

MEMORANDUM
RM-5086-1-ISA/ARPA
FEBRUARY 1967

EVOLUTION OF A
VIETNAMESE VILLAGE — PART III:
DUC LAP SINCE NOVEMBER 1964 AND SOME
COMMENTS ON VILLAGE PACIFICATION

R. Michael Pearce

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PREPARED FOR:
ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY

Rand
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FOREWORD

This report is one of a series of Rand studies that examine the organization, operations, motivation, and morale of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces that fought in South Vietnam.

Between August 1964 and December 1968 The Rand Corporation conducted approximately 2400 interviews with Vietnamese who were familiar with the activities of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army. Reports of those interviews, totaling some 62,000 pages, were reviewed and released to the public in June 1972. They can be obtained from the National Technical Information Service of the Department of Commerce.

The release of the interviews has made possible the declassification and release of some of the classified Rand reports derived from them. To remain consistent with the policy followed in reviewing the interviews, information that could lead to the identification of individual interviewees was deleted, along with a few specific references to sources that remain classified. In most cases, it was necessary to drop or to change only a word or two, and in some cases, a footnote. The meaning of a sentence or the intent of the author was not altered.

The reports contain information and interpretations relating to issues that are still being debated. It should be pointed out that there was substantive disagreement among the Rand researchers involved in Vietnam research at the time, and contrary points of view with totally different implications for U.S. operations can be found in the reports. This internal debate mirrored the debate that was then current throughout the nation.

A complete list of the Rand reports that have been released to the public is contained in the bibliography that follows.

(CRC, BJ: May 1975)

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PREFACE

This is the third and final Memorandum reporting on a field study of Duc Lap village, Hau Nghia province, Republic of Vietnam. Part I^{*} reported on the events and situation in the village from April to November 1964, while Part II^{**} provided the historical background of Duc Lap since 1945. The purpose of Part III is threefold: First, the narrative of events and description of the situation in Duc Lap are extended up to April 1966. No attempt is made to present an exhaustive history of the past 18 months in Duc Lap; rather, only those events which have contributed to the current deterioration of GVN (Government of Vietnam) influence in the village will be considered. Second, based on the Duc Lap experience and that of two other widely separated villages in Vietnam, a generalized picture is drawn of a "contested village." Finally, suggestions are made for regaining the initiative in Duc Lap within the context of the present GVN/US pacification program, utilizing available material and human resources.

^{*}RM-4552-ARPA, Evolution of a Vietnamese Village--Part I: The Present, After Eight Months of Pacification.

^{**}RM-4692-ARPA, Evolution of a Vietnamese Village--Part II: The Past, August 1945 to April 1964.

SUMMARY

According to the 1964 Hau Nghia province pacification plan, Duc Lap village was to be a center from which the theoretical pacification "oil spot" would spread into the surrounding area. By early November 1964 it appeared that pacification in Duc Lap was on the threshold of expanding south out of the village towards My Hanh village, itself another "oil spot."

Unfortunately, what happened in Duc Lap after November 1964 was not the expansion of pacification as planned, but a series of incidents which marked the beginning of the decline of government control in the village and which resulted in the virtual abandonment of the village. The first of these incidents was the accidental killing of the commander of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) battalion assigned to provide security for Duc Lap, and his American advisor. Both these men had been instrumental in the success of pacification in Duc Lap to that date. Although there may have been no connection with this accident, a new battalion was transferred almost immediately into Duc Lap from Central Vietnam. Not being familiar with its responsibility of providing protection for the village, the new battalion left Duc Lap unguarded during an operation a few days after its arrival. The Viet Cong took immediate advantage of the opportunity to penetrate two hamlets, causing considerable damage. The process of deterioration had begun in earnest.

Shortly thereafter, several members of the local defense force defected to the Viet Cong and the force was disbanded. In the ensuing confusion the Hoa Hao militia who had been in the village since 1961 asked to be relieved of duty. The Viet Cong continued their activities in the village and killed two ARVN soldiers in broad daylight. The battalion suspected the Hoa Hao militia of the murders, and a schism developed between the two defense forces in the village.

A coup d'état in Saigon forced the battalion to leave the village a second time. The Viet Cong again penetrated, causing more damage. By this time the village population's confidence in the government to provide security for them was severely shaken. Internally, the village

administration had lost, either through Viet Cong terror or by resignations, most of the hamlet chiefs.

In an apparent effort to show the people of Duc Lap that it could do something concrete in the village, the government built a new outpost on the eastern edge of the village. The Hoa Hao militia had been persuaded to remain in the village and to man the outpost. Because they still retained responsibility for the security of the province airfield and Go Cao hamlet, in addition to the new outpost, the militia had to recruit new men, some of whom were not Hoa Hao.

In March 1965 a Ranger battalion was assigned to Duc Lap. The security situation then appeared to have stabilized until a month later when the Viet Cong overran the outpost, killing five Hoa Hao and escaping with most of the weapons. The Ranger battalion which was in the village at the time did not respond to the outpost's plea for help. It was suspected, but never proven, that the overrunning of the outpost was an inside job and that the Viet Cong agent was a security man sent from the province office.

Viet Cong activity in Duc Lap continued on a small scale in the village until September 1965 when they made their first of three all-out attempts to drive the ARVN out and control the village. The second attack, in October, was quite similar to the first, and in both cases the defending Ranger battalions received heavy casualties. The Viet Cong also lost many men and failed to take the village in each instance.

The Viet Cong launched their third, largest, and last attack on the village in December. As in the previous attempts, the Viet Cong succeeded in driving the defending Rangers out of the village only to have them return with artillery and air support in a matter of hours. Throughout all three of these battles for Duc Lap, the civilian population suffered heavily in casualties and property damage. Many villagers had seen the futility of remaining in the village under such conditions and had fled.

Although the Viet Cong method of trying to take over Duc Lap seemed fairly clear--terror against the local population, penetrations of the village by armed guerrillas, attack on the outpost, and finally, the three full-scale attacks on the village--it was not until January 1966

that a possible reason for the Viet Cong determination to control the village was learned. A captured Viet Cong map showed their new liaison corridor running right through the village. The Viet Cong had hoped to alienate the population from the ARVN battalion in the village through terror and intimidation, thereby depriving the government forces of intelligence and support. The second phase of their plan was to drive the ARVN out of the village by means of full-scale attacks and thus preserve their infiltration route through Duc Lap.

Indeed, the Viet Cong plan appeared to work, as the remaining ARVN force did move its headquarters compound out of the village; also, over 75 percent of the population had left the village, and about as many houses in the village had been destroyed or torn down and not rebuilt.

The experience in Duc Lap was compared with village pacification programs in two other villages in Vietnam on the basis of five selected criteria. These criteria, which were developed from the successes and failures of pacification in Duc Lap, are (1) security, (2) village administration, (3) economic continuity, (4) rural health, and (5) education.

Phuoc Chau village is located in a valley in Quang Tin province in Central Vietnam. Pacification began in the village in February 1964 under the protection of an ARVN regiment. After the initial military clearing operation in the valley and the establishment of security, the other aspects of pacification were begun. First, a village chief and assistants were appointed, and it was through them that most of the pacification tasks were performed. Land distribution, self-defense, rice harvest, maternity clinic, and schools were some of the varied pacification problems which had to be solved by the village administration with the assistance of the ARVN regiment.

Within four months Phuoc Chau was well on the road to permanent pacification. Unfortunately, however, in June 1965 the ARVN regiment was ordered out of the valley and Phuoc Chau went back to the Viet Cong by default. Over 3000 of the 6000 people living in the valley left with the government forces. While the decision to pull the regiment out of the valley was probably correct, the commander of that unit was bitter about the order and could not see the possibility of ever winning the war if operations like this were continued.

My Long village in Vinh Binh province presented several contrasts to both Phuoc Chau and Duc Lap. This is a fishing village located on the Mekong river in the heart of the delta. Pacification in My Long began in January 1964 with the standard clearing operation by an ARVN battalion. The next step was the building of a Popular Force outpost in the village and the selection of a village administrative committee. Of the three men chosen to run the village, only the police officer proved up to the task, as the village chief and his deputy spent most of the time in the district town. In spite of this administrative deficiency, My Long was selected as a relocatee village into which almost 1000 people were moved from a Viet Cong-controlled area. Fifteen Viet Cong agents had been uncovered in the village, and the police official suspected that at least 30 more lived among the relocatees.

Economically, My Long was better off than either Duc Lap or Phuoc Chau, since the fecund fishing grounds of the Mekong provided a continuous source of income to the village. The relative prosperity of the village was reflected in the number of small businesses which started in My Long soon after the pacification program was begun.

One of the most visible results of the pacification program was a new village dispensary and maternity clinic. Built with funds provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and village self-help labor, this building was one of the proudest pacification achievements of the people of My Long. A new school was also built in My Long to replace the old one whose roof had been blown off during a storm and not replaced.

On the surface, it appeared that in My Long, as in Phuoc Chau, pacification was progressing. However, a visit to the village one year later, in June 1965, revealed that rather than expanding, pacification had indeed contracted in the village. In fact, only one hamlet out of eight could be considered in any way under pacification. A new village administrative committee had been appointed, but they were not much more effective than their predecessors. Although the village had not been attacked, as had Duc Lap, the only working hamlet chief had been killed and not replaced.

Perhaps the failure of pacification in My Long was most noticeable in the village market area, where most of the small businesses that had

begun with pacification were now closed. The fishing had also been disrupted by the war, and the annual catch was down from 500 tons per year to 70 or 80. No attempt had been made to open the only land route to the district and province capitals, thus My Long is still totally dependent on the Mekong river as a transport and communications artery.

The dispensary/maternity clinic is still operating, but on a reduced scale because of the lack of funds to pay a full-time midwife. The only enduring aspect of pacification in My Long appears to be the school, which still employs five full-time teachers.

Collectively, the experiences of Duc Lap, Phuoc Chau, and My Long can be synthesized into a generalized composite of the situation in the many other Vietnamese villages located in the so-called contested zones. The first characteristic of the contested villages is a general lack of security against Viet Cong harassment, penetrations, or worse.

As a result of the insecurity of these villages, the administration is usually inefficient. Viet Cong terror has purposely been directed at Government of Vietnam (GVN) village officials to drive them from their jobs. When this occurs, the village is left without an administration, which makes Viet Cong control considerably easier.

To compound the situation, the economic life in a contested village is at best disrupted, if not altogether destroyed. Because of the fighting, the villagers cannot go to their fields to work, and because of road and canal destruction, they cannot move their produce to market. Thus, the economic production and standard of living decline.

War is frequently accompanied by poor health conditions, and in the contested villages the lack of proper medical facilities has probably accounted for untold fatalities which could have been avoided. In addition, destruction of existing health facilities, purposely by the Viet Cong and sometimes accidentally by the GVN, has contributed to this serious social problem.

Although almost every village in Vietnam has a school, in the contested villages these are usually substandard. Both the Viet Cong and the GVN appreciate the value of education, and schools are rarely destroyed on purpose by either side.

The experiences of Duc Lap, Phuoc Chau, and My Long suggest that to regain the initiative in the villages of Vietnam, a coordinated pacification program is needed, similar to that which is already being attempted by the current Revolutionary Development program. The Revolutionary Development team in Duc Lap was observed for only a short time, thus no definite conclusions could be drawn from their activities. The overriding consideration in the present proposal is that of security, both within and outside of the village. External security is generally provided by an ARVN unit which extends protection against major Viet Cong attacks. Sometimes, such as in Duc Lap, when the Viet Cong are determined to take a village, even the presence of an ARVN unit does not guarantee freedom from such incidents.

The other aspect of security is that of an internal security, or village defense, force. The Hoa Hao militia in Duc Lap could be the basis for such a force, which would eventually grow to include local villagers. The GVN Popular Force Command has an ongoing program which trains Popular Force units within their own village. The 12-day training cycle includes motivational training in an attempt to avoid situations such as occurred in Duc Lap when half the local Combat Youth defected to the Viet Cong.

Once a reasonable degree of security has been established in the village, the next step would be to train village officials for the further implementation of the pacification program. It is suggested that a village administration training scheme be developed to train villagers within their own villages. Under this program, such procedures as the processing of I.D. cards, birth and death certificates, and other papers would be taught on a simplified and uniform basis. File-keeping, elementary budgeting, and tax-collection methods would also be covered. As direct benefit to the village officials themselves, a simple method of computing and reporting time sheets would be introduced to avoid one of the fundamental problems in recruiting village officials in Vietnam--the poor pay system.

Concurrent with this training program would be an information program designed to explain to the village officials their responsibilities in the administration of the village, and to tell the people the benefits they would receive under an improved village-administration system.

The problem of maintaining economic continuity in the village while it is undergoing pacification would be met with a program aimed not at changing the production of the village, but rather at improving the methods used, to bring a greater return to the villager. The most urgent priority would be given to those programs which would require little technology or expense to implement and yet would give the villager the most direct return. Examples of such economic assistance are pig programs, rice seed, and fertilizer.

Rural health is one of the major social aspects of pacification in which the GVN has clear superiority over the Viet Cong. Yet little appears to have been done to press this advantage. A program similar to the self-defense and village-administration training is suggested, in which locally trained nurses would be taught to care for the most common local diseases and ailments with simple, effective treatment. Under this program the nurses could be trained in their village by a national government training team which would visit the villages undergoing pacification on a regularly scheduled basis.

A second social aspect of pacification in which the government has a distinct advantage over the Viet Cong is the ability to provide education for the villagers. Not only could elementary schooling be improved but a rural scholarship program could be organized to provide high-school education for qualified village-school graduates. On a much smaller basis, the opportunity to attend the university in Saigon could be extended to exceptionally qualified students through the rural scholarship program. Clearly, the Viet Cong cannot offer these educational opportunities to the villagers in the areas under their control.

Much of the Viet Cong success thus far in the war can be attributed to their organization, dedication, and discipline. In order to combat and defeat the Viet Cong on all fronts in the war, the government must be equally organized, dedicated, and disciplined. The basic ingredient of the revolutionary war in Vietnam is the individual villager. The basic ingredient in any pacification program designed to gain the villagers' support should be nhân đạo (humanity).

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I. INTRODUCTION

On February 7, 1965, the Vietnam "war" changed. What had before been a conflict generally limited to actions within the borders of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) was at that time expanded to include an international conflict with daily bombing raids (by U.S. aircraft and pilots) into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Soon to follow the bombing raids in the North was the introduction of U.S. combat troops into South Vietnam.

On February 7, 1965, the nature of the conflict inside South Vietnam had not changed. It was still a revolutionary war being fought on the jungle-covered mountains, in the lowland rice fields, and in the villages. The Viet Cong insurgents, although increasingly bolstered by troops from the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), were essentially still carrying on their guerrilla-type war, while the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) continued to fight them with conventional-warfare methods. The newly introduced U.S. combat forces brought increased mobility and firepower with them to buttress the sagging ARVN and took a direct combat role against the Viet Cong/NVA Main Force.

This well-publicized war between the Viet Cong Main Force and U.S.-ARVN troops has completely overshadowed the continuing more subtle struggle still taking place in Vietnam. "The battle for the villages" in Vietnam is not only a shadow struggle subordinate to the more conventional fighting currently being pursued there, but as Roger Hilsman suggested in his Foreword to People's War People's Army,^{*} it "may yet rank as one of the decisive battles of world history."

The present study is an attempt to better understand the nature of the battle for the villages by placing it in the context of the revolutionary war which began 20 years ago and is still being fought in Vietnam today. To understand this struggle, therefore, it seems necessary to have a basic understanding of the villages themselves.

For this purpose one village in Vietnam, Duc Lap, has been studied intensively over the past two years in order to draw out of its experience those guidelines or themes which seem most general and applicable

^{*} Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, New York, 1962.

to the villages of Vietnam. This is not to imply that the lessons of Duc Lap will be exactly repeated throughout Vietnam; but field work conducted in other villages indicates that many of the problems currently being faced in Duc Lap are similar to those in villages in other areas of Vietnam.

The experience in Duc Lap has shown that the battle for the villages is more than a cliché; it is a fact. Basically, it is not a battle in the strictest military sense, but rather it is a struggle for security from violence and against the numerous social, political, and economic problems besetting a recently independent, formerly colonial country. Aside from the obvious threats of intimidation, terrorism, and attack, some of the problems involved in this type of struggle are ineffective or nonexistent village-level government, corruption, double taxation, a declining economy, social disruption, lack of adequate educational facilities, and substandard health conditions.

The target in the battle for the villages is the individual villager (living in his own village). When it is remembered that over 70 percent of the population of Vietnam lives in villages, the necessity of gaining the support of this majority of the people in the current revolutionary war becomes more apparent. Tied by tradition to his family, simple in desires, generally suspicious of outsiders, this same Vietnamese villager has at times proved to be an indefatigable fighter when he fights for a cause in which he believes.

The appropriate weapons and tactics to be used in the battle for the villages are largely not to be found in any military arsenal. Because this type of struggle is also fought on a social-political-economic front with little emphasis on the common military methods of warfare, the traditional means of fighting are not considered totally adequate for it.

Strategically, the battle for the villages is inherently protracted. Rapid victories are rare; instead, the fight is generally carried on with consistent programs aimed at small but effective gains rather than quick, spectacular, and temporary solutions. It is in terms of tactics that perhaps the most innovative methods must come. What is required is to bring in the necessary resources and methods to

adequately wage the war down to the village level. Bureaucratic blocks, corruption, and the myriad minor obstacles must be removed. Moreover, the battlefield for the struggle must be clearly recognized, which means seeing the villages of Vietnam not only as a collection of dirty, brown, thatched huts but as the homes of people who are willing to be helped and to help themselves, provided they can be protected.

Both the Viet Cong insurgents and the GVN are waging the battle for the villages. Because they are closer to the villages and the villagers, today the Viet Cong have the edge. Paradoxically, it is the GVN which has the material and technical advantages in this struggle, yet the Viet Cong, without the present ability to really provide the necessary solutions for the problems of the villagers, have convinced many of them that if they succeed to power, they will be able to fulfill all promises made to the people. Much of the Viet Cong success thus far in the battle for the villages may be attributed to their deliberate effort to identify themselves with the villagers, their problems, and their grievances. Moreover, the Viet Cong influence over the villagers of Vietnam is based upon five years or more of uninterrupted control in many areas. In addition, the Viet Cong use one weapon of which the GVN is nominally deprived--terror.

Recent events in Duc Lap village provide insight into the nature of the battle for the villages being waged in Vietnam today. Although the village is still considered to be comprised of six hamlets, Tan Hoi and Cay Sen hamlets have fallen completely under Viet Cong control; security in Go Cao and Duc Hanh A and B hamlets is marginal and sometimes nonexistent. Three times during 1965, Ap Chanh (the main hamlet) was completely overrun by the Viet Cong, which resulted in great personal and property damage, not to mention the less obvious effects upon the villagers' attitudes toward their situation.

By April 1966 Duc Lap had been under various GVN pacification programs for two years. Unfortunately, at the end of that period the villagers' attitude toward the GVN appeared, in general, to be worse than it was before pacification began. In 1964 the villagers of Duc Lap had the hope that pacification would be at least a partial answer to their problems of security and inadequate village administration and

would also provide economic and social assistance; now even that hope is gone. The people of Duc Lap have seen the failure of two major government attempts to pacify the village: first, the Strategic Hamlet Program of the Diem regime; and second, the various post-Diem GVN pacification programs ranging from "oil spot" to New Rural Life Hamlets. As a result of these failures, the villagers of Duc Lap were understandably disillusioned, and their willingness to support the GVN has waned considerably. This was particularly noticeable during the last few weeks of observation in Duc Lap. At that time a 59-man Revolutionary Development Cadre team began to operate in the village in connection with the latest GVN/US pacification program. Although this team was supposedly self-sufficient, including their own defense, they worked in Duc Lap only during the day and retreated each night to Bao Trai, the province capital, two miles away. The lack of self-confidence displayed by the Revolutionary Development Cadre did not go unnoticed by the villagers of Duc Lap, one of whom said, "How do they expect us to have confidence in them when they leave the village every night while we have to stay here and face the Viet Cong?"

The change in the people's attitude was particularly felt by the author and his research assistant, Mr. Nguyen Quang Minh. Whereas in November 1964 most of the people in the then-secure hamlets of Duc Lap would consent to interviews, six months later it was increasingly difficult to talk to the villagers. By the spring of 1966 many of the same people previously contacted refused to talk to an American, or even to a Vietnamese who was not a resident of the village. This complete withdrawal of some of the villagers could be partially explained by the deterioration of the security situation in Duc Lap. Before, the people had reasonable assurance of security against Viet Cong reprisal if they talked to a foreigner; now they have witnessed the inability or unwillingness of the government troops stationed in their village to protect them, and each failure on the part of the government to provide security for the villagers of Duc Lap makes the task of pacifying the village all the more difficult.

If the GVN is to adequately fight the battle for the villages, it must use all the human, technical, and material resources it has at hand

in imaginative and effective programs. Copious evidence from the past few years shows that haphazard or poorly planned programs in the battle for the villages often do more harm than good and make a successful conclusion all the more difficult, if not unattainable.

II. THE 1964 PACIFICATION PLAN FOR DUC LAP

Before looking in detail at the events which took place in Duc Lap after November 1964, a brief review of the proposed implementation of the Hau Nghia province pacification plan in the village might be instructive as a basis with which to compare what actually happened in Duc Lap.

In accordance with the province pacification plan, six months after the initial entry (in April 1964) of an ARVN battalion into Duc Lap to provide security for the pacification cadre--during which time the New Life Hamlets were to be consolidated within the village in order to meet six New Rural Life hamlet criteria^{*}--the pacification program would expand from the theoretical "oil-spot" thus created. The expansion of the pacification effort from Duc Lap could feasibly go in two directions: (1) south from Ap Chanh through Bao Sen and Hau Hoa hamlets in the direction of My Hanh village, or (2) north past the hamlets of Tan Hoi and Cay Sen toward the village of Tan My (see Fig. 1). Expansion to the east was blocked by the swamp which separates Duc Hoa and Cu Chi districts. To the west was Bao Trai, the province capital, which was an "oil-spot" in its own right.

Of the two possible directions for expansion, that to the south was chosen, in accordance with the Duc Hoa district and Hau Nghia province pacification plans. A secondary road (single-lane, dirt) ran south out of Ap Chanh hamlet in Duc Lap through Hau Hoa hamlet in the direction of My Hanh village. Reconnaissance patrols from the battalion headquarters in Ap Chanh indicated that although cut in many places, the road to My Hanh could be easily repaired for vehicular use. Another reason for expansion in the direction of My Hanh was that that village was planned as a refugee center and a pacification "oil-spot." Expansion toward My Hanh would also be theoretically correct, as two "oil-spots" would spread out until they joined, thus forming a larger pacified area.

Expansion to the north toward Tan My was considerably more risky than in the direction of My Hanh. There is only a very poor road

^{*}For a detailed description of the six hamlet criteria as applied in Duc Lap, see Part I of this study, RM-4552-1-ARPA, pp. 18-19.

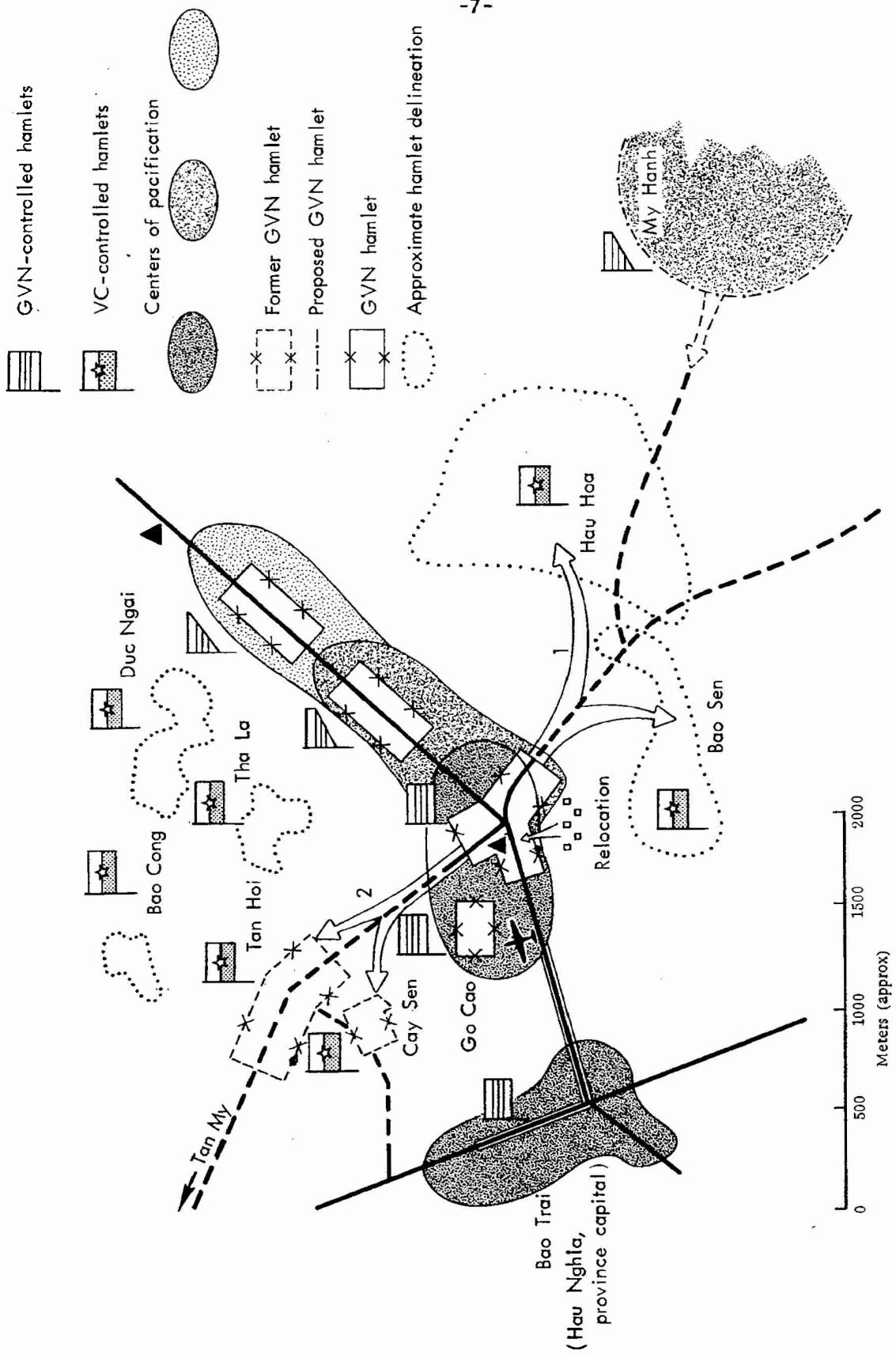


Fig. 1—Proposed pacification expansion

leading from Duc Lap in that direction, and the swamp running east of the village curves north around Tan My, providing a natural hiding place for Viet Cong guerrillas on two sides of the village. Although it would have been militarily expedient to move in a northerly direction in an attempt to dislodge the local Viet Cong company which supposedly operated from Duc Ngai and Bao Cong hamlets against Duc Lap, it was feared that a pacification attempt in an area which was heavily controlled by the Viet Cong would not only be more difficult but would also run the risk of failure--a result which would bode no good for future pacification efforts in the rest of the province. Moreover, a high percentage of the population in the area north of Duc Lap reportedly supported the Viet Cong, making pacification there doubly difficult.

The province pacification officials decided it was better to take the smaller and surer step toward My Hanh, rather than leap off in an unsure direction. Once Duc Lap achieved "oil-spot" status (the exact criteria of which were never clearly defined), the expansion of the pacification effort toward My Hanh could begin.

On paper, the planned expansion of pacification from Ap Chanh looked good, although by November 1964--eight months after the beginning of the pacification program in Duc Lap--the village was still undergoing pacification, and it was not considered secure enough by some U.S. officials to become an "oil-spot." Nevertheless, in November 1964 the province officials decided to expand from Ap Chanh in an effort to secure some of the nearby areas belonging to Hau Hoa and Bao Sen hamlets. The first step in this direction was to move approximately 20 families from along the southern fringe of Duc Lap into the vacant areas within the perimeter fence of Ap Chanh. This was to be a relatively small relocation, but it would be the first step in achieving an area cleared of Viet Cong and their supporters, from which more ambitious efforts could be launched.

That this planned small-scale expansion of the pacification program in Duc Lap never took place is mute testimony of the real situation in the village at that time. In fact, with the benefit of several months hindsight, it appears that November 1964 was the high point of

the village pacification program. Since then the situation in Duc Lap has grown steadily worse.

What has happened in Duc Lap since November 1964 has been a deterioration of the security situation, with a concomitant lack of support by the village population for the government; in fact, some villagers even refuse to associate with any government-sponsored program. Graphically, the extent of government control in Duc Lap could be described as parabolic. That is, in April 1964, at the start of pacification in Duc Lap, government control was low. It gradually rose through the pacification program to its high point in November 1964, then declined to its present position, which in most respects is worse than the situation in April 1964.

III. DUC LAP SINCE NOVEMBER 1964

While the series of events which contributed to the deterioration of government control in Duc Lap are complex and interrelated, one specific incident might be singled out as the beginning of the decline.

THE BEGINNING OF THE DECLINE IN GOVERNMENT CONTROL

On the night of November 8, 1964, the American advisor to the 3rd Battalion, 46th Regiment, ARVN, was killed along with the battalion commander and another Vietnamese soldier by mortar rounds from the battalion compound which fell short of their target.* Within two days of this unfortunate accident, the battalion which had been in Duc Lap since the beginning of the pacification program in April and had been relatively successful in securing the village was transferred to another province, and another battalion was sent to the village.

While the deaths of the battalion commander and his American advisor cannot be considered to have contributed directly to the untimely move of the battalion from Duc Lap--there had been unofficial rumors for weeks that the battalion would be moved because it had been in the village too long [sic]--they could be used as a pretext to replace the battalion.

As a result of the deaths, the pacification program in Duc Lap was dealt a double blow. First, the battalion had been in Duc Lap for eight months, and security in the village had reached its highest point. There had been no major Viet Cong penetration of the village since the battalion's arrival, and the people in the village had begun to show confidence in the ARVN troops' ability to protect them. The relative security of Duc Lap at that time appears to be mostly the result of the operating policies of the battalion commander and his American advisor. Aggressive night patrols and ambushes were the modus operandi of the battalion security forces, and in addition, the village was never left totally unguarded when the battalion went out on an

* This incident is explained in more detail in Part I of this study, RM-4552-ARPA, pp. 30-31.

operation. At least one company remained scattered throughout the village to insure continuing security against possible Viet Cong attempts to penetrate the village.

The second loss to the pacification program in Duc Lap was that of the invaluable contribution made by the battalion commander and his American advisor. Both men had developed a strong personal relationship with the villagers. They were both thoroughly aware of the problems confronting them in their attempt to pacify Duc Lap, and neither of them tried to delude the other with false impressions on the progress of their work.

Moreover, both men formed an individual personal attachment to their task that probably goes a long way toward explaining their success. The American advisor attempted to learn Vietnamese and spent many hours a day conversing with villagers in simple but effective sentences about their lives, their aspirations, and how he might be able to help them. While it often proves fatal in a wartime situation such as exists today in Vietnam to form personal attachments, both men became extremely friendly with several families in Duc Lap and visited their houses often to discuss problems in the village. They in turn were invited by the villagers to private ceremonies, weddings, funerals, or ancestor worships. In short, what for many might merely have been another routine assignment had become for these two men a challenge which demanded their utmost personal attention. Moreover, it appears that their approach and dedication to their task greatly contributed to the favorable response by the villagers.

The new battalion, the 3rd of the 49th Regiment, was a unit of the 25th ARVN division which moved to Hau Nghia from Quang Ngai province in central Vietnam as part of the Hop Tac (Cooperation) plan to strengthen the government's position around the capital of Saigon. The troops of the 3rd battalion were almost all central Vietnamese, and none of them were from the immediate area of Duc Lap. Their unfamiliarity with the people and area around Duc Lap undoubtedly contributed to the difficulty of maintaining the level of rapport between soldier and civilian established by the preceding battalion. Moreover, the new unit commander did not appear to view the battalion's primary role of providing security for Duc Lap in the same manner as his predecessor.

THE FIRST VIET CONG PENETRATION

The new battalion arrived in the middle of November 1964, and within a few days it had mounted a full-scale, battalion-size operation into the area north of Duc Lap to try to catch the local Viet Cong company which periodically harassed the village. The battalion pulled out almost to a man, leaving Duc Lap extremely vulnerable to all but the smallest of Viet Cong units. Apparently, the local Viet Cong reacted rapidly to take advantage of this situation. On the same night the battalion pulled out of the village, a Viet Cong unit estimated later by the village residents at a platoon or more entered Duc Hanh A and B hamlets. With no government troops to defend them, both hamlets were left open to Viet Cong penetration. In Duc Hanh A the Viet Cong tore large gaps (over 100 meters in some places) in the hamlet perimeter fence, destroyed the hamlet information office, looted and destroyed the hamlet dispensary (which was stocked with a small amount of medicine), and, in a final act of defiance toward the government, tore down the flagpole which stood in front of the hamlet schoolhouse. However, the Viet Cong did not damage the Duc Hanh A schoolhouse itself, which was particularly liked by the hamlet residents. Essentially, the same destruction took place in Duc Hanh B.

In both hamlets many people were threatened, although none were killed. The hamlet chief of Duc Hanh A, a man who had been a particularly good source of information in the past, had hidden during the Viet Cong penetration and was unharmed. This man had been captured by the Viet Cong once before and they had threatened to decapitate him if they caught him again. In spite of their threats, he had continued in his post as hamlet chief and had felt reasonably secure in his job as long as there were government soldiers in the hamlet to protect him.

REACTION OF THE VILLAGERS

The real consequence of the Viet Cong penetration into the Duc Hanhs was at first difficult to judge. Many of the hamlet residents appeared to accept this type of incident as inevitable* and outwardly

* This was somewhat surprising, since no major incident had

continued as if nothing had happened. However, after lengthy discussions with some people who had been interviewed before this incident took place, the first indications of its effects began to emerge. There was an increasing reluctance on the part of the villagers to discuss certain aspects of their village life, especially with an American. In particular, it was difficult to get these people to comment on the activities of the other villagers or to offer their opinions regarding the Viet Cong and the government. Previously, both of these subjects had been discussed quite freely with the same people. In addition, it was extremely difficult to get the people of Duc Hanh A to describe the Viet Cong penetration of their hamlet. They would describe the incident only in vague and general terms, not elaborating or giving any details. One extremely noticeable effect of the Viet Cong penetration of Duc Hanh A was that the hamlet chief, who prior to the incident had provided a great deal of information about the hamlet and even his own personal life and contacts with the Viet Cong, suddenly became very difficult to find; in fact, once when the author came to visit him, his wife indicated apologetically that he had left the house early that morning and she did not know when he would return. Skeptical of this explanation, the author investigated further and found the hamlet chief behind his house running across the rice fields and going into the next house.

A NEW VILLAGE CHIEF

At about the same time, although not necessarily related to the Viet Cong penetration of Duc Hanh A and B hamlets, one noticeable change occurred in the village. The former finance officer who had been appointed village chief by the province chief resigned his post, and the former village chief who had become assistant village chief was reinstated. Several people had written letters to the province officials expressing disapproval of the appointment of the finance

occurred in the village during the past several months. This rather unexpected reaction may have been a clue, at the time, to the possibility of hidden feelings or knowledge of Viet Cong activities on the part of the villagers.

officer as village chief, while others had made their complaints to the province office in person. In the face of this opposition, the finance officer relinquished the position of village chief.

While there is little doubt that the finance officer was a sincere and honest man, the man whom he had replaced as village chief was respected and liked by the people of Duc Lap. Moreover, the finance officer's appointment as village chief had come from the province, and the last time a village chief had been appointed from outside the village the results were disastrous.*

DEFECTORS FROM THE COMBAT YOUTH

When the finance officer took over control of the village administration in November 1964, he had been partly responsible for the formation of the local village defense unit, the Thanh Nien Chien Dan (Combat Youth). This village defense unit, unlike the Hoa Hao militia,** was formed entirely of local villagers, was armed and supplied by the province Popular Force office, and was trained by the ARVN battalion stationed in Duc Lap. In one of their first encounters with the Viet Cong, the Combat Youth had successfully ambushed an estimated 16 Viet Cong, killing three and wounding one, with no losses to themselves. At that time it appeared that the village was on its way to meeting step four (the establishment of an internal village defense force) of the Chien Thang (Victory) national pacification plan.

However, a few days after the Viet Cong incident in Duc Hanh A and B, half of the Combat Youth platoon in Ap Chanh disappeared with their weapons. Many people in the village said that some of them defected to the Viet Cong, while the others supposedly went back to their homes outside the four fenced hamlets of Duc Lap. The Hoa Hao militia was not strong enough to go after the defectors, and the ARVN battalion in

* See Part II of this study, RM-4692-1-ARPA, pp. 19-211.

** Although they were officially designated as Popular Forces and also were under the authority of the province Popular Force office, the Hoa Hao in Duc Lap continued to call themselves militia rather than Combat Youth or Popular Forces.

Duc Lap showed little interest in chasing around the village for a few weapons.

The remaining members of the Combat Youth were immediately disarmed and dismissed by the provincial officials, and the platoon commander was thrown into jail at the province capital because half his platoon had defected. While it might be easy to assume that the Combat Youth defected because they were simply afraid of being killed by the Viet Cong, some people in the village had different ideas. One who spoke up, for instance, was the Hoa Hao platoon commander. On previous occasions he had indicated suspicions of the Combat Youth platoon and no doubt was envious that they were better equipped and paid than his own more experienced platoon. At the time of the Combat Youth defection, the Hoa Hao commander and several of his militia had already resigned from their jobs in the village. When asked why he had done so, he stated:

The present Combat Youth is composed of no good individuals. Many of them have bad connections with the Viet Cong. We realized that they were stronger than we were and that they planned to combine with our group. We resigned for that reason only, not because we were discouraged with our work or because we are afraid of death--we have been sacrificing and sooner or later we will have to pay with our lives for our country. The people of Duc Lap love us and want our platoon to stay here for a long time. They do not like one platoon working here one day and another platoon tomorrow. They don't want change, and therefore if the platoons keep on changing and do not remain in one place very long they cannot develop deep sympathy with the people. My brothers are afraid of an "inside enemy."* Before, we all knew each other, but nowadays one platoon works and then another platoon works.

One villager who was aware of the problem involving the Combat Youth commented:

I know that during the past some of the people here were somewhat indoctrinated by the Viet Cong because they lived so close to them. Now they come into the hamlet

* It is interesting to note here the Hoa Hao commander's fear of an "inside enemy" if his unit combined with the strangers of the Combat Youth. It would not be too long before the problem of an "inside enemy" would appear in Duc Lap with costly consequences.

because they have to win their bread, but their minds are out there with the Viet Cong. They also come here because they are called to serve in this force [Combat Youth]. I am afraid they will join the Viet Cong with all the guns they have. An example was the case of those who already follow the Viet Cong. When we recruit men from here we must be smart and appoint them to work in other places. They'll be in a strange place and not have relatives there. How can they do anything against their uncles if their uncles are Viet Cong?

At the personal request of the province chief, the Hoa Hao platoon resumed its job in Duc Lap; in fact, the commander was authorized to increase the size of his unit, and he began to recruit men from his home area in another part of Vietnam. The Hoa Hao were still responsible for securing the province airfield and the adjacent hamlet of Go Cao, but they did not have the same working relationship with the new battalion as in the past; they no longer accompanied the battalion on combined ambushes or patrols, and their assistance was not sought for local intelligence matters.

After the Viet Cong penetration into Duc Hanh A and B, the battalion stayed close to the village, and whenever it mounted an operation a housekeeping force was always left behind in Ap Chanh. Some villagers even said that perhaps the Viet Cong penetration was just an unlucky incident and perhaps the new battalion would now stay in the village to guarantee security for them. It was not long, however, before the people of Duc Lap were again made aware of the Viet Cong presence in and around Duc Lap and their ability to act immediately on a favorable situation.

VIET CONG TERRORISM

In December 1964, the battalion mounted a daylight operation in an effort to catch a local Viet Cong company which had been harassing the province capital. While the battalion was out on the operation, a small force was left behind in the Ap Chanh battalion headquarters compound to secure against another Viet Cong penetration. After the noon meal on this particular day, two of the soldiers who remained behind to protect the village left the compound to visit a house a hundred meters down the road toward My Hanh--still within the fence of Ap Chanh.

There are two versions why the soldiers left the compound, the official one and that known to all the villagers of Duc Lap. According to the former version, the soldiers were invited to the house of an old man to have a bowl of soup; the latter version is that the two soldiers had gone to visit a girl who lived in the house. Whatever the reason, the two soldiers had no sooner entered the house than six armed Viet Cong surrounded it, knowing that it was now empty, as the occupants had fled upon the soldiers' entrance. Without even looking inside, they fired their automatic weapons point-blank into the structure. Both soldiers were killed, and the six Viet Cong escaped unmo-lested.

Although this act was not actually observed by many villagers, it was known to everyone in Ap Chanh within a few hours and to the entire village by the next day. While some of the villagers appeared to be genuinely incensed over the apparently senseless killing, most chose to act as if nothing had happened. As long as they were not personally involved, there appeared to be no reason why they should comment one way or the other. One woman, however, became quite emotional and even broke into tears when recounting the incident as she knew it. She re-called:

I talked to the crowd about this in tears, and the men of the battalion also cried. I said that the Viet Cong did badly, that they were not right in killing these two men. Even though there are Viet Cong here [in the village] I still said that, because I knew that these two soldiers were drafted and they were about to finish their terms in the army. After listening to me someone said, "Is that so, is that so, are they drafted soldiers who are about to finish their service?"

"Yes," I told them. I said that the Viet Cong government declared they would only kill the cruel ones, and before killing they would send several letters requesting the concerned person to work if they want to but not to be cruel to the people, so that the people could get along all right. If he is good he could return to his normal civilian life. I understood their policy, but I do not know why they killed these men.

As I see it, the people sent information about these two soldiers to the Viet Cong to get credit, but the information was not in detail, so the other side shot these two

drafted soldiers. If they [the informers] only reported the information correctly these two men would not have gotten killed. If they [VC] want credit, they should choose the stubborn ones, those who give trouble to the people or torture the people. I even shouted because I was very angry. I thought that when one's son goes out because he was forced to go by the government, the parents stay home and cry, praying daily to Heaven for their son. I shouted so that everybody there could hear, "How could you misters [VC] woodenheartedly do such a thing?"

The battalion immediately suspected the Hoa Hao militia (who were also in the village at the time) of the killings because there had been some bad feelings between the soldiers of the battalion and some of the Hoa Hao. The battalion surrounded the Hoa Hao post and were ready to fight it out when the province chief (having heard of the trouble) came into the village, literally stepping in between the two groups to prevent bloodshed. Whether the two soldiers had been the victims of a Viet Cong plot or had just happened to be in the wrong part of the village at the wrong time was not conclusively determined. The old man in whose house the killing had taken place and the girl both disappeared from the village and therefore could not shed any further light on the incident.

The real impact of this incident on the villagers was twofold: First, it once again made the villagers aware of the Viet Cong presence in and around Duc Lap and the inability of the government troops to provide continual security for the village and themselves. The second (and perhaps more subtle) result of the incident was that it brought into the open the schism that had developed between the Hoa Hao militia and the ARVN battalion in the village. Just at the time when both of the village security forces should be working together to prove to the people that they were capable of defending the village against Viet Cong penetrations and attacks, they were feuding with each other and not paying full attention to their respective tasks.

Whether this split between the Hoa Hao militia and the battalion was fostered by the Viet Cong is not known. However, the Viet Cong had once stopped a man from Duc Lap and lectured him on the necessity of creating disunity among the government forces. According to him:

They [VC] told us to create misunderstandings and doubt among the soldiers of this side [GVN] so they will fight with one another and so they can convince these people to get out of the government ranks and desert the army. We had to say, "Yes, we will do that." We could not say anything else because we wanted to get away and come back here. There are some who are in between [ARVN and the Hoa Hao], trying to cause both sides to fight each other, and their tactics are very clever. One soldier fights with another soldier, one soldier's wife fights with another soldier's wife.

VIET CONG PRESENCE

By the end of 1964 the pacification program in Duc Lap was behind schedule to the extent that the village still had not achieved the level of security necessary for expansion of the program south toward My Hanh. Viet Cong presence had grown rather than diminished in the village. Although there was little Viet Cong activity during the first month of 1965, the Viet Cong did take advantage of Tet (lunar New Year), the biggest annual Vietnamese holiday, in a subtle and novel way.

During Tet, villagers traditionally try to forget the problems of the past year and look hopefully to the new year. In the past, there was much celebrating and visiting with friends and relatives throughout the village during Tet. Many of the men of the village often got together in one of the local restaurants and gambled. Gambling during Tet is one of the few forms of amusement for the villagers and provides an enjoyable diversion from their everyday problems. Displaying their domination over a village which was supposedly undergoing pacification, the Viet Cong forbade the people of Duc Lap to gamble during the 1965 Tet holidays. This incident was revealed several weeks later during the course of an interview with a villager:

A: On last New Years Day the Viet Cong captured about 20 or 30 people while they were going out to have fun or gambling or something else.

Q: Because they were gambling?

A: Yes, the sin of gambling. Think of that, the Viet Cong forbids gambling, they just said so. They forbid stealing and gambling, therefore everybody must stop stealing and gambling. If one dares to repeat one of these misconducts and he is caught he will be xu [tried and put to death].

Q: Put to death?

A: It's an iron regulation, don't you know. They explained it to us clearly: "I gamble with you and when you lose you would give me your paddy. At the end of the harvest season you would not have anything left. What would you do to make your living? You steal. First you gamble, then you become a thief. After stealing for a long time you may even hit a man until he dies. So it's your own sin and you had better die first in order to stop from killing somebody in order to get money."

Whether or not one agrees with the Viet Cong logic of killing a man before he gambles and winds up killing someone else, this incident indicates the deterioration of the security in the village to a point where the Viet Cong were able to enforce their will over the population of Duc Lap even with the presence of a government battalion in the village. Of perhaps even greater importance is the fact that it was only the people of the village who were affected by the Viet Cong policy of no gambling during Tet. The soldiers of the battalion, probably totally unaware of the Viet Cong order to the villagers, were observed gambling among themselves throughout Duc Lap.

THE SECOND VIET CONG PENETRATION

Soon after the Tet holiday the Viet Cong again showed the people of Duc Lap that they were able to take advantage of an opportunity to discredit the government in the eyes of the villagers. Perhaps more than any other incident, the coup d'état of February 19 and 20, 1965, showed how the rural areas can be affected by the government upheavals taking place in Saigon. Moreover, it once again displayed the government's inability to provide continuing security for the villagers, many of whom had voluntarily supported the government programs up until then in the hope that they would be defended against Viet Cong reprisal.

On the afternoon of February 19, several ARVN battalions, led by Brigadier General Lam Van Phat and Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao* surrounded the Joint General Staff headquarters in Saigon as well as Tan Son Nhut

* General Phat and Colonel Thao were both wanted at the time by the GVN for their involvement in the bloodless September 13, 1964, coup d'état against General Khanh. Also, as a result of their earlier failure, both men had been dismissed from their positions in the ARVN.

Air Base. The purpose of the coup was to remove Lieutenant General Nguyen Khanh from control of the Armed Forces and from his position in the government. The issue was not decided immediately, and a state of confusion continued through the night of the 19th into the morning of the 20th. Orders for ARVN units to be rushed to Saigon to help put down the coup were flashed throughout the 5th, 7th, and 25th Division areas. Likewise, counterorders were also sent to determine which units were supporting the coup and which were supporting the government. The battalion stationed in Duc Lap (which belonged to the 25th Division) was called to come to Saigon in support of the government against the coup d'état forces. Late in the afternoon of the 19th, the battalion moved out of the village and headed toward Saigon along National Route One. By nightfall the unit had made its way as far as Hoc Mon, about 10 kilometers from Saigon, where it set up a bivouac.

On the afternoon of the 19th, the province New Rural Life office had completed the rehabilitation of the dispensaries, information offices, and perimeter fences of Duc Hanh A and B which were destroyed during the Viet Cong penetration in November 1964. The shutters and roof of the dispensaries and information offices had been repaired, and the doors had also been replaced. In addition, the flagpole which formerly stood in front of the school in Duc Hanh A was put back up.

Except for the 20 Hoa Hao militia, who were divided between their post in Ap Chanh and patrolling the province airfield, the village was left totally undefended. On the night of February 19 the Viet Cong, reacting quickly to a favorable situation, again penetrated the village. They tore the shutters and doors off the recently refurbished dispensaries and information offices in Duc Hanh A and B, as well as destroying the roofs of the buildings in which these offices were housed. In addition, several hundred meters of the hamlet perimeter fences were torn down and the metal fence posts pulled up and carried away.

An unexpected loss due to the Viet Cong penetration on the 19th of February was the death of the hamlet chief of Duc Hanh B. Apparently, in the confusion that immediately followed the Viet Cong incident the fact that the Duc Hanh B hamlet chief was missing was overlooked by village officials. This was not learned by the author until a conversation with the village chief several days after the incident:

Q: Who is Mr. Tru?

A: He was the old man who lost many front teeth. He was the hamlet chief. He was killed!

Q: But why did they kill him?

A: Because they [VC] said he followed the government and stubbornly opposed them, so they killed him.

After the killing of the head of Duc Hanh B, the dangers of being a hamlet chief had become all too clear to the chief of Duc Hanh A. He resigned soon after the 19th of February, leaving both hamlets without an administrative link to the village. The administration of Duc Lap was thereby reduced to the village officials--all of whom lived and worked in Ap Chanh and rarely ventured to the other hamlets for fear of their lives--plus one hamlet chief in Go Cao and one in Ap Chanh. The Ap Chanh hamlet chief was also the owner of the largest general store in the village and was merely a figurehead who collected his monthly salary without performing any duties as hamlet chief.

Because the Viet Cong destroyed the dispensaries in Duc Hanh A and B, which were of direct benefit to the people of the village, it might be thought that the villagers would demonstrate their anger against the Viet Cong. But no such manifestations were evident in Duc Lap. Rather, the people living in Duc Hanh A and B tended to become less connected with the village and seemed to be trying to avoid anything or anyone connected with the government at any level. Perhaps they felt their best defense against Viet Cong terror was to be completely disassociated from the government, even though they were still living in a government-built and, supposedly, a government-defended hamlet. If the villagers of Duc Lap had any genuine resentment toward the Viet Cong penetrations of Duc Hanh A and B, they concealed it well.

During the penetration of Duc Hanh A and B, the small Hoa Hao militia force remained at its post in Ap Chanh and did not attempt to reinforce the hamlets for fear of a Viet Cong attack on Ap Chanh. That the battalion returned to the village the next day must have been small solace to the residents of the two hamlets who had twice within four months witnessed the government's inability to provide continuing protection for them against Viet Cong penetration and incidents. The two

Viet Cong penetrations of Duc Hanh A and B achieved a psychological result seemingly far costlier to the government than the replacement of a dispensary, information office, and hamlet fence. Since both penetrations had been aimed at the civilian population (in fact, both had taken place while the military force was absent), it appeared that the primary Viet Cong aim was to gain control of the population of Duc Lap by overt (penetrations, murders) and covert (the order forbidding gambling) methods.

ANOTHER NEW BATTALION

On March 3, 1965, 12 days after the second Viet Cong penetration into Duc Hanh A and B, the ARVN battalion stationed in Duc Lap was replaced by a Ranger battalion. This new battalion was the third battalion in the village in five months.

The shuffling of battalions in and out of Duc Lap, which is contrary to the idea of continuity of pacification, might be expected to have a negative effect on the pacification effort. On the other hand, the new battalion were Rangers--supposedly elite troops. Perhaps the aggressive patrolling and ambushing tactics of the first pacification battalion in Duc Lap would be resumed.

A NEW OUTPOST

Soon after the second Viet Cong penetration of Duc Hanh A and B and the arrival of the Ranger battalion, the province officials decided to improve the security of the road connecting Bao Trai with Cu Chi, which runs across the swamp east of Duc Lap. An outpost was built on the edge of the village approximately 500 meters east of the fence of Duc Hanh B hamlet in the general area known as Duc Hanh C (Fig. 2). The outpost consisted of a small blockhouse shaped like a key, approximately ten meters in length and about three meters wide at the widest point. On top of the blockhouse, which stood approximately two meters above the surrounding ground, was a five-meter watch tower. The blockhouse was surrounded by a three-strand barbed-wire fence with a single gate on the side facing away from the road. The outer perim-

eter of the outpost was a triple row of three-strand wire fences, approximately 30 meters square. There was a space of about two meters between each of the three outer perimeter fences in which mines could be buried as additional defensive measures. These mines, however, were never emplaced. Entrance into the outpost was through a maze-like gate which faced the road. At night, the gate was closed by lashing three barbed-wire gates into place, thus forming an unbroken perimeter fence. As an additional measure, small tin-can lanterns were hung at irregular intervals along the fence to illuminate the area immediately surrounding the fence and discourage any Viet Cong attempt to sneak in and cut the fence.

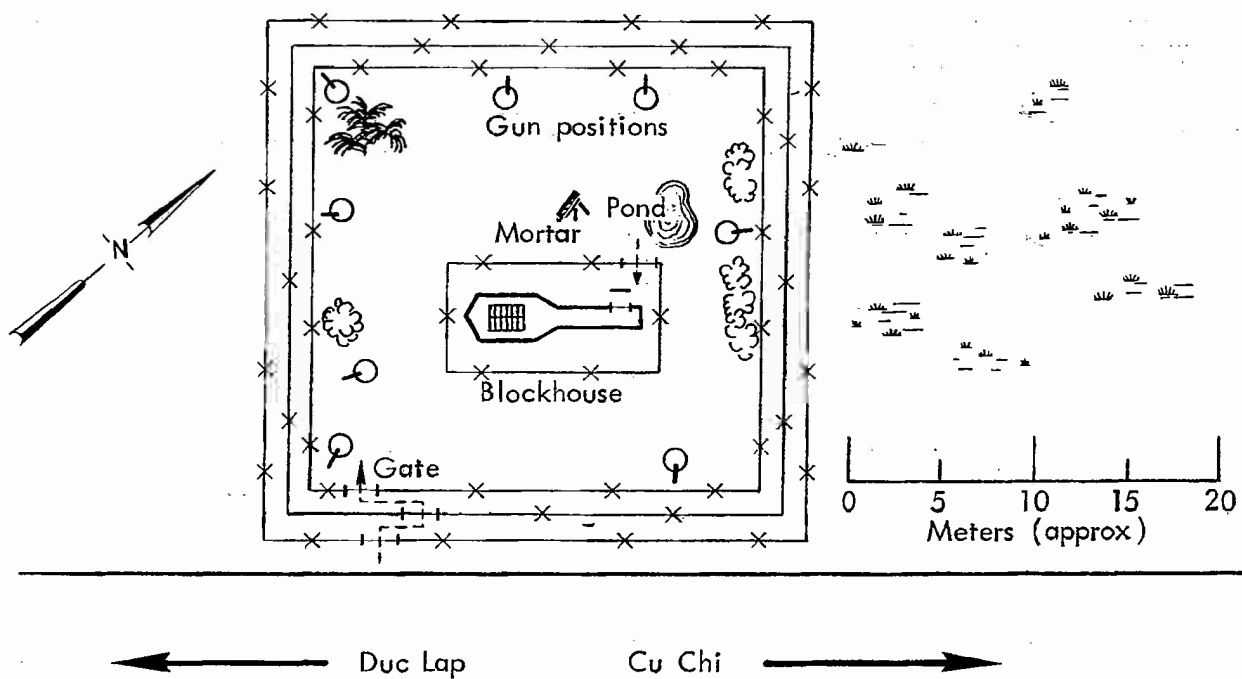


Fig. 2—Duc Hanh C outpost

THE "INSIDE ENEMY"

The outpost was generally manned by about 10 to 14 men from the Hoa Hao militia who would spend seven days on duty before being relieved by another group from Ap Chanh. On some occasions, the men would bring their families to stay with them during their seven-day stint in the outpost. The outpost had been occupied only a few weeks when the first problem arose.

Early in 1965 several new men were recruited from An Giang province, including a few non-Hoa Hao from Rach Gia in Kien Giang province. Previously, the militia in Duc Lap had been made up exclusively of Hoa Hao, all of whom were well acquainted with each other in An Giang prior to their coming to Hau Nghia. Although the Hoa Hao no doubt felt compelled to meet the commitment given them by the province chief, it was difficult to understand why they allowed men who were not of their religion to join them, unless they were unable to recruit sufficient men from among the Hoa Hao. This situation seemed especially unusual in light of the recent defections from the defunct Combat Youth and the Hoa Hao commander's suspicions of an "inside enemy."

Soon after this group of outsiders joined the militia in Duc Lap, three of the new men were assigned for a week's duty at the outpost in the swamp, along with seven Hoa Hao. One night after they had been in the outpost for a few days, the three men deserted, probably to the Viet Cong. As they left, they fired back at the other men in the post so that they could not follow them. The three deserters went north in the direction of Bao Cong village, which is Viet Cong-controlled.

The most serious aspect of the desertion of the three new men was that they could give the local Viet Cong a detailed description of the number of men in the outpost, the layout of the outpost, and the defensive measures. One member of the Hoa Hao militia (a squad leader) had suspected these new men but had kept it to himself. After they had deserted, he related that:

I had suspected those three fellows because they always stood in the post and looked outside, just as they did the very evening they deserted from the post. Those three boys were assigned to guard the corners of the post. In the evening when they were guarding, I called their names,

but there were no answers. I told the post commander and he said they may have been urinating or something...

Another Hoa Hao interrupted the conversation and said:

It's your fault. Why didn't you tell us about them before? It's no use for you to tell us now. You said you suspected them a long time ago.

The first Hoa Hao continued the conversation:

One of the three men tried to find out my origin. I told him I came from Saigon. To answer his questions I told him I had been in the army for a long time. He asked me to give him an M-6 grenade. I said I couldn't and that he would have to ask the post commander.

When asked if he thought any more of the new men would defect to the Viet Cong, the squad leader replied:

I cannot be sure, but I do not trust that boy Ut, because he always sleeps when he guards.

Then he added, using the same phrase as the Hoa Hao commander:

I am most afraid of an "inside enemy."

A day later, in a discussion with several men in the village, another fact was revealed. One elderly gentleman recalled that only a few days prior to the desertion of the three men from the outpost, two of them had gotten involved in an incident with some of the local inhabitants of Duc Hanh B. According to him:

Two buffalo boys were sitting on their animals' backs and they [two of the deserters] bet to see who could shoot and hit one of the boys. The bet was a pack of cigarettes.

Another man added bitterly, "Yes, and they shot the boy's leg off."*

The old man, who was also the village lawyer, continued describing the incident:

They [the boy's parents] were going to make out a complaint to be brought to the village. They asked me if I would take the complaint down there for them. But those guys ran away. Even the squad leader suspected that they had connections with the other side, and one

* Actually they had broken the boy's leg, and he was later taken to the hospital in Bao Trai where the leg was set and put in a cast.

of the men knew them in Rach Gia and now he realizes why their faces were familiar. So now I figure the Liberation Front sent these three men to join our forces and create hatred among the people for our forces by doing things like shooting that buffalo boy, so that the people would hate the soldiers. It's also possible that the commander was not careful in his recruiting.

ATTACK ON THE OUTPOST

Shortly after the desertion from the outpost, a man was sent to Duc Lap from the province security office to investigate the incident. This newcomer to Duc Lap, whose name was Boon, took an active part in the Hoa Hao militia activities and even spent several nights in the outpost. During his stay in the outpost he assumed the duty of radio operator, keeping in contact with the post in Ap Chanh by means of the small radio issued to the outpost.

By April 1965, a month after the Rangers' arrival in Duc Lap, the security situation in the village had at least temporarily stabilized. The Viet Cong, however, again took the initiative and on the night of April 9 attacked and overran the outpost on the edge of the village. Various accounts of the attack were given by several villagers. However, the Hoa Hao commander, whose men were manning the outpost, recounted the following incident as he knew it:

On the evening of the 9th at 1:30 a.m., a group of Viet Cong got inside the outpost and exploded two mines, killing five people [including one woman], wounding three, with seven rifles, five carbines, one Thompson [submachine gun], one Garand [M-1], and one local-made "mot" [mortar] lost. Ten people were left alive. It happened during brother Ut's guard period.* The reason was he fell asleep or noi tuyen [inside enemy]--we don't know yet. Our communications walkie-talkie was lost. At about 2:25 a.m., we came to their aid and brought out the dead bodies and carried the wounded to Hau Nghia province.

There were ten people completely unharmed and one man was captured, Boon. We are afraid that he might have fallen asleep or he might have betrayed us. We don't know yet because the matter is not clear. Because he was

* This is the same Ut referred to on p. 24. Unfortunately, Ut could not be interviewed later about the incident because he was killed during the attack.

sent here by the province, I still dare not affirm whether he was sleeping or betrayed us.

His guard post was at the gate, and the Viet Cong got in at that spot and set up one mine along the front wall of the blockhouse and another at the back wall. The walkie-talkie radio was hanging on the wall inside the blockhouse. The clock near the radio was completely destroyed, yet the radio was not broken; therefore the radio must have been taken out of the blockhouse, the mines exploded, and our men who slept inside the blockhouse were all killed.

Possibly, he [Boon] was captured; however, I suspect not. At the same time, they [Viet Cong] captured a woman who lived in the post. She had two wounds in her foot. They thought she was seriously wounded and they took her with them to treat her wounds, then they let her go. She told us that Boon was caught and was tied up. Perhaps they didn't want that woman to know that Boon betrayed us. He calls back by radio once or twice a day.* We don't know whether it is his wish to do that or if he is forced by the Viet Cong. He threatens to beat this person, hit another, to open this man's stomach. Almost everyone in the post knows his voice well, because he was the one who handled the radio in the post. He used to complain that he wanted to quit. He said so often, so that everybody heard him.

It was later estimated that three Viet Cong Local Force or guerrilla platoons had attacked and overrun the outpost. A particularly distasteful aspect of the incident to the people of Duc Lap was that the Ranger battalion was in the village that night and during the attack was called upon by the outpost defenders but failed to come to support them.

Shortly after the overrunning of the outpost, the battalion commander was asked why he did not come to the assistance of the outpost defenders. He drew a rough map on a piece of paper and explained that he had heard the firing at the outpost from his command post in Ap Chanh. He was informed by radio that the Ranger company in Duc Hanh B was pinned down by three light machine guns which the Viet Cong had

*The radio which was lost during the attack was a small fixed-channel walkie-talkie type used by the outpost to keep in touch with the post in Ap Chanh. The radio calls to the larger receiver at Ap Chanh during the next few days after the attack were thought to have come from the lost radio.

set up between the hamlet and the outpost to keep any reinforcements from coming to the rescue. Furthermore, according to the battalion commander, his companies in Duc Hanh A and B received mortar fire from two directions, pinning his troops down in the two hamlets. In addition, the province capital of Bao Trai was also under mortar attack, so none of the four artillery pieces there could give any fire support to the beleaguered outpost. When asked why he did not have patrols and ambushes set up around the outside perimeter of the village to avoid the exact situation that had taken place, the battalion commander appeared not to understand and gave no answer.

With the battalion commander's explanation, the incident was considered closed. Apparently this also satisfied the province officials, as no further steps were taken to investigate the matter. The only overt result from the overrunning of the outpost was that within two weeks an ARVN engineer unit was back at the site rebuilding the outpost on exactly the same spot, exactly the way it was before it was destroyed. Moreover, the Hoa Hao were once again ordered to man the outpost from their depleted force.

For a two-month period following the outpost incident Duc Lap was relatively quiet, with only occasional harassing firings into the village or attempted minings on the road. Nevertheless, the results of the penetrations of Duc Hanh A and B and the overrunning of the outpost had indicated that the security situation in Duc Lap was approaching or had already sunk to the pre-April 1964 level.

VIET CONG ROADBLOCKS

One evening in June 1965 the Viet Cong again returned to Duc Lap and created two simultaneous incidents in two separate hamlets of the village. In Duc Hanh A, the Viet Cong erected three large roadblocks on the road within the hamlet perimeter fence (or forced the local villagers to erect them). Each roadblock was different from the other, suggesting that three different teams took part in the incident. The first roadblock was placed on the road where the hamlet gate formerly stood. The gate had been torn down and not used since the first Viet Cong penetration into the hamlet in November 1964. This roadblock

consisted of several strands of barbed wire wound around the former gate and anchored to the ground by metal posts. The roadblock was so solid that it could not be dragged away and had to be blown up to be removed.

About one hundred meters farther into the hamlet was the second roadblock, a large earth pile which had been dug from alongside the road. This roadblock was decorated with several piles of rocks set in patterns, which suggested that the builders had plenty of time to engage in the decoration and did not worry about their work being disturbed.

The third roadblock, approximately 100 meters farther into the hamlet, was also a large earth pile about one and one-half meters high. Whoever built this roadblock had a sense of the comic, for in its center stood a full-grown, live banana tree plus several other small clumps of freshly planted flowers.

One house in the hamlet was located just inside the perimeter fence, approximately 15 meters from the first roadblock. During the removal of the roadblocks by an ARVN demolition team, the middle-aged woman who lived in the house was asked about the previous night's activities:

Q: Were you here when the earth piles were put up last night to block the road?

A: Yes, they did not ask us, they just did it.

Q: What time was it?

A: About ten o'clock. The moon was already up.

Q: How many men were there?

A: I don't know, but I heard many of them. I did not know who they were. I thought they were guards on patrol. Not until this morning did I see the earth piles.*

The other incident took place in Go Cao hamlet at the other end of the village. The village officials did not learn about this incident until about nine o'clock in the morning, when two old women came

*This woman's evasive answer is typical of the villagers' response to questions about activities with which they would prefer not to get involved.

into the store in Ap Chanh and said that about 50 armed Viet Cong had come to the village at night and ordered every house to cook one pot of rice for them. They collected the rice and then warned the people not to tell anyone about their coming. The Hoa Hao commander, upon hearing about the incident, gathered about ten of his men and started out for Go Cao hamlet, but obviously by nine o'clock in the morning the Viet Cong had already fled with their rice.

By June 1965 it appeared that the pacification program had ceased altogether in Duc Lap, and the province was interested in occupying the village merely to preserve the only road link from the province capital to National Route One. As a result, a new policy for the occupation of the village was created. Several Ranger battalions would rotate in and out of the village, each spending approximately six weeks in Duc Lap.

If there had been any chance of reviving the lagging pacification program in the village after the series of incidents during the first six months of the year, the musical-chairs tactics of the Ranger battalions killed it. The constant rotation of battalions in Duc Lap was denying the village the continuity of security which had been developed so well by the original battalion in the village. Moreover, with strange soldiers coming into the village every six weeks, it was almost impossible for the government troops to gain familiarity with the village and its problems and build a rapport with the people.

IV. THE BATTLE FOR DUC LAP

During the advent of the 1965 rainy season, the Viet Cong throughout Vietnam were preparing for a major offensive which they hoped would culminate in a quick collapse of ARVN resistance and their subsequent victory in the war. In the middle months of 1965, many of the villagers began leaving Duc Lap. In addition to clearly recognizing the increasing insecurity within their own village, they may also have sensed the gravity of the overall situation.

During the first six months of the year, the Viet Cong-initiated incidents in the village had been directed almost exclusively at the civilian population. Apparently, the Viet Cong hoped to bring the villagers to distrust the government's protective ability and to condition them to accept the inevitability of Viet Cong control of the village. To some degree, judging by the unauthorized exodus of villagers from Duc Lap, the Viet Cong plan had worked. This first phase of the battle for Duc Lap having been relatively successful, the Viet Cong were now ready to commence phase two. This essentially involved driving the ARVN soldiers from Duc Lap, which would leave the village territory as well as the people in it under complete Viet Cong control.

The battle for Duc Lap consisted of three separate full-scale attacks on the village in September, October, and December 1965. With the exception that two different ARVN Ranger battalions were involved, the September and October attacks by the Viet Cong on Duc Lap were so similar that a general summary of the two incidents will be given rather than a detailed account of each.

The Ranger compound in Ap Chanh was located just off the main road running through the village and behind a row of houses (Fig. 3). The rectangular compound was surrounded by a defensive wall approximately one meter high and 75 to 100 meters long on each side. Because the surrounding houses of Ap Chanh masked the fields of fire in three directions, the defenses of the compound were oriented in the one direction toward which the battalion weapons could be brought to bear. Oddly, it was from that single direction that the Viet Cong attacked on both occasions. Yet in both attacks, the element of surprise was

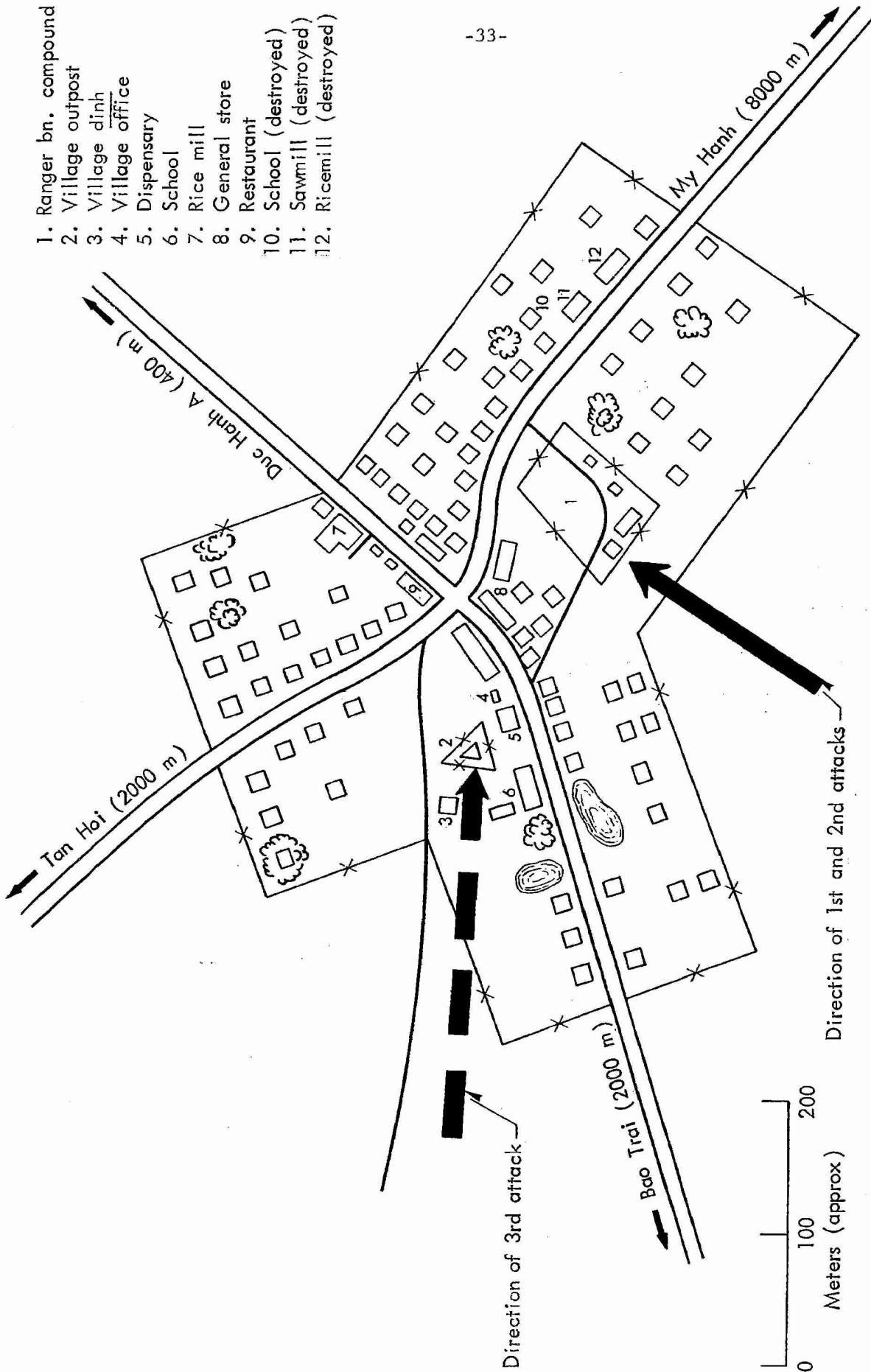


Fig. 3—The battle for Duc Lap

so complete that the Viet Cong shock troops were already inside the compound defenses when the first rounds were fired.

The beginning of each attack was signaled by a mortar round which landed directly on the American advisor's hut. Fortunately, in both cases no one was killed by the initial mortar round, although one American was killed by machine-gun fire later in the first attack. Before the mortar attack, the Viet Cong had already cut the outer barbed-wire defenses and infiltrated upon the outer edge of the defensive wall. Immediately after the initial mortar round hit, the compound was brought under heavy fire from machine guns and automatic weapons. In both instances, the surprised defenders immediately fell back into foxholes in the middle of the compound. As the Viet Cong pressed forward, the Rangers and American advisors retreated out of the compound into the rice fields on the other side of the hamlet. During the October attack on Duc Lap, the first assistance given the defenders was flare shells fired from the artillery in Bao Trai, the province capital. Unfortunately, these flares were fired just at the time the defenders, dressed only in their underwear, were making their way through the barbed-wire fence, and they were perfectly silhouetted for the Viet Cong attackers.

In both attacks, the defending Rangers were driven from their compound by the Viet Cong. Similarly, in both cases, air strikes were called in when the Viet Cong had occupied the compound. One such air strike mistook a burning house as the compound, used it as an aiming point, and destroyed several structures outside the compound, including a school, a rice mill, and a sawmill.

Reinforcements from the province capital, Bao Trai, arrived in Duc Lap (two miles away) four or five hours after the attack had begun in each case. Despite the heavy casualties they inflicted, the Viet Cong failed to drive the Rangers completely out of the village in both attacks. The cost to the Rangers, however, had been high: Of the battalion involved in the September attack, 44 were killed and 32 wounded. In the October attack, 33 of the defenders were killed, and approximately the same number were wounded.

By December, after two full-scale attacks on Duc Lap, the succeeding Ranger battalion--the third in three months--assumed it was only a

matter of time until it would be hit. In order to avoid the mistakes of the previous Ranger battalions, the new commander placed his troops in the empty Ap Chanh outpost, formerly occupied by the Hoa Hao militia. This outpost, a triangle-shaped remnant of the French occupation in the village, was located between the village dinh (temple) and the village administrative offices.

Apparently determined to take control of Duc Lap, the Viet Cong launched their third and (from the standpoint of the people of the village) most damaging attack on December 18. The ARVN intelligence estimates after the battle placed the number of attacking Viet Cong at around 900--two full battalions plus a heavy-weapons unit.

The attacking Viet Cong came from the direction of Go Cao hamlet, across a large empty area behind the temple and the schoolhouse. In fact, the Viet Cong attackers passed over the mass grave of 60 of their comrades who were killed and left behind during the October attack on the village. Seventy-five-millimeter recoilless rifles were set up and trained directly on the outpost at almost point-blank range. Even at that short distance, however, the Viet Cong proved to be poor gunners. The majority of the rounds landed short, in the temple, or long, in the village office and the houses beyond. The damage to the village from the poor Viet Cong shooting was perhaps as great as that from the two earlier air strikes. In addition, the temple, schoolhouse, village office, dispensary, and several other buildings in the hamlet were heavily damaged by stray small-arms fire. Few houses in the general vicinity of the battle received no damage of any kind. Moreover, many of the thatched huts in the hamlets, if not hit directly, were burned up by fires started in neighboring houses.

During the battle, the Ranger battalion suffered heavy casualties and eventually had to abandon the outpost. The Viet Cong, however, were slow to press their advantage and did not completely overrun the hamlet as they had done previously. Civilian casualties were accordingly high and would have probably been higher had so many people not already left the village.

The three successive failures by the Viet Cong to drive the government forces from Duc Lap was, in a sense, an oblique victory for the

ARVN troops. But in the battles three government Ranger battalions had been badly mauled--one so seriously that it was sent to the Trung Lap Ranger training center for retraining and reequipping. Duc Lap was a shell of the former village; most of the residents had gone to Saigon or other towns and villages, or they merely returned to their former homes in the Viet Cong-controlled areas around Duc Lap. Much of Ap Chanh had been destroyed, and many houses in Duc Hanh B had been pulled down by the Viet Cong. This time the people did not even bother to rebuild them.

If New Year 1965 had dawned grimly for the people of Duc Lap, New Year 1966 appeared even more grim. In the words of the Hau Nghia USAID province representative, "Duc Lap, for all intents and purposes, has been abandoned." What he neglected to add was, "by the people and by the government."

Initially, the Viet Cong methods of attempting to take over Duc Lap seemed clearer than the actual reasons for their wanting the village so badly. Chronologically, the Viet Cong activities in Duc Lap from April 1964 (the beginning of the pacification program in the village) until December 1965 (the virtual abandonment of the village) can be listed: A hamlet section chief is kidnapped; a pacification team leader is murdered; several minings are attempted; first penetration of Duc Hanh A and B is made; the local Combat Youth defects; two ARVN soldiers are killed; gambling during Tet is outlawed; second penetration of Duc Hanh A and B is made; the village outpost is overrun; roadblocks; the rice collection; three full-scale attacks are made on Ap Chanh. (The locations of some of these incidents are shown in Fig. 4.) Intertwined with these known incidents may be countless other threats, tax collections, and contacts between the Viet Cong and the population of Duc Lap which will never be known.

The effects of these incidents in the village can also be chronicled in order to try and understand the Viet Cong methods: An attempt is made to undermine an apparently successful pacification program through the murder of a pacification team leader; * the new unit's

* Although not planned by the Viet Cong, the accidental killing of

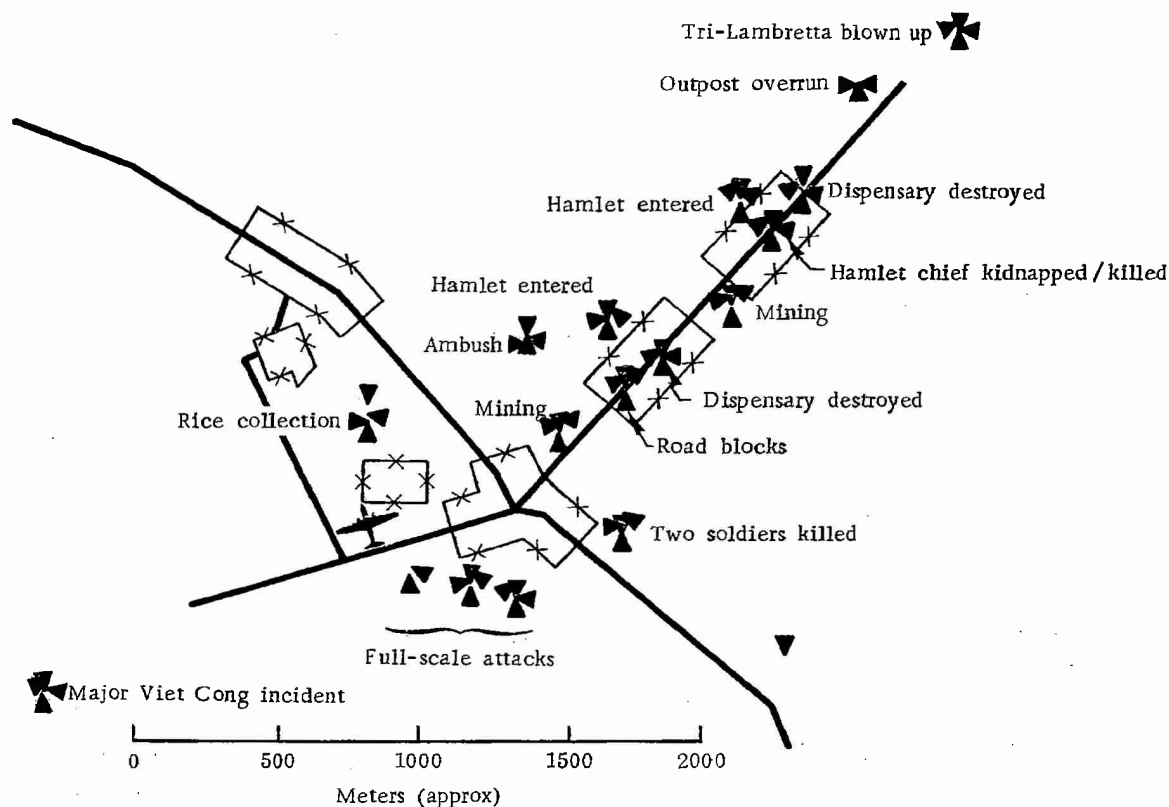


Fig.4—Major Viet Cong incidents

(November 1, 1964—January 1966)

unfamiliarity with the situation in Duc Lap is quickly exploited by demonstrating to the population the inability of the government soldiers to protect them; further steps in this direction are taken by pressuring members of the local defense to defect, thereby giving a further impression of a weakening government position. As the security situation continues to decline, the village administrative functions are affected: Hamlet chiefs resign, the village officials cannot travel to other hamlets to do their jobs, government taxes are no longer collected, the village economy begins to suffer as people are afraid to go to their fields to work, the local businesses begin

two key personnel in the village--the ARVN battalion commander and his American advisor--further crippled the pacification program; the ARVN battalion was transferred, and a new unit came into the village.

to close for lack of trade, and the government dispensaries and information offices are destroyed and not rebuilt, thus depriving the people of their benefits. Only the schools are left untouched, and even then, whenever the situation appears dangerous or a government military operation is taking place, the parents keep their children home for safety reasons; thus even the government schools are affected by the deteriorating situation in the village.

The majority of the Viet Cong incidents in Duc Lap before September 1965 were aimed directly at discrediting the government in the eyes of the village so that they would no longer support the government pacification program, or insuring the villagers' noncompliance with the GVN through intimidation, or both. It appears that when the Viet Cong felt they had achieved a certain amount of success in this phase of their plan, they decided to make a final effort to take over complete control of the village. The result was the series of three attacks on Ap Chanh. It further appears that these attacks were aimed primarily at the Ranger battalions and that the negative side effects on the civil population of Duc Lap were incidental and were considered tolerable. Apparently, the Viet Cong believed that once they drove the Rangers out of the village they could remove any possibly alienated or uncooperative elements of the population, without fear of any meaningful repercussions.

In January 1966 an additional motive for the Viet Cong to remove any government presence from Duc Lap was uncovered. During a sweep through the area west of Bao Trai along the Vam Co Dong river--an area in which the Viet Cong have enjoyed uninterrupted control for several years--an American infantry unit uncovered a great quantity of Viet Cong documents. One of these captured items was an annotated map of the area around Duc Lap (Fig. 5). As can readily be seen from the map, Duc Lap is nearly in the middle, with the most important item, the new liaison corridor, running directly through the village. The strategic hamlet designated on the map is probably Duc Hanh B, or it may be a single indicator for both Duc Hanh A and B hamlets. The Duc Lap cross-roads post refers to the outpost in Ap Chanh, and the new liaison route appears to run between Ap Chanh and Duc Hanh A. Obviously, the

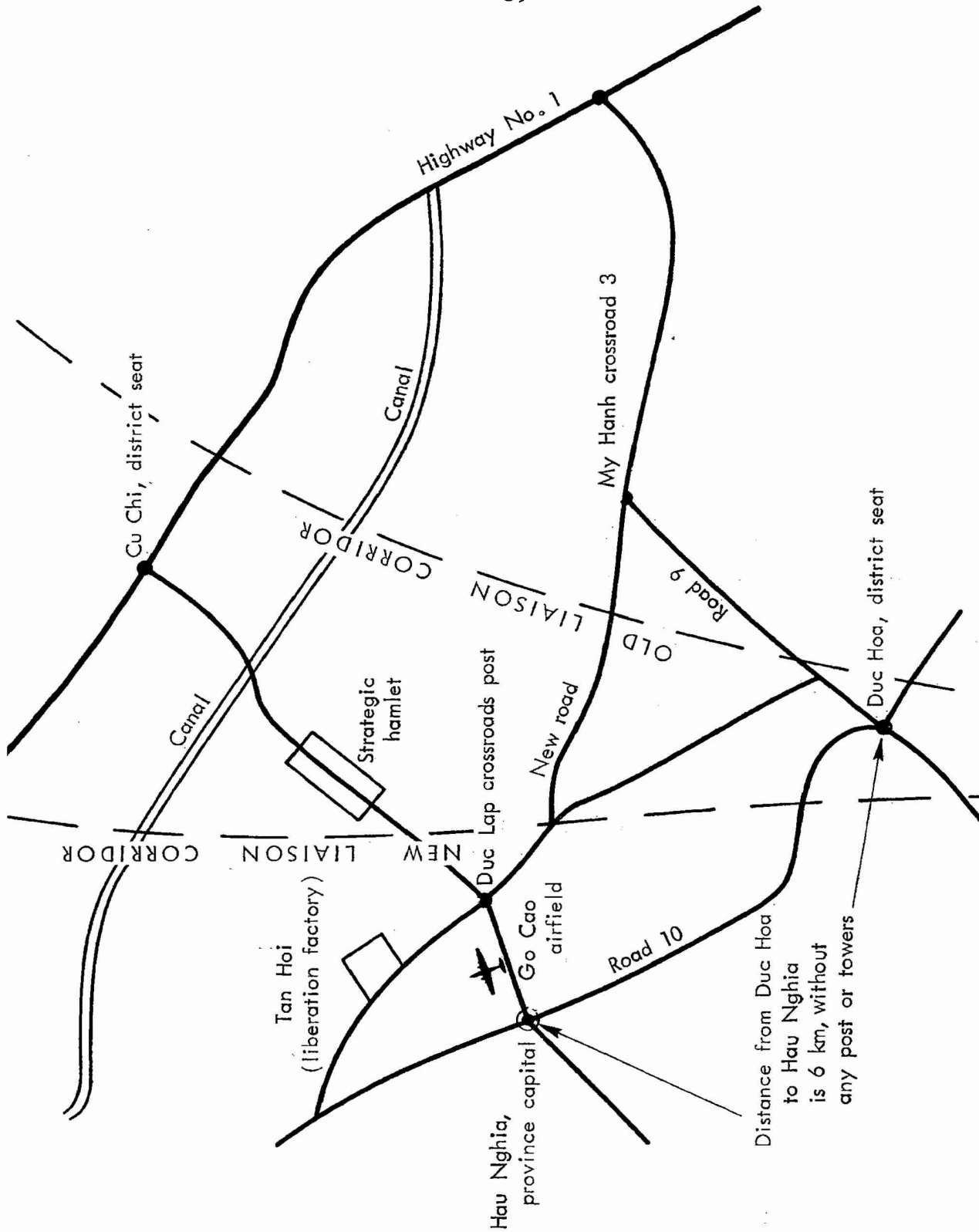


Fig.5—Facsimile of sketch of Viet Cong B502 (platoon) infiltration routes (old and new) in Duc Hoa, Hau Nghia, Hoc Mon, and Cu Chi areas

proximity of government Rangers to the Viet Cong passageway through Hau Nghia would present a dangerous situation for them; thus the removal of the soldiers could have appeared necessary. Once the civilian population had been intimidated enough to at least not supply the Rangers with information, the military attacks against the Rangers could take place and the new liaison route would then be safeguarded.

Whether or not this was the Viet Cong strategy is of course not known, but considering the chronology of events in the village since November 1964, it appears that Duc Lap meant more to the Viet Cong than just a place to demonstrate the weaknesses of the government pacification program.

An epilogue to the battle for Duc Lap was written shortly after the third attack on the village. The Ranger battalion, which was badly mauled during the final attack, pulled out of Duc Lap and located its headquarters compound on the outskirts of the province capital. The security in Duc Lap was to be maintained by companies of the battalion which would rotate in and out of the village once or twice a week.

Although this new tactic would deprive Duc Lap of the continuity of security provided by a single unit remaining in the village, it really did not matter much because by that time the population of the village had declined from a high of around 4500 to less than 1000. Fully 75 percent of the houses in the village had been destroyed or torn down by the departing villagers. The last hopes of pacifying Duc Lap appear to have departed with them.

V. DUC LAP IN COMPARISON WITH TWO
OTHER VIETNAMESE VILLAGES

To avoid giving the impression that Duc Lap and the problems of pacification encountered there are unique in Vietnam and in a context of their own, two other Vietnamese villages were studied for the purposes of comparison. These two villages were located at opposite ends of Vietnam; one is an inland valley settlement in Central Vietnam, and the other is a fishing village in the Mekong delta. Although their settings are as different from each other as from that of Duc Lap, many similarities could be found among the three villages in the problems concerning their pacification. The investigation was, by necessity, much more limited in scope and depth in these two villages than in Duc Lap, but sufficient information was obtained to provide a reasonable comparison of their individual pacification situations. This material will be presented in terms of the same five criteria of village pacification which were developed during the study of Duc Lap.

While these criteria are not necessarily exhaustive, they do represent major aspects of rural Vietnamese villages which appear to be most important in achieving permanent pacification. They are (1) security, (2) village administration, (3) economic continuity, (4) rural health, and (5) education. Obviously, there are many other aspects of village life which could be included, but the long-term experience in Duc Lap, coupled with the much briefer observations in two other villages, has shown that the selected criteria are fundamentally sound for comparing village pacification programs.

As pointed out in the preceding sections on Duc Lap, the overall security of the area (such as that provided in varying degrees by the successive ARVN battalions in Duc Lap) is a necessary prerequisite for the continued success of the pacification effort in any village. In Duc Lap, when the ARVN troops failed to achieve security, the pacification program in the village also failed. Similarly, in the first village to be compared with Duc Lap--Phuoc Chau--pacification ultimately failed because the primary security force was permanently transferred elsewhere and the area was left open to unhampered Viet Cong penetration.

PHUOC CHAU

Phuoc Chau village lies in a well-defined valley of the same name 20 miles west of Tam Ky, the capital of Quang Tin province (see Frontispiece). Except for Chau Lam hamlet, which is located on the slopes of the hills at the eastern end of the valley, the nine hamlets of Phuoc Chau are on the valley floor, as shown in Fig. 6. The 6000 inhabitants of Phuoc Chau are all Vietnamese, and the village is one of the westernmost locations of an ethnic Vietnamese population cluster in Quang Tin province. Prior to the initial loss of the village to the Viet Cong in 1961, the population of Phuoc Chau reached a high of 7000.

Unlike Duc Lap, all the hamlets of Phuoc Chau, with the exception of Chau Chanh (main hamlet) where an artillery post had been established, were under complete Viet Cong control from October 1961 until February 1964. The Chau Chanh post came under heavy Viet Cong attack in November 1962, during which the defenders won a major victory over the insurgents.*

Viet Cong Control

The initial Viet Cong attempt to control the population of Phuoc Chau was made by several political cadre who came to the village to propagandize the people. It is interesting to note that only one of those cadre was from the village itself and the rest were strangers. In fact it was even said by the villagers of Phuoc Chau that some of the cadre were from North Vietnam.

The political cadre were closely followed by 12 or 13 armed cadre, who were known as security agents. They seized several villagers,

* For a more detailed account of the battle of Chau Chanh, see Denno, Colonel Bryce F., "The Viet Cong Defeat at Phuoc Chau," The Marine Corps Gazette, Vol. XLIX, No. 3, March 1965, pp. 34-39. Although Colonel Denno's report contains minor errors in the description of the valley and the post in Chau Chanh, nevertheless it presents an accurate description of the battle fought there. Perhaps most valuable to the writing of this article was the capture and subsequent interrogation of a Viet Cong unit commander who took part in the battle, thus giving the points of view of both sides, attacker and defender. This is a situation which has rarely occurred in the war in Vietnam.

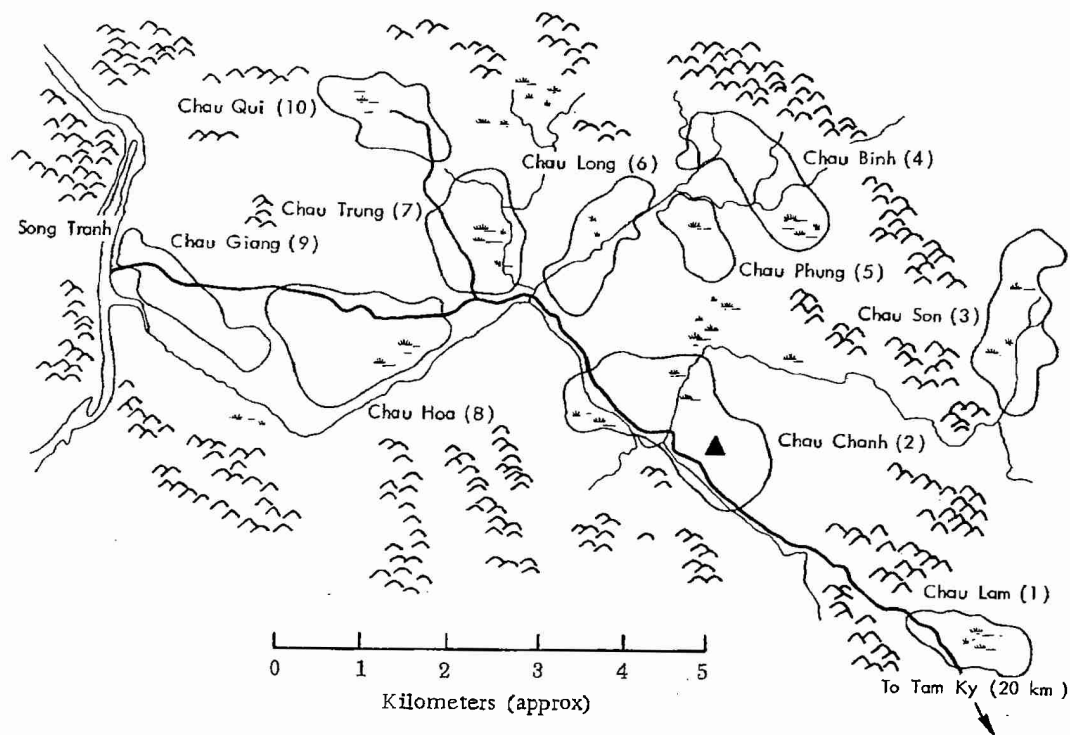


Fig.6—Phuoc Chau

accused them of various crimes, and asked the people to forgive them. By thus involving the people of the village in the absolution of their fellow villagers, the first step was taken toward the ultimate control of the population of Phuoc Chau through association with the Viet Cong cause. Next, the Viet Cong organized the entire village population in groups in order to more easily control them. First the armed guerilla units were organized, then special-interest groups such as a youth organization, a farmers' organization, and a young girls' organization were formed. Everyone in the village belonged to a group. According to some of the villagers, the purpose of these organizations was to gather information about the members so as to provide the Viet Cong with a detailed accounting of each individual's actions. The reporting system in Phuoc Chau went so far as to include children who

would report what their parents were saying and doing. Meetings were held almost every day for the purpose of passing this information to the cadre.

Another method by which the Viet Cong political cadre maintained close control over the population of Phuoc Chau was living with the people of the village. The Viet Cong political cadre would live in the people's houses, shifting every three or four days so as not to create a burden on individual families, although they would always pay for their food (with Republic of Vietnam piasters).

In addition to these measures, the Viet Cong also used terror as a control device. Viet Cong security agents killed three villagers in public--a hamlet chief, a defector from the Viet Cong, and a student home from Saigon to visit his parents--but many villagers were allegedly killed at night in their houses.

The hard core, or Main Force, Viet Cong troops rarely stayed in the hamlets of Phuoc Chau but remained in the hills surrounding the valley. Whenever the Viet Cong troops did come into the village, they always acted properly to the people, never intimidating them or stealing from them. In the Vietnamese manner of address, they called, "old ladies their mothers, old men their fathers, and the young people their brothers and sisters."

In order to create a "liberation" image, the Viet Cong instituted a sham land-reform program in the village. Those people who did not leave the village when the Viet Cong took control were allowed to keep their land, but they had to pay a 25 percent tax on their holdings. This was usually paid in rice or other foodstuffs. The land of those who left Phuoc Chau was "redistributed" among the landless and the poor. In reality, the Viet Cong held the land, but the new tenants could work the fields. Of course, they were still obligated to pay the Viet Cong tax.

The Viet Cong further consolidated its control of the population of Phuoc Chau by appointing a new village chief and new hamlet chiefs. Needless to say, these new officials were immediately responsive to all Viet Cong demands.

Pacification Begins

To clear the village of Viet Cong guerrillas, an ARVN regiment undertook an area-saturation operation by which they would clear one area before moving on to another. One ARVN company was assigned to each area to be cleared, and no area was to exceed one square kilometer in size. Each succeeding area to be cleared had to overlap at least one-half of a previously cleared area. The initial Viet Cong reaction to the ARVN clearing operation was to evacuate all the people from the village. They told the villagers that the ARVN was conducting a 20-day operation in the valley and to take a 15-day food supply and go into the hills, as the government troops would not remain in the village. The five-day discrepancy in their order was never explained. Viet Cong security agents threatened to kill anyone who did not comply with the orders.

Many of the villagers made a token effort to obey the Viet Cong in order to save their lives, but most returned to their hamlets after spending a few days in the jungle. Over 1000 people, however, did remain in the jungle for an extended period of time. Except for 180 people, all those who fled had returned to the village as of June 1964. The difference between the former 7000 inhabitants of Phuoc Chau and the 6000 who were there in June 1964 is accounted for by those people who left the village when the Viet Cong took control and did not come back with the return of GVN control.

Once the initial clearing operation was completed and the threat of a Viet Cong attack removed, the other tasks of pacification in Phuoc Chau began. The immediate task facing the ARVN regimental commander was to reorganize and reestablish the village administration. The former village chief, who had fled when the Viet Cong took control of the village, returned and was reappointed to his old job, in which he was delegated maximum authority in the administration of his village. Once the village chief was again working, the regimental commander funneled all civil problems to him, and even in military matters he conferred with the village chief and the newly appointed hamlet chiefs. By purposely building up the stature of the village chief, which gave him confidence in himself and also gave the villagers confidence in him,

the regimental commander was freed to work on the many other problems of pacifying the village. This was extremely important in the pacification of Phuoc Chau, and according to the regimental commander, "Without the village chief there can be no pacification."* The village chief was given rice and money for distribution to the needy of the village, rather than the standard practice of the ARVN handing out these items. In addition, the regimental commander assigned some soldiers to protect the village chief in case a remaining Viet Cong agent in the village tried to assassinate him.

Among the many tasks which the village chief handled was the sensitive problem of land distribution. This problem arose when some people returned under the pacification program to claim the land they had lost when they fled the village from the Viet Cong. The village chief had to make several arbitrary decisions regarding the redistribution of land taken over and allocated by the Viet Cong. Although he had the backing of the ARVN regiment in the village to enforce any unpopular decisions, the majority of the villagers involved accepted his judgment without complaining. Several other village officials were selected by the villagers and the village chief and approved by the ARVN regimental commander to assist the chief in administering the village. These included a police officer, a finance officer, an administrative officer, and an information officer.

After the village officials had been selected, the regimental commander gathered the villagers together and explained why the government was trying to pacify Phuoc Chau and the problems involved. He then asked them what they would do if they were in his place. What he was doing, in effect, was shifting much of the burden and responsibility of the pacification of Phuoc Chau to the villagers themselves. This was done by enlisting their participation in all aspects of pacification from self-help projects to self-defense.

* A different situation occurred in Duc Lap, where the village chief was removed and reinstated within a two-month period. At the same time Viet Cong activity in the village stepped up and pacification began to slide backward. Although the two may not be entirely related, during that crucial period Duc Lap had no effective administrative leadership or contact with the ARVN battalion in the village.

One of the most important elements of villager participation and responsibility for pacification in Phuoc Chau was in the creation of a local security force. This unit, which was to become the backbone of the village self-defense system, was primarily made up of former Viet Cong who had returned to the village after the pacification program began. While this may be considered risky in view of the fact that they had already defected from one side in the war, the former Viet Cong members of the village self-defense force acquitted themselves well in the defense of the village. In at least one instance, a hamlet militia unit made up of returned Viet Cong surprised some of their former comrades returning to the village at night. As a result of this engagement, the Viet Cong were prevented from entering one of the hamlets-- at the cost of one slight wound to a defender.

The importance of Phuoc Chau to both the government and the Viet Cong is better understood when the rice-production potential of the valley is considered. Phuoc Chau valley is the only large flat area suitable for extensive rice cultivation in the immediate area and is capable of producing a surplus crop. This surplus could be an important source of income to Phuoc Chau, provided, of course, that the harvest is protected from the Viet Cong. For this purpose, soldiers of the ARVN regiment accompany the farmers into their fields during harvest to prevent the Viet Cong from getting any of the crop.

If the surplus rice was to bring any return to the villagers of Phuoc Chau, it had to be moved to the province capital of Tam Ky on the coastal lowland. Although the one road connecting Phuoc Chau with the lowland was in a general state of disrepair after pacification began, it was used to transport rice and other products. In fact, when the ARVN regiment cleared the road and the surrounding area of Viet Cong, in conjunction with the pacification program, a thrice-weekly bus service from Phuoc Chau to the populous coastal lowlands was started-- the first in three years. Several shops were reopened in the village which provided a variety of services for both the soldiers of the regiment and the village population.

Although the rural Vietnamese had in the past taken care of the sick and wounded with a variety of local medicines and cures, the coming of government forces usually meant more modern medicines and

medical methods. In Phuoc Chau the regimental commander used his medical orderlies to conduct sick calls throughout the village until such time as a regular village dispensary could be established. A combined village dispensary-maternity clinic was planned for the future, with USAID assistance.

One immediate result of the pacification program in Phuoc Chau was the reestablishment of the village school system. Although the Viet Cong had held classes during their period of control in the village, the teachers were generally poorly trained and there were few school supplies. Soon after the clearing operation in the valley had been completed and village and hamlet administrations established, schools were built and staffed in each hamlet. Even the most remote hamlet, at the far end of the valley, had its own schoolhouse and teacher. Although the schoolroom was merely an unwallled, open-air frame with a thatched roof, it was full of children during the day and served as a hamlet meeting place in the evening. The school teacher had lived in the hamlet before the Viet Cong came, but he had fled for fear of his life. After his return, he was confident the government would remain in the village and provide security so that he and his fellow villagers could pursue their occupations.

By June 1964, four months after the initial pacification operation began, Phuoc Chau was, in the opinion of many, well on the way to pacification. The situation in Phuoc Chau (where everything appeared to have been done right) provided vivid contrast to that in Duc Lap, where in the same length of time the village was less than half pacified. Primary responsibility and credit for the textbook example of pacification in Phuoc Chau were due the imaginative and resourceful ARVN regimental commander and his American counterpart, combined with the willingness of the village population to assume part of the responsibility for pacification once they had been shown evidence of the government's intent to stay and secure them.

Unfortunately, however, the success of pacification in Phuoc Chau was short-lived, as the valley was evacuated in June 1965, 16 months after it was first entered. In order to determine why the valley had been abandoned, the same ARVN regimental commander who had pacified the

valley was interviewed at his headquarters on the coastal plain two miles east of Tam Ky, the provincial capital:

Q: In your opinion, why did you leave the valley? How many people came out of the valley, and what do you think will happen to those left?

A: At the order of the division [2nd ARVN Division] we pulled back from Phuoc Chau to this place. But I believed that we would have had to expend too many troops to protect such a small group of the population, so we moved here [National Route One]* in order to have more troops to pacify. I think that before, there were 5000 people and about 3000 left Phuoc Chau and went to Phuoc Lam. We told them we could take them all and they could bring some property with them. The troops were the last element to pull out.

Q: When you left the valley, was it as secure as last year?

A: Phuoc Chau valley was still secure, but we were obliged to pull out the troops from one battalion down to one company, and at that time we lost 50 percent of the valley. The order from the division obliged me to concentrate my troops for mobile operations because the battalion was too spread out. From that time we started to lose.

Q: The impression is given that the valley was less secure due to increased Viet Cong pressure and that the people were not confident in the government, and therefore the division decided to pull the regiment out.

A: (American advisor to the regiment) I don't think there was any lack of confidence in the government to any great degree. The government did reduce its forces there, but I don't know that it had any great psychological effect on the people.

The regimental commander preferred to avoid answering the question regarding how he felt about having to leave the valley after having spent over a year there. To his credit, he tried to bring as many of the people from the valley as he could. Considering the withdrawal of

* National Route One begins in Tay Ninh province at the Cambodian border and passes through Cu Chi (just five miles east of Duc Lap) to Saigon, then turns north, following the coastal plain through the cities of Danang, Hue, and thence across the 17th parallel through the DRV to Hanoi and ends at the Chinese border, a distance of almost 2000 kilometers.

Phuoc Chau in a larger context, that of protecting a larger segment of the population of Quang Tin province with the forces available, the decision was probably correct. But the regimental commander did not hide the fact that he was disappointed at having to leave the valley, as the pacification of Phuoc Chau had been a personal challenge to him. Moreover, his questioning the wisdom of the decision to pull out of Phuoc Chau was pessimistically reflected in the following conversation:

Q: Do you feel that the war can be won right here in South Vietnam?

A: I feel that the situation is now too late. Before, we only had to spend 10 piasters [to defeat the Viet Cong], now we have to spend 30 [meaning we now have to pay thrice the price to win the war]. I have many viewpoints on the general situation. I say on tactics, you change your tactics and maybe you win some parts, but you lose the whole thing. There have been many mistakes in tactics. Before, they told us to arm all the people, and they do not know that the people are not yet capable of defending themselves. Before leaving them, we must create in them the capability to fight the Communists. In an antiguerrilla war we have three phases: phase one, establish a base; phase two, isolation of the enemy; phase three, destroy. Phase three is very easy; it is the easiest. But phase two is difficult; phase two requires intelligence and effort. We stepped over phase two and tried to pacify an area by phase three. You do not only work by tactics, you work by strategy. If one general is wrong, maybe some people are killed. If one politician is wrong, maybe one country is lost. If one historian is wrong, a generation is lost.

In this war the enemy cannot destroy the army, but they destroy the will to fight. My troops now go over to the Viet Cong; it is very common. I do not fear sacrificing a battalion if I have the possibility to make up another. But now we feel that we do not have the possibility to have another one. We know that the Viet Cong divide into phases: phase one, they destroy the Popular Forces; phase two, destroy the Regional Forces; and phase three, destroy the regular army. What do we think? The Viet Cong regular forces are very strong and very weak too. If they have support from the people, they are very strong. If they have no eyes, no hands, no ears, they will be very, very weak. In Phuoc Chau my personal aim was to catch all the local Viet Cong. Even if a company of Viet Cong regular forces was there, I would not touch them

because there is no time to fight them. When I can isolate the regular forces, I can destroy them easily, but if you do not destroy the local forces you need more troops, because the local forces are more difficult to destroy than a regular Viet Cong company. I talked with the people of Phuoc Chau in a meeting. I told them the Viet Cong cannot chase me out of Phuoc Chau valley. "You, only you, can chase me out of Phuoc Chau. If we treat you badly, then you chase us out of this valley."

For whatever consolation it may have been to the regimental commander, the Phuoc Chau experience did point out that a successful pacification plan could be developed and implemented, at least in a limited area, provided, of course, that enough forces were available to remain in the village and secure it from Viet Cong attacks and penetration.

MY LONG

The second village, My Long in Vinh Binh province, presents several contrasts in terms of location, settlement pattern, and economy to Duc Lap and Phuoc Chau. My Long is a fishing village located on the right bank of the Song Co Chien, a Mekong distributary. In contrast to Phuoc Chau and Duc Lap, both of which may be considered as clustered settlements, the eight hamlets of My Long stretch for 12 kilometers along the river bank (see Fig. 7). The river provides My Long with its main source of economic income through fishing and is the only relatively unhampered access route to the village. The nine-kilometer road from My Long to Cau Ngan district town is so badly cut that it is impassible except for bicycle and foot traffic.

Nearly six months of uninterrupted Viet Cong control of My Long ended in January 1964 when the current pacification program began in the village. Once the initial search-and-clear operation was completed, an ARVN battalion was stationed in the village to effect security for the pacification program.

The present population given for My Long is approximately 2500, which includes 1400 people who relocated into the village from other areas of Vinh Binh province. In reality, this population figure is for Ben Day hamlet, which is the center of My Long village and the location of the village office, Popular Force outpost, school, and market. About

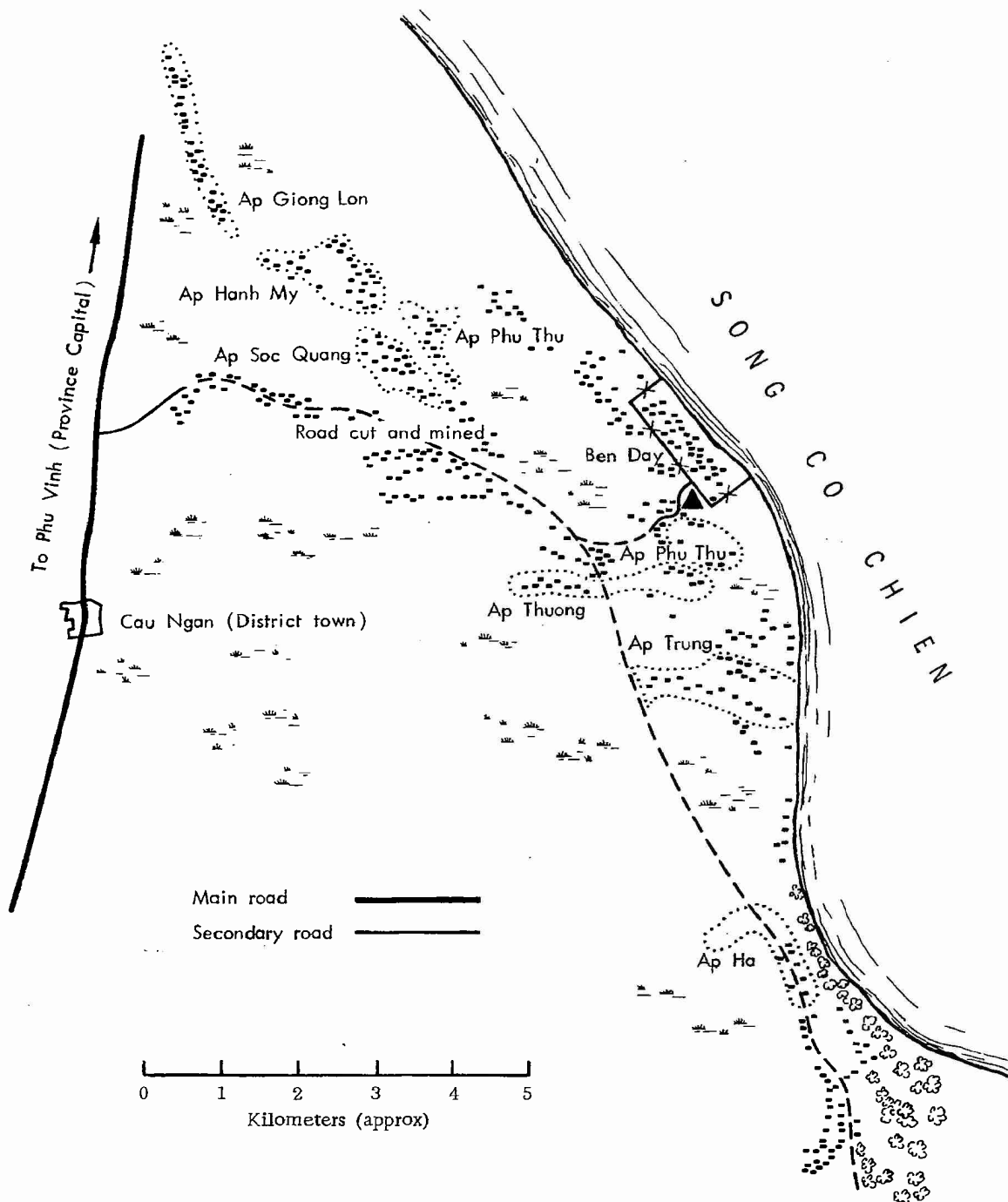


Fig.7—My Long

one-third of the population of Ben Day left during and immediately after the beginning of the pacification program because they feared the hamlet would become a target for Viet Cong attacks. Their fears were justified in that control of My Long had changed hands five times in the previous year and a half. Based on this experience, many of the villagers had little reason to believe in the government's ability to maintain permanent security in My Long.

Even after My Long had been under pacification for six months (July 1964), the village chief and his deputy lived in the district town and commuted only occasionally to My Long--whenever their presence was needed in the village. Periods of a week or more would go by without either of these two village officials appearing in the village. The only other member of the village administration was the police officer. He was a permanent resident of My Long and had lived in the village continuously for the past three years except during those periods of Viet Cong control.

As part of the pacification program, an outpost was built and manned by local militia and regional forces. This outpost, which was located just behind the village office (a location similar to that of the Duc Lap outpost), was very heavily fortified, even by Vietnamese standards. It consisted of a concrete blockhouse surrounded by a triangular concrete and steel firing wall, which in turn was surrounded by ten multistrand barbed-wire fences. To enter the outpost, one had to go through a maze of gates and false entrances. In July 1964, only Ben Day hamlet could be considered reasonably secure.

The village police officer said he had caught 15 Viet Cong agents in My Long since the pacification program had begun, and he thought there were about 30 left in the village. Also, the policeman had shot and killed one Viet Cong guerrilla who had returned to Ben Day hamlet in broad daylight with his weapon to visit his family. When asked how he thought the local security of My Long could be improved, the police officer asked for two watchtowers. He explained that watchtowers placed at each end of Ben Day hamlet would be a concrete example--something the people could see--of the government's interest in permanently

securing My Long.* In fact, little or no effort had been made to pacify the other seven hamlets of the village. One other request the village police officer made for securing the village was money with which to pay informants for information about the Viet Cong.

Four months after the initial pacification effort in My Long, 822 people were relocated into the village from Hiep Thanh village, which is located south of My Long on the tip of a peninsula--a well-known Viet Cong sanctuary. The ARVN troops responsible for relocating the people into My Long had physically forced many of them to move against their will and had destroyed most of their possessions rather than allowing the people to bring them. In addition to the undue burden this placed on My Long, the presence of Viet Cong agit-prop agents among the relocatees further complicated the relocation and endangered the village security.

The Hiep Thanh relocatees consisted of 10 old men, 87 old women, 129 women, one young man (probably sick), 281 boys, and 305 girls. The majority of the women without husbands said they were widowed or divorced. The male residents of Hiep Thanh, however, began to trickle slowly into My Long after the relocation was completed. Thereafter, throughout the relocatee area of Ben Day hamlet, several men of military age could be observed working as either fishermen or laborers. The village police officer estimates that the Viet Cong agents are among these men.

The pungent odor of fish that greets one upon arrival in My Long attests to the primary economic pursuit of the village. The best fishing grounds are approximately ten kilometers down the river, where it meets the South China Sea. Most families in My Long have a boat, although only the more prosperous people have motor boats. The control of boat traffic along the river has been a constant problem for the Vietnamese navy. During the relocation of the people from Hiep Thanh

*The real value of watchtowers for improving the security of My Long seems rather doubtful. Past experience in Vietnam has shown that watchtowers are extremely vulnerable to Viet Cong destruction and that the primary function of surveillance from them is never adequately performed.

to My Long, the Viet Cong staged a nighttime motor-boat attack on the village which was repulsed by the Vietnamese river force.

In addition to the fishing trade, there is some rice production in My Long. In July 1964 the main square around the marketplace in the center of Ben Day hamlet was lined with shops and businesses which had begun since the start of pacification. More than 20 small businesses were operating, including two general stores, two teahouses, and several tailors. Although the hamlets of My Long are strung out along the river for quite a distance, the village marketplace in Ben Day hamlet seemed to be the focal point of village activities. This was particularly evident when the daily market took place in the morning, with people coming from the other hamlets to buy and sell goods.

One of the villagers' proudest achievements in My Long under the pacification program was the new village dispensary and maternity clinic. This was a cooperative self-help project--USAID provided assistance in the form of 80,000 piasters, and the people of the village voluntarily supplied the common or unskilled labor, while the province sent in the necessary skilled laborers. The three-room maternity clinic was completed in April 1964 and, according to the resident midwife, has had plenty of business since then. It is interesting to note that much of this business has come from the relocatees from Hiep Thanh. Between April and June 1964, 35 babies were born to the relocated "widows and divorcees" of Hiep Thanh. No doubt most of the fathers are with the Viet Cong.

In conjunction with the setting up of the maternity clinic and dispensary, a trained doctor spent three months in the village training personnel to take care of the sick. Another type of health service provided for the people of My Long was the village dentist. This man came to the village from Cau Ngan district town several months after the pacification program had begun. According to him, business was still slow, but he believed that once he had gained acceptance from the villagers he would be able to earn a suitable living.

Plans called for a new schoolroom to be built to supplement the overcrowded building opposite the village office in Ben Day hamlet. As in Duc Lap and Phuoc Chau, education remains high on the list of the villagers' wants and needs.

On a smaller scale than in Phuoc Chau (one hamlet versus nine), pacification appeared to have gotten off to a good start in the village. The material benefits of pacification (USAID supplies, dispensary, etc.) were quite evident in My Long, but the less obvious aspects, i.e., a change in the villagers' attitudes and a real willingness to fully support pacification in their village, had not yet evolved.

A subsequent visit to My Long in July 1965 showed that in the past year pacification had, if anything, contracted, and no attempt had been made to extend the pacification program to the other hamlets. The ARVN battalion has long since left My Long, and it appears that the village has remained in government hands only because the Viet Cong have not been able to mass a large enough local force to take it or they have not been interested in doing so.

Outwardly, one hopeful sign was a change in the village administration, which at least resulted in the officials living in the village. The former village chief had quit his job to join the National Police, and his deputy had abandoned his post and moved to the province capital. The former police officer also left My Long to rejoin the Regional Forces. The new village officials were appointed to their jobs by the district chief. They had held similar posts in Can Long district, but since their village there became insecure, the district chief moved them to My Long.

Although the village officials insisted that they were able to perform all their normal duties, the district officials in Cau Ngan told a different tale. According to one district official, "Our administration over there [My Long] is just to keep our village in good legal shape; in other words, it is only a symbol." According to the district economic officer, the only function of the village council in My Long is to collect taxes, and even that administrative function is performed only when a military operation takes place to provide security for the district officials. The district chief admitted that it is not difficult to collect taxes in My Long, because most people earn their living from fishing, which is easy to tax. But taxing of property, rice production, land, cattle, or buffalo is almost nonexistent. Only in Ben Day can such taxes be collected, which causes some resentment among the

inhabitants of that hamlet. Once each month the village finance officer travels to Cau Ngan district town to have the village tax records checked. This is the reverse of the procedure in Duc Lap, where a clerk travels from the district office to the village. The trip to Cau Ngan from My Long, like the trip from Duc Lap to Duc Hoa, is circuitous because of the road destruction. It is necessary to go by boat from My Long to Tra Vinh, the province capital, then by road to Cau Ngan.

Although the village, district, and province administration seem reluctant to give up their tax-collection function in My Long, they seem even more unwilling to open up any other administrative channels in the village. Since Ben Day is the only hamlet in the village controlled by the government, there is no government representation in seven of the eight hamlets of My Long. The hamlet chief of Ben Day (the only government hamlet chief in My Long village), plays an important role in the administration of the hamlet. According to one district official, the Ben Day hamlet chief works for the administrative committee of the village. He is a link between the people and the village administrative committee, and he is also on the committee. The people go to him first. The Viet Cong, however, recently removed this last link in the village between the people and the administration when they killed the hamlet chief while he was conducting a security check around the hamlet. The obvious hazards of being hamlet chief in My Long make it unlikely that anyone in the village will volunteer for the position.

The local security of My Long village, or more specifically, Ben Day hamlet, is presently handled by a company of Regional Forces and some assorted Co Dinh Xa (village agency) troops, as they are locally called. Regarding the latter group, one district official described them as "soldiers of the village pacification committee." This committee organizes the Nghia Quan (Popular Force) and Thanh Nien Chien Dan (Combat Youth).

In terms of the economic continuity of the village, there has been a significant change for the worse. The primary source of income in My Long has been, is, and probably always will be, fishing. The proximity

of the village to good fishing grounds makes it almost ideally suited for that occupation. A large variety of fish and shrimp are caught daily in the Song Co Chien. What is not consumed in the village is either dried and shipped out or is sent fresh to nearby markets. The economic future of My Long seemed bright, but as one district official said:

My Long village is the richest in Cau Ngan district. It is because of the fishing. The fishing port produced more than 500 tons each year. But this quantity has now been reduced, due to our war, and it is only about 70 or 80 tons a year. It was planned for a big port to be built in the village at a cost of many millions of piasters, but because there is no security anymore the project has been postponed.

Another result of the general insecurity of My Long has been the closing of several of the shops in Ben Day hamlet. The dentist has left the village, as have several of the tailors. Both teahouses are closed, although the two general stores remain open.

In addition to the fishing, My Long produces enough rice from the salt-water paddies around the village to be self-sufficient in that vital product. One of the most urgently needed aids in the village, as expressed by the villagers themselves, is loans for the purchase of long-shaft motors for their fishing boats. One villager suggested that the government sell these motors at a reduced price to the fishermen or else make loans available to them, similar to the National Agricultural Cooperative Office (NACO) loans for farmers.

During the relocation of the Hiep Thanh villagers into My Long, USAID assistance was plentiful, but since June 1964, due to the increasing insecurity, it has dwindled to a fraction of the former total. This aid was primarily in the form of pigs, metal sheets for roofing, and cement.

The village maternity clinic and dispensary is still operating in Ben Day hamlet, but it too seems to have deteriorated. The resident midwife is paid from village funds. Sometimes her monthly salary of 600 piasters is several months overdue, whereupon she has to abandon her job at the maternity clinic temporarily to earn enough money to

take care of her family. As a result, the quality of the medical treatment for maternity delivery and other needs has been reduced.

In the year since the author last visited My Long, a new school has been erected and five teachers are now employed full time in the village. During a storm the roof of the old schoolhouse blew off and was not replaced. Apparently, funds to repair the roof are not available, so the building is not being used at all.

A general conclusion on the situation in My Long is that the village economy has markedly declined, while the social aspects of pacification, such as education and health, continued in the village, but on much smaller scales than before. Perhaps the single most important reason for the steady decline in My Long was the relative isolation of the village from the population centers of the province. True, the river has been used in the past and is still used as a communications link, but not all people own boats, and this means of transport is too slow for people to conveniently make the round trip to the province capital in a single day. If the road to Cau Ngan district town could be opened and secured, then the village would have a direct link to a hard-surface highway and bus transportation. But to open this road would mean a major military operation, and to keep it open would require at least a battalion, if not more, of ARVN troops. The GVN does not appear willing or able to tie down that many troops to secure a village. Thus the future in My Long appears as grim as that in Duc Lap, Phuoc Chau, and many of the other "contested villages" in Vietnam.

VI. THE CONTESTED VILLAGES--A GENERALIZED VIEW

It seems reasonable that from the collective experiences in Duc Lap, Phuoc Chau, and My Long a generalized composite picture can be drawn of the situation in the many other Vietnamese villages located in the so-called contested zones; that is, in those areas where neither the Viet Cong nor the government have complete and continuing control and authority. There appear to be many more contested villages throughout Vietnam than completely controlled Viet Cong villages or their opposite communities on the government side. While the individual situations in the villages in Vietnam may vary considerably in detail, a few general characteristics of the contested villages can be described to give an idea of their internal situation.

SECURITY

The primary aspect of the contested villages in Vietnam is that they do not have continuous security, generally because the government forces are neither strong enough nor active enough to destroy or, at least, neutralize the local Viet Cong forces. As a result, the villagers can generally expect some form of Viet Cong harassment or even penetration in their villages. Many of the villagers in Duc Lap, Phuoc Chau, and My Long appear to accept this as part of their situation of living in the middle of a revolutionary war. The pattern and nature of Viet Cong activity in the contested villages vary with the size of the local Viet Cong forces and the size and aggressiveness of the local defending force. At the outset of a pacification effort in a village, the defending force may be a regular government unit, such as the ARVN battalion in Duc Lap, the ARVN Regiment in Phuoc Chau, or the Regional Force company in My Long, or just a Popular Force platoon. Generally, in those villages in the contested zones which are undergoing government pacification, an ARVN unit is stationed either in or near the village to provide defense against Viet Cong Main Force attacks. Too often, however, responsibility for both internal and external security is prematurely entrusted to a village or hamlet militia, and the defending ARVN unit is withdrawn. The local paramilitary

forces usually are not strong enough to provide the vital external security shield, particularly when faced with the task of maintaining internal security as well.

The maintenance of internal security in the contested village presents one of the more difficult tasks for the government because it means identifying, isolating, and ultimately destroying the Viet Cong organization which has been built up within the village. Although this organization is often nothing more than a few informants or sympathizers, at other times whole Viet Cong guerrilla units have been known to live within a village undergoing government pacification. In the past, the government armed forces have found the task of uncovering an actual or potential Viet Cong organization within a village extremely difficult, if not impossible. Local village security units have been somewhat more successful in carrying out this very important aspect of pacification, which may be partially explained by the fact that this particular function is more closely related to police work than to military activity. For instance, in Duc Lap the Hoa Hao militia and disbanded Combat Youth generally had better intelligence than the government forces had on local Viet Cong activities in the village, because they conducted themselves in a way which permitted them to mingle more freely and effectively with the villagers than the ARVN troops could. In fact, whenever good intelligence was available, either of these units was able to inflict heavy losses on local Viet Cong units. But, as the defection of several of the Combat Youth in Duc Lap showed, one of the greatest difficulties and most common hazards in recruiting and organizing a local defense force is that the Viet Cong might infiltrate the unit.

A different situation occurred in Phuoc Chau, where Viet Cong defectors were recruited as defenders within the village, even though their loyalty to the government could logically be questioned. However, these units proved to be reasonably effective in providing internal security, with no reported redefections or collusion with the Viet Cong.

Generally speaking, the contested villages suffer from a lack of both external and internal security. The former is usually ascribed to preventing major Viet Cong attacks such as the three that occurred

in Duc Lap; the latter is more concerned with the local Viet Cong organization within a village. That one type of security can exist without the other has been shown in Phuoc Chau, where no major Viet Cong attacks occurred (probably due to the presence of an ARVN regiment in the village), but small harassments and penetrations by local Viet Cong units continued. My Long appeared to have an internal security problem more than an external one. Duc Lap, unfortunately, was plagued by a lack of both internal and external security, as the events described above have shown.

ADMINISTRATION

As a result of the problem of insecurity in the village, the administration of the contested villages is generally inefficient. Few people wish to risk their lives working for the government as village officials when the possibility of violent death almost always exists. The Viet Cong have, in the past, made village chiefs and other local officials particular targets for their terrorism. Without adequate protection, only the most foolhardy or brave work as village administrators. Even if administrative officials are working in the village, usually not all positions are filled, which further contributes to the ineffectiveness of the village administration. Another problem concerning the village administration is that many of those officials who do work, although perhaps dedicated and honest men, have had little experience or training in administrative matters and through no real fault of their own are patently inefficient in their jobs. As a result, the village is not properly administered, so that not even the simplest of services are provided to the village population. This, in turn, often creates more dissatisfaction with the government and increases the villagers' vulnerability to Viet Cong persuasion. In some circumstances (My Long, for example), the only evident government administrative function in the village may be tax collection. The Viet Cong, to be sure, also collect their taxes in the contested villages and on a generally more organized scale and schedule than the government has.

ECONOMY

During times of peace the life of the average villager is difficult at best, being an almost endless struggle to produce enough food for subsistence, let alone a small profit. The continuity of this pattern of existence is broken during times of war, especially in those contested villages where fighting takes place and both the villagers' homes and fields are destroyed. In those areas where the Viet Cong and ARVN forces are fighting, the villager must often stay away from his fields, and subsequently his crops suffer. As a result, the economic production of the contested villages and the standard of living of many of the villagers in them declines. This is especially true in the contested villages in Vietnam, where both the Viet Cong and the government make demands upon the villager for food and taxes.

Another problem which contributes to lower economic production is that of relocation. Many villagers are either forced to relocate into government hamlets or do so voluntarily, in the so far vain hope of separating themselves from the Viet Cong. As a result, they are moved farther from their fields, and their hard life is made even harder because they must now spend more time each day traveling to and from them--time which might be spent more profitably tending to crops. When the villagers must relocate into the government hamlets, they can generally bring only their household belongings and, perhaps, one or two animals. As a result, their fruit trees, gardens, and livestock deteriorate or are lost. Thus, as a direct result of the war, the difficult life of the villagers in the contested villages of Vietnam is made even more difficult because their one means of gaining a livelihood is severely curtailed.

HEALTH

Within the contested villages of Vietnam, one of the most common social problems is that of a low standard of health. The government has tried to develop adequate health facilities, such as dispensaries and maternity clinics, in villages under its control. However, those villages which are either Viet Cong-controlled or severely contested generally have none of these facilities, or, if they do exist, they

are by and large substandard. Considering that a major proportion of rural dwellers in Vietnam today are either in Viet Cong-controlled zones or in contested zones, it is a wonder that the rural health problem has not become more acute than it is. Unfortunately, the majority of the people in the Viet Cong-controlled areas have little opportunity to visit trained doctors or nurses, and the amount of disease and death in those areas can be only estimated. The government has tried to take steps to improve the rural health standards in many areas, but all too often the government-built and staffed facilities become Viet Cong targets and are destroyed.* As a result, the real victims of the war, the villagers, suffer even more.

EDUCATION

One almost universal characteristic of the villages in Vietnam, be they contested, GVN, or Viet Cong-controlled, is the presence of a school. It appears that schools are generally considered sanctuaries by both the Viet Cong and the government forces and are treated as such. Thus, although education is affected less than any other aspect of the contested villages, in many cases the educational facilities are still inadequate for the rural population. Viet Cong schools usually are even worse, and often untrained but politically reliable villagers are used as teachers. That the Viet Cong also have schools in the villages under their control is an indication that both sides in this war appreciate the value of education, although perhaps not for the same reasons.

The general situation in the contested villages of Vietnam today was best summed up by the district chief of Cau Ngan, an ARVN captain, who said:

Only we military people consider our lives as light as feathers; the people consider their lives most precious, especially the life of a family man. In this war they are the victims, like when buffaloes and cows bump one another, only the mosquitoes and flies in between them die.

* One example is the dispensaries in Duc Hanh A and B which were twice destroyed by the Viet Cong. Another more widespread situation occurred when the World Health Organization-sponsored malaria-eradication teams were kidnapped or killed by the Viet Cong to the extent that many areas of Vietnam did not receive the benefit of this nonpolitical, humane effort.

VII. REGAINING THE INITIATIVE IN THE VILLAGES

When this study was begun in April 1964, its purpose was to make a detailed examination of the pacification program in Duc Lap so that the experience gained there could be used in guiding other village-level pacification programs in Vietnam. In theory, the evolution of pacification in Duc Lap meant the eventual reduction of Viet Cong activity in the village, an increase in government presence and control through a planned program of village security, and the institution of social and economic development schemes for the benefit of the village population. As the pacification program further evolved, the village population was to take an increasing part in its own self-defense and self-government. This would, of course, have required as a prerequisite the establishment of a reasonable degree of freedom from Viet Cong harassment, terrorism, and attack, together with the establishment of a responsive and efficient local village administration. Neither of these situations has thus far come to exist in Duc Lap, nor has either been significantly present (except temporarily) in the other two villages considered.

Instead, what has happened has been a steady deterioration of the security situation in Duc Lap, with an accompanying decline in government-sponsored social and economic aid to the village to the point that there is actually less GVN control in Duc Lap than there was before the pacification program began. Similar situations have occurred in Phuoc Chau and My Long. The causes of this decline are many, and some have been pointed out in preceding sections. The process of deterioration has been chronicled so that some of the mistakes made in Duc Lap, Phuoc Chau, and My Long may be avoided in other Vietnamese villages. It is hoped that some value may come from the lost hopes, suffering, and privations impressed upon the people of Duc Lap, Phuoc Chau, and My Long by their government's half-hearted attempt to pacify their villages.

The problem in Duc Lap today is compounded by the fact that the village has gone part way through the pacification cycle, and having failed once, the government is going to have to do twice as much as before if a new pacification program is to succeed.

Without considering a complete reorientation of the present pacification program, and acknowledging the limited resources, both material and human, presently available, the following suggestions are given, based on the problems as seen in Duc Lap and specifically aimed at solutions in that village.* However, it would be remiss not to indicate that these suggestions, while generally directed at Duc Lap, are equally applicable in concept, although perhaps not in detail, to Phuoc Chau, My Long, or any other of the many contested villages in Vietnam. In fact, this proposal for regaining the initiative in the villages is really a composite of the experiences gained in these three villages, and each village situation contributed a necessary part to the whole idea as well as having its own specific value.

SECURITY

Without question, the overriding consideration in the pacification of Duc Lap, or any other village in Vietnam, is external security. External security, as used here, means protection from major Viet Cong attacks or terror incidents and differs from internal village security which will be discussed later in this section.

The external security of Duc Lap was originally handled by an ARVN infantry battalion, and, as the recent history of the village has shown, this unit initially had moderate success in protecting the village from the Viet Cong. The successive ARVN units sent into Duc Lap were not as successful in securing the village, which resulted in the failure of the whole pacification program there. With the decline in security and the failure of the pacification program in the village, the villagers in turn lost any confidence they might have had in the government.

Most of the villagers in Duc Lap were realistic enough to realize that the government could not provide them absolute security from Viet

*These suggestions were formulated before the current GVN/US pacification program, i.e., Revolutionary Development, began. It appears that there may be a great deal of overlap between the pacification program proposed here and that currently being attempted by the GVN. Shortly before field work in Duc Lap was brought to a close, a 59-man Revolutionary Development team came to the village. The brief length

Cong contact of any kind. In a village in the middle of a revolutionary war this is almost a sheer impossibility. On the one hand, it was the GVN's presence in Duc Lap and their demand for cooperation and support that led to the villagers being the target for increased Viet Cong intimidation, terror, and attack. On the other hand, the villagers have been given little recent evidence upon which to build confidence in the government's ability or willingness to provide them the security they require to pursue their occupations without fear of Viet Cong attacks or terror--or more simply put, without fear of destruction of their crops and property or loss of their lives.

From the apparent progress in the earlier periods of pacification in each of the three villages studied, it might be concluded that security breeds confidence, and that confidence provides a favorable climate for pacification. When the villagers can determine for themselves that the government is going to remain in the village and protect them, then they seem more willing to participate in government-sponsored programs and to contribute to their own defense and welfare. The point at which this occurs in a village pacification program cannot be determined accurately from the Duc Lap experience, primarily because the villagers were not given the opportunity, in terms of time, to prove themselves willing to support the government. A reasonable estimate would be that Duc Lap was on the threshold of pacification in November 1964, as Phuoc Chau and My Long probably were in July 1964.

That pacification was able to advance as far as it did is a tribute to the external security provided to the villages by the ARVN forces. The importance of external security as the first step in village pacification cannot be overstated. Realistically, though, the experience in Duc Lap has shown that external security alone does not necessarily bring pacification.

of time available for observation precluded making other than impressionistic conclusions, and these were not encouraging. The cadre team, which is supposed to be self-sufficient, including its own defense, as all team members are armed and trained in the use of weapons, left the village each night to sleep in the province capital two miles away. Behavior of this nature is not conducive to building confidence in a village population which has been buffeted between the two sides in the war for over three years and which has gone through four previous pacification programs, all of which failed.

One of the early tests of pacification will be the villagers' willingness and ability to defend themselves from infiltration and attack by local Viet Cong agents and guerrillas. This is essentially a police and intelligence function which requires the organization, training, motivating, and equipping of a village self-defense or Popular Force capability. This is the internal-security requirement of pacification, as opposed to external security.

In Duc Lap the possible nucleus of a village self-defense system could have been the Hoa Hao militia. Although there were not enough Hoa Hao to defend the whole village, a careful and selective recruiting program from the other hamlets in Duc Lap could have been made to augment the experienced force. Considering the past experience with the Combat Youth in Duc Lap, it might have been better to have allowed the Hoa Hao the opportunity to assist in the selection of a village Popular Force.

There is an ongoing program initiated by the Popular Force Command, under which national training teams spend approximately 12 days training, or retraining, whichever the case may be, local village Popular Force units within their own villages. During this training cycle there is also a period given over to explaining the role of the Popular Force in the war against the Viet Cong, or, more simply, "Why We Fight." This basic motivational indoctrination would seem a prerequisite to training local Popular Force soldiers in Duc Lap, especially after the unfortunate experience with the village Combat Youth.

Another aspect of this training is the explanation to the Popular Force that their task is to protect their village against Viet Cong attacks. Assigning the Popular Force the most difficult Viet Cong units to uncover--the local guerrillas--gives them a target, a goal toward which they can work. This would be of particular value in Duc Lap, where in the past the Hoa Hao militia had been tied down to static defensive posts guarding the province airfield. That procedure prevented the aggressive patrolling and setting of ambushes necessary to keep Viet Cong units attempting to infiltrate, harass, or attack the village off balance. The Combat Youth, for instance, in one of their earliest engagements ambushed an unsuspecting Viet Cong unit, inflicting heavy casualties without a single loss to themselves.

A final incentive coming from this training program is that at the end of the 12-day training cycle, the village Popular Force unit is given a basic issue of four necessary items: blanket, mosquito bar, uniform, and pack. Experience has shown that the blanket and uniform are essential items for the Popular Force units, especially those out on nightly ambush or patrol. The prestige and morale factor of receiving some tangible support from the government contributes to the spirit of the local unit and emphasizes the importance and seriousness with which they view their task.

VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

Once an ARVN unit is in sufficient control of the area surrounding the village to provide external security and the development of internal security is under way, the other aspects of pacification--the social, political, and economic programs--can begin. Initially, this part of village pacification is perforce subordinate to security, yet it is through these programs that permanent pacification is established and maintained.

One of the earliest considerations in regaining the initiative within the village would be the strengthening of the village administration through a training program for village officials. In Duc Lap the village administration went through one serious upheaval, with the village chief being replaced and then being reinstated a few months later, causing the villagers to doubt his abilities. Several minor changes of other officials also occurred within the village. Constant shuffling of village officials does not allow them to become fully acquainted with their jobs nor does it allow the villagers to get to know and trust their local administrators. In addition, several posts in the Duc Lap village administration have gone unfilled for lack of qualified personnel. Other positions in the village administration have been filled by officials appointed to do work for which they have neither prior training, special aptitude, nor any real interest.

What appears to be needed most to correct this situation is a training program for local village officials which would be conducted within their own village, rather than the on-the-job self-training

basis currently in practice. This training program would be aimed at improving the efficiency of the village administration and raising the status of the village chief and his officials in the eyes of the villagers. Recalling the words of the regimental commander in Phuoc Chau, "Without the village chief there can be no pacification," it seems that the importance of having a well-trained and efficient local leader not only to represent the government to the people but also to be the link between the people and the district or province officials is mandatory for a successful pacification program.

The importance of this link is emphasized in the case of Duc Lap, where the normal village-district-province administration channel does not function properly. Because of the lack of direct communications with Duc Hoa district, there is no intermediate administrative level to filter out those village transactions which need not go to the province. The Duc Lap village officials are reluctant to approach the province officials directly with their problems. Moreover, the individual villager's chances of obtaining direct assistance from his district or provincial representatives is small.

While the province is actually in charge of matters in Duc Lap, Duc Hoa district still maintains a fiction of administrative control by sending a clerk to the village once a month to audit the village financial records. The inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the Duc Lap village administration in the simple function of keeping financial records was revealed during a conversation with the district clerk who visits the village:

A: The finance of that village [Duc Lap] is very poor. They do poor bookkeeping; that's why I have to do it all myself. They only collect taxes or other payments and every month when I come I have to put them into items and columns. I have to add them up and close the accounts at the end of every month before making financial reports to the district, where they will add it into their report to the province.

Q: Do they pay taxes regularly in Duc Lap?

A: We can collect very little from Duc Lap. We only collect fees for issuing certificates, but not taxes. Before I started working there, they did not have any record books for anything and no patents [licenses] for stores. I had to start making them pay

for their patents. So now another kind of payment we collect is patents, but none from land or rice fields.

Q: On the average, how much do the people pay in taxes in Duc Lap each year?

A: Not much. Like last year, only about ten piasters apiece. And from January [1965] until now [June 1965], only 700 piasters or so have been collected. We try to make them pay taxes every time we issue an authorization that they need. We have to, or else they would never pay.

One way to implement the suggested village-administration training scheme would be to have a national government training team come to the village. The village chief and his assistants would be trained in the proper procedure for processing papers (I.D. cards, birth and death records, etc.), file-keeping, handling the variety of complaints which come to the village office, elementary budgeting, and tax-collection methods. The village budget and tax assistance to be provided under this training program would be of particular importance to Duc Lap. One of the complaints uncovered in Duc Lap was that the village officials' pay was invariably delayed each month because they did not fill out the pay forms correctly. A simplified method of computing their time sheets and salary would probably speed up their paychecks by avoiding the possibility of having forms sent back for correction. Moreover, adequate local accounting would undoubtedly eliminate the monthly visit of the district clerk to Duc Lap to audit the village finance records. Rather, his trip could be made quarterly or even semiannually.

The length of time the national training team would be required to stay in Duc Lap would of course depend on how long it takes to adequately train the village administration. It would seem that 10 to 14 days would suffice if no serious problems arose. During the training session in Duc Lap, the national training team could also be accompanied by a team from the province, Hau Nghia, which would learn how to train other village administrations and would be able to continue such training after the national team had departed.

Through this program, a degree of standardization in village-level administrative procedures could be initiated wherever the training team(s) went in the province. To insure that standardization of administrative

procedures was being carried out by each of the province training teams, it might be advisable to have one member of the national team remain with each provincial team for a suitable length of time. In addition to standardization, another benefit from this training program would be to extend national-government presence down to the villages on a somewhat more systematic basis than presently exists. Moreover, a feedback channel from the village to the district and the province would also be opened up instead of the present one-way channel from province to district and thence to the villages.

Although this proposed village-administration training is an innovation in that there is no similar ongoing US-GVN program, one precedent which might be of value in initiating this work would be the hamlet and village survey work done in selected provinces by joint US-GVN teams for the U.S. Information Service, USIS (now JUSPAO). Because the suggested training program is intended not only to improve village administrative procedures and to increase the efficiency of local village officials but also to benefit the individual villager, it would seem necessary to include an information phase in the program. Specifically, this phase would have two functions: (1) to explain to the village chief and his assistants their role in creating an effective village administration and its contribution to the war effort against the Viet Cong, and (2), perhaps equally important, to explain the purpose of the training program to the villagers and to show them the benefits to be gained from an improved village administration.

The most important goal of this proposed village-administration training program is not to create political awareness or political identity in the villager, but rather to bring government representation to each individual in his own village. Its aim is to make the individual villager feel that he is being represented locally by a trained and efficient village administration which is both cognizant of his problems and responsive to his needs.

The simultaneous training of a village self-defense force and administrative officials might be an important step toward closer coordination between these two important activities. In Duc Lap, for instance, because the village chief and the militia were all Hoa Hao, there was a certain amount of cooperation between them which was

uncommon in other villages. Yet, many times, each acted totally independent from the other. This suggestion does not necessarily mean the control of one by the other, but rather a dovetailing of these two important village activities for better coordination under the pacification program.

ECONOMIC CONTINUITY

Perhaps one of the most unspectacular but necessary aspects of a village-level pacification program is maintaining and bettering the economic continuity of the village. The monotonous daily struggle for subsistence at certain times of the year (planting and harvest) takes precedence even over the perennial problem of survival in the war. The continual problem of raising enough food for subsistence and perhaps even a small profit has become acute for the villagers who are caught in the middle of the war. Judging by the experience in Duc Lap, what appears necessary is not a drastic altering of this traditional routine, but the initiation of programs at the village level designed to meet the basic needs of the people and start them on the road to a better economic life.* Perhaps the most urgent priority or economic aid should be given to those programs which provide direct benefit to the villagers and which require little technology or expense to implement.

The most successful economic programs in Duc Lap have been the government-sponsored pig program, the rice-seed program, and, when properly explained to the farmers, the fertilizer program. Each of these programs was aimed directly at bettering the immediate economic situation of the villager, and generally they involved rapid return for the time and effort invested.

If a program to maintain and better the economic continuity of the village were conducted in conjunction with the village-administration and self-defense training programs, then the current GVN-USAID economic aid could be channeled through a revitalized village administration in

* One suggestion along this line would be the expansion of slack-season (when rice cannot be grown) crops for food and for cash; for instance, in Duc Lap some farmers plant peanuts and tobacco during the dry season.

an attempt to get the economic assistance to those who actually need it. Moreover, this would help the village administration take a more active role in the functions of the village. Of course, the proposed economic-assistance program would be designed to fit existing GVN-USAID programs as closely as possible and would also be based upon village resources and production capabilities.

RURAL HEALTH

Rural health is one of the social aspects of the villages that could be used with great effectiveness in village pacification programs. Here, the government has a distinct advantage over the Viet Cong. For instance, in Duc Lap a dispensary was built in four of the hamlets in the village, but only in Duc Hanh A was a nurse assigned. She worked for several months, then quit because it cost her half of her 600-piaster monthly salary to travel back and forth from her home in Bao Trai to Duc Hanh A. During the time the nurse worked in the hamlet, she had provided elementary medical aid for the local residents and had been direct evidence of the social benefits of the pacification program. The people of Duc Hanh A indicated their appreciation of her work in the hamlet, and they were very sorry to see her leave.

The dispensary stood unused for quite a while as mute evidence of the government's failure to maintain a program which was not only of direct benefit to the people in the hamlet but was also well received by them and was something the Viet Cong could not provide. In fact, the Viet Cong must have viewed the empty dispensary as a threat to their image as "liberators," as they destroyed it twice, the last time in February 1965. It has not been rebuilt since then.

Shortly after the destruction of the dispensary in Duc Hanh A, an interview was held with the province Social Affairs Officer in an attempt to get his views on the incident:

Q: How do you feel about the destruction at Duc Hanh A in Duc Lap, the barbed wire torn down and the dispensary destroyed?

A: Well, once in a while the Viet Cong strike and it must be so. I really have no feeling at all.

Q: Do you think that what happened might cause the people to lose their confidence in the government?

A: No, they don't lose any confidence in the government, because it established dispensaries and schools for them. While I was there I realized they lived happily. They really had confidence in our government, even when the Viet Cong came and made trouble once in a while.

Q: If this is so, then the people must look upon the Viet Cong comings and goings as ordinary happenings.

A: Yes, that's true. They look at these things as very common. Fighting is so common in their eyes. When the Viet Cong come, they either run away or come and inform us.

As the person directly responsible for the distribution of social aid to the villagers, this province official displayed what might be termed a common ignorance of the situation in the villages of his province. When asked what were the relations between his office and the people of Duc Lap, he answered, "Relations? Not much. We only have contact with them once in a while."

Moreover, when discussing the people in the villages, he (perhaps unintentionally) classed himself above the peasants he was supposed to help:

Most of them are hard workers; their minds are simple. Rural people are very simple, truthful, and innocent. They do not know about politics such as we do.

To initiate a program aimed at improving the social conditions in villages in conjunction with pacification, it would seem necessary to have a modicum of knowledge about the villagers and their needs. The first step in a program of this nature might be to survey the most common diseases and ailments found among the villagers which could be effectively treated by locally trained nurses. Regularly scheduled and publicized visits also could be made by national health teams to those villages which have already had the rural-health training course. During these visits to the village by the national health teams, additional training could be given to the local health personnel.

Perhaps one of the most valuable assets of a program of this nature is that it could be used effectively to display to the villagers

in very real and understandable terms the difference between the Viet Cong's and the national government's resources and willingness to provide for the welfare of the people. Experience in Duc Lap has indicated that the Viet Cong medical treatment given to the villagers in areas under their control, whenever available, has been extremely crude and generally ineffective. The government, by comparison, has at its disposal relatively modern medical techniques and resources for treating ailing villagers. It seems that the government should be publicizing this obvious advantage it has over the Viet Cong more than has been done in the past.

EDUCATION

A second social aspect in which the government has a distinct advantage over the Viet Cong--and one, it should be added, that the villagers are most likely to fully understand--is the ability to provide educational facilities for the children in the village. In Duc Lap, except for the one dispensary in Duc Hanh A, the establishment of schools has been about the only successful action of the current pacification program and has met with the complete approval of the villagers.

Although the Viet Cong have elementary-type schools in some of their areas, only the government can provide the opportunity for a high-school education or possibly even some university training for village children. The Viet Cong do not possess this educational capability, and it appears that the government has not taken advantage of this obvious deficiency. Many of the villagers of Duc Lap have expressed their willingness to work and sacrifice in order to send their children to school to get the education that they did not get themselves, but it is almost impossible for the average rural dweller to save enough to send his son or daughter to the secondary school in Duc Hoa, let alone to the university in Saigon. One solution might be the creation of a rural scholarship program which would be designed to send children from villages to secondary school, and those who are exceptionally qualified on to university training.

EPILOGUE

The program suggested above for regaining the initiative in the villages is aimed at those social, political, and economic aspects of rural Vietnam in which the Viet Cong appear to have made progress with far fewer resources and facilities than the government. Although the Viet Cong success in controlling much of the rural area of Vietnam is often attributed to their organization, dedication, and discipline, the defeat of pacification in Duc Lap, Phuoc Chau, and My Long attests not so much to a Viet Cong victory as to a GVN failure. These three failures and those in countless other Vietnamese villages indicate that in order to be successful, any government pacification program must be equally organized, dedicated, and disciplined. This suggests a higher degree of thoughtful planning, coordinated implementation, and purposive determination on the part of the government than has been displayed in the past.

The basic ingredient of the revolutionary war in Vietnam is the individual villager whose support is necessary if success is to be realized by either side. The basic ingredient in this proposed program for gaining the villagers' support can be summed up in one word which comes from the Vietnamese themselves: nhân đạo (humanity).

