

VIET NAM'S STRATEGIC HAMLETS



*Darohoa strategic hamlet,
Tuyen Duc province,
Highlands of Central Vietnam*

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*One of the factors essential
to the improvement of our present situation
is the realization of the Strategic Hamlets.*

President Ngô-Dinh-Diệm

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I - STRATEGIC HAMLETS: WEAPONS AGAINST UNDER-DEVELOPMENT AND SUBVERSION

In the course of the history of Viet Nam, the hamlet, after the family, is the basic social unit of the country. Through political upheavals and many other changes, the structure of the hamlet has retained its essential character. This demonstrates the strength of its organization and the permanence of this basic unit. Any revolutionary movement in order to be effective needs therefore to start from the hamlet.

The Commune (Xa), in its traditional form, was a collection of families, an association possessing a well-defined amount of land, self-supporting, self-governing, and claimed the right to settle the proportionate amount of taxes to be given to the State.

The Commune, made up of one or several hamlets (Ap) was conceived in itself to be a moral being with the right to the full exercise of civil rights, with the powers of purchase and with free access to justice. The Commune managed its internal affairs as it chose, distributed the revenue, levied taxes, dispensed justice, secured order, and undertook useful public works with little or no participation by a higher authority. Depending upon the importance of the Commune, there were officers responsible for the preservation of order, public works, finance, records of births and deaths, and other public civic functions.

The present administrative structure of the Village unit (Xa) consists of several hamlets (Ap). The Hamlet itself is the basic administrative organization, providing the village with labour and contributing to the village's finances. The functioning and consistency of its organization are one of the determining factors of the nation's life. In the political, social, economic and military fields, the Hamlet can be rightly considered as the nervous center of the present conflict. The outcome of the anti-communist fight in Viet Nam will depend on the Hamlet.

Under the new Strategic Hamlet Scheme started in March 1962, Government activities are centered on the Hamlet. The villagers' needs are met through direct contact between them and the authorities. All means are used to give the Hamlet direct assistance and to bring it into the orbit of the nation. The aim of the scheme is to make the hamlet residents realize their rights and responsibilities, to provide them with the means for active participation in the reconstruction and defense of the country, to give them equal opportunities of fulfilment of their rights and of enjoying the benefits the nation can afford them.

Realizing the importance of the Hamlet, the Việt Cộng (Communists) have always considered the Hamlet as an ideal field for the implementation of their plan of subversion, and at the same time a source for the replenishment of their guerrilla forces. In order to eliminate this danger, to uncover guerrilla activities and to force the Việt Cộng to accept combat under conditions chosen by Government forces, the authorities have decided to reorganize the hamlet.

At its first stage the Strategic Hamlet Scheme calls for the building of defense works around the existing villages : watch-towers, earthworks, moats lined with bamboo spears, etc.

When a strategic hamlet is created, it must first rely on regular armed forces for its defense: Army, Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps units from the district. At this stage, a hamlet is known as a «secure hamlet,» not a strategic hamlet. It becomes «strategic» when regular armed forces are no longer necessary. With Government assistance, the hamlet forms its own Self-Defense Corps and Republican Youth and Combatant Youth organizations. Hamlet residents are trained in military matters by special instruction teams which are sent in to set up and maintain defenses. Local defense forces begin manning watchtowers, gun slots, guard posts and sometimes, patrols. To check infiltration by Red agents, hamlet authorities keep a close watch on the population.

As Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu, Political Adviser for the Presidency, architect and prime mover of the program, puts it, «the system of Strategic Hamlets is a revolutionary system native to underdeveloped countries who have suffered misery and humiliation, divided minds, and Communist subversion, Strategic hamlets seek to assure the security of the people in order that the success of the political, social and military revolution might be assured by an enthusiastic movement of solidarity and self-sufficiency.»

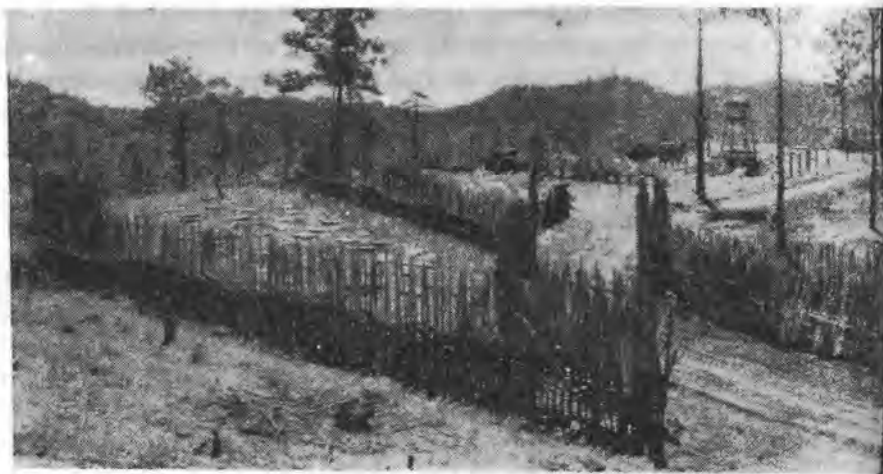
Military Revolution

In this war without a frontline, the Việt-Công are attempting to use the hamlet to carry out their plan of sabotage. Theirs is a system of hiding: in the forest or among the population. They thus seek opportunities for their hit-and-run tactics. Disguised as peasants, they mingle with them. Through terrorism they attempt to maintain fear among the population, and warn people of reprisals if they inform the Army of their movements.

It is therefore necessary for the authorities to reconsider their strategy and tactics, by converting these unfavorable conditions to their own advantage.

From now on, whenever the Communists want to launch an attack they must attack the fortified villages. Government forces are not to pursue the enemy and to run into ambushes ; the enemy is to attack the villages and to fall into our traps.

Strategic hamlets have forced upon the Communists a war along a definite front. They seriously upset their strategy by depriving them of the advantages resulting from the lack of a traditional front and from surprise attacks. By setting up a continuous frontline at the level of the individual hamlet as well as of a group of inter-dependent hamlets coordinating their efforts along a common scheme, the new system has forced the Communists to accept fighting conditions along this defined line, beyond which the defense of the villages



Darahoa strategic hamlet, Tuy n Duc

may be assured by local elements entrenched behind their own defense works. From being supplementary forces in the traditional strategy, local elements have become principal combatants. The Army's regular units were once split into smaller elements to be put up in each village. They may now be regrouped for more effective operations in support of the villages or against Việt-Công regular troops. Our forces, adopting guerrilla methods, will fight the Việt-Công with their own weapons.

This change of positions will undoubtedly produce an important evolution in the attitude of the population towards the Việt-Công. When they now attack the hamlets, the Communists unmask their faces and appear in fact as the aggressors, the enemy of the people. While entirely changing the military aspect of the war in Việt-Nam, the new strategy makes a still greater impact on rural life, in terms of political, social and economic progress.



province, Highlands of Central Viet Nam

Political Revolution

The term Strategic Hamlet is also significant from a political point of view. Problems of democracy have been much more concerned with the press and parliaments than they have been with the countryside. With the establishment of strategic hamlets, the government seeks the realization of democracy on the grounds to which it is classically ideally suited, that of local government. Among the first steps taken after the establishment of a strategic hamlet is the election of the hamlet committee, which usually consists of twelve representatives each concerned with some particular aspect of public affairs in the hamlet.

The basic end of the Strategic Hamlet Program is to implement democracy in rural areas. Those primarily responsible for the development of the program stress



Electoral meeting in a strategic hamlet, Gia Dinh province

that even if there were no war and no Communists, the program would still go ahead. Just as India has sought solutions to problems of underdevelopment through a Community Development program, a Strategic Hamlet program is essential to a solution of the problems in Việt-Nam.

Once all security measures have been completed, a comprehensive political and social program is launched. A hamlet administrative committee is elected through direct or indirect universal suffrage, depending upon the security situation in the area. After the establishing of the hamlet administrative committee, village council elections take place.

Village by-laws are drafted by an assembly of hamlet chiefs, association leaders, village councilmen and the chief of district. The purpose of the by-laws is to establish a legal framework for democracy in the village (for example, no arbitrary arrest or imprisonment), community development (equal rights and duties for all villagers).

Finally, a general assembly is held during which the responsibility for management of the hamlet is officially transferred to the duly elected hamlet council. Appropriate instructions, with special emphasis on the problem of security, are issued.

The aims of strategic hamlets are security and self-sufficiency in administrative and military matters.

Members of the hamlet's committee do not receive any allowances or salary but have to exploit public and private estates, in order to create an income necessary for expenses and supporting hamlet administration.

The Government will lend weapons to the hamlets for six months. Paramilitary forces in the hamlets will have to count on arming themselves by taking weapons from the enemy. The Government will supply ammunition only.

Economic Revolution

Rural progress is to be accelerated under the Strategic Hamlet Scheme. These programs have been drawn up by the Government with the help of the United States Operations Mission (U.S.O.M). Within the scheme, the province chiefs and their staffs are to draft Provincial Rehabilitation and Development Plans focussed on the social and economic arena. These plans, which differ from province to province, are reviewed in Saigon by the Interministerial Strategic Hamlet Committee and by USOM technicians. Upon approval, they are implemented immediately in the countryside. Many such plans are now underway with most encouraging results, and many more are being formulated.

According to USOM director Joseph L. Brent, 20,000 tons of chemical fertilizers, enough to increase rice crop yields up to 250 per cent on the lands where they are applied, will be distributed to families in strategic hamlets in the poorer provinces of Central Viet Nam during the first six months of 1963. This activity will be buttressed by intensive educational support — both by USOM technicians and by specially prepared audio-visual material.

Hundreds of new schoolrooms will be built in strategic hamlets in 1963, and students will be provided with school books, pencils and paper. Special « crash » courses for teacher training are now being developed, and the use of radio as a teaching medium will soon be studied.

Plant insect and rodent control will be introduced throughout the country, following up recent successful experiences in Central Viet Nam, where bumper rice crops are attributed to the killing of 16 million or more rats. Large additional crop increases are anticipated from this project.

Poorer farmers will be assisted to raise better grades of pigs and to make compost in a program directed at improving the living standard of literally hundreds of thousands of families.

New varieties of crops will be widely introduced. For instance, sample tests just completed have shown yields of up to 22 tons per hectare of a Taiwan variety of sweet potatoes, as compared with an average five ton yield from local varieties.

Loans will be made to over a thousand poor fishing families to permit them to motorize their sampans, and projects for the improvement of nets and fish landing facilities will be continued and expanded. In this connection, it is interesting to note that motorized sampans, able to go farther out to sea, can catch five times as much fish as non-motorized sampans. This represents a formidable increase in income to the fishermen.

Rural dispensaries, to be established during 1963 at selected strategic locations, will service many thousands of hamlets which presently do not have facilities of this kind.

To complement the above programs, which will come from the government to the people, that is from the top down, the Government has decided to institute a program which will originate with the people and come to the Government from the bottom up. This new approach to rural development is known as the hamlet

self-help program, and it works in the following manner: the hamlet inhabitants hold mass meetings to discuss their own social and economic needs, and decide by vote what the most pressing needs are in their hamlet. The majority decision may be a water well, a market, a bridge, a road project, an irrigation ditch or almost anything. The Hamlet Council sends their decision to the Province Strategic Hamlet Committee, together with a cost estimate and request for materials, tools and perhaps technical advice, if these are unavailable in the hamlet, but necessary to carry out the desired project. The Province Committee, with a USOM representative sitting in, provides immediate screening and makes available to the hamlet — from government and USOM resources — the materials and assistance which it determines to be necessary.

This Self-Help Program has already been started in several provinces and is stimulating great local interest and enthusiasm. It not only permits the rural population to raise its voice in matters affecting the local welfare, but it also draws the people into the processes of self-government, and gives them a personal stake in the future of their country.

Social Revolution

The development of strategic hamlets brings about a social revolution characterized by a new scale of values along which every citizen, rich or poor, advances as far as he can by his own means.

It has been mentioned earlier (« Political Revolution ») that hamlet residents elect their own executives. Strategic hamlets being the new weapon in the anti-communist struggle, it is obvious that a new social hierarchy will be established, at the top of which the three following classes may be found:

(1) The anti-communist combatants and their families.

(2) The fighters of discord and division. Among these are included individuals who are not afraid of threats and have volunteered for their shares of responsibility in the hamlet. They are the elected local officials who have stood for election in spite of dangers.

(3) The fighters of under-development. The workers, who, though not exposed to the same extent as the above, also have equal rights.

These combatants should be favored because of their positive contribution to the defense and welfare of the nation. Their families must also be favored.

Special provisions are also made for the destitute because they must be given a chance to participate in the Personalist revolution for the common progress of the people.

We should understand that the strategic hamlets are not designed to imprison people but to protect them. If fortifications were built around the hamlets while injustice prevailed inside, the people would believe that they were imprisoned. Therefore, we must increase the living standards of the people, in all respects, in carrying out our goal.

Conclusion

The achievement of a military, political, economic and social revolution at the hamlet level is the present goal of the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam. It is also the goal of the Personalist doctrine which aims at liberating man from all forms of oppression, wherever they may come from.

By carrying out this revolution, the Vietnamese people want to reaffirm their determination to attain their ideals. Being personalist requires a militant democratic spirit which conceives liberty as a conquest over oneself and exterior obstacles. In this Strategic Hamlet Scheme, the doctrine is especially tailored for the Vietnamese middle class and the peasants, who, defending their direct interests which they comprehend the more because these are connected with their hamlets, also defend the supreme interests of the Nation.



*The housing area of Khwontang strategic hamlet
in Ba Xuyên province*

II — ESSENTIAL FACTOR OF NATIONAL RECOVERY

(Excerpt from President Ngô-Dinh-Diêm's message
to the National Assembly, October 1, 1962)

One of the factors essential to the improvement of our present situation is, as I have just pointed out, the realization of the Strategic Hamlets.

The Strategic Hamlets seriously upset Communist tactics, depriving them of the advantages of the absence of a traditional front and of those attacks which they so easily staged not so long ago, with the tactics of dispersion and surprise. By delimiting a continuous line of fire at hamlet level as well as in the complex of hamlets, as solidarity has been developed between them and encouraged at the central level, the new organization forces the Communists into fighting on this well-defined line, behind which the riposte is prepared by well-entrenched local elements. In short, the tactics are now reversed: the local elements, supplemental as they were, become the principal elements, and the regular units of the Army which were formerly dispersed to meet the needs of the defense of the villages now have only a mission of intervention and thus are relieved for large scale operations against the Communist regular troops. Better still, under the pressure of our active and articulate defense which takes its pattern from certain pitfalls of guerrilla warfare, the Communists find themselves forced into an improvised counter-guerrilla action. It may be said that the battle has changed, not only in apparatus but in its spirit also.

And it is precisely this change which makes the Strategic Hamlets a military revolution, although the most important and the most significant aspect must be found beyond the purely military field.

The Strategic Hamlet is indeed also and primarily the point of impact of a political and social revolution which will serve as a foundation for our economic revolution.

On the political level, as security is restored by the defense system of the Strategic Hamlets and the careful screening of the local enemy elements, democracy and the guarantees of the law can be implemented. The hamlet, with the representative system of government prevailing in civilized societies, enjoys communal liberties, the more concrete and the more evident as they are practised within the framework of an administrative and financial autonomy in constant expansion.

On the social level, moreover, the Strategic Hamlets henceforth form the base of a new scale of values, founded essentially on civic virtues and dedication to the common good. The twofold personalist principle of collective progress and individual advancement offers virtually boundless opportunities to the man of courage, if he is also a good man.

A political, social and military revolution, such then is the heroic triptych which our people, with our youth in the forefront, are now building in the Strategic Hamlets. Our solution of the double problem of the economic revolution and of the development of Man in his well being, in freedom and justice, is inscribed in the most certain future, whatever communism, the enemy of mankind, may do.

BASIC TASK FOR THE FUTURE

**(Excerpt from President Ngô-Dinh-Diêm's message
on the occasion of Tết, January 25, 1963)**

We have just weathered one of our most difficult years. All the trials seem to have combined to hamper our people's march forward : to the increasing terrorist activities, to the floods which damaged our crops in the Transbassac and in the Central Coastal provinces, was added a heavy threat at our borders. The situation in Laos increased the possibility of massive infiltration into our territory by the Communists and served as a platform for Colonialist, Feudalist and Communist propaganda aimed at smothering Việt-Nam under the guise of peaceful coexistence.

...To forge with our own hands our destiny and our grandeur in the perspective of a Vietnamese people united in the building of a new society and a new civilization which will enable each and all to attain the full development of all facets of the human personality : in depth, in the secrecy of his soul and his heart ; in breadth, in the national community and in the heights of spiritual communion with the Supreme Being, I solemnly affirm that in this coming phase our basic task will be to achieve the political, economic, military and social revolution which, beginning in the strategic hamlets, must spread throughout the superstructure of the nation.

Thanks to our indomitable resolution, thanks to the combative and creative spirit of the entire nation, I am convinced that if the year which has just passed has been one of progress of the people, the year ahead will be that of the victory of the people.

III - STRATEGIC HAMLETS, BASIS FOR TOTAL REVOLUTION

In an address to the students of the National Institute of Administration on the occasion of the inauguration of the Institute's new campus on Aug. 23, 1962, Political Counselor Ngo Dinh Nhu outlined the various aspects of the strategic hamlet policy which has been carried out throughout the country as a national drive to defeat Communist subversion.

Strategic hamlets, the Counselor said, are aimed at a three-fold revolution in the political, social and military fields, which will automatically lead to an economic revolution. As a result of this, the present life of the people and all the laws which command it will be subject to a sweeping change, he added.



Villagers finish a bamboo-fence (Thua Thiên province)

The two main features of the political life in a strategic hamlet, as pointed out by Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu, is an administration by the people themselves and no arbitrary arrests.

Strategic hamlets help discriminating between friends and enemies in the context of a war without a frontline. Arbitrary arrests which often occurred in the state of a « war without a frontline » — made necessary by Communist infiltration — are to be brought to an end with the new organization in the hamlets.

On the other hand a policy of clemency is now possible, for those who were on the enemy side and wish to redeem themselves.

The hamlet as a social unit is no more ruled by the law of the powerful and the rich as is still the case in the city society where those who have power and money « enjoy every privilege and yet are the last to be punished for their mistakes or even are not punished at all. »

This regime of injustice must be eradicated by establishing a new system of values based on the contribution of each in the common struggle, with privileges going to those who face danger of death to defend the community and those who work hard for its welfare.

In the military field, the Counselor continued, strategic hamlets will bring to an end the state of « war without a frontline that has been going on for years ». « Since we did not know where the enemy was, ten times we launched a military operation, nine times we missed the Việt-Công, and the tenth time, we struck right on the head of the population », Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu said.

Now with the building of strategic hamlets, he added, the enemy can no longer take advantage of a situation in which a powerful and well-armed army would not be able to overcome a small guerrilla unit armed with obsolete weapons.

From a tactical point of view, the Communists never seek to face a powerful deployment of government forces and never attacked a government post without having more or less the support of fifth column agents. With that advantage they would invariably proceed according to their four « quicks strokes » : quick concentration, quick assault, quick settlement, and quick withdrawal.

Strategic hamlets are now preventing the Communist from using their guerrilla tactics as they are deprived of any backing from within the population. On the contrary, « our forces are now able to conduct guerrilla warfare while the Communists are forced to fight a conventional war ».

The establishment of strategic hamlets put the Viêt-Công into the position of « fish out of the water » upsetting thereby the much-feared « peoples's warfare » theory that has been carried out by the Communists in many places of the world.

Finally, the Political Counselor said that by establishing strategic hamlets « we are taking advantage of the war created by the Communists to implement democracy ». The present conditions are more favorable than at any other time for the implementation of democracy in Viêt-Nam as an underdeveloped country.

Democracy established within the strategic hamlets will open the path for the liquidation of all injustice,

corruption, and other illogical situations in towns and cities, thus laying the foundation for a new society, a new civilization.

In carrying out this revolution from the root of the society while conducting an all-out war against Communist subversion and aggression, the Vietnamese people will set example of harmonization between the two opposing currents which all underdeveloped countries have been facing since the end of World War Two: one toward centralised, dictatorial power, the other toward liberalization and de-centralization.

Most of the underdeveloped countries have chosen the dictatorial path in their striving toward development before implementing democracy, and this at the expense of the freedom-loving forces, thus creating permanent internal conflicts and crisis.

The ambition of the strategic hamlet policy is to find a way out of underdevelopment without sacrificing democracy and freedom. In the historic movement of the underdeveloped countries, in the world of today, the building of strategic hamlets in Việt-Nam will therefore represent a new approach which will have consequences far beyond the national frontier, Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu concluded.

**IV - STRATEGIC HAMLETS BUILT
OR UNDER CONSTRUCTION
AS OF JANUARY 16, 1963**

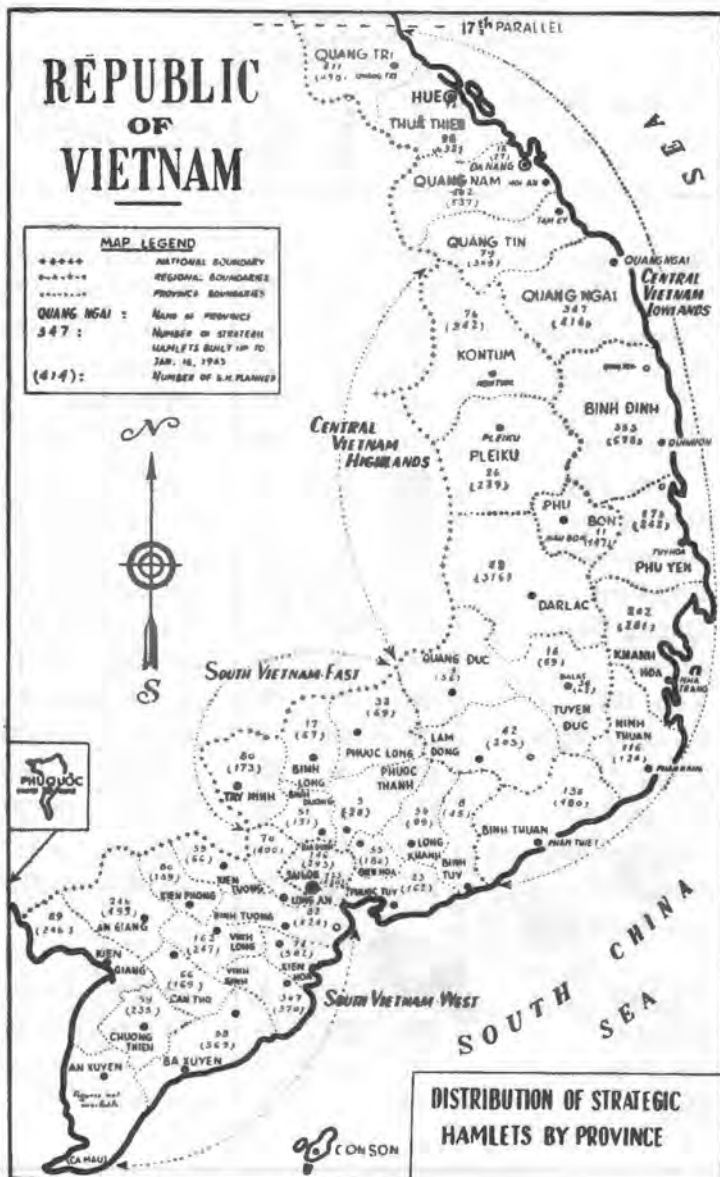
PROVINCE OR CITY	Number of Strategic Hamlets			Total population of Province or City	Population of the Strategic Hamlets
	planned	completed	under construction		
Ninh Thuan	124	116	3	134.375	131.920
Quang Tri	498	411	34	259.849	227.942
Quang Ngai	414	347	15	648.353	527.225
Binh Thuan	180	136	28	234.264	189.966
Khanh Hoa	281	202	3	221.718	174.987
Phu Yen	242	175	61	331.092	259.736
Vinh Binh	570	367	15	537.677	379.502
Vinh Long	247	162	25	536.671	362.621
Long Khanh	99	50	25	108.158	71.922
Gia Dinh	293	146	65	705.309	395.112
Quang Duc	56	9	20	30.158	16.602
Kien Phong	189	80	49	246.343	132.663
Kien Tuong	66	59	7	56.043	29.984
Binh Dinh	675	353	45	784.766	418.542
Darlac	316	48	102	176.243	86.518
Tay Ninh	173	80	61	288.184	60.106
An Giang	495	246	138	732.001	345.055
Dinh Tuong	424	82	64	694.433	309.316
Lam Dong	203	42	22	61.162	25.933
Binh Tuy	45	8	34	56.153	22.509
Binh Long	67	17	27	59.003	21.777

PROVINCE OR CITY	Number of Strategic Hamlets			Total population of Province or City	Population of the Strategic Hamlets
	planned	completed	under construction		
Ba Xuyen	565	58	154	573.547	201.838
Phong Dinh	169	66	53	395.437	130.392
Phuoc Thanh	28	5	11	49.414	16.325
Binh Duong	151	51	46	302.654	98.696
Thua Thien	432	98	137	451.821	145.926
Bien Hoa	180	53	65	235.468	70.997
Tuyen Duc	69	16	10	32.981	9.750
Quang Tin	309	79	60	348.724	95.646
Kien Giang	246	89	61	354.476	95.526
KonTum	242	76	166	102.261	26.336
Quang Nam	537	102	127	573.742	133.011
PleiKu	229	26	61	153.038	31.741
Kien Hoa	582	74	50	537.343	105.389
Chuong Thien	235	59	6	269.921	52.630
Long An	400	70	35	492.946	73.906
Phuoc Tuy	162	23	83	136.977	18.697
Phuoc Long	69	32	37	44.729	5.443
Phu Bon	147	11	72	49.545	4.102
An Xuyen (1)					
Da Lat	42	36	6	49.574	31.002
Saigon	430	223	99	1.275.000	661.086
Da Nang	27	18	8	110.630	36.826
Hue	24		7	106.102	

(1) Figures not available

MAP LEGEND

+++++	NATIONAL BOUNDARY
o---o---o	REGIONAL BOUNDARIES
-----	PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
QUANG NGAI :	NAME OF PROVINCE
347 :	NUMBER OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS BUILT UP TO JAN. 18, 1963
(614) :	NUMBER OF L.H. PLANNED



VI — WHAT IS BEING SAID ABOUT STRATEGIC HAMLETS

There are some definitely encouraging elements: the ratio of casualties between Government and Viet cong forces, the ratio of arms captured or lost between the two sides, the steady extension of the strategic hamlet program, the increasingly effective work of the montagnards along the border areas. All these indicate some turning in the situation.

DEAN RUSK

U.S. Secretary of State

(News conference, Feb. 1, 1963,
quoted by USIS)

Unlike the plight of those in Communist countries... this cooperative movement in the strategic hamlets will have provided the people with security, freedom and advancement. The co-operation will have done what Communism and Communists can never do — have never done. It will have satisfied the real yearnings of the human spirit. Thus I see in the placing of people within the strategic hamlets the way to victory in the battle for men's minds.

SIR GARFIELD BARWICK

Australian Minister for External Affairs

The first results of the use of « strategic hamlets » to weaken the Communist attack in South Viet Nam have been most encouraging, and the United States is fully backing the program... The primary purpose is to protect all of the people from Communist terror. The hamlets also are being provided with basic social services

such as schools, first-aid stations, and agricultural extension and credit programs. The latter means technical agricultural guidance and funds for new farming activities.

The strategic hamlets have three other central purposes: (1) to cut off the Communists from contact with the people, thus depriving them of sources of information, supplies and recruits, (2) to give the average villager a stake in the fighting, and (3) to involve all of the people in their own defense.

This effort is just getting underway, and as it is essentially a long-range program, results cannot really be evaluated yet. The reports we have received to date, however, are most encouraging, and we are giving the program our full support.

AVERELL HARRIMAN

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State
for Far Eastern Affairs

(quoted by Continental Press)

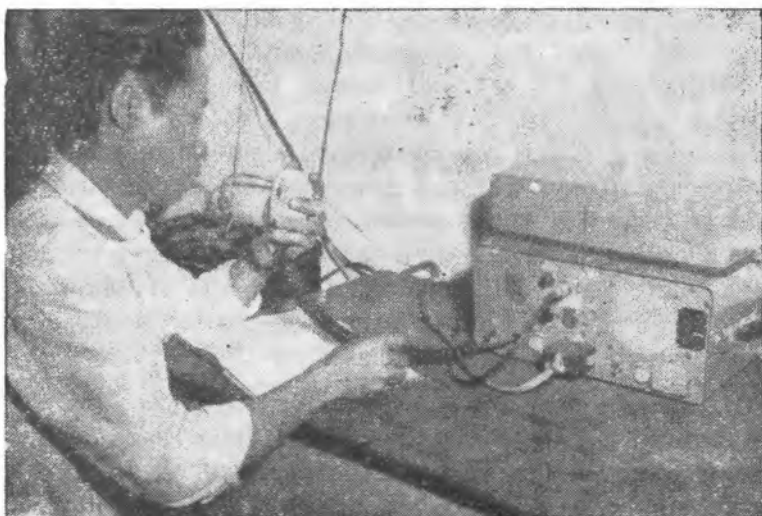
It is generally acknowledged that military efforts alone cannot defeat the Viet cong. As was demonstrated in Malaya, in order to win, the Government of South Viet Nam must gain and hold the loyalty of the general populace at the village and hamlet level. It is from these rural folk that the Viet cong cajoles or extorts its sustenance, intelligence, and recruits. The Viet cong must be denied this support. Success in this requires greater security and the extension of civic action, refugee relief, resettlement, and repair of war damage.

SEYMOUR J. JANOW

Assistant Far Eastern Administrator
Agency for International Development
(quoted by Continental Press)



Members of Strategic Hamlet Youth in Long An province are equipped with portable radio transmitters



Radio communication in a strategic hamlet

There is one misconception about this program (of strategic hamlets) I should like to correct. These plans, unlike those in Malaya, do not call for relocating villages except in rare circumstances. In general, the defenses are to be put around existing villages. Although there are one or two places in heavily penetrated regions where villages have actually had to be regrouped, these are the exception not the rule.

The strategic villages will provide protection. At the same time, the South Vietnamese plan to use the strategic village idea as a way to tie the villagers into the governmental structure and to provide the villages with government services — health, education, agricultural services, police protection, and good village administration.

South Vietnamese government plans call for civic action teams sent by the provincial and national governments which will not only help the villagers in setting up their defenses, but will also expand the political, social, and economic base for integrating the villages into the national fabric. For example, these teams include a medical technician, a school teacher, an agricultural credit representative, a public information representative, two or three public administration advisers, and a youth activities representative, as well as a police adviser, a civil guard liaison officer to man the radio that calls for reinforcements if attacked, and a squad of soldiers to issue weapons to the villagers and provide training in their use.

...The villages have used their arms to fight the Communists. Of the villages that have been armed so far, only a few as yet have been attacked, but all of them have fought when attacked and fought well. Only five percent of the village radios have been lost

as a result of Viet cong action, and we really expected the rate to be much higher. More than this, in the last few weeks a high percentage of the Viet cong killed have been killed by villagers resisting Viet cong attack.

Let us take one week as an example. During one week in August (1962) over 600 Viet cong were killed as against less than 100 killed among the pro-Government forces. And of these 600 Viet cong killed, two-thirds were killed not by the South Vietnamese regular army but by villagers armed through the strategic village program. This, I think, is an encouraging indication of the attitude of the villagers.

In sum then, although the plans are just beginning to be implemented, the results are encouraging. The defection rate of the Viet cong has risen and the recruitment rate has gone down. Just in the last two months there are areas of South Viet Nam that are now safe that only last spring could not be entered without a company of armed guards.

ROGER HILSMAN

Director of Intelligence and Research
U.S. Department of State

I have said that the tide was turning in our favor. The military measures being taken in South Viet Nam are providing increasing opportunities for political and economic growth. And the Government is starting to take advantage of these opportunities. The Government is beginning to reach the people and the people are beginning to reach for the Government. The strategic hamlet program is perhaps the greatest single factor in this encouraging development. It is a program aimed

directly at the people and provides them with defense against and isolation of the Viet cong. It is also a vehicle by which democratic processes can be developed and expanded, and human needs can be met.

More than 4,000 strategic hamlets were completed in 1962 alone. This program was instrumental in bringing an additional 500,000 people under control of the Government. Elections have been held in more than 1,000 hamlets to select a hamlet chief and a council. These elected officials then decide themselves on projects for improvement of the well-being and living conditions of the people. The United States Advisory Group, and here I include the Agency for International Development, is assisting these officials in achieving their expectations for a better life. The peasant wants two things: first, physical security for himself and his family; and second, a measure of social and economic progress. He will support the side that shows him the greatest promise of achieving these things. The Government of Viet Nam is showing him both promise and progress, and he is responding encouragingly. This is a slow process but it is fundamental to eventual success.

General EARLE G. WHEELER

U. S. Army Chief of Staff
(Feb. 4, 1963)

It is realized, both by Vietnamese and American leaders, that military operations alone will not win the war. As the British learnt in Malaya, the only radical counterinsurgency method is to deprive the terrorists of recruits, money, food, and arms. This is now being attempted in South Viet-Nam. A vast campaign to build «strategic hamlets» has been launched in every

province... This ambitious program, which owes some of its impetus to a group of British experts from Malaya, has won the full support of the United States aid mission in Saigon.

THE TIMES (London)

Jan. 21, 63

To most of us in the Western world the defense against Communism is a more or less straightforward issue of military strength. What defenses may be necessary against infiltration and subversion we are inclined, rightly or wrongly, to take somewhat lightly — « It can't happen here ».

This confidence in the stability of democratic institutions exaggerated though it may be, is the product of centuries of experience in a democratic society. But in many, if not most Eastern countries, this natural bulwark simply does not exist, and has to be built up from the ground, and often on little or no foundation.

Hence the Vietnamese experiment. A little more than a year ago the precarious state of the country induced the establishment of a policy of « Strategic Hamlets ». These were originally designed as minor strongholds against the attacks of Communist guerrillas, and were marked by their defensive perimeter...

Now, however, these strategic hamlets are to serve another purpose, in addition to the original one of defense. They are to be made into testing grounds for the establishment and growth of such democratic institutions as representative government, the guarantee of legal rights and so on. Thus they are designed to form not only the bastions of defense against Commu-

nism, but the focal points of a new and enlightened form of society — which is, after all, no more than a variant of their original role.

In the military sense the strategic hamlets have already proved themselves an outstanding success. They have managed to embolden the Vietnamese population to deny to the Communist guerrillas the support and supplies on which such operations must necessarily depend, and have therefore reduced them to the position of flying columns, always in danger of being cut off from their bases.

Now it remains to be seen whether the second objective can be achieved as successfully as the first.

HALIFAX MAIL-STAR,
N. S. Canada
Nov. 17, 1962

According to observers, the villagers are becoming more co-operative in providing the government more information about the activities of the Viet Cong, who are now denied their former sources of food, shelter and recruits. It is possible to discern some broad historical analogies to this concept of strategic hamlets. In recent times, during the period of Communist insurgency in Malaya, the Malayan Government used the technique of fortifying clusters of hamlets to thwart the depredations of Communist guerrillas.

According to some observers, the strategic hamlet concept has its antecedents in ancient Vietnamese history itself. It was used successfully by the Vietnamese in their progressive settlement of the country. Fortifying clusters of hamlets aided in the defense of the settlers

not only against hostile tribesmen but also against the periodic armed intrusions of the Chinese from the north. Throughout history, people have instinctively tended to band together to defend themselves against marauders. The establishment of strategic hamlets is the natural response of government and people of South Viet-Nam to defend the countryside against the unrelenting harassment by the Việt-Công. The strategy is of interest to us because it has been used here (in Burma) against the various insurgents. The British Generals in Malaya claimed it was completely successful.

THE NATION (Rangoon)

Oct. 8, 1962



A strategic hamlet in the High Plateaus

Mr. R.B.Ooi, assistant editor of the *Malayan Times* English-language daily, expressed confidence that Viet Nam's strategic villages have a vital role in the struggle against Communist terrorists.

Mr. Ooi, just returned from an extensive tour of Viet Nam, wrote in a leader-page article : « The strategic hamlets, started as a defense system against the Viet Cong, have developed into a political and social system that is serving as a foundation for Viet Nam's economic progress. »

After discussing in detail the establishment and working of the three thousand villages, Mr Ooi says : « The strategic hamlets are the answer to the Communist strategy of infiltration into the villages. »

Mr. Ooi feels that the long border with Laos and North Viet Nam makes it very difficult to contain the Viet cong in any particular sector, but the strategic hamlets sited all over the country plus better-trained armed forces are helping to stem Communist infiltration.

« While the fight is going on, community development is taking place. Rural industries, co-operative institutions and development of local resources are being established, » he writes.

In conclusion Mr. Ooi says : « The organizational process of creating strategic hamlets is achieved in relatively short time, but the objectives set forth in this program are long-term objectives. »

THE MALAYAN TIMES, daily
(Kuala Lumpur)
Nov. 10, 1962

Communist North Viet Nam has declared a « hate campaign » against South Viet Nam's strategic hamlets — the fortified villages which are being built in thousands all over the country. More than four million villagers are now living behind palisades of sharpened bamboo and mud ramparts, some of which are planted out with prickly cactus.

The purpose of the *strathams* is to protect the villages from terrorist raids, to cut off the Viet cong (Communists) from recruits and supplies, and to raise the standard of living of the people inside the fences.

... President Ngo Dinh Diem's Government has said that all hamlet councils will be elected in an attempt to instill a grassroots democracy in South Viet Nam. The Communist threat to this aspect of the program will be taken most seriously by South Viet Nam's leaders, as well as by American officials here, who are giving full financial and military support to the program.

JOHN STIRLING

The Hong Kong Tiger Standard
December 11, 1962

Most important of all, the government's U.S. — supported strategic hamlet program is beginning to pay dividends. With all its admitted imperfections, the «fortified» or strategic hamlet is the heart of the anti-Communist effort.

Nor have the Communists found an answer to it. They may come up with one but they haven't so far. And their alarm at the growth of the hamlets is reflected in agitated broadcasts from Radio Hanoi and Peking.

Some hamlets have been attacked and overrun by the Viet cong. But when they attack a hamlet, the Communists are attacking the people upon whom they depend for support.

That isn't very good public relations. These things don't add up to victory, but they hardly support the suggestion that the war is being lost.

KEYES BEECH

The Chicago Daily News, Jan. 24, 63

Foreign correspondents reporting on the war in South Viet Nam hold divergent views on the country's government and politics, but they generally agree on one thing: the success of the strategic hamlet system.

Experience has shown that the strategic hamlet can hold off the Viet cong long enough to allow the army to come. In a great number of instances the villagers did not even need outside help to put the attackers to rout.

Foreign correspondents agree that the hamlets will play an important role in the future of democracy in Ngo Dinh Diem's South Viet Nam.

THE MANILA CHRONICLE
Dec. 13, 62

If the saying is true that you get the truth from your enemies more than from your friends, South Viet Nam's program of «strategic hamlets» appears to be paying off.

... Both Vietnamese and American officials have often said they are proving effective. A mounting tide of criticism from the Communists seems to bear out this claim.

On Nov. 29, 62, North Viet Nam demonstrated how much the Communists dislike the hamlets by announcing it had filed a demand with the International Armistice Commission that they be dismantled. The Communist China News Agency reported the action and North Viet Nam's views in a dispatch received in Tokyo.

North Viet Nam's main worry seems to be that inhabitants of the hamlets are being trained to fight back against the attacks of the Communist Viet Cong.

JOHN RODERICK
(V.P. Feature Dec. 10, 62)

Luong Son was one of the first hamlets to be successfully fortified in this province (Binh Thuan, Central Việt-Nam)... Three phases constitute the development of each hamlet. Phase One is control, which establishes security and identification of all members of the population. Phase Two deals with the realization of the self-sufficiency of the hamlet in an economic sense. Phase Three is the development of the hamlet population in all normal social, political, and economic areas.

In this respect the Government of Việt-Nam has at least made a start in increasing education and health opportunities for villagers.

Lt. Col. Nguyen-Quoc-Hoang, chief of Binh-Thuan province, was obviously proud of this hamlet which is



*A security check at the gate of a strategic hamlet,
Long An province*

his model unit. «The important thing here is not the modest fortifications but the enthusiasm of the people. They are showing tremendous courage in the fight against Communism.»

...During the construction of this strategic hamlet the Viet-Cong raided this location on seven different occasions. Once the attacking force was of platoon size and another time of company size.

This was before the combat youth force had its female platoon of sharpshooters.

The women are waiting for the Viet-Cong with a lot of firepower.

Everyone in the hamlet has a job to do and the younger men do most of the firing during a raid. So far the girls' squad has proven to be a big morale factor in the hamlet and a challenge to the young men not to be outdone on the rifle range.

EDWARD NEILAN

The Christian Science Monitor

Farm credit program for strategic hamlets.

At its final session yesterday, the Sixth Convention of the Commissariat General for Cooperatives and Agricultural Credit endorsed the following four-point program for this year:

— Agricultural Credit : From VN\$1,000 million to VN\$1,400 million depending on security conditions will be loaned under new regulations aimed at speeding up the formalities. Most loans will go to strategic hamlets.

— Cooperatives : Existing organizations will be strengthened by improving organizational and management activities.

— Farmers Associations : More Associations at the strategic hamlet level and more savings and loan funds.

— Organization : 48 more offices will be opened in the districts and more co-op experts trained.

VIET NAM PRESS

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