

41st DIA
the Mekong Delta

A Critical Analysis of the Strategic Hamlet program in South Vietnam

The strategic hamlet program as an effort to counter insurgency has been an effective practice in the area south of Saigon for the past 20 months (April 1962 - December 1963). During that period we have seen a considerable amount of progress in certain areas. But I must point out that we may be winning these selected "battles" but we are losing the war.

The areas to criticize are hundred-fold, but let us attempt to analyze them in order of priority.

1. Continued pressure was never applied on the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong is perhaps the safest man living south of Saigon.

2. We have attempted to place the vestiges of a successful prosperous rural community -- schools, health centers, newspapers etc. in the "strategic" hamlets of the Mekong Delta without attacking the basic problems of ~~xxxxxx~~ freedom from danger, the slavery of the peasant to the land and the money lender. Granted we have made attempts in these areas, but the diffusion of effort has resulted ⁱⁿ the solution of none. It is my contention that if the basic problems are solved, the people will add the vestiges abovementioned on their own or with a minimum of assistance ~~of~~ from the government. I must qualify this statement by excluding poverty stricken areas like the Plain of Reeds.

3. The most often criticized aspect of the program has been the over-extension of strategic hamlets. By nature, the strategic hamlet implies that its location should be strategic -- should serve some purpose in the over-all effort against the internal enemy. In areas where this credo has been observed and effort has not been made to encompass areas which were not important, the effect on the Viet Cong has been considerable -- it has restricted their movements

it has deprived them ~~of~~ to a certain extent of the materials needed to sustain a guerrilla war and it has deprived them of

4. The attitudes of the people have been considered in theory, but in the desire to press forward -- to clear and hold, the feelings of the peasant have, in fact, been ignored.

Now, it is easy for a person who has been working in the field to ~~xxxxxx~~ identify the problems -- more difficult is the preparation and implementation of realistic plans to solve them. Outlined below is an attempt at a realistic, positive, action plan to accomplish our goal -- to eliminate the Viet Cong as a threat to the security of Vietnam and its present alignment with the United States.

1. Reorganization of the forces available to more effectively ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ protect those areas for which the government has accepted responsibility and to put increased pressure on the Viet Cong.

2. Determined/consideration of the basic problems of land ownership and usury.

3. Provision of an effective organization to continuously study the basic problems, institute workable solutions and follow up to see that the solutions initiated are accomplishing their goal.