

*Indochina Monographs*

# Pacification

by

*Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho*



U.S. ARMY CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

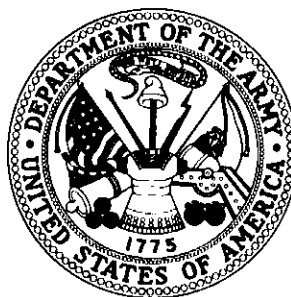
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Indochina Monographs

This is one of a series published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History. They were written by officers who held responsible positions in the Cambodian, Laotian, and South Vietnamese armed forces during the war in Indochina. The General Research Corporation provided writing facilities and other necessary support under an Army contract with the Center of Military History. The monographs were not edited or altered and reflect the views of their authors--not necessarily those of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense. The authors were not attempting to write definitive accounts but to set down how they saw the war in Southeast Asia.

Colonel William E. Le Gro, U.S. Army, retired, has written a forthcoming work allied with this series, Vietnam: From Cease-Fire to Capitulation. Another book, The Final Collapse by General Cao Van Vien, the last chairman of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff, will be formally published and sold by the Superintendent of Documents.

Taken together these works should provide useful source materials for serious historians pending publication of the more definitive series, the U.S. Army in Vietnam.

JAMES L. COLLINS, JR.  
Brigadier General, USA  
Chief of Military History



In the attempt to present every relevant aspect of the GVN pacification effort, I have mostly relied on my personal experience as one of the many architects who helped draw part of the blueprint and oversaw its progress, and complemented it by conducting interviews with responsible officials and studying available documentation.

Several people have contributed to the completion of this monograph to whom I feel particularly indebted. I certainly owe a debt of gratitude to General Cao Van Vien, Chairman of the Joint General Staff and Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, Chief of Staff and Commanding General of the Central Logistics Command, RVNAF — under whom I served many years as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations — for their valuable guidance and suggestions concerning the pacification planning and coordination process at the GVN level. To Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, Commanding General of I Corps, and Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh, Commander of the 3d ARVN Infantry Division, I owe insight and an unbiased viewpoint with regard to the actual implementation of the pacification program at the field level and the many problems involved. Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, my colleague of many years as J-2, JGS, has helped me with his always thoughtful critical remarks and his authoritative knowledge of enemy schemes and actions.

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McLean, Virginia  
10 October, 1977

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The war in Vietnam was a continuation of the basic conflict, begun in 1946, which pitted the Communists against the free, nationalistic Vietnamese. Punctuated by a short pause following the Geneva Accords, the Communist-led struggle in the South followed fundamentally consistent policies and strategies aimed at achieving complete political dominance over all of Vietnam.

The Viet Cong insurgents operating behind a screen of a national liberation movement were fronts for the Vietnamese Communist Party whose Politbureau in Hanoi directed the total war effort. Although the Viet Cong profited from the Viet Minh experience and knew how to conceal their true identity, they were unable to make the appeal of their cause as strong as the feverish desire for independence was for the Viet Minh in 1949. The Viet Minh had been able to take over the control of the nationalist and anti-colonial movements and eliminate most of the nationalist contenders in the process. They had enjoyed an undisputed cause and derived from it great strength and popularity. The Viet Cong also attempted to revive the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist issue but the old magic failed to work because South Vietnam, despite its heavy reliance on U.S. aid, had become a truly independent nation.

The regime of the Republic of Vietnam, under Ngo Dinh Diem and successive military and civilian governments, was thus faced with a double challenge, that of nation building and the threat of insurgency and outright invasion from the north. In many respects, the war against the Viet Cong bore the characteristics of a civil war, although both sides received aid and were supported with troops from outside sources.

The cells of the Viet Cong infrastructure, aided by and in concert with local and NVA main forces, acted on the body of South Vietnam like cancerous tumors and sapped the strength of the GVN. The GVN task of nation building stood little chance of success unless these tumors were removed, and the GVN military effort was inextricably entwined with political, social and economic endeavors. Together, they made up the total effort known as pacification.

Nowhere was this total effort more arduous than in the Vietnamese countryside, the main battleground of the war and pacification.

The Vietnamese countryside suffered most from destruction and privations and was the feeding ground for social injustice, crimes, oppressions, and all the vices generated by a colonialist and feudalistic heritage. Land was inequitably distributed; most private land being in the possession of wealthy landlords. The majority of farmers did not own the land they cultivated but had to lease it from landlords who charged exorbitant rents. It was also plagued by debilitating diseases, lack of medication and sanitation, shortages of food and clothing, and widespread illiteracy. Because of the lack of schools and teachers, most rural children were denied an education and forced at an early age to work as farmhands under harsh and difficult conditions. The prospects for the future looked grim and disheartening.

South Vietnam, before the French-Viet Minh war began in 1946, ranked as one of the top rice producers among Southeast Asian countries. About 90% of its population lived on rice farming and depended on agriculture as a principal means of subsistence. Yet during the war South Vietnam had to import rice in increasing quantities each year. The escalating war forced the peasants to relinquish their land and farming, quit breeding cattle and poultry and move to urban areas as refugees. Unemployment was widespread and became more serious every year. The national economy deteriorated and functioned only as a result of aid transfusions. As a result of population growth and increasing imports through U.S. aid programs, consumption rose, surpassing production by a five-to-one ratio.

The village and hamlet governmental structure was truly the relic of a feudalistic age. Local leaders, who in most cases inherited their positions, domineered and exploited the peasants by levying high rents and taxes. The farm worker led a miserable life, barely subsisting on what was left of the fruit of his toil after land rents, and going further into debt with each decade. The undercurrent of discontent among the rural people was widespread.

In addition to suffering social vices and economic misfortunes, South Vietnam was also the victim of blatant invasion from Communist North Vietnam, assisted by the Communist bloc. In the face of this situation, the government and people of South Vietnam endeavored on the one hand to defeat the Communist aggressors, and on the other hand to reform their own society. It was a difficult enterprise because both tasks demanded equal priority. National resources and manpower were utilized to the full, augmented by considerable contributions in combat forces, material resources, and money from the United States and the Free World.

To our side as well as to the enemy, the rural area of South Vietnam was to be the decisive battlefield. Without it, the enemy would lose his foothold and the opportunities to protract his war, for the rural area was his major source of subsistence and manpower. The countryside was the arena for the ideological struggle between the Free World and Communism. It was where the battle for the hearts and minds of the people was fought and whoever won their trust, cooperation, and support would be the final victor. Without the rural area, which in Communist doctrine included not only the agricultural lands but also the forests, swamps and mountains, the nation could hardly survive.

To win the battle for the rural area, the enemy conceived the strategy on "encircling the cities with the rural area," while on the RVN side, "all efforts of the nation were to focus on the rural area." In fact, one element of the enemy's strategy in attacking the cities and towns in his general offensive of 1968 was to draw the GVN and allied forces out of the countryside where they were enjoying considerable success in

pacification. The Communists believed control of the rural area was the key to success in a people's war.

The importance of the rural area was obvious. Vietnam, like China, was an agricultural country. Peasants were the largest social group and compared to other social elements were the most underprivileged. Like the Chinese peasants, the Vietnamese peasants were used by the Communists as a front for their "revolutionary war." After the Communists took over control of North Vietnam, one of the first policies they implemented was land reform which redistributed land among the peasants. This policy turned peasants into private landowners, which served well the purpose of winning them over.

In the economic battle, the rural area also played a key role. It was the source of food supplies, and Communist control would certainly help them to achieve self-sufficiency and sustain the war effort. Because of this economic importance, the enemy tried to cut us off from the rural area with his policy of "encircling the adversary's economy" and causing economic difficulties in order to make South Vietnam increasingly dependent on foreign aid.

In the ideological struggle, the rural area was also a fecund ground for political indoctrination and for fomenting class hatred and class struggle. The marked inequality between rural life and urban life existed not only in terms of material comfort and basic necessities but also in the disparity with which law and order were enforced. In many instances, rural life appeared to be governed by a different set of laws and regulations. Too frequently, central government directives were interpreted and manipulated by village authorities to suit their own purposes or merely disregarded in favor of their own rules.

The Communists strove to acquire the inexhaustible manpower of the rural areas. This dependence of the Communists on the rural area was in a certain sense similar to the bond that tied the Nationalists to the cities and urban areas, which were a major source of Nationalist manpower.

The RVN government was fully aware of the Communist dependence on the rural area, and the national strategy of "Pacification and

Development" was designed to separate the Communists from it. The strategy also sought to establish the GVN presence in less secure, contested areas with a view of controlling the nation's manpower and resources and denying them to the enemy. Despite its awareness, the RVN initially appeared not to be truly cognizant of the full implications of the problem at hand. Its efforts to implement pacification were not pushed hard enough and sometimes appeared to be devoid of genuine enthusiasm. These efforts also met with vigorous opposition from the Communists who persistently sought to thwart or offset whatever achievements the RVN happened to gain.

One of the Communists' first reactions was, characteristically enough, to oppose the establishment of local government at the village and hamlet level since this was an extension of the prestige, laws, and political influence of the RVN central government. Unable to wreck the RVN governmental infrastructure, the Communists resorted to effective methods of intimidation, repression, and terror. Through machinations and manipulations, they managed to help into office those who were considered "middle-of-the-roaders," men who were too weak and too indifferent to serve in any effective way and obstructed the nomination of local leaders who enjoyed prestige, affection, and respect among the population. The Communists resorted to kidnapping or outright assassination if intimidation failed to remove those local officials whom they considered too devoted or too zealous. Countless officials at the grass-roots level were reduced to silence or became casualties. The enemy's goal was to instill fear, disenchantment, and anxiety among the active GVN cadre and force them into inaction.

In addition to their effort to neutralize or paralyze our local government structure, the Communists also systematically set about to undermine and disrupt every program the RVN initiated at the local level. Such key programs as "Land to the Tiller" and "Farm Credit" met with vicious slander or outright sabotage. For example, Communist cadres instigated the peasants to apply in mass for credits in order to over-tax the bureaucracy and exhaust the funds; then they urged the peasants not to make repayments. The fish-breeding program also failed to

interest farmers at first because Communist cadres spread the rumor that the type of fish that the GVN had imported from the Philippines would cause leprosy.

The most significant Communist opposition to pacification dated back to the early days of the First Republic's Strategic Hamlet system which the Communists vilified as a program designed to "repress the population" and to "imprison the population behind the hamlet's barrier." In addition to the vilification campaign, the Communists stepped up attacks and shellings against Strategic Hamlets.

After their defeat during the 1968 general offensive, Communist main force units had to withdraw to border base areas leaving much of the countryside to GVN control. The pacification program subsequently made remarkable progress across the country. This took the Communist command in the south by surprise, and it resolved to wreck the GVN's pacification and development program at all costs. As a matter of fact, almost all directives issued by COSVN during that period focused on a determined effort to defeat the GVN pacification program.<sup>1</sup> A document captured in 1971 admitted that the loss of the rural area would eventually make it impossible for the Communists to gain victory.<sup>2</sup>

To confront the enemy and compete with him in the rural area, the GVN first sought to place all villages and hamlets across the country under military control. In addition to protecting the population, the GVN also strived to regiment it into organizations and arm its able-bodied members. The goal was to turn villages and hamlets into centers of resistance against the enemy and to make him feel unsafe wherever he went. Once this was done, development could take place with more chance of success. Regional and Popular Forces (RF and PF) and People's Self-Defense Forces (PSDF) were employed to defend and protect their own villages. The tactic was based on a guerrilla warfare precept: if the enemy force was small, destroy it; if it was sizeable, harass and pin

<sup>1</sup>COSVN: Central Office South Vietnam; the Communist Headquarters located near the Cambodian border north of Saigon.

<sup>2</sup>Enemy document captured in 1971 and confirmed by J-2, JGS.

it down, or withdraw to conserve force and call for regular reinforcements to destroy it. ARVN regular units, meanwhile, would concentrate on attacking and destroying the enemy's logistical bases and his main force units, thus denying him the chance to rest, recuperate, or reorganize.

To help advance the democratic process and to expand national authority, the governmental structure was to be consolidated and made to function effectively. All basic institutions of the regime were to be founded on popular vote, and the government was to assist the people and to respond to their aspirations. National laws were to be enforced so as to eliminate village tyrants who repressed and exploited the people.

For the success of the pacification effort, the GVN deemed it important to improve the welfare of the entire population. In its view, pacification would not be complete if it did not lay the foundation for economic development and social betterment. As a result, several programs related to pacification such as land reform, farm credit, and farmers' associations were implemented on a large scale in conjunction with the military and political efforts. Through these programs, the GVN eventually turned farm tenants and farm workers into land owners and eradicated the abominable land rent system. At the same time, it created conditions for agricultural development by teaching farmers modern techniques, making available seeds, fertilizers, insecticides and encouraging the breeding of farm animals and the planting of supplementary crops. The economic element of pacification also included opening roads and waterways and maintaining lines of communication which were vital to economic and military progress.

In health and education, the effort concentrated on eliminating illiteracy, making primary and secondary education available to the rural population, providing free medical care and improving sanitation. Such programs as the construction of classrooms, dispensaries, maternity wards, and the recruiting and training of teachers, nurses, technicians, were undertaken as pacification progressed.



military potential and driving him into a strategic defense. The final phase was an all-out offensive employing mobile warfare combined with fortification warfare, aimed at complete destruction of enemy forces.

Communist forces in South Vietnam consisted of three principal components: (1) the infrastructure (political and support) and guerrillas; (2) regional forces; and (3) regular or main forces. There were two types of guerrillas: the para-military and the full military or unattached. Guerrilla activities were generally localized and consisted of sabotage, assassination, harassment, which were aimed at sowing confusion, terror and loss of confidence among the population and forcing the RVN forces to spread thin and lose mobility. Guerrillas also constituted a source of manpower for regional forces whose scope of activities was more extensive and whose combat effectiveness and armament were better. Regional forces were generally employed in a supporting role when regular forces were committed and they both used the tactics of mobile warfare.

Guerrillas were organized into squads and platoons while regional forces consisted of battalions and regiments. Regular forces were initially of battalion or regimental size but were gradually upgraded into divisions and finally army corps.

By 1959, when the enemy began to rekindle war activities in South Vietnam, Communist forces consisted primarily of Viet Cong elements or South Vietnamese Communists. Their cadre were mainly former Viet Minh elements regrouped to North Vietnam in 1954 but re-introduced into the South after 1959. In 1962, however, North Vietnam began to infiltrate men into the South to help the Viet Cong build up its multi-level military force and also as replacements for increasing losses. By 1964, entire NVA regiments were introduced into the South and after US combat forces entered the war a year later, division-size NVA units were recorded fighting on southern battlefields. The infiltration of NVA men and units, together with combat and logistic support assets continued unabated despite heavy US bombardments. During this period, intelligence reports indicated a constant movement of NVA divisions in and out of South Vietnam. At the time of the 1972 invasion, there were

14 NVA infantry divisions committed to three main fronts in South Vietnam, supported by one sapper division, one artillery division and one AAA division. These forces remained in the South until the cease-fire in January 1973 and constituted a permanent military threat for the RVN. By this time, 90% of Communist combat units in South Vietnam were NVA and only one-third of total Communist strength were Viet Cong.

The enemy infrastructure which existed in South Vietnam from the beginning of the war did not cause grave concern to the GVN until 1967 when its role became prominent in combat support. Despite heavy losses incurred by enemy main force units, this infrastructure continued its activities such as tax collection, supply, recruitment, etc., even in the areas adjacent to cities and US and RVNAF bases. The war in Vietnam was being fought on two levels: the conspicuous, violent, high level of combat against Communist armed forces, and the silent, ubiquitous low-key but no less deadly struggle against the enemy infrastructure.

The elimination of the VCI proved to be a task much more difficult than the destruction of enemy combat units because of its cellular, well-dispersed and well-concealed organization. The VCI was in fact so well woven into the South Vietnamese social fabric that it was almost invulnerable to detection. Even if one VCI cell was discovered, it would be difficult to trace it to others because of airtight compartmentalization.

#### *System Evolution*

Under the First Republic (1955-1963), the concept of strategic hamlets took shape in a piecemeal manner in some localities during 1961. It was subsequently expanded and developed into a cohesive, nation-wide system.

In the beginning, some local authorities merely duplicated the village defense system as it had been employed with success against the Viet Minh in Bui Chu and Phat Diem, the two oldest Roman Catholic diocesan areas in North Vietnam. In Ninh Thuan province, for example, Lieutenant Colonel Khanh, the province chief, initiated a village defense

program by encouraging villagers to plant a special kind of cactus around their village. Growing rapidly to over a meter in height, the spiny and thorn-bristled cactus hedge formed a difficult barrier which discouraged enemy infiltrators from penetrating the village. Male and female youths were tasked for security and guard duties, using rudimentary weapons such as pointed sticks, lances and spears.

In Darlac Province, Trung Hoa village was fashioned into a North Vietnam-type village by Father Hoa, a Catholic priest of Chinese origin who fled North Vietnam in 1954. Father Hoa had brought with him a large number of Nung people, a North Vietnamese ethnic group, whom he helped resettle in the village.<sup>1</sup> The Nung resettlement area soon became a tightly stockaded village whose defense enclosure of wooden stakes was reinforced by a system of camouflaged trap holes lined with poison-soaked spikes. The poison would cause hard-to-heal and sometimes fatal infections. For the defense against Viet Cong attacks, villagers were armed with crossbows and arrows, lances and spears in addition to a few obsolete rifles.

Despite crude weapons, the defense of the two villages was effective. This success inspired the Vinh Long province chief, Lieutenant Colonel Le Van Phuoc, to establish self-defense systems in a number of villages located along National Route QL-4, patterned after Ninh Thuan and Trung Hoa. Although experimental, these village defense systems proved successful counters to guerrilla activities.

In order to develop a village defense system for the entire country, Counselor Ngo Dinh Nhu developed the concept of Strategic Hamlets.<sup>2</sup> This concept was an amalgamation of ideas derived from Vietnamese self-defense villages, British anti-Communist tactics successfully used in Malaya, and the Israeli Kibbutz defense system. By 1961, Mr. Nhu's concept developed into a cohesive national policy and its ensuing Strategic Hamlet program, which he himself directed, was initiated on a nation-wide basis. Designed

<sup>1</sup>Another important Nung resettlement area was established at Nam Can, a district of An Xuyen Province in the Mekong Delta.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu was the younger brother of President Ngo Dinh Diem. In addition to his official position as Political Adviser to the President, he was also the founder of the Can Lao Party.

to transform villages and hamlets into anti-guerrilla bastions, the basic idea was to oppose the Communists with a ubiquitous resistance and defense system whose "main and long frontline" was the villages and hamlets themselves. With each village and hamlet fortified and armed, the enemy would find it very difficult to select a weak point to attack. He would find strong resistance everywhere.

According to Mr. Nhu, the enemy enjoyed the advantage of fighting a frontless war. To offset that advantage, he said, we had to turn the rural areas into a "crisscrossed line of defense." The regular army would not be able to spread its troops over this line anyway, so there was no need to greatly expand it. Instead, the army would be kept at a reasonable size and improved in combat effectiveness; it would concentrate primarily on enemy base areas and main force units. The people would become the primary force in the fight against enemy guerrillas. Toward that end, they would organize the defense of villages and hamlets by themselves and fight the enemy by employing "people's guerrilla tactics."

The Strategic Hamlet program progressed slowly but proved effective enough in the face of an insurgency still in its embryonic stage. The slow progress could be attributed to the fact that the program did not enjoy such large-scale US support as its successor later did. It was partly funded by the national budget and partly by the Military Assistance Program. Despite this, by the end of 1962 statistics showed that out of a total of 11,864 hamlets, 3,235 had been completed and about 34% of the total population was considered as living under the GVN protection.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>A Strategic Hamlet was considered completed when it met the following criteria:

- a. The enemy infrastructure had been neutralized.
- b. The population had been organized for hamlet defense.
- c. The defense system (barrier, moat, trenches, traps, etc.) had been physically established.
- d. Secret underground shelters for weapons and personnel had been constructed for the hamlet defense force.
- e. The hamlet council and administrative body had been elected and functioning.

The population of South Vietnam in 1961 was estimated at 14 million.

The percentage of population under GVN control was computed on the basis of reports submitted through the administrative hierarchy, from village to district to province, and from province to the central government. This reporting procedure was not as accurate as the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) which the US later initiated in 1967. There was the possibility that Viet Cong infrastructure members were among the population recorded as living in GVN-controlled hamlets.

To ensure tight population control, some local governments adopted stringent measures such as a census file for every household, containing not only names and other particulars of its members but also a group photograph showing every member of the household. Those households having members or relatives who had regrouped to North Vietnam or were active Viet Cong were identified by red dots, one dot for each such member, painted on a pillar in front of the house. Blue dots were used for other members of the household. Thus, at a glance, local government officials could tell which households had members cooperating with the other side. Naturally, these households were subject to discreet surveillance by the local government.

In 1963, several political upheavals slowed the accomplishment of the objectives of the Strategic Hamlet program and eventually terminated it altogether, but until that year the program was achieving considerable success in neutralizing the local VCI and in organizing effective local defenses. The Buddhist opposition movement in 1963 led to a military coup which overthrew the Ngo Dinh Diem regime and ushered in a period of turmoil and instability. At the same time, the military situation deteriorated markedly through the escalation of attacks by the Viet Cong. The Strategic Hamlet program, as a consequence, came to a complete stop. Those cadre who had managed and directed the program were either arrested or removed for having been part of the old regime. The few cadre who remained free dissassociated themselves from the program. Soon after the military junta took over, its president officially announced the abolition of the Strategic

Hamlet program in a proclamation that was widely acclaimed by the public and secretly enjoyed by the enemy. In some localities, the gains achieved through two years of hard toil disintegrated almost overnight. The Military Revolutionary Council had acted out of political necessity but had not foreseen the detrimental consequences.

The countryside was once again left without governmental control, and the enemy at once filled this void with his own apparatus. During the months immediately following the overthrow of President Diem, the overall situation became utterly chaotic with coups and countercoups, power struggles, and an increased level of enemy attacks.

In the face of the deteriorating situation, the GVN was in a dilemma. On the one hand, there was no way to reinstate the Strategic Hamlet program since it had been linked with the old regime and officially abolished. On the other hand, the GVN could not give the enemy free reign over the countryside. As a solution, the government instituted a new pacification program, the "New Life Hamlet" program. As a matter of fact, there was nothing that could distinguish this program from its predecessor, only a change in name.

The New Life program began to move unsteadily forward. At first it was a loosely controlled, hesitant, unenthusiastic effort. There were not enough resources to commit to the program, and the new cadre were reluctant to implement it forcefully for fear of being identified with the old regime cadre. Furthermore, the leadership gave it no clear-cut direction and the organizations that were to operate the program were plagued by ineffectiveness and incompetence. Very few local authorities knew exactly what to do or how to do it.

The year 1965 came as a miracle that saved South Vietnam from probable collapse. US combat troops followed by Free World Military Assistance forces were committed to South Vietnam to ward off an imminent Communist victory and the US poured in material resources to help

the RVN regain its military footing. After initial successes that restored stability and maintained a fair military balance, both the US and the RVN governments could turn their attention to pacification.

Based on lessons learned through the Strategic Hamlet and the New Life Hamlet, the GVN initiated the Rural Development program in 1966. This was followed, in 1967, by the so-called New Model Pacification program. To give a good start to this effort, centralized planning was initiated but there was a clear lack of coordination between the military plan and its civilian counterpart. As a result, the organizational structure for operational control was not effective and there was little mutual support between the military and the civilian efforts. Moreover, there was a shortage of cadre at all levels and the training effort failed to turn them out in sufficient numbers. The ARVN, meanwhile, considered pacification a responsibility of the civilians; it claimed to have no part in it since its mission was to conduct mobile operations to destroy the enemy. During this period, the Regional and Popular Forces were still in their nascent stage; they were not yet capable of taking up the pacification responsibilities. In order to provide effective support for the pacification program, the RF and PF (formerly Civil Guard and People's Militia or Self-Defense Corps, respectively) required expansion, reorganization and more intensive training.

Despite all these constraints, the pacification program seemed to be well on its way to progress. Its chances of success, however, were undermined by the enemy's general offensive in 1968. All the forces that had been committed to the pacification program, regular and territorial alike, had to be redeployed for the defense of provincial capitals and district towns. The countryside was once again left open to enemy control.

After successively defeating the enemy's attack in 1968, the GVN and RVNAF followed up their victories by initiating a three-month pacification plan called the "Accelerated Pacification Campaign," from November 1968 to January 1969. The campaign was designed to enlarge the extent of GVN control, and this was a most appropriate time for

the special pacification effort to succeed since enemy forces had by then withdrawn to their border base areas for refitting and reorganizing. The RVNAF, with the support of the US and all other allied troops, enjoyed the initiative on all battlefields. As a result, the pacification effort was crowned with success.

In 1969 and 1970, pacification progressed by leaps and bounds. The total number of people and the extent of territory under GVN control surpassed all expectations. The enemy was effectively driven back to his bases over the border, and his units were unable to undertake any major action, preoccupied as they were with refitting and regrouping. Pursuing their military gains, the RVNAF took the initiative and struck across the border, first into enemy bases in Cambodia in 1970 and then into lower Laos. As a result, during 1971 the GVN had time to consolidate the gains achieved during the two previous years without major confrontations with enemy main-force units. In view of the markedly improved situation, the GVN found it appropriate to choose another name for its pacification effort. From 1971 on it was called "Community Defense and Development," the ultimate goal for which the GVN was striving.

During this period, the enemy studied the lessons learned from his military defeat in 1968. Meanwhile, in view of the remarkable gains achieved by the GVN in its pacification program, the enemy was in danger of being denied the countryside altogether.

In 1972, the Communists launched a new general offensive, an offensive which was radically different from the 1968 Tet offensive. Supported by tanks and artillery, nearly five NVA infantry divisions crossed the DMZ and invaded Quang Tri. Simultaneously, three divisions attacked north of Kontum and three others north of Binh Long. This offensive was aimed at forcing a coalition government on South Vietnam, defeating the Vietnamization program so that the RVNAF would be unable to take over the combat role from US forces, and finally, forcing the RVN to accept terms advantageous to the Communist side at the Paris talks. The GVN and the RVNAF were determined to defend the countryside at all costs, and the RVNAF had, by this time, improved and

*Strategy and Operational Concept*

matured into a formidable fighting force. Furthermore, despite the gradual withdrawal of US combat forces from Vietnam, there still remained in country sizable US strategic and tactical air, naval fire-power, and logistical support to assist the RVNAF.

With effective US support, the RVNAF were able to hold out against the greatly reinforced regular NVA forces and prevent further inroads into the countryside. Following these military achievements, the GVN concentrated on consolidating the pacification gains instead of pushing for further expansion. Rather than renewing another annual effort, the government looked farther ahead and developed a four-year pacification plan. This was known as "1972-1975 Community Defense and Local Development" plan which was designed, as the name implied, to consolidate territorial security on the one hand and to develop the nation in all aspects on the other.

No sooner had the plan been implemented than it was obstructed by the disadvantages brought about by the Paris Agreement of 28 January 1973. Taking advantage of the Agreement, the enemy increased his strength in the countryside through infiltrations of weapons, equipment, and manpower from North Vietnam.

Thus over the long war years, the pacification effort had been revitalized time and again under several different names: Strategic Hamlet, New Life Hamlet, Rural or Revolutionary Development, National Pacification and Development, and finally Community Defense and Local Development. Despite the various names which changed with each regime in power, the basic national objectives laid out in each plan remained essentially the same. The only differences between early and later plans were some operational procedures, the ever-expanding scale and extent of the effort, and the increasing contributions in financial and material resources made by the United States and other friendly nations.

Pacification was designed to achieve three basic objectives: (1) to end the war and restore peace; (2) to develop democracy; and (3) to reform society. These were the proclaimed objectives that President Nguyen Van Thieu reiterated time and again in his public statements.

To achieve the first objective—end the war and restore peace—it was paramount in the first place to defeat Communist aggression and to provide security for the entire national territory, and finally to extend the influences and services of the government over the population. In more concrete terms, the objective was to provide protection for the people against kidnappings, assassinations, and other forms of terrorism caused by Communist guerrilla activities; to destroy the enemy main force; and to eliminate the enemy infrastructure. Once the enemy's presence was removed, the people would be able to enjoy a peaceful life.

The second objective—develop democracy—implied the establishment of a solid and effective governmental structure in the rural areas and the active participation of the rural population in national affairs. Democracy was to be developed at the grass-roots level through village and hamlet elections in which the people would choose their own representatives to help run their own affairs.

Finally, in order to reform society, the third objective, it would be necessary to develop the national economy, to stabilize and improve rural living conditions and to bring about prosperity and welfare for the people, with the ultimate goal of achieving self-sufficiency and terminating reliance on foreign aid.

To provide security for pacification, the RVNAF and US forces adopted the strategic concept of "clear-and-hold." In practice, clear-and-hold operations were designed to destroy the enemy, neutralize his forces, and drive them away from the area to be pacified. Then by maintaining a permanent ARVN force in the area to ensure security, a local government could be established, and in time elections could be held to institute democracy. When the area reached that stage of development,

the enemy would be unable to return to harass and to take revenge on the people.

"Clear-and-hold" differed greatly from "search-and-destroy" which was widely employed during the initial stage of active US participation in the war. For even when Communist units had been effectively defeated or driven away from a certain area, they were still able to return and renew their activities if there was no friendly force to secure the area. An area was considered "cleared" when the enemy's main or local forces, guerrilla and infrastructure had been destroyed or neutralized. The principal role in this stage was given to major ARVN units, augmented sometimes by Regional Forces, and often supported and assisted by US or Free World Military Assistance (FWMA) forces. ARVN forces were also assisted by National Police (NP) forces who provided information concerning the enemy's infrastructure and helped screen and interrogate persons detained.

As the term implied, activities during the "securing" stage were aimed at eliminating remnants of enemy forces or infrastructure, protecting the population and preventing the enemy from reviving his activities. At the same time, the government tried to establish its presence in villages and hamlets in order to create the conditions for developmental projects to flourish. An area was designated totally secure when the villages and hamlets in it were assigned enough military and police forces to deter all terrorist activities directed against the population. Police field forces were employed in the elimination of the VCI or, in coordination with territorial forces, the maintenance of security in villages and hamlets. ARVN and US forces meanwhile operated in adjacent areas as a shield to divert the enemy's regular forces from the area being pacified, and to relieve any pressure the enemy might exert on it. As soon as the area became secure, Regional Forces began to take over from ARVN forces, thus releasing them for new operations.

Another type of local defense force was created to assist territorial forces in local security: the People's Self-Defense Force.

Organized and trained locally, the PSDF performed guard duties in hamlets and sounded the alert when the enemy attacked but were usually unable to counter an enemy attack without the support of other territorial or regular forces.

As a continuation of the pacification process, the "development" stage consolidated the village and hamlet governmental structure and expanded GVN authority and prestige. An area was considered as developed when its villages and hamlets had been completely and effectively brought under GVN control and after local government had been established through elections and was functioning effectively. Thereafter, security and order were entrusted to police and people's self-defense forces. Regional and popular forces were thus released for longer range security operations to prevent the enemy from re-infiltrating. During this stage, national cadre teams arrived to initiate developmental programs such as self-help economic projects, school and classroom building, and public health.

In summary, pacification was a phased process involving the cooperation and coordination of both military and civilian efforts. The military effort was provided by the RVNAF and US/FWMA forces who conducted search-and-destroy operations in order to foster the security which the civilian effort required. As pacification was a responsibility shared by military forces, government cadre and the people, joint planning and supervision were required at every level. To achieve effectiveness in coordination, control, and supervision, a Pacification Council, which consisted of military and civilian representatives, was established at each level, from the central government down to districts.

The Central Pacification Council, which was chaired in 1970 by the Prime Minister and consisted of cabinet ministers and the Chairman of the Joint General Staff as members, directed and controlled overall policies and plans. Civilian programs were managed and directed by the Ministry of Rural Development which also supervised implementation at province and district level.<sup>4</sup> Other specialized activities were directed

<sup>4</sup>In 1971, the Ministry of Rural Development was disbanded and its role was assumed by the newly created Central Pacification and Development Center, directly under control of the Prime Minister.

by respective ministries through their own control channels, which reached down to province level. Military activities were directed and supervised through the military hierarchy which included the Ministry of Defense, the Joint General Staff, Military Region Commands, Sectors (provinces), and Subsectors (districts).

Pacification Councils at the province level were responsible for detailed planning and execution. Each year, the province chief and his staff established the province's pacification plan which was reviewed by the Military Region Pacification Council and finally approved by the Central Pacification Council. Upon approval, the plan was sent back to the province chief for execution. Military forces that were required to support the provincial plan were placed under the operational control of the province chief/sector commander. Funds, materiel and equipment were allocated by respective ministries directly to the province.

#### *Interim Objectives and Priorities*

While the ultimate national goals to be achieved through pacification remained unchanged, the GVN established yearly programs with specific objectives to be met during the year. For example, the pacification effort prior to 1968 focused on populated, prosperous urban areas, those areas bordering on important lines of communication and waterways, and those villages and hamlets surrounding provincial capitals and district towns. The strategic concept then, which was labeled "the spreading oil stain," consisted of consolidating pacified nuclei from which the pacification effort would spread out in all directions. Since urban areas were the hubs of the RVN strategy, the enemy chose to strike directly into them during his general offensive of 1968 although his ultimate goal remained liberating the rural areas.

As soon as the last enemy attacks were driven back, the GVN immediately set about to restore control of the rural areas through a special, large-scale, and intensive pacification campaign which lasted three months, from 1 November 1968 to 31 January 1969. The goal of this campaign was to retake the hamlets lost to the enemy and to expand the



unit instead of the hamlet, the displacement of the local populace from one hamlet to another for purpose of pacification was deemed unnecessary and disadvantageous. Displacement of landbound peasants would be an unpopular act that would have adverse consequences on their daily life.

To implement this overall concept, the GVN laid out objectives to be achieved by year's end:

1. An increase in percentage of population under GVN control, up to 90% across the country.
2. To destroy, by all means, at least 23,400 enemy infrastructure cadre.
3. To build the PSDF to a strength of two million members, and equip this force with 400,000 individual weapons.
4. To establish local governments for all villages and hamlets over the entire national territory.
5. To secure the defection of at least 36,000 enemy cadre and troops.
6. To reduce the total number of war victims and refugees below the one-million mark; and to resettle or return to their home villages 300,000 people.
7. To step up information and propaganda activities.
8. To encourage the development of the rural economy.

All the objectives that had been set forth for the previous year were retained in 1970. Like the previous year, the 1970 pacification objectives focused primarily on the protection of the population against Communist terrorism and the maximum destruction of the enemy infrastructure. To achieve this, the GVN pushed the buildup of PSDF to four million, double the 1969 strength and including 1,500,000 combat members and 2,500,000 support members. At the same time, it made an effort to train and equip this force in order to turn it into a combat effective force ready to take over from popular forces when required. To expand GVN control, it was required that village and hamlet government and district and provincial councils be established throughout the country. The Chieu Hoi program, meanwhile, was aimed at the high and middle echelon enemy cadre: it appealed for their cooperation in the common

task of nation building. To alleviate a perennial burden that had adversely affected the GVN effort, programs were initiated to help war victims and refugees find opportunities for a better life. Other short-term projects designed to pave the way for long-range efforts during the following years were also initiated in agriculture, public health and sanitation, and education. In addition, emphasis was placed on such programs as increasing the rural police force, village and hamlet self-help, land reform, ethnic minority development, and urban development.

The government set forth priorities for the achievement of the various objectives and their related programs:

Priority 1: C-class hamlets were to be upgraded to B- or A- class in order to provide total security and protection to 90% of the national population.<sup>5</sup>

To meet this goal, the government attempted to bring the popular forces up to full authorized strength. At the same time, people's self-defense forces, armed or unarmed, were more formally organized and received more adequate training. Since the incipient local governments were still plagued by a shortage of cadre, efforts were made to assign them additional personnel. An emphasis was placed on their qualifications, efficiency, and willingness to stay permanently in their place of work, day or night. Finally, an adequate and permanent police force was required to maintain security and order in villages and hamlets.

Priority 2: To consolidate C-class hamlets and prevent them from downgrading to D-class.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Before the advent of the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), which American officials instituted in 1967, the GVN only considered three categories of hamlets and rated them accordingly: A: 100% secure hamlets or hamlets affording free access day and night; B: semi-secure hamlets, affording free access during daytime and limited access during night time; C: insecure hamlets or those under VC control.

<sup>6</sup>Hamlets were classified into seven classes:  
A- and B-classes: totally secure, day and night  
C-class: relatively secure  
D- and E-classes: undergoing pacification  
N-class: unevaluated for lack of data  
V-class: not under GVN control

In summary, all hamlets were to be upgraded to A, B, or C category and at least 90% of the people would be living in A or B hamlets.

*The Ultimate National Goals*

The year 1971 ushered in a period of improved security throughout the nation. The RVNAF held the initiative on all battlefields, crossed the heretofore inviolable national border and struck destructive blows on the enemy's logistical bases and sanctuaries. Cross-border operations conducted by US-RVNAF units into Cambodia in 1970 and the Laos incursion in 1971, in addition to the closing of Sihanoukville port by the new Cambodian government in 1970, effectively upset Communist plans for an early summer offensive against Saigon, a repetition of their 1968 offensive. As a result, the Communists were compelled to reorganize their bases and replace their battle losses. Almost the entire population of South Vietnam lived under effective protection of the government and the armed forces. The situation was so good that the GVN deemed it a most appropriate time to pass on to the nation-building phase, particularly economic development and social reform. Pacification was considered an anachronistic term since its most important objective had been achieved.

The new pacification plan for 1971 was thus redesignated "Community Defense and Development." It was designed to destroy whatever was left of the enemy infrastructure, achieve maximum efficiency in the governmental structure, expand and develop the national economy, and push ahead more vigorously the land reform program. The ARVN regular forces, which had been partially pinned down by their pacification duties, were to turn over territorial responsibilities to the RF and PF. The goal was to release ARVN forces for mobile operations while affording the RF and PF the opportunity to prove themselves in combating enemy local forces and guerrillas.

The objectives set forth for the 1971 Community Defense and Development plan were grouped under three basic national goals which remained the ultimate goals for which the RVN was striving. These were called the "Three Selves," namely: Self-Defense, Self-Management, and Self-Sufficiency.

Under the goal of Self-Defense, five programs were initiated: (1) territorial security; (2) people's self-defense forces; (3) national police; (4) destruction of the enemy infrastructure; and (5) Chieu Hoi (Open Arms).

The objectives to be met in territorial security during 1971 were to upgrade all hamlets into A- or B-class, provide security and protection for 95% of the total population, and remove all V-class hamlets. These efforts required the RF and PF to step up mobile operations against enemy local forces while the ARVN infantry divisions were to be entirely free to concentrate on large-scale search-and-destroy operations against enemy mainforce units.

The PSDF which had been built up to required strength were to be formally organized into teams and groups and armed with 500,000 individual weapons.

The national police force, whose primary role was to destroy the enemy infrastructure, was to be increased to 122,000 men by year's end in order to provide every village with a police force strong enough to maintain law and order.

To free the local population from Communist terrorism and safeguard the GVN program against sabotage, an effort was to be made to eliminate all types of enemy cadre, to include econo-financial cadre (tax collectors or procurement agents) and commo-liaison cadre (guides or messengers) in particular, and to destroy every enemy infrastructure organization. In addition, the local population was encouraged to cooperate with governmental authorities by providing information concerning enemy activities.

The task of appealing for returnees from enemy ranks was not only undertaken by specialized government cadre but was also performed by PSDF by appealing to their own relatives or friends who had sided with the enemy. In addition, armed propaganda teams, which consisted primarily of former returnees, were employed in proselyting activities aimed at enemy main force units.

The Self-Management goal meant that the government would increase its efficiency. In the first place, national cadre at all levels including province, district, village and hamlet chiefs, were to be trained.

Periodic seminars were to be conducted by mobile training teams to afford the national cadre an opportunity to exchange views and communicate experiences. Furthermore, the government hoped that by the end of 1971 the entire local government structure would have been instituted through elections.

With regard to the local population, an effort was made to instill in them the spirit and political awareness of struggling against the Communists. This was conceived as an obligation, a duty that every citizen had to carry as his share toward the "Three Selves" program. To foster the spirit of democracy and encourage participation, local self-help development projects were initiated to which the GVN provided part of the funds needed but whose implementation relied primarily on the people's financial contributions and labor. The local population actively participated in such projects as market place, school and maternity ward construction, road building and bridge repair. The final goal was to make every cadre and every serviceman thoroughly conversant with GVN policies and programs and responsive to the aspirations of the people by acting as eyes and ears for the central government. The local population was to be rallied into organizations with the purpose of fostering mutual assistance and mutual affection. If someone became ill or was in distress, he could always expect help and comfort from members of his organization. With regard to youths, a program of physical education and sports was initiated in both urban and rural areas in order to encourage physical fitness and competitiveness. This program was also intended to promote political education among young people with the view of preparing them for active participation in future social activities.

Improved security and increased effectiveness of the local government structure and national cadre would allow the GVN to switch more energy to self-sufficiency, the task of improving, socially and economically, the living conditions of the population. Toward that end, the "Land to the Tiller" program, a bold land reform measure which was initiated late in 1970, had the planned purpose of distributing 400,000

hectares of farmland to landless farm workers.<sup>7</sup> This was intended both as an incentive to help boost farm production and as a means to achieve social justice and win the peasants over to the RVN cause. Other agricultural improvement programs such as forestry, fisheries, and farm breeding were also pushed vigorously forward. At the same time, the GVN also undertook an extensive project of irrigation, encouraged the planting of two or three crops of "miracle rice," and established rural development banks throughout the country to provide needed credit for farmers to plant rice or other supplementary crops and to breed cattle or poultry.

With regard to strengthening the national economy and in keeping with long-range plans, the GVN designed short-term programs to encourage production increase, stem inflation, stabilize consumer prices, and increase personal income. To meet national requirements and conserve manpower, the government placed emphasis on the training, assignment, and employment of technicians and specialists. ARVN engineers and contractors repaired, rebuilt or rehabilitated roads and bridges to provide convenient communication between urban and rural areas, particularly between villages or hamlets and district towns, and to facilitate the flow of goods and services. Also in support of economic development, sections of the railroad system were kept in operation and electric power production was substantially increased in urban and suburban areas. This was a step toward the final goal of providing electricity and running water to remote areas of the countryside.

Up to 1971, all local self-help or self-sufficiency programs were entirely funded and managed by the central government. To set democracy in motion and to help the local infrastructure develop its own initiatives, these programs were turned over to the local governments and people who would, from then on, decide what specific projects suited their own needs and decide how to finance them on their own. The GVN would thus be able to save sizable funds needed for other programs of national importance.

<sup>7</sup>Hectare is a unit of area measurement in the metric system, equivalent to 10,000 square meters or approximately 2.47 acres.

In 1972, the GVN took a longer view of the future and, to achieve the ultimate national goals, initiated a four-year Community Defense and Local Development plan whose implementation was graduated into yearly programs to be completed by 1975. The plan provided comprehensive guidance for the national efforts in each of the major areas.

Militarily, the GVN contemplated the reduction of its armed forces. The maintenance of a large, standing military force depended essentially on the security status, US aid, and existing national resources and capabilities. If it was possible to reduce strength without endangering or undermining the capabilities to defend the nation against the enemy within or without, then this would be done. But most importantly, for future defense purposes, attempts should be made to create a "peoples' army," if only to alleviate the financial burden presently imposed on the national budget. Territorial security could be further improved by military activities directed toward destroying enemy main force units, enemy base areas and sanctuaries, and eradicating enemy local guerrillas and infrastructure.

Politically, the goal was to achieve a solid foundation for democracy. Toward that end, the administrative structure at every level would be made efficient, and the people would be educated to become fully aware of their civic duties. When this was done, they would enthusiastically participate in every national activity. To improve the administration, work procedures would be simplified to the maximum extent and the national cadre at all levels would be endowed with a responsible "public service" spirit in addition to professional qualifications.

Economically, it was possible to increase domestic and foreign investments as the security situation improved. Production and exports would be boosted in order to earn additional foreign currency and to reduce inflation. On the other hand, to compete with foreign products and also to meet domestic demands, agriculture and industry would be expanded and made increasingly productive. Personal income taxes would be gradually increased, not only to boost national income but also to make citizens fully cognizant of their obligation with regard to the

national development effort. Although consumer prices would continue to rise at an annual rate of 10%, efforts were made to cut down on government expenditures, including national defense. In any case, for its own survival, South Vietnam would have to rely on continued US economic and financial aid, even if true peace was restored.

In summary, the 1972-1975 Community Defense and Local Development plan was designed to consolidate security and increase development efforts in local communities with the view of achieving the three basic goals of Self-Defense, Self-Management and Self-Sufficiency.

The war the Communists waged was purported to be a people's war. This was a myth perpetuated by Communist dogmatism and propaganda. The part played by the South Vietnamese people in prosecuting the war on the Communist side was minimal and insignificant. In fact, the South Vietnamese people always chose to flee in the face of Communist incursions.

Winning support, the strategic goal of pacification was paramount to the RVN cause. Yet the people seemed indifferent to the GVN courtship. If successful, the pacification effort would replace this indifference with a solid commitment on the part of the people; a commitment that would support the defense of the nation and achieve a just peace.

CHAPTER III

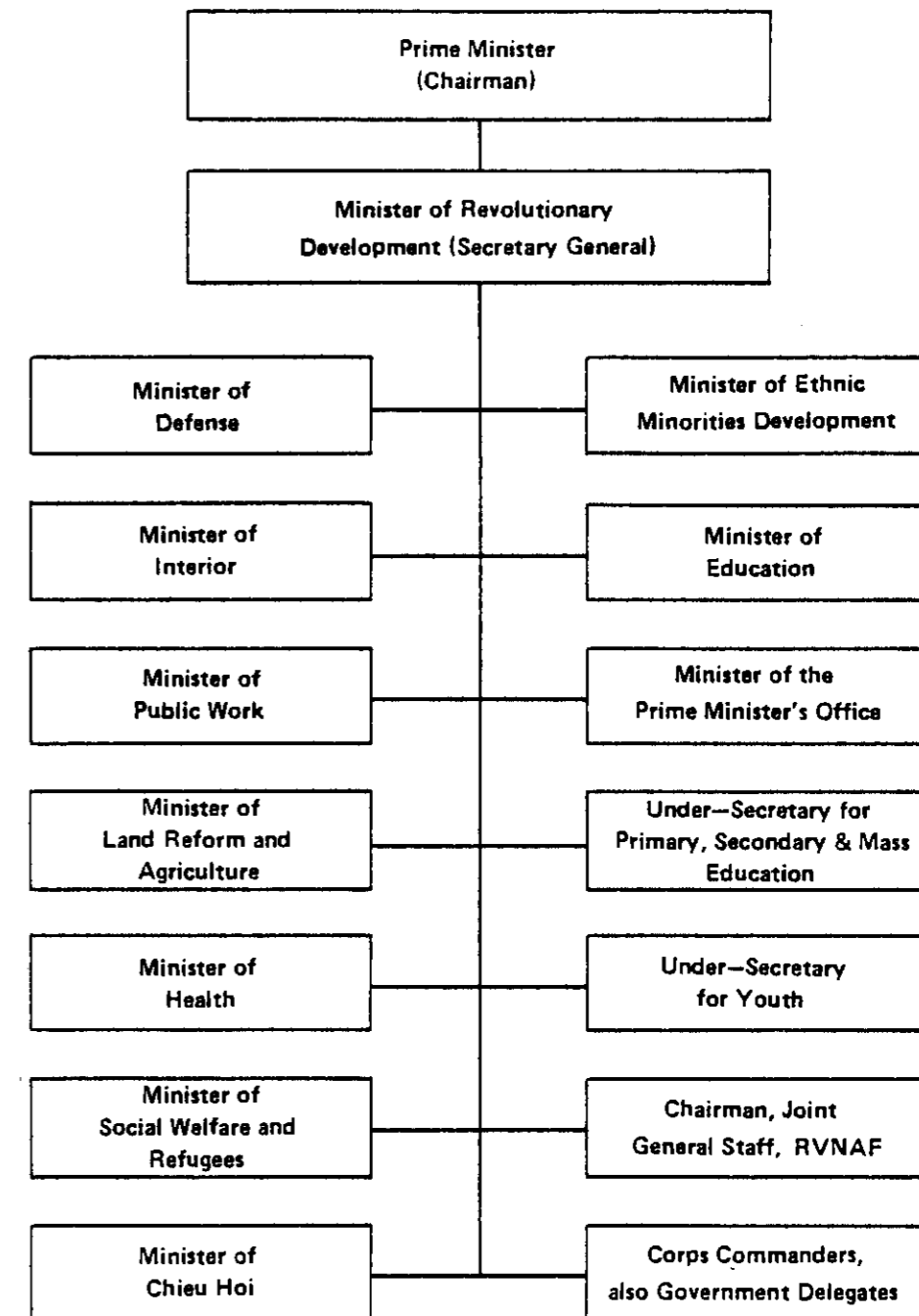
Operation and Support

*The GVN Organization For Pacification*

Beginning in 1966, when pacification became a cohesively organized effort and was subjected to centralized annual planning, the GVN established a nation-wide control and monitoring system designed to coordinate activities of the various organizations and agencies involved in the program. As far as the civilian government was concerned, there was always a shortage of qualified personnel required for key executive positions. Consequently, several high-ranking military officers were appointed cabinet ministers or to highly responsible positions in the pacification program.

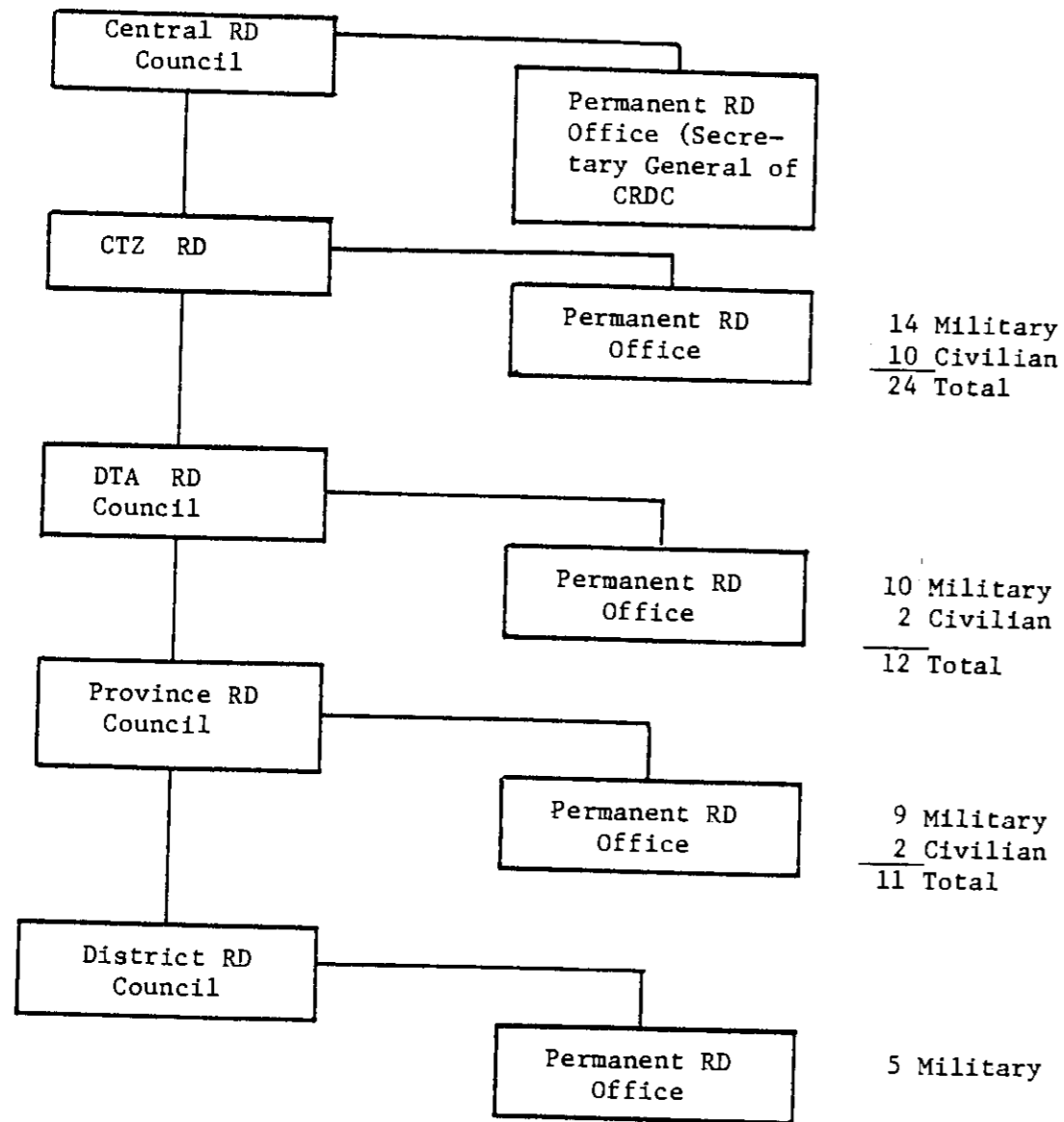
In 1966 the GVN organization for pacification consisted essentially of a system of standing committees spanning the entire governmental hierarchy and reaching down to the district level. At the central government level, there was established a Central Rural (or Revolutionary) Development Council chaired by the Prime Minister. (*Chart 1*) Members of the Council included, on the civilian side: the Ministers of Interior, Land Reform, Public Works, Health, Social Welfare, Open Arms, Ethnic Minorities, the Minister in charge of the Prime Minister's Office, and the under-secretaries of Education and Youth. On the military side, there were: the Minister of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint General Staff and the four Corps Commanders who participated in the Council as Government Delegates (or Regional Governors). The Minister of Rural Development was appointed Secretary General of the Council. (*Chart 2*)

Chart 1 – Central Revolutionary Development Council, 1968



\*The Chairman, Joint General Staff, RVNAF has the rank of a Cabinet Minister.

Chart 2 — GVN Revolutionary Development Councils, 1967 - 68



The Rural Development (RD) councils at all levels were redesignated "Pacification and Development" (PD) councils in 1969. Cabinet ministers continued to serve as members of the Central Pacification and Development Council (CPDC) under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. In 1970, the chairmanship of CPDC was assumed by the President of the Republic. At the same time, Corps Commanders were excluded as Council members since they no longer served as Government Delegates. The Prime Minister in his new capacity as Secretary General was assisted by a permanent staff organization called Center for Coordination of Pacification and Development whose functions were to monitor, coordinate and supervise pacification programs.

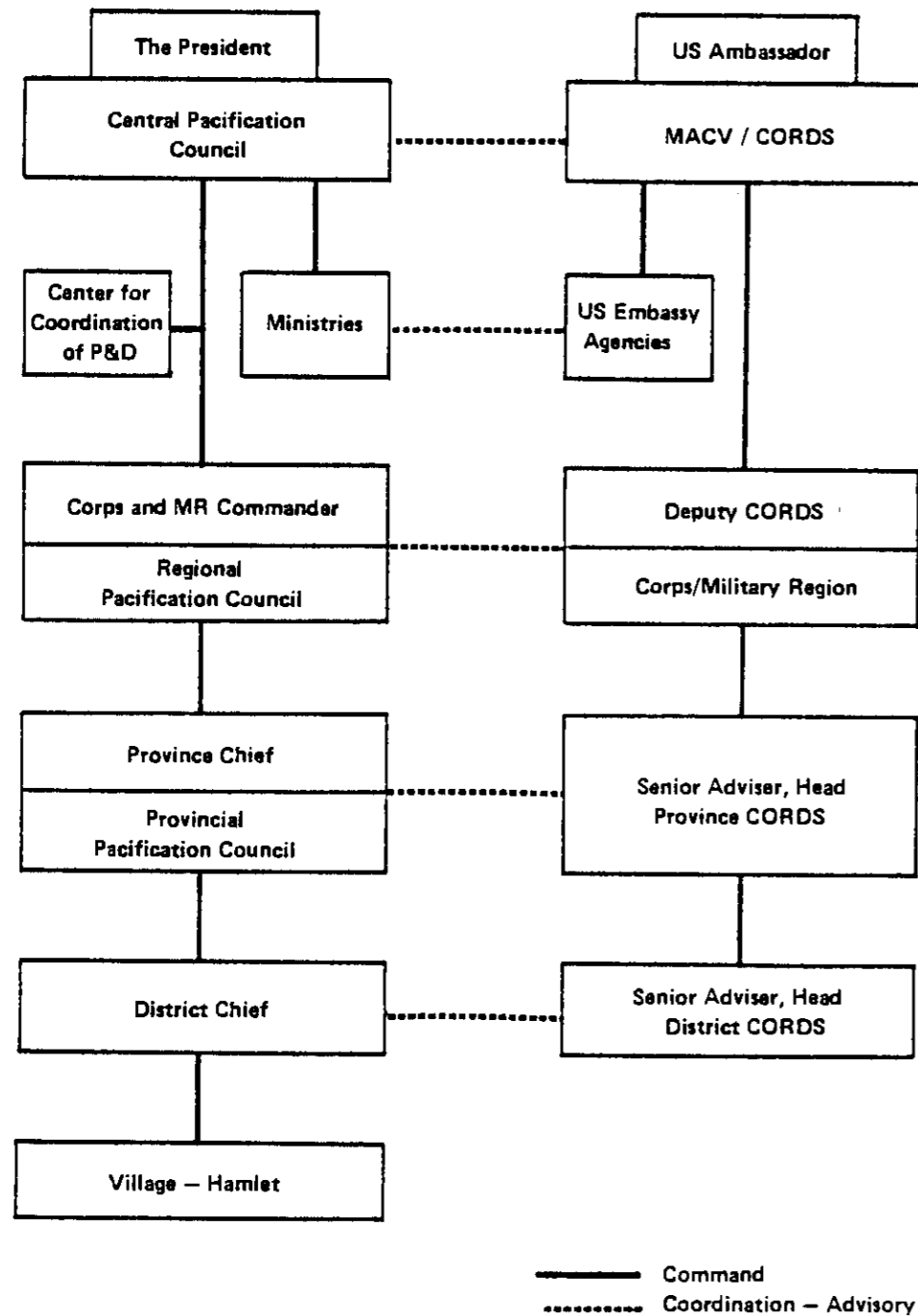
In practice, however, the Prime Minister played the role of the Chairman as he always had, and the Director of the Center for Coordination, a Lieutenant General, served as Secretary General. (Chart 3)

This gave rise to a redundancy in functions since the Minister of Rural Development still served as the nominal Secretary General of the CPDC. The problem was solved in 1971 when the Ministry of Rural Development was dissolved.

As members of the CPDC, the cabinet ministers were responsible for recommending pacification policies and operational procedures, and reviewing and providing support for provincial pacification programs.

At the Corps Tactical Zone (Military Region after 1970) level, the same organization existed. The Corps Commander was Chairman of the Regional Pacification and Development Council (RPDC). He was assisted in his functions by a Permanent Office, redesignated Regional Pacification and Development Center in 1970. Members of the RPDC included: the Corps Deputy Commander for territory, division commanders province chiefs and representatives of the ministers who made up the CPDC. These ministerial representatives had the rank of inspector or director. The director of the RPDC, usually an Army Colonel, served as Secretary General. Corps commanders were responsible to the central government for both military and civilian activities since prior to 1970 they also served as government delegates in their respective Corps Tactical Zones.

Chart 3 - Pacification Councils and US Support Organization (as of 1970)



In 1970 when Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ) became Military Regions (MR), the GVN abolished the position of government delegate with a view to making corps commanders more responsive to tactical problems. In his capacity as Chairman of the RPDC, a corps commander was responsible to the central government for all problems concerning territorial security in the Military Region. His pacification duties included conducting military operations in support of pacification; determining priorities for the employment of military forces (regular and territorial) in support for pacification; reviewing provincial pacification plans; and providing guidance and supervision for the implementation of the military forces (regular and territorial) in support of pacification.

At the Division Tactical Area (DTA) level, the division commander was responsible for all matters pertaining to territorial security and pacification within his area of responsibility which generally included several provinces. Prior to 1970, at the DTA level, there was also a DTA Rural Development Committee chaired by the division commander but with very limited civilian membership. As a result of the abolition of the DTA in 1970, the DTA Rural Development Committee was also dissolved, but the division commander was still responsible for territorial security and, to a lesser extent, pacification support in his area of responsibility. He performed his pacification duties only when directed by corps commanders. These duties were coordinated with province chiefs and consisted of providing support, and conducting clear-and-hold operations in areas targeted for pacification.

Whether responsible or not for pacification, division commanders were usually overburdened by problems concerning territorial security. Almost 80% of their time was spent solving these problems, and as a consequence, a division commander had little time left for mobile operations. After 1970 a significant effort was made to alleviate division commanders' territorial responsibilities and to permit them to concentrate more on mobile tactical operations since divisions were to gradually take over combat responsibilities from the departing US forces. This effort was made by releasing divisional units from their static pacification support mission and replacing them gradually

with Regional Forces. Thus, Sectors or Provinces were made directly subordinate to the Military Region as far as territorial security and pacification support were concerned. As of that time, at corps headquarters, the position of Deputy Corps Commander for Territory was created and he was placed in charge of territorial security and pacification support within his Military Region.

The province was the primary level responsible for actually carrying out the pacification program. As a result, a province chief usually enjoyed great powers. As Chairman of the Provincial Pacification and Development Council (PPDC), he was directly responsible to the corps commander for military affairs and to the central government for administrative affairs and the management of national resources committed to the pacification program. Province chiefs were appointed by presidential decree upon recommendation of the corps commander and with prior concurrence of the Prime Minister. They were mostly Army officers, usually with the rank of colonel or lieutenant colonel. Within his province, the province chief was responsible for everything, tactical operations, administration, and politics.

A province chief was assisted by two deputies: a deputy for administration, always a civilian, and a deputy for military affairs who was also called Deputy Sector Commander since the province chief was the Sector Commander. The deputy sector commander assisted the province chief in all matters concerning territorial security, tactical operations, the employment, organization, and control of Regional/Popular Forces, and the control of para-military forces in the province (national police, RD cadre, PSDF). The deputy province chief for administration assisted the province chief in the administration and management of provincial affairs and directing and controlling the activities of departmental services. These included: Reconstruction, Public Works, Agriculture, Taxation, Social Affairs, Finances, Open Arms, Information, Health, Education and other services which operated under direct control of the province chiefs but were subordinated to their respective ministries administratively.

As Chairman of the PPDC, the province chief's pacification duties consisted of developing the annual provincial pacification plan

based on guidelines and policies of the CDPC and specific directives of the corps commander and directing the coordinated employment of military and para-military forces in support of his pacification program. The province chief was at the same time the planner and executor of his own pacification program and he was held entirely responsible for its success or failure.

The lowest echelon in the GVN organization for pacification was the district or subsector. Prior to 1970, there existed at the district level a District Rural Development Committee but it was dissolved at the same time as the DTA Rural Development Committees. District chiefs were for the most part Army officers, usually lieutenant colonels or majors, appointed by a ministerial decree of the Minister of Interior, acting on orders of the Prime Minister and upon recommendation of the corps commander, often without the province chief's consultation. The district chief was responsible for all problems concerning territorial security and pacification in his area of responsibility. His pacification-related duties were to assist the province chief in the preparation and implementation of the provincial pacification and development plan; direct and supervise subordinate RF and PF units in the support of pacification; and provide guidance for village chiefs concerning security and defense plans.

Like the province chief, the district chief was assisted by two deputies: one for administration, always a civilian, who helped run the district office and manage district administrative affairs and the other, the deputy subsector commander. A district chief commanded and controlled all subordinate or attached RF and PF units, and other para-military forces of the district. In his major role of pacification support, a district chief's responsibilities were burdensome. His staffs, civilian and military alike were small and usually plagued by ineffectiveness due to the lack of qualified personnel.

Security problems always constituted major headaches for the district chief and occupied most of his time. The subsector staff was capable of only routine operation; it had neither the capability

nor the assets to direct and control tactical operations, or coordinate military and civilian activities at village and hamlet level.

In an effort to facilitate district command and control, the GVN created sub-subsector commands at the village level in 1973. The sub-subsector was the lowest military command of the RVN territorial organization, designed to control and coordinate military and paramilitary forces at the village level. This greatly reduced the control burden placed on the district chief and made the coordination of forces more effective for the support of pacification, for which he was held totally responsible.

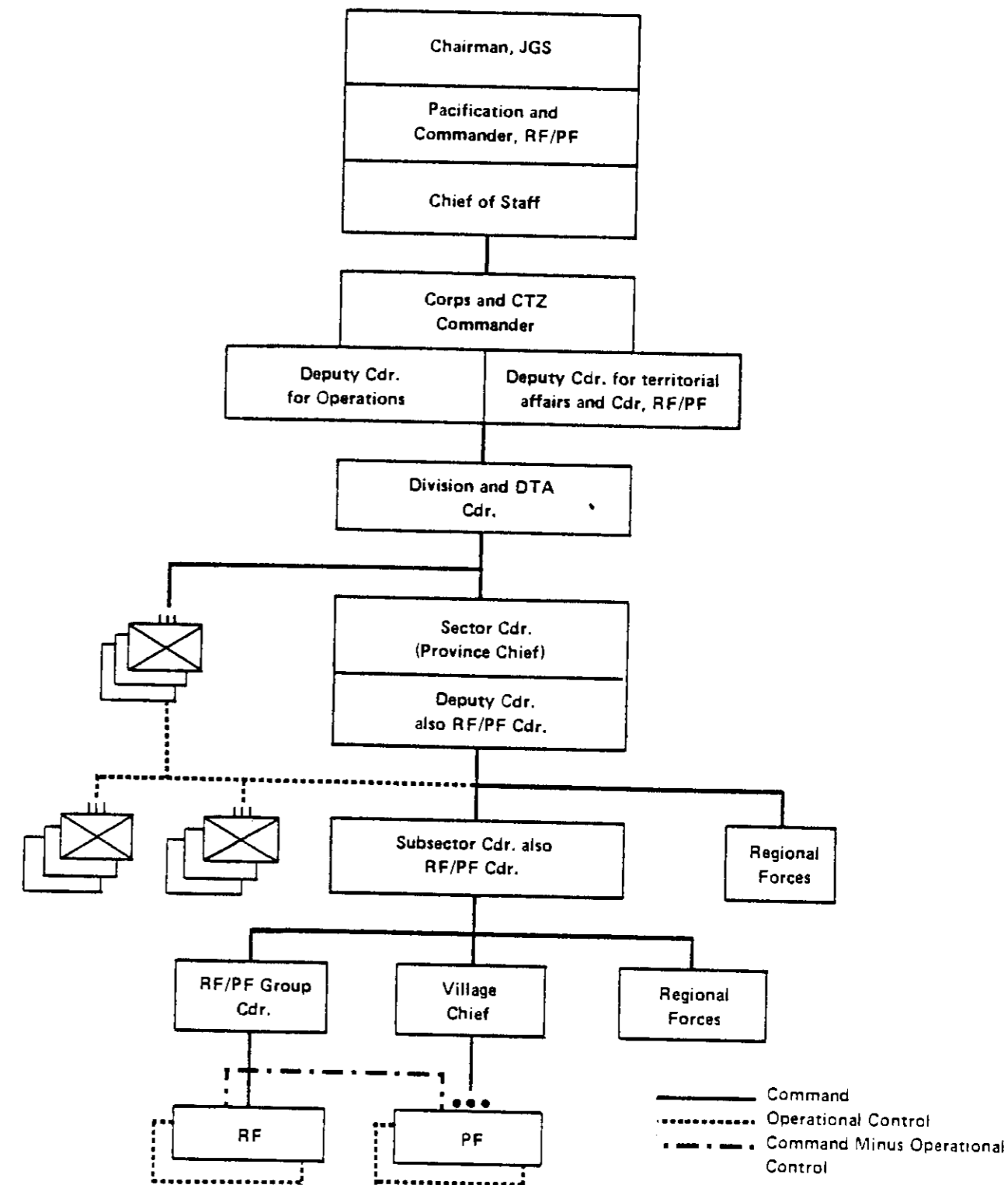
Each district was composed of several villages and hamlets which constituted the very foundation of Vietnamese society. Consequently, villages and hamlets were the focus of the pacification and development effort. The village was the lowest level of the GVN administrative structure and village affairs were run by a village council whose members were popularly elected as was the village chief. Hamlets were geographical subdivisions of a village and run by administrative committees whose members were also popularly elected.

#### *Employment of Forces in Support of Pacification*

The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces were responsible for providing military support for the GVN pacification program. The Chairman of the Joint General Staff (JGS) as a member of the Central PD Council was assisted by a deputy in charge of pacification who was also commander of the RF and PF. This position was established expressly for the purpose of directing and supervising the organization, training, equipping, and employment of the RF and PF in support of pacification. (Chart 4)

The RVNAF consisted of three services: the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy (including Marines). The Army was deployed in the four Military Regions and most units were placed under the tactical command of the Corps Headquarters. Infantry was the largest combat arm of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). It consisted of infantry divisions, separate infantry units and Regional Force and

Chart 4 - RVNAF Organization for Pacification Support





stood at 530,589 against the regular tri-service strength of 448,953.

During their incipient stage of development, the Regional and Popular Forces were poorly equipped and under strength. After being made part of the RVNAF and thus qualifying for US support under the Military Assistance Program (MAP), RF and PF units expanded considerably in numbers and were equipped with the same types of infantry weapons as regular forces. In addition, regional and popular troops enjoyed the same status in pay and special allowances as regular troops. The only difference was in tactical employment and the size of units. (Chart 5)

Regional Forces, in their role as provincial and district main force, were organized into companies. Due to tactical requirements, RF companies were sometimes assembled into groups. In keeping with the RVNAF improvement and modernization trends and as required by the security situation, RF units were subsequently upgraded into maneuver battalions and, at a later stage, into Regional Mobile Groups (RMG) with organic artillery support provided by a battery of four 105-mm howitzers. RMG headquarters were activated with the capability to command and control from 3 to 5 battalions. They were designed to replace the former Sector Tactical Commands which, due to shortages of personnel, were ineffective in the exercise of operational control. The allocation of RF units to each province depended on the local security situation and provincial manpower resources and recruiting prospects.

Popular Forces while assuming the role of village and hamlet main force were organic to districts and placed under the command and control of village chiefs. Although equipped with the same infantry weapons as RF units, PF units were confined to platoon size with an authorized strength of 35 men per platoon. Each village was authorized a PF platoon, but as a result of significant gains in the pacification programs, the number of villages under GVN control increased considerably every year and there were not enough platoons to go around. To offset the shortage, the strength of a PF platoon was reduced to 29, providing extra spaces to be used in activating additional platoons. (Chart 6)

Chart 5 -- Command and Control, Regional and Popular Forces

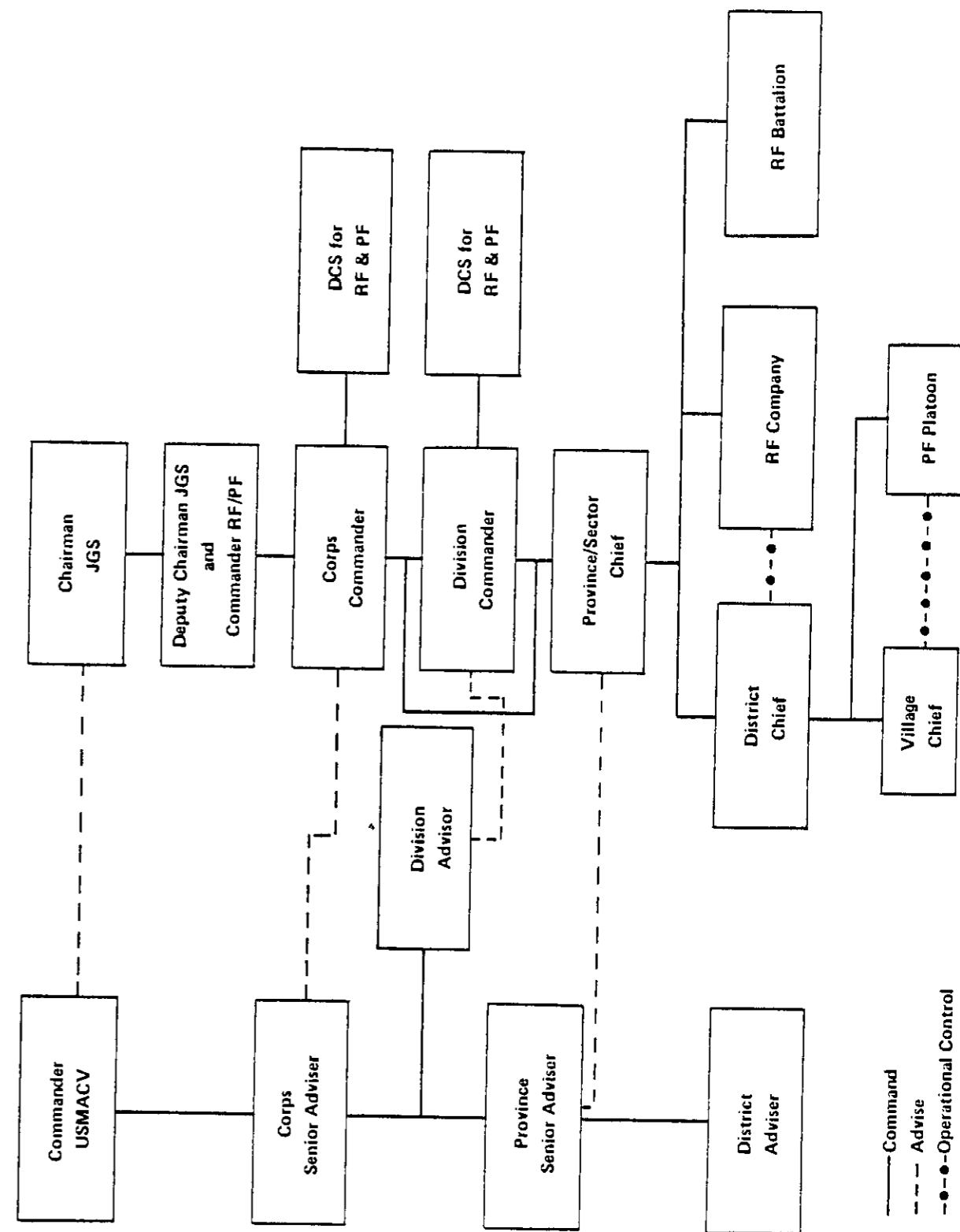
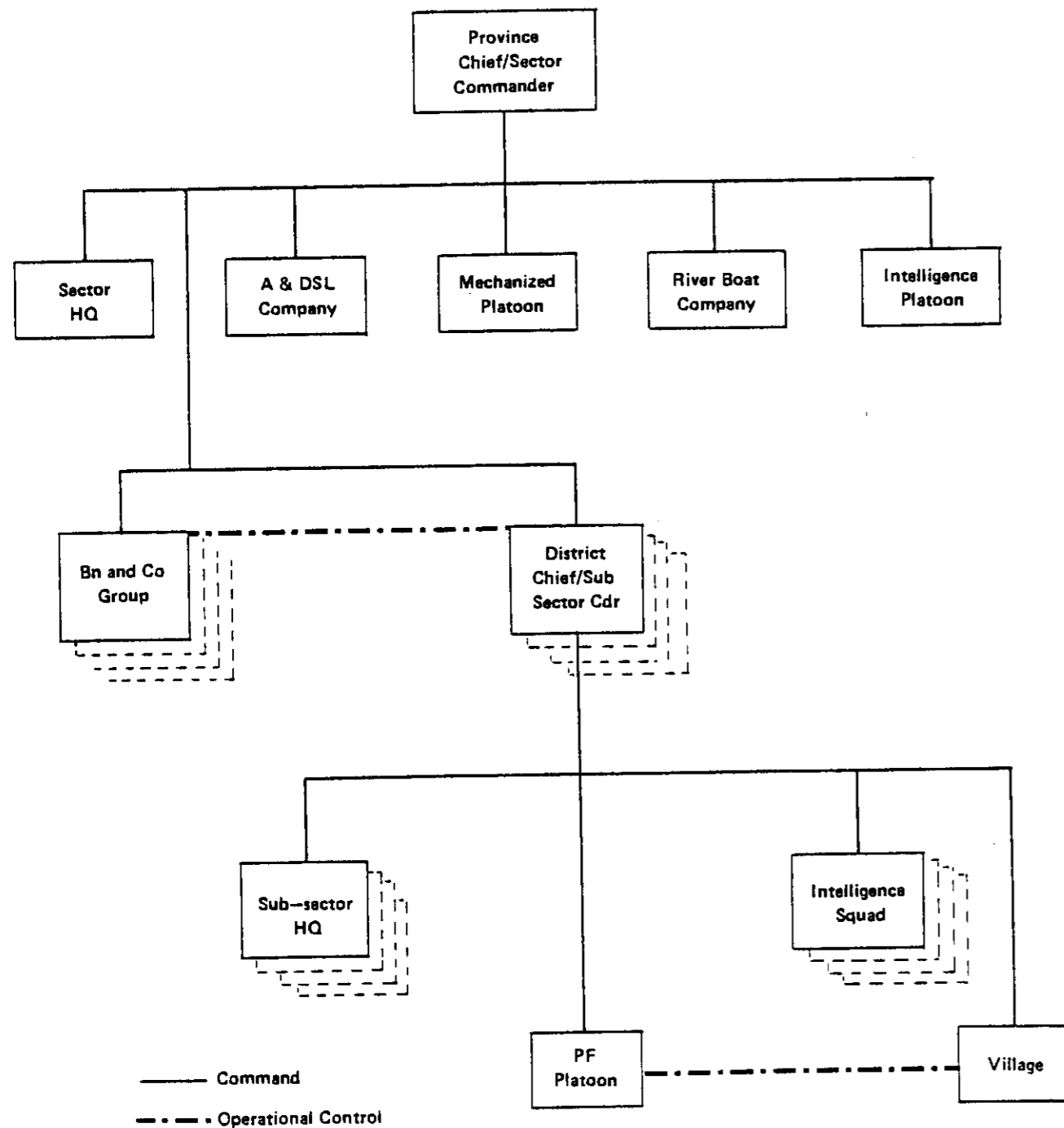


Chart 6 - Organization, Province Regional and Popular Forces



The usual area of operation of RF units, when their organization was still limited to company and company-group size, was within their province and occasionally in the provincial boundary areas. After they were upgraded into maneuver battalions and mobile groups, RF units were employed in areas extending into adjacent provinces as well, or even far away from their home province, but only for limited periods of time that never exceeded two months. In MR-4 for example, RF units organic to the provinces of Go Cong and Vinh Long were deployed to operate in My Tho and Chuong Thien provinces, respectively. Also, a number of RF units organic to An Giang province were committed to operations in far away Kien Giang province. When operating as mobile tactical units in those instances, RF units often proved as effective as regular ARVN units.

To provide administrative and logistical support to RF and PF units, each province was assigned an Administrative and Logistical Support Company (ALSC) whose size varied depending on the number of RF and PF units to be supported. These ALSCs were subsequently upgraded into Administrative and Logistical Support Centers which were organized into five different standard sizes or classes: A, B, C, D, and E, in decreasing order. Each center provided support for a province with the exception of Binh Dinh, Quang Nam and Dinh Tuong which, because of their unusual concentration of RF and PF units, were assigned two Administration and Logistic Centers each.

Artillery support for RF and PF units was also greatly enhanced by the activation of a total of 174 artillery sections across the country, each section equipped with two 105-mm howitzers. These artillery sections were assigned to sectors as organic units to provide direct support to RF and PF. The availability of territorial artillery units allowed the release of divisional artillery units for mobile operations. In addition to artillery, each province was also assigned an armored platoon equipped with V-100 armored reconnaissance vehicles for the protection of lines of communication, and, in case of areas such as the Mekong Delta, a river boat section to facilitate movements on waterways.

Prior to 1966, the role of the National Police was generally

confined to maintaining law and order in urban areas, cities, provincial capitals and district towns; there was no police force in villages and hamlets. National police forces were subordinated to the Ministry of Interior and placed under the control of a NP General Directorate. Over the years, the NP expanded considerably in keeping with its growing role and finally developed into an authorized 122,000-man strong para-military force. NP forces included uniformed police, special police, combat or field police, and harbor police. (Charts 7 & 8) In addition to the NP central command, there were four regional commands, one for each military region, and the Saigon command. At the province level, there was a NP service, at district level, a NP section and at village level, a NP subsection.

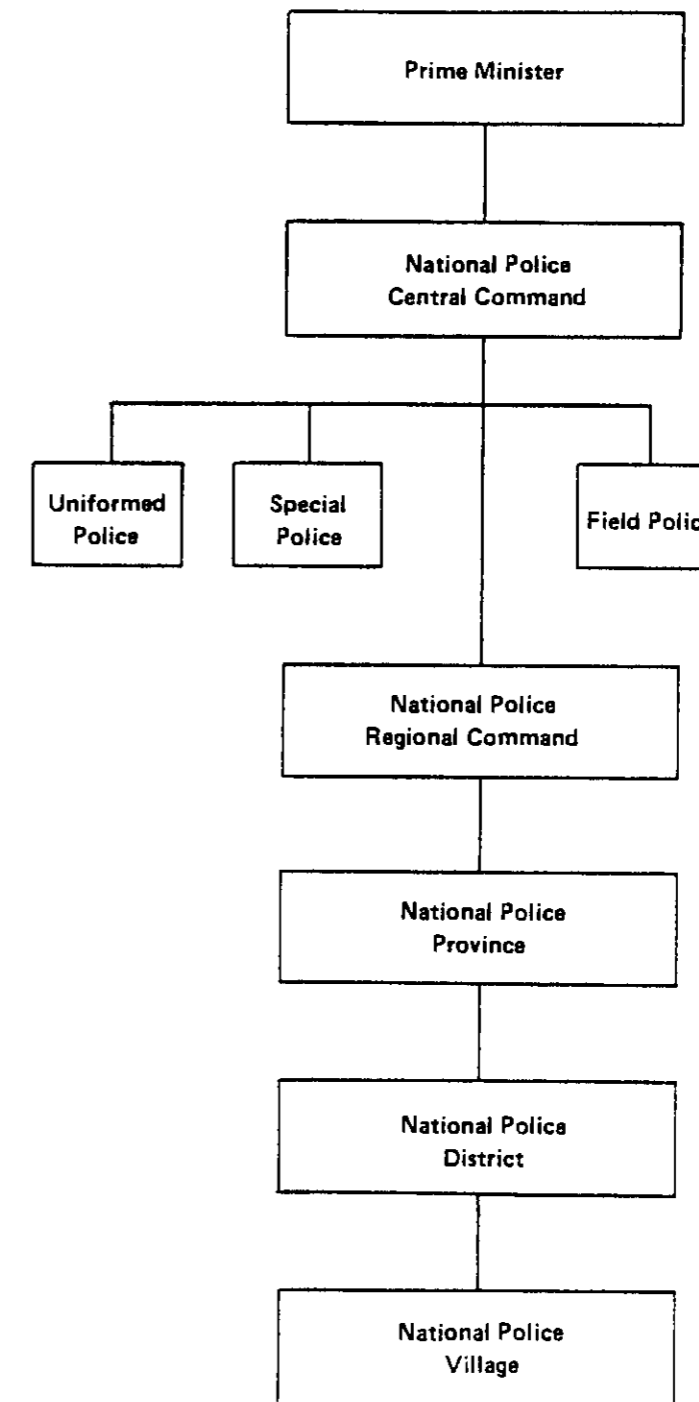
During the period of intensified pacification effort, the NP made significant contributions in the destruction of the enemy infrastructure and maintenance of law and order in villages and hamlets.

Police field forces (PFF) were well equipped and organized into companies. PFF companies were deployed in provinces where they operated in cooperation and coordination with rural development cadre groups.

During the pacification process, NP subsections were established in villages as soon as they became secure. The strength of each village NP subsection varied according to the size of the village population. Villages having upwards of 10,000 inhabitants were assigned one 18-man NP subsection each. Villages having between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants were assigned a 12-man NP subsection. A 6-man NP subsection was assigned to each village with less than 5,000 inhabitants. A village NP subsection had the mission to maintain law and order in order to protect the lives and properties of villagers; coordinate activities with military and para-military forces to destroy or arrest members of the enemy infrastructure; control and screen the village population; develop and maintain an agent net; investigate and interrogate Viet Cong suspects; and control village resources.

Police field forces were directly subordinated to the NP central command. The commander of NP field forces served as an assistant to the NP commander. While equipped and trained in the same way as

Chart 7 - Organization, National Police



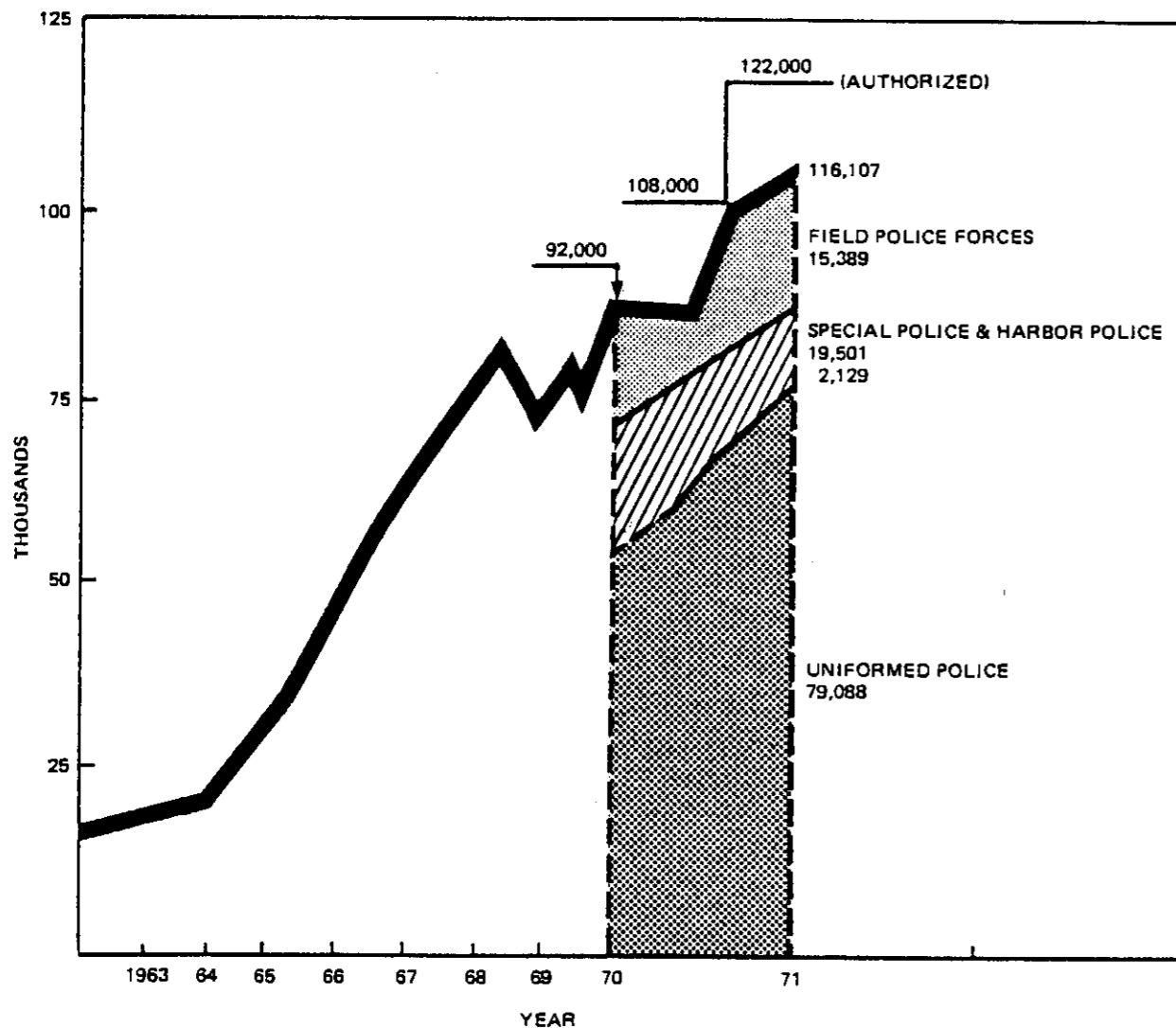


Chart 8 - Expansion of National Police Forces

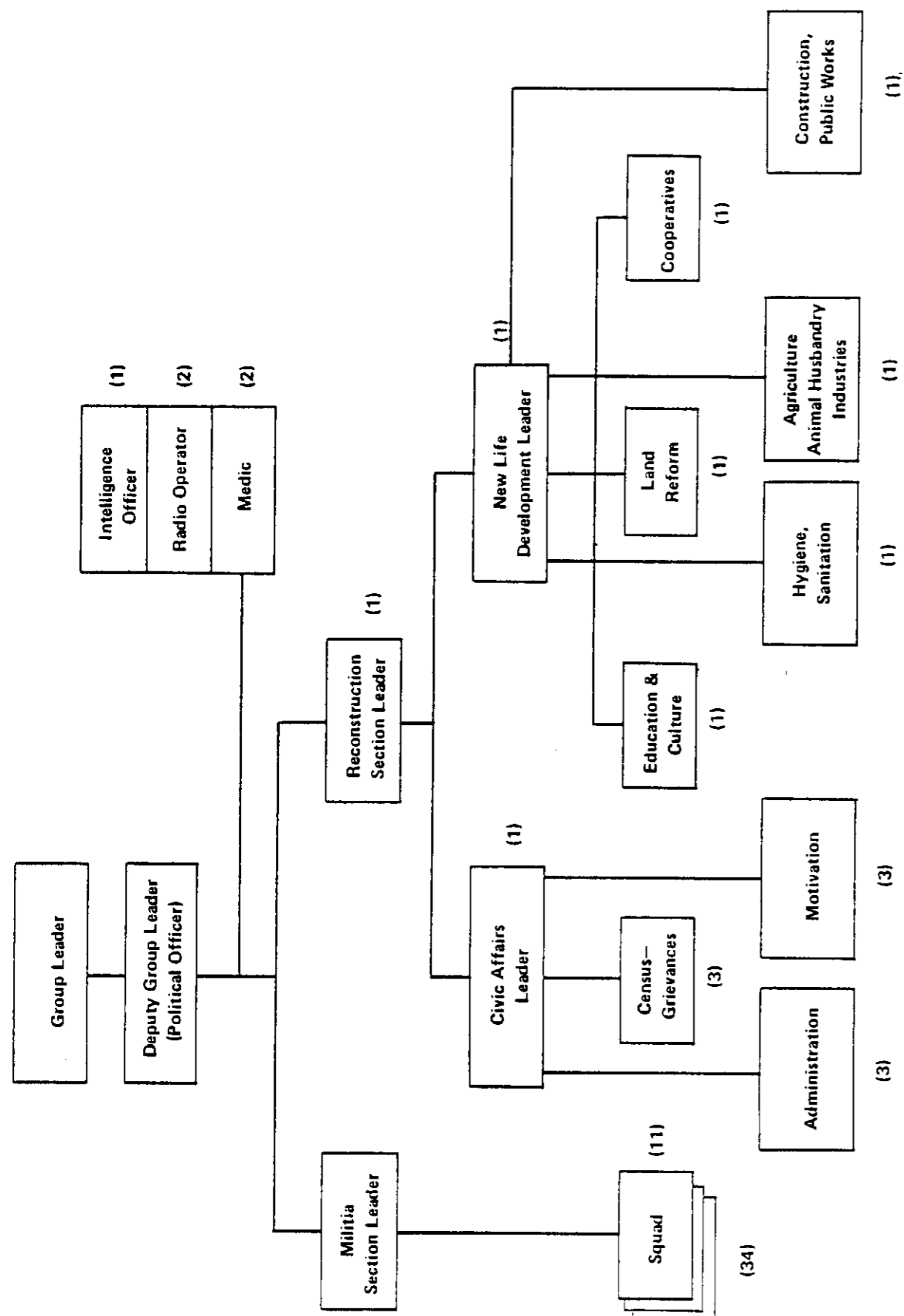
other police forces, the PFF specialized in the role of anti-violence and anti-rebellion and had combat capabilities similar to military forces. PFF companies were attached to provinces to support pacification but retained their police command channel and were administratively supported by the NP central command. At each NP regional command there was a PFF representative whose mission was to coordinate PFF efforts within a military region. The province chief, however, had full authority in the employment of PFF companies assigned to his province. He was assisted by a PFF provincial representative.

At the district level, the NP section chief and the PFF company commander assisted the district chief in determining the employment of PFF platoons for the support of pacification. When required, PFF platoons were also deployed to operate in villages. A PFF platoon leader would cooperate with the village chief on the basis of mutual support and neither was under the control of the other.

Rural Development (RD) cadre were organized into groups of 39 men each. In the central highlands, RD cadre were called Rural Mountaineers and organized into groups of 70 men each. RD cadre were recruited in each province and sent to the Vung Tau RD Training Center for training. Upon completion of training they were sent back to their provinces of origin. Each RD group was composed of a group headquarters, a military section and a reconstruction section.<sup>2</sup> (Chart 9) While the organization of the military section was fairly consistent, the composition of the reconstruction section varied greatly according to local requirement. Thus specialized members of a RD reconstruction section were selected on the basis of local activities where they would serve. If the local population lived on fishing, the RD group would include specialists in fisheries and the manufacturing of fish

<sup>2</sup>As of 1970, the military section was removed from the organization of RD cadre teams, thus reducing the authorized strength of each team to 25. This resulted from a marked improvement of the security situation and the sizable expansion of regional and popular forces. In 1971, following the deactivation of the Ministry of Rural Development, RD cadre personnel were reintegrated into various ministries such as Information/Open Arms, Agriculture, and Public Works.

Chart 9 — Organization, 59—Man Revolutionary Development Cadre Group



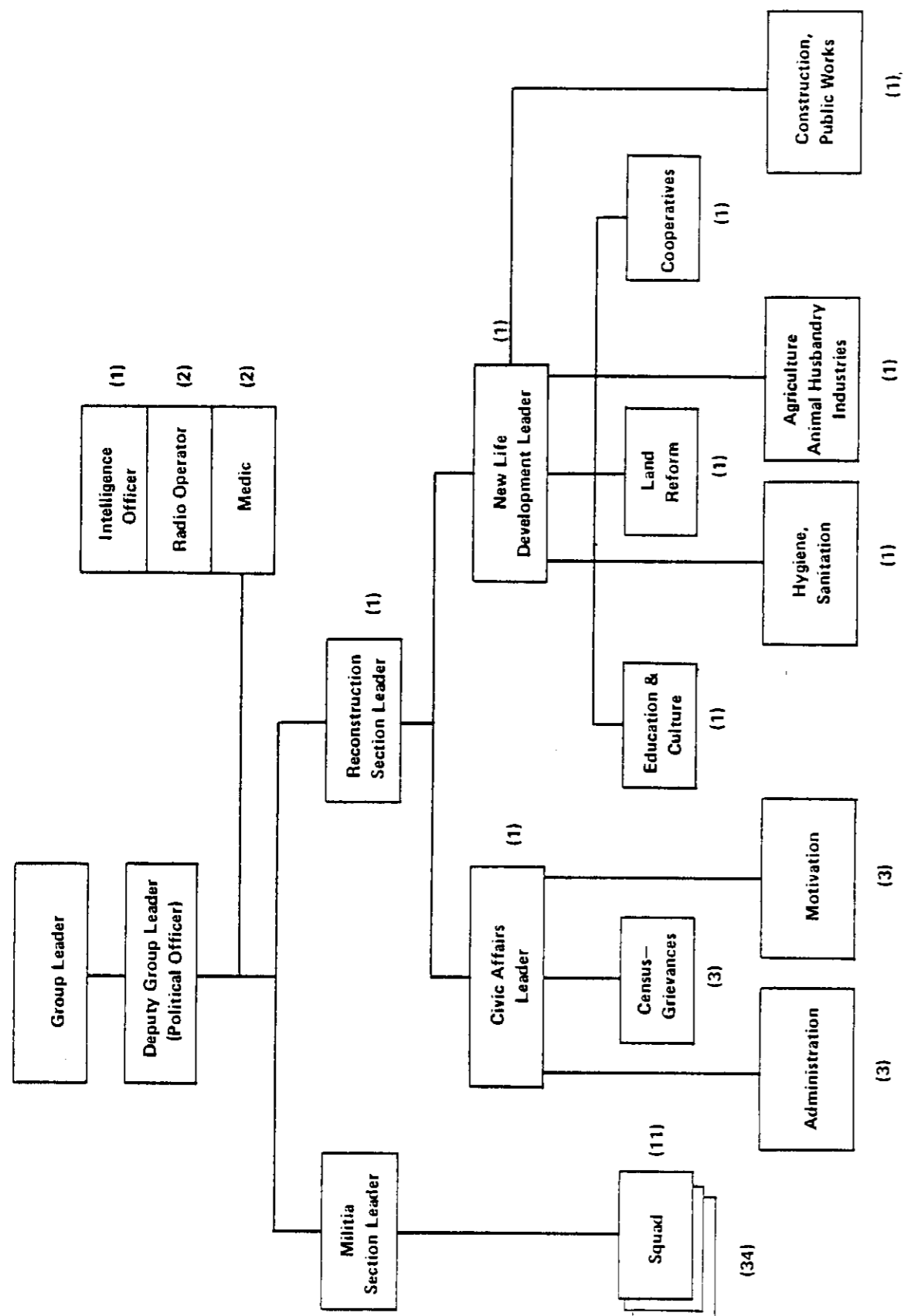
sauce. Likewise, in those areas where the local inhabitants were farmers, the composition of the RD groups would invariably include specialists in agriculture and farm animal breeding. The need for those RD specialists was formulated by the provinces and the RD training center was responsible for their training.

A RD group mission was to study and improve local political, cultural, social, and economic programs; find out the true aspirations of the local population; study and recommend local self-help projects; and encourage the local population in the maintenance of the local road system. With an authorized strength of 34, the military section of a RD group planned security measures for the protection of the group headquarters and the reconstruction section, coordinated activities with friendly forces, and organized and trained the village PSDF.

A provincial RD headquarters coordinated RD activities and helped the province chief control assigned RD groups. (Chart 10) In addition to its specified mission, a provincial RD headquarters also cooperated with departmental services to develop programs to meet the needs of the local population. Other tasks performed by the provincial RD headquarters included census and classification of the population; encouraging the population to participate in community activities; improving education programs and combating illiteracy; assisting the population in the maintenance of public hygiene such as house sanitation and the digging of wells; organizing and conducting political indoctrination sessions; and assisting the population in the organization of farmers' associations.

During the period from 1965 to 1970, RD cadre groups played key roles in the pacification and development effort. As of 1971, however, since the pacification program focused on community defense and community development, it was directly operated by the specialized cadre of various ministries. As a result, RD cadre groups were deactivated and the personnel were absorbed into the ministries, such as Information and Open Arms, Agriculture, etc., depending on their qualifications. The pacification effort was also centralized under the Central Pacification and Development Council and the Ministry of Rural

Chart 9 - Organization, 59-Man Revolutionary Development Cadre Group



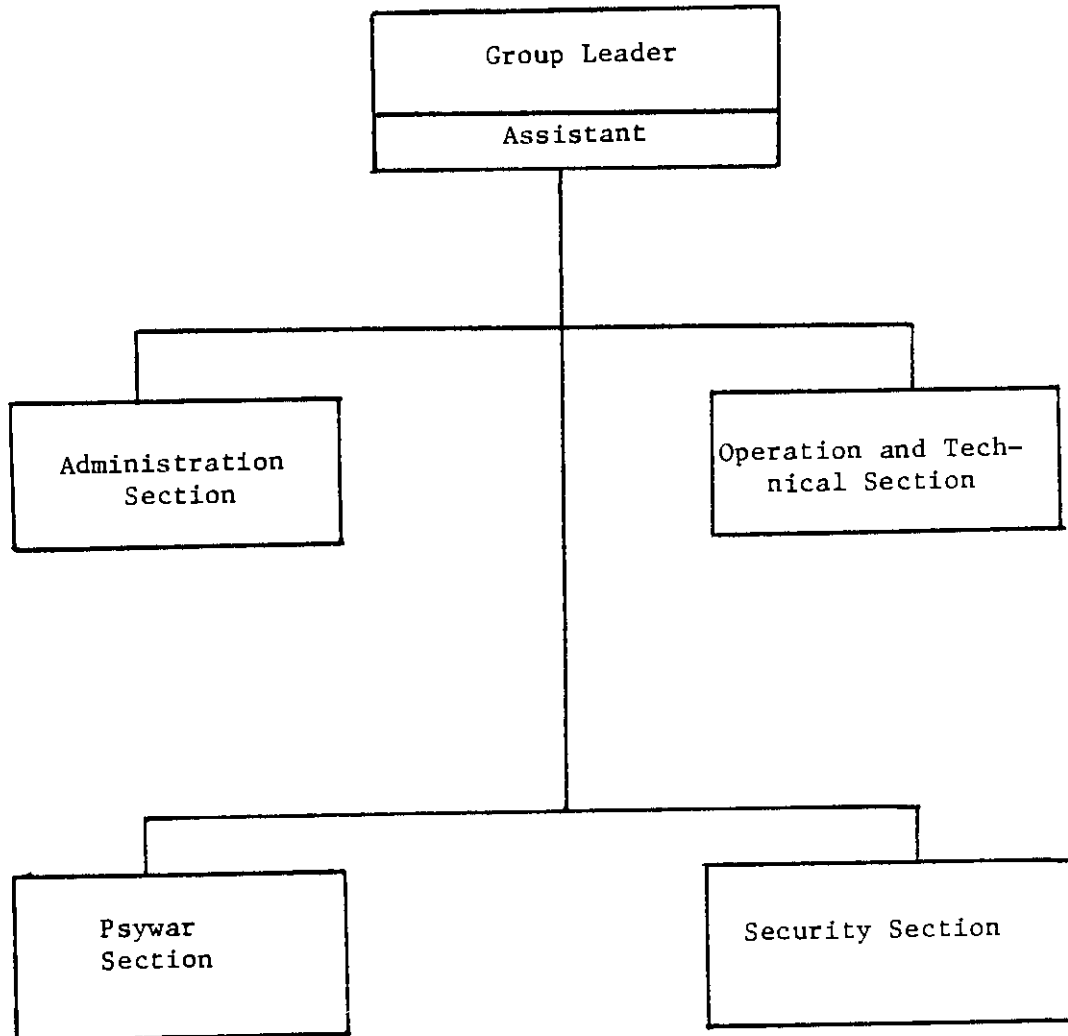
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Chart 10 — Organization, Province RD Cadre Group Headquarters





be deployed to operate in village boundary areas or in adjacent villages. The long-duration deployment of a PF platoon from its home village was discouraged and subject to approval by the Military Region Command. When operating away from its home village, a PF platoon received free rations of rice.

People's Self-Defense Forces were not usually employed in a military capacity. Being an auxiliary force, PSDF members assisted popular forces in the enforcement of security in the villages and participated in activities involving the villagers and their families. In secure areas, PSDFs were also employed to guard roads and bridges and in mixed patrols with PFs. However, PSDFs were almost never entrusted the task of manning the defense of important GVN installations or vital lines of communication.

The great number of military forces employed in support of pacification never seemed to keep up with the requirements occasioned by the necessity to deploy a permanent occupation force to every hamlet. The situation was such that when protection forces were deployed from a certain area considered "secure", that area might relapse into insecurity and the local population would lose confidence in the GVN. To ensure a judicious employment of forces, the Central Pacification and Development Council devised certain principles which were embodied in the concept of area security. According to this concept, whenever an area had been pacified and deemed secure, its military forces would be reduced and partly redeployed to other less secure areas. This redistribution of forces generally occurred within a Military Region and was a function of the changing situation and the MR commander made the decisions affecting the redeployment of regular ARVN forces and RF battalions.

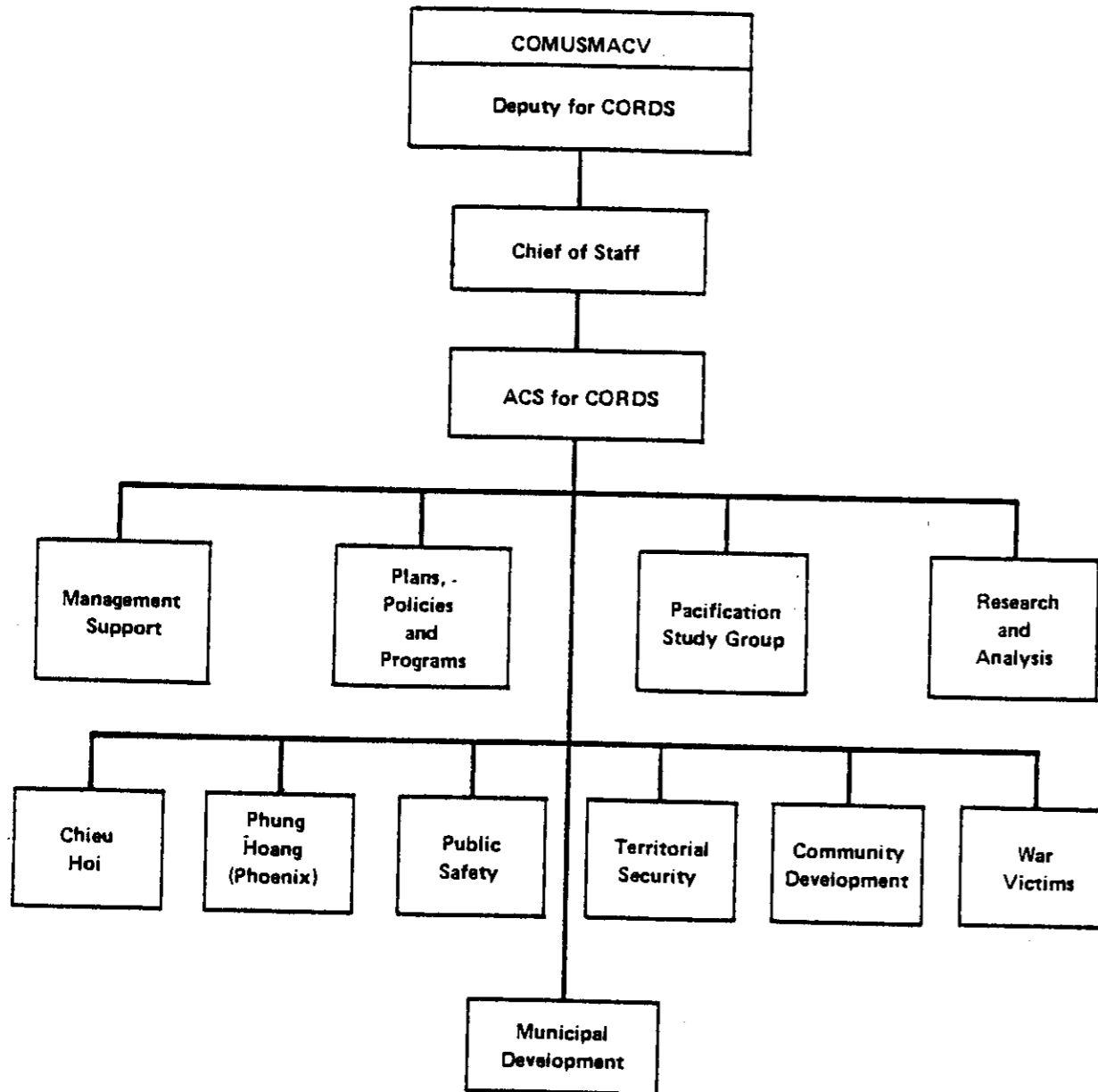
*U.S. Organization for Pacification Support*

The Office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) was organized in May 1967 as an effort designed to unify US pacification support activities heretofore conducted separately by such US agencies as United States Agency for International

Development (USAID), the CIA, Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) and the military advisory system. CORDS provided support to the GVN in all aspects concerning the pacification program. Placed under the control of the Commander, USMACV (COMUSMACV), it directed and supervised both military and civilian support activities. COMUSMACV was assisted by a Deputy for CORDS, a US official with ambassador's rank, whose functions were to coordinate and supervise all pacification support activities, military and civilian. In particular, the Deputy COMUSMACV for CORDS was responsible for formulating policies and programs designed to interface with the GVN pacification effort. (Chart 11)

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) was the principal staff assistant to COMUSMACV and DEPCORDS/MACV on US Civil-Military Support for the GVN pacification and development program. He had primary general staff responsibilities for: providing advice on all aspects of US Civil/Military Support for the Community Defense and Local Development Program; in conjunction with GVN authorities, developing joint and combined plans, policies, concepts, and programs concerning US Civil/Military support for community defense and local development; supervising the execution of plans and programs for US Civil/Military support for Community Defense and Local Development; providing advice and assistance to GVN, including the Central Pacification and Development Council, the various ministries, the RVNAF JGS, and other GVN agencies on US Civil/Military support for Community Defense and Local Development; managing and directing US civil assistance to the autonomous cities in the fields of integral security, political mobilization, and technical support; serving as the focal point for local development programs, population and resources control, and for civic action by US forces; serving as point of contact with sponsoring US agencies for the Community Defense and Local Development Programs; evaluating Civil/Military Community Defense and Local Development activities and reports on the progress, status, and problems of community defense and local development support; carrying out US representation to the GVN Chieu Hoi ministry, recommending basic

Chart 11 -- Organization, Office of the Assistant  
Chief of Staff for CORDS, USMACV



policies, goals and guidelines for planning purpose, and acting on all Community Defense and Local Development program support policy matters pertaining to subordinate echelons.

The principal functions of CORDS Directorates were as follows:

Pacification Study Group

Conducted field studies of community defense and local defense programs, and other programs to the extent they affected community defense and local development.

Management Support Directorate

Supervised and coordinated activities in the management and administrative area, including manpower planning and control, management analysis, and manpower development, administrative services, general services and communications; and air operations in support for CORDS activities.

Plans, Policies, and Programs Directorate

Advised and assisted the GVN Central Pacification and Development Council and other GVN agencies in the development of community defense and local development plans, policies and concepts; developed military political and economic plans, as well as policies and concepts concerning community defense and local development activities; contributed to plans and policies developed by other MACV staff sections, determined MACCORDS plaster requirements; negotiated with USAID and the GVN on all resource levels; advised the Director for CORDS on the impact on defense and development of military strategies and tactics; through senior advisers and regional DEPCORDS, coordinated with US and GVN field commanders, province senior advisers and province chiefs regarding implementation of programs; and coordinated CORDS responses to all audits.

Research and Analysis Directorate

Operated the MACCORDS management information systems; developed and operated automated data processing systems in support of CORDS and GVN community defense and development objectives; controlled CORDS field reporting, analyzed reports to provide quantitative and qualitative measurement of community defense and local development progress; analyzed the dynamics of the community defense and local development

process to define problems and recommended solutions; advised and assisted the GVN central pacification and development council on matters pertaining to measurement of pacification progress; advised and assisted the office of the Prime Minister in the establishment of a GVN computer center; provided staff support services to CORDS directorates relating to ADP, reports, graphics and briefings.

Phung Hoang Directorate

Advised and assisted the GVN Phung Hoang Division of Headquarters, National Police Command and recommended and developed Phung Hoang plans and policies.

Municipal Development Directorate

Advised and assisted the urban committee of the CPDC, the Director General of Reconstruction and Urban Planning and other GVN agencies in the formulation of policy, programs and projects for development of the urban areas of the RVN; coordinated the function of CORDS and other US mission agencies, as appropriate, in matters relating to the administration, physical planning, and technical and social development in urban areas; promoted the involvement of the private sector urban programs and projects. Assisted and advised the Mayor of Saigon and was responsible for all US assistance to the city of Saigon, to include personnel, commodities and funding.

War Victims Directorate

Developed policy goals, objectives and guidelines for US assistance to GVN programs assisting refugees, war veterans, and other people in need of social and economic help and to the GVN programs of land development and hamlet building benefiting victims of war; advised the GVN Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of War Veterans, and the Directorate General of Land Development and Hamlet Building.

Territorial Security Directorate

Advised and assisted the RVNAF JGS on regional forces and popular forces, the Ministry of Interior on people's self-defense forces, and the Director General of Youth and Sports on youth affairs; developed and recommended policies and programs on the employment and improvement of regional forces/popular forces units.

Community Development Directorate

Advised and assisted in implementation of programs under the auspices of the central pacification and development council, the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD), the Ministry for the Development of Ethnic Minorities (MDEM), and Ministry of the Interior (MOI) overall responsibility within CORDS for advisory efforts aimed at improving the operation of province and lower levels of government; tasked with support and technical supervision of regional and provincial advisory operations in development; served as direct counterpart to MORD and MDEM; advised appropriate subdivisions of CPDC, MOI and other ministries, as required, to assist in implementation of specific programs assigned to the directorate in the GVN pacification programs, the national fund for local development, the province development council, the village self-development fund, the rural credit program, the rural development cadre program, and the Son Thon Rural Development Cadre (Mountaineer RD) program.

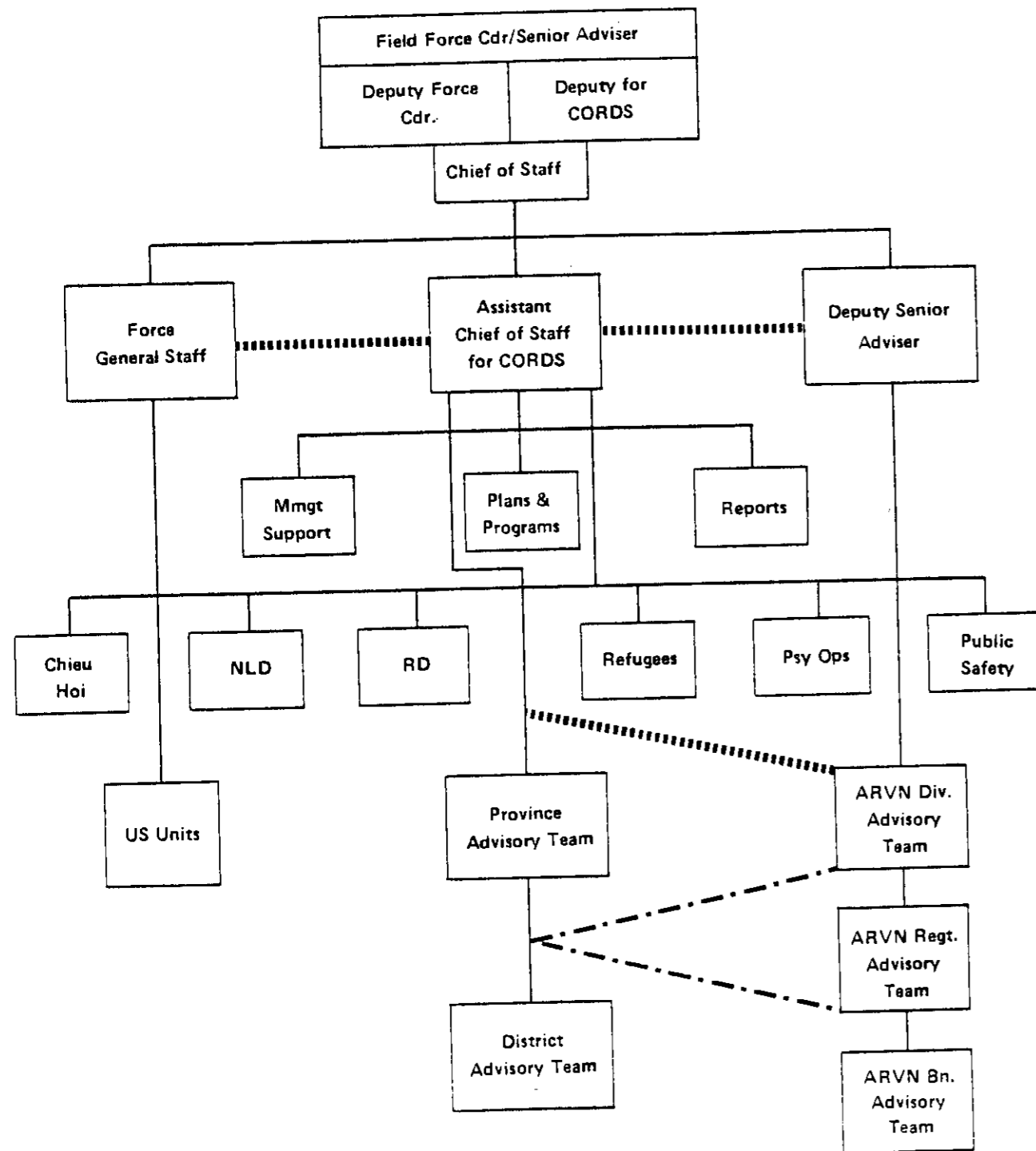
Public Safety Directorate

Served as the principal advisor to the Director CORDS and the Director, USAID, and developed and recommended basic policy, goals, objectives, and guideline for US civil military support to the GVN national police command; developed and recommended basic policy, priorities, goals, objectives and guidelines for the US public safety programs supporting these agencies. Assessed the progress and priorities of law enforcement and related security actions.

At the Corps and Military Region level, the Commander, US Field Force, in his capacity as senior adviser to the ARVN Corps commander, was responsible to MACV for all efforts concerning pacification and security in his area of responsibility. He was assisted by a Deputy for CORDS, usually a civilian, whose functions were to coordinate and supervise US activities in support of the pacification program in the MR. In addition, the Commander, US Field Force was also assisted by a military deputy, responsible for military activities. (Chart 12)

At the province/sector level, the civilian and military advisory efforts were integrated under the control of the Province Senior Advisor who, as Director, Province CORDS, was a civilian or a military

Chart 12 - Organization, CTZ/MR CORDS in 1968



..... Coordination of Military & CORDS matters  
 - - - Operational Control when unit assigned on RD direct support mission

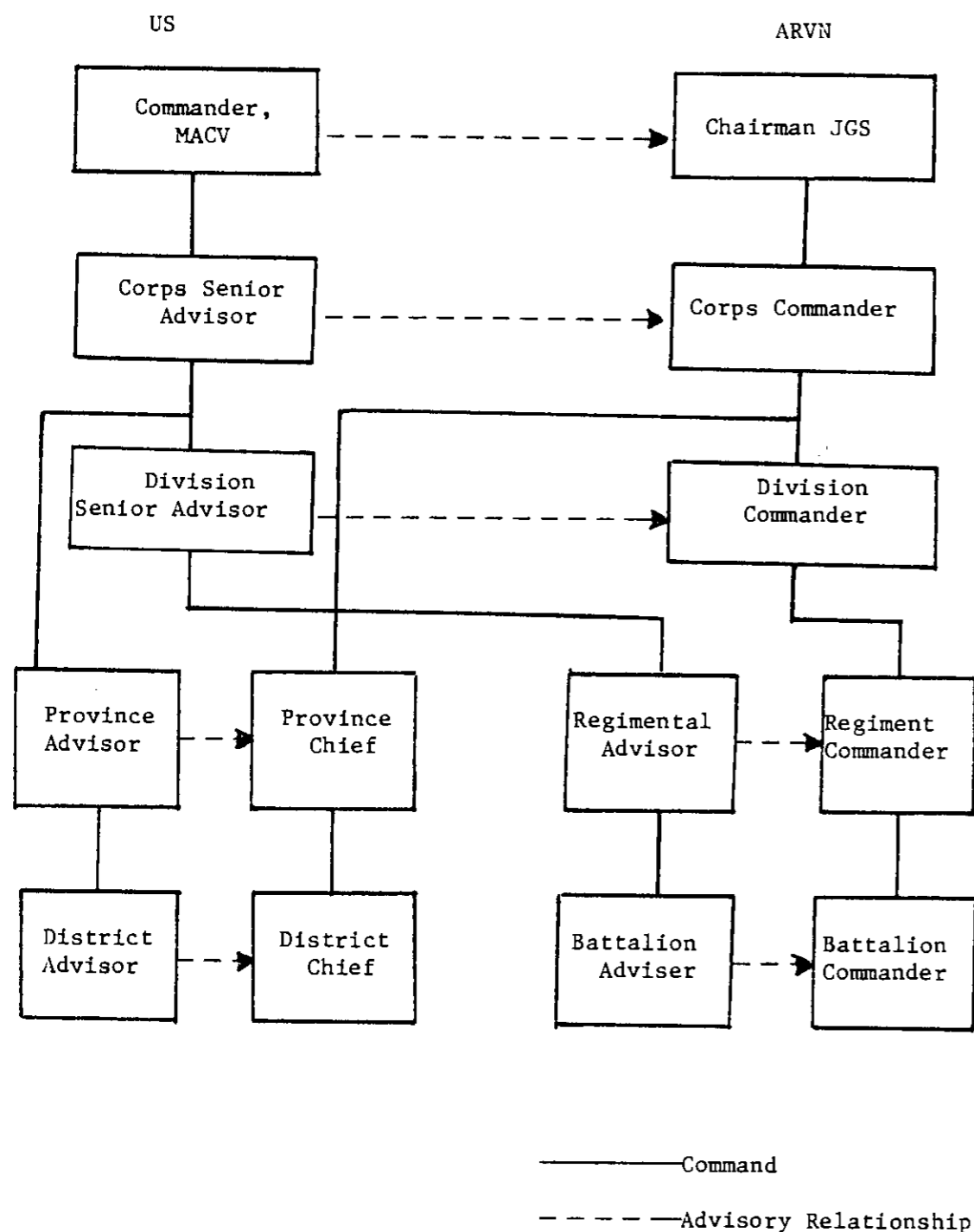
officer. As director, province CORDS, the province senior adviser reported to and received directives from the deputy CORDS, US Field Force. When a regular ARVN battalion was attached to the province as reinforcement for pacification support, the battalion's adviser was placed under the control of the director, province CORDS. In general, the province senior adviser/CORDS director advised and assisted the province chief in all areas related to the pacification program of the province.

At the district level, CORDS also integrated civilian and military support and advisory activities concerning pacification. The director, district CORDS, district senior adviser, was responsible for implementing and following up on pacification support activities. The CORDS district adviser was usually a military officer since his duties as senior district adviser included mostly military activities.

In addition to the CORDS system, the US placed advisers with Vietnamese forces, adding to the RVN military effort to support pacification. Greatly expanded in organization and personnel, the US advisory system encompassed the entire RVNAF hierarchy and reached down to the battalion level. Advisory groups and teams advised and assisted RVNAF units in all areas of operation. They were supported by a communication system of their own which provided a continuous link from the central echelon to corps, divisions, regiments and battalions. At corps level, US Field Force commanders also played the role of corps senior advisers. (Chart 13)

In conjunction with their combat efforts, US forces also performed civic action activities which were highly praiseworthy in view of their effective contributions to the GVN pacification effort. US civic action programs underwent some changes in emphasis; in 1964, for example, US civic action efforts were focused on providing health protection and sanitation for the peasantry in rural areas. They included such programs as well digging, and anti-malaria operations. In 1965, however, in view of the massive US participation, US civic programs emphasized the necessity to reduce casualties and damage to the civilian population, foster good rapport between US forces and the population, and assist the peasants in their farm work, particularly

Chart 13 — US Advisory Relationship with ARVN



in those areas adjacent to US bases. US civic action programs also helped the local population to repair roads and build bridges, schools, maternity wards and dispensaries.

Civic action programs implemented by US forces gained popular sympathy and developed excellent rapport between them and the civilian population. In addition to the building task, US forces took good care of the civilian population whenever casualties and damage occurred. Injured civilians were always immediately evacuated for treatment, and all damages were compensated for with fairness. In this respect, US forces seldom incurred criticism since they carried out with zeal MACV directives to "limit to the maximum extent casualties and damages to the civilian population."

Within the first six months of 1966 alone, US forces built 78 schools, 29 dispensaries, 43 bridges, and repaired 246 miles of rural road. In addition, a total of 12,860 tons of clothing, food, and medicine donated by the International Catholic Relief Service were distributed to the local population during military operations.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the most realistically useful civic operation undertaken by US forces was the Medical Civil Action Program (MEDCAP). It was widely appreciated by the rural population since it provided for much-needed medical treatment and medicine.

US civic action operations were also helpful in bringing relief to the increasing number of war refugees. In this regard, the US effort was particularly effective during 1968 when thousands of people became victims of heavy fighting. Relief programs of long duration were undertaken by US forces who assisted the RVN in building resettlement centers and distributing food, medicine, and clothing to the refugees.

<sup>2</sup>General William C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam: 1964-1968, Ground Operations, Appendix E, p. 239.

*The Phoenix Program*

The Phoenix program was proposed by US authorities in 1967 as a means to consolidate and unify intelligence activities aimed at the destruction of the VCI. Despite GVN concurrence, it was nearly a year before the government approved Phoenix by executive decree. The delay stemmed from difficulties in defining terms of reference for the program and in selecting the agency responsible for its execution.

To implement the program, Phoenix committees were established from the central government to the districts with the missions of collecting information on the VCI, and planning for the organizing operations to neutralize it. (Charts 14, 15, & 16)

Corps commanders, province and district chiefs served as chairmen of the Phoenix committees at their respective levels. In this organization, the Regional National Police director, the provincial NP chief and the district NP chief played the role of committee secretary general. Members of a Phoenix committee included representatives of the police field force, the special police, the military security service, the provincial reconnaissance unit (PRU) and Chieu Hoi, RD cadre, Sector S-2 and other military organizations.

The coordination of intelligence and operations among various military and civilian agencies included the following tasks: (1) to collect, corroborate and disseminate information pertaining to key cadre, organization, and plans of the VCI; (2) to exploit information gathered in a timely manner so as to conduct quick reaction military operations; and (3) to classify, interrogate, and recommend the adjudication of suspects temporarily detained.

The task of eliminating the VCI was carried out in close coordination with search-and-destroy and pacification operations, making full use of propaganda and psywar techniques and resources. The Phoenix effort was supported by military units in combined operations, closely coordinated with police forces. The goal was maximum coordination; police field forces and the PRU joined in the task of eliminating the VCI. RF and

Chart 14 — Phoenix Operation and Control System

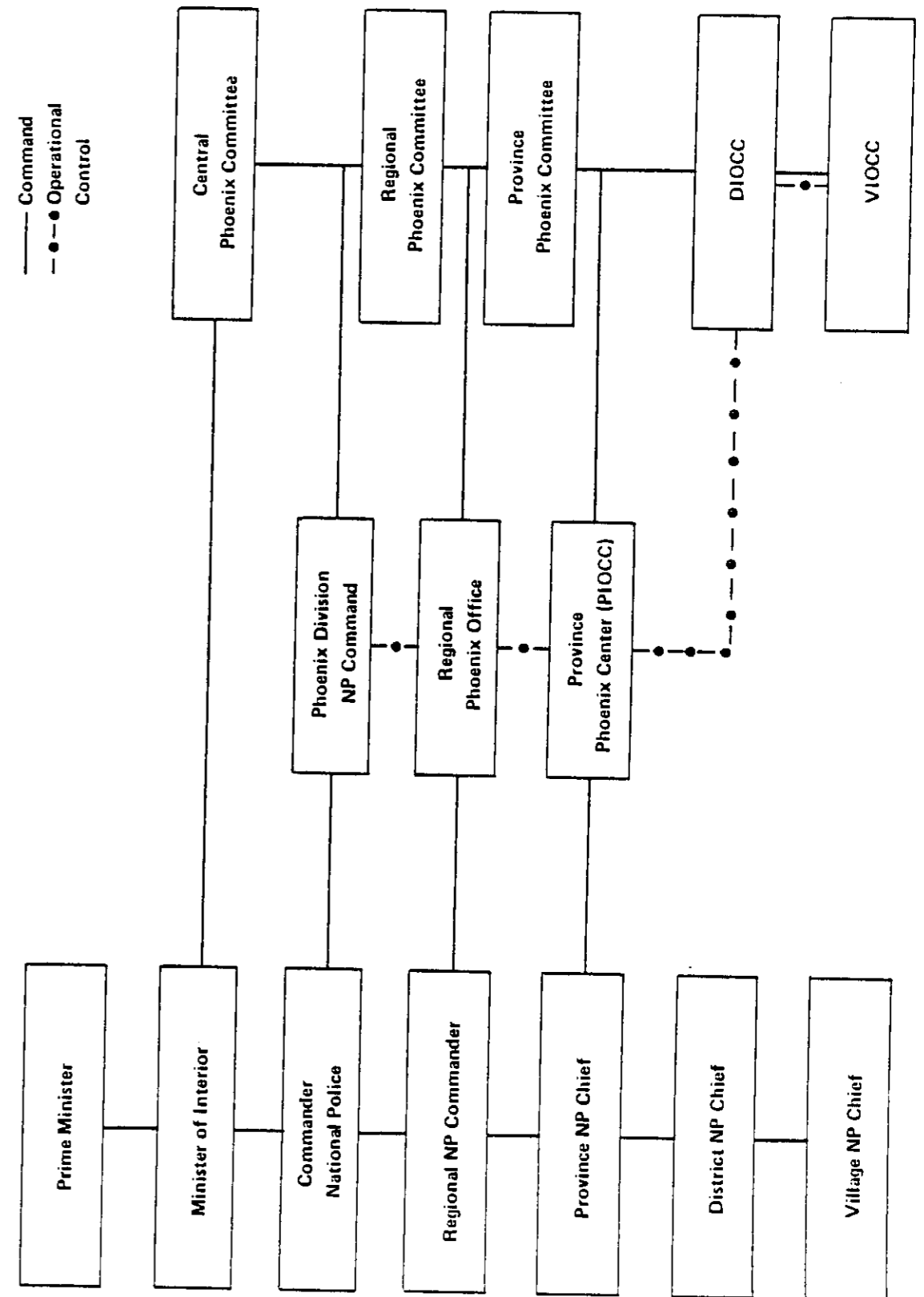


Chart 15 – Organization, Province PHOENIX Committee

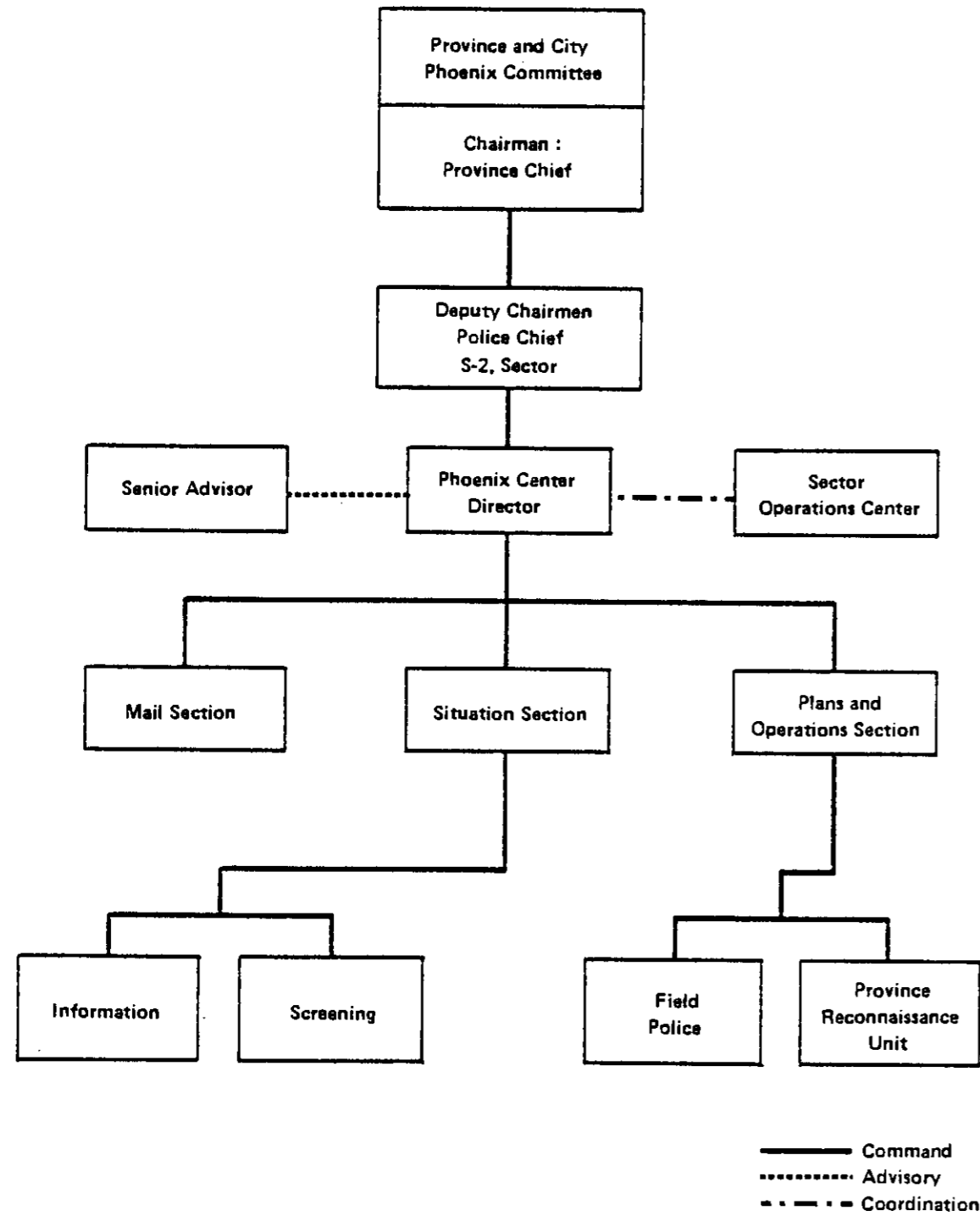
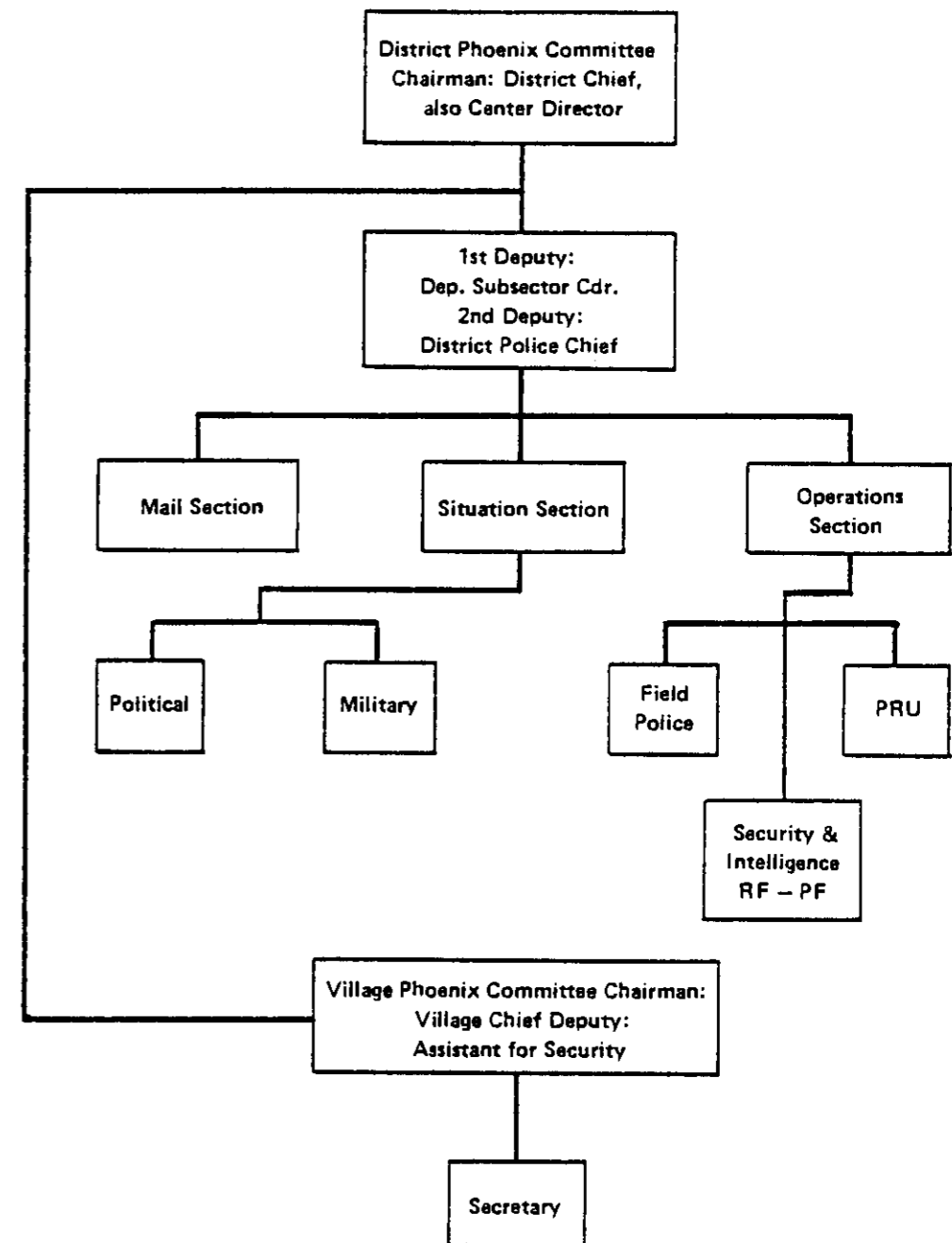


Chart 16 – Organization, District PHOENIX Committee



PF units participated in operations designed to attack and destroy the VCI. For example, these units provided the information, held or cordoned the target, and protected searching and screening parties made up of the special police, police field force, and military security personnel.

Information on the VCI, collected by intelligence agencies during military operations, or by the provincial interrogation center, was immediately disseminated to related units or agencies, to the DIOCC, and to the provincial permanent center for exploitation.

Provincial reconnaissance units (PRU) conducted special operations to collect or exploit information and participated in combined operations with other forces. Organized and armed by the US Embassy, PRUs were placed under the control of and employed by the provincial police chiefs when the National Police was assigned the responsibility of implementing the Phoenix program. Together with police field force units, PRUs made up the main police striking force in the task of eliminating the VCI.

The National Police was the principal active component of the Phoenix organization. The Special Police were responsible for collecting, corroborating and evaluating information concerning the VCI. The police field force units were the NP reaction forces who actually conducted police operations designed to destroy the VCI.

RD cadre teams were also given the mission of supporting the elimination of the VCI by providing information leading to the discovery of the VCI and participating in reaction operations conducted by friendly forces.

Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) cadre, because of their specialized knowledge of the enemy, were particularly useful in the elimination of the VCI. They were most effective in appealing for enemy personnel's return and providing support to intelligence collection activities or reaction operations. Selected returnees were employed in the interrogation of VC suspects or to identify VCI personnel among refugees.

The enemy infrastructure usually conveyed the general impression that its personnel were a special breed of fanatic Communist cadres. In fact, a distinction had to be made between those VCI cadre who were

truly indoctrinated party members and the sympathizers or common people who were induced into serving in the VCI. In most cases, the second category of VCI personnel was made up of ordinary, poor people who cooperated with the enemy either because of his pressure or for profit. They included smugglers of medicine and other essential commodities plying their trade between GVN-controlled and VC areas.

People detained by police and security forces during military operations were first classified into three categories, VC or NVA soldier, suspected member of the VCI, or undetermined identity. If subsequent interrogation, documentation, police records check, and possibly possession of weapons proved conclusively that the individual was clearly an enemy soldier or a VCI operative, he (or she) was sent to the PW camp (in the first instance) or remanded to trial (if a member of the VCI). If, on the other hand, no evidence was found to implicate the person as a VCI member, he was released. Those detainees who were suspected of being members of the VCI but could not be convicted as such for lack of evidence were placed under the jurisdiction of the provincial security committee which had the authority to either release or detain them temporarily pending investigation. This committee was chaired by the province chief and included the provincial judge or prosecutor, the police chief, the MSS representative, the sector S-2 and representatives of operational forces as members. The role of the MSS representative was particularly significant since the MSS, a counter-intelligence agency, collected and provided information on the VCI to the PIOCC and DIOCC. The committee was empowered to release or detain a suspect at the provincial reeducation center (jail) for a period of time ranging from three months to a maximum of two years. The "trial" of suspects took place once a month and its procedure began with a presentation of records by the police chief. If there were no complications, the committee immediately decided on each case.

This procedure was criticized as unconstitutional and undemocratic because it amounted to a trial without due legal process. However, the GVN contended that it was simply an administrative, not a judicial act, hence not determined by national laws. And since it was not a trial

process in the legal sense the suspect could not have legal counsel nor was his presence required when the committee made its decision.

The reason the GVN resorted to this procedure against the VCI was that it was nearly impossible in most cases to produce enough hard evidence for indictment, yet the suspect's culpability was certain beyond reasonable doubt. Thus to stay on the safe side, the official reasoning went, it was better to detain the suspect than to free the criminal, even at the expense of incurring some wrath. On the other hand, the GVN authorities were faced with the problem of identifying hard-core VCI members from among the suspects who, for the most part, were just sympathizers or innocent people induced into the VCI service under persuasion, coercion or threats of blackmail, or simply to earn a living. To provide enough time for thorough research and investigation, temporary detention of the suspects was necessary.

For all the criticism directed against it, the detention power authorized provincial security committees failed to deter the VCI members still at large since the maximum two years behind bars was not really too high a price for the hard-core VC. Compared to what had been done under the First Republic which outlawed the Communists altogether, detention appeared mild and even democratic. Under President Diem's secret directives, province chiefs were allowed to "dispose of" VCI members in whichever way they deemed appropriate including murder, without legal justification. The VCI members were especially fearful of the "Central Vietnam Special Task Force" organized and directed by Diem's brother, Mr. Ngo Dinh Can in the early 60's. The task force members indiscriminately slaughtered every VCI member they hunted down and this deterred VCI overt activities for some time.

Under the Second Republic, the spirit of democracy was strong and pervasive, precluding the use of harsh measures. Against members of the VCI captured, the strongest measure taken was detention which, to hard-core elements, could be looked upon as a period of rest pending release and renewed activities. To the innocent people detained because of suspicion, however, detention was apt to alienate them from the GVN cause and, under Communist proselyting influence, could well turn them into sympathizers and eventually members of the VCI.

The GVN had no choice than proceed with the program of eliminating the VCI, which could be equated with a military force in terms of destructive effectiveness. GVN officials responsible for the program were fond of saying that eliminating a district or province political commissar of the VCI was tantamount to putting a whole VC company out of action. Given the effect of the program on VCI activities, this was not an inflated statement.

The period from the inception of the Phoenix program up to 1971, which was considered the best year of the RVN in terms of security and pacification achievements, saw a marked decline in VCI activities. Out of an estimated total of 40,000 members recorded by 1971, the VCI suffered 15,603 eliminated or neutralized, broken down into 5,615 killed, 4,391 detained, and 5,597 returnees, or more than one third of its strength. In 1968 the VCI suffered the biggest loss ever in its ranks, because it was pushed into overt military activities in support of the "general offensive-general uprising" campaign.

In retrospect, the Phoenix program can be termed a reasonable success. This success could have been maintained and furthered as long as South Vietnam was free from NVA incursions. Like pacification in general, its achievements could be offset by military reverses. The momentum of the program came to a standstill in 1972, for example, when NVA units launched the Easter offensive. The same was true of the post-cease-fire period during which pacification and other programs suffered severe setbacks in the face of stepped-up enemy attacks which the RVNAF alone, thinly spread as they were and with reduced war supplies, were unable to contain effectively.

The program was also beset by internal problems among which the most serious was the shortage of capable intelligence personnel at the province and district levels for effective coordination of activities against the VCI. Next came the lack of appropriate support and weight given to the program by province and district chiefs who, either because of their overburdened responsibilities or failure to realize the importance of the program and take proper interest in it, placed its execution squarely into the hands of the national police. Left to its own

initiative, the politically-oriented national police was generally reluctant to take forceful actions and became ineffective against the VCI.

Then there was the problem of identifying and prosecuting VCI members operating under cover and living mixed with the population. Identification was particularly difficult against planted agents in crowded urban and suburban areas where the mass of working people lived. Very seldom, if ever, was their presence detected by the national police.

The problem was even harder in the rural areas where village and hamlet councilmen operated in constant fear of retaliation which accounted for their lack of enthusiasm or even dereliction in eliminating the VCI. More often than not, they failed to take action even when they knew there were enemy agents living in the community, for sometimes these agents turned out to be the relatives of certain councilmen themselves. The fear of retaliation led to a propensity toward accommodation and finally developed into a philosophy of "live and let live" which was at the root of passivity and inaction. In a few extreme cases, some councilmen might turn out to be the very VCI that the Phoenix effort set out to eliminate.

CHAPTER IV

RVN-US Cooperation and Coordination in Pacification

*The Central Level*

Prior to 1968, during which period the Minister of Revolutionary Development (RD) served as secretary general of the Central Revolutionary (Rural) Development Council, all pacification plans and programs were developed by the RD Ministry in cooperation and coordination with US Embassy agencies and other GVN ministries. When approved and signed by the Prime Minister, these plans and programs were disseminated to GVN ministries and the Joint General Staff for implementation.

To develop a pacification plan or program, every year the Central Pacification and Development Council (CPDC) formulated a set of concepts and objectives as guidance for the pacification effort during the year. Before these concepts and objectives were disseminated to the ministries and the Joint General Staff (JGS) for planning, they were subject to discussion and agreement between the President of the Republic and the US Ambassador.

As far as the JGS was concerned, the CPDC concepts and objectives served as bases for planning the military support requirement which was formalized by the annual Combined Campaign Plan, a planning effort jointly made by the JGS and the US Military Assistance Command (USMACV). To the ministries of the GVN, these pacification concepts and objectives also constituted guidelines for their own specific plans and programs which they worked out in coordination with counterpart US agencies.

*(Chart 17)*

On the military side, the yearly planning process involved the establishment of a combined staff made up of elements from the JGS and MACV. It was this combined staff that worked out the military plan in support of the GVN pacification effort. The combined JGS-MACV staff



the chairman, JGS and the commander, USMACV signed the documents. Since the plan involved FWMA forces, the commanders of these forces were also invited to attend the ceremony and co-sign the document.

The plan was then disseminated by quickest means to ARVN Corps, US Field Forces, FWMA forces and the services and arms. Upon receipt of the plan, ARVN corps and US Field Forces proceeded to study and work out their own plans, based on the concepts and directives contained in the Combined Campaign Plan. As far as ARVN Corps were concerned, they were responsible for establishing projects, plans and programs in accordance with the basic JGS-MACV plan and in cooperation with US Field Forces concerning military activities. Corps plans were then submitted to the JGS for approval before being implemented. These plans also served as basic guidelines for province chiefs to establish provincial plans.

Central, corps, and provincial plans were completed before the end of the year so that they could be implemented as of the beginning of the new year. To provide effective support for the GVN pacification effort, and also to follow up on the implementation of the pacification plan, the JGS and MACV jointly conducted program review trips every quarter. During these field trips, the chairman, JGS and the commander, USMACV personally visited each corps headquarters where they reviewed the progress being made and gave appropriate directives to help solve problems beyond corps capabilities. These quarterly review meetings were attended by major unit commanders of all forces operating in the corps tactical zone, including US, ARVN, and FWMAF and their staffs. In addition to efforts on the military side, every six months the President of the Republic, as chairman of CPDC, also made field trips to corps headquarters to review pacification progress being made in each corps tactical zone. He was usually accompanied by the entire cabinet and high-ranking military authorities. At each presidential review meeting held at corps headquarters, all province chiefs were present. On the US side, there was also the participation of high-ranking officials from the US Embassy, CORDS, and other agencies involved in pacification support.

The MACV-JGS quarterly reviews centered on the problem of security in each corps area and the military effort made by each corps in support of the GVN pacification program. Of particular interest to the US and RVN military leaders was the employment of military forces. They were mostly concerned to see whether this employment was judicious and responsive enough to each corps area pacification requirements, and whether forces available were appropriately distributed among the four corps areas for the effort. The presidential reviews, on the other hand, focused primarily on national development and the progress made by each province in meeting the pacification criteria set forth by the CPDC.

Apart from periodically scheduled review sessions conducted by the president and high-ranking military authorities, there were also frequent field trips by ministerial representatives, JGS staff officers and their US counterparts. These trips were made to provinces, districts, and sometimes villages, with the purpose of assessing local problems and difficulties and helping local authorities to solve them or giving them additional resources and support, if required.

As was the case with the JGS, every year the various GVN ministries also received guidance directives from the CPDC to establish their own plans and programs. Each ministerial plan was drafted by the ministry staff and signed by the minister himself. These plans became appendices of the annual overall national pacification plan, called the Pacification and Development Plan or the Community Defense and Local Development Plan.

The establishment of these individual plans required elaborate coordination among the various ministries, between the ministries and their US counterpart agencies and between the ministries and the JGS. The coordination was vital and indispensable since the pacification effort required substantial US assistance and support in funding and technicians on the one hand and the guarantee of security provided by military forces on the other.

The task of coordination among civilian ministries was complex and difficult to trace with accuracy since a ministerial plan involved many different elements and required the assistance and support of several different organizations. The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), for example,

was responsible for making plans and programs related to the development of agriculture. In this program, MOA was required to obtain funds for the purchase of seeds, and for the publication of pamphlets or instructional materials on the use of fertilizers and insecticides for distribution to provinces before the crop season started. It was also necessary to plan for farm credits through the rural development bank, organize and conduct seminars in provinces to help farmers acquire better farming methods, and encourage them to increase the planting of "miracle rice." Also, it was necessary to keep track of special agricultural projects and to train all types of specialists for the provinces in order to guarantee the success of these projects.

To implement this program, MOA had to coordinate and cooperate with several other ministries or agencies. For example, MOA needed the help of the Ministry of Economic Affairs to plan for foreign currency funds for the import of fertilizers, insecticides, and farm equipment. Likewise, the Ministry of Economic Affairs had to coordinate with MOA on rice import and export policies, agricultural products, and farm breeding. MOA then needed the assistance of the Ministry of Finance to reduce tariffs imposed on imported agricultural equipment and machinery. From the Ministry of Defense, MOA had to request special transfers of drafted agricultural specialists serving in the RVNAF so that they could help with programs, help with the clearance of interdicted fishing zones along the coastline, and to guarantee the security for MOA specialists in rural areas. The Ministry of Information was also asked to cooperate in disseminating information about MOA projects and programs by radio and television. To help facilitate the movement of local products to consumer markets across the country, MOA had to coordinate with the Minister of Public Works for the repair, improvement, and development of the communication system. Finally, MOA coordinated with the Ministry of Education to help conduct classes for the training of specialists and to promote the 4T programs in schools, and coordinated with the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Ethnic Minorities for the attachment to MOA of qualified cadre.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The 4T program was similar to American 4-H clubs. The four Ts stand for: Than (Health), Tri (Head), Tam (Heart), and Thu (Hands).

*The Corps Tactical Zone/Military Region Level*

The corps commander, as chairman of the Regional Pacification and Development Council, was responsible for developing a regional pacification plan. The CTZ pacification plan reflected the regional variances and was designed to reach the regional objectives set forth by the CPDC. It was developed in cooperation and coordination with the US Field Force as far as military or operational support was concerned and with ministerial representatives and the regional CORDS in matters dealing with civilian programs. As soon as the CTZ pacification plan was approved, it was disseminated to divisions/DTAs and to provinces for planning. The DTAs were primarily responsible for planning tactical operations to support the provinces while the provinces had to plan for every activity to implement the program. To develop his own pacification plan, the province chief had to rely on directives contained in the corps plan and reinforcement support provided by the DTA or CTZ. The provincial pacification plan was reviewed by the corps commander before being submitted to the CPDC for approval.

As chairman of the regional pacification and development council, it was the corps commander's prerogative to reject or modify province plans. In a few cases, he just returned the plan to the province chief for modification. In general, however, the corps commander seldom exercised his prerogative and usually transmitted province plans as they were submitted.

The most difficult problem encountered by corps in providing support for the provinces was the shortage of military forces. There were several ways corps could solve this problem without asking for additional forces from the JGS. The corps commander could redistribute territorial force allocations; request additional authorized strength in territorial forces and allocate the authorized spaces to needy provinces; redeploy regular forces or deploy RF units from one province to another for short durations; and coordinate with US/FWMA forces for operational support if corps organic forces had been fully committed and in case the areas to be pacified lay within the US/FWMA areas of responsibility.