

# THE WAR AT THE GRASS ROOTS: "PACIFICATION" IN VIETNAM

After the big promises at Honolulu last spring, are Americans making any real headway in "pacifying" Vietnam's villages and rice fields? Are schools, hospitals, money, other aid building a new nation? A survey by "U. S. News & World Report" staff members reveals a mixed picture. In some places the nonshooting war goes well. In others, Viet Cong reign with few signs of change.

dhist elements tried to overthrow the Ky Government.

**An Giang.** In this delta Province, dominated by Hoa Hao, a Buddhist sect, there is some suspected collaboration with the Communists. But almost all of the Province is reasonably secure. American officials say that a whole complex of social and economic projects is going forward—including new cash crops, farm credits and land reform.

Pacification team at work in hamlet  
—USN&WR Photo



The Agency for International Development is the main civilian instrument of the U. S. in the pacification program. Although AID began its schedule of imports for the program late last year, shipping bottlenecks at Saigon impeded the flow. Only now are the imports beginning to move in large quantities.

Inflation, fed by U. S. military spending, has caused trouble. In early stages of the U. S. build-up, AID was pumping some commodities into the economy while the U. S. military was buying the same commodities, pushing prices up. But that situation has eased.

In some instances, U. S. determination to get things done quickly has boomeranged. For example, difficulties have developed with an attempt to "mass produce" Vietnamese pacification leaders at a special school at Vung Tau, and the school's enrollment has dwindled.

Generally, however, American officials find some reason for optimism. Gen. Nguyen Duc Thang, Minister for Pacification in the Ky Government, is regarded by Americans working with him as realistic, zealous and imaginative. Also, budgeting procedures of the Vietnamese Government—long a worry—have been improved.

**Reds' reaction watched.** Americans in the program feel that it has reached a point where it can begin to work. The big question is how the Communists will react.

Should the Reds decide to switch back from conventional warfare involving fairly large units to guerrilla-type warfare pressed by small groups all over the country, the pacification program would be in trouble.

Some observers here believe that the U. S. then would have no choice but to invade Communist North Vietnam, risking intervention by Red China.

The prevailing view in Saigon is that the next few months may prove crucial

## SAIGON

Now moving into a new phase is the "other war" in Vietnam—the "pacification" program.

Aim of the program is to make key areas of South Vietnam militarily secure, then to lift living standards and attack social problems, as promised by President Johnson and Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky at their meeting in Honolulu six months ago.

Many of the problems of pacification are older than the war itself. Exploitation of those problems—land hunger, lack of education, for example—has been one of the strongest weapons of the Communists. New problems are created by the continuing build-up of U. S. forces.

On-the-spot surveys out in the provinces by members of the International Staff of "U. S. News & World Report" show that wheels of the pacification program have stopped spinning and the program is moving ahead in some regions, while in other regions there has been little or no progress.

One yardstick that can be used is what has been happening in the last six months in the four areas that have high-priority in the program.

A "highlight" report on those areas: **Binh Dinh.** In population, this is Vietnam's largest Province. Military security has been achieved to a large degree by the crack South Korean Capital Division and the 22nd Vietnamese Division. Vietnamese civilian leaders working in the pacification plan are beginning to get results that please American officials.

**Gia Dinh.** This is the Province surrounding Saigon. The situation shows improvement. Attacks by the U. S. First Division on Communist strongholds to the north and northwest have blunted the threat to Saigon. American and Vietnamese intelligence is well co-ordinated—a first step toward pacification.

**Quang Nam.** This is the area around the Da Nang air base. There has been no progress here—chiefly because of political eruptions last spring, when radical Bud-

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in deciding whether pacification can prevent escalation of the war into a much larger conflict.

Following are close-up looks at the progress and problems of pacification as seen by members of the "U. S. News & World Report" survey team.

## QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

"We are late, but we have finally started moving," said a top American official in this Province, which is often called "the cradle of Vietnamese revolutions."

Delay in pacification is understandable. Into this Province pour troops and matériel from North Vietnam. A few months ago, U. S. marines launched a series of massive "spoiling attacks" against Communist infiltrators. Then the marines left. Now there are more Com-

American volunteer organization, the International Rescue Committee. A Spanish surgeon under contract to AID is working in the Province hospital. An American couple assigned by the American Friends Service Committee is preparing to open a day school for children of working mothers and war widows.

A representative of the U. S. Information Service has helped the Vietnamese start a biweekly newspaper to counter clandestine Communist propaganda.

**Program is "rolling."** Sit in on working sessions of the AID group and you hear discussion of such problems as these: how to get a sugar-cane expert assigned to the Province, which is the center of Vietnam's cane industry; how to speed shipment of spare parts; how to improve coastal-shipping facilities.

No one has any illusions about the

to pacify a village, how do officials in Washington know how long it will take to clean up the whole country?"

After months of frustration, however, a new and tougher approach to pacification is starting to pay off.

As one American officer put it: "We began by attempting hasty clearing operations and calling the areas secure. Then we turned around to find the areas still loaded with small units of Viet Cong. We have had to settle down to weeding them out, hamlet by hamlet."

**Road to security.** It has been found that there are three steps to success:

1. Clearing an area of Viet Cong units.

2. Securing that area with an outside arc of Vietnamese and Allied troops and stationing local militia in villages and hamlets.

3. Injecting 59-man "new life development" teams which screen and classify residents, establish a government, train local officials, adjust grievances, reorganize social and economic activities and rout out the remaining Communist influences.

Drive through the area and you find that methods of farming are being improved, new schools are being built, markets are being constructed, medical services are available, bridges and culverts—some blasted as many as 17 times by the Viet Cong—are in place again.

**"Grateful to U. S."** A comment from 41-year-old Nguyen Lac, a hamlet chief:

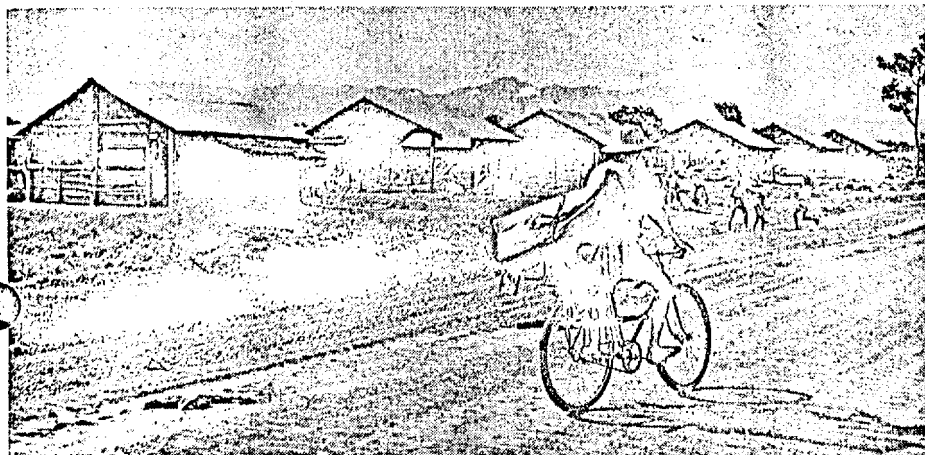
"Our people are still poor. That hasn't changed. But now we have a new market, water wells, a school, canals and a repaired dam. We don't know whether to thank the Vietnamese Government or AID. Neither tells us clearly which help is from whom. Yet we are more grateful to the U. S. than to our Government, because our Government did not help us before the Americans came."

One big problem is the lack of qualified Vietnamese administrators. On that point, the American-educated chief of the Province, Dr. Nguyen Huu Chi, 31, made this blunt statement:

"Three graduates of the National Institute of Administration are sent to each Province each year. But they're sent with no support into a system which is corrupt and inefficient. Soon they become maladjusted and have the choice of becoming corrupt, too, or being thrown out."

Vigilance is necessary to prevent loss of AID commodities. James Herbert, AID representative in the Province, said this:

"You have to watch goods like a hawk, from port to hamlet, then recheck to see if they are being used on projects for which they were intended."



—USN&WR Photo

Homes being rebuilt with village labor, Marine help and U. S. AID material in Quang Nam Province near Da Nang. Hamlet was leveled during fighting earlier.

munists here than ever before—infiltrators plus local recruits.

However, 6,000 South Korean marines are permanently in the Province now, and it is hoped by the Allies that the bolstered military force will provide a shield for the pacification program, which is picking up momentum.

**Port is big help.** A reporter returning to the Province after an absence of eight months finds big changes. For example, a makeshift port is in operation where there was none before. It manages to unload 75 to 100 tons of cargo daily, brought down the coast from Da Nang.

Last year, AID officials here complained that they were getting less than 20 per cent of what had been promised them. Now, adequate shipments are coming in by air as well as by sea.

The sick are being treated by an American Red Cross team and two medical teams of refugees from Red Cuba who work under the sponsorship of an

size of the pacification job. Almost every opinion offered is prefaced by the comment:

"It is going to be a long war."

But, even in this relatively remote part of the country, there is a feeling that American power has started to roll. A local schoolteacher and politician put it this way:

"People here are convinced that the Government and the Americans are going to win, but they worry about how to get through the period until victory comes without being killed or losing what little they have."

## HOA VANG DISTRICT,

## Quang Nam Province

In this area, just south of the huge Da Nang military complex, you find no valid timetable for pacification.

A U. S. Marine officer remarked:

"When we see 2005/06/29 : CIA-RDP67B00446R000400120024-9

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Most military men here believe that the biggest battles are still to come. Viet Cong forces in Quang Nam have increased to 10,000 men—3,000 more than a year ago. They are supported by the North Vietnamese 21st Regiment.

American officers are confident of military victory. Said Lieut. Col. Van Bell, commander of a U. S. Marine battalion: "Pacification problems are a lot harder to handle than fighting."

### TAN AN, Long An Province

"To pacify a hamlet is usually easy. To keep it pacified is very difficult."

That comment came from a Vietnamese official in this Province southwest of Saigon. The Province is important because through it stretches the last leg of National Highway 4, the main road from the Mekong Delta to Saigon. Priority is being given to pacifying hamlets along both sides of the highway. The program is intended to fill the dual need of securing the vital transportation link and

Besides a shortage of forces, a complaint of Province officials is that the pacification teams too often leave hamlets with developments uncompleted.

Without adequate security, assassinations and kidnappings by the Viet Cong are an ever-present danger. In recent months, the Communists have been releasing kidnap victims after a few weeks of "indoctrination."

Viet Cong harassment is causing more and more people to leave this area. So there is a manpower shortage and a resultant shortage of rice. An American agriculture expert says, however, that progress is expected in production of between-seasons second crops, such as melon, and sugar cane, that can be produced without disrupting rice planting.

The security problem is complicated by the presence of about 8,000 Communist soldiers in the Province.

**Fear of reprisal.** If pacification really is to succeed here, military experts say, the village militia must be built up, and regional forces under the Province chief must be increased.

The big difficulty, according to a U. S. adviser, is that "the Viet Cong actually can operate anywhere—and in the disputed areas, the people are more likely to lean toward the Viet Cong because they are afraid of reprisals."

### ● Summing it all up:

The pacification program is showing some results, but there are just not enough troops to assure security so that the job can be done with maximum efficiency behind a military shield.

Some American strategists here appear ready to put much of the increasing U. S. strength into pacification missions, to speed results.

What has been developed so far, American officials say, are concepts of "how to do it"—training leaders, establishing close liaison with district and provincial chiefs, and determining how and where troops can best be used to safeguard the pacification process.

**Indirect benefits.** Said a high-ranking American:

"You really cannot expect to be able to judge results until next summer or next autumn. This first year was a time of getting our organization together and consolidating our ideas."

While the program has shown few concrete results so far, there are indications of indirect benefits to the Allied cause. A young U. S. Army medic reported, for example:

"Most of the civilians I treat come from Communist-controlled areas. No one expects gratitude. But many of the patients give valuable information on the Communist forces—and that helps us get pacification." [END]

Water wells have a high priority among the self-help projects at village level.



U. S. AID provided a market place in Giang Nam hamlet as part of the pacification program. It cost \$334, plus 150 bags of cement, 150 aluminum roof sheets.

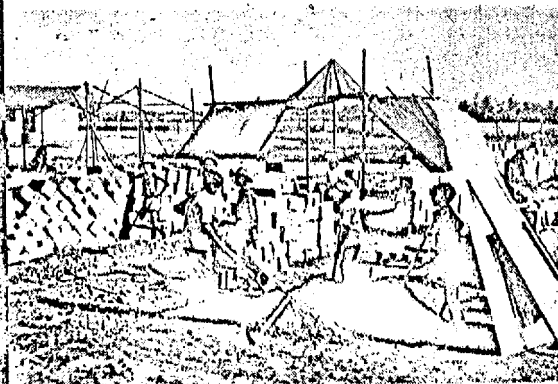
bringing the Province's 380,000 people under Government control.

So far this year, 13 hamlets have undergone pacification "treatment" by 59-man teams. One of the 13 has gone back to the Viet Cong because the security forces were unable to prevent a Communist battalion from making its presence felt and intimidating the peasants.

A total of 8 teams will attempt to pacify 16 hamlets in the Province this year; the goal next year is 11 teams, pacifying 22 hamlets. Official records show that 543 hamlets in Long An Province are earmarked for pacification.

"Security is our problem," said Lieut. Col. Nguyen Van Nguu, Province chief.

Seven-room Que Son High School is being built by students.



—USN&WR Photos