required to remain in the village, they could easily be recalled to active duty if needed.

Use Soldiers to Reoccupy Abandoned Farmland

Soldiers can be used to reoccupy abandoned farmland, a traditional role for Vietnam's army. Volunteer soldiers could be organized into soldiers' agricultural colonies, or *don dien*, the historical institution by which the Vietnamese transformed veterans into farmers. The volunteers would be formed into company-size units and, with their families, would settle in strategic areas. While farming, they would keep their weapons and remain under military command. (A detailed account of the development of the *don dien* is given in Appendix B.)

Rewrite Tactical Doctrine

The Vietnamese must rewrite their own tactical doctrine, not translate it from French or English. Specifically, the army must review the way it fights with a view toward relying less on air and artillery support and more on maneuvering small units. This could result in increased effectiveness and eventually in substantial savings of money and manpower. With a third of its current operating costs going for artillery ammunition alone, the army could make an immediate savings simply by relying less on artillery. Air support, even more expensive, can probably also be reduced.

The argument will arise that less artillery and air support means more friendly casualties, implying a direct trade-off between tonnage of ordnance and soldiers' lives. True, if the South Vietnamese continue to fight using the tactics we have taught them — which require artillery and air support — less support would probably mean more casualties. But tactics can be changed. Military organizations that, for various reasons, have had less support, have developed and employed different tactics with considerable success. The outstanding example, of course, is the tactics developed by the Viet Cong. Moreover, most artillery and air support is not used in direct support of troops in combat, and its value to them cannot be demonstrated easily. Nor does
the ordnance fired or dropped in direct support of troops in combat
guarantee that they will not have to face the same enemy another day.
Only when the enemy is determined to overrun a fixed position are his
losses from artillery or air support obvious. More often, he withdraws
before artillery or airpower can be brought to bear.

THE SECOND PHASE

The withdrawal of American forces probably will have been completed
by 1973. If any American soldiers remain, they will be advisors, per­
haps merely observers, or involved in the mechanics of providing and
maintaining the military equipment that the United States has given the
South Vietnamese. South Vietnam alone will face the enemy, and the North
Vietnamese Army will continue to be a major military threat. Although
food production, particularly rice, will have increased significantly
by 1973, serious economic problems will remain. Development of the
divilian economy will depend on releasing some of the country's trained
manpower from the armed forces.

If the measures recommended for the first phase have been followed,
the People's Army will exist, its command structure will have been
worked out, and its tactical doctrine established. The country will
have a reserve system and a means of employing those soldiers who
wish to resume farming. With more local officers commanding the
territorial forces, a growing cadre of combat veterans in the
People's Self-Defense Force, better training, additional weapons,
and local defense committees to generate and coordinate local support,
the effectiveness of the People's Army should increase so that gradually
it will be able to assume a greater share of the defense burden. In
the second phase, South Vietnam can take additional steps to expand
the People's Army, further increase its effectiveness, and prepare to
reduce the regular army.

Begin Limited Demobilization

As the People's Army becomes capable of assuming a larger portion
of the defense burden, South Vietnam can begin a limited demobilization.
Those released first should include some of the technicians now serving in the army and soldiers who volunteer for the farming colonies. Many technicians were drafted in 1967 and 1968, and their loss to the army was a serious blow to South Vietnam's economy. Of course, not all the technicians can be released, but those that could be spared would easily be absorbed into the civilian economy, producing immediate benefits. 15

Provide Soldiers with Civilian Skills and Jobs

For soldiers who are not technicians and who show no talent for farming, a program of vocational training should be started. Because the war has lasted so long, many of South Vietnam's soldiers know no other profession than soldiering. Vocational training would facilitate the absorption of veterans into the economy and insure a more productive future for them than that of unskilled laborers. The training could be given on a part-time basis in order not to interfere with military duties. Industries requiring skilled or semiskilled workers could be encouraged, through tax benefits or the promise of government contracts, to set up training programs at nearby army garrisons, or soldiers could be released part-time to receive on-the-job training at nearby industries. 16

South Vietnam also faces the task of finding suitable employment for its officers, who during the years of war have acquired considerable experience in management and have grown accustomed to command. Positions must be found for them that offer income and authority commensurate with what they now enjoy. Otherwise they may oppose any reduction in the size of the armed forces.

Create an Urban Auxiliary Militia

The defense of a large city is militarily a more complex operation than the defense of a hamlet. Only when a city is actually penetrated by enemy forces, as in 1968, is a rifle behind every lamppost useful. With many veterans expected to remain in the cities when demobilized, the urban People's Self-Defense Force will expand rapidly. An urban
Auxiliary militia should be created as part of the PSDF to use this excess of urban veterans more effectively. Members of the urban auxiliary militia working part-time could easily assume many of the routine tasks now performed by full-time soldiers. Disabled veterans could be utilized as well. The urban auxiliary militia would also provide an additional apparatus for maintaining control in the cities, a problem that is likely to increase as economic crises continue and more soldiers are demobilized.

Reduce the Number of Competing Security Organizations

South Vietnam must begin to reduce the number of organizations charged with maintaining security in the countryside, not simply for the sake of military principle, but to reduce the confusion arising from overlapping responsibilities and commands. At one time, there were fourteen different armed organizations concerned with rural security; at present there are eight. The Revolutionary Development Cadre could ultimately be absorbed as cadres into the People's Self-Defense Force. The Popular Forces and Regional Forces could be combined, perhaps along with the National Police Field Force, into a single territorial force of the People's Army that would have the same mission as the Regional and Popular Forces now have. Soldiers could volunteer to serve in platoons stationed in their own village or in companies stationed in their own province. Requiring of those stationed outside their own village a shorter period of service would provide the necessary incentive to fill the ranks of the provincial force.

Assign the Army to Reconstruction

Freed from some of their local-security responsibilities by the People's Army, units of the regular army would be able to devote more attention to dealing with the threat posed by the North Vietnamese regulars. When not engaged in combat, some of the units could undertake reconstruction and development tasks, concentrating on those that fulfill the basic needs of the population. In the urban areas, they would include repairing and expanding facilities for water, power,
sewage, housing, and education, all of which have been overwhelmed by the rapid urbanization that has taken place in South Vietnam. In the rural areas, the army could concentrate on clearing land, building roads, canals, and schools, and providing medical attention and basic education.

THE THIRD PHASE

As part of the burden of defense is transferred to the People's Army, South Vietnam's regular army could become a small professional force of around 300,000 men, the figure that President Thieu foresees. The present elite Airborne, Ranger, and Marine battalions would form the fighting core. They might well be organized in brigades rather than the present cumbersome divisions. Meanwhile, the army's heavy artillery could be territorialized under a separate command. If properly deployed in batteries of two to three guns each, the current number of heavy artillery could be made to cover most of the country, and, in semi-permanent positions, the guns could be pre-zeroed, enabling them to respond quickly to calls from units of either the regular army or the People's Army. The mobile units of the regular army would retain their lighter 105mm howitzers for operations in remote areas not covered by the big guns. In the future, they might rely more on mortars, which are a great deal cheaper and more portable.

The fully constituted People's Army would consist of the part-time People's Self-Defense Force (6,000,000-7,000,000 strong, including about 200,000 veterans as cadre), supported by about 300,000 full-time local soldiers of the territorial units. At the edge of the densely populated area, or surrounding some of the traditional enemy base areas, would be several hundred don dien.

A man's service would begin at the age of 16, when, as now, he would be required to join the People's Self-Defense Force. At the draft age of 18, he would become a full-time soldier in a local territorial unit of the People's Army, where he would serve at least a year before becoming eligible to enter one of South Vietnam's military academies or to join the regular army, air force, or navy. Near the completion of his service, he could elect to join a don dien and receive land and
assistance from the government or to receive vocational training for a civilian job. Upon discharge, he would automatically return to the People's Self-Defense Force.

**REDUCING THE BURDEN**

There are two ways of reducing South Vietnam's defense budget: by reducing the size of the armed forces, and by changing their style of fighting. For example, since the cost of ammunition is a large part of the total cost of fighting, changing the style of fighting to consume less ammunition would, other things being equal, reduce the defense budget.

The burden of defense could be gradually transferred from the expensive regular army to a much cheaper people's army. Over a four-year period, 1972-1976, the regular ground forces could gradually be reduced to 200,000 men, while the Regional Forces would remain roughly the same size. The Popular Forces would be absorbed into the People's Self-Defense Force. It is a process of demobilization by degrees. Soldiers would not be released from the service entirely, but would become part-time soldiers or cadres in the People's Army; thus, each reduction in the size of the regular ground forces would be matched by increased strength in the People's Army. If such a reduction is made, then eventually more than $700 million a year could be saved on South Vietnam's land forces, which now cost about $2 billion annually. Added expenses incurred in assigning additional cadres and expanding and strengthening the People's Self-Defense Force would be approximately $70 million, resulting in a net savings of approximately $630 million. Less reliance on air support would result in additional savings.

The saving of $630 million would not be enough to make South Vietnam independent of American assistance (the United States would save most of the money). However, South Vietnam would reap benefits from the saving in men. During the six-year period, 400,000 soldiers would be added to the nation's civilian labor force, 60,000 of them becoming
farmers in army-run don dien. This would bring roughly 240,000 hectares of abandoned or new farmland under cultivation. And with two-thirds of all the full-time soldiers serving in their own village or province, the desertion rate should decline.

MEETING THE THREAT

South Vietnam's armed forces must be able to fight against a broad spectrum of contingencies ranging from protracted war to conventional invasion. Preparing for one threat increases the probability that the enemy will respond with another. For the time being, the enemy appears to have decided to continue a low-level, protracted war, which could, of course, be punctuated by periodic offensives. A large army designed to meet only the maximum conventional threat will exhaust itself in a protracted war. A vast people's army backed by a much smaller mobile regular army is a more appropriate instrument to meet this variable threat. It is cheap, conserves manpower by relying heavily on part-time soldiers, and provides the people with their own adequate defense force independent of regular army units.

North Vietnam may decide, shortly before or after the completion of American troop withdrawal, to launch a large-scale offensive in the belief that without the presence of half a million American soldiers, South Vietnam's armed forces could not defend their country. The offensive might take the form of a marked increase in North Vietnamese infiltration followed by widespread attacks on population centers, such as occurred in 1968, or attacks focused on a particular geographic area in South Vietnam. From its newly consolidated strongholds in northeast Cambodia and southern Laos, the enemy might attempt to overrun the Vietnamese central highlands and split the country in two, a repeat of the 1964 strategy; or, North Vietnam might choose to increase infiltration across the Demilitarized Zone and focus attacks on the northern provinces of Military Region I.

Such a test of South Vietnam's capability is likely to come before the nation has been able to organize, train, and field an effective people's army. For this reason, any reductions in the size of the regular army should be gradual. The measures suggested for the first
phase would not diminish regular army strength except for the loss of the cadres assigned to the People's Self-Defense Force. The measures in the second phase, between 1973 and 1975, would require only about a 30-percent reduction in the regular ground forces. Large reductions would not be made until the third phase. The gradualness of the reorganization would provide a testing period during which the performance of the people's army could be evaluated. As the people's army became more effective, it could better forestall any enemy buildup such as ordinarily precedes a quasi-conventional offensive. By its continuous presence in all populated areas of the country, the people's army could deny the enemy its sources of local sustenance and intelligence; impair its ability to pre-position the weapons and supplies necessary for a major offensive, thus forcing it to rely on a more conventional, more vulnerable system of logistics support; and reduce its ability to move and mass troops invisibly, thus depriving it of the advantage of tactical surprise. Forced out in the open, faced with a stubborn defense by local units, the enemy would be compelled to operate in larger units, making it even more vulnerable to counterattack by air power and regular army units.

Much of the regular army is still tied down in territorial defense. Redeployment of a unit often means stripping a province of its defenses. This has always been a problem. In the 1968 enemy offensives, the lack of an adequate territorial defense force compelled the regular army to disperse its forces in order to defend hundreds of beleaguered population centers. Many villages were abandoned to the enemy simply because there were no units available to defend them. The critical factor in a protracted war or a Tet-style offensive is the availability and effectiveness of territorial forces. They bore the brunt of the 1968 offensives; they bear the brunt of the fighting now; and they are most likely to be the first hit in any new offensive. For this reason, the number of full-time territorial soldiers in the people's army should remain high. An effective people's army comprising both full-time territorial soldiers and part-time members of the People's Self-Defense Force would free the regular army from the task of local security, allowing
it to concentrate on attacking large enemy units and conventional supply lines.

The chance exists that North Vietnam will launch a conventional invasion across the Demilitarized Zone to seize South Vietnam's northernmost provinces, hoping thereby to shatter the morale of the South Vietnam army and compel its government to sue for peace. The fear of a Korean-style invasion led to the development of a conventionally structured South Vietnamese army in the first place, and has dominated allied thinking for the past fifteen years. It remains one of the principal arguments against changes in the structure of South Vietnam's regular forces or reduction in their size.

North Vietnam's armed forces have become more conventional. They have acquired Soviet tanks and heavy artillery, and have displayed their willingness to use these weapons to defend vital infiltration routes. A conventional invasion involving the use of such heavy weapons would require the North Vietnamese to depart dramatically from their traditionally austere style of fighting, and to take enormous military risks. The logistics train needed to sustain tanks and heavy artillery in combat would be extremely vulnerable to air interdiction. The initiation of conventional warfare on a large scale in the South would moreover impose a serious drain on North Vietnam's own resources, including its skilled manpower, and increase the country's dependency on external support.

Nevertheless, it is possible that North Vietnam might accept the risks of failure and retaliation to launch a conventional invasion. The crucial element in meeting this threat is not the regular army's total size, but its deployable strength. By assuming a greater share of the defense burden throughout the country, the people's army would allow gradual redeployment of regular army units to the parts of the country that are vulnerable to conventional invasion. The regular army would thus be able more rapidly to concentrate its forces at the point of attack without exposing the rest of the country to attack by smaller enemy units that might move to fill the vacuum.
NOTES

14. A number of Vietnamese officers have already begun to ques­tion American military doctrine and develop their own. An example is the recent book by Do Ngoc Nhan, Can de chi dao chien luoc chien tranh Viet-Nam (The Problem of Strategic Leadership in the Vietnam War), Saigon, 1970. The following quote is typical: "There must be a limit to quantity. The increase of military strength still depends on the country's population, on its economic condition, and on many other factors. The strengthening of armed forces by increasing their size cannot go on forever.... On the battlefield, there are numerous examples of small but well-trained and organized units which defeated enemy units of twice their size." (p. 60.)

15. In 1967, it was estimated that there were approximately 73,000 skilled specialists in South Vietnam's armed forces. Many of these were engineers, engineering technicians, or administrative specialists. Joint Planning Group, Postwar Development, p. 133. The general mobilization of 1968 drafted additional technical personnel from industry. Republic of Vietnam, Joint General Staff, Combat Development and Test Center, Report of the Study on Living Standards, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (Army), Saigon: 1969, pp. 51-52.

16. The Vietnamese have already taken steps in this direction. Recently, the commander of army logistics announced that certain units in the army could work two shifts, one for the army and one for themselves.

17. They are: Regional Forces, Popular Forces, People's Self-Defense Force, National Police, National Police Field Force, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, Revolutionary Development Cadre, and Armed Propaganda Teams.

18. Some observers believe that new soldiers should serve in the regular army first and then in the territorial forces. This would result in a young army whose soldiers would not be burdened by wives and children. As the soldiers acquired a family, they would in effect work their way home, serving in the Regional Forces and Popular Forces on the way. Others, the author included, disagree. Because South Vietnam's future army will be much smaller than it now is, it must be more proficient, hence will require a greater number of professional soldiers. The Viet Cong select soldiers for their elite main-force units from the ranks of the local forces. A soldier works his way up. The notion that young soldiers have no family responsibilities is questionable, as Vietnamese soldiers must often support their parents, brothers, and sisters.

19. The suggested scheme is phased as follows. In 1972, 35,000 of the spaces (not necessarily the men) allotted for the Revolutionary Development cadre would be reassigned to the People's Self-Defense Force.
The remaining spaces would be phased out altogether. The Popular Forces would be reduced by 86,000 men — an acceleration from Thieu's suggested reduction of 50,000 a year. No reduction would be made in the Regional Forces or regular army.

If security conditions allow, another 86,000 Popular Forces soldiers would be released from full-time active duty in 1973, along with approximately 30,000–40,000 soldiers in the regular army.

The remaining members of the Popular Forces would be released during 1974. Since a number of Regional Forces soldiers are assigned to support functions for the Popular Forces, the demobilization of the Popular Forces would allow a modest reduction in Regional Forces support personnel. Approximately another 30,000–40,000 regular army soldiers would also be released.

During 1975, another 50,000–60,000 regular army veterans would be released from full-time active duty.

Soldiers and militiamen who were released from full-time active duty would be assigned as cadres to the People's Self-Defense Force or would be assigned to don dien.
V. POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ESTABLISHING A PEOPLE'S ARMY

The other half of the coin of Vietnamization is, of course, de-Americanization. No matter how much South Vietnam may need a people's army, we Americans cannot create it for the Vietnamese as we have created their regular army. The Vietnamese will have to develop their own military structure and style of fighting. There are many indications that South Vietnam's leaders are willing to move toward creating a people's army. President Thieu seems to favor the idea. His Prime Minister, Tran Thien Khiem, is also considered by many observers to be favorably disposed. The realization that South Vietnam cannot support its present army for very long is shared by others in the Senate and House. For example, Ton That Dinh, a retired army general and chairman of the Senate's Defense Committee, has spoken of the need for a "people's army," and Tran Van Don, also a retired general and now a deputy in South Vietnam's Assembly, has frequently used the term "people's army" himself to refer to an ideal army of the future.

Being politicians foremost, these men recognize not only the economic necessity of creating a people's army but also its political utility in providing whoever leads South Vietnam with a power base independent of the regular army. This is why many of South Vietnam's military leaders will oppose it. The generals would also be reluctant to entrust much of the country's defenses to an army consisting largely of armed peasants and part-time soldiers. As professionals, they prefer to rely on regular-army divisions. But some of the generals may oppose it primarily because they see a people's army as a direct threat to the political power they exercise as commanders of large military formations. It is to Thieu's credit that he has succeeded in reducing much of the political power wielded by South Vietnam's division and corps commanders and freeing the presidency from a military veto. But this was accomplished during a period of military buildup, and commands were not threatened. When the regular army is being reduced in size, it may be more difficult to obtain the cooperation of some generals, who might see not only their political power jeopardized but their military commands as well.
Many of the Vietnamese proponents of a people's army, rightly or wrongly, perceive the Americans as a major obstacle to implementing this concept. Perhaps they have learned from long experience that changes in the structure of their forces away from the American prototype have little chance of acceptance by their American advisors. "As long as we are dependent on the Americans for support," said one Vietnamese officer, "we will not be able to alter the structure of our armed forces." It is in Americans' interest to realize that the problem is actually the converse: that is, as long as the structure of the armed forces and style of fighting remain unchanged, the South Vietnamese will continue to be totally dependent on that American support.

We can remove ourselves as obstacles to a people's army. We can encourage its development and help overcome some of the political resistance by pointing out that the economies of both the United States and South Vietnam eventually will compel the South Vietnamese to develop a cheaper way of maintaining their defenses. We could also point out that the development of a people's army (along the lines suggested here) requires no rash military risks and no major, destabilizing reorganization. Finally, we could point out that with a cheaper people's army, South Vietnam has a much better chance of receiving American support for a longer time than with its present costly army. By nature, if not always by necessity, Americans like economy, and the people's army looks like a bargain.

These arguments should not be pushed on the Vietnamese as part of a new "American plan." The people's army is very much a Vietnamese idea, and it should not be made to appear as another foreign import. A wise strategy for American advisors would be quietly to encourage the interest that already exists in the top levels of government and the military.

Development of a people's army thus holds much promise for South Vietnam. Its development might also reveal principles of defense organization that could be applied in other nations in Southeast Asia. There is a need in the region as a whole for the creation of low-cost but effective defense capabilities that are not an overwhelming burden upon local societies and economies and that will result in greater self-reliance and less dependence on American assistance.
Appendix A

HISTORICAL SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF SUSTAINED MOBILIZATION

Modern South Vietnamese military institutions are foreign imports. At present, the Vietnamese armed forces are organized, equipped, and fight in the fashion of the American armed forces. Before American advisors took over, the Vietnamese army was patterned after that of the French. Precolonial military institutions are largely forgotten. Today's Vietnamese officers know the victories of Napoleon and the tactics taught at Fort Benning, Georgia, better than they know, for example, the development of military organization under the feudal dynasties of Vietnam. Were they less products of French education and American advice, they might profitably look to their own military traditions.

Despite their ultimate failure against the French challenge in the nineteenth century, Vietnam's precolonial military institutions for nine centuries preserved the country's independence against numerically and technologically superior enemies. Confronted with the ever-present threat of invasion by the Chinese; frequent incursions by tribal peoples from the mountains that border three-quarters of the narrow country; a turbulent frontier in the south; and incessant internal revolts, the rulers of Vietnam devoted a great deal of attention to military organization and introduced a number of "modern" features very early in their history.

National conscription, for example, was introduced under the Ly Dynasty in the eleventh century. All male inhabitants in the realm were registered and classified according to their eligibility for military service. There were five categories: princes, mandarins, professional military men, special professions such as priests, physicians, actors, all other men between the ages of eighteen and sixty, and the aged and the sick.1

The Ly emperors also removed the army from feudal command and placed it under national command, thereby greatly reducing the power of rebellious princes.2 The military mandarinate they created was
of supporting soldiers' dependents on army bases, all members of this militia, part-time and full-time, would serve close to their own homes. This is a good idea also since local soldiers tend to behave better because they are close to home and do not desert as often as soldiers serving far from their homes. Many South Vietnamese call this concept _quan doi nhan dan_, which means "army of the people," or "people's army," not because of any resemblance to so-called people's armies in China and North Vietnam but because of its greater reliance on human resources than on costly weapons, and on people defending their own homes than on full-time professional soldiers.

The term "people's army" itself seems to offend many Americans. It sounds vaguely communist. The South Vietnamese who support the idea do not share these ideological reservations. The country already has an organization called the People's Self-Defense Force, and the term "people's army" is often used to describe the kind of military organization envisaged in the future. The idea of a people's army has special appeal to the Vietnamese, for it is basically a return to the military institutions and techniques that for centuries enabled Vietnam to preserve its independence against numerically and technologically superior enemies.

**SOUTH VIETNAM HAS AN INCIPIENT PEOPLE'S ARMY**

South Vietnam already has a people's army of sorts in the Regional Forces (RF), Popular Forces (PF), and People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF). The Regional and Popular Forces, local soldiers whose full-time job is to provide security for the rural population, together outnumber the men in South Vietnam's regular army. As these soldiers are intimately familiar with the terrain and people in the area in which they operate, they have the same advantage as the local Viet Cong. They fight well when given support by the local communities. In highly cohesive communities, such as in An Giang Province, where followers of the Hoa Hao sect predominate and by informal agreement with the government hold most command positions in the area's military units and government, local soldiers can be extremely effective. Proportionally, the Regional and Popular Forces also cost very little, less than
penalties were prescribed for village officials who attempted to draft an only son. Villages that provided couriers for the postal system were exempt, as were villages in which the headquarters of a high-ranking mandarin were located, since these villagers would have to provide the official with guards. Provinces that had recently suffered floods or droughts were also exempted.

As providing recruits was a responsibility of the village, so was the upkeep of a soldier and his family. The bulk of the regular soldiers came from large families that were sufficiently wealthy in land and sons that the temporary loss of one would not cause great hardship. The soldier's family was charged by the village with his upkeep, in return for which the village subsidized the family by giving it either an allowance, a tax reduction or exemption, or a concession that allowed the soldier's family to use a portion of the communal lands owned by the village. (This contrasts with today's practice, which places the burden of supporting a soldier's family on the soldier himself. The fact that the soldier must move frequently, while his family cannot always follow him, makes it more difficult for him to provide support and illustrates the advantage of placing responsibility for supporting a soldier's family on a geographically fixed institution, such as the village where the family lives.)

Desertion likewise was considered a problem of the village. When a soldier deserted, the army informed his village — most frequently that was his destination anyway — and the village was required to return the deserter or replace him with another. One can conclude that the family of a deserter would lose its tax exemptions and the use of communal lands, which probably provided an incentive for the soldier not to desert, and for his family to put pressure on him to return if he did. Desertion was widespread nonetheless.

In his ten-year struggle to defeat Chinese invaders in the early fifteenth century, General Le Loi, who later became emperor, assembled an army of 250,000 men. Vietnam could not permanently support an army of that size, so Le Loi reduced it to 100,000, and further divided it into five contingents that rotated on active duty. While one contingent remained at arms, the other four worked in the fields. Upon assuming
power following a long civil war, the Emperor Gia Long faced problems similar to those of Le Loi. During the civil war, everyone had been pressed into service; the country had been ravaged by war and the fields neglected. Gia Long rewarded the veterans who had stayed with him by giving them land, a common practice in Southeast Asia. He divided his army into two parts, sometimes three, which rotated on active duty. A soldier spent four months of every year in the army and the other eight working his fields in his own village. During his eight months off-duty, he was still subject to recall to labor on government projects such as the construction of roads and forts. The term of enlistment was ten years, upon completion of which the discharged veteran was exempted from one-half of his taxes. If he reenlisted for an additional ten years, he was granted total exemption upon retirement.

The concept of rotational active duty seems to offer a means by which the burden of mobilization can be reduced, both for the soldier and for the state. The soldiers released from regular army units for certain periods of time need not be totally dismissed from military obligations. They could be settled with their families in villages and employed in agriculture or public works projects under military command. Or, they could be rotated into local militia units near their homes for several months each year. This measure would not only allow the soldier to spend more time with his family but would increase the effectiveness of the local militia units as well. To fill in for the one-third to one-half of the regulars who would be absent at any given moment, men from local militia units could be required to serve several months of each year with regular units in the area. This would provide the regulars with a resident's knowledge of the area in which they were operating.

The idea of employing military units in economic and social tasks did not originate with the Vietnamese but with the Chinese. Among the nonmilitary tasks that Vietnamese soldiers have performed when not fighting are the clearing of jungles, the draining of swamps, the digging of canals, and the building of dikes and roads. In the seventeenth century, some soldiers harvested rice for the government, while others raised silkworms and wove silk.
Another institution borrowed from the Chinese was the military colony, or *don dien*, as the Vietnamese called it. The historical development of this institution and its relevance to current problems are described in the following section.
NOTES

1. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam, histoire et civilisation*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1955, pp. 146-147. Under the Emperor Le Thanh Tong in the fifteenth century, the "inscribed" population was divided into six categories: (1) the able-bodied (*trang hang*), who were suitable for military service; (2) the military (*quan hang*), who remained at work in the fields but who were ready to be called in time of need; (3) simple inhabitants (*dan hang*); (4) the aged (*lao hang*); (5) the mercenaries (*co hang*), who were those without land and who hired themselves out as laborers, and (6) the indigent (*cung hang*).

2. Ibid.


4. The lack of precise figures and a tendency to exaggerate the size of the armies that engaged in historic struggles make it difficult to estimate the actual number of men under arms. A Vietnamese historian, Truong Minh Ky, suggested that the Emperor Dinh Tien Hoang (968-980) led a military force composed of ten armies of 100,000 each, a million soldiers! But a later French historian, Alfred Schreiner, suggests that the figure might have been closer to 131,000. Alfred Schreiner, *Abrégé de l'histoire d'Annam*, Saigon: Chez l'Autour, 1906, pp. 35-36. Le Thanh Khoi reports that Tran Hung Dao defeated half a million invaders in 1284 with a Vietnamese army of 200,000. Le Thanh Khoi, pp. 183-189. Le Loi was reported to have an army of 250,000 in the fifteenth century. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam*, p. 217. Observers in Vietnam in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reported Vietnamese military strengths at between 80,000 in times of peace and 200,000 in times of war. See Charles B. Maybon, *Histoire moderne du pays d'Annam (1592-1820)*, Paris: Libraire Plon, 1920, pp. 367-369. The military strengths reported did not necessarily include the number of soldiers in *don dien*.

5. The figures vary: Under the Nguyen Dynasty, in the area north of Song Gianh, the traditional stronghold of the preceding Le Dynasty, only one-seventh of the able-bodied males were required to serve. In the areas populated by Montagnards, no more than one-tenth were required to serve. In the central provinces from Quang Binh to Binh Thuan, patrimony of the Nguyen, the quota was higher. This ensured that the army would contain a large number of soldiers who were loyal to the Nguyen. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam*, p. 330.


Traditionally, the emperor of Vietnam dealt with villages, seldom with individuals. The taxes to be paid and the quotas for conscription were calculated by the central government and sent to the villages, which had the responsibility for collection and recruiting. Those who were not inscribed on the rolls of a village posed a problem for the emperor as there was little government machinery for dealing with people as individuals. Indeed, there was little place for them in Vietnamese society. The citizens already inscribed were unlikely to welcome additional members in their villages; they would only increase their draft quota and add mouths to feed from the same amount of land. Inscribed villagers tried to get rid of any uninscribed residents, sometimes by sending them off to the army in place of the inscribed residents. This was expressly forbidden. Military service was a duty of inscribed citizens, not landless vagabonds. Although the latter could volunteer for special units, they could not replace inscribed recruits, and severe penalties were prescribed for the village notables who tried to substitute them as recruits.\(^1\) If the uninscribed could not be easily absorbed into existing villages, then the solution was to have them establish new villages on new land. Eventually, they could become inscribed citizens themselves, and the land they cleared and crops they grew taxed and added to the emperor's wealth. The first act of a new village was the establishment of an official register of its residents and a land register from which taxes could be calculated. The continual formation of new villages required territorial expansion, certain to be resisted by Vietnam's neighbors. It required war and conquest, which meant the possibility of reprisals. New villages on the frontier had to be able to defend themselves.

To meet these requirements, the Vietnamese developed the *don dien*, or military colony.\(^2\) Veterans of the army, uninscribed citizens, and sometimes convicts were settled with their families on the frontier. They cleared the land and defended the frontier until a new military expedition
and a new generation of don dien pushed it forward and the old don dien became regular villages.

The don dien was thus a means by which the uninscribed, the landless, the poor, the malcontents, and the vagabonds, always a threat to internal stability, could be made into villagers, that is, placed in a framework the emperor could deal with. Second, it was a means of developing the wealth of the nation (khan hoang). Literally translated, it means to exploit or cultivate (khan) virgin or abandoned land (hoang), but it implies more than merely cutting down trees. Cleared land was the primary manifestation of wealth in Vietnam. "A bit of land is a bit of gold," runs an old Vietnamese proverb, so to clear land implied economic development in a broad sense. Some Vietnamese historians prefer to translate khan hoang as the French expression mise en valeur, "to make worthwhile," or "to develop." Mise en valeur was a mission of the French army in the colonies. It came after conquest and pacification, and it implied that the army's work was not done until the conquered and pacified area was developed into something worthwhile. Roads and railroads had to be built, towns laid out, markets established, and trade opened. The third function of the don dien was defense.

Settling soldiers and their families on the frontier where they can farm and defend the border at the same time is an ancient concept. As early as the second century B.C., the Chinese are known to have settled army veterans on newly conquered land. Chinese military colonies were established in Vietnam under the T'ang Dynasty. Later the Vietnamese borrowed this institution for themselves, as much for internal political reasons as for security. Having won its independence from China in the tenth century, Vietnam was plagued by civil wars and Chinese invasions. In the early part of the fifteenth century, internal upheavals in Vietnam brought in another Chinese army to occupy the country. After ten years of fighting, the Chinese were driven out by Vietnamese forces led by General Le Loi. Following his victory, General Le Loi became the first emperor of a new dynasty, under the name Le Thai To. The long campaign against the Chinese invaders left a surplus of soldiers and much of the riceland abandoned. It was essential to the economic and political survival of the new dynasty that abandoned land
be brought under cultivation, that employment be found for the soldiers, and that the lot of the landless peasants be improved. 5

Le Thai To put soldiers and landless peasants to work on abandoned rice fields or sent them to clear virgin land. Under his successor, Le Thanh Tong, people of this category were organized into regular military colonies. As land in the Tonkin delta was limited, eyes turned south toward the coastal plains inhabited by the Chams and, beyond them, the Khmers. From the eleventh century on, the Vietnamese advanced steadily down the coast, consolidating their territorial gains by populating them with landless peasants and veterans. Internal stability was thus linked with territorial expansion, an idea that still persists among many Vietnamese today.

As a result of dynastic struggles in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, two powerful families emerged in Vietnam: the Trinh in the north, who both served and dominated the succeeding Le emperors, and the Nguyen in the south, who broke away to rule the southern half of Vietnam as an independent kingdom. This led to a half century of warfare between the two parts of Vietnam. The southern part of Vietnam maintained its independence despite seven major invasions by the north. Cut off from the southern frontier by the Nguyen and blocked on the west by mountains that were ill-suited for planting rice, military colonies in the north declined in use under the later Le emperors. 6 Not so in the south under the Nguyen, who realized that their continued defense against the north's repeated attempts to reconquer the south depended on increasing their own resources. This required continued territorial expansion, so the Nguyen encouraged the establishment of military colonies. Even prisoners of war taken during the war between north and south Vietnam were sent by the Nguyen to cultivate lands that they had taken from the Chams. 7

Military colonies were established by the Nguyen on their northern frontier as well. The area to the south of the Song Gianh, the border between the two Vietnams, was one vast military camp inhabited by soldier-farmers who took up arms to defend their fields. 8 Being close to their source of supply gave the Nguyen troops a great advantage, since the northern armies invariably ran short of food if their campaigns lasted too long.
Nguyen Phuc Anh made extensive use of don dien in his long struggle to regain power. He was the last surviving member of the Nguyen family, which, along with its rivals in the north, the Trinh family and the Le emperors, had been overthrown in a revolution. The leaders of the revolution were the Tay Son brothers, themselves descendants of North Vietnamese prisoners of war who had been captured by the Nguyen army and sent to a military colony near An Khe. They launched their revolt in 1771 and after fifteen years of fighting managed to establish control over all of Vietnam. Nguyen Anh was forced to flee with the remainder of his army to Bangkok, where he established don dien to sustain his troops during their exile. He returned to South Vietnam in 1787 and began a fifteen-year struggle against the Tay Son. From the start he realized that the success of his struggle depended on establishing, in the southern provinces he controlled, an economic base that was independent of the north for its supply of rice. The southern delta was not yet the rice bowl it later became and was dependent on the north.

To rapidly expand the production of rice in the delta, Nguyen Anh offered a number of incentives: farmers who achieved certain quotas of rice production were exempted from military service. Mandarins were directed to make loans to individuals for the purchase of draft animals and farming tools. The loans were to be paid back in rice after harvest. Reserve troops were also made to farm, and if they achieved a certain quota they were not sent to the front. At the same time, Nguyen Anh established don dien in the parts of the delta that were not already under cultivation. Their mission was to provide rice to sustain the army, rations for military operations, and rice for export that could be converted to cash to buy military equipment.

To accelerate the movement of people from the cities to the countryside, Nguyen Anh initiated a land rush by decreeing in 1791 that all land unclaimed in twenty days would be taken over by the army to establish new don dien. No more claims would be accepted after that time. Fearing that the army would grab everything, people rushed to the countryside to stake their claims and file their applications. The lack of communications in the country and the twenty-day time limit still gave the army a definite advantage in the massive land grab,
which may have been Nguyen Anh's intention. Land was often the reward for service in the army. These measures enabled Nguyen Anh to rapidly expand production in the delta, which provided him with resources to carry on the war. The masses of people organized in the don dien also provided him with a vast reserve force that could be called up in time of war.

In addition to establishing military-agricultural colonies, or don dien, the Vietnamese also established civilian agricultural colonies called dinh dien from dinh meaning "camp" and dien meaning "farm" or "rice field." The dinh dien had no particular military function. Nguyen Anh's efforts to resettle people in don dien or dinh dien were not always successful. Often the recruits ran away after receiving financial assistance and farming tools from the government. This was because the land soldiers cleared in don dien and dinh dien was given to them as communal land, while if people cleared land for themselves and paid taxes on it from the beginning they could obtain individual title. Less interested in justice than in increasing production and revenue, the government did not always punish the deserters. Generally don dien were more successful than dinh dien. Members of the former, as soldiers, were still subject to military discipline. When soldiers of the don dien were called to the front, their land was turned over to neighboring villages as communal land.12

Years after Nguyen Anh defeated the last of the Tay Son brothers and proclaimed himself emperor, adopting the name Gia Long, the use of don dien was revived again, this time in 1830 by Le Van Duyet, Viceroy of Cochinchina under Gia Long's successor, the Emperor Minh Mang. Minh Mang was determined to continue colonizing the Mekong Delta. This was related to his resumption of a more active imperialist policy toward Cambodia and to his attempts at agrarian reform. Le Van Duyet established his don dien around the "citadel" of Saigon. Following the traditional pattern, the dien tot, or soldiers of the don dien, were farmers in peacetime summoned only in time of war. Their peacetime mission was farming the land conceded to them by the emperor and, of course, guarding their own villages. They had no camps or forts and lived in their own homes. Once a year, they assembled in Saigon to
practice and parade, then returned, unarmed, to their villages. All were volunteers. Rank was by age, providing the soldier had at least two years of service in the don dien; the grade was that of the regular army. Historians differ as to what ultimately became of these particular don dien. One early French historian states that they were dissolved after a serious revolt in Cochinchina in 1833, and another states that the dien tot were absorbed into a special regiment of the regular army in 1842. Some veterans of the old don dien apparently were reunited in My Tho under the command of one of their former officers. They began to cultivate land on the edge of the Plain of Reeds and established a market at Cay Lay.

In 1850, Nguyen Tri Phuong, another viceroy, established don dien of fifty men each in the six provinces of Cochinchina. The bulk of the volunteers came from the overpopulated provinces of central Vietnam, where the land was poor for farming, particularly Quang Nam, Binh Dinh, Khanh Hoa, and Binh Thuan. In return for a personal tax exemption for seven years and the right to farm two hectares of land, the soldiers of the don dien had to clear the land and live together in hamlets — dispersion would have impaired their defense function. Each company had to establish a marketplace. If the soldiers attained the rank of noncommissioned officer or served well for three consecutive years, the land became theirs to pass on to their children. Unlike the don dien of Le Van Duyet, whose members were made up entirely of rice farmers, the don dien of Nguyen Tri Phuong included men of all professions. Nor did they assemble in Saigon once a year as the don dien soldiers of Le Van Duyet had; instead, they were inspected annually in the provinces. In time of war, they were called to serve in their own regiments at the side of the regular troops. In 1854, the emperor issued a decree joining ap, new hamlets whose inhabitants also had certain military obligations, to existing don dien. At the same time, civilian authority replaced military command. It was an intermediate step between military colonies and regular villages.

By the time the French arrived in 1859, Nguyen Tri Phuong had organized twenty-four regiments of don dien, a total of 12,000 men. They cleared thousands of hectares of land, established numerous
villages, and proved particularly effective in driving the Cambodians out of the Mekong Delta; their aggressiveness was encouraged by the fact that during war with the Cambodians the pillage of the conquered was theirs. Had it not been for the French conquest, the Vietnamese in the *don dien* probably would have taken over the southeastern provinces of Cambodia. *Dien tot* were also summoned to fight the French. Additional rifles were distributed to them, and some fought at the side of the Vietnamese regular forces in the battle of Ky Hoa in 1861.

Impressed with both their military and development capabilities, the French for a while considered employing *don dien* to assist them in the pacification of the delta. On March 19, 1861, Admiral Charner issued a decree perpetuating them in areas of French rule; however, subsequent revolts in which *dien tot* participated caused the admiral to reverse his decision, and on August 22 of the same year he ordered the suppression of the *don dien* in the areas controlled by the French. Their little forts were destroyed, and the veterans were either absorbed into existing villages or fled to join bands of rebels in Cochinchina. Some returned to central Vietnam. When the French occupied all of Cochinchina in 1867, they suppressed the remaining *don dien* and at the same time created a regular militia, which they hoped would be a more reliable institution for their purposes.

Throughout the history of Vietnam as an independent nation, *don dien* were used to perform a variety of functions. Under Le Thanh Tong, the main concern was to transform vagabonds into landed villagers, to absorb the veterans left after a long war against China, and to restore the economy devastated during ten years of fighting. Under the early Nguyen lords, the mission of the *don dien* was to increase the resources of a nation, to feed soldiers defending a frontier in the north, and to expand and defend a frontier in the south. Under Nguyen Anh, their function was dedicated more to production in support of a protracted offensive war, less to defense. Under Minh Mang, *don dien* were used to satisfy the appetites of landless peasants and to support an aggressive imperialist policy toward Cambodia. Finally, under Nguyen Tri Phuong, the *don dien* became a self-supporting militia that could be summoned to fight in regular military formations. There was less
concern with clearing land, evidenced by the fact that not all members were even farmers. Possibly don dien were also meant to be pockets of loyalty in rebellious areas (this could have been a use under Le Van Duyet and Nguyen Tri Phuong), but as such they were not entirely successful, for rebellions sometimes broke out in the neighborhoods of don dien. Perhaps their greatest contribution to the internal security of the nation was in drawing off the landless, the unemployed, the malcontents, exiled criminals, and army veterans -- people who otherwise would have increased internal dissidence at home -- and making them productive, inscribed citizens. Or, in the words of one French historian, the don dien made "useful, industrious workers of the pariahs of Vietnamese society." But not always. The don dien had a tendency to become predatory. Poor, and jealous of the regular villagers who lived nearby, soldiers of the don dien occasionally took advantage of local upheavals to pillage their neighbors, and villagers were said to have abhorred the don dien, regarding them as refuges for brigands and those escaping debt.

During the French colonial period in Vietnam, the meaning of the term don dien changed and acquired an ugly connotation. No longer was it a concession of land given by the emperor to a colony of settlers who in return developed the land and performed military duties. It became instead a concession of land given by the colonial government to an individual, more often a large corporation, for the purpose of commercial development. Don dien came to mean plantation; its military connotation was dropped. Its source of recruits remained the same. To get cheap labor for the rice, rubber, coffee, and tea plantations in the south, the French sent recruiting agents into the overcrowded and poor provinces of the north. They particularly favored provinces recently hit by famine. When recruits were insufficient, convicts were sent to the plantations, just as convicts had been consigned to the frontier by the emperor in pre-colonial days.

Conditions on the plantations were harsh. "Recruits" signed a three-year contract that made them virtual slaves. They had no hope of owning the land they cleared. They received little pay, could not legally leave the plantation, and were subject to corporal punishment.
Living conditions were poor. Few men returned healthy; few reenlisted; many deserted. The term ḏòng diển ṭat ṭọ evokes particularly bitter memories among Vietnamese even today. These were the "red soil plantations," so called because of the reddish color of the soil in the highlands, where rubber trees were found to grow well but living conditions were harsh.

At the end of the Indochina War, the new government led by Ngo Dinh Diem faced problems that would have been familiar to many pre-colonial emperors of Vietnam. The Vietnamese National Army created by the French was too large for the country to support; one million acres of rice land had been abandoned during the war, and thousands of rural inhabitants had fled to the cities; the partition of Vietnam brought another 900,000 refugees from North Vietnam. Reducing the size of the army from 220,000 to 150,000 men and disbanding the military units of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects (another 50,000) added 120,000 veterans to the almost 1,000,000 local and northern refugees who had to be transformed into productive citizens and absorbed into the society.²² To meet this problem the government set up relocation centers throughout the country. Abandoned rice land was recultivated, and new land was cleared in the Ca Mau Peninsula and parts of the northern provinces. Some of the resettlement areas were huge, such as that opened in 1956 at Cai San, southwest of Saigon, where 20,000 former inhabitants who had fled to the cities during the war were resettled and 50,000 northern refugees relocated on 190,000 acres of land that had remained uncultivated since 1948. Each family at Cai San received three hectares of land, on which they paid no rent for one year.²³ By the end of 1957 a total of 300,000 people had been settled in 300 new villages. Diem had two advantages in carrying out this resettlement. The first was the availability of land, especially in the fertile Mekong Delta. The second was almost total peace, a condition reflected in the relocation centers, which were ḏinh diển rather than ḏòng diển in that, with the exception of a sprinkling of demobilized soldiers, they had no military character or function.

The hamlet of Binh Hung established by Father Hoa and his "sea swallows," however, was firmly within the tradition of the ḏòng diển.
Father Augustin Nguyen Lac Hoa was a Catholic priest born in China, and a soldier in the Chinese Nationalist Army. He fought against the Chinese Communists in the 1930s, the Japanese, and the Communists again. In 1950, Father Hoa led a band of 2,000 Catholic refugees out of China and settled them in the northern part of Vietnam, but, seeing that the Communists were about to win there as well, he moved them to Cambodia. Fearing renewed pressure when Cambodia recognized the People's Republic of China in 1958, Father Hoa and about 375 followers, mostly Chinese veterans and their Vietnamese wives, moved again, this time to South Vietnam. President Diem gave Father Hoa and his followers a piece of swamp land in the remote Ca Mau Peninsula, an area that had long been dominated by Viet Minh and later Viet Cong. There the group established Binh Hung Hamlet. Within months they were attacked by the Viet Cong, whom they fought with knives and staves. Defense was obviously a requirement as much as production, so Father Hoa and his followers organized their own army. Later, they received more modern weapons, including the AR-15 rifle, which they had several years in advance of the Vietnamese army. Second, the "sea swallows," as Father Hoa's troops were called, were able to expand the area under their control and invite new settlers to join them. By 1965 they controlled a sector fifteen miles square on which 18,000 people were settled; 1,000 of them were regular soldiers supported by the entire community. In 1966 the "sea swallows" were integrated with the regular armed forces, but conditions in the Hai Yen ("sea swallow") Special Sector of An Xuyen Province deteriorated as the Viet Cong increased their pressure and the units defending the Sector -- several companies of Regional Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group plus the "sea swallows" -- seemed unable to coordinate their activities, which Father Hoa complained about. Some observers feel that Vietnamese government officials were hostile to Father Hoa's "private army" and his habit of going over people's heads to solicit support, and therefore made little effort to help him.24

The dinh dien of the mid-fifties gave way to agrovilles and later strategic hamlets, but the don dien is neither an agroville nor a strategic hamlet, as is commonly mistaken. When acts of violence began to increase in South Vietnam in the late 1950s, the South Vietnamese
government, operating on the principle that the insurgents were being helped, willingly or unwillingly, by the peasants, especially those in scattered settlements where government control was tenuous, decided to relocate them forcibly in *khu tru mat*, literally "closer settlement areas," or agrovilles. There were twenty-three such areas located on former French land concessions still uncultivated. Each one was to be a large fortified village completely controlled by the government, where peasants would be insulated from any contact with the enemy. In all, some 43,000 peasants branded as unreliable were compelled to leave newly settled areas of the Delta and resettle in agrovilles.²⁵

Plans for relocating another 150,000 people were not implemented. *Ap chien luo*, or strategic hamlets, succeeded agrovilles. Strategic hamlets appealed to many Vietnamese, especially those, like President Diem, who came from central Vietnam where many hamlets originated as *don dien* when the Vietnamese were advancing south. The strategic hamlet program was intended to turn every hamlet in South Vietnam, actually 14,000 of a total of 16,000 since some would be abandoned, into a fortified stockade that would defend itself. Hamlets were chosen as the basic defensive unit instead of villages simply because most villages, especially those in the Delta, were geographically indefensible units; hamlets were more compact. To prevent the enemy from overrunning the hamlets by force or infiltrating them by stealth, each hamlet was surrounded by elaborate defensive works, including moats, sharpened stakes, hedges, walls, and barbed wire. Everyone had to be inside the stockade at night.²⁶

Neither *khu tru mat* nor *ap chien luo* worked for a variety of reasons.²⁷ Most important is that they are not in the same tradition as the *don dien* or *dinh dien*. In the latter, the landless were given the opportunity to become landed villagers, whereas in *khu tru mat* the peasants were compelled to leave land they were farming and even to buy the new piece of land on which they were to be resettled. In the *ap chien luo*, some peasants were forced to abandon their hamlets, and many had to walk a greater distance to their fields each day. In the *don dien*, soldiers eventually became farmers. In the *ap chien luo*, farmers were expected to become soldiers in return for nothing except
a sometimes negligible improvement in their security. In other words, both the *don dien* and the *dinh dien* presented an opportunity for economic improvement, while neither the *khu tru mat* nor the *ap chien luoc* offered real economic improvement, subjecting the peasant to increased militarization of his life. One must distinguish between settlement on new land or resettlement on abandoned land by soldiers and landless peasants, and forcible relocation of peasants for military security. The distinction is not a pedantic one. In *don dien* and *dinh dien* the settlers were recruits; in *khu tru mat* and *ap chien luoc*, they were conscripts.

The *don dien* has great relevance to South Vietnam’s current problems. It offers a means by which the country can shift some of its military manpower to production without complete demobilization. Thus, without diminishing the country’s ability to defend itself, the *don dien* is a limited means of economic development. In purely economic terms, of course, the *don dien* is probably inefficient. Even without the added mission of defense; few of the *dinh dien* of the late 1950s achieved total self-sufficiency. But *don dien* can reduce the extent to which the army must be fed by the rest of society; at least some soldiers would grow their own food. Now they only eat. And, properly distributed, it seems that *don dien* can enhance security in certain areas, open areas for the future settlement of landless refugees, and absorb army veterans as they are demobilized. Finally, an extremely important consideration, the *don dien* is a Vietnamese concept; it is understood by the Vietnamese and draws strength from the fact that it reflects a durable tradition.

Recently, several Vietnamese officials have revived the *don dien* concept. Colonel Nguyen Be, Commandant of the National Training Center at Vung Tau, proposes the use of *don dien* primarily for strategic reasons. Dr. Phan Quang Dan, Minister of State, proposes that *don dien* be established to clear land in less secure areas and open the way for future resettlement of landless refugees, and General Pham Van Dong, Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, has established *don dien* to absorb demobilized veterans.
Colonel Be's plan calls for the establishment of don dien in belts that would separate the populated areas from the jungle-covered mountains where enemy units have their bases. Each don dien would clear the land as well as defend itself. Collectively, they would reduce Viet Cong movement from the remote areas into the more populous areas. (His repeated references to uncultivated foothills near the mountains imply that he is talking primarily about the provinces of central Vietnam.) He described two types of don dien: cooperative and private. As in the traditional don dien, demobilized soldiers and civil servants would be recruited to clear the land. A veteran officer with the rank of captain or above who could recruit fifty volunteers would be given from 500 to 1,000 hectares, depending on the soil, upon which to establish a cooperative plantation. (In a recent conversation, Colonel Be said that 5,000 hectares should be given to each fifty families to allow for future expansion.) Those who recruited fewer followers would be given a share according to the number of families they recruited. Officers and noncommissioned officers with ten years of service or more, who could afford to buy a tractor, would be given 20 to 50 hectares for a private plantation. All of the settlers would be both farmers and soldiers.

Colonel Be also has suggested that prisoners of war, those serving sentences for helping the Viet Cong, and ralliers, together with "those who have been by their own choice or otherwise expelled from the ordinary hamlets and village communities," be resettled with their families on a large farming center to be established on Phu Quoc Island. Prisoners would do the initial work in clearing the land and building the hamlets. Upon completion of their sentence they could elect to remain on the island and would receive the cleared land to farm. Light industries also would be developed on the island to absorb additional labor. The merits in this plan are that it would end the separation of families during the prison terms, thus removing a burden on the hamlets where families of prisoners live; it would usefully employ prison labor; and conceivably it could offer a useful life to those who had little to return to and who therefore might easily become a threat to future stability. Essentially, this part of Be's plan is a renewal of the
ancient practice of consigning malcontents to the frontier, giving them the opportunity to become productive citizens. In a plan that now awaits President Thieu's signature, Minister of State Phan Quang Dan has proposed the use of *don dien* to clear land and establish new hamlets. Phan Quang Dan believes that the army has grown disproportionately large for the country to support, and that though it is dangerous for the society and the economy to support such a large army of soldiers who remain idle most of the time, it is equally dangerous to suddenly demobilize them. Rapid demobilization would produce massive unemployment, economic chaos and, potentially, political chaos. Complete demobilization also ignores the fact that North Vietnam will continue the war for years, perhaps decades. The Vietnamese have faced similar problems before; for a thousand years the Vietnamese defended their northern frontier against China while expanding their southern frontier. And they did this with an army of peasants bolstered by a smaller force of professionals -- essentially, a people's army. South Vietnam must now go back to that tradition. Specifically, it must return to the land, its most abundant and most easily exploited source of wealth.

Phan Quang Dan's plan would form special volunteer units of soldiers who have over ten years' service. Unlike Colonel Be, Dr. Dan would keep the volunteers on active duty rather than discharge them. Each soldier and his family would be given three hectares to farm, but would continue to receive his regular salary in addition. Only in this way can South Vietnam improve the lot of its soldiers; raising their salaries would only increase the burden on the economy and cause inflation, and giving them imported goods offers no solution at all. (Of course, Dr. Dan admits that not all soldiers know how to farm, but many do and others can be taught, just as they were taught how to shoot.) Currently, soldiers are paid for defending the country some of the time, and for being idle most of the time. In a *don dien* they would be paid for producing and defending their own and neighboring hamlets. The troops would also build roads and dig canals and wells in return for their salary.
Phan Quang Dan's first target area is located in a heavily vegetated area called the Rung La, northeast of Saigon, where there are over 100,000 hectares of uncultivated land, enough to settle 30,000 families. The water supply is adequate for only one rice crop a year, but other crops can be grown in the dry season, and Dr. Dan says that the area is also excellent for fruit trees. He would begin by establishing *don dien* to clear and farm the land on both sides of the railroad that runs through the Rung La. After the *don dien* were established, landless refugees from Cambodia and the central provinces of Vietnam would be brought in to establish new hamlets in the area. 31

Looking ahead to the establishment of *don dien*, Phan Quang Dan's idea of recruiting men with over ten years' service in the army seems to be a sound one for a variety of reasons. First, it is an equitable arrangement enabling those who have served longest to improve their situation first. Second, individuals with rural backgrounds, desirable for a *don dien*, predominate among soldiers with over ten years' service. Having joined the army before 1961, while South Vietnam's society was still overwhelmingly rural, the older soldiers have a rural background and are familiar with farming. Young men in the cities, with advantages of education and proximity, could generally avoid the draft by landing government jobs or higher-paying industrial jobs. Those drafted in 1968-1969 included more urban industrial workers. 32 The older soldiers are the ones who most likely want to go back to the countryside. This view was confirmed in many conversations with Vietnamese officers. Typical was the view expressed by Colonel Pham Van Son that the older soldiers, those between 35 and 45, probably would want to return to the countryside, while the younger ones would rather remain in the cities. 33

A *don dien* composed of fifty men seems a bit small for a defensive unit. Something closer to company size, 100 to 125 men, would be preferable. Giving each soldier three hectares to farm would produce a hamlet of 400 to 500 hectares (allowing for houses and land irregularities), or roughly two kilometers by two or two and a half kilometers. A *don dien* of that size should be able to send out at least one-fifth of its soldiers to patrol the area and set up ambushes nightly without immense hardship. This is not much more than is required for members of
the People's Self-Defense Force and, as in the PSDF, women could share the burden of defense.34

One high-ranking Vietnamese officer recommended that General Lyautey's scheme for turning French soldiers serving in Indochina into planters be followed in the establishment of don dien.35 Lyautey ordered his soldiers to clear land and plant crops when not fighting. At the end of three years, one-third of the garrison was released from active duty to become full-time farmers in the land already cleared, and a new contingent replaced them, which, at the end of three years, would have the same privilege. The advantages of this method are obvious: not only does it increase the defensive capabilities of each don dien, but it also gives each soldier the visible prospect of becoming a landowner at the end of his service.

A don dien should remain under military command until the security is improved enough for it to become a regular hamlet. During this period, regular army officers and perhaps some soldiers may be assigned to the don dien to facilitate reinforcement and other forms of support. Within the don dien, leaders should be elected by the men; numerous Vietnamese officers have made this point in private conversations. Those elected company or don dien commander could be given the rank equivalent to a company commander in the territorial forces, and would act as both military commander and hamlet chief until the don dien became a regular hamlet and regular civilian officials were elected.

The location of don dien must be based on the availability of arable land and its strategic location. Don dien should be established only where they can be supported by a larger military unit nearby. Vietnamese officials favor the clearing and occupation of War Zones C and D, the U Minh Forest, and the Plain of Reeds, all traditional insurgent strongholds. Progress in bringing these areas under cultivation is bound to be slow. Canals will have to be dug to drain swamps and bring fresh water, and dikes will have to be built to prevent flooding by sea water. The soil may also have to be treated. Army engineers can be assigned to the larger tasks. Other areas being considered include parts of Tay Ninh Province, Long Khanh Province, the Rung La, the foothills of the central highlands, and the highlands
themselves. In settling the highlands, care must be taken not to usurp the lands occupied by the highland tribes. Forced relocation and land grabbing has provoked dissident movements in South Vietnam before. Resettlement of Cambodian army veterans in the northeastern highlands of that country was one of the causes of the Khmer Loeu (highland Khmers) insurgency, which began in 1968. The highlands of South Vietnam are too strategic an area for Vietnamese to provoke similar dissident movements. Thoughtful Vietnamese suggest that highlanders' land claims be settled before don dien are established. Don dien composed of highland veterans (of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group and the present Border Ranger Command) can be established in areas where the population is of the same ethnic composition.

It is unlikely that the military duties of a don dien soldier will interfere with his farming activities or vice versa. Peasants in South Vietnam traditionally are underemployed and during slack seasons usually seek jobs elsewhere. An economist studying the village of Khanh Hau in Long An Province concluded that "six months of the year . . . the large majority of employable labor in the village does not work except sporadically on largely maintenance tasks." Even during the peak growing season for rice, which lasts 96 days, the total available labor force (men between 17 and 44 years of age and women between 17 and 22) was not fully employed (that is, working six days a week). Another observer studying My Thuan village in Vinh Long Province confirmed this view of rural underemployment. The don dien would be most vulnerable during the planting and harvesting of its crops, but the Lyautey plan already described would solve this problem by providing enough men for labor and guards. Additional troops could reinforce the don dien and assist in the planting and harvesting. Since the growing seasons vary widely in South Vietnam, there would be no nationwide demand at any single time.

The don dien may be organized either as a communal enterprise or as a settlement of individual farmers with collective military duties. The poor production record and widespread resistance to agricultural collectives in North Vietnam hardly encourage the establishment of communes. Individual landownership seems preferable. The traditional
method of transferring land titles could be used. Initially, the land would be held by the don dien as communal land, perhaps for one to three years, while it is being cleared and cultivation begun. Soldiers who had served with good records would receive individual land titles at the end of the period. At that same time, full military pay could be suspended or reduced.

Rice and secondary dry-season crops such as vegetables and tobacco are the most likely ones to be planted. The new varieties of "miracle rice" probably would not be grown since they require intensive care and military duties could easily interfere. Azolla, a vegetable fertilizer rich in nitrogen (needed if the new varieties of rice are to be planted) should also be considered. Dr. Phan Quang Dan has mentioned that the Rung La area may be suitable for fruit trees. Growing fruits and vegetables can eventually lead to the establishment of small food processing industries adjacent to the don dien. They could, like don dien, employ soldiers and veterans as workers who also perform military duties.

Throughout Vietnam's history, the don dien has been a solution to a chronic problem. Facing a protracted war with limited economic resources, the Vietnamese could find in the don dien a means of reducing their burden of defense.
NOTES


2. The term *don dien* combines the words "military post" (*don*) and "rice-field" (*dien*). On current maps of Vietnam and in dictionaries, *don dien* is translated as "plantation." A *don dien* was a concession from the emperor to a group of soldiers to exploit a piece of land. Later it came to mean a concession from the government to an individual or company for exploiting a piece of land, thus losing its military meaning.

3. Tac dat tạc vang.


9. Ibid., p. 313.


11. Ibid., p. 57.


14. Deschaseaux, ibid., states that the dien tot were absorbed into a special regiment in the army, while Alfred Schreiner states that they were dissolved shortly after the 1833 revolt; see Alfred Schreiner, Les institutions annamites en Basse-Cochinchine avant la conquête française, Saigon: Claude & Cie., 1900, Vol. III, pp. 66-67.


23. Ibid.


29. Some idea of the armed forces' consumption of rice can be gained from the following figures: The 1.1 million men currently under arms consume an average of 237,000 metric tons of rice annually (1.1 million x 18 kilograms per month x 12 months). With an average production of two tons per hectare, this represents the production of 118,500 hectares. Soldiers and their families consume approximately 900,000 metric tons a year (74% of 1.1 million soldiers are married and have an average of 4 children per family x 12.5 kilograms per month for the wife plus 10 kilograms for each child x 12 months = 746,340 tons). It would require the establishment of 1494 *don dien*, each containing 100 men and their families farming 300 hectares of land producing two tons per hectare, for the army to become completely self-sufficient in rice for its soldiers and their families. That is a total of 149,400 men assigned to *don dien*, or approximately 14% of the total armed forces.

30. Published letter from Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Be to the President of the Republic of Vietnam, dated December 21, 1968, Chiloc Lanh; discussion between the author and Colonel Nguyen Be, March 27, 1971, Saigon.

31. Discussion between the author and Dr. Phan Quang Dan, March 16, 1971, Saigon.


34. Discussion between the author and Dr. John Russell, April 7, 1971, Saigon.
