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MEKONG  
DELTA  
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IN  
SOUTH  
VIETNAM

JOHN D. DONOGHUE

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## Preface to the Vietnam Studies Publications

In 1955 Michigan State University began a program of technical assistance to the Government of South Vietnam, supported by a contract with the predecessor agency of the United States Agency for International Development. Through this program Michigan State University provided technical advisors in the broad field of public administration, including police administration. In recent years, most of this advisory service has been devoted to strengthening the teaching, in-service training, and research programs of the National Institute of Administration, an agency in Saigon created by the Vietnamese Government to strengthen the public service generally.

Members of the Michigan State University group have included specialists in the field of public administration, police administration, economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and other special fields. In the course of over seven years of technical cooperation in Vietnam, members of the Michigan State University group have contributed a large number of surveys and studies of various types, training documents, and reports containing recommendations on various administrative problems.

This document is one of many prepared in Vietnam as a part of the work of the Michigan State University group. It was written for a specific purpose and under particular circumstances and should be read with these qualifications in mind. It is being reproduced and made available at this time for the use of the Agency for International Development, and is not intended for general circulation. We suggest that this study be used with the understanding that additional materials are available from the earlier MSUG studies which appeared in mimeographed form, and that it fits into the broad context of a technical assistance program as part of the U. S. foreign aid program in Vietnam.

## *Preface*

**T**his study was originally mimeographed in May 1961 for distribution in Vietnam by the Michigan State University Advisory Group in Saigon. It is being reprinted because of its timeliness and the sparsity of information available about a country to which the United States has firmly committed itself.

With the exception of this "Preface," the "Introduction," the "Conclusion," and some minor editorial changes, this report has not been altered from the original. Therefore, the reader must allow for certain variables not usually attendant such a descriptive work, namely the audience to which it was directed and the conditions under which it was written.

This manuscript was prepared for an audience familiar with the over-all situation in Vietnam, its geography, climate, history and general political, economic and social conditions. It was intended to further acquaint the informed reader with some of the social, economic and administrative aspects of village life in the Mekong Delta region of the

south.<sup>1</sup> Thus, certain assumptions were made with regard to the previous knowledge of the reader about Vietnam.

Secondly, the original manuscript was produced under the pressure of time and within the limits of a person working in conjunction with a government which did not look favorably on criticism. It was decided at the time to publish the manuscript in its present form with the understanding that more detail and analysis on certain crucial issues, considered "delicate" by the Vietnamese Government, could be added later. Since the manuscript has not been changed, these additions are not presented in this volume.

Regardless of these limitations, however, the material contained in this volume should be of considerable interest because it retains some of the freshness of on-the-scene reporting of a village which at the time of the field research was threatened by Communist take-over. At that time, village officials were being threatened, terrorized and murdered. Since then, from all reports, the Viet Cong has set up its own provisional government in the village in competition with the organization described in the pages that follow.

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<sup>1</sup>It was assumed the reader would be familiar with a number of previously mimeographed reports by the MSU Advisory team that resulted from research in Khanh Hau, a village just south of Saigon. Those reports were: J. B. Hendry, *The Study of a Vietnamese Rural Community—Economic Activity*, (Saigon: MSUG, Dec., 1959); G. C. Hickey, *The Study of a Vietnamese Rural Community—Sociology*, (Saigon: MSUG, 1959); and L. W. Woodruff, *The Study of a Vietnamese Rural Community—Administrative Activity* (2 vols.; Saigon: MSUG, May, 1960).

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# 1 | Introduction

The Mekong Delta region may be considered a vast, underdeveloped and underpopulated frontier land. This fertile lowland area is fractionated by the Mekong River, its many tributaries and canals, and supports a relatively small, new and mobile population. The peopling of the delta region was accelerated in the late 19th century after the French conquest and has continued until the present.

It is common in this area of land abundance for a family to work or own a large plot of paddy land. As the size of the family increases, the sons move on to areas of unused or unclaimed land and set up new households. The communities are therefore small and the households and farmsteads are dispersed, rather than clustered as in the older, more densely settled areas of Vietnam.

Thus spread out, accessibility of the households and small population clusters is difficult, especially by road. Footpaths, and more often canals, are the only means of transportation and communication between the village office and the individual households under the jurisdiction of the village, province and nation.



These ecological characteristics have created an advantageous situation for the Viet Cong and posed a series threat to the Diem Government. The Viet Cong has taken advantage of the poor channels of communication and transportation to infiltrate the villages, live off the land and escape the detection of civil and military authorities.

The government responded by creating numerous action programs or attempts at planned change and by initiating an agrovillage designed to relocate the dispersed peasants into centers with access to schools, markets, dispensaries and military protection. In effect, the government has attempted to alter the communications network by the forced physical movement of the people.

Both the activities of the Viet Cong and the reaction of the Diem regime have worked hardship on the peasants who inhabit the delta. The opposing factions are both intent on involving the peasant in legitimizing their claim on the territory. Both receive resistance.

The purpose of research in the delta region was to discover the effectiveness of the government's programs and communication channels, the type of activities engaged in by the Viet Cong, and in general, to arrive at some understanding of the social and economic organization of the area that was the initial target of the stepped-up Communist move into Southeast Asia.

Vinh Long Province lies in the heart of this delta region. On the initial reconnaissance trip to Vinh Long provincial headquarters in March 1960, any one of a number of districts in the province could have been selected for study. It was decided to study Thanh Loi Village in the Binh Minh District because of its population characteristics and its location along the Hau Giang River, a branch of the Mekong.

Returning in April for a week of intensive interviewing and observation, however, the research group found the district chief had been replaced by an army captain and research in Thanh Loi would be impossible because the Thanh Loi village chief was involved in supervising work in the Tan Luoc agrovillage.

The Chief of the Provincial Bureau of Military Affairs and the district chief assisted in the selection of an alternate village for study. Ultimately, because of the deterioration in security, My Thuan, the seat of district administration, and Thanh Loi were recommended as the only villages of nine in Binh Minh District that the officials considered safe enough for the proposed research.

One of the problems encountered here was that of transportation between settlement areas, or hamlets. With the exception of several

hamlets near the market town, located on the Vinh Long-Cantho provincial road, the majority of the eleven hamlets are not accessible by road. Travel to the remote areas was possible only by boat. The provincial and district officials were of the opinion that it would be dangerous to go up the streams by boat on any regular schedule. Thus, My Thuan Village was selected, not on the basis of scientific problems, but on the basis of accessibility and convenience.

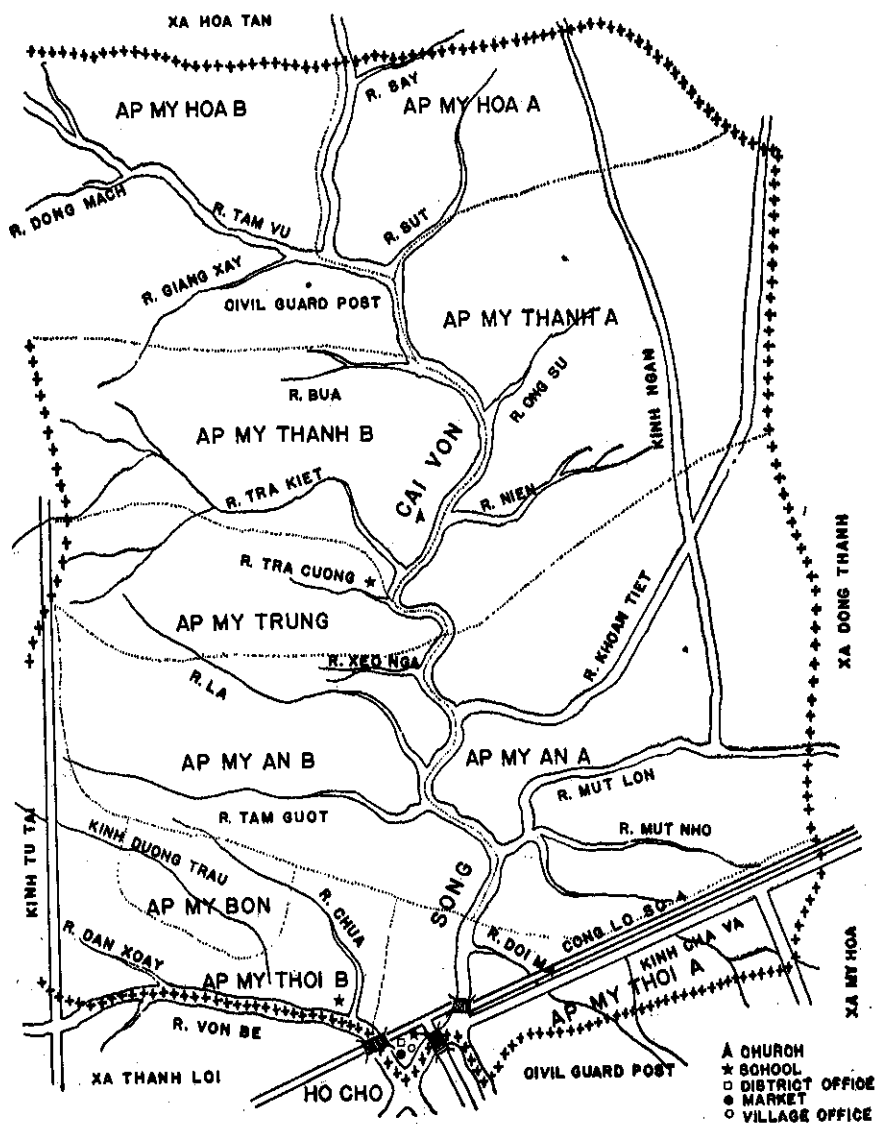
The authors spent one week in the village in April gathering information from village and district officials, farmers, teachers, and laborers. Interviews were designed to elicit attitudinal data, as well as factual information on focal areas.

During May, notes were organized, more information collected from agencies in Saigon and a detailed questionnaire prepared for use on a return trip to My Thuan. In June, with the help of four additional field workers, interviews were continued.

The primary concern of the last trip was to obtain information on farm income and expenditures. Due to the lack of statistics on the size of farm holdings in the village, it was essential to gather other data which would permit some judgment on the way of life of the Mekong Delta farmers. In the short period of time allotted for this trip, an attempt was made to interview a cross section of farmers concerning their economic activities and their utilization of time. Due to the vagueness of the peasant on problems of time conception and the spatial allotment of money and other forms of exchange, this type of information is difficult to obtain and, at best, only approximates the existing conditions.

The description of life in My Thuan village that follows is based on interviews with village officials and village people, as well as observations during the three field trips. Except in cases where it is felt pertinent, no attempt will be made to present the sources of information. Rather, the description will be a composite picture based on the combined interviews and observations.

The research in the village was enhanced immeasurably because of the involvement of Mrs. Vo Hong Phuc, a sociologist and Mr. Nguyen Van Thuan, both members of the Michigan State University Group in Saigon. Appreciation is also extended to Arnella Turner who acted as editor of the original manuscript.



MAP 1  
My Thuan Village

## 2

# The Organization of Village Administration

### THE VILLAGE

My Thuan is located 28 kilometers south of Vinh Long City, Vinh Long Province, and 3 kilometers from the ferry crossing which separates Vinh Long and Phong Dinh (Cantho) Provinces. My Thuan has the largest area and population in Binh Minh District. It occupies an area of 5,196 hectares and has a population of between 15,000 and 17,000 people. My Thuan, one of three villages in An Truong Canton, is divided into ten hamlets and one *ho* or market center (see Map 1).

The market center (*Ho Cho*) differs from the other hamlets of My Thuan in that its 5,000 people, crowded into a tightly agglomerated settlement, are engaged not in agriculture but in various crafts and marketing activities. *Ho Cho* is situated on the busy Vinh Long-Cantho highway, which is bustling with military, bus, and auto traffic. The center contains the district and village offices, the market buildings, the theater, the jewelry and clothing stores, and the restaurants, all of which are in contrast to the quiet, sleepy hamlets located along the



MAP 2  
Binh Minh District 1959

streams and canals. The footpaths through the hamlets are shaded by banana and coconut trees growing in gardens surrounding the widely-separated, thatch-roofed huts. Most of the hamlet people are rice producers, although garden fruits and vegetables, as well as fish from the numerous waterways, provide an important source of food and income.

The 10 hamlets were officially amalgamated into 3 hamlets in December 1959; however they remain functionally unaffected by this change.

District headquarters are located in the market center across the road from the village office. The relationship between district and village administration is thus closer than in the other eight villages of the district. Because of its comparative wealth and location, My Thuan is required to carry a considerable proportion of the financial burden of the district, and in certain areas, notably police functions and information services, there are apparently overlapping activities.

The village is also the canton seat. The canton chief, a French citizen, lives in My Thuan, but his role as an administrator is negligible. The canton exists in name only, and the canton chief participates primarily as a respected elder in ceremonial affairs. In addition to district officials and the canton chief, the chiefs of My Hoa and Thanh Loi (see Map 2) also live in My Thuan because of the serious security situation in the area.

The village council is composed of a village chief, a police officer, finance officer, and three special commissioners for political affairs, youth and information. The village chief is aided by a clerk and an assistant. The members of the village council are paid by funds from the village budget, with monthly allowances as follows

Village Chief	1,900\$ <sup>1</sup>
Police Officer	1,800\$
Finance Officer	1,800\$
Information Agent	200\$
Youth Agent	200\$
Political Officer	500\$

The clerk receives 900\$ per month, and the chief's assistant 1,400\$. The salary differences more or less reflect the importance of the various members of the council in the village administration. The chief, police officer, and finance officer carry the burden of the administrative duties, the others being part-time employees whose major sources of income are from other occupations. The political agent is the head of the village

<sup>1</sup>The unofficial exchange rate in 72\$VN to \$1.00 US.

National Revolutionary Movement, which thus far has relatively few members (162). He also receives applications from villagers for permission to leave the village and advises on such matters as land reform contracts.

The formal organization of My Thuan is charted on Figure 1. The village chief, assisted by the council members, communicates instructions, decrees and other information directly to the 11 hamlet chiefs. He sends a messenger (by bicycle and boat) into the hamlets asking them to come into the village office. Since some of the hamlets are located quite far from the office, the hamlet chiefs arrive at different times. Therefore, the chief never talks to the hamlet chiefs as a group, but on an individual basis. The instructions are usually conveyed verbally to the hamlet chiefs, who are then responsible for passing on the information to the individual members of the hamlets.

All of the positions on the village council are appointive. Ordinarily the district chief submits a list of names for vacancies on the council to the province chief, who makes the selections. Some sources reported that the province chief sends the names selected to the Department of Interior in Saigon, which gives final approval.

According to one well-informed observer, the 69-year-old village chief of My Thuan was suggested for his position by his nephew, the chief of Binh Duong Province. He was active on the village council from 1955 to May of 1960. During this period he apparently learned much in the art of settling disputes. His office was crowded throughout the day with people, who had a wide variety of problems. He complained often of this tiring work and mentioned on several occasions his desire to retire. However, he gave the impression of one who enjoyed working with people, most of whom seemed to respect him. By Western conceptions of office management, the chief was not very efficient. He kept notes, for example, on small scraps of paper that he stuffed under his desk blotter. Often he would be trying to handle the problems of several different villagers at the same time. At other times he would forget where he had placed certain documents, and villagers would help in the search by going through his desk drawers. Very often he would discuss disputes with the members of the research team and seek their advice. Most of the time the office appeared to be in a state of chaos. However, in spite of these shortcomings, the chief had a way of bringing to bear a mixture of legal concepts and traditional Confucian standards to solve problems ultimately in a manner that seemed to satisfy all the parties concerned. It can be assumed that the chief rarely resorted to the higher authority of the district for the settlement of local disputes.

A new district chief had been assigned to Binh Minh District ten days before the week of intensive research. The village chief had some apprehension about the new district chief because he was an aggressive young army officer whom the chief believed demanded efficiency and immediate action on all directives. The village chief was concerned about the maintenance of social harmony. In all his moralizing to the villagers, he expressed this concern; in arriving at decisions, this seemed of primary urgency.

The village chief's house is located about one kilometer from the village office, but since the first of the year he had not been returning to his house at night because of the security situation. Instead he was lodging with a relative who owned a jewelry store in the vicinity of the village office. Although the chief had not personally received any threatening letters from the Viet Cong, he felt that it was hazardous outside the market center at night.

When the research group returned to My Thuan in June, it was learned that the village chief had been relieved of his duties because one of his sons was discovered to be an officer in the Viet Cong guerrilla army. The police officer had temporarily succeeded him as the chief of the village council.

### THE HAMLET

There are now three official hamlets in the village, each of which is supposed to have a hamlet chief who receives a monthly salary of 300\$. The 10 hamlets and the market center are consolidated into these 3 larger units of about 5,000 people each in order to afford a higher salary for the 3 hamlet chiefs. Until recently hamlet chiefs received no allowance. However, the new units have never been recognized by either the village chief or the hamlet chiefs. The 900\$ is presently evenly divided among the 11 hamlet chiefs, and they still function as previously in village administration.

The hamlets are rather natural geographic units formed by the Song Cai River and its tributaries which dissect the village (see Map 1). With the exception of the several hamlets bordering the market center, the hamlets of My Thuan are not easily accessible by road, and in traveling to the more remote areas, it is necessary to go by boat. Because of the security problem, the researchers were not permitted to venture further than 1,800-2,500 meters from the market center. They therefore visited only three of the hamlets.

The majority of the houses are small, 1- and 2-room straw huts with several wooden beds, and an altar on which there is a picture



of the Hoa Hao Pope<sup>2</sup> in the center of the main room. In front of each hut is a small stand or altar holding a container of joss sticks. A plaque of wood on each house indicates the number of people in the household and their relationship to the household head. This is accomplished by a series of circles: red indicating male adults of the household; yellow, female adults; and green, the children. If the circle is only half colored, it indicates the person is illiterate. The primary reason for the plaques is the security problem. If military or police officers find people residing in a household who are not shown on the plaque, there is cause for suspicion. According to some, the plaque was also useful during the now defunct illiteracy campaign as a kind of social pressure on the members of each household to learn to read and write as rapidly as possible.

The hamlet chiefs hold key positions in the administrative hierarchy of the village. Theirs is the task of living in the remoter areas, attempting to carry out government policy, usually without the benefit of any military protection. Communication between the government through the village office to the peasant is dependent upon the hamlet chief. The chiefs are the link between the government and the majority of the Vietnamese population. Because of their strategic importance, they have borne the brunt of Viet Cong terrorism and propaganda.

An incident occurred in My Thuan which illustrates this point. The hamlet chief had recently been killed by the Viet Cong. Shortly after the village chief had appointed an acting hamlet chief to take over for the victim, the new appointee received a threatening letter from the terrorists, instructing him not to take over the duties or they "could not guarantee his life." (see Appendix B) He fled to the village office, along with another local appointee who had been threatened, to attempt to resign his new position. The village chief begged him not to resign, stating that if the hamlet officials left their hamlets or refused to participate in the administration, there would be no hope for carrying out village affairs.

Hamlet chiefs are appointed by the district chief upon recommendation of the village chief. The selection is based primarily on loyalty to the government and prestige in the community, as are most administrative appointments at the local level. However, in recent times, the village chief has had difficulty in recruiting officials to work in the hamlets, and the hamlet chiefs interviewed, as well as the village chief himself, all stated that they wanted to resign, but that their superiors refused to grant them permission. There is a great personal risk in under-

<sup>2</sup>The Hoa Hao is a Buddhist religious sect prevalent in this region. It was estimated that 85-90 percent of the population of My Thuan are members of the Hoa Hao group, which will be discussed further in the section on "Political and Religious Groups."

taking these positions. As one hamlet chief said, "If you don't do wrong things, you won't receive bad consequences, but at night I lock the door and open it up for no one."

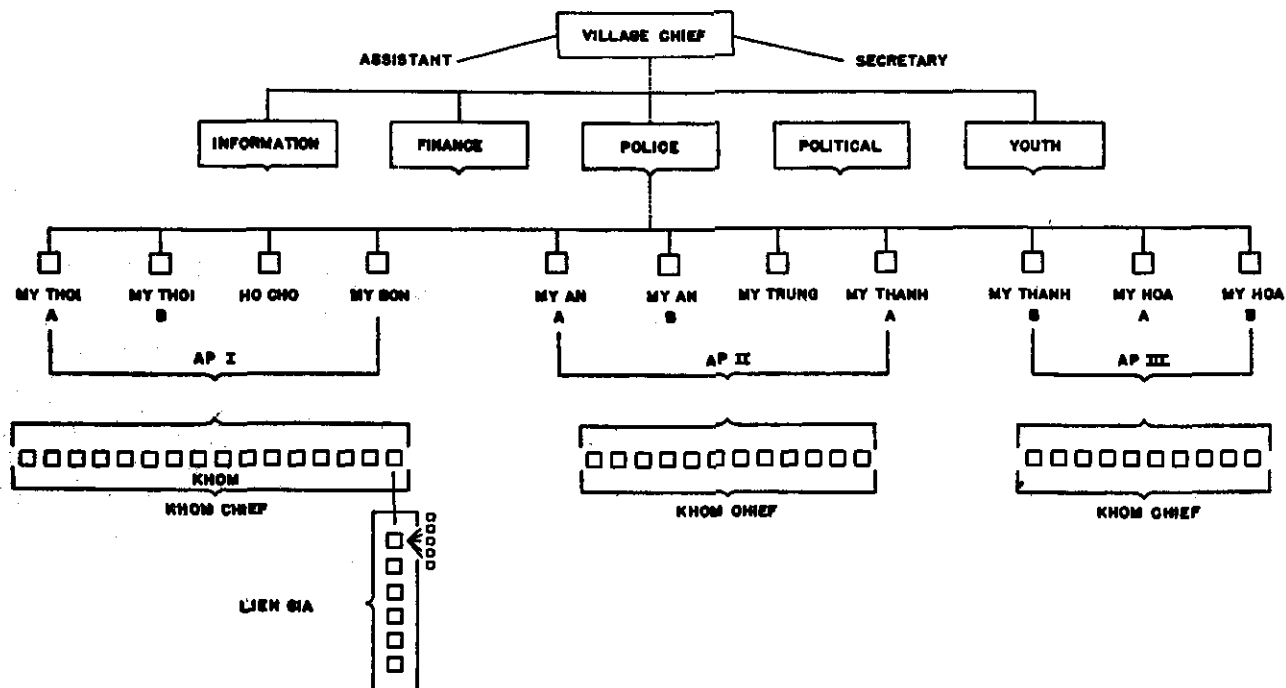
Each hamlet chief appoints, with the consent of the village council, a number of *khom* (agglomeration) chiefs. A *khom* consists of from 25 to 35 households. The *khom* is then further subdivided into 5 or 6 interfamily groups (*lien-gia*), each with its appointed chief (see Appendix A). One of the major functions of this administrative hierarchy is to facilitate communications from the village council to the individual family heads. Usually, for example, written documents do not pass down below the village level. Rather, the village chief sends a messenger by bicycle to the hamlets, requesting the hamlet chiefs to come to the village hall. The village chief gives the information to each hamlet chief verbally, the latter then returns and instructs the *khom* chiefs. The *khom* chief notifies the head of each *lien gia*, whose responsibility it is to inform the family head. In practice, however, we found that the methods employed by the hamlet chiefs in the communication process deviated somewhat from the ideal system. One hamlet chief, for example, stated that he did not utilize the *khom* chiefs or the interfamily chiefs because they are not paid officials. He said he does not want to impose upon them, so he passes communications informally through friends, although several of these are *khom* chiefs.

The interfamily groups are the smallest official units in the village. The function of the interfamily chief is to report to the agglomeration chief the number of visitors in his group. He records the name and length of stay in the hamlet of any outsiders. He also distributes incoming mail. Ideally, information is passed verbally from *khom* chief to the heads of the interfamily groups. The primary function of the interfamily groups, however, is security. The heads of these groups are supposed to watch the movements not only of nonresidents, but also of the group members. Any irregularities are to be reported to the *khom* chief, who reports to the village security officers. (See My Thuan Village organization chart.)

In principle, disputes between villagers ascend the hierarchy from interfamily chief through the *khom* and hamlet chief to the village chief. If the dispute is not settled at one of these levels, it may ultimately go through the district chief to the province chief.

In fact, however, most disputes are brought directly to the hamlet chief. One hamlet chief estimated that he spent 3 or 4 hours a day handling land and rent disputes, debts, and fights. Land and rent problems are usually referred to the village chief because these are generally legal grievances. Arguments over debts were concerned with

FIGURE 1  
My Thuan Village Organization



two subjects, rice and cash. The latter generally amounted to a few hundred piasters. Fights occurred most generally after drinking parties.

Within the hamlets there appeared to be a high degree of geographical mobility, and during the observation period it was noted that many household heads were absent from the village. This may account for the lack of "hamlet solidarity" or "hamlet identification" which most informants reported. Since there is no double cropping in My Thuan, farmers work on their own land only six months of the year. During the other half of the year, they move over to another village or province to work on the fields, or they are employed as menial laborers, carpenters, or construction assistants. Ordinarily a man leaves his wife and children in the village while he is engaged in outside employment. However, poor farmers who own little or no land and who live in shabby, poorly constructed dwellings often move the entire family to a new place of employment. The roof and family valuables are placed on a cart and moved to a more favorable area, where a new house is built. The wealthier people, with large land holdings and solidly constructed homes, are more averse to moving than are the poor.

Before a person can leave the village he must obtain an exit visa. Ordinarily the hamlet chief must approve the visa, but it was noted that villagers often went directly to the village chief for this permit. Although the purpose of the visa system is to restrict travel for security reasons, it also gives the hamlet chief a strong instrument of control. Individuals who do not conform to certain directives may be refused permission to travel to other villages or provinces for outside employment. Since this directly influences family income, villagers are sensitive to the impact nonconformity might have on them. A hamlet chief explained to the researchers, for example, in connection with recruitment for work on the agroville:

There was some griping about the work, of course, within a family or a group of friends, but there was no open dissent. The people think they must do this kind of work because it is their duty as citizens. If a person is not a good citizen, it can cause him all kinds of trouble. For example, if a person refuses to work on the agroville, he may be considered antigovernment and when he applies for an exit permit to work in another village, he may be refused. Therefore, villagers were eager to work on the agrovilles in order to earn their certificates so that they could return to their own work.

There are about 50 Cambodian families in My Thuan who form a special hamlet (Ap My Bon) located about two kilometers from the village hall. This hamlet has its own hamlet chief, and is divided into *khom* and interfamily groups like any other hamlet in the village. It was reported by the village chief that there was little, if any, conflict between the Cambodians and the other villagers since the majority of

them are long-time residents who speak Vietnamese, send their children to the schools, cultivate rice according to local practices, and live in Vietnamese-style houses. The Cambodians have taken Vietnamese names, but only 2 instead of the usual 3 (Vietnamese have 3 names—Nguyen Van Ba, for example, whereas the Cambodians have two, Thach Oi). Despite this apparent acculturation, the members of this hamlet continue to observe certain Cambodian religious practices. The New Year, for example, is celebrated in the manner and at the time (April of the lunar calendar) traditional to Cambodia. The extent to which the Cambodians have been acculturated is a topic for further research.

### 3 | Security

#### THE PROBLEM

Administration, groups and associations, economic activity and religious affairs—in short, all activities in My Thuan—are intimately affected by the security problem. Governmental programs in the hinterlands of the hamlets and villages are especially curtailed. Thus, health, education, and agricultural authorities confine their work to provincial and district seats rather than risk operating away from areas of military or police protection. The district information agent, for example, formerly traveled 25 days a month to the various villages in the district, organizing the National Revolutionary Movement and dispersing information and propaganda. His activities are now confined to the My Thuan market center. According to this informant, the major areas of insecurity (see Map 2) are along the border of neighboring Sadec District and along the Bassac River across from the city of Can Tho. All of the villages are dangerous at night, but in the villages of Phong Hoa and Vinh Thoc, the Viet Cong is active also by day.

According to the provincial military affairs officer, 81 Viet Cong had been killed or arrested in Binh Minh District during the one-month period previous to our visit. He added that the major problem was

identification. The Viet Cong in the area are farmers by day who hide their weapons when there are large numbers of troops in the area. At night they move rather freely, however, and ambush small bands of military, police, or government authorities.

The chief of a village adjacent to My Thuan was able to point up the problem more succinctly. He was hit by six bullets during a Viet Cong raid on his house. After three months in the hospital, he took up residence in My Thuan, returning to his own village only during the daylight hours. Our first interview with this informant occurred after he had read the major slogans at an anti-Communist rally at the My Thuan school. (The theme of the slogans centered on the Viet Cong attack on the Ben San Leprosorium.) On several other occasions we had the opportunity to talk with the My Hoa chief. Following are excerpts from these interviews:

It is dangerous in my village because the civil guards from the district headquarters cross the river to the village only in the daytime. Before sunset they return to the district, leaving the village unprotected at night. The village people have no protection from the Viet Cong, so they will not inform on them to the authorities. They feel insecure because they think the military is too weak to cope with the Viet Cong problem. For example: In February, about 100 armed Viet Cong assembled in Song Phu Village<sup>1</sup> and this was known by everyone. Yet the military did nothing to break up this gathering because they were not strong enough. So, although the authorities want the villagers to resist the Viet Cong, they cannot give them security.

The village council is not trusted either. They were not terrorized as I was, but they still live in the village. Maybe they are on both sides at the same time. If someone denounces another person as a Viet Cong, the village council does nothing about it; they are passive and they ignore it. The village council either does not know how to handle the situation or lacks the strength—that is, they do not have enough personnel to go out and arrest the accused person. This has had a demoralizing effect, and people have become reluctant to get involved in the Viet Cong problem.

The villagers do not want to take sides. They are more interested in making a living than in getting in trouble.<sup>2</sup> When the Viet Cong comes to the village, no one informs because they are afraid of retaliation by the terrorists. Even the Hoa Hao, who are very anti-Communist, will not involve themselves because they have paddy land to cultivate and they are afraid they will be bothered. The only Hoa Hao that speak up against the Viet Cong are those who live right near the district headquarters.<sup>3</sup> If you denounce the Viet Cong, you gain nothing but trouble.

As might be surmised from the above, loyal governmental authorities are not in enviable positions. This is recognized by the people we interviewed. Invariably a village, hamlet, or *khom* chief would state at the outset of the interview, "I do not want to be a chief, but I cannot get permission to resign." The recently killed hamlet chief and the village

<sup>1</sup>Song Phu is a village located between My Thuan and Vinh Long City which was attacked on February 26, 1960. The village office was burned down and the military garrison across the street was attacked. Both were being rebuilt during our stay in Vinh Long.

<sup>2</sup>We heard this statement from numerous informants in the village.

<sup>3</sup>For more information on Hoa Hao loyalty, see the section on "Political and Religious Groups."

chief quoted above who hobbles about with a cane are ever-present examples of the consequences of "collaboration with the Americans and Diem." (See Appendix B for translations of threatening letters to hamlet officials.)

The Viet Cong tactic of sowing distrust among the villagers has apparently been successful in the My Thuan area. One informant stated, for example, that the civil guards are ineffective because they do not trust each other. There is constant suspicion that one's friends, neighbors, or comrades-in-arms may be Viet Cong cadres. Since there are indications of justification for this fear, one of the government's most important means of combatting the Viet Cong, the use of informers, has been temporarily crippled. Unless confidence is restored in the government's ability to thwart the Viet Cong, it can be expected that security conditions will continue to deteriorate.

There are a number of law enforcement and paramilitary organizations in My Thuan. Data on these organizations was collected by Paul Shields, police advisor with the Michigan State University Advisory Group, during the final field trip. Because of the importance of the security problem in My Thuan, this information on agencies designed to maintain law and order in the area is stated here in its entirety.

Nine police and military organizations are located in My Thuan:

1. Rural police unit
2. Surete (Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation) district agency
3. One company of Civil Guard
4. The Self-Defense Corps district unit
5. The Cantonal Self-Defense Corps unit
6. The Village Self-Defense Corps unit
7. Village Guard-Youth (18-35 years of age)
8. Village Guard—People (36-50 years of age)
9. Commando Training Camp of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (1,000 trainees).

#### **RURAL POLICE**

The rural police unit consists of 8 uniformed officers in charge of law enforcement within the district seat. The rural police are under the district chief's direct command. Two members of the unit are on detached duty at the ferry landing to maintain order and regulate traffic; three others walk beats around the market place, and three guard the police station, which includes a one-room jail.



## VILLAGE POLICE

The council member in charge of the police (*Hot Vien Canh Sat*) in My Thuan village is 47 years old. A farmer by profession, he started his public career in 1956 when the district chief nominated him as registrar of the village. He was later appointed police chief in 1958. In 1959 he attended two 20-day training courses; one for basic military instruction in Binh Thuy near Cantho, and the other for police instruction at the National Police Academy, Rach Dua, near Cap St. Jacques. This course was a special class for village police.

His functions consist mainly of the protection of villagers' lives and properties and the maintenance of order and security. At the village level, he is the only official vested with judicial police functions; that is, he has power of arrest and authority to carry on house searches and seizures, but he handles only minor violations. In criminal or political cases, after making an arrest, he is entitled only to receive the offenders' or witnesses' statements and to refer immediately to his direct supervisor, the district chief, for action or further investigation. He reports all information on Viet Cong subversive activities to the district chief. He also informs the village chief, the self-defense corps district bureau, the civil guard intelligence officer, the rural police, and the Surete district agency. He serves court writs or subpoenas, mobilization notices, and carries out various administrative orders given by the district chief. He also helps the finance officer collect taxes from unwilling or insolvent taxpayers. He directs or leads all patrols in the capacity of village self-defense corps commander, supervises and organizes the village defense in case of emergency, and controls the Republican Youth Guard (Village Guard-Youth) and the Village Guard-People. He works eight hours a day and is on call any time of the day or night. No petty cash or any lump sum is allowed for running his organization or maintaining his equipment.

## VILLAGE SELF-DEFENSE CORPS

The police chief is assisted in his duties by the village self-defense corps. The police chief has 16 men and 1 squad chief at his disposal. A number of self-defense corpsmen are on special assignment: 9 have been assigned to the cantonal self-defense corps unit, 3 to the self-defense corps bureau at the district chief's office, 2 to reinforce the Surete's district agency, and 8 to guard the district chief's office. Three were hospitalized, wounded in the line of duty.

All self-defense corpsmen are volunteers. Applicants must furnish with their application a birth certificate, an extract of the court (police

record), and a certificate of good character. After security clearance by the Surete and upon appointment, they are sent to the province seat to undergo a one-month training course at the provincial self-defense corps headquarters. This course consists of basic military instruction, political interrogation and the rudiments of law enforcement. The salary of a self-defense corpsman is 900 piasters per month. The squad chief draws 1,300 piasters per month. They are paid by the village police chief, who receives at the end of each month a payroll from the district chief, who in turn receives the money from the provincial self-defense corps organization.

The self-defense corpsmen execute the police chief's orders. They man the outposts, if any; guard public buildings and bridges; escort village officials in unsafe areas, especially the finance officer on his tax collection trips; and patrol the village area under the command of the police chief. The patrol area covers all roads, rice paddies, swamps, jungle, and waterways. This area has recently been restricted to the southern sector of the village because of the establishment of an Army of the Republic of Vietnam commando training camp 600 yards away from the district seat.

#### **OTHER SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS**

The civil guard company's role is to provide support in emergency, to carry out small raids against the Viet Cong, and to protect the district seat. It sometimes participates in large-scale military operations outside the district. It has police duties in that it can make arrests, detail patrols, and conduct mopping-up operations.

#### **REPUBLICAN YOUTH, VILLAGE GUARD-YOUTH, VILLAGE GUARD-PEOPLE.**

There are 26 fixed posts or check points of the night watch manned by the Republican Youth, which comprises 14 companies of 100 men each. Two companies are on duty every night. Every villager from 18 to 35 years of age is compulsorily enlisted in this organization. Their sole weapons are 5-foot bamboo poles and 2-meter lengths of rope.

In addition to this force, there are five other companies of the Village Guard-People, grouping all male villagers from 36 to 50. They are equipped with the same armament as the Republican Youth and are vested with similar functions.

#### **EQUIPMENT**

The police have no other equipment except the armament mentioned above. The ammunition for the obsolete French rifles appears to be

very old, and many misfiring cases have been reported. The police chief's own pistol is very rusty and has not been properly maintained. These weapons were turned over to the village in 1955 by the district chief, who, in turn, received them from the provincial self-defense corps bureau.

#### **COMMUNICATIONS**

There are no telephones at the village seat. No means of transportation is available to the police, although some self-defense corpsmen own their own bicycles. Messages to the hamlet chiefs and to the Republican Youth company commander are conveyed by runners or by the operators of commercial motor sampans.

## 4 | Groups and Associations

### INTRODUCTION

One of the primary purposes of the research in My Thuan was an attempt to discover any indigenous face-to-face groups in which people in the hamlets participate and through which they interact in carrying out their everyday activities. The research group was interested in determining the structure and organization of voluntary associations which, in turn, would lead to indications of leadership characteristics, sources of innovation, primary interaction patterns, and groups through which various action programs might be initiated. Ordinarily the determination of such groups is not difficult—in America there are PTA's, bridge clubs, country clubs, street groups, and fraternal and veterans' organizations; in Japan, neighborhood associations, religious and recreation groups. In My Thuan, however, due to a number of factors, such groupings were impossible to locate or define.<sup>1</sup> Possibly the major deterrent was the unwillingness of the villagers to discuss such groups, if they exist, for fear that any such nongovernment-sponsored group might be labeled "subversive." Apparently, the government has discouraged the formation and functioning of groups that are not directly under the control of local

<sup>1</sup>Unfortunately, we did not follow through in our interviews on the *Hui* group so well documented in J. B. Hendry, *op. cit.*

officials. The executive committees of all the existing groups and associations are composed of village council members, and the ordinary committees are comprised of certain village notables.

Although some important voluntary associations may have been overlooked, it appeared that the government has overtly attempted to replace some of these former infrastructures in My Thuan with new government organizations. The reasons for this change were undoubtedly linked to security conditions, and the belief that the new organizations are better equipped to handle problems in the future development of the Vietnamese countryside. However, since the existence of the present groups and associations is recent and a result of imposition from the national level, it should not be unexpected that generally they are poorly developed, ill-defined, overlapping in function, or not functioning at all.

As in most areas of governmental services in Vietnam, the problems of creating groups and associations are related to the lack of trained personnel who work at the village level and the propensity of the available personnel to engage in political propaganda activities at the expense of successfully implementing programs. When a new organization is constituted, village council members, especially the chief, assume a role in the executive committee. Informants state that the chief of the village council, because of his prestige and power, can better control the organization and hasten its activities. Thus, in addition to his official functions, the village chief serves as Chairman of the Farmers' Association, the Social Welfare Committee, the Village Youth Organization, the Farmers' Union, the Women's Association, the Agricultural Affairs Committee, the Community and Rural Development Committee, the Student Parent Association, Civic Action, and the Government Employees League.

#### **FARMERS' ASSOCIATION** (*Hiep Hoi Nong Dan*)

This association, one of only three in Binh Minh District (My Thuan, Thanh Loi, and Tan Luoc), was organized in 1959. The district information chief is chairman of the district Farmers' Association. In My Thuan, where the association has a membership of 100, the village chief is chairman and charged with organizing it. According to the district information chief, the small membership is a result of the inefficiency of the cadres who explain the program and the inexperience of the chairman, the village chief.

The purpose of the Farmers' Association is the granting of loans for buying equipment and developing the land. Members buy shares

which cost 100\$ each and no member may own more than 50 shares. The Farmers' Association attempts to eliminate middlemen in the buying of equipment. Members are exempt from transportation costs and taxes on new equipment, if bought through the association. The association operates as a private organization, although it receives government aid.

#### **FARMERS' COOPERATIVE** (*Hop Tax Xa Nong Dan*)

At present the Farmers' Cooperative exists in name only in My Thuan. Ultimately, its function will be primarily centered on the efficient buying and cooperative selling of rice. One of the problems of organizing the cooperative has been the confusion of the villagers between the Farmers' Association and the cooperative. One of the reasons for this is that the same person is the head of both organizations at the provincial level, and the same cadres are used to explain both the association and the cooperative.

#### **SOCIAL WELFARE COMMITTEE** (*Uy Ban Xa Hoi*)

The executive council of the Social Welfare Committee is composed of seven members: a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, treasurer, and three members. The village chief acts as chairman while a notable of prestige is the vice-chairman. The secretary is the village information cadre, and a wealthy person is treasurer. The three members are hamlet chiefs who report to the Committee on Social Welfare Activities in their own hamlets. The aim of the committee is to help the poor, the widowed, orphans, and victims of the Viet Cong.

The committee is financed by a special fund for welfare activities raised from fines on gambling, traffic violations, and other menial offenses. In addition, the committee sometimes invites theatrical groups from Vinh, Long or Saigon for special benefit performances to gain revenue. In order to do this, however, the village chief must consult with the district chief, who is chairman of the District Social Welfare Committee.

#### **FARMERS' UNION** (*Nghiep Doan Nong Dan*)

This is the only organization (other than religious groups) that we were able to uncover at the village level which is not government-organized and directed. It is a mutual aid association which is operative only during planting and harvesting seasons. Any farmer who resides in the village can affiliate with the union provided he is willing to exchange

labor. There are no executive committees, constitutions, or fees. The Farmers' Union does not appear to be a highly structured group with a large membership. Of informants consulted, only a few mentioned the union; some were unaware of its existence, and none belonged. Apparently, it is an informal association similar to the neighborhood labor exchange groups in Japan and Korea, which cooperate during the busy seasons of the agricultural cycle.

#### **AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE** (*Uy Ban Nong Vu*)

This committee's function is to settle disputes between landlords and tenants. Since this type of dispute involves two conflicting parties, the village chief is the chairman of the committee which also includes one representative each for landlords and tenants. The village chief described his position on this committee as "delicate" because he must reconcile the interests of both parties without creating hard feelings between them. This committee is active only during the harvest season, since most of the disputes arise over an equitable rent to be paid in paddy to the landowner at the time of harvest. Ordinarily the rent is established at the time of rental, but often the tenant either feels his harvest is too small due to the quality of the soil, or attempts to renege on the payment. It is the responsibility of the Agricultural Affairs Committee to arrive at solutions to such problems.

#### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE** (*Uy Ban Phat Trien Cong Dong*)

This organization is now affiliated with the Rural Development Committee (*Uy Bon Kien Thiet Nong Thon*) because of their similar functions in the village. The village chief is the chairman of this committee, which has no fixed number of members.

The purpose of the committee is to promote activities of common interest to the village residents. These activities include road construction, canal digging, school and bridge repairing, and work on the agrovillage. A duty of the committee is to inform the villagers of the aims and reasons for collective work projects. This is sometimes carried out with the collaboration of Information and Civic Action cadres.

#### **STUDENT-PARENT ASSOCIATION** (*Hoì Phu Huynh Hoo Sinh*)

There are 4 elementary schools and 1 primary school in My Thuan.<sup>2</sup> There are also a number of private schools which are usually open only during the regular school vacation period, with 1 or 2 classes each.

<sup>2</sup>The elementary school contains the first through the third grades; the primary school, the first five grades.

The public school teachers gain additional income from teaching at these schools. Tuition varies from 15-25\$ per month. Applications for permission to open a new school are received by the village chief, who in turn orders the hamlet chief to investigate before granting the request.

The largest public school in My Thuan is the primary school, with a principal, faculty of 20 (10 female), and an enrollment of 1,216 pupils, 400 of whom are girls. The principal, a cadre with civil service ranking, receives 10,000\$ per month. Two of the faculty are also cadre members. Besides these, there are teachers who are paid on a daily basis (2,300\$ per month), and those who are hired temporarily (1,700\$). The temporary teachers are recruited by the chief of the province by means of examinations and are paid from the provincial budget.

The primary school and the four elementary schools are administratively under the Provincial Education Service. Each month this service organizes a pedagogic conference which is attended by all teachers in Vinh Long Province. The chief of the education service and the school inspector visit village schools twice a month. The schools are required to send monthly activity reports to the provincial headquarters, a copy of which goes to the village office. Consequently, although the schools are not under the direct control of the village, they must keep the village council informed of all their activities.

Each village school has a Student-Parent Association (SPA). The primary school, because of its large enrollment, has a relatively active association with 138 members, a chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, and 2 advisors. The advisors are the district chief and the village chief. Most of the association members are men, since very few women, it seems, are interested in attending the meetings. There are no fixed fees nor regular meetings. Although contributions from individuals are small, the association received 6,000\$ in the six-month period preceeding our field work.

The association organized a social committee which opened a barber shop at the school in order to raise money to help needy students. The barber shop is operated by fifth-grade students under the guidance of the faculty. A recent social activity of the association was the contribution of 500 cookies for workers on the Tan Luoc agrovillage.

The Student-Parent Association has been actively engaged in seeking solutions to the problems of too few teachers, classrooms, and textbooks. They are also interested in finding means to build a cafeteria for students from neighboring villages and distant hamlets, where the schools have only 1 or 2 grades.



The anti-illiteracy classes conducted at night for adults no longer exist because of the shortage of funds and school equipment. Due to the lack of money, the teachers received a very small fee, but most of them were volunteers. The teachers in the village informed the researchers that it was impossible to continue the classes under such conditions. The village chief, however, could not understand such an attitude. He stated that it costs practically nothing to learn Vietnamese. Paper and pencils are expensive, but these are luxuries. The fastest and cheapest way to learn *Quoc Ngu* (National Language) is to substitute a stick for a pencil and sand for paper. He offered this advice to illiterate villagers and threatened them with a fine of 1.20\$ if they came to the office again unable to write their names.

The educational level of the village schools apparently is not very high relative to Saigon standards. For example: A teacher in one of the elementary schools stated that she was appointed to the teaching staff at 900\$ per month because her father had helped build the school. Although she enjoyed teaching, she was only a primary school graduate.

## 5 | *Political and Religious Groups*

The conventional mode of organizing the presentation of the description of groups in Vietnam is hindered by a series of complicating factors. In the first place, a number of groups which may have been organized to carry on certain types of activities function primarily as a political organ; for example, youth groups. Then again, a governmental agency, such as Information, is involved in a number of activities not directly related to its primary function. Finally, certain religious groups, notably the Hoa Hao in My Thuan, are also political or military organizations. Hence, it seems pertinent to discuss these various groups, agencies, and institutions, as well as a number of related ceremonies, in this separate section.

Political groups such as the National Revolutionary Movement, the Youth of the Republic of Vietnam, or the Government Employee League are quasi-voluntary organizations. These are officially recognized, government-sponsored groups. Their main goals are the generation of enthusiasm, the gaining of a large, active membership, and the creation and maintenance of a dynamic leadership. On the other hand, the Hoa

Hao sect and the Catholic organization, "spontaneous" voluntary associations, suffer from the lack of official recognition and national support. Since they do not operate within the framework of official means, goals, and aspirations, their ultimate effectiveness as functioning groups is impaired. Thus, officially recognized associations seek spontaneity, whereas, spontaneous groups seek official recognition. In consequence, the leaders of both types of groups indicated a degree of frustration as they grappled with these problems. It must be restated here, however, that in large measure these problems are related to the poor security situation in My Thuan. Under normal circumstances, certain of these conditions would not prevail.

#### THE INFORMATION AGENCY

This agency is included for discussion here because of the wide range of activities in which the district information agent participates that are intimately related to other groups and associations in My Thuan. In each village in Binh Minh District there are two information cadres under the direct supervision of the district information chief.<sup>1</sup> He distributes news and information to the cadres and is generally responsible for their activities. In addition, the district information chief organizes public meetings to disseminate information on such government programs as agrarian reforms, community development, agrovilles, and the various farmers' associations. He is also responsible for the organization of anti-Communist rallies and demonstrations. Due to the security situation, information services to the more remote hamlets and villages have been disrupted so that the information chief, by spending most of his time in My Thuan, has become more influential in village affairs than would ordinarily be expected.

The information chief was born in Ho Tinh, a northern province of Central Vietnam. He is the eldest son of his family, a former captain in the Viet Minh Army (1945-51). Before entering the Information Agency five years ago, he was a school teacher in Vinh Long Province. Because of his low salary, (2,000\$ per month) he says he would like to resign, return home, open a private business, and take care of his aging parents. The information chief disclosed that he had considered resignation many times, but entertained the belief that one day in the near future he would be admitted to a cadre category in the civil service. However, after four years in Vinh Long, his status remains unchanged. The information chief is a dynamic, tense, outspoken individual. Although he is a disciplinarian on such occasions as anti-Communist rallies, where he sternly

<sup>1</sup>In each village one of the information cadres is also attached to the village council.

shouts orders and slogans over the loudspeaker system, his everyday personal relations appeared to be casual and cordial. His northern or central dialect, however, is a cause for ridicule and laughter, especially among the village children.

The information chief claims that the failure of most programs at the village level is due primarily to the inefficiency of information, civic action, and technical cadres. The following is an excerpt from an interview with him on this subject:

In most cases, the recruitment and training of cadres are handled by people in the agencies of the central government. The jobs are not high-paying and they require constant traveling. Therefore, such positions can appeal only to a small segment of the society, most likely those who had no other job at the time of recruitment. Civic action cadres, for example, receive from 1,500\$ to 2,000\$ per month. Usually they follow a six-month training period, after which they are sent out to the field. In some emergency cases, however, cadres receive no training at all and are hired on a temporary basis. I pointed out the inefficiency of the cadres to district and provincial authorities. They were aware of the situation but claimed they were not in a position to do anything about it.

Generally people are in favor of government policies, but they do not like the people who carry out these policies. It is the cadres—they are very bad because they don't want to serve the government and the people. Of course, security is the most desirable thing for the people, and a feeling of security would make them happy. They do not want to be bothered and interrupted in their work and in their lives; they want to be left alone. There is a small group that is dissatisfied with this village and district administration because there is a great abuse of power by the authorities. Take, for example, the agrovillage development program. The people are forced to help in this project, but they do understand *why* they should help in it. Every new project should be explained thoroughly to the people so they can do their jobs well. This is the fault of the government cadres who are not well trained in these subjects. The agrovillage has many advantages. If it is successful, it will help eliminate the insecurity problem and will be a great handicap to the Viet Cong. If the government cannot get hold of the population, then the government will fail. The villagers are simple-minded people, and they appreciate small, concrete, informal help—things they can see. This is why I do not think the present policy of the government with regard to the Viet Cong is good. They should use peaceful means, rather than killing and cutting off Viet Cong heads.

On National Health Day, the district information officer had the responsibility of organizing an anti-Communist rally. This was held in front of the primary school adjacent to the village office and attended by the village notables and youth groups from four neighboring villages. The information chief and his assistant had arranged for flags to be draped on the platform and for a loudspeaker system to be installed. The youth groups, consisting of both men and women, marched into the school yard dressed in blue and white uniforms. The assistant information chief instructed them where and how to stand and was disturbed by the delay in the ceremony caused by the tardiness of several

groups. The major address was given by the information chief, followed by a reading of slogans by the My Hoa village chief. The information chief then led the youth in shouting, "Down with the Viet Cong; long live the Republic." After closing the ceremony, he lectured the groups on the virtue of promptness at future rallies.

#### THE NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT (*Phong Trao Cach Mang Quoc Gia*)

The district information chief is also the chairman of the National Revolutionary Movement. According to the chief, the NRM has become more active during the past year, although recruitment remains his most important problem. There were only 1,400 members in the district last year, whereas membership has increased in one year to 7,093. My Thuan has 162 active members and 744 applicants. The NRM investigates each new candidate prior to admission into the organization; hence each applicant must wait about three months before membership is activated. Both men and women between the ages of 36 and 60 are eligible for membership. The monthly fee is two piasters. Although the political affairs officer of the village council is the head of the My Thuan NRM, most of the activities are, in fact, centered around the district chairman, the information chief. The chief said:

I am probably better known to the villagers as the chairman of the NRM than I am as district information chief, because I have helped many people in the district in an informal way. I feel people appreciate informal help more than anything else. People come to me whenever they need an application blank<sup>2</sup> for an exit visa from the village or for help in filling out the application. I think this is a very effective way of helping because village people are simple-minded and appreciate only concrete things. Because of this approach, the NRM is becoming more active and popular. I think the government ought to pay a salary to the heads of the NRM. They should have a special budget for the party which fights against Communism and propagates government policies. In these areas the National Revolutionary Movement plays an important role."

The district chief claims he was elected chairman of the NRM over two other candidates by receiving four-fifths of the votes cast. He was elected for a one-year period and wants to resign, "but, I have already been asked to run for a second term."

The NRM has a monthly magazine, published in Saigon, which covers such features as agrovilles, community development, government policies, and rural life improvement. According to the chief, most articles are devoted to anti-Communism. The district NRM chairman should meet with the village chairmen about once a month and with the provincial chairman whenever it is necessary. There is no regular correspondence between provincial and district chairmen; some months

<sup>2</sup>The usual price of an application blank is one piaster.

3 or 4 letters are received, other months there are none. The party has a yearly convention in Saigon, to which the provincial chairman appoints the district representative. The same representative cannot attend the convention two consecutive years.

#### **THE REPUBLICAN YOUTH** (*Thanh Nien Cong Hoa*)

The Cong Hoa Youth in My Thuan are divided into 39 groups, whose members range in age from 18 to 35. This organization participates in a number of activities of which the most important appears to be security. There are 80 young men who form the Village Protection Youth Group. Fifty of these had been sent for schooling in guerrilla warfare and gun handling to the Bien Hoa Training Center. At the time of the field study, the youth group was engaged primarily in work on the Tan Luoc agrovillage. This work consisted of building roads, canals, and house foundations. The work was divided into a number of periods, each period lasting ten days. During each period, 800 men were on the site.

Ordinarily the Village Youth Group engages in marching drills from 3 to 6 p.m. every day. At night they man 14 key security posts in the village from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. These posts are located at such insecure places as bridges along the streams and rivers. Each post is manned by 12 youths armed with a 1½-meter bamboo stick and a bamboo rattle. An individual's watch comes up about twice a week.

The Village Youth officer (200\$ per month) conceives of his work as being of special importance because he attempts to obtain information from Viet Cong agents through young men that can be trusted. Because of the security situation, however, his mobility has been limited.

In each hamlet there are three persons in charge of youth. Their responsibilities consist of recruitment, drilling the youth corps, and helping in social work of various kinds. Each of the 3 hamlet groups consists of from 20-30 young men who have uniforms and participate in such activities as propaganda meetings, parades, and other gatherings. The hamlet youth officers, chosen by the hamlet chief, meet with the Village Youth officer once a month, when possible.

The Young Women of the Republic (*Thanh Nu Cong Hoa*) is an affiliate of the man's organization, under the supervision of the Village Youth officer. This group together with the boys' group, form the youth group of the Republic of Vietnam, which is under the supervision of the deputy province chief at the provincial level, and under the Directorate-General of Youth at the central level. The girls' organization was formed in November 1959, and is composed of 4 groups, each divided into sub-

groups, with 12 girls each. These divisions were effected in order to facilitate training. At the time of the field study, 144 village girls belonged to the youth group.

The girls' organization encountered numerous difficulties in recruiting members. According to informants, the girls preferred sewing, housekeeping, or outside employment to drilling and attending meetings. A major obstacle to overcome was the shyness of the girls relative to wearing uniforms. Girls who were unopposed to joining the organization balked when they had to provide and wear the uniform composed of black trousers, white blouse, white cap, and scarf. The wife of the ex-district chief was instrumental in getting the uniforms accepted. She found a number of girls who were willing to wear them and took them on demonstration tours of the various hamlets and villages within the district. Gradually enrollment in the organization increased.

Like in the boys' youth group, marching practice is emphasized and the girls practice from 3 to 6 p.m. for a period of about three months. Eventually, gun handling and judo are introduced to the girls. Since the departure of the ex-district chief's wife, however, there have been no activities in all of the girls' groups except marching. Previously, she held meetings to explain the purpose of the organization and to train leaders.

Leadership is a major problem inhibiting the growth of the young women's association. Informants state that none of the girls like to be group leaders because of shyness. Therefore, of the 4 group leaders, 3 are leaders in the men's youth group. The one female is reported to be not very enthusiastic about her position, but her friends elected her because they believed that, relatively, she was more suited than the other members of the group.

Membership is not compulsory for all girls in the village. Therefore, recruitment is difficult, because most of the eligible girls are engaged in housework, commerce in the market, or menial work in connection with agriculture or fishing. The problem is more acute in the age group above 25 years because it interferes with married life. Therefore, there are always absentees from each training session. One girl expressed the opinion that she would like to migrate to Saigon to work in order to help her parents, rather than remain in the village where there were too many compulsory activities, such as drilling and community development. However, leaving the village requires an exit permit which is valid only for one month, after which the girl would have to return to the village for a permit renewal. The degree to which membership in the Cong Hoa Youth is compulsory is uncertain. Some informants stated categorically that membership was compulsory because of strong

pressures exerted by village and hamlet officials. The Viet Cong accused a hamlet youth commander of forcing "each young man to buy insignia for five piasters apiece, and compel[ing] them to mount guard regardless of age or illness." (See Appendix.) On the other hand, the number of youth actually enrolled in the Cong Hoa Youth of My Thuan is exceedingly small.

#### **GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE LEAGUE**

This organization is composed of employees of the various governmental agencies. The league has numerous functions, the most important of which is the organization of political education classes, which are held every Thursday from 8 to 9:30 a.m. Attendants are cadres from all government agencies at the village and district level including Youth, Information, Civil Guard, Civic Action, NRM, Psychological Warfare, and Health. Cadres from each of these agencies take turns presenting a subject at each class. These topics have already been prepared by the Ministry of Information in Saigon, from whence they are channeled through the provincial information service to the village.

During the school vacation period, teachers who belong to the league form a district mobile team comprised of 8 or more cadres from the above agencies. Together with 24 civil guardsmen, they travel to the district villages explaining their work to the villagers. The team spends 3 days in each of the 9 villages.

#### **THE HOA HAO SECT**

Since My Thuan was the former seat or headquarters of the Hoa Hao in this area, an estimated 85-90 percent of the population are adherents of this Buddhist sect. Many of the Hoa Hao buildings remain, although, they have been appropriated by the present government for use as public offices or military installations. These offices include the My Thuan village office, the school building, the Civil Guard headquarters, and the offices of Information, Youth, and the National Revolutionary Movement. A large cemetery and a make-shift temple are located across from the school. The Hoa Hao present a number of problems to the village and district administrators, and their position in Vietnamese society is unique and complex. In order to understand some of these problems, it is necessary to have a general notion of the historical development of the sect and their present political situation in Vietnam.

The founder and pope of the Hoa Hao sect, Huynh Phu So, was a son of a village notable in the village of Hoa Hao, Chau Doc Pro-



vince.<sup>8</sup> Because of the boy's constant illness, So's father, Huynh Cong Bo, committed him to the care of a monk, Thay Xom, who later became known as the Tran Son monk. This monk was a disciple of a scholar named Nguyen Van Quyen, who practiced asceticism and preached Buddhism on the Cam Mountain from 1820 to 1844. When the scholar Quyen died, the Tran Son monk continued to preach his doctrines. During this time, Huynh Phu So, living a secluded life on the Tia Mountain, learned the doctrines and ethics of his master. When the Tran Son monk died, So returned to his family in Hoa Hao, although his illness continued. In 1930, So recovered from his illness and began preaching his own doctrine, undoubtedly a variation on that of his Tran Son master.

Huynh Phu So attracted a large following and founded the Buddhist Hoa Hao sect. A major tenet of his sect was that pagodas, temples, and special priests were unnecessary for the propagation of the religion and that all believers were considered to be equal. A believer reiterates twice daily, in the morning and in the evening, a one sentence prayer: "I pledge to do good actions and practice virtue." This prayer is uttered before a red cloth which bears four Chinese characters, "Bao Son Ky Houng" (a good scent from a strange mountain). Followers also abstain from eating meat four days each month.

The number of believers increased rapidly, especially in the western provinces of Vietnam, including Vinh Long, Sadec, Soc Trang, Rach Gia, Can Tho, and Chau Doc. Ultimately, Huynh Phu So was regarded as a living Buddha by the sect's two million adherents. However, So's success as a preacher and missionary became a threat to the French, who were afraid the Japanese invaders might mobilize the Hoa Hao against them. In consequence, the French committed So to an asylum in Saigon and treated him for mental illness. Later, he was sent to Bac Lieu, where he was prohibited from preaching his doctrines. However, his ardent followers actively continued in their beliefs and enthusiasm.

In 1942, the Japanese became interested in the Hoa Hao potentialities as enemies of the French, brought Huynh Phu So back to Saigon, promised the Hoa Hao freedom, and trained and equipped their army. The Hoa Hao army was led by two fervent believers, Tran Van Soai or "Nam Lua," and Lam Thanh Nguyen.

The creation of the Hoa Hao army changed the course of the sect. From a religious body, the Hoa Hao, once armed, turned to plunder-

<sup>8</sup>The historical description that follows was adapted from *The Times of Vietnam*, Vol. II, Nos. 9 and 10, 1959, and from Bernard B. Fall, "The Political-Religious Sects of Vietnam," *Public Affairs* (Sept 1955), pp 235-53.

ing and terrorizing the people of the western provinces. According to informants, outsiders were not allowed in the Hoa Hao territory without permission; money was extorted at the market place and from the villagers; many non-Hoa Hao inhabitants were forced to give up their homes and land to settle elsewhere. It was said that although 60 percent of the population in the area were Hoa Hao, the remainder collaborated with them in order to live peacefully. The My Thuan village chief, for example, a non-Hoa Hao Buddhist, stated that people who lived during the Hoa Hao reign had to conform to Hoa Hao traditions and policy for fear of being beheaded if they did not. The Japanese authorities discouraged these activities, but they were defeated by the allies before any action was taken.

After the Japanese defeat, the Viet Minh seized control of Vietnam, but the Hoa Hao resisted and refused to surrender either their independence or their army to the new government. The conflict between these two forces apparently abated when the French troops returned to regain power in Vietnam. The Viet Minh, realizing the danger of the French return, were obliged to reconcile with the Hoa Hao in order that they might oppose the French advance in the western provinces. This new anti-French alliance was called "The Rally of the Nationalist Forces."

When the Viet Minh attempted to absorb or incorporate the Hoa Hao into their own army, Huynh Phu So formed the anti-French and anti-Communist Democratic Socialist Party. In April 1947, the Viet Minh captured and killed So, pope of the Hoa Hao. As a result, Tran Van Soai, with the popular support of the sect, joined forces with the French in order to fight the Viet Minh. This alliance with the French strengthened the Hoa Hao military force, and Hoa Hao terrorization continued to mount, largely due to a lack of discipline within the sect's army.

The absence of strong leadership and discipline ultimately led to a split in the Hoa Hao ranks. Some of the troops followed Lam Thanh Nguyen into the That mountains, while others entered the jungle with another leader, Le Quang Vinh or Ba Cut. The latter was captured and executed in 1958 by decision of a military tribunal. A third group, under Tran Van Soai, formed an alliance with the Cao Dai, another paramilitary religious sect.

This split led to the weakening of the Hoa Hao army, and in 1955, the army of the Republic of Vietnam finally ended its political and military rule of the western provinces. After the defeat of the Hoa Hao, General Tran Van Soai resigned and now lives under house arrest with his family in Dalat. A number of other Hoa Hao generals are in

prison in Saigon, and others have reverted to their former occupations, although still devoted to Huynh Phu So, their master. In My Thuan almost every household displays a picture of the revered Hoa Hao pope on the family altar. Although the Hoa Hao followers are no longer an active, formal military organization, they remain a unified group and continue to identify themselves with the pope and with the sect. In My Thuan they have not been assimilated into the Republican Movement; they constitute an ever-present problem to the government and its local representatives.

None of the local government officials are members of the Hoa Hao sect. On the contrary, they see the Hoa Hao as a threat to security and harmony and a deterrent to progress and the national cause. For example: A district official informed us that the members of the Hoa Hao were mostly illiterate progeny of bandits and pirates, who presented officials with problems unique to this area. Resistant to new ideas and propaganda, they balked in carrying out government projects and public works. Because of their pre-Diem activities, they could not be trusted, and government authorities had to control their activities carefully in order to assure the maintenance of peace and order. In short, the Hoa Hao were regarded as an outlaw group, rather than a religious organization. The Hoa Hao, on the other hand, maintain their own leadership hierarchy, criticize the government and administration, and constantly agitate for autonomy and self-expression. In the course of these field studies, a number of events occurred which pointed up the nature of this conflict between the Hoa Hao and the local administrators.

The district and provincial authorities have not given the Hoa Hao permission to gather for religious or other ceremonies. On April 5, 1960, however, they were allowed to celebrate the Buddhist Memorial Day, *Thanh Minh*, in the cemetery of their war dead. Ordinarily, *Thanh Minh* is a family celebration at which relatives gather to pay homage to their ancestors; flowers are brought to the graves, and rituals are held in front of the altars in the homes or in the pagodas. This year, however, by order of the central government, the purpose and nature of the ceremonies were altered so as to be a memorial specifically to those who died for the country or fighting the Viet Cong. Thus, the Hoa Hao, many of whom died fighting the French and the Viet Cong, were allowed to assemble.

About 500 people congregated in the large cemetery, a small number compared with the total Hoa Hao population in the village, but informants stated that they had not received permission from the district chief until it was too late to notify those who lived in the more remote areas. The cemetery was planned by Tran Van Soai to bring to-

gether in one place the dead who were killed fighting the French and Communists in scattered areas throughout the western provinces. At present, there are over 1,000 large concrete tombs in My Thuan cemetery, all of which have inscriptions indicating the name and dates of birth and death of the deceased. Adjacent to the graveyard is a large Hoa Hao temple, which has been recently converted into a Civil Guard post. As a substitute temple, the Hoa Hao have constructed a small thatch hut which contains an altar, a picture of Huynh Phu So, and the red cloth bearing the sacred Chinese characters.

On Memorial Day, the people assembled bearing offerings of rice, pork, bananas, cookies, wine, and beer. These, together with candles and joss sticks, were placed on the tombs by family members of the deceased. After lighting the joss sticks and kowtowing, the food and drinks were consumed by those present. Inside the temple-hut, a number of elderly believers sat around on the floor talking and eating. Here the research group had an opportunity to discuss a number of problems with the local Hoa Hao leaders.

Informants asserted that neither the number nor the ardor of the Hoa Hao members had decreased in recent years. They admitted, however, that their religious and political activities are now limited largely to prayers and other ritual performances in individual homes. They noted that the Viet Cong terrorism in the area had increased in direct proportion to the curtailment of Hoa Hao activities. Therefore, they argued, if the government would release their generals from the Saigon jails and permit them to reform their army, the Hoa Hao could aid the present regime by presenting a united force against the Viet Cong. Although numerous Hoa Hao members have joined the civil guard and other military and paramilitary units, they contended this was not nearly so effective as would be the re-establishment of their own army. The present "military" leader of the sect complained that the civil guard contained many Viet Cong, so that civil guardsmen could not trust each other. If the Hoa Hao had their own army, they would know and trust each other; they would have the *esprit de corps* and the common spiritual and moral characteristics not found in the civil guard. In short, they believed that they would be the most effective anti-Communist group in the area. This argument was stated and restated by various people in numerous contexts. Reformulation of the army appeared to be the goal not only of the military and religious leaders, but of the rank and file members of the sect. As the researchers left the cemetery, the Hoa Hao lined up across the graveyard and stood at attention as their military leader saluted in farewell.

The group returned to My Thuan in time to witness the prepara-

tions for the anniversary of the foundation of the Hoa Hao religion on June 10th (or the 17th of the 5th lunar month). About 100 followers were observed working in the cemetery, constructing stands and makeshift shelters, cleaning the grounds, and white-washing the tombs. Large timbers and other building materials were being carried onto the site. My Thuan looked alive with activity. In the car with the research team as it approached the scene was a provincial official who exclaimed, "What is wrong with the district chief that he is allowing this to go on? He had strict orders from the province chief that these people should not be allowed to gather like this. They will not have this ceremony."

After renewing acquaintances in My Thuan, the researchers proceeded to the Tan Luoc agrovillage. Enroute the provincial authority explained that although the Hoa Hao claim to be anti Communist, recently they have become suspected of collaborating with the Viet Cong. Many of the threatening letters that village and hamlet officials have received, for example, are believed not to have come from the Viet Cong after all, but from the Hoa Hao. Therefore, he continued, government authorities must be constantly watchful that any gathering of Hoa Hao be curtailed. (In this connection see Appendix I. Note the letter heading: "Coalition of the *Armed Forces of Religious Sects* against the Americans and Diem.")

Returning to My Thuan that afternoon, it was discovered that the stands, pavilions and decorations for the celebration were nearly completely dismantled. What had been an enthusiastic, hard-working group, turned into a number of morose and sullen workers. At the cemetery, people explained that the government had reversed its decision and the planned ceremony was prohibited. Some of the younger Hoa Hao followers expressed anger and resentment over this action; the older men merely stated that nothing could be done about it. A young elementary school teacher, daughter of a Hoa Hao leader said:

At first we were allowed to celebrate in great pomp by the district chief, but later we received an order from the province chief that we had to celebrate this ceremony in a very "intimate manner." So we had to tear down everything that we had built for the occasion. The people had been working hard on this project, and each member had contributed a few piasters, the total amounting to over 30,000\$. Some people said they would go to the village of Hoa Hao, about 100 kilometers from My Thuan, to celebrate. A few of the people cried when we were ordered to take down all of the stands and so on that we had already completed. It was all very sad, but what could we do? It was a government order.

The distrust and animosity between the government and the Hoa Hao are becoming more critical. The Hoa Hao, although basically anti-Communist, has shifted allegiance several times in its short history from the Japanese to the Viet Minh, to the French, to the Republic

under President Diem. There is no reason to suspect that it will not again shift its political sentiments to the Viet Cong. In fact, it might be to its present advantage to exist in a climate of chaos, confusion, and out-lawry. If we can predict on the basis of past action and the present attitude of ambivalence toward Communism and the Republican government, however, it appears that the Hoa Hao sect would re-emerge as an irritant to any form of stable Viet Minh government. The Hoa Hao seeks independence, freedom of action, and the reformation of its own army. Yet, in the past, this has resulted in widespread terrorism, banditry, and lawlessness. If the Hoa Hao problem is to be solved by any responsible government, ultimately there must be an intensive campaign to educate its followers to the need of active cooperation within the law for the development of religious and personal freedom. The government on its part must indicate a willingness to accept the Hoa Hao religion as an important movement within Buddhism and to foster means by which complete and uninhibited religious expression may be achieved.

#### THE CATHOLIC GROUP

At present the Catholic group, consisting of about 250 members, has no formal organization. The Catholics, according to some informants, are more influential in the village than their numbers indicate, since government officials and local administrators such as the district chief, district information officer, the canton chief, and other influential individuals are members of this religion. Plans have been underway for some time to form a Catholic association for the propagation of the faith and the building of a church. A priest from Vinh Long frequently visits the village to advise on the formation of such an organization, which the district information officer has volunteered to undertake. The press of time, however, has thus far limited the activities of the information officer in this activity, most of his efforts being utilized in the organization of government-sponsored groups. Since the aims of this organization are apolitical, he claims, his primary responsibilities should not be neglected in order to foster its formation.

Although there is no formal Catholic group, it is interesting to note that so many of the local administrators in a predominantly Hoa Hao region are members of the Catholic faith. The Catholics in this region enjoy certain privileges because of their religious affiliation. For example: In the recruitment of workers for the agroville, a group of Catholics were relieved from work because they were helping to rebuild a Catholic church that had been destroyed by the Viet Cong. Catholics are considered the most violently anti-Communist religious group in Vietnam, many of them having migrated from North Vietnam

in order to escape Communism. Therefore, they often are spared the irritation of suspicion and investigation to which members of other religious bodies may be subjected. In this connection, it is noteworthy that one plan advanced for the rationale of the Cai Son agrovillage in another part of Vinh Long Province was to group all the Catholics in the area in this settlement, so that it would become a fortress of anti-Communism.<sup>4</sup> However, although the Catholics may enjoy certain privileges, they have not as yet formed an organization through which they can accomplish their collective aspirations and their special interests.

#### THE MEMORIAL DAY CELEBRATION AT THE DINH

The *dinh* is a shrine found in most Vietnamese villages, where people gather on certain religious occasions to participate in ceremonies for the well-being, prosperity, and longevity of the local territorial group and its members.<sup>5</sup> The *dinh* is a Vietnamese institution similar in scope and function to the Japanese *jinja* or Shinto Shrine, where traditionally local tutelary deities are venerated for the protection of the living. Gatherings of a nonreligious character which have community-wide interest also take place at the *dinh*. A distinction might be made, then, between the *dinh*, on the one hand, and the temple or pagoda, on the other. The *dinh* and its ceremonies are oriented toward the territorial unit and the living, whereas, the temple or pagoda and the attendant rituals focus upon the kinship unit and the dead.<sup>6</sup> The temples and pagodas and the concern with ancestor veneration are ordinarily associated with Buddhism, while the *dinh* and the emphasis on the well-being of the living is an indigenous form of animism. While these distinctions may not be made by the villagers, participation in both form an important part of the religious life of the community.

There are two *dinh* in My Thuan, but the My Thanh *dinh* is the "official" *dinh* of the village, the other having been added when My Trung Hamlet was amalgamated to My Thuan Village. The My Thanh *dinh* was destroyed by the Viet Minh and rebuilt in 1957. The excanton chief, a Catholic French citizen who was an officer in the Hoa Hao army, was responsible for the construction of the present building. He received 43,000\$ from the government and additional funds from the villagers for the rebuilding of the *dinh*. He was chosen for this responsibility because he was "qualified in moral character." It is said that if a person of doubtful reputation builds a *dinh*, the punishment may be

<sup>4</sup>It was after completing an inspection visit to this agrovillage that the province chief was killed in an ambush.

<sup>5</sup>Hickey, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>A similar distinction can be made between the *jinja* and the temple in Japan.

death. Presently, the box of the *dinh* genii, which contains the sacred paper which legitimatizes the *dinh*, is kept in his home for protection

The Buddhist All Souls Day (*Thanh Minh*), celebrated on April 5, is a day for commemorating ancestors, and rites are usually held at the temples and pagodas, at the graves, and in the homes. This year, however, by order of the central government, the celebrations were to be limited to a memorial for those who died defending the country and fighting the Viet Cong. In My Thuan, district officials arranged to conduct the ceremonies at the My Thanh *dinh*, located near the village office. Officials from the three adjacent villages of My Hoa, Tan Phuoc, and Dong Thanh were invited to participate. Following is the schedule of the ceremony as drawn up by the district officials:

- 8:00 — Arrival of village council members and guests
- 8:15 — Arrival of district chief and his assistants
- 8:20 — Salute to the colors
- 8:25 — Address by district information chief
- 8:35 — Speech honoring the dead
- 9:00 — Prayers by Buddhist priest
- 10:00 — Organizing committee member thanks the audience
- 10:15 — Ceremony ends

The *dinh* was decorated with Vietnamese flags and the officials and guests were dressed either in black tunics and turban, in Western style clothing, or in military uniforms. No women were in attendance. The civil guard and the local police were charged with security during the affair. The My Thuan village officials were responsible for the *dinh* decorations and securing a Buddhist priest for the ceremony. Inside the *dinh*, in front of the main altar, were three tables where district and village officials and notables were seated (see Figure 2), and outside about 100 guests assembled, mostly businessmen and wealthy landlords. At 8:20, after the guests had assembled, the district information chief gave a short speech in which he outlined the purpose of the ceremony. His main emphasis was on the differences which existed between the North and the South: "How lucky we are in the South to be able to assemble to celebrate Memorial Day, for in the North people are not allowed to hold any kind of religious meetings because the Communists advocate the three negatives: no country, no family and no religion." He asked those assembled to remember the dead and the national heroes who had sacrificed themselves to protect the country.

The chief of the market hamlet of My Thuan, who was selected to begin the ceremony because of his old age, rose, lighted the joss sticks and kowtowed in front of the altar. The My Thuan village chief then per-



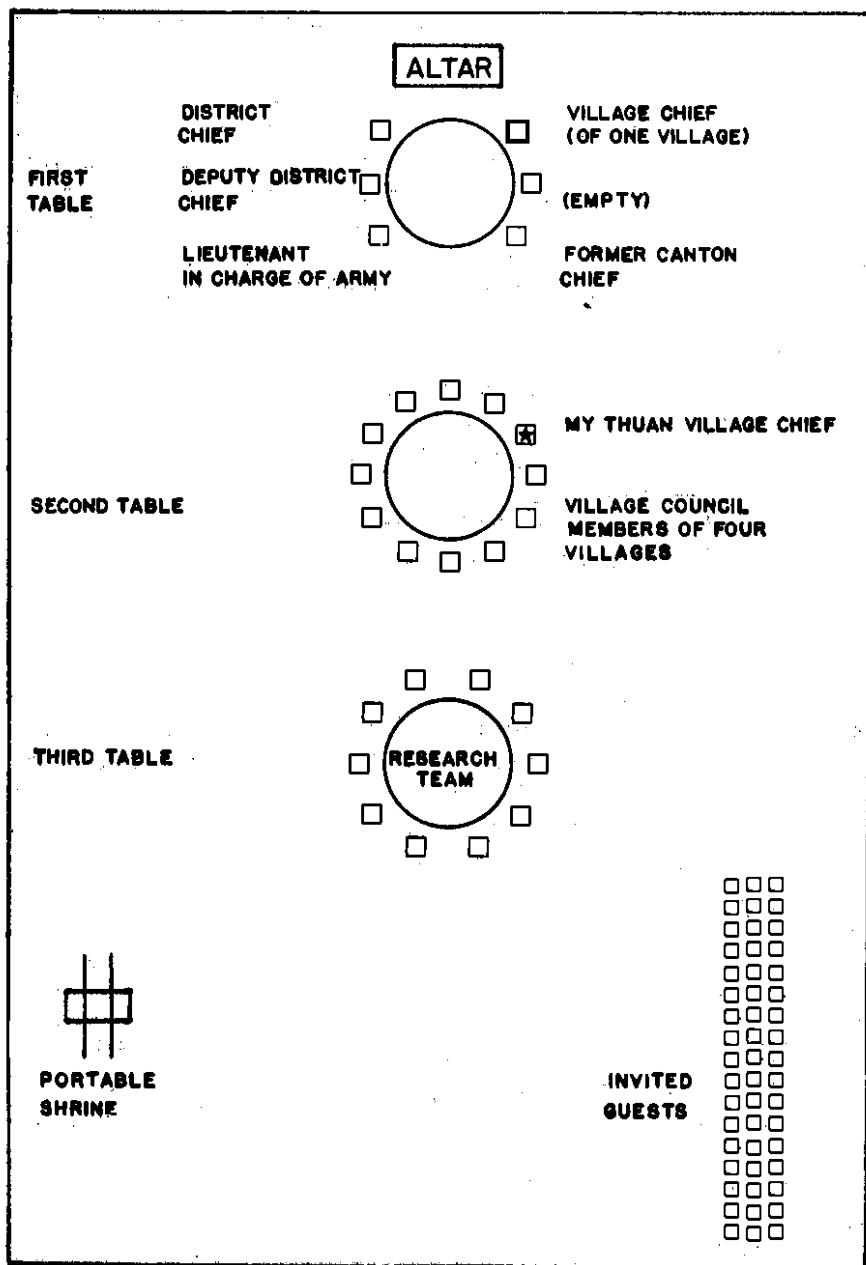


FIGURE 2  
Seating Arrangement at *Dinh* Ceremony  
April 5, 1960

formed in the same manner, after which he distributed incense sticks to the other honored guests, including the district chief and his assistants. After those seated at the tables had completed their kowtowing, the guests who had assembled outside the *dinh* entered in threes to kowtow before the altar. In the meantime, the Buddhist priest, dressed in saffron robes, and the *ong tu*, the elderly *dinh* keeper, recited prayers almost simultaneously. The old learned man (*lettre*) praised those who had sacrificed their lives for Vietnam and asked the dieties to protect the country, villages, and hamlets and to bring peace to the entire nation. The Buddhist priest, who was asked to give his services free of charge for this occasion, recited the usual prayers for the dead. Tea was served to the participants at the tables. When the learned man completed his prayers, he burned the prayer paper as the guests continued to kowtow. The district information chief announced the closing of the ceremony at 9:30.

Observers of this ceremony stated that the various functionaries in this ritual looked, and probably felt, uneasy in the performance of their ceremonial roles. This was the first time that such a ceremony had been held, and it included a complex blending of rites and prayers, as well as of purpose. The village chief informed us there was some confusion because this was not a traditional ceremony. Therefore, the *ong tu* and the Buddhist priest were reciting prayers at the same time. Because the priest does not ordinarily participate in such ceremonies, his functions overlapped those of the *ong tu*. However, since this was to be a ceremony for the dead, the services of the priest were deemed indispensable. The district information chief explained that ordinarily *dinh* ceremonies are organized by village officials, but since they had received instructions from the central government too late, and because there were to be a number of villages included, this chore fell on district officials. He added that he was a Catholic and did not understand the details of *dinh* ceremonies, but that he had tried to do his best to organize the meeting.

All Souls Day is traditionally a day for the religious commemoration of the dead. At this ceremony, however, new elements were introduced which fused the secular or political with the sacred, and resulted in a rather restrained, uninspired, and unspontaneous affair. This is apparently an attempt by the central government to utilize local, indigenous religious ceremonies for propaganda purposes, and to increase national awareness at the local level.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Note also that the Hoa Hao were allowed to congregate for the Memorial Day ceremony which was related to those killed fighting the Viet Cong, but were refused permission for a ceremony not directly connected with the National cause.

## 6 | *Economic Activity*

One of the major problems facing Vietnam in its move toward modernization and industrialization is that of increasing the production and consumption potential of its rural residents who comprise about 80 percent of the population. Until this agricultural sector of the population attains a cash income sufficient to allow it to consume large quantities of locally made products, demand for these products, investment incentives, and nonagricultural employment remain low, thus retarding economic development. Unlike such Asian countries as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, or mainland China, Vietnam has a wealth of natural resources, land, and no undue population pressure. Yet agricultural innovation and economic progress in the rural areas have not occurred in Vietnam as rapidly, or to the extent, they have occurred in some of these other nations. In the pages that follow, some attempt will be made to describe the economic activities in My Thuan and to analyze some of the major obstacles to innovation and change. While My Thuan may not be a "typical" community with regard to its economic practices, it is probable that many of the problems found in this village are common to the Vietnamese countryside, especially the Delta area.

My Thuan is primarily a rice producing village, although a number of garden crops are raised for home consumption. Of the total land area 91 percent, or 4,741 hectares, are under wet rice cultivation. Another 455 hectares are utilized for garden crops and 900 hectares, located far from streams and rivers, are not yet under cultivation. The most important fruits and vegetables grown in the gardens surrounding the house plots are potatoes, lettuce, corn, cabbage, coconuts, oranges, and mangoes. According to village records, there are 938 landowners including owners of agricultural plots of various sizes, operators of larger commercial establishments, and still larger private operating agencies such as the Catholic church. From these statistics and from interviews with village officials, it is estimated that about 30 percent of the families in the village own some land. The majority of the farmers are tenants. From the available statistics, it is difficult to determine the size of farm holdings or the size and amount of land rented.

#### AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

The farmers of My Thuan produce only one crop of rice a year. The reason advanced for not double cropping is the serious shortage of water. That this should be so in the river-webbed Mekong Delta is because there is little or no irrigation, rain water being the primary source of water for the flooding of the paddy fields. Various informants stated that water from the rivers and streams is not utilized because of the high alum content in the water. There is little evidence, however, to support this charge. In the first place, several farmers in the village have borrowed pumps from the provincial extension office in order to pump water from the stream onto their plots for irrigation purposes. Secondly, water from the streams is used to supplement the rain water during the height of the rainy season; i.e., the water overflows its banks and inundates the fields. When the water reaches a level of 20 centimeters below the top of the rice plants, farmers dike the fields so as to halt the influx of water. Without this river supplement, irrigation from rain water alone would be difficult. Thus, land located some distance from a river or stream is not highly valued, and the uncultivated 900 hectares in My Thuan are all in "dry" areas.<sup>1</sup>

There are probably two major reasons why irrigation, and thus double-cropping, are not practiced in this area:

(1) Irrigation systems are tremendously complicated affairs in terms of human relationships. Cooperation, control, and planning are

<sup>1</sup>The rivers are also an important source of drinking water since there are few wells in the village for this purpose.

necessary for the successful implementation of an irrigation project. These, as well as the technical aspects of the irrigation system are not well developed, and since agricultural extension is practically nonexistent in My Thuan, it should not be expected that any large-scale projects will develop in the foreseeable future.

(2) Possibly a more important factor bearing on this subject is the lack of incentives for higher production. Subsistence farmers the world over are conservative. Obviously, survival, not production, is their major preoccupation, and the incentives for altering existing practices which have thus far proved adequate are practically nonexistent. In My Thuan the farmers are not starving. On the contrary, a number of tenants and small land owners stated that they were relatively prosperous because of the high yields in good years:

I have heard that the use of fertilizers in other villages has increased the yields. The people in this area would be willing to use fertilizers if we could learn how to use them and where to get them. But really, we don't have to have fertilizer here, because the soil is very good. The average yield is probably about 100 *gla* per hectare, but in good years we get from 115 to 130 *gla*.<sup>2</sup> The rice plants in this village are larger (this probably means more shoots) so we get a higher yield.

Land is abundant in the Delta region, a farmer being able to rent as much land as he can cultivate, and production from a single crop appears adequate for the survival of most of the peasants. Therefore, there is little experimentation with new methods of cultivation, such as the use of fertilizers, new seeds, irrigation, or double cropping.

Farming activities are spread over a 6- or 7-month period, from the fifth to the first lunar months (see Figure 3). With the first rains that break the three-month dry season, the farmers begin to prepare their seedbeds, which takes from 2 to 5 days, depending upon the number of hectares to be cultivated. After the seeds have been broadcast in the seedbeds, the plowing and harrowing of the fields begins. Preparation of the fields takes about thirty man-days per hectare. Owners or tenants operating more than two hectares ordinarily hire additional laborers and water buffaloes for these chores. (The cost of labor in My Thuan is 40\$ per day plus meals.) During the sixth and seventh month, for a period of 30-40 days, the seedlings mature. The plants are then removed from the seed beds, tied in bundles and allowed to soak in water until the beginning of the middle of the eighth month, at which time they are transplanted into the paddy fields. A small amount of weeding is done by sickles in the ninth and tenth months. Harvesting begins at the end of the first lunar month (see Figure 3) and lasts for about 30 days. Labor is hired during this time by the larger operators, and there were

<sup>2</sup>In South Vietnam, 1 *gla* equals 20 kilograms.

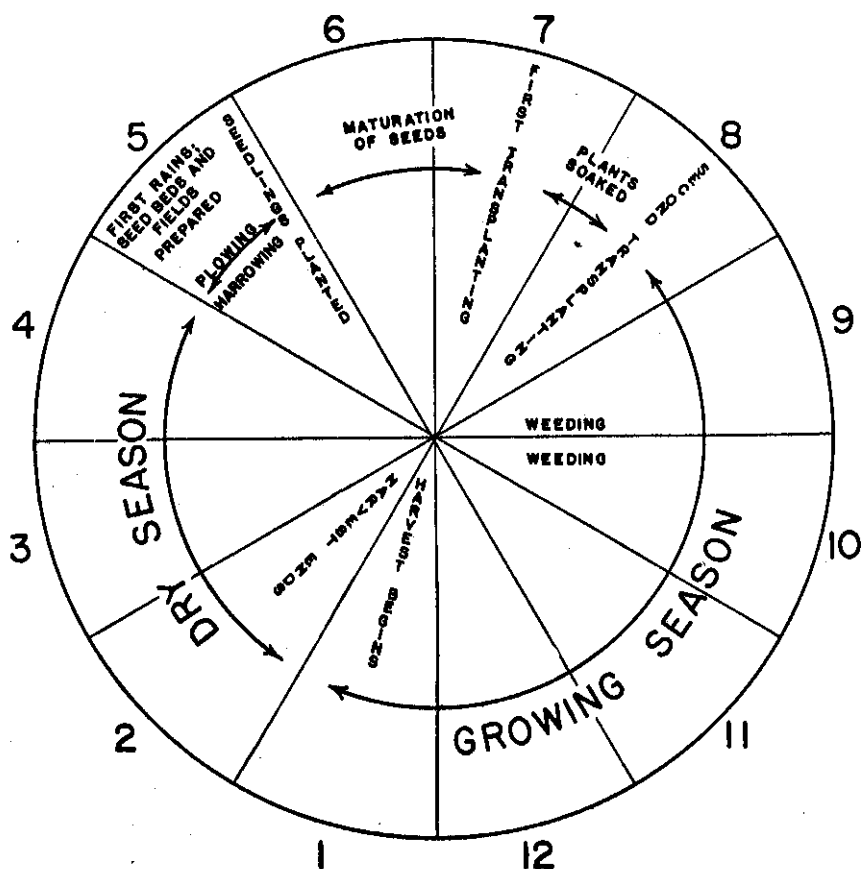


FIGURE 3  
Agricultural Cycle  
(Lunar Calendar)

some reports of labor exchange among families operating small plots.

Although many of the farmers talked about the "average" yield, crop damage in the My Thuan area is high, due to a disease called *tim* or "rust" and the usual insects. Generally, both "rust" and the insects appear to occur together, and their effect upon the yield is devastating. A rice field which normally produces 100 *gia* per hectare, for example, may yield only 5 or 10 *gia*. One farmer who was only slightly affected by insects and "rust" complained that his yield on 9 hectares last year was

only 600 *gia*, whereas normally he expects about 800 *gia*. The disease problem works a hardship upon the operator, because usually labor and rental agreement are reached prior to the harvest season, and if the yield is low, the farmer is unable to fulfill his contract (see below).

Insecticides are unknown in My Thuan. We broached the question in all of our interviews, but the farmers stated that they did not know that crop devastation could be avoided through the use of medicines. Interestingly, farmers indicated they would not be willing to invest large sums of money on insecticides even if they were available, and they explained that they believed yields varied depending upon luck more than on pest control.

Weeds are another problem that harass the My Thuan farmer. Most of our informants said that weeding was "no problem at all except in the areas where there was a scarcity of water." Weeding, a necessity for high yields, was reportedly carried out only during the pre-transplanting period and occasionally in locations where inundation was incomplete. With the effective introduction of such weedkillers as 2-4-D, production in My Thuan could no doubt be increased significantly.

In interviews with farmers who could understand the utility of irrigation pumps, fertilizers, and insecticides, we asked why they had not resorted to loans from the National Agricultural Credit Organization (NACO). A typical response was:

I have heard of how farmers in the next village have increased their income by using scientific methods of farming. But I am only a poor peasant. Why would anybody give me money to increase my own personal happiness? Nobody in my hamlet has asked for a government loan, because they think that no one would give them any money.

Agricultural practices in My Thuan are not highly developed, the standard of living is low, as is the level of aspirations. If the situation we observed in this village is in any way characteristic of the Vietnamese countryside, then drastic measures must be taken by the various governmental agencies to extend knowledge relative to more efficient means of production and agricultural credit, and to heighten the expectations and aspirations of the average Vietnamese peasant.

Another factor which perhaps inhibits more rapid agricultural development is the high degree of tenancy in My Thuan. It is estimated that about 70 percent of the farmers rent the land they cultivate. Generally, tenants cannot be expected to be in the vanguard of innovators, since they are, in effect, working the land for the owner rather than for themselves. Thus, long-range planning for the use of the land, which is necessary for the modernization of agriculture, is absent. One of the

reasons advanced by the landowners for the present ratio of tenants is the high costs of hired labor:

It is easier and cheaper for us to rent the land out than to hire laborers and worry about it ourselves. Farm labor costs 40\$ per day plus food. Food costs alone are very high, if you figure that 5 people are needed for our 10 hectares for over 30 days at transplanting and harvesting times. If the land is rented, you don't have to think about these things, they are the tenants' problems.

The maximum rent set by the government is 25 percent of the yield on the rented land. However, in My Thuan, we were informed that such high rents were never charged, the average being 10-15 percent. Thus, if a farmer produces 100 *gia* per hectare on 2 hectares of rented land, he might pay only 20-25 *gia* in rent to his landlord. One landowner stated that usually his tenants bring their rent by boat up the stream and leave it at a previously designated place on a given day after the harvest. A tenant stated that he pays his rent to a man whom the landowner sends to his house. It was surprising that many people did not even know their landlords; the original agreements were apparently reached through a middleman.

According to the village chief, only 3 village landowners were affected by the recent land reform, i.e., they owned more than 100 hectares of paddy fields,<sup>8</sup> and there are 20 absentee landlords. It appeared that although individual landholdings were not great, even small owners rented land to tenants rather than work it themselves because of the high costs of hired labor. However, a determining factor in the size of farm unit operated was the number of farm laborers in the family. Five or six adults, for example, may be able to operate as many as 10 hectares, whereas a family with only 2 workers, a man and his wife, can work only 1 or 2 hectares.

As in all other facets of My Thuan life, the security problem affects the nature of landlord-tenant relations. Landlords are one of the chief targets of Viet Cong intimidation and terrorism. Landowners are threatened not to collect their rents, and tenants are warned not to pay rents. To some extent, no doubt, the tenants have invented this device as an excuse not to pay rents, but there is abundant evidence to support the claim that rents go uncollected or unpaid as a direct result of coercion from the Viet Cong. One landlord, for example, stated that he owns almost 100 hectares, but does not go there to collect rents nor to farm any of it himself because it is in a remote area held by the Viet Cong. The threat of terrorism may also be a reason why the rents paid in My Thuan are so far below the price set as equitable by the government. Although none of the owners interviewed are considered "large" land-

<sup>8</sup>One of these was an Indian.



holders, it is possible that in areas of the south where such landlords exist, the withholding of rents may account for the decrease in rice shipments to the Saigon markets and the shortage of rice in Central Vietnam.

## MARKETING

The marketing practices followed in My Thuan, and in Vietnam generally, are such as to allow a considerable amount of price manipulation by the middlemen and the rice-mill operators. In the absence of marketing cooperatives and farmers' unions, information on the fluctuating prices of rice and garden crops is unavailable. Thus farmers often sell their rice to the middlemen far below the official prices set by the government or the unofficial seasonal prices. This system of marketing operates to the disadvantage of the farmer. One farmer complained:

Last year I harvested more rice than the year before but I received less money. I was disappointed this year because I only got 30\$ per *gia* from the middleman. Later I found out that others were getting as high as 37\$ to 40\$ per *gia*. Most people do not know the price of rice, so they go to the rice-mill owner and ask the price they should use in bargaining with the middlemen.

There are 20 or 30 middlemen who work in My Thuan. They visit each farmer individually and bargain for the rice which they purchase with funds loaned to them by 1 of the 4 rice-mill owners in the village (all Vietnamese). The middlemen then sell the rice to the rice-mill owner, their profit being the difference between the price they paid the farmer and the price paid to them by the mill owner. The mill owner then polishes the rice and transports it to Saigon. Polishing and transportation costs must be considered when the mill owner bargains with the middlemen and with the wholesale dealers in Saigon.

Nearly 20 hectares are under fruit and vegetable cultivation for the Saigon markets. Middlemen passing through the village at the appropriate times buy and transport these products to the city. Fishing is an important part of the economic activity of My Thuan, but the fish caught in the numerous streams and rivers are mostly for home consumption. However, there are some commercial fishermen who sell their produce individually in the markets of the neighboring city of Can Tho.

## INCOME AND EXPENDITURES

As stated earlier, one of the main objectives of this research was to acquire an understanding of the way of life or the standard of living of the Mekong Delta peasant. This is a difficult task for a number of

**TABLE 1**  
**FARM INCOME AND EXPENDITURES—TENANTS**

TENANT	AMOUNT OF LAND RENTED (HECTARES)	FAMILY SIZE	INCOME					EXPENDITURES			NET INCOME PER YEAR	
			Production (gls)	Home Consumption of Rice (gls)	Amount of Rice Sold (gls)	Income from Rice (Piasters)	Additional Income (Piasters)	Rent (gls)	Labor (Piasters)	Buffaloes + Equipment (Piasters)	Family Income	Per Capita Income
A	4.5	6	500	200	233	9,420	1,200 (outside labor)	67	800	3,950	13,770	2,295
B	1.7	7	110-170	90-150	0	0	1,200 Veg. + Fruits	10-17		550	4,650-6,770	664-969
C	1	5	100-110	50-60	40-50	1,600-2,000	4,000 livestock labor	10		1,000	6,600-7,000	1,500-1,600

**TABLE 2**  
**FARM INCOME AND EXPENDITURES—OWNERS**

OWNER	AMOUNT OF LAND OWNED-RENTED	FAMILY SIZE	INCOME						EXPENDITURES	NET INCOME PER YEAR	
			Production (gls)	Home Consumption of Rice (gls)	Amount of Rice Sold (gls)	Income from Rice (Piasters)	Additional Income (Piasters)	Rent Received (gls)	Labor (Piasters)	Family Income	Per Capita Income
D	4	8	450	100	210-250	6,400-8,000	1,000 Clerk		1,600-2,000	16,610	2,076
E	9	10	590	200	400	16,000	8,000 Fruits + Veg.		1,900	25,660	2,566
F	10	4	All Rented Out	200	0	0	1,000 Clerk	200		9,000	2,250
G	4	2	400	30	320	14,600			5,000	9,000	4,500

reasons. In the first place, farmers are reluctant to discuss income with strangers because, for example, production is related to both taxation and rent. Secondly, peasants are not accustomed to dividing the world of reality into such units as piasters per month and expenditures per year. In other words, questions have to be structured so as to fit the way of thinking of the peasant, which complicates the processes of comparison and communication. Finally, there is the problem of reliability and validity. In the short period in the field, one could not expect to acquire a random sample of the income and expenditures of the total population. Furthermore, no way of measuring the accuracy of the reports on these matters which were accumulated during the course of interviews had been evolved. However, because of the consistency of the responses received, there is some reason to believe that they reflect to some extent the real situation. Seven operators of farms of various sizes, ranging from small rented plots to large landholdings, were interviewed. Tables 1 and 2 contain a summary of the data collected from the farm operators.

It is noteworthy that among both tenants and landlords, production, rent, cost of labor, home consumption of rice, and per capita income are relatively consistent. Although the per capita income may appear to be low, the average being about 2,000\$, it must be remembered that the majority of the peasants in My Thuan are living at the subsistence level. Unlike Khanh Hau, where Hendry found the per capita income to be from 4,000-5,000\$, the farmers of My Thuan do not double crop, use fertilizers, or irrigate, except with rainwater.<sup>4</sup> In various interviews, it was observed that the size of farm unit operated depended upon the number of farm workers in the family. The data on income and expenditures support these observations. This is another indication of the subsistence orientation of the My Thuan peasant.

## SECONDARY AND NONFARM EMPLOYMENT

Perhaps the major source of cash income in the village is from off-seasonal employment as agricultural laborers or as day laborers in other villages, towns, and provinces. In some of the surrounding areas, such as in Long An Province, there is a considerable amount of double cropping, which affords a source of employment for the My Thuan villagers. According to the political agent of the village council, 50 to 70 applications per day are made by villagers for travel to other villages and provinces for work.<sup>5</sup> In My Thoc Hamlet alone, 30 people went to An

<sup>4</sup>Hendry, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>5</sup>Surprisingly, few people ever request to travel to Saigon for either work or recreation.

Giang Province during the month of the research to work in private and public rice fields.

Men in the village also accept employment as carpenters, roof repairmen, and other daily labor in return for cash. Others remain in the village to repair houses, make wooden sandals, or engage in such commercial activities as foresting, fishing, and fruit peddling. From a series of interviews with the commercial, nonfarm inhabitants of My Thuan, it was estimated that their yearly income does not differ significantly from that of the agricultural population. Cash income varies from day to day depending upon such factors as the availability of odd jobs and the amount of fish, fruit, or candies sold in the market.

## INHERITANCE

It is difficult to determine the dominant pattern of inheritance in Vietnam, especially among small landowners and tenants. In the case of large landowners, say 50-100 hectares, however, it was generally agreed in My Thuan that the ideal pattern is for the eldest son to inherit about 10 hectares devoted to the cult of the ancestors, the remainder being divided equally among the other offspring, regardless of sex or birth order. However, in many cases the land for the cult of the ancestors is inherited by the "most competent" son, or the individual "most devoted" to his parents, or merely by a favored son. In some cases the eldest son claims all of the land in the absence of a will. In such instances, if a dispute arises, the hamlet chief refers the case to the village chief. If the village chief is unable to arrive at an equitable solution, the case is referred to a provincial court. In most such cases, the court decides to divide the land equally among offspring, the land for the cult of the ancestors being awarded to the eldest son. Therefore, it appears that the ideal patterns coincide somewhat with the legal norms.

In the case of small landowners or tenants, if no will is left, the sons and daughters decide among themselves the disposition of the property, and all try to contribute to the cult of the ancestor. For example: On the anniversary of the death of the father, the children gather, each contributing food, money, or lodgings for the event.

Although the system of primogeniture is apparently ideally followed in the inheritance of land for the cult of the ancestor, in many instances ultimogeniture is practiced in the inheritance of the house and household effects. Thus, it appears that children who have not yet left the household in marriage have the responsibility for the care of the aged and the maintenance of the house and garden. The wide range of inheritance practices followed in My Thuan is a factor contributing

to the large number of civil disputes handled by the village chief. In the absence of cooperatives and farmer's associations, and because of the flexible nature of the land and rent contracts, civil disputes arising over inheritance, land, rent, and tenure present persistent detriments to the realization of efficient village administration.

## SUMMARY

One of the most pressing problems in Vietnam is that of increasing the living standards of the peasants in the countryside. For this to occur, it is necessary to increase agricultural production through the modernization of the traditional farming methods and to decrease the percentage of the population dependent upon farming as a way of life. From our observations in My Thuan, however, it appears that innovation in farming methods is likely to occur very slowly due to the following factors: (1) the nature of the security problem; (2) the relatively low level of economic aspiration; (3) the structure of rural economic relationships; (4) the lack of large-scale agricultural organizations; (5) the severe shortage of trained agricultural specialists capable of initiating new techniques at the local level; (6) the scarcity of research on soil and water conditions, as well as on the organization and condition of the rural labor force, and (7) the lack of crop diversification and markets for garden products.

## 7 | Conclusion

My Thuan must be placed in the larger context of a developing nation-state. The problems existing in this village are probably representative of those found generally in rural Vietnam and, indeed, in most of the newly developing countries of the world. Simply stated, these problems ultimately revolve about the solution of two related questions: how to increase the standards of living of the peasants, the majority of the population, and how to develop in rural areas an image of and identification with a nation-state. In most instances, the obligation and responsibility of answering these questions has fallen on the central governments. Planning, organizing and initiating change programs have emanated from the center. In Vietnam, the youth rallies, nationally oriented religious ceremonies, the discouraging of splinter sects, the agrovillage programs, the organization of farmers' unions and cooperatives, are all governmental attempts to either stimulate economic development or solidify the image of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his government. That there are obstacles and failures in the finalization of these attempts at planned change comes as no surprise to those familiar with the change process in developing countries.

The problem, as we understand it from the case of My Thuan, comes into relief if it is placed within a communications context. Numerous programs are initiated by the various development agencies in Saigon. These are relayed to provincial headquarters which is seriously understaffed with personnel trained in administration of health, construction, welfare, education, propaganda, and military programs. Nevertheless, every attempt is made to forward the instructions, orders, and plans to the district office where, at most, the district chief, usually an army officer, and a couple of clerks are charged with implementation. At any one time these officials may be involved in 10 or 12 major developmental programs.

At this point the communication process breaks down as a result of channel overload. Messages transmitted to the village chief and his assistants are incomplete, contradictory, and, above all, physically impossible given the communication channel or administrative and social structure below the village level. Thus, messages from the source (Saigon) are interpreted and reinterpreted thru the various receiver levels where the communication facilities, or human resources, are limited. The breakdown in the communication network because of overload and poor receiver facilities has been detrimental to the development process. "Forced labor," "forced attendance at meetings," and "forced organizations" are alienating the peasants from the government and setting the stage for even greater political unrest.

There are no easy or rapid solutions to the problems which face Vietnam or other developing countries. The training of personnel capable of operating within complicated bureaucracies and who possess some empathy with the masses of people and the organizing of the communication networks to handle the complexities of national development are not goals achieved easily or rapidly.

## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

*Abstracts from Letter  
from the Secretary of State at the Presidency  
to Prefects and Chiefs of Province  
Dated March 13, 1957  
Concerning the Reorganization  
of the Five-Family Group*

### A. ADVANTAGES

1. To promote the spirit of unity and mutual aid among people.
2. To expedite easily reconstruction and social works.
3. To help the village council avoid the waste of time spent directly on settling petty disputes.
4. To propagate quickly the government policies.
5. To help the government become efficient in the following work:
  - a. Controlling people
  - b. Protecting order, security, and stopping all destruction plots
  - c. Taking census of national resources
  - d. Collecting taxes.

### B. DISADVANTAGES

1. Present inconsistency of the organization.
2. Lack of coordination between family group and hamlet chiefs and village council members.
3. Lack of means to form and train chiefs of family groups, resulting in a number of them who do not have a sound point of view, ability, and working spirit.
4. Lack of means of control and expedition because of large areas, remote roads, scattered houses.
5. Incompletely organized areas because of the danger or insecurity of the location.
6. Many difficulties encountered by the organization in big cities, due to the heterogeneous composition of society and the great number of foreigners.
7. Restraining influence in some areas of the opposition group, where people are not wholeheartedly devoted to the government cause.
8. Understanding in a very narrow sense the meaning of family group and regard of this organization only as a means for people to control and denounce one another, putting too much emphasis on politics while neglecting social works.

The Secretary of State then requested the officials concerned to make careful studies of characteristics of each region in order to reorganize the family groups, based on the following basic criteria:

1. *Terminology.* It should not be called "five-family" (*Ngu-gia*) or "ten-family" (*Thap-gia*), but be called "mutual-aid family group" (*Lien-gia tuong-tro*). The number of families depends on each area and population of each place. A mutual-aid family group does not need to have a specific number of houses; it may consist of 5, 6, 7, or 10 houses.
2. *Leadership.* It may be difficult to find people who have the ability and good will, therefore, it should not create many functions, many officers for each section, such as finance, social, police, etc. . . .  
Each group may appoint a mutual-aid family group chief and a deputy to take care of all works. Later, when there is a larger personnel, and depending on the development of each group, the number of officers may be increased to take charge of each section.
3. *Aim of the organization.* The organization of mutual-aid family groups has not only a political aim to prevent Communism or guerrilla forces but a primary aim of creating the spirit of unity, mutual assistance, mutual security, mutual aid, mutual achievement of reconstruction and social works which are useful to everyone, mutual effort to understand the policies of the government and to carry out government orders concerning tax collection, as well as other public matters.
4. *Interest of leadership group.* From the psychological point of view, to have duties means to have rights. For that reason the official who carries out these duties will devote himself to the job. Thus, family group chiefs and their deputies should

have a deserving position and should be given a certificate so stating. In the official ceremonies or meetings, they should be invited to participate in these activities and should be seated right after the village council officials. To stimulate family group chiefs and their deputies, they should be awarded certificates praising their deeds or congratulating those who have successfully done their duties or recognizing family groups which have achieved outstanding work. However, the problem of reward depends on the situation in each place. Explanations should be given to village councils so that each place could estimate the amount of allowance to cover office materials for family group chiefs and deputies according to the village budget, but money should not be collected monthly from each house for fear of abuses, complaints, etc. . . .

5. *The relationships between different family groups and the authority.* Each family group chief should send to the hamlet chief (in villages) and to the district chief a short weekly report on activities already carried out, or events which have taken place in the group. In urgent or important circumstances, reports should be submitted right away.

The hamlet chief should send reports to the village council which, in turn, would forward them to the district. Every 15 days, the district chief would collect all materials and prepare a general report which would be sent to the chief of province or prefect.

In the monthly report to be submitted to the President, province chiefs and prefects should discuss clearly the activities of the family groups in their regions, and at the same time they should give their opinions and suggest solutions in order to correct the shortcomings, if any.

6. *The control and encouragement of family groups.* The work of the family groups must be continuously controlled and encouraged in order to obtain good results.

In the inspection tour, visits should be made to the family groups. In addition, each district should appoint an official to be in charge of controlling family groups in order to show to the family group chiefs and deputies the necessary things to be done and to correct the drawbacks, in case there are any.

The controlling work can be assigned to the deputy district chief, deputy canton chief, to a representative of the village council, or to the chief of the Civic Action Team or the Civil Guard.

# 1. AIMS OF THE MUTUAL-AID FAMILY GROUPS ORGANIZATION

The organization of the mutual-aid family groups has three aims:

- a. To group people into one strongly organized block in order to orientate them toward the cause of government.
- b. To educate people so they can be conscious of their rights and duties as citizens.
- c. To eliminate the Viet Cong and rebels who are still sabotaging the government.

Because of nearly a century under the yoke of Colonialism and Communism, the Vietnamese peasantry has led a very obscure life. Peasants have lacked everything from every point of view; their knowledge is very low, therefore, they are receptive to all kinds of clever propaganda. They cannot distinguish between the right and the wrong government.

The ruling group, being afraid of the coalition of people into one block and of their becoming too educated, applied the policy of "divide and rule" and "obscurantism."

The Communists are very clever, exploiting the patriotism of people in order to introduce to them the ideas of "resistance to attain independence," using people as sacrificial objects before guns. They cleverly group people behind "save-the-country" forces such as organizing fronts, "Vietnamese-Coalition Association," various men's, women's, and youth groups in order to control and transform them into machines to serve the party, exploiting the psychology of people to make propaganda, to dupe them and to poison their minds. Because the former puppet national government was a corrupt government which depended entirely on the forces of the Colonialists to oppress and exploit the people, it created hatred among them and exposed them to the Communist influence.

In order to remedy the situation of chaos which still exists in remote areas, and to educate people so they can understand the Republican Government regime, and at the same time to create a strong force which will support the life improvement program of the government, it is necessary to organize mutual-aid family groups in every place.

In practice, the mutual-aid family group is not a new organization. The Viet Cong has already organized what they called "five-family groups" (*Ngu-gia Lien-bao*) or "neighborhood family groups" (*Lan-gia Lien-ket*), but in comparing these two organizations, they are found to be similar only in form, not in function.

In terms of form, the Viet Cong has grouped 5 or 3 families into a number family of groups called "5 families groups" (*Ngu-gia Lien-bao*) or "3 families groups" (*Tam-gia Lien-bao*).

In terms of function, the Viet Cong has taken advantage of the organization to transform it into a brainwashing operation and has changed people into machines to serve the party.

Thanks to this organization, the Viet Cong can control properties of people in order to facilitate appropriation of their property and to further impoverish people by means of taxes: agricultural taxes, commercial taxes, etc. . . .

Furthermore, they use this organization to spy on individuals, to create suspicion among them, to inculcate hatred among social classes in order to advocate class struggle, and to kill small capitalists, tenants, landowners, and intellectuals, that they classify as "*Tri, Phu, Dia, Hao*" (Intellectuals, wealthy people, landlords and notables) who are enemies of the proletarian class.

On the contrary, the organization of mutual-aid family group aims at reconstructing and gathering scattered families, to eliminate all cleavages which divide the rich and the poor and to create an atmosphere of understanding, favorable to mutual aid among people in case of distress, illness, or other misfortune.

Thanks to the organization of family group, people can have more contact with hamlet chiefs and village councils, and through these organizations can indicate to the government their wishes and problems. The government, on the other hand, can diffuse to the families which are scattered the instruction and information in order to guide and shape the people in conformance with government policies. The government can also rely on the family group organizations to control and eliminate Viet Cong agents on the spot or rebels infiltrating in villages to perform subversive activities.

The mutual-aid family group is not a compulsory, or a "spy" organization like the one under the Communist regime.

The government is trying to create a spirit of unity so people can defend their own interests; i.e.:

- interest in education in order to become good citizens.
- elimination of rebels to protect themselves from false propaganda of the Viet Cong in order to avoid dupery.
- contribution of their efforts, with means already available, to social or community development works so that village people can benefit from common roads, schools, churches or *dinh*, etc. . . .

Therefore, in order to fulfill the ideal aim of the mutual-aid family group, the organization should be planned carefully, arranging propaganda meetings to explain thoroughly its purpose to the people and to distinguish the practical usefulness of the mutual-aid family group from the false five-family group organization of the Viet Cong.

Battalion  
Thuong Kiet  
Company 256  
No. 35/CTQS

## APPENDIX B

### Coalition of the Armed Forces of the Religious Sects Against American and Diem

To Mr. Y, Secretary of  
M Hamlet  
My Thuan Village  
Binh Minh District

— Vinh Long —

While the situation is critical, the fighting movement of the people becomes stronger and stronger every day. The Americans and Diem without any pity oppress the people and use dictatorship, one-religion and one-family system to govern the country. While they are entirely isolated from the people, their regime comes to a declining stage right at its very root. At present, the Americans and Diem can only use the barbarian policy, there is no other barbarian policy that they have not yet had recourse to. Hence, this regime is essentially a barbarian and bloody one.

Based on the above situation, the Revolution and people at present do not fully recognize this regime and the various reactionary organizations of the Americans and Diem. For that reason, the Revolution and people have recently taken some opposition measures at various places and right at My Thuan that you, undoubtedly, have heard and seen.

In the past, that is, since the day the hamlet chief paid for his crime, you have committed many indecent deeds, sometimes secretly, at other times in the open, hiding from the people and bypassing the Revolution. You have stubbornly continued working for the rebels, to be exact, such as recently tying two draft dodgers, then handing them over to the Americans and Diem, selling family declaration forms, collecting money from people and, at present, you have given the hamlets an order to take names and ages of persons in each family to compel people to work at the agrovilles. You collaborate closely with the hamlet, carrying out plots against peace by the Americans and Diem, siding with landowners in the fixing of rice rentals, forcing farmers to pay high rentals, and looking after rented lands for landowners.

All these above actions, which are very detrimental to the Revolution and people, prove that you may be the future hamlet chief, and it would be very dangerous if you did not repent soon.

We, the commanding staff of Company 256 of Battalion Ly Thuong Kiet wholeheartedly warn you so you can correct yourself and resign immediately from your function as secretary and stop collaborating with rebels. If you stubbornly refuse to do so, you will be entirely responsible in front of the Revolution and people.

War Zone, March 26, 1960

— sealed —

Battalion  
Ly Thuong Kiet  
Company 256  
No. 35/CTQS

**Coalition of the Armed Forces of  
Religious Sects against Americans and Diem**

To Mr. X, Commander  
Company B, Youth of the Republic  
Resident of L Hamlet  
My Thuan Village  
Binh Minh District  
— Vinh Long —

Faced with the Revolutionary movement of the South which breaks out like a storm, the people and the Revolution of the South are trying to give the country-sellers and usurpers, Americans and Diem, a deathly kick which will soon decide their fates. The Americans and Diem become more and more isolated from the people everyday, and their regime declines and becomes disorganized from day to day. The Americans and Diem no longer have any means to use demagoguery. For, at present, the people of the South have already been trained by many sacred years of the Revolution of Vietnam, and they have already witnessed the wily and dishonest face of the Americans and Diem.

On their dead-end road to agony, the only means is to use dictatorship and fascism, such as killing, beating up, imprisoning and stabbing villagers, etc. . . . They hope that such actions will suppress the movement and spirit of the Revolution of people. But they are completely wrong, for the Vietnamese people have inherited from their fathers the spirit of Revolution. With the spirit of revolt and unsubmitiveness, the struggle movement becomes stronger and stronger everyday. The people are determined to smash the war plot by the Americans and Diem in order to attain peace, unification, independence and democracy throughout the country. While facing failure, the Americans and Diem have more dangerous plots. They are building agrovilles everywhere. Agrovilles are big prisons and hells on earth. When these agrovilles are completed, they will concentrate the peace-loving patriotic families and people there in order to exploit their wealth, to draft young men so that they have enough forces to start the invasion war with the North, causing bloody killing among brothers.

At My Thuan, you have proved yourself an efficient servant of the Americans and Diem, and you collaborate closely with the hamlet chief every day.

The young men in the village, due to their poverty which constantly keeps them busy around the house, are always late to their work. At times, you let entire companies remain under the sun, force each young man to buy insignia for 5 piasters apiece, compel them to mount guard regardless of age and illness. You are very efficient in the recruiting of workers for agrovilles. In this undertaking, you and the hamlet chief accept bribes from people. If anyone wants to remain home, he has to pay you privately, such as in the fourth collection of pay in lieu of work on March 27, 1960. You have forced hundreds of people to work at Tan Luoc agrovillage. Some of them who have not yet finished with their farming work came to you to ask for a cancellation, and you threatened to bring them to the village council to settle the matter, and you accepted bribes from those who stayed home. There were people who had to pay you four times in lieu of work. Beside bribes in cash, you and the hamlet secretary accept bribes in kind such as *mang cau* (some kind of fruit) vegetables, tea, etc. . . .

During New Year of this year, you collaborated closely with the hamlet chief to carry out plot by the Americans and Diem to impoverish people. In the most critical and urgent situation, the Revolution of the South breaks out. The Revolution and people do not fully recognize the present regime and the reactionary organizations of the Americans and Diem. The Revolution and people, in My Thuan as elsewhere, have taken strong opposition attitudes, but you still stubbornly, either secretly or in the open, continue to serve the rebels under different forms.

On behalf of the Revolution and people, we, the commanding staff of Company 256 of Battalion Ly Thuong Kiet, once again order you to stop your servant job under any form.

If you violate this order the Revolution and people will not guarantee your life or your property.

War Zone, March 29, 1960  
BCH Company 256  
— Sealed —

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