-government groups are exploiting in their attempt to win the support of the people. Prepare recommendations for corrective government action which may be required.

(2) Analyze the government civil service structure to determine methods for improving the calibre and motivation of governmental employees at all levels.

(3) Analyze the present status of upward communication to determine improved methods for allowing the people to express and satisfy their grievances without resort to violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The Strategic Hamlet Program as applied in Kien Hoa Province suggests several action possibilities which might be applicable in other under-developed areas subject to communist-inspired insurgency. A few of these action possibilities are listed below:

(1) Encourage thorough decentralization of responsibility, authority and resources. American or other Free World advisers assigned at lower echelons of government could serve as catalysts in a decentralization process. The role of the Peace Corps in such an undertaking requires careful consideration.
(2) Identify, train and motivate responsible local leadership, both government officials and non-governmental leaders. Training should include thorough yet simple explanation of the inter-relationship of government and the governed—showing contrast between western democracy and Communist exploitation of legitimate grievances.

(3) Encourage national leadership to work on improving attitudes and administrative procedures of governmental bureaucracy to provide truly responsive government. The complaints and action technique used by Province Chief Chau in Kien Hoa and earlier by President Magsaysay in the Philippines could be adapted to conditions in other countries. Rewarding of capable, honest civil servants and punishment of corrupt officials would greatly strengthen national bureaucracy.

(4) Emphasize immediate grass-roots development over long range national development. The avowed aim of the Communist world—China and Cuba in particular—is to use the technique of exploiting local grievances to create national wars of liberation.
which will bring to power groups which would be subservient to their plans for world domination. The U.S. and Free World in general cannot afford to devote years to gradual national development while a clever, ambitious enemy is steadily subverting the rural and urban population.
FOOTNOTES


1a. O'Donnell's evaluation of Lt. Col. Thao's effectiveness in this operation is confirmed independently by John McAlister (personal communication 1965, based on field trips in Kien Hoa Province, 1961). Thao had also been active in the development of the agroville program (Zasloff N.D.).

2. The Strategic Hamlet Program was preceded in Vietnam by a number of different resettlement and rural development programs. The Land Development Program has been outlined by Henderson (1961). In this program, which started in 1957, loyal Vietnamese peasants were to be resettled in areas such as the highlands around Pleiku, and the Mekong Delta, which had served as bases for Viet Cong and other dissident groups. The aims of the program were to develop or reclaim land which had been abandoned as a result of the war, or which had never been subjected to advanced agricultural techniques. Equally important (or perhaps more important) was the idea that these resettlement areas were to be of assistance in the political and military control of insecure areas, and were to serve as centers from which minority populations (e.g. the montagnards) could be influenced.
The planning for the Land Development Program was based on earlier experience with resettlement programs for the 850,000 refugees who had come from the North following the Geneva Conference in 1954. The program had to be abandoned in the Delta region because the strength of the Viet Cong there made it impossible to carry out the engineering tasks (ditching, damming, draining) before the resettlement could actually take place. Resettlement in the highlands encountered a number of technological and economic problems, and U.S. aid was withdrawn from the project before it was implemented. Nonetheless, it was pursued by the Vietnamese.

In 1959, a rural regroupment program was undertaken, in which two kinds of centers were to be set up: centers called *qui khu* for people believed to be sympathetic, or potentially sympathetic to the Viet Cong; and centers called *qui ap* for families who were believed to be loyal to the South Vietnamese Government, but who were living in remote areas where they could not be protected from the Viet Cong. The program was gradually abandoned when it proved difficult or impossible to differentiate among the population according to potential sympathy to the Viet Cong (even many government officials had relatives in the North), and when the loyal families could not be convinced that moving to the agglomeration centers was for their own good (see Zasloff N.D.:6-8, for a brief review of the program).
The "Agroville Program" (Zasloff N.D.: 9-32), which was begun later in 1959, was designed to concentrate rural population for purposes of economic development, and to prevent them from giving aid to the Viet Cong. It did not, however, incorporate the self-defense features of the strategic hamlets. It was hoped that the regrouped populations could be linked up a new strategic road system, that the program would stimulate the development of more and more competent village administrators, that economic development would lead to better local finances for the villages, and that a youth movement could be developed in the new setting to provide future rural leadership.

As far as the peasants were concerned, the major disadvantages of the agroville program were the forced abandonment of their homes, ancestral shrines, fruit and shade trees, and familiar surroundings, forced indebtedness for new land which they had not chosen, and unpaid corvée labor in the construction of the new settlements. Since not all of the fields could be relocated the peasants were forced to walk several kilometers from the new settlements and could not give their fields the continual attention they required. Local leaders in the agroville projects were subject to great pressures from the Viet Cong, who used peasant discontent with the program to great advantage. The agroville program was gradually abandoned in 1961 and re-
placed by the Strategic Hamlet Program. For further discussion of the Strategic Hamlets, see Smith (1964), and for a journalistic account of the background to the strategic hamlet program, see Warner (1963). For a detailed comparison of the strategic hamlet program with similar programs in other countries, see Osborne (1965). Ed.

3. This committee was also known as the "Trueheart Committee" which was a U.S. coordinating committee for provincial operations consisting of working-level representatives of all U.S. agencies in Vietnam chaired by Mr. William Trueheart, the Deputy Chief of Mission.


5. The insidiousness of numerical self-delusion can be illustrated by an encounter the writer had with one U.S. official in Saigon, who, when told that the strategic hamlet program in the Mekong Delta was beginning to disintegrate, turned to a large chart behind him which showed number
of hamlets completed, number of militia trained, number of rolls of barbed wire issued, etc., and in an outraged voice demanded an explanation, vigorously pointing out that it couldn't be disintegrating, that the figures indicated that it was moving ahead remarkably well, and that more figures were arriving daily! Unfortunately, this self-delusion had to be shattered by hard facts, and the emphasis on reporting was changed from quantitative to qualitative analysis.


For an interesting discussion of this thought see "Ideology and Organization in Counterinsurgency," by Methvin (1964).
8. The hard-core Communists could probably not be converted.

9. This extension of coordinated US activities to the lowest levels helped to assure that the policies and plans developed jointly in Saigon were translated into action programs at the grass-roots level.

10. When the majority of the US purchased local currency had been spent and had been replaced by GVN controlled currency, the practice of a three-man sign-off for expenditures was continued because the GVN officials knew that the US personnel were honest and were not convinced that their own men were. A side effect of the three-man sign-off was that the province chief felt that he could go ahead with the program because he had two people to share the blame, or back him up if he got in hot water with the Saigon bureaucracy.
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