

THE USE OF THE BRITISH RESETTLEMENT VILLAGE

IN MALAYA AND VIETNAM, 1948-1965

by

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IN

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ABSTRACT

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, scholars have created extensive literature about wars in Vietnam. Many of these works address campaigns and Vietnam's millennium-long struggle against Chinese domination; the bulk of the literature, though, examines the war for independence from France and the long struggle to unify post-colonial Vietnam under the communists, in which the United States played such a significant role in combating the communists. This study, too, addresses the Vietnamese struggle for independence in the twentieth century; however, rather than concentrating on France and the U.S., it will examine the efforts of another world power at that time, Great Britain, and how the British influenced events in Vietnam.

This study examines the role of the British in Southeast Asia during the mid-twentieth century, specifically Malaya and South Vietnam, in combating communist insurgent forces. The primary focus is on the use of Britain's village resettlement model, a counter-insurgency technique originally implemented in Malaya, in order to battle communist guerrillas in Vietnam. In addition to the resettlement village, this study will also address military and civil defense tactics considered important for defeating an insurgency.

This study will examine the use of the British resettlement model and other counter-insurgency tactics during the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960, the First Indochina War, and the Second Indochina War, respectively. For this study, the First Indochina War signifies the war between the French and Viet Minh in Vietnam, 1945-

1954, while the Second Indochina war denotes the period of American involvement in Vietnam, 1954-1975.

The principal focus of this study is the counter-insurgency tactics used during the Malayan Emergency and the early period of American involvement in Vietnam, 1954-1963. In the end, this study concludes that the British resettlement model helped to defeat the communist guerrillas in Malaya, while circumstances unique to Vietnam ensured its failure in Vietnam.

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CHAPTER I

THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY: 1948-1960

After the end of World War II, western world powers, such as the United States and Great Britain, began to position themselves to fight the expansion of communism. By the end of the war, the Soviet Union had expanded greatly and Chinese nationalist forces, led by Chiang Kaishek, were losing the fight against Mao Zedong's communist forces. In 1947, Harry S. Truman announced the Truman doctrine, which provided economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey to fight leftist insurgents. The next year, the U.S. announced the Marshall Plan, which was a multi-billion dollar program designed to save Western Europe from the onslaught of communism. That same year, the world was witness to the largest peacetime air campaign to date, the Berlin Airlift. Then, in the following year, Mao Zedong's communist forces took control of mainland China. Events such as these drew the line between capitalist and communist governments, and forced the world into four decades of cold war.

After World War II, the British considered communism a threat. On 5 March 1946, during a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, Winston Churchill stated, "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent." In his "iron curtain" speech, Churchill alluded to the isolationist policy adopted by the Soviet Union. The term "bamboo curtain" differentiated Chinese policy from its Soviet counterpart. The following discussion considers the Cold War in the Asian theater, because the Cold War became a hot war in several Asian countries.

“For the United Kingdom, the armed struggle in the Far East against communist aggression began not in 1950 in Korea, but two years earlier in the Federation of Malaya.”¹

The British first began to lay claim to the Malayan region in 1786, after they leased the island of Penang from the Sultan of Kedah.² The British also soon settled in Singapore and Malacca, and the three settlements became known as the Straits Settlements. In 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles founded a small trading station in Singapore, and, in due time, Singapore became a major trading port in the world. In 1867, the British transferred the administration of the Straits Settlements from the East India Company to the Colonial Office. Then, beginning in 1874, the British placed advisers in Perak, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan. From then on, the British gradually extended their “protection” to other Malayan states in conjunction with the economic development of the peninsula.³

The development of the area began to draw large numbers of immigrants to the region from all parts of Asia. The British encouraged Chinese immigration, because they viewed them as hard working and good business people. By 1921, the immigrants outnumbered the indigenous Malays. This trend continued and became clear between World War I and World War II. In 1931, Malays comprised 37.8 percent of the population, and the remainder primarily immigrants. The ethnic Chinese were the

¹ United Kingdom Central Office of Information. “The Fight Against Communist Terrorism in Malaya.” (London: 1953), 1.

² United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 3.

³ United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 3.

majority immigrants at 39.2 percent, while the Indian immigrants constituted 14.3 percent of the population.⁴ Later, the Malayan Emergency affected the Chinese population more than any other group in Malaya.

During the twentieth century, the Malayan Emergency is the best example of government forces successfully thwarting a communist insurgency. The Malayan Emergency began in 1948, and is best described as a military and political campaign fought by the British and the Malayan Federation government against the ethnic Chinese-led Malayan Communist Party (MCP). The MCP was a group of trained communists, who had been trained abroad, that led the armed guerillas, which numbered only a few thousand. The British and Malayan security forces battled the communist guerrillas in difficult jungle warfare. According to British officials, the guerrillas existed primarily by “extorting supplies, money, food, and information from Malaysians living without protection on the jungle fringes.”⁵ At first, the British labeled the communist guerrillas as “bandits,” but later, for the duration of the Emergency, called them “communist terrorists (CT’s).” The British recognized that the term “bandits” had negative repercussions, because the Japanese and Chiang Kaishek had used the same term to describe communists, “since neither of these powers had been successful, the use of ‘bandits’ by the British put them on a similar level in the eyes of the Malayan Chinese.”⁶ In this

⁴ United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 3.

⁵ United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 1.

⁶ Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1971), author’s note.

study, “communist terrorists” are referred to as insurgents, communist guerrillas, communists, or just guerrillas.

The MCP was founded in the early 1920s, as a result of Russian efforts to develop communism abroad. The Russian organization in charge of promoting communism was the Comintern, which established a Far Eastern Bureau at Shanghai. The Far Eastern Bureau operated through the agency of the Chinese Communist Party and directed the infiltration of communism into Burma, Siam, Indochina, and Malaya. The communist ideas did not enjoy any support among the Malays, but did penetrate into the Hainanese section of the ethnic Chinese community. The movement did encourage members of other races to join them, but it was observed, “at no time did the MCP allow anyone other than Chinese to become a member of its inner cabinet or controlling secret committees.”⁷

The MCP was made up predominantly of Chinese immigrants, who did not have any sense of loyalty to the Malayan government, and operated as a subversive underground organization. The MCP continued to grow in strength and by 1937 had enough power to provoke a series of labor strikes. Also, in 1937, the communists and Guomindang in mainland China joined forces to oust the Japanese from their country. This unlikely alliance allowed the MCP to promote itself as anti-Japanese and form groups among the Chinese population, such as the Guomindang. The Guomindang did not have any empathy for the communists and withdrew support for the MCP in 1940 after they instigated violent anti-British protests.

⁷ United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 6.

Although the British opposed communism and were poised to join in the fight after World War II, they did not begin their campaign until communist guerrillas began attacking people in Malaya. The British declared the Emergency after communist guerrillas attacked and murdered British subjects living in Malaya. Although the communist guerrillas had attacked members of Malaya's general population, the British took little action until the guerrillas attacked British subjects, who comprised only a small portion of the population.

During the Emergency, Malaya consisted of two separate political entities: The Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore.⁸ The Federation of Malaya, which is geographically the Malay Peninsula, encompassed an area of 50,600 square miles and had an estimated population of about 5.3 million. The island Colony of Singapore, which also administered the Cocos and Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, covered an area of 291 square miles and had an estimated population of 1 million. The communists carried out their campaign mostly in the Federation, and very little in Singapore. In the Federation, the Chinese numbered approximately 2 million, while in Singapore, they comprised the majority of the population numbering about 808,000.⁹ Table 1.1 distinguishes the population for the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore based on the Malayan census of 1947.

⁸ United Kingdom, "Communist Terrorism in Malaya," 1.

⁹ United Kingdom, "Communist Terrorism in Malaya," 1.

Table 1.1 Population Figures in the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore Based on Malayan Census of 1947.

Race	Federation of Malaya			Colony of Singapore			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Malays	1,064,474	1,097,557	2,162,031	38,182	33,972	72,154	2,234,185
Other Malaysians	143,442	122,361	265,803	25,066	18,515	43,581	309,384
Chinese	1,038,573	845,961	1,884,534	387,883	342,250	730,133	2,614,667
Indians	314,619	216,019	530,638	51,724	17,254	69,978	599,616
Europeans	5,831	3,776	9,607	5,182	4,169	9,351	18,958
Eurasians	4,773	5,288	10,061	4,445	4,665	9,110	19,171
Other Communities	23,856	21,547	45,412	4,033	3,484	7,517	52,929
Totals	2,595,577	2,312,509	4,908,086	516,515	424,309	940,824	5,848,910

Source: United Kingdom Central Office of Information, "The Fight Against Communist Terrorism in Malaya."¹⁰

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a small number of Chinese traders settled in the Philippines, East Indies, Siam, Malaya, and Indochina.¹¹ However, during these early migration periods into Southeast Asia, the Spanish and Dutch periodically persecuted the Chinese; hence, the Chinese immigrant population did not grow significantly, except in Siam where the Siamese people usually welcomed the Chinese and let them assimilate into their society. After the British established control in Penang in 1789 and Singapore in 1819, Chinese traders began to immigrate more into the Malayan region. Unlike the Dutch and the Spanish, the British generally avoided persecution of the immigrant Chinese, and encouraged Chinese immigration into Malaya.¹² The British instituted free trade policies, and began to expand their control

¹⁰ United Kingdom, "Communist Terrorism in Malaya," 4; after further research, this author was unable to determine which persons comprised the categories "other Malaysians" and "other communities," in order to know who the census is describing.

¹¹ Siam is now present day Thailand, while Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam comprised Indochina under French colonial rule.

¹² Chai Hon-Chan, *The Development of British Malaya: 1896-1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 103.

from the periphery into the Malayan states; these conditions proved favorable to the Chinese traders. During the nineteenth century, the Chinese began their rise as a viable economic power among the sparse native population of Malaya.¹³

When the Chinese initially immigrated to Malaya, they attempted to make their living in shop keeping, tin mining, manufacturing, farming, or some other enterprises.¹⁴ The Chinese, who were at the center of the emergency, usually resided in urban areas, but they moved into Malaya's countryside in order to make a living. Although many Chinese had been successful in the urban areas, two significant events contributed to their exodus into the countryside: the depression of the 1930s and World War II.

The turmoil of the 1930s and 1940s helped to set the stage for the turbulence that arose in immediate post-World War II Malaya. The depression of the 1930s left most Malayan Chinese entrepreneurs financially ruined. Likewise, as production ground to a halt, many Chinese laborers employed in Malayan industry lost their jobs. Due to the lack of gainful employment in urban areas, many Chinese created or settled in and around rural communities. World War II produced the next wave of Chinese migration to the countryside, particularly during Japan's occupation of Malaya. As a result of Japanese occupation, Malaya experienced food shortages and high unemployment, which forced even more Chinese to move into rural areas. However, the Chinese in Malaya suffered their greatest hardship at the hands of the Japanese. It was not uncommon for the Japanese to brutalize, or even murder, members of Malaya's Chinese population, a fate

¹³Chai Hon-Chan, *The Development of British Malaya*, 103.

¹⁴K. Pelzer, "Resettlement in Malaya," *Yale Review*, Vol. # 41, no. 3 (March 1952), 393.

similar to that suffered by many in mainland China. In addition to forcing a large number of Chinese into Malaya's countryside, Japanese occupation resulted in an unlikely alliance between the British and communists in Malaya.

The course of events during World War II exposed the complete subservience of the MCP policy to that of the Soviet Union, which later created, in Malaya, conditions favorable to the growth and influence of the MCP.¹⁵ At the onset of World War II, the MCP, in character of with other communist organizations around the world opposed the war. The MCP attempted to hamper the allied war effort by provoking labor unrest in Malaya's tin and rubber industry. However, after Germany invaded Russia, this policy was completely reversed, and, after the Japanese invaded Malaya in December 1941, the MCP approached the Malayan government with an offer to unite against the common enemy, which the government eventually accepted. The alliance did not create any political agreement; "cooperation was on a purely military basis" for the remainder of the war.¹⁶

The MCP secretly organized a guerrilla force of about 3,000 men, which was well trained in jungle warfare, and supported them through an underground organization. The underground organization provided intelligence and captured Japanese weapons to the guerrillas. In the summer of 1943, British officers landed in Malaya with orders to contact any resistance forces. The officers contacted the communist guerrillas, who were operating under the title of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). After

¹⁵ United Kingdom, "Communist Terrorism in Malaya," 6.

¹⁶ United Kingdom, "Communist Terrorism in Malaya," 6.

lengthy negotiations, the communist forces agreed to “cooperate with the Allied Command for the duration of the war and the necessary period of military administration following it; the guerrillas were to receive liaison officers in all [of] their units and to accept tactical orders from Allied Headquarters, and in return SEAC [Southeast Asian Command] was to arm and equip them.”¹⁷

After World War II, the British-led government’s alliance with the MCP quickly faded. The British tried to seize many of the weapons and material they had supplied to the communist guerrillas, but the guerrillas were able to hide some items in caves and jungle encampments. Therefore, the MCP reverted to its earlier tactics, provoking labor and political unrest throughout Malaya.

As a prelude to setting up a communist government, the insurgents had unsuccessfully sought to wreck the Malayan economy. However, the campaign against the insurgents placed a heavy strain on the economy and slowed political and social development. Although backed by a substantial supply of men, money, and materials from the United Kingdom, the exploitation of much of Malaya’s natural resources was considerably reduced; especially rubber, which was the main commodity upon which the economy of Malaya relied.¹⁸ The rubber industry originated with the “planting of seedlings sent from Kew Gardens to Singapore in 1877,” and subsequently had grown as a result of British development and investment.¹⁹ In Malaya, although originally in the

¹⁷United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 7.

¹⁸ United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 3.

¹⁹ United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 3.

hands of the Chinese, tin mining was also another major activity expanded by the British to the point that Malaya became the world's leading producer.²⁰ Even though the MCP failed to wreck the economy, they did gain popular support.

This popular support developed because Malaysians lacked confidence in the British, which stemmed from Britain's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1941. Also, Japan's quick surrender to the United States enabled the British to walk back into Malaya without a great show of strength. Many in Malaya felt betrayed by the British, and viewed them as weak and unlikely to provide protection in the future. Nonetheless, the British pressured the Malay sultans into relinquishing their power, regained control in Malaya, and governed through a military administration. Many British men assigned to the military administration treated the population with disrespect and confiscated property, which caused Malays to feel even greater resentment toward the British. The MCP stepped up their political insurgency, but failed and initiated a military campaign. The MCP began to use hit-and-run guerrilla tactics against plantations, mines, and the general population to disrupt the government.

On 16 June 1948, communist guerrillas attacked and brutally murdered five people, including three Europeans, on rubber estates in the Sungei Siput district of Perak and two Chinese, one on the Senai Estate near Johore Bahru and the other on an estate near Taping. Normally, English-speaking people were indifferent to the killing of Chinese and had grown accustomed to the violence and mayhem over the previous months. However, the killing of the three Europeans caused an uproar. Plantation

²⁰ United Kingdom, "Communist Terrorism in Malaya," 3

owners began immediately to pressure the British-led government to take action; thus a state of emergency was declared in Perak and Johore. The police raided offices of the MCP and the MPAJA Ex-Service Comrades Association throughout the country. On 18 June 1948, the government extended the Emergency to the whole Malayan Federation, and then to Singapore the following month.

From the onset, the MCP achieved military success, as well as popular support from the displaced Chinese in Malaya's rural areas. Because they illegally inhabited tracts of land in the countryside, the displaced Chinese were popularly known as "squatters." At the beginning of the Emergency, approximately 500,000 people comprised the squatter population. The largest squatter settlements were in Johore, Perak, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan, where communist activity was the most severe. Pahang and Kedah had fewer squatters, although a considerable amount, while Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis, Penang, and Malacca had very few.²¹ From the very beginning, most people had viewed the Emergency as a problem with the Chinese.²² Ninety-five percent of the communist guerrillas were from the squatter settlements.²³ Some Malays did join the insurgent movement and formed the 10th Malay Regiment, but government forces eliminated the 10th regiment in 1953. The 10th Regiment's operations had been confined to the central area of Pahang. There was one other large contingent of communist Malays

²¹ United Kingdom, "Communist Terrorism in Malaya," 20.

²² P.B.G. Waller, *A Study of the Emergency Regulations of Malaya, 1948-1960* (Melno Park: Stanford Research Institute, 1967), 25.

²³ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 25.

in the state of Kelantan, but government forces also defeated them about the same time the 10th Regiment was defeated. A few small bands of Malays continued to side with the ethnic Chinese communists, but they never posed any serious threat to government operations.²⁴ The British reasoned that the Emergency could not be won solely through military operations; civic action measures had to be integrated in the overall plan. The British had to address the squatter problem. Essentially, the Emergency became “a struggle to determine which side should govern and dominate the Chinese squatters.”²⁵

The squatters who most interested the British were those who dwelled outside the normal boundaries of government administration and were at the mercy of the communist guerrillas. In order to combat the problem, the British planned to resettle the squatters in new villages. Resettlement can be defined as a "compulsory transfer of squatting families, sometimes great distances from their homes."²⁶ The number of resettled persons could range anywhere from 1,000 to 5,000. In 1949, with the institution of Regulations 17 E, 17 F, and 17 FA “the government was free to begin resettlement and regroupment.”²⁷ Regulations 17 E and 17 F dealt with restriction orders and the restriction of residence.

It required more than simple prohibition of residence to remove the hundreds of thousands of persons, mainly Chinese squatters, who were living in the prohibited parts of the control areas. ER 17 E

²⁴ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 25-26.

²⁵ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 25.

²⁶ Milton Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets in South Vietnam: A Survey and Comparison* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1965), Data Paper 55, 13.

²⁷ Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets*, 13; Federation of Malaya, Legislative Council Minutes and Council Papers No. 14 of 1950, *The Squatter Problem in the Federation of Malaya*. B91

empowered the head of a state to issue eviction orders directing any person unlawfully in occupation of land i.e., Chinese squatters, to leave that area for another area (normally a new village). The person affected could apply to go to an area other than one designated, and the district officer had absolute discretion to decide upon such applications. As an alternative, an alien could apply to return to his country of origin. Failure to comply with the eviction order could be punished with detention and, in the case of aliens, deportation. Any buildings on the land occupied could be destroyed by a police officer in the grade of corporal or above.

Regulation 17 FA addressed the issue of residency in controlled areas.

Orders under this regulation covered the whole of any area of the country in which armed terrorism existed. An order designating a controlled area was declared by the chief official [Mentri Besar (Chief Minister) of a Malaya state or Resident Commissioner of a settlement (Penang and Malacca)] of a state. This forbade any person therein to reside outside the residential parts specified in the order. It also provided that no person could enter or remain in any place other than the residential part except at specified time, normally the hours of daylight, thus establishing, in effect, an area curfew system during the night. In addition, when ER 17 EA (food restriction)...was enforced in a controlled area, the order provided that residential parts became food-restricted areas and the other parts, food-prohibited areas.²⁸

“Resettlement consisted of putting up a barbed wire fence around an already compact village and perhaps bringing in a few houses from the outside.”²⁹ The new settlements allowed government forces to conduct surveillance more easily because resettlement “usually took place on estates where squatters, who had been scattered around the perimeter, were concentrated into one settlement.”³⁰ Aside from the squatters, the government also found it necessary to concentrate laborers from rubber plantations

²⁸ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 14.

²⁹ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 26.

³⁰ Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets*, 13.

and tin mines into resettlement villages. The British first drafted the resettlement plans in 1949, but did not have tangible results until 1950. By the end of June 1952, the government had brought approximately 470,000 people under government control, of which eighty-five percent were Chinese. The government placed the people into 440 new villages, which left “about 30,000 persons still to be brought under administrative control.”³¹ When completed, the operation resettled one in every ten persons in the Federation. At the end of 1951, the resettlement operation had cost approximately 4.8 million British pounds in public money, including the cost of police buildings, education requirements, medical and health facilities, purchase of land, and agricultural assistance.³² Overall, between 1950 and 1960, the British relocated some 530,000 people into new villages. Figure 1.1 shows the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore in 1953.

³¹United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 20.

³² United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 20.

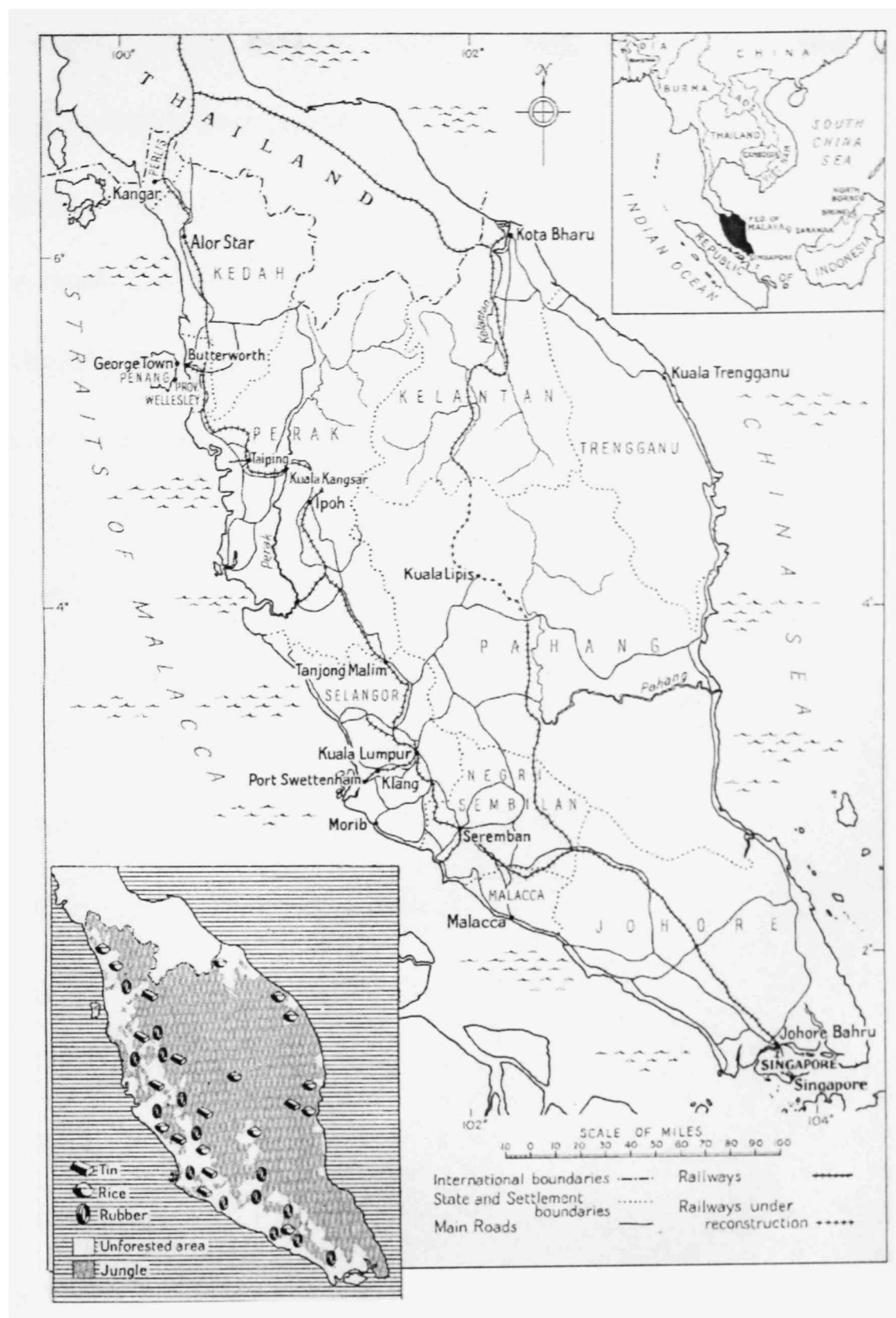


Figure 1.1 The Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore, in 1953.³³

Typically, village populations in Southeast Asia are spread out over a given area, but in resettlement villages the population was more concentrated. While implementing a

³³ United Kingdom, "Communist Terrorism in Malaya."

resettlement program, the primary goal is the close control of rural village populations. The government controls the population by applying “extraordinary administrative and police measures in order to establish or reestablish its authority in regions where the population is disaffected or threatened by subversion.”³⁴ Government control varied from a “simple individual registration system to the actual physical relocation or detention of individuals and communities, accompanied by strict rationing and supervision of their food supplies.”³⁵ In theory, resettlement villages physically isolated guerilla forces from would-be sympathizers. Consequently, guerrilla forces could not acquire food, supplies, and troop replacements. Accordingly, the government must assure that no subversive elements remained inside or reentered the village. Theoretically, if the guerrillas were cut off from their sources of supplies, they would be driven farther into the periphery and starved into submission, or they would have to confront government forces head on, which would allow the government to employ conventional military methods and easily defeat them.

Generally, during the construction of a resettlement village, the first phase was the building of defense works. A few examples are fences made of barbed wire, watchtowers, earthworks, and moats lined with bamboo spears. The government then built houses, schools, and medical facilities. During the Emergency, Chinese contractors provided much of the work in the new villages, while the Royal Army Service Corps often provided transport for removing the squatters. “The police, army, and civil

³⁴ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 1.

³⁵ Waller, *Emergency Regulation*, 1-2.

administration gave much assistance outside their normal duties.”³⁶ When initially created, a resettlement village relied on regular armed forces for its defense, such as army, civil guard, and self-defense corps from the district. After a village had been reasonably secured, it no longer needed regular armed forces for security. From this point, the village relied on village self-defense forces and district police for its protection.

The new villages were not effective until the implementation of the Briggs Plan. By early 1950, government forces were losing ground to the MCP. Therefore, the British decided to appoint a Director of Operations, who reported to the High Commissioner, in order to coordinate the military and police. The job was offered to Sir Harold Briggs, and he accepted the position for a one-year term. Briggs traveled around Malaya and surveyed the situation. At the end of May 1950, Briggs submitted a report that is popularly known as the Briggs Plan. The Briggs Plan described the military significance of moving the squatters into new villages and has some key points that should be noted. First, the plan recognized that government forces had to “dominate the populated areas and build up a feeling of complete security, which would in time result in a steady and increasing flow of information coming from all sources.”³⁷ Second, the report stated that the communist organizations had to be disintegrated within the populated areas, in order to, “isolate the bandits from their food and supply organizations in the populated areas.”³⁸ Further, the report concluded that, in order to destroy the communist guerrillas, the

³⁶ United Kingdom, “Communist Terrorism in Malaya,” 20.

³⁷ Harry Miller, *Menace in Malaya* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1954), 139.

³⁸ Miller, *Menace in Malaya*, 139.

government forces had to provoke the guerrillas to attack its forces “on their own ground.”³⁹ The initiation of the Briggs Plan was the turning point for the British-led government to begin achieving success against the communist guerrillas.

Two key features of the Briggs Plan, in part, contributed to British success in Malaya. First, the government integrated all relevant departments and services into the plan and placed them under central control of the Federal War Council, which consisted of a High Commissioner, Chief Secretary, Secretary for Defense, the chiefs of the armed forces, and the police. Second, the government implemented the Briggs Plan throughout Malaya, placing the heaviest troop concentrations in problem areas. Communist guerrillas were concentrated primarily in Johore. Table 1.2 shows the communist insurgents regimental order of battle for 1951.

Table 1.2 Communist Insurgent Forces Order of Battle in Malaya as of 1951.

Assignment Area	Regiment	Troop Strength
Selangor	First	220
Negri Sembilan	Second	250
North Johore and Malacca	Third	250
South Johore	Fourth	370
Perak and West Kelantan	Fifth	550
Western Pahang	Sixth	380
South Trengganu	Seventh	150
Kedah and Perlis	Eighth	270
Central Johore	Ninth	250
Central Pahang	Tenth	100
North Perak and North Kelantan	Twelfth	460
Totals	11	3250

Source Robert Jackson, *The Malayan Emergency: The Commonwealth's Wars 1948-1966*.⁴⁰

³⁹ Miller, *Menace in Malaya*, 139.

⁴⁰ Robert Jackson, *The Malayan Emergency: The Commonwealth's Wars 1948-1966* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 14.

Despite their focus in Johore, the British-led government did not complete resettlement in Johore until May 1951, more than two years after the project's implementation. By 1951, the government had resettled approximately 66,000 people in Johore. Ultimately, resettlement broke contact between the squatters and guerrillas, but not without problems.

The biggest problem for the government was to keep the villagers from supplying the guerrillas, for despite resettlement, sympathizers still continued to aid the guerrillas. This aid was possible because, during the early stages of resettlement, government forces destroyed original squatter settlements before fully implementing plans to accommodate the squatters. "This practice led to resentment and anger on the part of the squatters, as well as their willingness to cooperate with the insurgents."⁴¹ The government immediately recognized this flaw and abandoned the method. Whenever the government discovered Chinese squatters aiding the guerrillas, they acted quickly to punish the squatters.

During the early stages of the Emergency, the government initiated regulations that permitted the detainment of suspected sympathizers. Regulation 17 allowed the government to detain persons without a trial. The Chief Secretary had the power to detain people for "two years at a time, renewable if circumstances warranted."⁴² After eighteen months, a detained person could appeal to a review committee for amnesty and have his objections presented to a commission; all decisions of the commission were

⁴¹ Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets* 15; Pelzer, "Resettlement in Malaya," 398.

⁴² Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 19.

final.⁴³ Under Regulation 17C, the High Commissioner had the power to deport detainees. Deportation only applied to “the aliens and not Federation citizens or British subjects.” Regulation 17D permitted the “collective detention and deportation of inhabitants in an area,” who were known for supporting the guerrillas.⁴⁴ Between January and October of 1949, the government enforced 17D sixteen times and detained 6,343 people.⁴⁵ After the resettlement program began in 1949, the government stopped using 17D, because “it turned too many people against them and it made thousands of Chinese bitter.”⁴⁶ The government deported primarily first generation Chinese to China, but deportations ceased in 1950 after the communists gained control of China. The most infamous regulation was 17DA, which allowed for collective punishment of an entire area with a record of aiding the guerrillas, and where serious incidents had taken place.⁴⁷ The government imposed Regulation 17DA two times. The first use of 17DA was after the murder of Sir Henry Gurney, the British High-Commissioner in Malaya, by communist guerrillas on 7 October 1951. However, the most notorious case of collective punishment happened in 1952 in the town of Tanjong Malim, about fifty miles north of Kuala Lumpur.

At that time Tanjong Malim was home to around 20,000 people. The town’s water supply had to be piped in from a reservoir. Since June of 1948, guerrillas had

⁴³ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 19.

⁴⁴ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 19.

⁴⁵ Miller, *Menace in Malaya*, 134.

⁴⁶ Miller, *Menace in Malaya*, 134

sabotaged the pipeline several times, and each time it was repaired without incident. On 25 March 1952, a group of men went to repair the pipeline for the sixth time, but this time they were ambushed. The group included the Assistant District officer of Tanjong Malim, Mr. R.M.C. Codner; the Executive Engineer of Public Works of South Perak, Mr. W.H. Fourniss; a Chinese Constable Lew, Thai Lim, and eighteen other men. The guerrillas ambushed the party about two miles from town. Almost all of the men were either killed or wounded in the first moments of the attack. Codner, Fourniss, Lim, and seven policemen were among the twelve dead men. Eight other police were wounded, and only one Malayan man escaped injury. This ambush enraged Field Marshall Sir Gerald Templer. He arrived in the town and proclaimed that the act could have taken place only with the aid of local communist sympathizers. As a response, Templer invoked 17DA and placed all towns-people under a twenty-two hour curfew, allowed shops to be open for two hours a day, closed the schools, and cut men and women's rice rations to less than half the usual allowance.⁴⁸ After a week had elapsed, Templer had sheets of paper distributed to every house in the district with the request to write anonymously about their knowledge of communists and their supporters. The following day Templer had the papers collected and examined. Temple's use of 17DA resulted in the arrest of forty Chinese and forced the guerrillas to move north and disperse into smaller units. In all, Tanjong Malim suffered under Regulation 17DA for fourteen days.

⁴⁷ Waller, *Emergency Regulations*, 19-20.

⁴⁸ Miller, *Menace in Malaya*, 208-209.

but, because the collective punishment forced the guerrillas to move on and disperse, the punishment was effective.

The government also instituted the death penalty for those guilty of aiding the communists, but the death penalty had a negative effect on the government. Communists were able to pressure squatters for aid and keep them silent for fear of death. The government realized that squatters were often coerced into aiding the guerrillas and that they needed information from the squatters for better intelligence, so they opted not to use the death penalty except in extreme cases.

The police were responsible for law enforcement in the villages, which enabled the army to focus on combat. Thus, the British established a police post before any resettlement occurred. The main efforts of the police were in the populated areas. The rural Chinese population was over 1 million and approximately "60,000 were active organizers of communist support in the villages and squatter areas."⁴⁹ An estimated 500,000 of the ethnic Chinese yielded to the communist leadership and worked willingly, or unwillingly, for them. Thus, one must compare the number of police to the population and not in relation to the guerrillas in the jungle. In 1948, there were about 9,000 constables policing the villages; however, within six months the number had risen to 50,000. Later, the police were supplemented with part-time home guards, of which 40,000 could be expected to be on duty at any time. In 1948, there was one policeman for every 100 potential communist supporters, but, by the height of the emergency in the

⁴⁹ Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 44.

early 1950s, there was one policeman or home guardsman for every five active or ten potential supporters.⁵⁰

A village police station usually had no more than ten to twelve men, who were all Malays. The government used Malays, because they were less likely to be influenced by the communists. When the communists attacked a police post, most often with communist members within the village, they would often spare the lives of the police force, but killed any government officials, especially Chinese. The main reason the communists did not kill the policemen is that they were worried about changing the apathy of friends and kinsman in neighboring Malay kampong to rage against them. Further, the communists reasoned that the government could replace dead policemen, but if the police were frightened, there was a better chance that they would stay in their compounds at night, which allowed the communists to deal with traitors as they wished.⁵¹ Some policemen worked out deals with the communists, "a live and let live deal," and this action helped ensure that a village came under communist control. "That was how the communists usually started an oil spot, not by the spectacular capture of the village by armed guerrillas."⁵² Despite the threat of humiliation, bribes, and being killed, the police overall remained loyal to the government. The government encountered some problems in its resettlement program; however, the program helped them to combat the guerilla forces militarily.

⁵⁰ Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 44.

⁵¹ Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 48.

⁵² Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 49.

Along with the military aspects, the Malayan Emergency also had important political connotations. After World War II, Britain began to relinquish its colonies. Britain partitioned Pakistan and India and each nation achieved independence. Likewise, besides defeating the communists, the British-led government also wanted unification and independence in Malaya. By advocating Malayan independence, the British countered communist propaganda to the effect that Britain had renewed imperialist intentions in Malaya. However, the British-led government had to overcome the racial and ethnic diversity in the country. Aside from the British, the ethnic Malays constituted the dominant political power in Malaya, but the Chinese comprised a substantial part of the population. Therefore, they had to be integrated into Malayan politics.

Because of the Chinese squatter problem and constitutional changes that were taking place in Malaya, the government regarded Chinese support as essential to help end the Emergency and to establish an independent Malaya. After the start of the Emergency, Chinese and English-educated Chinese united and formed the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). “The leaders of both groups were mainly business men involved in tin, rubber, and trade, and they had much to lose should the communists win the jungle war.”⁵³ The English-educated Chinese convinced the British and Malaysians that they were committed to the cause and shared many of their same political goals. The Chinese-educated leaders won significant support from the Chinese community, which demonstrated that the MCA was a legitimate Chinese political party.⁵⁴ The MCA helped

⁵³ Leo Suryadinata, ed., *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 84.

⁵⁴ Suryadinata, *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians*, 84-85.

thousands of Chinese become citizens, which allowed them to participate in the political process. The MCA also provided money to the Chinese who had been resettled in the new villages. During the progress toward independence, the MCA worked closely with the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). The MCA and the UMNO represented the largest populations in Malaya and with the assistance of the Reid Constitution Commission, formed in 1956 to create a new constitution, expedited the movement toward independence.⁵⁵ By February 1957, the interested parties had completed work on the constitution and submitted it to the British government for review. An eleven-member panel, which represented the Malay monarchs, the British and members of the alliance, reviewed the constitution and made a few amendments. The Federal Council finally approved the constitution on 15 August 1957 and Malaya achieved independence on 31 August 1957; however, the fight against communists continued until July 1960.

⁵⁵ Suryadinata, *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians*, 86.

CHAPTER II

VIETNAM AND RESETTLEMENT: 1950-1960

At the time of the Malayan Emergency, the French battled guerrilla forces in Vietnam and also tried to initiate a resettlement program. The French campaign objectives were similar to those of General Louis Lyautey's efforts against Ab del Krim's Riff Kabyles in Morocco, during the 1920s.⁵⁶ The method is known as *tache d'huile*, the oil slick, which involved securing solidly held key centers, so that pacification forces could spread a tightening net around indigenous rebels.⁵⁷ "The French clung to the oil slick tactics until almost the bitter end of the war, and in good part because, politically and militarily, no other course seemed open to them."⁵⁸ In 1952, French General Francois Gonzales Linares headed the construction of "protected villages," which the French later named agrovilles. By constructing quasi-urban amenities, the French designed the agrovilles to attract peasants away from their normal hardships. This policy is known as "pacification by prosperity."⁵⁹ In addition to offering social and economic advantages, the French also secured the villages and encouraged villagers to develop their own militias, which the French trained and armed. Unlike the British who implemented their program

⁵⁶ Bernard Fall, *The Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 106.

⁵⁷ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 106.

⁵⁸ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 107.

⁵⁹ Dennis J. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 186.

throughout Malaya, the French concentrated their efforts in North Vietnam, particularly in the Red River Delta. "Pacification by Prosperity" had some success, but it was never decisive, because the peasant settlers felt insecure, "a feeling which the numerous French guard posts along the perimeter could do little to dispel so long as the [Viet Minh] operated at night, anonymously, and held all village authorities in the same state of dread as ever."⁶⁰

Between 1952 and 1954, French officials transplanted approximately 3 million Vietnamese into agrovilles, but funding for the agrovilles was high. In order to help offset the cost, the French relied partially on American financial support, which was "one of the earliest objects of American aid to France after the outbreak of the Korean War." According to a private Vietnamese source, the U.S. spent about "200,000 dollars on the 'show' agrovillage at Dong Quan."⁶¹ After visiting the villages of Khoi Loc in Quang Yen Province and Dong Quan in Ha Dong Province, noted Vietnam War correspondent Bernard Fall stated that, "the French strategic hamlets resembled British [Malayan] prototypes line for line."⁶² However, the British clashed with a smaller hostile force in Malaya, 300,000 government troops against 8,000 communist guerrillas, while the Viet Minh outnumbered the French 500,000 to 380,000. Further, the Viet Minh "possessed the mortars and recoilless cannon[s] necessary to breach even sophisticated defensive

⁶⁰ Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 186.

⁶¹ Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 186.

⁶² Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 375

positions.”⁶³ In Malaya, squatters were not only resettled, “but in most cases completely removed from the communist [guerrillas] zone of influence: since the squatters represented less than six percent of the population and made almost no contribution to the economic life of the country, this was feasible.”⁶⁴ Also, in contrast to the British, the French were reluctant to grant Vietnam its independence, or allow the Vietnamese a voice in government affairs; therefore, the French agrovillage program had little effect.

During the spring of 1954, a conference was convened in Geneva, Switzerland to negotiate various cold war issues, including an end to the First Indochina War. The issue was scheduled for discussion on 8 May 1954. However, the Viet Minh and French continued to battle each other throughout the conference. On 7 May 1954, the Viet Minh defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, which left the French with a remarkably weak bargaining position. The French and Viet Minh signed a final declaration on 21 July 1954, commonly known as the Geneva Accords, to end the First Indochina War. Pursuant to this the agreement, a temporary military demarcation line was established at the 17th parallel. The French and Viet Minh also agreed to move their respective forces, the French to the south and the Viet Minh to the north, during the 300-day regroupment period. Further, the agreement called for general elections to be held after two years. However, the elections never took place. In the south, the United States backed Ngo Dinh Diem, who became Premier, and took control of the government in 1954.

⁶³ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 376.

⁶⁴ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 376.

During the ensuing period, the United States and the Government of Vietnam (GVN) instituted nation-building policies throughout South Vietnam, which included pacification programs. Pacification of the rural areas is a traditional approach that has been used for centuries in Vietnam. Emperors used pacification techniques to “restore order following a peasant uprising or a serious outbreak of banditry.”⁶⁵ Pacification is a general term used to describe rural socioeconomic efforts of the government. The GVN attempted to use pacification as means of government control in war torn areas.

From 1957-1960, the GVN initiated its first effort of pacification via a land reform program under Ordinance Fifty-Seven. Before the French arrived in Vietnam, rice farmer families in the Mekong Delta had individual holdings generally ranging from two to twelve acres. From 1880-1939 cultivated rice land and the yield increased. The holdings in almost half of the cultivated areas in South Vietnam were more than 250 acres each, “with the tenant-farmer unit averaging 8.5 acres.”⁶⁶ By the 1930s, approximately two-thirds of the rural population in South Vietnam was tenant farmers, with an average payment of forty percent of their crop to the landlord. Tenant farmers practiced widespread borrowing, usually from the Chinese, at high interest rates, which left them in continuous debt. Most the great landowners were Vietnamese, but some were also French. However, the Chinese controlled money lending polishing, transport,

⁶⁵ Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), 61-62.

⁶⁶ Pike, *Viet Cong*, 62.

wholesale marketing, and the export of rice crops.⁶⁷ The land reform program attempted to alleviate the burden of the tenant farmer with three main provisions.

First, Ordinance Fifty-Seven attempted to regulate landlord tenant relations. The GVN initiated a rent control program to keep land rents within 15 to 20 percent of the chief crop yield. The GVN prepared five year contracts to be used by the landowners and tenants. However, the government infrequently enforced the rent control restrictions; and they all but disappeared after 1962. By this time, the National Liberation Front (NLF) was generally controlling rent rates. Second, the program allowed for the purchase of rice paddy land from large landowners and its resale to tenants. The tenants paid for the land with six yearly interest-free payments. In all, approximately 300,000 tenant families benefited from the program. The third provision enabled the GVN to purchase and redistribute French-owned land. The GVN also took over land that “had no clear title, had never been registered or surveyed, or whose ownership was in doubt.”⁶⁸ Most of the time, people were farming this land, which caused animosity among the farmers after the government seizure. The land purchased from the French, or, otherwise, seized by the government was not redistributed to individuals. The GVN rented out some of the land; army units farmed some of the land; and some was converted into communal lands, with the title being passed to the village council. Then, the villages sub-let the plots to the highest bidder in a closed-bid auction, but this practice was worse than the old landlord system. Each season farmers had to bid higher and higher to ensure they retained the

⁶⁷ Pike, *Viet Cong*, 62.

⁶⁸ Pike, *Viet Cong*, 62-63.

land on which they had worked so hard the year before. The village would extract the highest rent rates, but did not practice paternalism, which was the act of carrying a tenant through the year, as had been the practice in the old landlord system. Also, landowners often sabotaged the land reform program, which in many cases were land-owning government officials. The GVN failed to correct problems within the land program, and by 1960 Diem announced the program had been completed.

About the same time the GVN land program ended, the NLF proposed its solution for land tenure problems.⁶⁹ The NLF used the old Vietnamese proverb, “he should own the land who rubs it between his hand each season,” in areas where land tenure was a major issue, such as the Mekong Delta and the costal lowlands.⁷⁰ The NLF stated, “satisfactorily solving the problem of the peasants...is a way of mobilizing the people in the liberated area to participate in the struggle for, and protection of, the revolution,...a means of mobilizing the masses in the oppressed areas to rise up...and liberate themselves.”⁷¹ The NLF instructed its cadres to turn every issue into land terms. In the case of the strategic hamlet (*ap chien luoc*), the NLF described it as a “technique for depriving farmers of their land (the land on which the village was built) or a means of swindling farmers out of good land in exchange for bad.”⁷² The NLF declared that the GVN represented the rich landlords, pursued a false land reform scheme, levied

⁶⁹ Pike, *Viet Cong*, Chapter Three, 62-63.

⁷⁰ Pike, *Viet Cong*, 276.

⁷¹ Pike, *Viet Cong*, 276.

⁷² Pike, *Viet Cong*, 276.

unreasonable taxes, and that the U.S.—Diem faction confiscated millions of hectares ⁷³ of the best rice land for military purposes.⁷⁴ The NLF's efforts in land reform aided them in gaining popular support throughout Vietnam's rural population, as well as needed tax revenue. Aside from taxes, the NLF exacted food, supplies, and intelligence information from the villagers. The NLF attempted to proselytize the rural population with propaganda in the form of leaflets, word of mouth, and public lectures. The NLF had substantial control of much of the rural area in South Vietnam, especially at night. The fight against the NLF created deep-seated tension in the GVN and slowed government development because so many human and material resources were diverted to fighting the insurgents. Because the NLF was gaining power, the GVN had to take a stronger approach to break the ties between the NLF and the rural population. The GVN planned to begin resettling villagers.

In February of 1959, Diem made his first attempt of resettlement. Diem put forth a plan to develop centers of agglomeration. The GVN developed two types of centers of agglomeration. The first type, *qui khu*, relocated Viet Cong ⁷⁵ (VC) families, people with relatives in North Vietnam, or people who had been associated with the Viet Minh into new villages; thus, providing easier government surveillance. The determination of who were Viet Cong families was often at the discretion of local officials. The second type of relocation center, *qui ap*, relocated families that supported the South Vietnamese

⁷³ A hectare is a measure of land, 10,000 square meters, or about two and one-half acres.

⁷⁴ Pike, *Viet Cong*, 276.

⁷⁵ "Viet Cong" was a generalized term used by the United States and the South Vietnamese governments to identify anti-government forces in South Vietnam

government into new villages that lived outside the realm of government protection and were susceptible to Viet Cong attacks. The primary of goal of the centers was to concentrate the villagers, so they were not able to provide aid, comfort, and information to the Viet Cong.

Major Pham Ngoc Thao, a primary architect of the Diem agrovillage program at the Directorate General of Reconstruction, said "the agglomeration center plan had its origins in the Ministry of the Interior [and was] designed to improve security, [but] was crude, unsophisticated, and essentially military, [it] almost wholly ignoring the economic and social implications of relocation."⁷⁶ On 7 July 1959, the fifth anniversary of Diem's rise to power, Diem broadcast a speech, in which he described his plan to resettle rural southern Vietnamese into concentration centers. He proposed that the GVN would create densely populated settlements in the rural areas, "where conditions [were] favorable to communication and sanitation and where minimum facilities for the grouping of farmers living in isolation and destitution in the back country existe[d]."⁷⁷ Furthermore, Diem went on to say that the "settlement areas will not only improve the life of the rural population, but they will also constitute the economic units which will play an important role in the future development of the country as a whole."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Joseph J. Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam: The Agrovillage Program," *Pacific Affairs*, Winter 1962-63, 329.

⁷⁷ Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam," 327.

⁷⁸ Zasloff, "Rural resettlement in South Vietnam," 327.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1959, the Saigon ministries pressured local officials to institute the program. In a letter dated 9 July 1959, the government delegate for South Vietnam laid out explicit policy instructions for all province chiefs.⁷⁹ In the letter, the government delegate ordered the district chiefs to initiate discreet relations with the “presidents of village sections of the National Revolutionary Movement, groups of friends, members of the councils of notables of the villages, hamlet chiefs, and with representatives of the population[,] so that these groups spontaneously call for the opening of a conference under the presidency of the chief of district.”⁸⁰ In addition, the government delegate instructed the district chiefs to praise the national government and to condemn the policies of the communists, and demand the concentration of all Viet Cong families, in order to sever their relations with the Viet Cong. Moreover, the conferences had to “deliberate and indicate in general the principle by which these families will be concentrated: families having relatives in the North, or having relatives who work for the Viet Minh, etc... further, [the] meetings [were to] be held within a period of ten to fifteen days.”⁸¹

Major Thao wrote a report about the public’s widespread dissatisfaction with the program and presented it to Diem. In his report, Major Thao expressed his concerns about the disregard of economic and social aspects. Moreover, he reported that many

⁷⁹ The government delegate was comprised of “four super-province chiefs...appointed one each for the west and the east of Cochinchina and for the highlands and lowlands of Annam.” (Duncanson, *Government and Revolution*, 236.

⁸⁰ Zasloff, “Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam,” 330.

⁸¹ Zasloff, “Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam,” 330.

highly placed Vietnamese families asserted their discontent, because they had been relocated solely on the basis of their relatives living in the North. Major Thao also reported that he, as well as the Minister of the Interior, had relatives in the North, yet he was loyal to the South Vietnamese government, as were many others highly placed South Vietnamese with relatives in the North. Major Thao believed that, by separating and grouping the people by political affiliation, Viet Cong supporters accumulated more hatred towards the government, and those who supported the South Vietnamese government became less sympathetic toward Diem.⁸² Major Thao proposed integrating the two groups, so that those loyal to the South Vietnamese government might be able to help proselytize Viet Cong sympathizers. However, it has been reported that Major Thao was in fact a Viet Cong agent; thus, by having the two groups integrated, it would have been possible for the Viet Cong sympathizers to proselytize those loyal to Diem.⁸³ However, based partly on Major Thao's report, the South Vietnamese government developed plans for a new program that began in the latter part of 1959.

The construction of concentrated and fortified villages in Vietnam was not a new concept. People along the coastal plains and central Vietnam had been living in interdependent fortified villages for centuries. Diem had grown up in Central Vietnam

⁸² Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam," 330.

⁸³ Trung Nhu Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1985), 62. In his book *Viet Cong Memoirs*, Tang devoted an entire chapter to Major Thao, whom he considered a close friend, and makes profound statements about his actions to undermine the South Vietnamese Government. For Example, Tang states, "he [Thao] personally changed the balance of political power between the Saigon government and the NLF. He helped weaken Diem and Nhu by assisting in the debacle of their rural-pacification schemes, and he was a major figure...that undermined and eventually destroyed them." 62.

and was a firm believer in close-knit communal relationships. He thought that the insurgency problem in the South resulted from hamlets being scattered and stretched out along waterways with relatively little contact between them. Therefore, Diem reasoned, by relocating villagers into "closer settlement areas," southern villages would be more attuned to national tradition and would provide a better defense against the Viet Cong. The GVN called the resettlement areas agrovilles (*khu tru mat*) and satellite areas (*ab tru mat*); agrovillage is a term coined from the French resettlement villages. The term agrovillage in Vietnamese is *thi tran gua mien dong que*, which means rural city, but Diem used *Khu tru mat*, or prosperous dense center.⁸⁴ The plan also anticipated that the agrovilles would have schools, medical and social services, and electricity to entice the peasants. However, the government planned to use corvée labor to implement these community projects, a form of labor not new to Vietnam.

Vietnamese emperors, and the Chinese conquerors had used drafted labor for centuries. Likewise, the French constantly used corvée labor from the general population to build roads and military installations. Diem made the decision to use corvée labor and "directed that the community development principle (*cong dong phat trien*)...be employed for agrovillage labor, in other words, no remuneration could be paid."⁸⁵ Because Diem made the decision, there was no discretion at the lower administrative levels. Diem reasoned that, "the government was fully justified in requiring this kind of work from the inhabitants without pay, especially since peasants paid few taxes and received the

⁸⁴ Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam," 331.

⁸⁵ Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam," 334.

benefits of the government which included agricultural credit, land distribution, and police protection.”⁸⁶ Diem reasoned further that the peasants had the time to labor between planting and harvesting of rice crops and were fervent about the agrovillage program. Diem suggested that “whatever discomfort might be incurred along the way would, he felt, fade into insignificance when the final result was produced.”⁸⁷ During Diem’s regime, proponents of corvée labor reasoned that it was too expensive to pay laborers in an underdeveloped country, because the payments would create a strain on the national budget. On the other hand, opponents suggested that, because the agrovilles were built in areas where the Viet Cong presence was strong and communist activities were dependent on the local population, the Viet Cong could exploit the use of corvée labor and garner further support from the population.

Although the agrovillage program theoretically addressed the economic and social aspects of resettlement, security remained the primary concern. By 1959, South Vietnam’s President Ngo Dinh Diem had visited Kuala Lumpur and was aware of Britain’s success in combating guerrillas by relocating squatters into new villages. That same year, the South Vietnamese government estimated the number of Viet Cong guerrillas to be somewhere between 5,000 and 12,000, a small percentage of the population, but they were successful nonetheless. Diem hoped that an army of 150,000, with the aid of additional security forces, could attack and defeat the guerrillas, just as the

⁸⁶ Zasloff, “Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam,” 334.

⁸⁷ Zasloff, “Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam,” 334.

British had done. However, Diem's forces had to locate the guerillas and sever their contact with rural Vietnamese.

In his broadcast on 7 July 1959, Diem promoted the economic and social aspects of resettlement, but did not mention that one of his primary goals was to strengthen internal security, in order to fortify his political power. However, instructions delivered to all province chiefs did address the security issue. The instructions indicated that, after the creation of agrovilles, the population had to be concentrated, because they had been “living in such a spread out manner that the government cannot protect them and they are obliged to furnish supplies to the Viet Cong. Therefore, it is necessary to concentrate this population, especially the families who have children still in the North or who are followers of the Viet Cong.”⁸⁸ The Diem government hoped that, by bringing the people together, the agrovillage program would lessen their vulnerability to Viet Cong tax collection, information gathering, terrorism, and recruitment. Overall, the agrovilles were part of a larger security plan that involved four basic elements.

First, the agrovilles regrouped the population and linked them with a new strategic route system. The GVN built two major highways from Ca Mau to Saigon. The GVN built the agrovilles along the highways, in order to provide a stronger defense along the new routes. Secondly, the plan developed competent cadres for village council and administrative posts. Throughout the rural areas, corrupt and inefficient officials made it difficult to ensure public support. The biggest problem with replacing these officials was that there were inadequate numbers of trained people. Further, village monies were

⁸⁸ Zasloff, “Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam,” 328.

dwindling and low paying positions did not attract competent persons. The GVN hoped that the construction of agrovilles would increase economic development enticing competent leadership to emerge. Also, the plan's design improved village self-finance resources, which focused on the development of public lands. On these public lands, the GVN envisioned fruit trees and fishponds, which they hoped would increase village revenue. Major Thao estimated that, within six years, the public lands would generate 200,000 piastres, (roughly US \$3,300), a year.⁸⁹ Lastly, the plan called for the formation of a vigorous youth movement. The GVN looked for intelligent and enthusiastic persons who could be trained to provide leadership in the rural areas. The GVN believed that trained youth would eventually replace the present old village guards.⁹⁰

After Diem's rise to power the U.S. tried to assist the GVN with developing its police force. The Michigan State University Advisory Group (MSUG) headed the initial efforts in Vietnam. "The MSUG's administration staff provided military aid, training, and consultation to South Vietnam law enforcement agencies assigned to internal security: the sureté, municipal police, and civil guard."⁹¹ However, the MSUG became embroiled in bureaucratic infighting with Diem, the United States Operations Mission (USOM), and the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). The MSUG "disagreed

⁸⁹ The piastre was the legal tender for South Vietnam. At that time, the exchange rate was about sixty piastres for one American dollar.

⁹⁰ Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam," 331-332.

⁹¹ John Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance: Michigan State University and the Vietnam War* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 63.

with Diem and MAAG over the role of the civil guard and with the USOM over the development of a police communications system."⁹²

In the 1950s, the Vietnamese police force was less than competent and in disorder. In 1953, Bao Dai had sold the police and security forces to the Binh Xuyen to finance his lavish lifestyle, consequently, law enforcement deteriorated. Then, in 1955, Diem used the national army to take back control of the police and security forces from the Binh Xuyen. Nevertheless, "many police were corrupted, broken equipment went unrepaired, and facilities became outdated."⁹³

As the insurgency gained strength throughout the 1950s, the Central Identification Bureau created a National Identity Card program (NIC) in 1958 designed to weed out communist insurgents. The program planned to furnish an identification card to every Vietnamese citizen eighteen years of age and older. In 1959, the program began in and around Saigon, but with limited resources. The NIC progressed and achieved some success. In April 1962, 5,732,099, people had yet to be issued identification cards and, by June 1962, a total of 3,023,947 cards had been issued.⁹⁴ The limited success of the program can be attributed to "guerrilla influence in the sizable areas under strong communist influence[; thus, the program] was never carried to completion."⁹⁵

⁹² Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance*, 63-64.

⁹³ Ernst, *Forging A Fateful Alliance*, 64.

⁹⁴ Ernst, *Forging A Fateful Alliance*, 72-73.

⁹⁵ Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance*, 73.

In the rural areas the MSUG's involvement with the civil guard was a failure. As of 1955, the civil guard was a 60,000 man paramilitary organization. The MSUG wanted to convert the role of the civil guard from a paramilitary one to a civil agency operating at the village level, equipped only with small weaponry and handling crimes, such as burglary and homicide in the rural areas. MAAG and Diem disagreed with the MSUG's recommendations and insisted that the guard remain a paramilitary organization. Tensions between the MSUG, Diem, MAAG, USOM, and other U.S. officials persisted. Unable to reach a compromise, the MSUG suspended its work with the civil guard and "large-scale aid did not resume until two years later, when the [Public Safety Division] PSD assumed control...."⁹⁶ The reduction in aid and development had serious repercussions for the civil guard program. Although the two years without support were reasonably calm in South Vietnam, the insurgency was gaining momentum. In 1958, the death of military and civil Vietnamese ranged between 30 and 40 per month. During the last quarter of 1960, the average was 400 per month. Therefore, "bureaucratic delays and indecision caused the civil guard to be ill-prepared."⁹⁷

Very little information exists about the overall scope of the agrovillage program, but officials involved with the project estimated that the government anticipated placing approximately half a million people into about 80 central agrovilles between 1960 and 1963.⁹⁸ Although the agrovillage program seemed promising, many peasants did not like

⁹⁶ Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance*, 79.

⁹⁷ Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance*, 79.

⁹⁸ Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam," 331-332.

being resettled and forced to provide corvée labor. Because of resettlement, many peasants had to walk greater distances to their fields, which resulted in less work time; and workers were not compensated for their time lost serving as corvée laborers. In all, the agrovillage program meant less income for an already poor peasant population. Further, the U.S. expressed pessimism about Diem's program.

During a conversation between Diem and United States Ambassador Elbridge Dubrow on 26 September 1960, Diem reported that, "despite the initial problems of convincing the population of its [the agrovillage's] value, they could now see the advantages and are fully behind it."⁹⁹ However, Ambassador Dubrow commented, "On the basis of our reports, it is questionable whether the known hostility to the program, because of corvée labor and other reasons, has been overcome in a short time."¹⁰⁰ Ambassador Dubrow also told Diem that he should subsidize the inhabitants in the agrovilles because this practice had been successful in the high plateaus. Diem responded, "the agrovillage program is different than that of the High Plateau, since the peasants retain their paddy lands near the agrovillage, which gives them the same income as previously."¹⁰¹ Ambassador Dubrow responded to Diem, "...nevertheless, we had heard of reports that some of the peasants are not too satisfied with the agrovillage program,

⁹⁹ U.S. State Department, Foreign Service Despatch No. 149, from the American Embassy in Saigon to The Department of State in Washington, "President Diem's Comments on Agrovilles, Internal Security, and Need for Increased Security Forces," October 7, 1960. 1.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. State Department, "President Diem's Comments on Agrovilles," 1.

¹⁰¹ U.S. State Department, Foreign Service Despatch No. 149, Enclosure No. 1, from the American Embassy in Saigon to The Department of State in Washington, "Memorandum of Conversation 26 September 1960: Agrovilles, Internal Security Situation in Vietnam, and Need for More Troops and Arms," October 7, 1960. 1.

because they had been displaced from their original homes and would not receive any additional income for a considerable time."¹⁰² Ambassador Dubrow then asked Diem how many agrovilles he planned to build, and Diem said about 20. Diem added that, "with the completion of these agrovilles he would discontinue the program for some time since, as advantageous as the program is, it has cost the government a great deal of money."¹⁰³ Diem here was alluding to the fact that the construction of agrovilles was cut by seventy-five percent, because of financial considerations. However, Dubrow questioned whether money was the real issue. Ambassador Dubrow reported to Washington that, "perhaps he [Diem] has finally been convinced by all and sundry who have told him of the disgruntlement caused by the program that the 'real cost' is loss of popular support for his regime."¹⁰⁴ Dubrow hoped that the quiet suspension of the program would have beneficial effects. He reasoned that "the basic merits of the program [could] be resumed later[,] after the obvious advantages become apparent to the peasantry as a whole and the security situation is better in hand."¹⁰⁵ He went on to state further that, "Diem, by again raising the need for more CG [Civil Guards] and ARVN forces apparently is still thinking in terms of defeating the [Viet Cong] by force and is not paying enough attention to the political and psychological aspects of the problem."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² U.S. State Department, "Memorandum of Conversation 26," 1.

¹⁰³ U.S. State Department, "Memorandum of Conversation 26," 1.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. State Department, "President Diem's Comments on Agrovilles," 1.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. State Department, "President Diem's Comments on Agrovilles," 1.

¹⁰⁶ U.S. State Department, "President Diem's Comments on Agrovilles," 1.

Between 1959 and 1961, the South Vietnamese government built twenty-three agrovilles that housed approximately 40,000 people. According to Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, the significance of the program, a program that he later declared he had not approved of, demonstrated that corvée labor could still be imposed on the peasants by the government and Viet Cong.¹⁰⁷ The abandonment of the agroville paved the way for the development of the strategic hamlet program, a program Nhu supervised.

¹⁰⁷ Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in South Vietnam*, 261-262.

CHAPTER III

THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM: 1961-1965

In 1961, during the early stages of the strategic hamlet program, some local authorities emulated the successful village defense systems employed against the Viet Minh in Bui Chu and Phat Diem in North Vietnam, during the First Indochina War. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Khanh¹⁰⁸ initiated a village defense program in Ninh Thuan province in which the villagers planted fast-growing cacti around the perimeter to discourage enemy penetration. The youthful security forces equipped themselves with crude weapons, such as pointed sticks and lances. In Dar Lac province, Father Hoa, a Catholic priest, instructed the villagers to place wooden stakes around the village and make camouflaged trap holes lined with poison-soaked spikes. The villagers armed themselves with crossbows, spears, and a few old rifles. Because the defense of these two villages proved successful, Lieutenant Colonel Le Van Phuoc established some defensive villages along National Route QL-4 in Vinh Long Province.¹⁰⁹ These experimental defense villages proved effective against guerilla activities and prompted the South Vietnamese government to implement this strategy nation-wide.

Ngo Dinh Nhu commanded the plan to implement a nation-wide strategic hamlet program, which he developed from many sources. Nhu used ideas from Vietnamese self-

¹⁰⁸ After extensive research and questioning of former Vietnamese officials, this author has been unsuccessful in finding the family name of Lieutenant Colonel Khanh.

¹⁰⁹ Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification* (Washington, D.C.: Indochina Monographs, U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 11-13.

defense villages, British new villages in Malaya, and the Israeli kibbutz defense system.¹¹⁰ Nhu's basic plan was to transform villages and hamlets into anti-guerilla strongholds. Nhu's primary objective was to create a strategic hamlet defense system in which the villagers organized themselves to fight the Viet Cong, via "people's guerrilla tactics."¹¹¹ Nhu was adamant that the people take personal responsibility in developing the strategic hamlet program. Thus, the villagers had to provide funds and the labor to build the strategic hamlets, as well as people for self-defense forces.

The government's overall goal for the strategic hamlet program was to consolidate its authority via a defense system and administrative reorganization at the hamlet level. After the family, the hamlet was the next basic social unit in Vietnam. The origins of the hamlet predate the history of the nation, "with its roots in the Bacsonian and Dongsonian civilizations of Indonesian peoples, who inhabited Vietnam long before the Chinese conquest."¹¹² The hamlet generally designated a geographical and administrative sub-unit of the village. The hamlet provided manpower, finance and material to the village. One man represented each hamlet in the village council, and had wide powers, because he was responsible for various official registers and levying taxes. Lloyd Woodruff, a member of the MSUG, reported that there were 16,398 hamlets in Vietnam, as compared with more than 3,000 villages, an average of five or six hamlets in

¹¹⁰ Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification*, 12.

¹¹¹ Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification*, 13.

¹¹² Gene Gregory, "The Strategic Hamlet: Edifice of the Revolution," *The Times of Vietnam Magazine*, Vol. IV NO. 43, October 28, 1962, 6.

each village. Woodruff went on to report that the hamlets range in population from four persons to almost 17,000. Further, fifty percent of the hamlets had less than 500 inhabitants and 77 had more than 5,000.¹¹³ Self Defense Corps (SDC), Republican Youth, and defense fortifications comprised the military make-up of each hamlet. The Republican Youth served as an auxiliary warning and a guard force. The hamlets also served the government by organizing the inhabitants politically and socially. Thus, the government was able to conduct close surveillance of the inhabitants' political activities and social participation in government-controlled movements, such as the Republican Youth and community development labor projects. In theory, once these programs were put into place, they were to serve as the basis for rural economic reconstruction programs, including agricultural credit and extension services.¹¹⁴

Although Nhu used several examples to develop the strategic hamlet program, the British experience in Malaya played the central role. The South Vietnamese government enlisted the help of British advisors with experience in Malaya, chiefly Sir Robert Thompson, who had served as the defense minister, and had been one of the chief architects of the counter-insurgency plan in Malaya. Although the British offered practical experience to help remedy the situation in South Vietnam, American officials, at that time, believed that British involvement was not essential and could be detrimental to the United States' status in South Vietnam. Ambassador Dubrow clearly opposed British

¹¹³ Donnell and Hickey, *A Preliminary Report*; Lloyd W. Woodruff, *Local Administration in Vietnam: The Number of Local Units* (Saigon: Michigan State Advisory Group, National Institute of Administration, 1960), 2.

¹¹⁴ Donnell and Hickey, *A Preliminary Report*, 2-3.

involvement. He recognized Britain's success in Malaya against the communist guerrillas. Further, the British campaign offered "much that is useful and pertinent in the guerrilla war with the Viet Cong, [but] this has already been studied and incorporated where applicable in MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] training and operational doctrine."¹¹⁵ Dubrow believed that, although MAAG solicited and continued efforts to develop additional anti-guerrilla doctrine for Vietnam, "detailed application of this doctrine to counter-guerilla training can more appropriately be made by qualified and experienced personnel now in MAAG, than by introducing British or Malaysians at this fairly late stage into [the] training program."¹¹⁶ He recognized that the Malayan campaign was different from the guerrilla war in Vietnam, because the British Colonial Administration, with almost absolute power, led the fight to a great extent with foreign officers and troops. In Vietnam, the situation was significantly different, because the GVN and U.S. relied on the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). He reasoned that it would be "less confusing and more efficient, if the advisory role and operations [were] retained by [the] presently accredited country, U.S., and not divided unnecessarily with [the] British [or] anyone else."¹¹⁷ Likewise, he believed MAAG personnel were qualified and trained in wartime guerrilla tactics to handle the training mission. He was convinced that, "[the] introduction of other foreign advisors would be psychologically detrimental to U.S. prestige in Vietnam and could well be counter-productive by

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Incoming Telegram (Section One of Five)," No. 1444, Received 9 March 1961, 2.

¹¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Incoming Telegram," No. 1444, 2.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Incoming Telegram," No. 1444, 2-3

retarding rather than hastening training of [Vietnamese] armed forces.”¹¹⁸ Also, he assumed that the introduction of the British military would create problems regarding the Geneva Accords, because the British were members of the International Control Commission (ICC) for Vietnam. However, although his comments applied to ARVN, he believed that the “British [could have been] of real assistance in civilian counter-intelligence, or [the] ‘special branch field,’ [and that U.S. forces had been] developing recommendations for British collaboration in this field.”¹¹⁹ Despite the U.S opposition to British involvement, Sir Robert Thompson and the British Advisory Mission (BRIAM) were on their way to South Vietnam.

The arrival of BRIAM was not the first time that British troops had been introduced into South Vietnam. Under the command of Major-General Douglas D. Gracey, British forces had entered South Vietnam at the end of World War II. According to his written orders, General Gracey was to enter and “disarm, concentrate, and repatriate the defeated Japanese, to release and ship home Allied P.O.W.s [prisoners of war] and internees, and, in the process to maintain law and order.”¹²⁰ In conjunction with his orders, the British command advised General Gracey not to become embroiled in the politics of the country and to remain neutral.

¹¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Incoming Telegram,” No. 1444, 3.

¹¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Incoming Telegram,” No. 1444, 3.

¹²⁰ George Rosie, *The British in Vietnam: How the Twenty-Five Year War Began* (London: Panther Books Limited, 1970), 11.

The issue of post-war Indochina had surfaced throughout World War II at Allied conferences in Washington, London, Cairo, Teheran, and Yalta, and was a point of considerable debate. It is publicly known that President Franklin Roosevelt opposed the reestablishment of French colonial rule in Indochina after the war. The issue of colonial Indochina was one key point that created conflict between American, British, Chinese, French and Russian foreign policies. President Roosevelt had suggested that Indochina come under the control of an international trusteeship following the end of the war.

The British always did their best to ignore the idea of an international trusteeship, when the U.S. brought it up for discussion. They often felt that the American idea of a trusteeship was also directed at them, and not just the French. In 1945 at Yalta, American Under Secretary of State Edward Reilly Stettinius once again proposed the idea of a trusteeship in Indochina, to which Anthony Eden said, "he was suspicious of possible wider applications, and had not liked the topic when Roosevelt brought it up in Washington in 1943."¹²¹ He went on further to say that, "[Winston] Churchill considered that the intention...might be aimed at the British Empire, and he was not the man to let this go by."¹²² In response to the statement at Yalta, Roosevelt said, "that Indo-China [could] be set up under a trusteeship...Stalin liked the idea [and] China liked the idea. [However,] the British [did not] like the it, [because] it might bust up their empire....if the Indo-Chinese were to work together and eventually get their independence[,] the

¹²¹ Rosie, *The British In Vietnam*, 35

¹²² Rosie, *The British in Vietnam*, 35.

Burmese might do the same thing.”¹²³ Nonetheless, Roosevelt’s idea of an international trusteeship became a moot point after his death in 1945. After Harry S. Truman became President, he directed the State Department to begin issuing statements that there would not be a trusteeship in Indochina, unless it was under the French government. It was reported that Lord Louis Mountbatten told General Jacques Philippe Leclerc in October 1945 that, “but for the death of Roosevelt, France would not be going back to Indochina.”¹²⁴

In July of 1945, at the last wartime conference in Potsdam, the British acquired, in part, the responsibility to deal with post-war Indochina. The British Chiefs of Staff made the recommendation that the southern half of Indochina should fall under the command of Lord Louis Mountbatten’s Southeast Asia Command and not the American South China Command. The Allied powers decided that Chiang Kaishek’s Chinese nationalist forces (Goumindang) would accept the Japanese surrender north of the sixteenth parallel, while the British would secure Indochina south of the line. At that time, plans were still in effect that the British would forcibly retake Indochina, because the war with Japan was not yet over. Needless to say, with Japan’s quick surrender the following month, after the U.S. dropped the last atomic bomb at Nagasaki, the British, as in Malaya, were able to virtually walk into Indochina with out a great show of force.

After the British arrived in Saigon, it soon became apparent that General Gracey was exceeding his instructions by siding with the French and enabling them to regain

¹²³ Rosie, *The British in Vietnam*, 35.

¹²⁴ Rosie, *The British in Vietnam*, 36.

control of their lost colonial possession. Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh had set up governments in Hanoi and Saigon, but the British never formally recognized the government. The Viet Minh were growing bitter with the British reluctance and protested against what appeared to be British collusion with the French. After all, the Viet Minh had fought on the side of the allies against the Japanese, while the French Vichy government had openly collaborated with the Axis powers. On 17 September 1945 the Viet Minh closed down the Saigon market and initiated a series of strikes, and enforced a boycott of French traders. Therefore, Gracey responded by closing down the Vietnamese press and demanding that all Vietnamese disarm. The Viet Minh protested heatedly, but Gracey was unwavering in his determination and the press remained silent. Then, on 21 September, Gracey posted Proclamation 1 throughout Saigon and Cholon. Paragraph one was a reminder that he had control of "all British, French, and Japanese forces, and of all police forces and other armed bodies."¹²⁵ However, paragraph three contained the most profound statement. It called on all citizens "in the name of the Supreme Allied Commander to cooperate to the fullest extent to achieve [peace and normalcy] and hereby warn all wrongdoers, especially looters and saboteurs of public and private property, and those also carrying out similar criminal activities, that they will be summarily shot."¹²⁶ In essence, Gracey had declared martial law

The day after the posting of Proclamation 1, events took a new and decisive turn. Gracey gave in to French pressure and began to rearm the French. Two days later, on the

¹²⁵ Rosie, *The British in Vietnam*, 57

¹²⁶ Rosie, *The British in Vietnam*, 57

twenty-third, the French instigated a quick and vicious coup against the Viet Minh. The coup meant that any peaceful and negotiated return of power to the French was now and impossibility. After the news spread, Vietnamese throughout the entire country reacted vehemently. Throughout the fall of 1945, more French troops arrived and the British gradually relinquished their power. However, until enough French troops arrived to take complete control, British troops found themselves engaged in serious combat with the Viet Minh. It was not until 1946 that the British began to withdraw their troops from Vietnam. In January, British troops began leaving Vietnam and, on 28 January 1946, Gracey handed over command of all French forces to Leclerc and then left the country.¹²⁷ The rest of the British troops departed Vietnam that spring. Then, on 3 April, Mountbatten was informed that he was no longer General of the Army Douglas MacArthur's agent in Indochina, which brought an official end to the responsibility of British in Vietnam.¹²⁸ Fifteen years passed before the British returned to Vietnam; BRIAM arrived in South Vietnam in September 1961.

The South Vietnamese government had initiated the strategic hamlet program in 1961, but Diem did not officially sanction the program until 1962. On 3 February 1962, Diem formally launched the Strategic Hamlet Program by presidential decree. Then, on 19 March 1962, Diem approved a systematic counter-insurgency plan based on the recommendations of the BRIAM and U.S. advisors' security concepts. Under the supervision of Nhu and the Secretary of the State for the Presidency Nguyen Dinh,

¹²⁷ Charles de Gaulle assigned General Leclerc to command the French military in Indochina, 1945 to 1946.

¹²⁸ Rosie, *The British in Vietnam*, 125-127.

Colonel Hoang Van Lac assumed responsibility for executing the Delta Pacification Plan. The Delta Plan was to be implemented in 10 provinces around Saigon. The first operation began on 22 March 1962. Brigadier General Van Thanh Cao, who was also the government delegate for the Eastern region, headed the initial effort. Operation Sunrise, favored by Diem for tactical purposes, in the Binh Duong Province around the Ben Cat area, about 30 miles north of Saigon. The planning for Operation Sunrise and cadre training began in August 1961. Volunteers from public services, such as Civic Action, Information, Youth, Agricultural Credit, and Public Health, made up the Rural Reconstruction Cadre. However, the Civic Action Department retained a leading role on the teams in the hamlets.¹²⁹ The government chose the district of Cu Chi, which had been under communist control since at least 1945, as the test pilot area.

On 8 May 1962, a second systematic “pacification” operation, known as Operation Sea Swallow, began in the Phu Yen Province in Central Vietnam, and was similar to Operation Sunrise in its objectives and methods. The main objective of these two operations was to “clear and hold” the areas.

A government’s protection of its population is paramount and is best described by the Confucian adage; “To defend your state you must protect your subjects.”¹³⁰ Strategic hamlets are the most vital part of the counter-insurgency technique known as clear and

¹²⁹ Donnell and Hickey, *A Preliminary Report*, 1-2.

¹³⁰ Dennis J. Duncanson, “Pacification and Democracy in South Vietnam,” *The World Today*, October 1967, 410.

hold, which protects the population living in villages and small towns.¹³¹ The clear aspect constitutes the use, or coordination of, military, paramilitary, and police forces to combat insurgents in a particular area. In theory, during a clear operation, an insurgent force is dispersed and driven out of a contested area. However, it is important that the government forces hold the area and keep the insurgent units from returning. Thus, in order to hold the area, the strategic hamlet was an important component.¹³²

According to Thompson, Operations Sunrise and Sea Swallow were flawed. Instead of launching the strategic hamlet program in densely populated and well-developed areas around Saigon, Diem chose to launch Operation Sunrise in a sparsely populated area that the Viet Cong solidly controlled. Operation Sunrise resettled all the inhabitants in the Ben Cat area into four strategic hamlets away from their rice fields, “which gave the impression that all strategic hamlets were going to be of this type. This action provided the Viet Cong with an excellent propaganda line.”¹³³ Also, in order to hold the area, the government had to deploy a large number of forces, forces that the Viet Cong regularly ambushed along the highway from the province capital to the strategic hamlets. The Viet Cong continually attacked the four strategic hamlets around Ben Cat, until they finally came under their control in 1964. As for Operation Sea Swallow, Phu Yen “was not an important area and received undue priority [undue priority due to the lack of resources]...because the province authorities were enthusiastic and it was

¹³¹ Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 121.

¹³² Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, Chapter 10.

¹³³ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 129.

considered undesirable not to take advantage of this response.”¹³⁴ Diem summed up Operation Sea Swallow by saying, “It makes the Americans happy, [it was important to demonstrate to the American public that progress was being made in South Vietnam] and it does not worry either me or the Viet Cong.”¹³⁵

In addition to Thompson’s criticism of the developing strategic hamlet program, Roger Hilsman also criticized Diem’s handling of the program. Hilsman suggested that the GVN had given the strategic hamlet program high priority, but there was reliable evidence that, “the program suffers seriously from inadequate direction, coordination, and material assistance by the central government and from misunderstanding among officials at the provincial and local levels.”¹³⁶ Hilsman reported that the province chiefs were inclined to draw up unrealistic high quoted in order to please the authorities in Saigon. Furthermore, the GVN provided insufficient resources at the local level, which resulted in inadequately constructed and weakly defended hamlets, in addition to undue financial burdens being levied on the villagers. Also, the construction of the hamlets had not followed any particular pattern or prioritized plan, although, Diem indicated that priorities would be established after the merger of the Delta Pacification plan and the strategic hamlet program.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 127.

¹³⁵ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. 127.

¹³⁶ U.S. Department of State, Roger Hilsman to Governor Harriman, “Progress Report on Vietnam,” Research Memorandum RFE-27, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, (18 June 1962), 5

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of State, “Progress Report on Vietnam,” 5

The creation of a strategic hamlet was supposed to proceed in three phases. The first phase was general preparations, the second was the construction of the physical installations, and the third was the inauguration of political and social program.

In the first phase, the district chief and local command military officers met with the province chief and the strategic hamlet committee in charge of provinces to discuss plans to build a strategic hamlet in the district. The district chief then returned to his respective district to set up a gradual construction program for the chosen hamlets. Then various civil and military agencies were mobilized for the creation of the strategic hamlets. Dependent upon the situation and needs of the area, the civil and military agencies organized into strategic hamlet construction teams (*doan can bo xay ap chien louc*). The district chief assigned the teams to a particular hamlet, and he himself would lead one of the teams. Then, the teams attended orientation sessions to gain a better understanding of the area's problems and to anticipate the necessary methods that would have to be taken to remedy cultural, economic, political, military, and social problems.

After a team arrived at its assigned hamlet, its first priority was to install defense measures, which was the responsibility of the civil guard (*bao an*) and the self-defense corps (*dan ve*). The team's security member had the task of population control and the eradication of insurgents. In order to achieve this, the security member had to "establish new identity files and family records for each house, take photographs of each person, investigate the financial status of each family, determine the rate of literacy in the hamlet,

and issue plastic covered identification cards to the inhabitants, as soon as possible.”¹³⁸

Then, the civil agencies organized the population by age and invited them to join various associations to create a collective life among the inhabitants. This plan’s hope was to avoid division and isolation among the villagers, which might have served the cause of the insurgents. Through direct and indirect voting, the members of the organizations decided the make-up and leadership of the respective organizations, which the government expected be the first step toward democratic principles in the hamlets. Once they were organized, each organization instructed and guided its members in the courses of action in daily life and what to do in the event of an enemy attack. For example, during daily routines, village elders were responsible for houses and gardens, and, if attacked, they had to supply information to combat forces and encourage the youth to fight. The youth, primarily the men, trained in guard and patrol activities, community development, and combat methods. Lastly, the organizations had to establish a defense system “extending to each area of the hamlet, houses and gardens of respective members, by all available means and with any kind of weapons” that they could fabricate by themselves.¹³⁹

After all of the security measures had been completed, the hamlet team initiated political and social programs. First, all members of the hamlet elected an administrative committee through an indirect or indirect vote, depending on the security situation in their area. After the hamlet committees were established, the village council was elected.

¹³⁸ “The Creation of a Strategic Hamlet,” *The Times of Vietnam Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 43, October 28, 1962, 27.

¹³⁹ “The Creation of the Strategic Hamlet,” 28.

The hamlet chiefs, association leaders, village council, and the district chief then drafted village by-laws to establish a legal framework for democracy in the village. Finally, during a general assembly, the responsibility for hamlet management was transferred to the elected hamlet council, who received appropriate instructions, with special emphasis on security problems.

The government built three different types of strategic hamlets, or defended hamlets (*ap chien dau*), which varied due to their degree of physical fortifications. In Vietnam, a strategic hamlet “represented a fairly scattered hamlet, with possibly some regrouping of houses...[and may have been] surrounded by a light fence, but this fence was only symbolic and served a minor purpose from the defense point of view.”¹⁴⁰ The defended hamlet was a “compact hamlet, with houses grouped closely together and surrounded by a strong perimeter fence.”¹⁴¹ The strategic and defended hamlets were comparable to the Malayan kampongs and new villages during the Malayan Emergency. The former represented a strategic hamlet, while the latter a predominantly Chinese new village. In Malaya, the insurgents failed to penetrate the Malay population; thus, the kampongs required little more than the organization of home guard units supported by key police stations. The government could then concentrate on the resettlement of Chinese squatters into new villages. In Vietnam, the insurgents had infiltrated all of the countryside, “which meant that strategic hamlets, even in the reasonably secure areas, needed more elaborate organization for their defen[s]e than Malaya[n] kampongs.

¹⁴⁰ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 121.

¹⁴¹ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 121.

and...the defended hamlets required a considerable defensive organization, more so than in the new villages in Malaya.”¹⁴²

The most heavily fortified hamlets were located in the Saigon area. Heavy fortifications consisted of earthworks such as ditches, bamboo spears, fences, or thorny vegetation. The fences were built from bamboo, wooden pickets, and sometimes barbed wire strung between concrete posts. These heavy fortifications surrounded the main residential area of a hamlet, or group of smaller hamlets.

Within or at the edge of a hamlet, there was a defense post built of concrete, and also surrounded by a ditch, wall, and barbed wire. The defense posts were usually located in the hamlet, that contained the village headquarters, but the program also planned to build these types of posts in other hamlets within a village.

An example of the second type of hamlet was located in Vinh Long Province. These hamlets had a defense post surrounded by earthworks, but the earthworks were limited to that post. The hamlets were divided into defensive blocks and relied on bamboo spears embedded in the ground, thorny vegetation, steel-spiked boards, and hand grenades, which served as landmines. The spiked boards and grenades were moved nightly to confuse Viet Cong agents working in the area. The third type of strategic hamlets usually limited fortification and defensive devices to the defense post. However, each type of Vietnamese hamlet maintained the same social, administrative, and security organization.

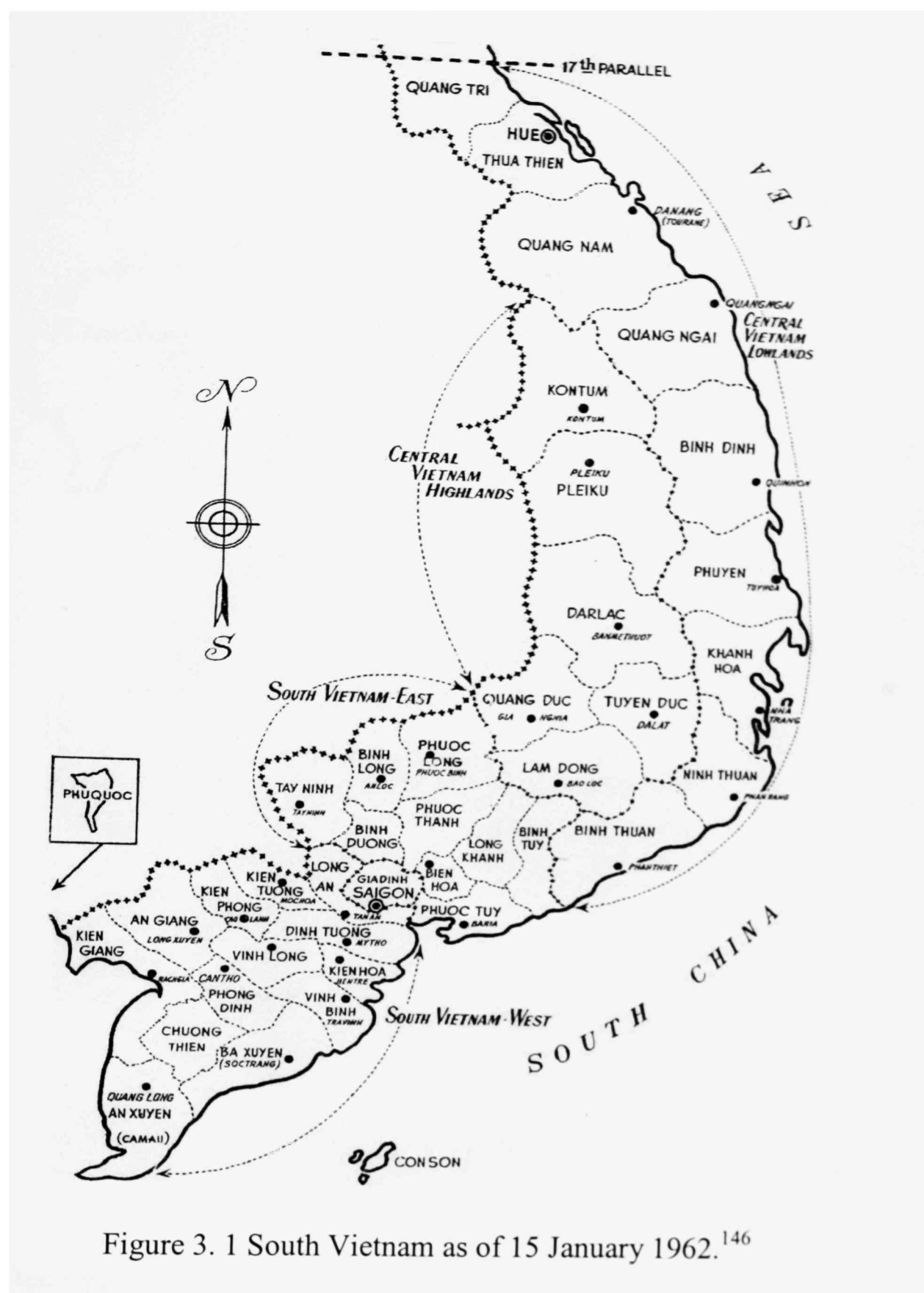
¹⁴² Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 122.

Some strategic hamlets adapted regular fortifications to the local conditions. Such was the case in Kien Hoa province where in a “hamlet bordered on three sides by a stream and canals, a wall and a ditch [were] constructed outside the remaining side, and a strategic road was cut through the coconut palms at the water’s edge to permit easier patrolling.”¹⁴³ Lieutenant Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, of the agrovillage program and also a key member in the implementation of the strategic hamlet program, was the province chief of Kien Hoa. Thao commented that although Kien Hoa was a comparatively wealthy province, “the fortification of all hamlets with ditches and walls [was] excessively expensive, and he [intended] to fortify only those that [had] suffered frequent attack from the Viet Cong and are likely to be attacked again.”¹⁴⁴ In Kien Hoa, at that time, the VC attacked in greater strength than they did in other provinces, and Thao believed that the “larger units would not be so readily deterred by the fortifications of the strategic hamlets.”¹⁴⁵ It is important to remind the reader that Thao was in fact a VC agent, and this probably is why the VC enjoyed success in Kien Hoa province.

In the following pages, Figure 3.1 shows a complete map of provinces in South Vietnam. Figures: 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 show regional areas within South Vietnam, and strategic hamlet projections. Tables: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 describe the numbers used in the regional maps.

¹⁴³ Donnell and Hickey, *A Preliminary Report*, 6.

¹⁴⁴ Donnell and Hickey, *A Preliminary Report*, 6.



¹⁴⁵ Donnell and Hickey, *A Preliminary Report*, 6.

¹⁴⁶ United States Information Service, (Saigon: 1962)

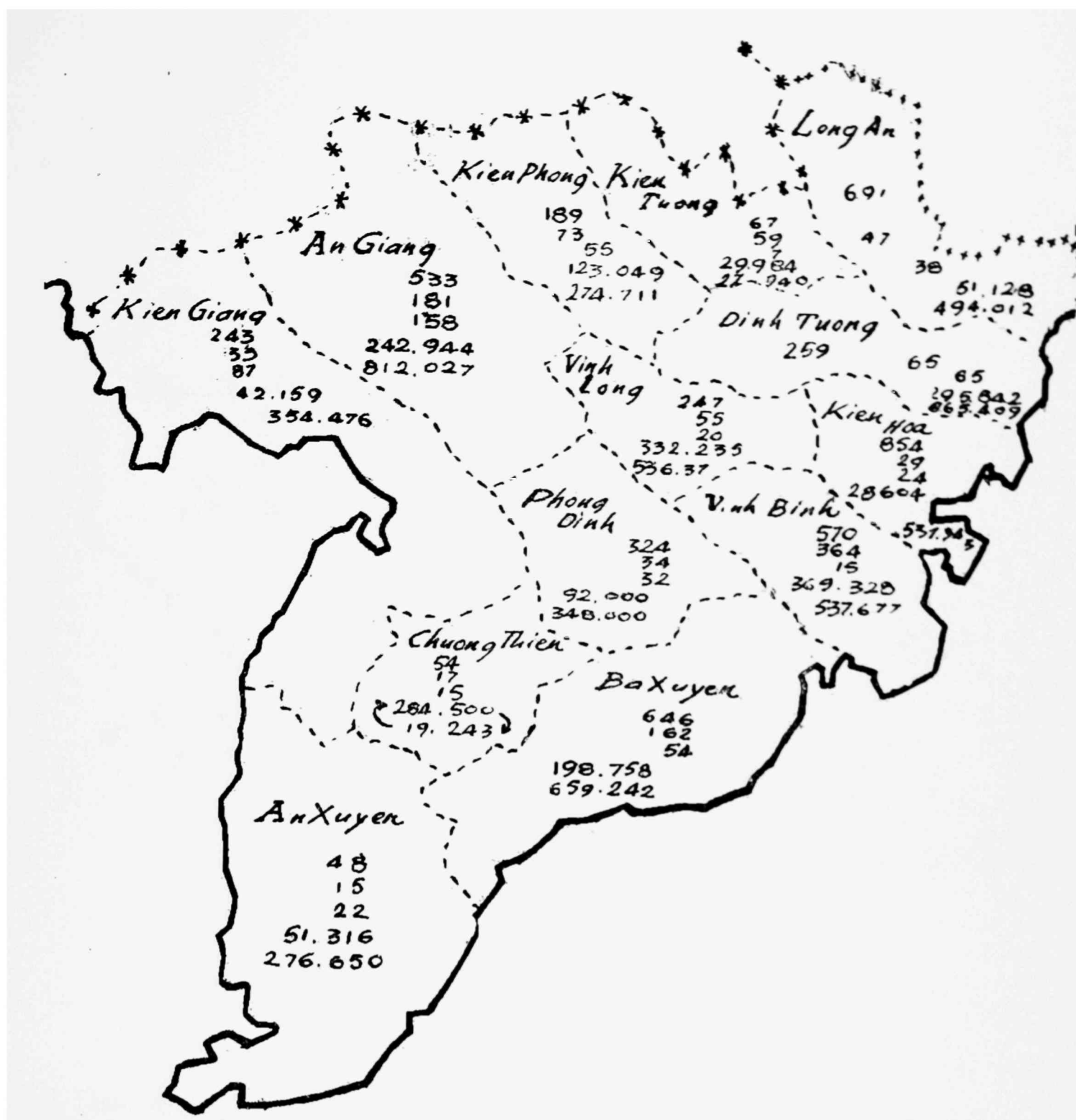


Figure 3.2 South Vietnam West¹⁴⁷

Table 3.1. Description of Numbers in Figure 3.2.

First Number	Second Number	Third Number	Fourth Number	Fifth Number
Total strategic hamlets planned for a province.	Total of strategic hamlets built.	Total strategic hamlets under construction.	Total population living in strategic hamlets	Total population for the province

¹⁴⁷ *The Times of Vietnam Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 43, October 28, 1962.

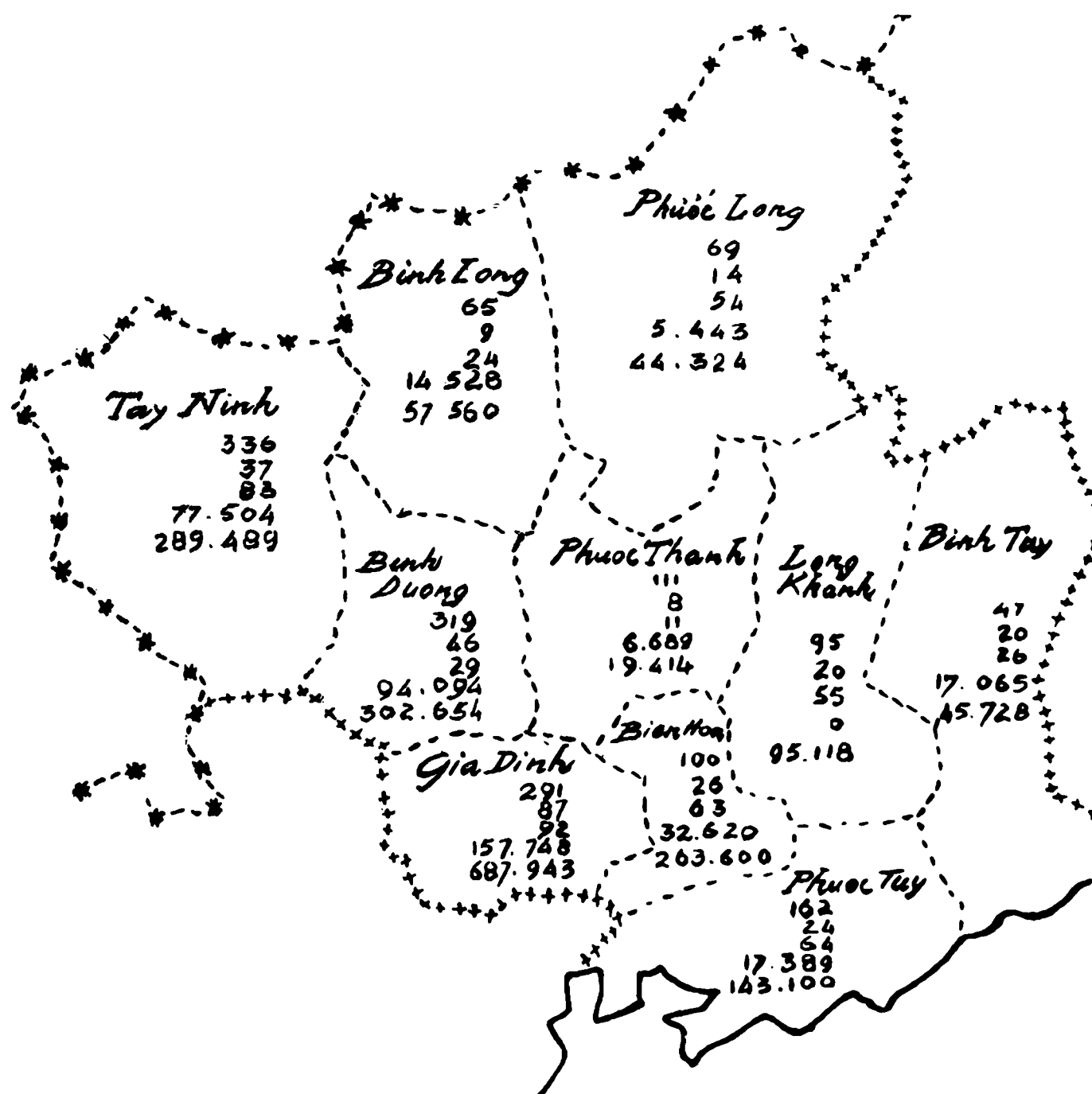


Figure 3.3 South Vietnam East¹⁴⁸

Table 3.2. Description of Numbers Figure 3.3.

First Number	Second Number	Third Number	Fourth Number	Fifth Number
Total strategic hamlets planned for a province.	Total of strategic hamlets built.	Total strategic hamlets under construction.	Total population living in strategic hamlets	Total population for the province

¹⁴⁸ *The Times of Vietnam Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 43, October 28, 1962

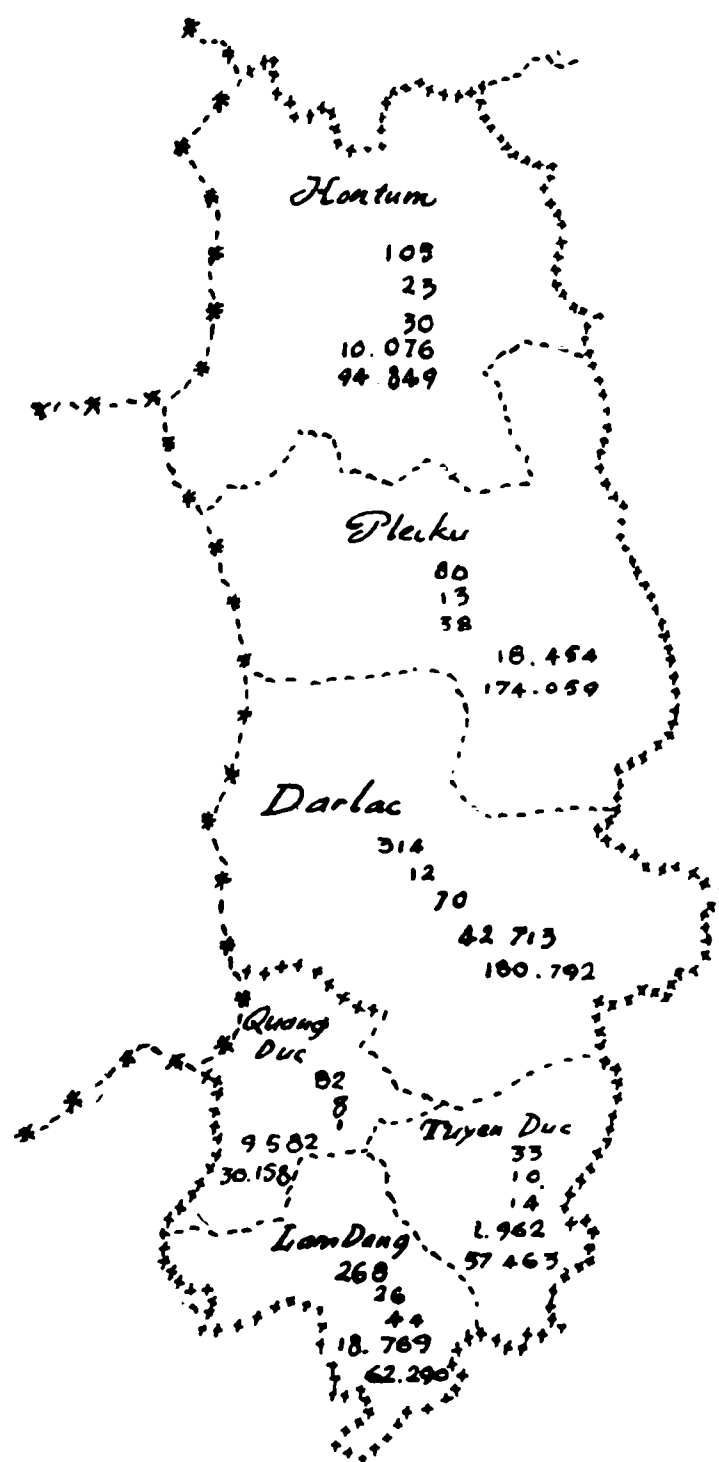


Figure 3.4 South Vietnam Central Highlands¹⁴⁹

Table 3.3. Description of Numbers in Figure 3.4.

First Number	Second Number	Third Number	Fourth Number	Fifth Number
Total strategic hamlets planned for a province.	Total of strategic hamlets built.	Total strategic hamlets under construction.	Total population living in strategic hamlets	Total population for the province

¹⁴⁹ *The Times of Vietnam Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 43, October 28, 1962.

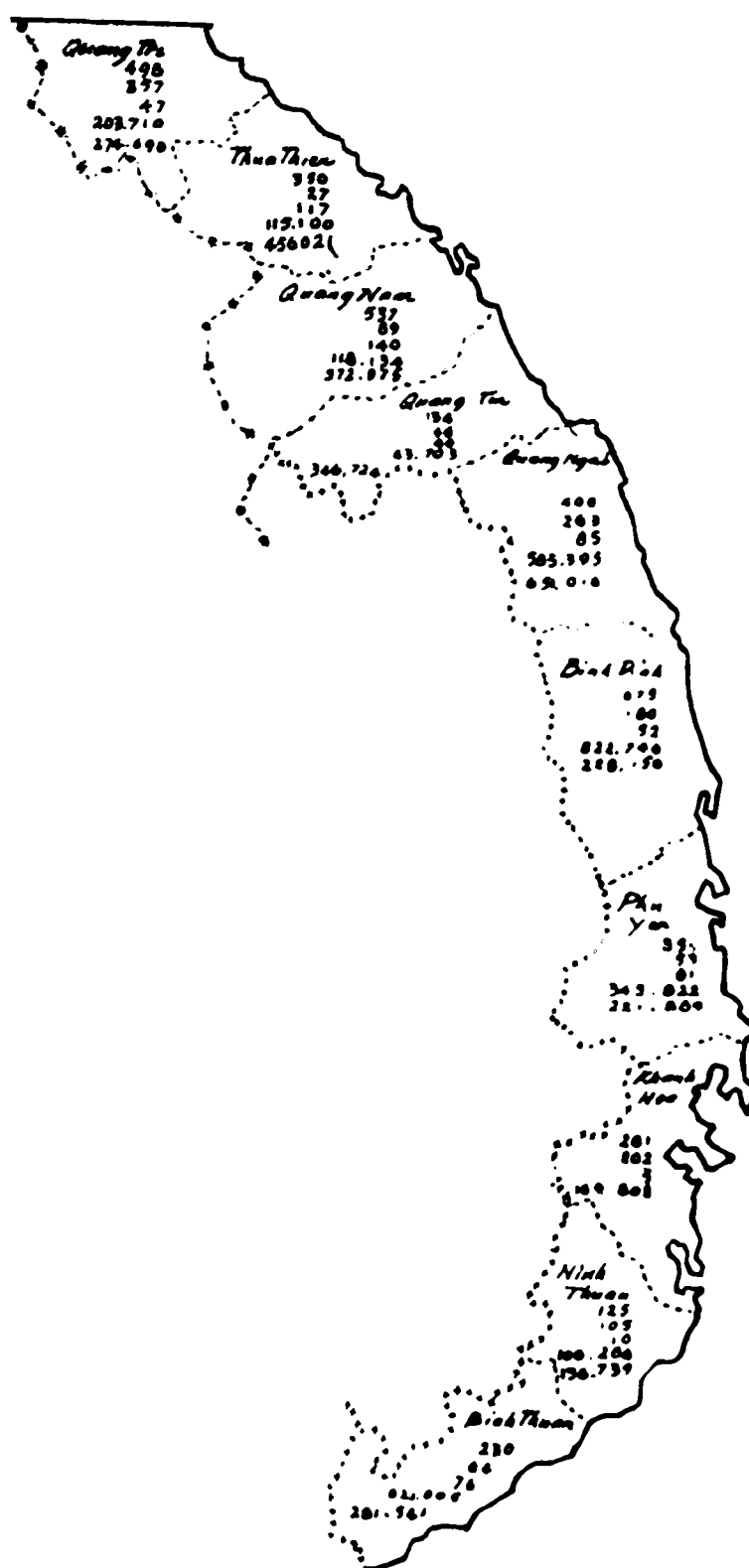


Figure 3.5 South Vietnam Central Lowlands¹⁵⁰

Table 3.4. Description of Numbers in Figure 3.5.

First Number	Second Number	Third Number	Fourth Number	Fifth Number
Total strategic hamlets planned for a province.	Total of strategic hamlets built.	Total strategic hamlets under construction.	Total population living in strategic hamlets	Total population for the province

¹⁵⁰ *The Times of Vietnam Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 43, October 28, 1962.

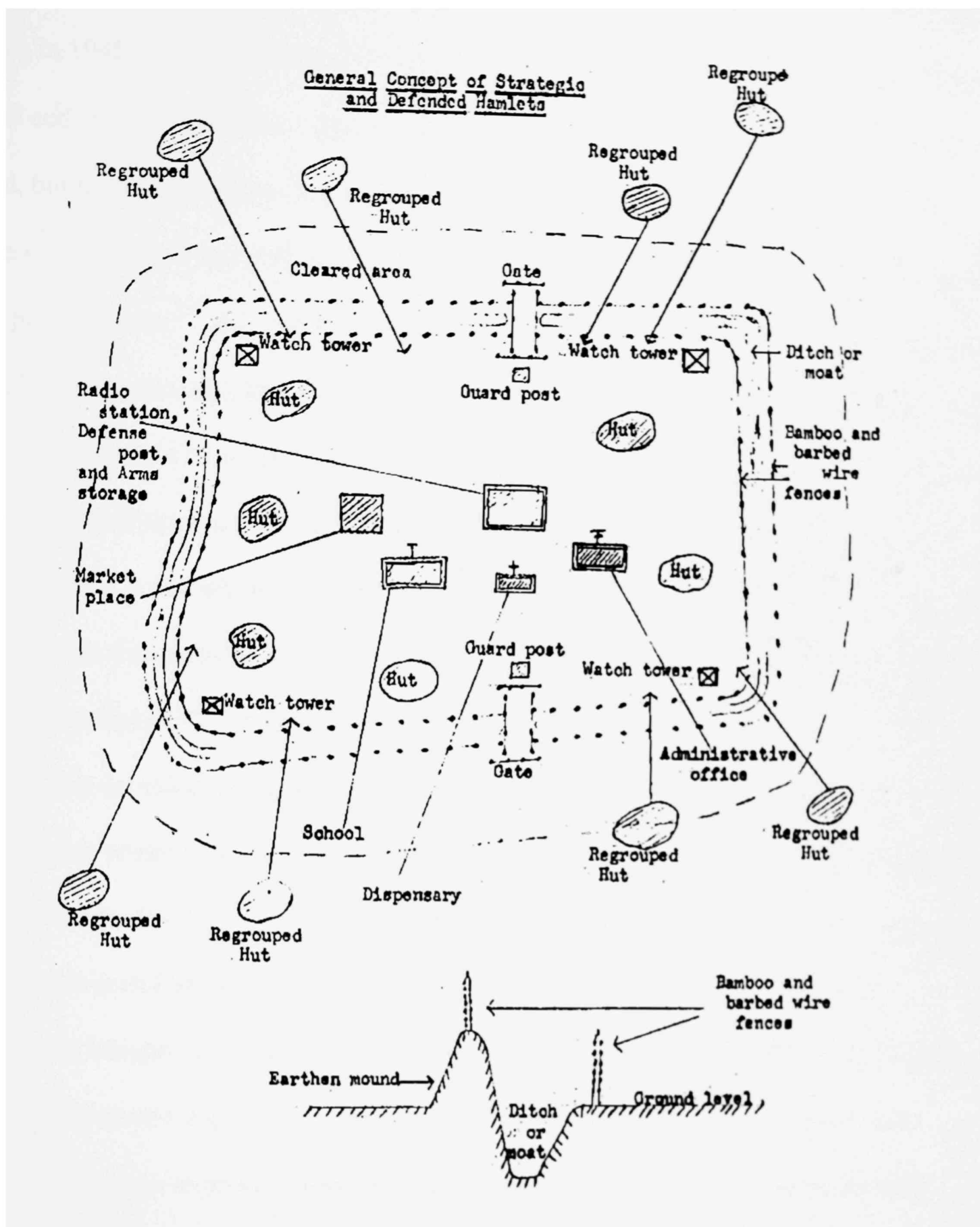


Figure 3.6 Diagram of a Typical Strategic Hamlet.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ *Foreign Office Files: United States of America, Series Two: Vietnam, 1959-1975 (Public Record Office Class FO 371/170100), Part 1. Vietnam, 1959-1963 (Marlborough: Adam Matthew Publications, 1998), 128.*

In 1963, the state of the Vietnamese police was equivalent to the Malayan police force in 1948. They were not able to deal with serious crimes, but only normal peacetime civil and criminal offenses. The village police force in Malaya had been increased seven fold, but in Vietnam, the task was left to the army and the paramilitary popular force. There was a significant difference between a trained policeman and a part-time villager in the popular force.¹⁵² In Vietnam, it was hard to recruit policemen, because the Viet Cong would kill anyone who arrested or interfered with them. Therefore, without the presence of a regular police force, the villagers could not feel secure when they went to sleep at night. "A well-armed, well-trained and sufficiently large force of village police would have been an invaluable tool against the VC when they were small bandit groups....In cooperation with some form of properly armed mobile force, such a force might well have controlled the VC from the beginning."¹⁵³

The development of the strategic hamlet program brought to the surface the GVN's plan to create a social revolution within South Vietnam. The social revolution was part of the South Vietnamese government's national policy of personalism. A group of young French Catholics developed the philosophy of personalism in the 1930s. Emmanuel Mounier, who led the personalists, along with others, published their ideas in the monthly review *Esprit*. Nhu met Mounier while studying in France at Ecole des Chartes. Nhu was impressed with the ideas of personalism. In turn, he convinced his brother Diem that personalism was the best philosophy to counter-balance the primitive

¹⁵² Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 70-71.

¹⁵³ Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 70-71.

type of Marxism that the Vietnamese communists tried to sell to the Vietnamese.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, Nhu believed that personalism was also the alternative to Western-style democracy, which embraces individual political and religious freedom.

The following description of personalism is based on the writings of personalists, found in Dennis J. Duncanson's book, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*. Christianity influenced personalist doctrine, but personalism claimed its independence from Christianity and professed that the person who transcended individualism, "could liberate [himself] from the determination alike of capitalism and Marxism, through [his] participation in the of social groups, family, [the] church, trade union, and so on."¹⁵⁵ Personalists also claimed that they did not "set out to be a hard and fast system of ideas, but a succession of intuitions marking a road each must follow on his own and as far as he can."¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the person living in a communal personalist state, had the opportunity to be more dignified and experience liberty underneath the "regulations and controls, reminiscent of totalitarian regimes, but differing from them, because in the latter unity and enthusiasm are brought about artificially and by lies whereas under a personalist regime they would be evoked as a spontaneous response to the leadership of persons of superior moral fiber."¹⁵⁷ In a personalist society the moral qualities to

¹⁵⁴ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 246.

¹⁵⁵ Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 216 as cited from the following: Jean-Marie Grevillot, *Les Grands Courants de la Pensee Contemporaine: Existentialisme, Marxisme, Personnalisme Chretien*, (Paris, 1947), 169, 230, 193, 260-261, 242-246.; Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism*, translated by P. Mairet, (London, 1952), 19, 103-105.; Jean Lacroix, *Marxisme, Existentialisme, Perrsonalisme*, (Paris, 1949), 185.

¹⁵⁶ Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 216.

¹⁵⁷ Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 216.

promote were, “loyalty, courage, humility, renunciation, sacrifice, [and] contentment with their lot.”¹⁵⁸

Although somewhat astray from Mounier’s personalist philosophy that economic development and political freedom could coincide with each other, the Diem regime, in particular Nhu and his wife, felt that economic development must precede political freedom, in essence, a Corporate State. Tran Le Xuan, better known as Madame Nhu, characterized best this corporate state view. With regards to the democratic state, she said, “the rights that [a] liberal state grants its citizens are in large part alienated by virtue of their [type of] economic and social existence.”¹⁵⁹ Likewise, “the parliamentary state is little more than an anachronism. Its wheels turn in mid-air; its speeches sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.”¹⁶⁰ She argued that:

Political democracy must be entirely reorganized on the basis of an effective economic democracy adapted to modern structures of production....[Power] can be founded only upon the final destiny of man; it must respect man and promote him....Popular sovereignty cannot be founded on the mere authority of numbers; [rule by] the great number (or the majority) can be as arbitrary as the [sovereigns] pleasure.¹⁶¹

“Ngo Dinh Nhu was convinced that the political structure of the corporate state was the right remedy for the three national ills of disunity, underdevelopment, and communist subversion.”¹⁶² Nhu went to great lengths to make evident that “the strategic hamlet

¹⁵⁸ Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 216.

¹⁵⁹ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 247.

¹⁶⁰ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 247.

¹⁶¹ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 247.

¹⁶² Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 217.

program was in the mainstream of the personalist philosophy, which the Diem regime considered South Vietnam's alternative to communism on one hand, and Western-type liberalism on the other."¹⁶³

Even though Diem subscribed to the personalist philosophy, he did not espouse it like his brother. Nevertheless, Diem did faintly echo the personalist philosophy in his "Double Seven"¹⁶⁴ speech on the eighth anniversary of his accession to power. In his speech, Diem proclaimed 1962 "the year of the strategic hamlets," and described their establishment as a "threefold political, social, and military revolution adapted to underdeveloped countries. Strategic hamlets bring the solution to our triple struggle against underdevelopment, disunity, and communism." Moreover, Diem defined strategic hamlets as "militant democracy in underdeveloped countries... the gaining of liberty, of habeas corpus, and social justice by all the people, liberating them from the grip of all determinists."¹⁶⁵ Nhu and Diem's ideological statements appear to contradict one another; nonetheless, the development of the strategic hamlet program grew into the South Vietnamese government's "major ideological and institutional tool in attempting to generate popular consensus in support of its efforts to defeat the enemy."¹⁶⁶

Regarding religion, a major stumbling block for the Diem Regime, Madame Nhu said, "Christian personalism shall underline, in opposition to religious individualism, the

¹⁶³ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Information Report Telegram, "Analysis of the Strategic Hamlets' Program and of the Montagnard Situation in South Vietnam," 11 July 1962, 2.

¹⁶⁴ "Double Seven" is the term for July 7th.

¹⁶⁵ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Analysis of the Strategic Hamlets' Program," 1-2

collective character of the Christian faith and life, which has been too much neglected over the past two centuries.” South Vietnamese leaders used this collective philosophy to emphasize that the regroupment of the rural population into agrovilles and strategic hamlets was “an expression of our [their] personalist views.”¹⁶⁷ This personalist view of religion helps to explain why Diem’s government failed miserably in its handling of the Buddhist crisis in 1963.

The British were skeptical whether the new social structure envisioned by Diem and Nhu would be an improvement when applied at the village level. H.A.F. Hohler commented in a dispatch that he doubted “whether personalism [had] sufficient appeal as a philosophy to ward off, and even supplant, the doctrines of Moscow and Peking...that [was] desired and preached by the [Vietnamese] communists.”¹⁶⁸ Further, if it was “stripped of its purple passages, [Vietnamese] personalism is not all that far removed from the doctrines of Marx and Lenin.”¹⁶⁹ Also, personalism had been declared on innumerable public occasions, but “it [had] never been simply codified in really intelligible and transmittable form.”¹⁷⁰

Although operations like Sea Swallow did not appear to worry the Viet Cong, they were worried about the overall strategic hamlet program; they were concerned that

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “Analysis of the Strategic Hamlets’ Program,” 1.

¹⁶⁷ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 247.

¹⁶⁸ H.A.F. Hohler, “The Strategic Hamlet Programme: Progress in 1962,” *Foreign Office Files United States of America, Series Two: Vietnam, 1959-1975 (Public Record Office Class FO 371/170100), Part 1: Vietnam, 1959-1963* (Marlborough: Adam Matthew Publications, 1998), 41-42

¹⁶⁹ Hohler, “The Strategic Hamlet Programme,” 42.

¹⁷⁰ Hohler, “The Strategic Hamlet Programme,” 60.

the program might succeed. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese knew that if the strategic hamlet program was able to sway the devotion of the South Vietnamese population towards the South Vietnamese government, their revolution would be in jeopardy. After all, the revolutionaries knew the importance of organizing villages because they had attempted to implement similar tactics in converting villages into combatant villages, the communist equivalent of a strategic hamlet, beginning in 1961.

The revolutionaries' attempt to convert villages into combatant villages is described in a translated report dated 14 October 1961. The bulk of this report consists of events that transpired at one village labeled XB, but to the careful reader this report demonstrates the revolutionaries' overall operating procedure and provides insight into what they encountered in other villages. The revolutionaries began agitating farmers to seek their own interests; the right to own land, or reduction of land rent. However, the revolutionaries' agitation of farmers did not start a mass movement and their struggle remained sporadic and weak, while government influence remained relatively strong. The revolutionaries then attempted to eliminate the influence of the government, especially the village notables and local security agents, usually by assassination. The revolutionaries failed to develop a mass base after the removal of the notables and agents and the government maintained its authority through village administration. Therefore, the revolutionaries began to hold meetings with the villagers and educated them regarding the revolution. The revolutionaries developed slogans, such as "Kill the Land Robbers" and "One Nail Board for Each Square of Land," which was used to persuade villagers to use force against the government.

At first, the revolutionaries had to carry the burden of making and placing rudimentary weapons for village defenses. The primary village defense weapons used were “naily boards,” metal or bamboo spikes attached to a board, then set in weeds or in marshland to pierce the shoe or foot of the enemy. Because the villagers were not accustomed to this practice, when the revolutionaries first tried to get the people to forge rudimentary weapons they encountered difficulties. Furthermore, the villagers thought the laying of “naily boards” was illegal and would result in reprisals by the government soldiers. As they placed “naily boards” around the villages and hamlets, the revolutionaries continued to educate and propagandize the villagers. The revolutionaries declared that “if the people did not lay 'naily boards,' the enemies would come to collect land rents, levy taxes, impose corvée labor and draft young men into the army.”¹⁷¹ After further educating the population of village XB, the revolutionaries had some success there. However, they did not fully realize their goals and had even less success in other villages. In summary, the revolutionaries believed the movement was weak because the cadres did not properly grasp party policy and lacked the revolutionary spirit. Further, they were not aligned with the thoughts and ideas of the people, and lacked the dedication of serving the masses and continuing the struggle for the people. Also, they were too bureaucratic and did not follow the methods the party prescribed, or study the local situation close enough. Moreover, local cadres inaugurated policies that were not rooted in the rights, interests, hopes, and feelings of the people and attempt to dogmatically

¹⁷¹ U.S. Department of Defense, Vietnamese Captured Document 1, “Organizing a Village in the Mekong Delta,” October 1961, 48.

indoctrinate the people with methods that are not pertinent to the situation.¹⁷² Although the revolutionaries did not have initial success with their combat hamlets, they were working at the grassroots level and learning from their mistakes.

Because the revolutionaries knew the importance of organizing the village population, when the South Vietnamese government instituted the strategic hamlet program, they had to act with urgency to defeat the program. The revolutionaries expressed their concern in a document dated October/November 1962. From the very beginning, when the GVN started to build strategic hamlets, the village communist party committee, as well as district commissars in charge of these villages, realized the danger to their insurgency, but they all believed that, they had good people, and the government would be unable to complete the work. Some communists even thought “the enemy would construct strategic hamlets for [their] benefit, therefore they neither opposed or made reports to higher authorities.”¹⁷³

The insurgents reported that when the GVN had completed the construction, their movement, naturally weak, declined very rapidly. The people became extremely confused and blamed the insurgent leadership for not standing against it earlier. Furthermore, the GVN was able to recruit the young men for its forces, organize more Republican Youth units, and initiate intelligence work.

Because of these developments, the political and armed elements found it difficult to conduct their activities. Each time they penetrated the area, they were all rounded up

¹⁷² U.S. Department of Defense, “Organizing a Village in the Mekong Delta,” 63.

¹⁷³ U.S. Department of Defense, Vietnamese Captured Document 35, “Experiences in the Anti-Strategic Hamlet Program,” October/ November, 1962, 2.

and pursued by the government forces. The cadre and insurgent village self-defense members were attacked and driven away, and consequently they could only adhere to hamlets at their outskirts. Provincial and district mobile units also found it difficult when they wanted to come to village elements.

The document went on to state, “our people are generally good, and do not like the U.S. and Diem, but when they are under oppression, they will unintentionally stand against the revolution. This is obviously their very wicked scheme learned from Malaya and now carried by U.S. and British advisors.”¹⁷⁴ On 17 April 1963, during a broadcast of the Clandestine Liberation Front Radio, the NLF proclaimed that the “National Assembly of Diem in Saigon approved the creation of a bastard, whose father is American and whose mother is British and which was put forward by the witch Ngo Dinh Nhu after months of scheming by [Professor Eugene] Staley¹⁷⁵ and Thompson.”¹⁷⁶

Many captured documents and radio broadcasts expressed this sense of urgency and concern, and also gave suggestions on how to combat the strategic hamlet program. Criticism of the strategic hamlet program was one of the principal themes of North Vietnamese propaganda, until the flare-up of the Buddhist crisis. Diem and Nhu’s mismanagement of the strategic hamlet program enabled the revolutionaries to be patient

¹⁷⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Vietnamese Captured Document 35. “Experiences in the Anti-Strategic Hamlet Program,” October/ November, 1962, 2-3. 6.

¹⁷⁵ In the summer of 1961, President John F. Kennedy sent professor Eugene Staley of Stanford to Vietnam on a fact-finding mission and to prepare a report on Diem’s needs. When he returned, Staley “recommended increasing Vietnamese army strength..., doubling the civil guard..., equipping the self defense corps with modern small arms and radios, and constructing a network of fortified, or strategic hamlets.” This recommendation is known as the Staley plan. Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History Volume II* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 983

¹⁷⁶ Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets*, 48.

and strike out when the opportunity arose. Thus, by mid-summer of 1963, due to the over extension of the strategic hamlet program and eruption of the Buddhist crisis, the revolutionaries easily overran a majority of the strategic hamlets and held them.

By 30 June 1962, the government had built approximately 2,000 strategic hamlets. This total represents an increase of 1,300 strategic hamlets from January 1962, an increase of about 200 hamlets per month. The South Vietnamese government had hoped to complete 7,000 strategic hamlets by the end of 1962 and 12,000 by the end of 1963. At the end of 1962, the government had completed 3,235 strategic hamlets, which housed about thirty-four percent of the population. The population percentages were “computed on the basis of reports submitted through the administrative hierarchy, from village to district to province, and from the province to the central government.” This system was not reliable and “there was the possibility that Viet Cong were recorded as living in the government controlled hamlets.”¹⁷⁷ The South Vietnamese government did not reach its projected goal of 12,000 strategic hamlets; by April 1963 they had built only 5,917 hamlets.¹⁷⁸

The strategic hamlet program progressed slowly because funding was inadequate. Unlike the subsequent new life hamlet (*ap tan sinh*) program, the strategic hamlet program did not have large-scale U.S. financial support.¹⁷⁹ Even though the strategic

¹⁷⁷ Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification*, 14.

¹⁷⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “Analysis of the Strategic Hamlets’ Program and of the Montagnard Situation in South Vietnam,” 4; Fall. *The Two Vietnams*, 376.

¹⁷⁹ Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification*, 13.

hamlet program experienced difficulties in the initial stages, the construction of strategic hamlets increased, but too rapidly in respect to the availability of funds.

The government built the strategic hamlets in such a reckless fashion that their establishment did little to deter the Viet Cong. In fact, the over extended program left pockets of Viet Cong who posed a constant threat in areas that should otherwise have been secure.¹⁸⁰ In contrast, by the end of the Malayan Emergency the British had built about 600 solidly defended hamlets housing approximately 500,000 people.

Because the South Vietnamese government had over extended its resources, the Vietnamese living in strategic hamlets could not defend themselves. This over extension was due largely to the South Vietnamese government's obsession with promoting the strategic hamlet program as a national rallying symbol and its lack of attention to detail and planning. Furthermore, the Buddhist crisis caused further chaos in the strategic hamlet program. The total collapse of the strategic hamlet program occurred in November 1963 after the assassination of Diem and his brother Nhu.

After the assassination of Diem and Nhu, the VC struck rapidly throughout the rural areas to destroy the government's pacification efforts. The U.S. tried to salvage the program and, by January 1964, strategic hamlets were renamed new life hamlets, which stressed rural reconstruction. For new life hamlets, six new criteria were developed for judging a hamlet's completion, as well as the institution of safeguards against forced relocation, which was widespread in the previous program. The six criteria for a new life hamlet were: "1) elimination of Viet Cong infrastructure; 2) trained and armed militia; 3)

¹⁸⁰ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. 137.

physical defenses completed; 4) communications systems for requesting reinforcement setup; 5) organization of community for civil defense and social development activities; 6) free election of hamlet committee by secret ballot.”¹⁸¹ The U.S. also increased funding a made a strong effort to get money into the rural areas that had been lacking during Diem’s regime. Although given a new name, the new life hamlet program also soon faltered, because of continuing political instability in Saigon in the wake of Diem's assassination. Table 3.5 is a comparison between the strategic hamlet program and the new life hamlet program. Table 3.6 on the following page is a general overview of the strategic hamlet program by corps tactical zone (CTZ) and province.

Table 3.5 Strategic and New Life Hamlet Programs.

Date	Hamlets Completed/Constructed	Hamlets Under Construction	Population in New Life Hamlets
September 1962	3,235	2,217	34%
*November 1963	8,544	1,051	85%
**April 1964	6,562	782	55%
***May 1964	4,207	n/a	n/a
December 1965	3,800	n/a	n/a

* Inflated data under Nhu program.

** Last revision under strategic hamlet criteria.

*** Re-revision under new life hamlet criteria.

n/a- Not available.

Source: William Nighswonger, *Rural pacification in Vietnam*.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ William Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 73

¹⁸² Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam*, 63

Table 3.6 Strategic Hamlet Statistics in Vietnam by CTZ and Province, as of July 31, 1963.

Provinces	Now Planned	USOM Funded	Completed EOM	Under Construction EOM	Population in Strategic Hamlets (Thousands)	% Population of Province in SH	Relocation/Resettlement into SH Highlanders	Relocation/Resettlement into SH Lowlanders	Militia men Trained to Date	Militia men in Hamlets Trained and Armed
First Region										
Quang Tri	498	—	441	—	—	—	—	600	—	—
Thua Thien	464	464	395	42	388.6	85	—	70	2364	1340
Quang Nam	537	243	332	173	369.2	63	56	3107	6058	2019
Quang Tin	292	172	243	49	184.2	40	170	2500	1655	607
Quang Ngai	430	419	316	95	537.8	87.5	311	2328	7791	4690
Second Region										
Binh Dinh	675	675	623	52	742.7	88	128	10506	7516	4999
Phu Yen	260	242	221	21	282.5	85	4219	3352	4526	3500
Khanh Hoa	286	—	234	52	194.2	70	638	958	3398	3082
Ninh Thuan	127	127	127	—	135.3	99	702	1121	1908	—
Binh Thuan	180	160	180	—	231.8	99	485	3228	546	210
Kontum	272	192	213	29	80.6	80	5000	—	3096	2840
Pleiku	247	162	127	63	82.1	61	—	—	1650	640
Phu Bon	147	100	47	53	21.5	35	4200	60	1921	1921
Darlac	367	—	230	36	148.8	84.7	3620	89	18464	10081
Third Region										
Quang Duc	76	60	60	16	33.3	92	3198	80	879	512
Tuyen Duc	136	69	59	52	37.2	56.7	2820	429	818	529
Phouc Long	105	93	103	2	60.1	92	5150	332	1126	400
Lam Dong	101	101	59	28	37.2	61	3347	653	1113	533
Binh Long	91	—	48	41	49.8	80	3500	601	352	176
Phouc Thanh	44	19	—	41	—	—	—	1903	340	—
Long Khanh	118	118	72	30	85.7	78	82	661	1829	330
Binh Tuy	63	63	47	16	36.5	61	209	889	3765	49
Tay Ninh	157	154	101	22	216.8	79	—	8585	1751	1236
Binh Dong	205	154	107	39	158.7	52	—	31782	2079	1040
Gia Dinh	307	307	307	—	741.2	—	—	9675	2486	278
Bien Hoa	130	—	141	39	—	—	—	—	2525	—
Phouc Tuy	162	162	135	26	121	87	455	2302	1711	118
Fourth Region										
Long An	450	282	224	50	217.4	44	—	1200	2856	1565
Kien Tuong	70	70	61	6	50.5	90	—	—	488	200
Dinh Tuong	426	—	171	—	—	—	1660	—	1307	—
Kien Phong	216	216	170	15	233	75	—	3003	2366	—
An Giang	521	521	439	52	700.4	83.3	—	1930	3127	2415
Vinh Long	247	133	219	24	436.7	81	—	1335	4941	4941
Kien Hoa	582	166	200	72	244.5	46	—	4163	4541	1899
Vinh Binh	647	570	451	62	408.9	76.8	—	4947	5875	4121
Kien Giang	223	189	185	38	237.2	65	—	800	1390	950
Phong Dinh	257	257	169	23	264.1	66	—	2495	1679	630
Chuong Thien	137	71	112	25	154.1	63	—	1000	930	582
Ba Xuyen	570	244	201	112	235.2	43	—	3929	1996	1690
An Xuyen	—	45	49	1	54.9	25	—	—	611	329
Totals	10,823	7,020	7,619	1,497	8,213.7	70.7%	39,950	110,613	113,774	60,452

Source: *Monthly Provincial Statistical Report on Strategic Hamlets: July 31, 1963* (USOM/Vietnam Office for Rural Affairs).¹⁸³

¹⁸³ USOM/ Vietnam Office for Rural Affairs, *Monthly Provincial Statistical Report on Strategic Hamlets: July 31, 1963* (Saigon: Vietnam Office for Rural Affairs, 1963).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The use of the British resettlement model helped defeat the communists in Malaya, but fell well short of the desired goal in Vietnam. In Vietnam, there were many more insurgents than those in Malaya. Furthermore, the insurgents in Vietnam benefited from hundreds of miles of uncontrolled frontiers. Moreover, generally during the period of American involvement, North Vietnam gave material aid and moral support to southern insurgents, who possessed the framework of an alternative administration on both the civil and military sides that was by and large organized in a more complete and disciplined manner than the GVN.¹⁸⁴ During the French colonial period, an efficient prefectural administration existed down to the provincial and district levels, but, after their defeat in 1954, the seasoned cadre of French administrators were withdrawn, which left no experienced Vietnamese ready to replace them. Thus, the Diem regime had to build its administration from the ground up. The majority of Diem's best administrators gained their experience through collaboration with the French, or had come from the north, and were, accordingly, easy targets for detraction. Diem's political position should have been a strong one, because he was the ruler of an independent state. However, villages in Vietnam have always enjoyed a measure of autonomy and were reluctant to embrace the GVN's political, economic, and social revolution. In Malaya, great

¹⁸⁴ Hohler, "The Strategic Hamlet Programme," 54.

emphasis was placed on the development of an efficient administration, including a competent police force, down to the village level.

In Malaya, the Chinese were easily discernable from the Malays and Indians, which allowed the government to focus on one segment of the population. However, it must be noted that the guerrillas, were not always physically distinguishable from the non-communists, because the majority of guerrillas were Chinese who fought among almost wholly Chinese squatters and villagers. “The only people in the Chinese villages who were physically distinguishable from the guerrillas were the handful of uniformed Malay policemen.”¹⁸⁵ Government forces in Vietnam did not have one ethnic group on which they could focus; thus, it was harder to locate Viet Cong guerrillas living among the population. The squatters in Malaya were products of economic depression and Japanese brutality. Therefore, the act of resettlement, in most cases, provided a better life for the squatters. The squatters enjoyed new urban amenities, such as schools and medical facilities. The “new villages” provided such a better life that many of them remain intact today. In Vietnam, the government resettled people whose families had been living on the same tracts of land for generations. Although new urban amenities were planned for the Vietnamese, the villagers had to provide corvée labor to complete any of the planned projects, which meant lost time in their fields. Rural Vietnamese preferred to be left alone, so that they could conduct their lives as they always had. By uprooting and resettling them, the South Vietnamese government caused greater hardships for the rural Vietnamese, which increased anti-government sentiment.

¹⁸⁵ Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 66.

The two key aspects of British success in Malaya were economics and politics; both posed serious problems in Vietnam. One of the most important factors in Britain's success in Malaya was the economic prosperity Malaya achieved as a result of the Korean War. Malaya's tin and rubber industries grew substantially during the early stages of the Korean War. The growth in these industries provided jobs for the population. But even more important was the fact that the additional revenue allowed the British-led government to finance the resettlement program in its initial stages. In Vietnam, the South Vietnamese government lacked the resources to properly fund the agrovillage and strategic hamlet programs and forced the peasants themselves to pay for something they clearly did not want.

Politically, the British guided the disparate political parties in Malaya to independence by compromising on divisive issues. The cooperation between the MCA, UMNO, and MIC was vital to Malaya's independence. In Vietnam, the Diem regime, and even the French, governed the country more like a dictatorship and callously imposed their rule, which hindered the participation of competing entities.

Numerous authors have written about the use of resettlement villages in Malaya and Vietnam. The majority of works are generally military analyses that only briefly address the impact upon the affected populations. A few works do address the effect of resettlement on village populations, but more research needs to be conducted. Other issues that can be expanded on are the economic effects on the population and political cooperation, or lack of cooperation. Historians may also want to look at race, class, and gender issues. Perhaps the best possible sources for these issues are observations

recorded by missionaries, anthropologists, and humanitarian organizations. Nevertheless, enough literature has been produced about the use of resettlement villages as a counter-insurgency technique during the Cold War that has proven that it is not easy to transplant one country's successful program to another.

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