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**Vietnamese
Studies**

**THE FAILURE
OF
"SPECIAL WAR"**

1961-65

254

Vietnamese Studies

No. 11

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INTRODUCTION

The present issue covers the period from mid-1961 to mid-1965 when Washington carried out the so-called "special war" strategy in South Vietnam with a view to suppressing the Vietnamese patriotic movement. The failure of this strategy forced the United States to send U.S. troops there for a direct participation in the war towards the middle of 1965. How the strategy was carried out, and how it was defeated, such is the content of the present issue. Before going into details, we deem it useful to outline the historical background of the period under study and its various aspects.

U.S. intervention dates much further back than that period. When World War Two ended, isolationism being dead for good, the United States openly undertook a systematic policy of world hegemony, which brought it into direct confrontation with the colonial peoples' liberation movement. In Vietnam, the first American machinations took place in 1944-1945, and open intervention in 1950 through material and financial help to France, the sending of a U.S. military mission to Indochina, the signing of various agreements with the puppet governments, all aimed at militarily suppressing the resistance movements of the peoples of Indochina. The

victory of the Vietnamese people's forces at Dien Bien Phu and the signing of the 1954 Geneva accords brought about the failure of this first American intervention.

After the 1954 armistice, Washington concentrated its efforts on South Vietnam with a double purpose: to liquidate the revolutionary patriotic movement through a policy of systematic extermination of all patriotic elements and large-scale bloody repression so as to turn South Vietnam into a secure base, and then attack the North with an army trained and equipped by the United States. The Geneva accords were systematically violated and France ousted: the U.S. remained the only master.

The tool of this policy was the Diem regime, rigged up with the most reactionary and feudalistic elements in the country, assisted by a body of American advisers, and financed, equipped and inspired by Washington. For long years, the U.S. - Diem regime imposed bloody terror on the whole country. From 1954 to 1959, tens of thousands of people, charged with "communism" (Vietcong) were massacred, over 150,000 incarcerated in prisons and concentration camps, while millions of others were regrouped in "prosperity centres" and "agricultural settlements", which were in fact but camouflaged concentration camps.

The violation of the Geneva agreements, especially the sabotage of general elections in 1956, and the complete interruption of all relations with the North ran counter to the aspiration of all popular strata for unification. Barbarous repression of unprecedented scope, and the stifling of all democratic liberties aroused vigorous opposition in the whole country. As early as 1954, each

social class and category had to wage a resolute struggle to defend their most elementary rights, maintain peace, and bring about the restoration of the country's unity. (See Vietnamese Studies, n° 8, "South Vietnam 1954-1965", dealing with this struggle).

From 1954 to 1959, this struggle was strictly political, in the form of demonstrations, petitions, sendings of delegations, strikes, refusal to relinquish lands distributed by the Resistance, economic and social claims, involving millions of people in a multiform and uninterrupted fight. Subsequent developments could not be understood if one failed to see this political mobilisation, of unprecedented scope, of the entire South Vietnamese people against the U.S. - Diem regime. The American advisers and Diem embarked upon a veritable unilateral war, carried out wholesale massacres and ferocious mopping-ups, and concentrated the population through a typically fascist policy.

By 1959, the South Vietnamese people found themselves facing two alternatives: either to resign themselves to being exterminated, or to take up arms for self-defence. Self-defence armed struggle was then waged jointly with political struggle; first with rudimentary weapons, then with arms captured from the enemy. The most cruel hangmen of the Diem administration were punished. Gradually, self-defence, then guerilla units were formed. They attacked scattered military posts and patrols, while mass demonstrations, protected by armed partisans, multiplied. The U.S. - Diem administration, paralysed in the villages, went through a deep crisis. The year 1960 witnessed local uprisings which spread and

resulted in the liquidation or neutralisation of administrative organs set up by Saigon over a great part of the territory.

On December 20, 1960, the National Front for Liberation (N.F.L.) was set up, which co-ordinated the struggles of the various social classes and strata, of the various regions, and brought the fight to a higher level by advocating the overthrow of the U.S. - Diem regime, the establishment of a coalition government with a programme of independence, peace, democracy and neutrality. The acute crisis of the Saigon regime, and the creation of the N.F.L. forced Washington to adopt a new policy. In 1961, John Kennedy came to the White House, and appointed General Maxwell Taylor his military adviser. American neo-colonialism became all the more virulent as it had found its doctrinaires.

*

In May 1961, U.S. Vice-president L.B. Johnson was sent to Saigon, followed by General Taylor and the economist Staley. "Special warfare" plans were quickly licked into shape, aimed at liquidating the South Vietnamese patriotic movement within 18 months. Details of the Staley - Taylor plan and the people's struggle against it will be studied in the present issue. We shall only say briefly that the latter part of 1961 and the year 1962 were a period of hard political and military struggle waged by the people and the liberation forces against mopping-up raids and the setting up of "strategic hamlets" all over the country.

On January 2, 1963, in a small village 60 kilometres from Saigon, a guerrilla group inflicted a severe defeat on 2,000 Saigon troops, destroying 6 helicopters, 3 amphibious cars, and putting out of action 450 men. This battle at Apbac marked a turning point by proving that the most modern weapons and sophisticated tactics of special warfare were ineffective against the people's forces. Following these political and military setbacks, the disintegration of the Diem regime quickened. The loss of its control over the countryside and the severe casualties suffered by its troops gave rise to an acute crisis, and the urban people could intensify their struggle. In the summer of 1963, the Buddhist crisis tolled the knell of the regime, and the Americans got rid of Diem in November 1963.

The year 1964 and the early part of 1965 saw successive coups d'etat take place and a string of puppet governments installed in Saigon, while in the military field the large-scale mopping-up raids undertaken by the Saigon troops ended often in disaster, many posts were annihilated or had to be evacuated, and whole battalions of puppet troops were decimated. Most of the strategic hamlets were destroyed. By mid-1965, the Saigon army, the main tool of special warfare, was disintegrating. Vainly did Washington engage in air escalation against North Vietnam: the special war had come to grief in South Vietnam. The Johnson administration had to send American troops massively, and wage a local war using important U.S. effectives, which the promoters of special war had precisely sought to avoid. A new phase of the war began. Over half a million men trained and

equipped by the U.S., and commanded by U.S. officers, had to admit defeat. Massive landings of G.I.s on South Vietnamese beaches marked the failure of special war as it had been conceived by the most brilliant politicians and strategists of Washington: Johnson, Kennedy, Taylor, McNamara...

We shall deal with the following points, in succession:

1. The Staley - Taylor plan.
2. People's war versus special war.
3. The major battles from 1963 to 1965.
4. The political crisis of the Saigon regime.
5. The National Front for Liberation in the years 1961 - 1965.

THE STALEY — TAYLOR PLAN

(July 1961 — December 1962)

TON VY

I

FROM STALEY TO TAYLOR

THE end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960 marked a new upsurge of the patriotic movement of the South Vietnamese people against the U.S.-Diem dictatorship.

The unremitting political struggle of the preceding years combined with armed struggle for self-defence gained in strength and scope.

The repressive apparatus was collapsing. In certain areas, the village puppet administration was destroyed by two-thirds. Its most cruel agents were either neutralized or punished. Many "prosperity zones" were

dissolved. 80% of the population, who had been confined in them, recovered their liberty.

The upsurge of the patriotic movement gave Washington the greatest concern because it brought to nothing the Yankee design to transform South Vietnam into a new-type colony and a military base.

Dealing with South Vietnam at a press conference Kennedy asked himself :

"How we fight that kind of a problem which is going to be with us all through this decade seems to me to be one of the great problems now before the United States." (1)

The Kennedy administration attempted to solve it by embarking on armed aggression of a new type: the special war. Kennedy took into his brain-trust General Maxwell Taylor, promoter of the "flexible response" strategy which meant stepping up the preparations for a nuclear war, while seeking to crush the national liberation movements by means of "special wars" in which the armed forces of the local people, formed by a "national government", would constitute the spear-head, while the Americans would supply arms, funds and advisers and take in hand the command of the war themselves.

In early May 1961, Secretary of State Dean Rusk declared at a press conference :

(1) *New York Times*, April 22, 1961.

"The President has authorized an increase of military aid to the Republic of Vietnam, the importance of which I am not in a position to reveal." (1)

On May 11, 1961, Lyndon B. Johnson, then Vice President of the United States, was sent to Saigon with a letter from Kennedy to Ngo Dinh Diem. Here are some of the points contained in the letter:

— More U.S. aid for South Vietnam's Civil Guard now actively mobilized as an extension of the regular army;

— U.S. military advisory groups to help train the self-defense corps, the local village militias;

— Funds to help meet the cost of adding 20,000 more men to South Vietnam's 150,000-man army;

— Special guerilla warfare engineers to repair guerilla-wrecked bridges, construct roads and airstrips."

On May 13, 1961, following three days of talks, a Johnson-Diem joint declaration was issued, which put in a concrete form Kennedy's directives.

This was nothing but a U.S.-Diem military alliance, a programme of direct aggression against South Vietnam.

The United States pledged to help Diem reinforce his regular army, to equip his civil guards, to put into

(1) Quoted by *Liberation* (Paris) May 6, 1961.

effect new counter-guerrilla measures in the villages and provinces, to draw up a financial and economic plan with a view to making fuller use of the available resources of South Vietnam in the fight against "communism" in Vietnam; American military experts would be posted in all spheres of activity of the puppet administration.

The declaration added that in order to combat the guerillas the two governments would take more effective measures as circumstances required.

In furtherance of this declaration, the Kennedy administration was from then on in a position to send to South Vietnam whole units of American special forces adapted to the conditions of the "special war" with which it was going to experiment.

As admitted by General Paul Harkins charged with conducting this war from 1962 to 1964, South Vietnam had become a proving ground for counter-guerrilla tactics of the U.S. army, an experimental war which resembled no previous undertaking of the United States. (1)

On the heels of Johnson, a joint economic and military mission headed by Eugen Staley, an economist of Stanford University, California, arrived in Saigon to study proper measures for translating the Johnson-Diem declaration into deeds.

(1) The *New York Times* on April 22, 1961 revealed that South Vietnam had become a testing ground for the U.S. Army's new guerrilla tactics, designed for tropical areas.

After a month of strenuous work, Staley sent to Kennedy a "secret one-inch report" accompanied by important proposals.

These were the proposals which, after endorsement by the White House, became the program of action for the U.S. Government in South Vietnam, known as *the Staley plan*.

The plan envisages three stages :

- first stage : "pacification" of South Vietnam in 18 months and implantation of "bases" in North Vietnam.
- second stage : economic rehabilitation of South Vietnam, reinforcement of the puppet army, intensification of sabotage activities in North Vietnam.
- third stage : development of the South Vietnam economy and march to the North.

The plan in fact aimed at total annexation of Vietnam.

The first stage was by far the most important. Staley proposed a series of measures to carry it out :

- to bring the strength of the regular army from 150,000 to 170,000 men by the end of 1961 ;
- to beef up the civil guard from 68,000 to 100,000 men. It would become part of the regular forces ;
- to bring the police force from 45,000 to 90,000 men ;
- to strengthen the village militias to such an extent as circumstances might require ;

— to confine the peasants in "prosperity zones" and "strategic hamlets"; set up a no-man's-land along the 17th parallel and the Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia frontier; build a hundred more "prosperity zones" and a network of "strategic hamlets" in the Mekong delta where a million peasants would be concentrated;

— to increase aid to the puppet government to help it achieve these objectives. This aid would reach 400 million dollars by 1961. (1)

The plan was put into practice with great diligence. From June to November 1961 alone, more than 1,000 American military personnel arrived in South Vietnam. There was a profuse influx of arms, war material and aircraft of all types: bombers, fighters, reconnaissance planes. *Newsweek* of August 21, 1961 revealed that new weapons had also been introduced for experimental purposes: micro-rockets, explosive gas. Toxic chemicals to destroy crops and vegetation, police dogs to track down guerillas... completed the panoply.

U.S. generals and admirals came in close succession to South Vietnam to step up and supervise the execution of the plan: General Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Harry Felt, Commander of the U.S. forces in the Pacific, Generals James Collins and Emmett O'Donnell, and Admiral John Sides, respectively commanders of the U.S. ground, air and naval forces in the Pacific.

(1) It should be noted that in 1953 when the Indochina war reached its highest point, the aid accorded by Washington to the French Expeditionary Corps totalled only 323 million dollars.

For his part Diem also took a series of measures: forcible conscription of young men, concentration of the population, enrolment of women, opening of training centres for rangers. The 1962 budget was brought to 23,000 million piastres or 9,000 million more than the previous year. The military sectors were reorganized into three operational zones called tactical zones.

Large-scale operations which at times involved from 10 to 14 battalions were launched one after another under the direct command of officers of M.A.A.G. in numerous provinces, first of all in the Mekong delta. American aircraft sprayed toxic chemicals to destroy crops and vegetation, chiefly along the South Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia frontier, poisoning a great number of men and animals.

Meanwhile, sabotage activities against North Vietnam were intensified. General Trudeau disclosed in May 1961 that Washington had worked out a plan of subversive activities against the European socialist countries and the D.R.V. Ngo Trong Hieu, a "minister" of Ngo Dinh Diem, on September 11, 1961 made this suggestive statement to an A.P. reporter: "*To infiltrate into North Vietnam is also good tactics. Wait, it will come.*"

In fact, commandos had been airdropped on numerous places in the D.R.V. But all were captured. On July 2, 1961 North Vietnam anti-aircraft forces shot down over Ninh Binh province an American plane of the C-47 type having on board many commandos.

However the plan on which they had pinned so much hope was violently opposed by the South Vietnamese people under the leadership of the National Front for Liberation.

Repeated setbacks, political and military, hampered its execution. Hardly had a few months passed when the Americans and their henchmen realized that the 18-month time-limit proposed for the "pacification" of South Vietnam was not realistic.

The Western press then spoke of the possibility of an intervention by the American armed forces in South Vietnam. The *Washington Post* of September 27, 1961, said the matter was under consideration.

To examine the problem, Kennedy on October 3, 1961, held a meeting with McNamara, General Lemnitzer, General Maxwell Taylor, adviser of the President, and other generals. Following this meeting, Taylor was sent to Saigon with the mission of studying measures to augment the U.S. war efforts to the extent of and including direct intervention by American armed forces.

On October 18, Taylor arrived in Saigon. The same day Diem proclaimed a state of emergency throughout the territory of South Vietnam. For a whole week, Taylor inspected military bases along the coasts, on the High Plateaux, at the South Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia frontiers. He even went into the demilitarized zone close to the 17th parallel. In connection with Taylor's trip, Western correspondents recalled the visit to Korea by the late John Foster Dulles in

1950, which was followed by aggression against North Korea. The comparison was correct and highly significant. Said *La Tribune des Nations*:

"General Maxwell Taylor has made a veritable inspection of the future battlefield."

Back to the United States, the number one American strategist proposed many measures to supplement the Staley plan. His proposals were quickly adopted by the U.S. National Security Council at its session of November 15, 1961: to bring many more military experts to South Vietnam, reform the command structure from top to bottom to enable the Americans to take in hand the military command without the intermediary of the Diem administration, increase the mobility and potential of the puppet army by supplying it with new modern weapons, launch without interruption raiding operations to herd the population into "strategic hamlets".

Taylor suggested that necessary steps be taken to introduce into South Vietnam the armed forces of the United States, Japan, Taiwan and the member countries of S.E.A.T.O.

The U.S. National Security Council underlined in its decision that more energetic measures of intervention might be taken including the intervention of U.S. air and naval forces.

The Staley-Taylor plan was the plan of a "special war" conducted by the Saigon army under the command of U.S. advisers.

It also provided for the sending of U.S. special forces which would take part in the fighting in co-ordination with the puppet troops.

M. Jackson, member of the Senate Armed Forces Committee, declared:

“The U.S. must pay whatever price is necessary to hold South Vietnam. If U.S. troops are required to defend South Vietnam, the U.S. must also pay that price.” (1)

Taylor's report, which completed the Staley plan, having been adopted by the Kennedy administration, Frederik Nolting, U.S. ambassador to Saigon, met with Ngo Dinh Diem for three straight weeks to discuss the measures of application. The results were not long to come. A flow of U.S. arms and material, military men and combat units was introduced into South Vietnam at an accelerated tempo and on an unprecedented scale:

— On November 10, 1961, a squadron of B.26 aircraft and several hundred American officers and troops arrived in Bien Hoa.

— On December 11, 1961, the aircraft carrier Core landed in Saigon two helicopter companies composed of 76 “Flying Bananas”, 7 T.28 combat planes and 370 American officers and soldiers.

— On January 15, 1962, the aircraft carrier Breton unloaded in Saigon ten L.20 aircraft and 2 “Flying Bananas”.

(1) *New York Post*, quoted by *Hsinhua News Agency*, February 14, 1961.

— On February 7, 1962, the ship Core came back to Saigon with 300 soldiers and 21 "Otter" aircraft on board.

From November 1961 to mid-April 1962, the Americans, in violation of the 1954 Geneva Agreements, introduced into South Vietnam nearly 300 aircraft: helicopters, jet planes, bombers, fighters, training, liaison and cargo planes. This air fleet represented more than half the number of aircraft used by the French colonialists during the Indochina war on all three fronts: Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

From 4,000 men at the beginning of 1962, American effectives in South Vietnam in July that year swelled to 8,500 and in November, to 11,000.

The 13th Task Force, one of the main units of the U.S. air forces in the Pacific, installed its "advance command" in Da Nang. To meet the needs of the American air forces, big radar systems were set up in Saigon and Da Nang.

The 7th Fleet no longer contented itself with cruising off the South Vietnam coasts. It sent units to Vung Tau (formerly called Cape St. Jacques) to prepare for future landings and study the construction of a naval base in Ha Tien.

The American military directly took part in various operations supported by U.S. aircraft in Ca Mau, Sadec, Ben Tre and on the highlands of Tay Nguyen.

Faced with the growing opposition of the forces of peace in the world, the American leaders sought to camouflage this armed intervention. But the American

press did not care to make any mystery of it. Robinson, correspondent of the N.B.C. television network in the Far East, openly declared:

"Whether we mean it or not, whether we recognize it or not, we are participating in an open war in South Vietnam" (1)

Washington was thus engaged more and more in the war, an atrocious war with untold crimes. According to a statement of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation of July 15, 1961, by June that year:

- 80,000 persons had been killed,
- 23,000 wounded during terrorist raids,
- 275,000 incarcerated in 874 prisons,
- 500,000 confined in "resettlement centres" or "prosperity zones".

II

THE MILITARY AID COMMAND (M.A.C.)

THE introduction of American armed forces into South Vietnam and their participation in the fighting led Kennedy to create on February 8, 1962 the Military Aid Command, headed by General

(1) Quoted by *Libre Belgique* (8-1-1962)

Paul D. Harkins, deputy commander of the U.S. ground forces in the Pacific. Its chief of staff was General G. Weede, commander of the marine forces in the Pacific. It was the operational command of all operations conducted by the American and puppet forces. It was also the advance command in the South-East Asian and South-West sectors of the U.S. Command in the Pacific.

Commenting on the nomination of General Weede, U.P.I. wrote on February 13, 1962:

“Military circles here thought Harkins’s selection of a marine general was particularly significant.

“They felt that Weede as Harkins’ deputy will have a firm grasp of the entire situation, if a Korean-type war broke out — and military authorities are not ruling out that possibility. Weede will be in a position to take command of marine shock troops which would be sent to South Vietnam immediately, possibly from the U.S. Seventh Fleet.”

Concerning the founding of M.A.C. the Government of the D.R.V. declared on February 18, 1962:

“It is a very grave act of military aggression on the part of the U.S. government against South Vietnam, directly threatening the security of the D.R.V., and peace in South-East Asia and the Pacific. This is an act of open violation of the Geneva Agreements.”

From now on the special war received a new impulse. By the end of 1962 American military personnel in South Vietnam already numbered 12,000 men as disclosed by General Earle J. Wheeler, Chief of Staff of the U.S. ground forces.

To meet the needs of the special war, a special military school was opened by the U.S. Army at Fort Bragg. *U.S. News and World Report* disclosed that 1,000 American second-lieutenants and lieutenants had been receiving special training for the war in Vietnam there. The U.S. Air Force on its side set up a training centre for commandos destined to fight in South Vietnam at Eglin base in Florida.

In South Vietnam, the Americans trained 7 companies of Rhade — a minority people — completely independent from the puppet army. They opened for the minorities three training centres at Buon E Nao, Buon Briop and Buon Kitam, each commanded by 12 officers of the American special forces.

The puppet regular forces, the civil guard and militia were reinforced. A paramilitary formation — the Republican Youth — was set up. Forcible conscription and military training of public servants and women continued full steam in 1962. So much so that by the end of 1962, Diem already had a regular army of 205,000 men plus 100,000 civil guards, 85,000 militia and 100,000 men and women of the "Republican Youth".

The command of the puppet army, patterned after its American counterpart, comprised a joint chiefs of

staff and commands of ground forces, marines, commandos and special forces.

New-type weapons intended for the special war were dumped into South Vietnam, some of which were tested for the first time: ultra-quickfiring submachineguns, automatic mines, radar-equipped spotter planes, Hu-1A jet helicopters, amphibious armoured cars, infra-red apparatus...

The U.S. government pressed the member countries of S.E.A.T.O. and other allies to take part in the American war efforts. For instance, at the A.N.Z.U.S. conference held in Canberra on May 9, 1962, the Australian and New-Zealand governments were asked to send militarymen to South Vietnam.

On September 17, 1961, ignoring its functions as a Co-Chairman of the 1954 Geneva Conference, the British Government announced the dispatch to South Vietnam of a mission of civilian administration and police experts. On January 10, 1962 this mission arrived in Saigon, led by General G.K. Thompson, ex-permanent secretary of defence in Malaya, who had directed the repression of Malayan guerillas. Its job was to impart to Diem its experiences in counter-guerilla activities.

On March 3, 1962, a military mission of 30 Australian officers led by Colonel Frank P. Serong also arrived in Saigon to assist the American advisers.

A battalion of Chiang Kai-shek troops was already operating in the Ca Mau region under the command of a Catholic priest, Nguyen Lac Hoa. The U.S. administration

pressed the Philippine government to send special forces and tried to drag the Japanese government into the gamble.

III

MOPPING-UP OPERATIONS

IN setting up M.A.C. the U.S. administration and its henchmen aimed at an objective, essential under the Staley - Taylor plan; i.e. ability to launch attacks without interruption in order to wipe out the South Vietnam patriotic forces. U.S. intervention in South Vietnam now had reached a relatively high level (1).

The Pentagon had worked out a "new strategy". It undertook to "switch on to the offensive" in order to

1. According to American military terminology, there are three different levels of intervention. At the lowest level the U.S. supplies military aid and advisers and directs the strategy. At the middle level, it introduces a certain number of U.S. units which indirectly take part in the fighting and are assigned to the staffs or logistical services. The Americans take part in the command at the top level. At the third level, a certain number of American units directly take part in combat. The Americans command at different levels. In 1962 U.S. intervention in South Vietnam was between the 2nd and 3rd levels.

regain the initiative and recover the former occupied zones. In the framework of this strategy and relying on two major trumpcards, helicopters and amphibious cars, a series of new tactics were adopted:

a) **Long-term raids.** From two battalions to a division of regular forces raided an area continuously for a period of three to six months. In co-ordination with the civil guard, the regional militia, the raiding troops swept repeatedly over the same area in order to paralyse and annihilate all resistance forces, destroy the revolutionary bases and herd the population into strategic hamlets.

b) **"Lightning offensives"**. These offensives were launched either by small commando units the size of one or two companies or by several battalions from various services (heliborne commandos, paratroopers, motorized units, marines...) having at their disposal many means of transport. The duration of such operations varied between a few days and a few weeks.

These offensives were in most cases supported by aircraft and artillery from military bases or from the fleet, and by amphibious cars.

These long-term raids were chiefly directed against civilians. Repression, burning of dwelling houses, concentration of peasants into strategic hamlets, such were their goals. The lightning-offensives were aimed at the regular units of the N.F.L. and the leading organs of the resistance, which they tried to destroy.

In execution of McNamara's new strategy, a 90-day period of offensive began in mid-April 1962. General

Paul D. Harkins declared that the Diem administration agreed to put into practice the Delta plan worked out by the Americans for the pacification of ten provinces around Saigon. The pilot raid baptized "Sunrise" was launched on March 23, 1962 with the aim of wiping out the revolutionary bases and the people's armed forces in six provinces of East Nam Bo. The raiding forces comprised two divisions of regulars supported by regional troops, air force and artillery. During this campaign which lasted until the year's end, McNamara and Generals Lemnitzer and Harkins went out on several occasions to the field to enquire personally into the progress of the operations.

In 1962 the U.S. command multiplied the raids to no less than 27,000 of smaller scale and nearly 1,000 others which involved a battalion or more each. Here are some instances :

- Hoa My campaign in April, Can Tho province.
- Co Loa campaign in April, Gia Dinh province.
- Hai Yen campaign in May, Phu Yen province.
- Binh Tay campaign in August, West Nam Bo.
- Sao Mai campaign in October, Long An and Tay Ninh.
- Booldodge campaign in November, former Zone D in Thu Dau Mot province.

The Binh Tay campaign involved 5,000 men, the Sao Mai 6,000 soldiers and 100 officers. Harkins and his staff were authors of the plans for the Sunrise, Binh Tay and Booldodge campaigns.

Tactics with names, more or less sensational or suggestive and based on new war methods were put into practice, such as "anti-guerilla guerilla warfare", "heliborne" and "amphibious" tactics, "eagle flights"...

The raids and bombings caused a lot of damage to the population. Ben Tre province with 600,000 inhabitants and an area of 2,155 square kilometres was subjected in March 1962 alone to 74 different large-scale raids. The results: 195 killed, 56 wounded and 278 arrested.

According to a declaration of Major Duong Thai Dong, chief of Phu Yen province (338,600 inhabitants), the Hai Yen campaign took a toll of 326 killed, 24 wounded and 340 arrested. In addition, 318 dwellings (more than 1,000 actually) were burnt and 12,189 peasants forced into strategic hamlets(1).

In a broadcast on January 28, 1963, Radio Saigon reported that during 1962 the U.S.-Diem armed forces stationed in Phuoc Thanh (64,600 inhabitants) had killed or wounded respectively 5,713 and 3,215 persons and arrested 277 others, destroyed hundreds of tons of rice and burnt thousands of houses.

Summing up a year of new American war efforts, General Harkins gave the figure of 30,000 persons killed by the U.S.-Diem troops in 1962. This figure,

(1) *Thoi Bao* (Times) published in Saigon, December 7, 1962.

although still far below reality, sufficed to give an idea of the savage character of the raids launched against the population.

Along with the raids, inhuman means of war were employed: massive bombing, napalm bombs, gas bombs, toxic chemicals. During the Lam Son campaign, American planes dropped, on the night of May 27, 1962 alone, one hundred tons of bombs on a populated area of Quang Ngai. The German doctor Erich Wulff (G.F.R.) who worked for two years in Saigon wrote:

"I saw soldiers carrying 5-inch-high bottles with a brown liquid inside. When they broke, they let out toxic gas.

"With the other European doctors, I attended the victims of this gas in the hospital. I counted 62 with second degree burns, some with third degree ones, as well as stomach and throat convulsions. Some of the victims became blind. 36 hours later the police came and took these cases away, and I could not tell if this blindness was temporary or permanent." (1)

Newsweek on November 27, 1961, disclosed that toxic chemicals had been used as early as 1961: "In South Vietnam, U.S. experts have been showing Vietnamese fliers how to spray communist-held areas with a chemical that turns the ricefields yellow, killing any crops being grown."

(1) *London Observer*, August 18, 1963.

National Guardian wrote on April 18, 1963:

“Seven months ago, the White House approved Operation *Ranch Hand* whose purpose was to hit the guerillas in the belly by destroying the rice-fields.”

From April 1961 to the middle of 1962 a dozen sprays were carried out by American planes on many regions of the provinces: Binh Long, Phuoc Thanh, Tay Ninh, Gia Dinh, Ben Tre, Ca Mau, Bien Hoa, Phuoc Tuy, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Thuan, Kontum... During the last months of 1962, more than 50 toxic chemical sprays were effected on many provinces of Nam Bo and Central Vietnam.

According to the results of investigations made by the South Vietnam Liberation Red Cross and published in 1963, the following products had been used by the Americans: 2-4D, 2-4-5T with high concentration, white arsenic, arseniates of alkalin and alkalino-terrous metals, calcium cyanamide, arseniates of metals, 2-4 dinitro-phenol DNP, dinitro-orthocresol DNC. That was a challenge to international law. World opinion was shocked. *La Tribune des Nations* said on February 2, 1962:

“The Staley plan has entered a new phase of its execution. This consists in establishing a no-man's-land along the South Vietnam frontier... First the destruction of all vegetation over thousands of kilometres... The Vietnamese air force has also begun to spread chemical products on cultivated fields in the mountain areas and

even in the plains, in areas where the Diem administration has lost its control. An ingenious plan, no doubt, but truly catastrophic for the supply of food, considering that South Vietnam now already has to import thousands of tons of rice."

IV

THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS

THE construction of strategic hamlets was proclaimed a State policy by the Saigon administration.

The usual layout of one of these hamlets is like this: first a bamboo fence made up of stakes 2 or 2.5 metres high surrounds the whole enclosure. Next comes a belt of barbed wire. In between is a space bristled with spikes and scattered with mines. A pit 3m wide and 1.5m deep with spikes on its edges and at its bottom stretches along the barbed wire. An earth wall 1.5m high with cement blockhouses at intervals completes the perimeter. In the middle of the enclosure are the offices of the hamlet administration and the Republican Youth. They look like military posts and are fitted with underground tunnels and trenches connecting with the blockhouses and watchtowers. The inhabitants of the hamlets are given identity cards with photos and fingerprints, wrapped in

plastic. Entrance and exit are only allowed at fixed hours under the surveillance of control posts. To prevent possible supply to the guerillas, rice and other food are kept in the storehouses and rations are distributed daily.

In the mountain regions, minority peoples were penned up in concentration camps.

In addition to these drastic security measures, the inmates of a strategic hamlet were subjected to repression and torture in an attempt to detect "guerillas" or "Vietcong". They were obliged to take part in the building of these concentration camps where they were kept, and to pay a dozen kinds of taxes. In a word, the most elementary democratic liberties were trampled underfoot and even their lives were threatened. That was the "new happy life" which the Americans and their henchmen had promised to the inhabitants of the strategic hamlets.

To the Americans, the construction of strategic hamlets was one of the fundamental strategies of the special war destined to break the revolutionary movement.

Bui Van Luong, Minister of the Interior of the Diem government, declared on May 22, 1962: "This is a final and decisive program which will lead either to a glorious victory or to a dismal defeat." No wonder both masters and lackeys pooled their efforts to have these hamlets set up.

As early as July 1961 a few hamlets had been built on an experimental basis in Vinh Long and Quang Ngai provinces. Then in execution of an instruction of Diem, the undertaking was extended as from the beginning of 1962 to the whole of South Vietnam. Diem undertook to set up these hamlets preferably on the sites of existing villages in order to round up the population on the spot. This was, in his opinion, the most convenient and cheapest method which moreover hurt the peasants least. He had indeed drawn a lesson from the British experience in Malaya. As was acknowledged by "Voice of America" in a broadcast of April 1st, 1962: "The strategic hamlet program is an adaptation of a program already applied in Malaya." The objectives of this program were:

From the **military point of view**, to transform the villages of South Vietnam into "fortresses" capable not only of repulsing the patriotic armed forces but also of "compelling the guerillas to accept pitched battles," which would enable the puppet regular forces to wipe them out easily. Ngo Dinh Nhu boasted of the merits of the strategic hamlets in these terms (1):

"From the military point of view, the strategic hamlet isolates the enemy, separates him from the population and compels him to accept combat in conditions favourable to us and unfavourable to him."

(1) Speech at the inauguration of the Cu Chi strategic hamlet on August 31, 1962.

What is more, the strategic hamlets formed, together with the system of posts along the communication axis, belts which parcelled out the liberated zone and ensured the security of urban centres, townships and other strategic centres of the enemy.

From the **political point of view**, these hamlets served to break up the mass struggle, destroy the revolutionary bases, erect and consolidate the puppet administrative apparatus in the villages, the espionage networks and other reactionary organisations, and re-establish the control of the puppet government over the population.

From the **economic point of view**, the puppet government hoped that with the installation of the strategic hamlets it could seize hold of the manpower and material resources of the countryside to put them in the service of their growing war efforts and at the same time exhaust the source of supply of the guerillas and keep the population at its mercy by stocking up all food supplies.

From the **social point of view**, it hoped to introduce some so-called reforms to fool the population, restore the rights of the reactionary landlords, consolidate the position and interests of their henchmen in the villages: members of the village administration, secret agents, civil guards, and militia.

With these ends in view, a plan was worked out in execution of which 16,330 strategic hamlets were to be constructed to replace the 17,000 villages and hamlets in South Vietnam before the end of 1962.

The execution of this plan would be done according to the "oil stain" tactics and in three stages.

In the first stage, strategic hamlets were to be erected in "pacified" zones. In the second, the construction would continue in the contested zones, and in the third, in the liberated zones.

In each stage, the Americans and their henchmen, through heavy concentration of troops, would try to break the revolutionary movement and set up at all costs a certain number of strategic hamlets in vital points which would serve as support and propaganda bases for them.

In the liberated or guerilla zones with a sparse population they carried out "out-and-out sweeps" and used all sorts of methods to herd the peasants to the neighbourhood of their posts or into areas under their control.

In general, any strategic hamlet to be set up had to fulfil the following conditions:

— to be situated along the main communication lines, around the provincial or district capitals, towns or cities;

— to have a certain military value; it must lie near fortified positions so as to be in a position to stop guerilla infiltrations or to be easily defended and rescued in case of attack by the guerillas;

— to have a large population, and reactionary headmen capable of holding it under control.

For these reasons, in spite of their desire not to change the sites of the villages too often, the Americans and their henchmen in effect compelled the peasants to abandon their dwellings, gardens and crops and to regroup far from their villages.

A unified system of leading organisations was installed from top to bottom. At the top there was the "Special Central Committee for Strategic Hamlets" headed by Ngo Dinh Nhu, the power behind the throne, and having as its members many ministers: Defence, Interior, Civil Affairs, Rural Reform, Education, Security and Police. The Committee was placed under the direct control and guidance of the American Sub-Committee for "Rural Affairs" which was part of U.S.O.M. and the "Steering Committee for Strategic Hamlets". Each military sector had its own "Inspection Board of Strategic Hamlets". Each province, district and village had a "Special Committee for the Construction of Strategic Hamlets".

The construction of a strategic hamlet generally comprised four stages:

— First stage: a ferocious raid followed by the transfer of the population, the putting in motion of the propaganda machine to brainwash the population, and the transportation of building materials.

— Second stage: setting up of the enclosure and the defence system of the hamlet.

— Third stage: consolidation of the administration, reactionary organs, spy networks, and building of the armed forces and paramilitary forces (1)

— Fourth stage: sham alerts, anti-guerilla exercises, building of the offices of the reactionary administration and organisations, an information hall, organisation of relief work to dupe the inhabitants. The latter were forced to supply the manpower for the construction of the hamlet.

These stages having been completed, they switched on to the "interior front", that is to the denunciation and extermination of patriotic elements or those suspected of being so.

New York Times on March 29, 1962, related how such operations took place:

(1) The armed forces and paramilitary forces of a strategic hamlet are usually composed of:

— a self-defence commando group armed with sub-machine guns, rifles and grenades. Its members are recruited from among the Republican Youth;

— a section of "Rural Defence Youth" composed of many combat groups, a group in charge of the laying of spikes and mines, and a group of liaison and information;

— a first-aid group;

— a supply group;

— a group for agitation work.

In addition all able-bodied men are enrolled in "popular self-defence" sections or groups to cooperate with the hamlet guards or serve the armed forces in case of fighting.

All these forces are placed under the command of the administrative committee of the hamlet.

"In this region, 1,200 families are to be moved voluntarily or forcibly from the forests controlled by the Vietcong and resettled in new strategic villages. The abandoned villages will be burnt...

Some families had been allowed to carry away beds, tables and benches before their homes were burnt. Others had nothing but the clothes on their backs. A young woman stood expressionless as she recounted how the troops had burnt the family's two tons of rice."

Bui Van Luong, Minister of the Interior, tried to camouflage this brutal reality under the "personalist" phraseology of the regime:

"The program of the strategic hamlets", he told those who wanted to know in his May 27, 1962 speech already quoted above, "is aimed at bringing security to the population, applying the laws in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution, personalism and community progress. It is a solution from the practical point of view as well as from the point of view of revolutionary personalist ideology and of social progress."

In the years 1961 and 1962 Washington thus moved from active intervention to armed aggression in the form of a special war in South Vietnam, while trying to hide this reality. The U.S. troops were said to be in

South Vietnam only "to provide logistic and tactical support" to the puppet army and "they were authorized to react only when attacked."

However U.P.I. said on March 11, 1962:

"Whether officials admit it or not, this is as much an American war as it is Vietnamese."

This was confirmed by *New York Herald Tribune* on November 23, 1962:

"The U.S. is deeply involved in the biggest 'secret' war in its history. Never have so many United States military men been involved in a combat area without a formal program to inform the public about what is happening. It is war fought without official public reports on the number of troops involved nor the amount of money and equipment being poured in."

With high mobility ensured by the helicopters, considerable fire power, enormous manpower, the use of toxic products and intelligence services equipped with ultra-modern material and technical means, the U.S. command, when launching the special war, thought that it had gathered indispensable conditions for victory. The concentration of the population into strategic hamlets was intended to exhaust for ever the resources of the people's resistance. Where the French did not succeed,

the United States thought it could win by its superior techniques while avoiding the involvement of U.S. infantry on a large scale.

However the White House and the Pentagon had reckoned without the heroic and clever resistance of the Vietnamese people.