

LETTER FROM SOUTH VIETNAM

MARCH 1

WHILE the objective of creating "a social revolution," to build "a better material life" and establish "democracy in the rural areas"—the rather well-worn phrases enunciated by the leaders of South Vietnam after their meeting in Honolulu last month with President Johnson—is perhaps impossible of achievement at such a late hour in this tormented, and by now cynical, country, it at least represents a new awareness on the part of both the South Vietnamese and the Americans of fundamental revolutionary dynamics. Even if one accepts the sincerity of the young leaders who, with our suddenly impassioned encouragement, have at last come up with something resembling a revolutionary program, it would be unreasonable, after so many promises have gone unfulfilled, to expect that anything but the most limited progress can be made before the end of 1966. There is, in fact, an odd contrast between the grandiose statements issued at Honolulu, which had such a strong Johnsonian ring as to amount almost to a call for a Great Vietnamese Society, and the more restrained announcements that have been made here of plans for what is being called "rural construction and development"—a term that has in this context replaced the previously all-embracing term "pacification," which now denotes, specifically, military campaigns to clear out the Vietcong. It is too soon to gauge the concrete results, if any, of the new pacification-cum-construction efforts, but some tentative assessments can be made.

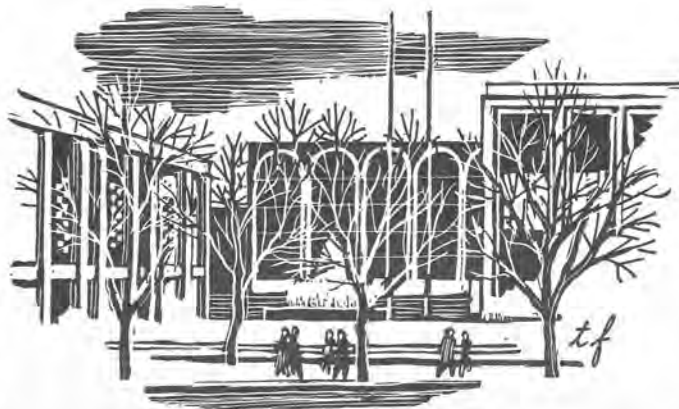
American advisers and observers here who have been involved in earlier schemes of the sort agree that the current one is at least more realistic in its recognition of the mistakes of the previous experiments, which failed, one after another, because of poor planning and poor execution. In general, the earlier reform programs were too broad in concept and too centralized in their administration, and were constantly caught up in webs of personal and bureaucratic conflict reaching from Saigon down into the provinces. Perhaps the biggest mistake was a failure to establish effective coordination between the military and the civic-action aspects of these plans; they invariably collapsed because of a

lack of sustained security measures in the villages and hamlets. Direct participation by the peasants was never spontaneous and seldom became more than halfhearted, mainly because of the fear of Vietcong reprisals. During the early sixties, there was the Strategic Hamlet Program, directed by Ngo Dinh Nhu, the brother of Ngo Dinh Diem. The program's chief aim was to establish and maintain political control by creating what amounted to private paramilitary forces, and its main accomplishment was to extend the grip of the Ngo family. Whatever else can be said about the two murdered brothers, Diem and Nhu did at least have a purpose. The programs of the shaky regimes that succeeded them, though they were also motivated primarily by the urge for political self-preservation, were inhibited at the start by military conditions of near-collapse and later on by the lack of both a coherent philosophy of government and a grasp of counter-revolutionary techniques. The attempts at rural reform between late 1963 and mid-1965 were, at best, sporadic ameliorative measures, vitiated not only by power contests among civilian and military officials but by corruption as well.

Not that all such struggles are now over or that corruption has been completely eliminated. Indeed, as a result of the huge and still increasing American involvement in Vietnam, plus inflation, the problem of corruption is worse than ever; as for the contests for political strength and influence, if they are not as open or as violent as they once were, they continue to simmer. Yet, for the first time, there seems to be both an attempt at genuine self-diagnosis by the Vietnamese and an acceptance by the Americans of fuller responsibility for guiding as well as for financing the reform program. This new approach by both parties has led to what looks like a workable plan—which was, in fact,

evolved before the Honolulu meeting and is now undergoing further refinement. It remains to be seen whether it can be effectively carried out in the face of the long-continued social disintegration, the still unresolved bureaucratic confusion within both the Vietnamese and the American hierarchies, a paucity of Vietnamese civilian leadership at the top and of trained cadres below, and the sheer pressure of the war and of the general uncertainty about the relative probability of its continuation by prolonged fighting, its dying out in ultimate stalemate, or its sudden cessation in a cease-fire. And the dangers and perplexities posed by each of these three possibilities must, in turn, be weighed in relation to the enemy's immediate purposes and tactics and his long-term objectives and strategy, which are bound to shift according to whether the government makes or fails to make headway in its efforts to convince peasants that it not only can protect them but can offer them a better way of life than the Vietcong.

AT the moment, the Vietcong and at least nine North Vietnamese regiments that have been infiltrated into South Vietnam seem to be pursuing a strategy based primarily on avoiding further large-scale battles with the Americans except on definite Communist terms, and on continuing to engage the South Vietnamese government forces in small or medium-sized attacks whenever and wherever possible. The great majority of the casualties suffered by the government troops, which continue to be three or four times as high as those of the Americans, are suffered in such attacks. The Communists are still able to exploit their mobility and elusiveness in the highlands stretching through central Vietnam from the Laotian border to the coast. They are still moving large forces more or less at will in this crucial area, much of which is jungle, and supporting them—though with increasing difficulty, under the impact of our air attacks—via the recently extended Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos. The American strategy is to seek out and fight the large forces, as was done successfully, though at a heavy cost, in the week-long Ia Drang Valley battle, near the Cambodian border, last November, and this year, on a



lesser scale, in Operation Masher, on the coastal plain. The Communists, in their current efforts to avoid a repetition of this type of direct combat, are withdrawing from some of their longtime strongholds. In February, they moved out of the rice-rich An Lao Valley, near the coast, apparently on the theory that even the combined American and Vietnamese forces will not be able to hold the place indefinitely. Thus, they believe, an area like An Lao can eventually be retaken, or reinfiltated, without a fight—something that has happened before in a number of other places that the Americans have swept through and then left. In the opinion of most military men here, the Communists' strategy is a logical one, at least right now, for until some four hundred thousand American troops have been added to the forces now in Vietnam, the ability to hunt and kill the Vietcong in their sanctuaries and also hold on to more than a few large areas at a time simply doesn't exist. This, in turn, means that if reconstruction measures are attempted in too many places at

once, the Vietcong will effectively disrupt such efforts, as they have done in the past, with consequent propaganda benefits.

None of the military men I have talked with here, from General William C. Westmoreland down to company commanders in the field, favor the permanent-enclave theory—the proposal to defend key bases and the principal cities and towns and let the Vietcong control the rest of the country—that has been advocated by General James M. Gavin and former Ambassador George Kennan, but, naturally, they are all aware of the limitations imposed by the number of troops now available. Together, the Vietnamese, the Americans, and their allies (notably the Koreans) can muster about nine hundred thousand men, two hundred thousand of them being American troops. Only about thirty per cent of these Americans can be employed as strike forces at any given time, for the rest are assigned to guarding bases and other areas and keeping supply lines open, or are taking necessary rest. Here, again, the diffi-

culty of carrying out the pacification-construction program is underlined. Even with a million and a half troops, the job of clearing out the Vietcong completely would be a colossal one, in view of the Communists' well-known ability to switch back and forth as they choose between counter-offensives and a resumption of guerrilla tactics. Consequently, an increasing number of knowledgeable Americans believe that even if successful Allied search-and-destroy operations are mounted, the war will eventually reach a stalemate. If that should happen, or if there should be an agreement for peace talks—followed, inevitably, by a long uncertain period in which attempts would be made to negotiate the intricate matters of troop withdrawal and methods of policing the country—the need to continue with pacification and construction would, of course, remain. The question would be: Pacification and construction by whom? The Communists, unless they were completely defeated, which seems unlikely, would certainly have something to say about this, and in that eventuality

the war could very well become a contest in which the North Vietnamese and the guerrillas of the National Liberation Front would undoubtedly continue to combine terror and assassination with propaganda and to do what they could to maintain their own hold on as many of their so-called "combat villages" as possible. No one here supposes that the Communist organization, so carefully built up over two decades throughout South Vietnam, will be readily destroyed—if, indeed, it ever can be. In the last analysis, whatever the South Vietnamese and the Americans do, it is on this organization that the Vietcong and their friends in Hanoi are depending for victory—if not now, then sometime in the future. The battle for Vietnam is, therefore, likely to evolve into a prolonged duel of will and perseverance, necessarily supported on our side by the continued presence of some military force, backed by threats of more.

Privately, the majority of the Americans, both military and civilian, who are leading the struggle here feel that President Johnson, in waging his peace offensive so ardently and so publicly, has failed to explain clearly to the American people the consequences of a cease-fire at this time. It is the unofficial view of many of the Americans and Vietnamese who have been wrestling the longest with pacification and construction programs that no formal peace offensive should have been mounted until at least a third of the country could undertake such programs under permanent protection. This, they point out, cannot be done until there are enough American or other Allied troops here to keep the Vietcong out of the areas in question for good, so that the government cadres could complete their work. In this sense, war and construction, though seemingly incompatible, go together, and negotia-

tions, especially prolonged and inconclusive ones, these men say, might simply serve to turn the situation to the Communists' advantage, as another inconclusive Geneva settlement could. While the men on the scene do not agree with all of Senator Mike Mansfield's views, they feel that he has faced up more straightforwardly than the President to the realities of the situation in stating in the Mansfield Report that "what might eventually materialize through negotiations . . . cannot be foreseen at this time with any degree of certainty," and in declaring that "under present concepts and plans, then, what lies ahead is, literally, a vast and continuing undertaking in social engineering in the wake of such military progress as may be registered."

THE Americans are still determined that the bulk of the social engineering must be undertaken by the Vietnamese themselves, the role of the

United States being confined to offers of advice and donations of material help. An attempt is being made to coordinate our overlapping lines of policy and administration by placing them all in the able hands of Deputy Ambassador William Porter. Porter's task, which is not an easy one, is to settle the jurisdictional disputes that have continued among the various American agencies engaged in the effort—most notably the Army, the State Department's Agency for International Development, and the Central Intelligence Agency. The retired Air Force major general and counter-insurgency expert Edward G. Lansdale, who is now serving in our Embassy in Saigon, continues to work behind the scenes at establishing liaison between individual Americans and Vietnamese.

As the program proceeds, more and more of it is expected to come under the direction of A.I.D., but at the moment this agency lacks sufficient manpower in the provinces, having fewer than two hundred economic advisers there compared to a thousand representing the Army at the sector, or provincial-headquarters, level, not to mention another thousand or so working for the Army at subsector, or district, levels. These military subsector advisers have often formed very close and effective relationships with their Vietnamese counterparts, the district chiefs, who are the vertebrae in the backbone of whatever pacification and construction efforts are being made by province chiefs. The feeling in the American Embassy, however, is that construction should be essentially a civilian undertaking, with the military much less in evidence.

It is not so simple for the Vietnamese to de-emphasize the role of *their* military. The lack of competent civilian officials, primarily a legacy of the colonial past, and the fact that the country

ruled by a military Directory, probably means that construction will continue to be carried out by military men for some time, though Premier Nguyen Cao Ky, with whom I recently spent a day travelling through central Vietnam, told me he hopes to replace those district chiefs who are Army captains—and this includes most of them—with civilians over the next year or so. Premier Ky, whose political stature was rather disproportionately elevated as a result of President Johnson's trip to Honolulu to meet him and his fellow-members of the ruling junta, continues to make a good impression on the Americans here, despite his fondness for Pop Art showmanship. (The sight of Ky and his wife dropping in on embattled villages dressed in "His" and "Hers" black flying suits had a comic-strip quality.) I have heard Ky compared with the young Mohammed V of Morocco, who, when he assumed the throne, was better known for his love of fast cars and fun than for his capacity to govern, but who, once he had been given counsel by Algerian and Moroccan elders, became a highly able king, strong and reform-minded. Ky has shown something of the same pattern of development, though in his case there is always the danger that he will seem to the Vietnamese too much of an American protégé—a danger that he himself is aware of. "We realize that during eighty years of French control and ten years of Diem, a small minority profited but never the common people of Vietnam," he told me. "But to get ourselves accepted by the people takes time."

It may take more time than Ky realizes, for among the Vietnamese there remains a strong disinclination to support a military government indefinitely, and among leading Buddhists and Catholics, as well as in the press and various political groups, pressure to bring in more civilians is again rising, though it has not yet become the emotional issue it was a year or two ago. A minor reorganization of the government after the Honolulu meeting—prompted by indistinct rumblings some weeks earlier of another coup—did not satisfy the demand that civilians play more important roles. This demand will almost surely increase in intensity, especially if the Buddhists go ahead with plans to create what is to be called a Buddhist Force—in effect, a political party of Buddhist lay leaders. There are also signs of a new polarization wherein both Buddhists and Catholics who favor negotia-

tions with the Vietcong will line up together against Buddhists and Catholics who oppose such negotiations.

Ky's announced long-range plans for the preparation of a new constitution and for a referendum on it, followed by free elections, have not yet had much of an impact on this nation, which has heard such pledges before. The skeptical consensus of those Vietnamese who have any awareness of or any interest in the democratic process is that seeing is believing. What may turn out to be more important than the legal introduction of democratic forms is the application at the local level of measures that, for the first time, really promise to combine collective social and political activities with insurgency and counter-insurgency methods not altogether unlike those employed so successfully by the Vietcong. The old military aphorism "Know your enemy" is at last beginning to be fully understood and accepted here. Whether it can be widely applied in both rural and urban areas—the importance of the cities as an insurgency battleground having grown in the last year, with the influx of refugees—will be the true test of the construction program. One danger that is already apparent is that the plan will become too mechanical in its implementation, too heavily dependent on blueprints and schedules handed down from the top. Where the Communists work horizontally through cells in hamlets, villages, and districts, and tie their program together in nine military regions or zones, which receive orders both from Hanoi and from the National Liberation Front, the government's structure is still a vertical one, working down from the central focus of power in Saigon, through the forty-three province chiefs, to the chiefs of the districts and villages.

The present setup in Saigon imparts a peculiar vagueness to the system, consisting, as it does, of a ten-man Directory and an executive branch, the latter presided over by Prime Minister Ky, who is himself a Directory member. Sitting on the Directory, which is headed by Chief of State Nguyen Van Thieu, are the four Army corps commanders—who are, in fact, the most powerful men in the country. Theoretically, their job is to mold policy and then pass it on to Ky to carry out. In their individual capacities as "government delegates" as well as Army chiefs they are in the position of being able to do what they wish, in the manner of warlords, irrespective of what Ky may order. Ky, who can be thoroughly disarming in private con-

versation, admitted to me with a smile, "This creates a very delicate position for me, but so far, at least, we have had a solid consensus in the Directory and we haven't had to take any votes. I just tell my fellow-officers, 'You decide what you want, and I'll carry it out.'" In practice, however, it is more often than not the four corps commanders who, acting on their own, not only decide what they want done but, more important, whom they want to have do it. This means, among other things, that province chiefs are being shifted about according to the whims of these four men; not all the whims, unfortunately, are in tune with the national construction effort, since they appear sometimes to be motivated primarily by self-protection and self-aggrandizement. To anyone taking the long view backward through the colonial period and forward to the possibilities of democratic achievement in Vietnam, such things raise the question of whether the sickness of the past can ever be overcome. An American friend of mine who has been here since 1955 says, "There is probably no other solution now but to go on trying. However, the longer we stick with the non-military construction task, the more difficult it will be to avoid concerning ourselves directly with Vietnamese political problems, and particularly with those related to such things as a man's being removed from his job because he is too effective, or because he is beginning to look too much like a natural leader, or—what is even more dangerous—because he seems too much a pet of the Americans."

LATE in February, just such a situation arose in the important central province of Binh Dinh, which includes one of four priority areas in the 1966 national construction program. These four areas—the three others are a group of villages around the northern base of Danang, most of the western delta province of An Giang, and Saigon and parts of six surrounding provinces—have been accorded priority both because they are of strategic importance and because the government wants to prove that it can effectively introduce and pursue its new construction program under varied conditions. Each of these areas presents a different set of problems, involving such factors as the religious and political backgrounds of the population, the presence or imminent presence of Vietcong or North Vietnamese forces, the economic situation (including the number of refugees from bombed hinterland zones), and

the availability of rice. The Vietnamese and the Americans have agreed that Binh Dinh—a cradle of revolutionary activity, where the Vietcong have always been strong—is in many respects the most important of the four priority regions. It is the one where the greatest progress has been made with the new construction techniques. These results have been attributable mainly to effective work done over the past year by Colonel Le Truong Tuong, the province chief, and a dedicated deputy, Major Nguyen Be. Despite their accomplishments, Colonel Tuong and Major Be have just been eased out of their jobs, to the dismay of American provincial advisers, who claim that the construction effort will be set back at least six months in consequence.

The removal of the two men was sought, as Prime Minister Ky has privately acknowledged, by Major General Vinh Loc, the commander of the II Corps, which includes Binh Dinh and most of the surrounding plateau area. I was told that General Loc and at least one other high-ranking Army officer in the area wanted Colonel Tuong and Major Be out of Binh Dinh for reasons of their own, the ostensible reason being that they were effective at the top administrative level but lacked support below. This was categorically denied by every American I spoke with in the province, and I was able to see for myself that the two men had been remarkably effective in imbuing the district chiefs and their staffs with new spirit and in creating a tight and efficient organization. Here was a clear case of a powerful commander exerting pressure to achieve his own ends, which were said to include the bringing in of a cousin as the new province chief. The Americans, when they were apprised of what was going on, did what they could to stop the transfers, but these efforts were made too late. "This is one we lost, and it's too bad, but I don't know what else we could or should have done," one of them said. There are others here, however, who feel strongly that if we mean business in Vietnam, we must do a lot more to save men like Tuong and Be from being moved around like pawns—that in such instances the United States should bring sufficient pressure sufficiently early—at the Directory level, if necessary. As one rather bitter American critic said, "All those fine declarations by President Johnson and Vice-President Humphrey won't mean a thing if we are still afraid or unwilling to fight for the ideas and the people we believe in. It's true that the threat of

sanctions is a dangerous procedure, but there are other forms of leverage, including the establishment of much closer relations with individual Vietnamese leaders in order to help prevent disastrous shifts and power plays. This sort of thing happens all the time because there is no political structure in Vietnam that enables a man to move upward through normal channels. It's a cinch that the Vietnamese aren't going to change, so we'd better."

The program that Tuong and Be created is built, as are such programs elsewhere in the country, around Rural Construction Units, as they are officially called, of sixty-six men. (The master plan just refashioned in Saigon calls for fifty-nine in such cadres, but the number will continue to vary from province to province, depending on specific local needs and the availability of trained people.) Fifteen of the R.C.U.s are currently functioning in Binh Dinh, five are held in reserve, and the members of six others have just finished a course, set up on American initiative a couple of years ago, at the main R.C.U. training center, in Vung Tau, a resort town on the sea near Saigon. All but two of the working teams are operating within three provincial priority zones—a valley to the northeast of the provincial capital, Qui Nhon, and two other valleys to the northwest of it. Each R.C.U. is theoretically made up of an armed People's Action Team (forty men), a Civil Affairs Team (sixteen), and a Propaganda and Maneuver Team (ten). The leader of the unit is the platoon chief of the People's Action Team, who has two assistants—one for security and one for political work. Under the security man are three squads of twelve men each, whose main job is to protect the hamlet or hamlets they are working in—usually one or two at a time for a period of three or four months. The political man directs the two remaining teams—Civil Affairs and Propaganda and Maneuver. The first consists of an investigating cell, whose task is to interview all the people in each hamlet the team works in and make a preliminary effort to classify the population, politically and otherwise; an administrative cell, including hamlet chiefs, which takes a census of the land and other properties and starts organizing the population for hamlet and village-council elections; and an action cell, which is in charge of taking any necessary steps to deal with elements harassing the hamlet. The Propaganda and Maneuver Team also has three cells, one for "maneuver," or acquainting itself with local sentiment

and trying to get the people to work together; one for civic action; and one for propaganda. Essentially, this group's job is to organize political courses in the hamlet, by age and other groups; to disseminate propaganda; and to get self-help and repair projects started—on schools, bridges, dams, and so on.

Binh Dinh, which has a population of nine hundred thousand, including some one hundred thousand refugees from neighboring provinces, was occupied almost solidly by the Vietminh—the anti-French predecessors of the Vietcong—between 1945 and 1955. When the Communists withdrew to the north after the French war, they left cadres behind them in the hamlets and villages, and these people create the vital protective screen for the Vietcong. In Binh Dinh, as elsewhere, construction starts only after the extermination and pacification efforts against main-force Vietcong units and guerrilla bands have been completed. In the first stage, these efforts are conducted both by the Americans and their allies (Binh Dinh is actually in the Korean Division's sphere of operations) and by the Vietnamese regular forces. Following the military action, clearing operations against any remaining guerrilla groups are carried on by the government's Regional and Popular Forces—provincial and local troops, respectively—and by the National Police Corps. Then the Rural Construction Units, spearheaded by the People's Action Team, come in and begin their work, in cooperation with Popular Force contingents that patrol village perimeters, and with newly established local self-defense forces, including young boys and girls and elderly men and women. At the top of the whole provincial structure is a Rural Construction Council, headed by the province chief and two vice-chairmen, and with a secretariat composed of district chiefs and their deputies, the P.A.T. chiefs, and the various heads of the special types of cadre, such as agricultural and health experts. Each district also has a council of its own, supervising the work of two or three Rural Construction Units. In all, there are 675 hamlets in Binh Dinh, of which fewer than a third are today considered "secure," and hence ready for follow-up construction work. The 1966 schedule calls for building fifty-six new hamlets in the province and strengthening fifty-one others—a modest goal.

Two years ago, when the P.A.T.s were originally formed, they were known as Advance People's Action groups. Directed by Vietnamese after being organized and trained by the

United States Central Intelligence Agency, they were, specifically, guerrilla outfits of six men each who, dressed in black pajamas, like those worn by the Vietcong, surreptitiously entered a Vietcong-controlled hamlet, usually at night; engaged in direct armed counter-insurgency action against the Communists; and followed this up, once the Vietcong were dispersed, by staying on the scene and helping the people harvest their rice and repair whatever damage had been done. Some counter-insurgency experts among the Americans feel that the method of operation should have been retained. Actually, a certain amount of clandestine counter-terror is still being carried on, mostly by ex-Vietcong who have surrendered under the Chieu Hoi, or Open Arms, Program, but there are also some Vietnamese—usually ex-Vietminh men, like Major Be in Binh Dinh—who feel that pacification and construction will never make serious headway until the program relies to a much greater extent on secret activity and organization within each hamlet. Even though the P.A.T. members are now selected from specific hamlets and villages, then taken off for the ten-week training course at Vung Tau, and sent back where they came from, they still bear a government stigma when they return, and the peasants of Vietnam are understandably mistrustful of any representative of the central government. If the Vietcong are to be defeated at their own game, the effort to recapture small areas from the Communists must be based on infiltration from within, preferably by such non-government elements as the peasants' union of the Confederation of Vietnamese Trade Unions. The peasants' union, once the biggest agrarian union in Southeast Asia, was destroyed during the Diem period and is now in the process of being rebuilt. Secret campaigns against Vietcong



agents right in their own hamlets—dangerous work, for even though there are only a handful of Vietcong in many hamlets, the handful control the population—would confront the Communists with opposition based on their own agitprop methods. Once the people of a hamlet—preferably a hamlet where the harsh taxation and conscription methods of the Communists had aroused resentment—were persuaded that they could obtain more benefits from a friendly government than from the Vietcong, the government would have won half the battle. The other half would be won when autonomous hamlets and “coöperative villages” were created. The role of the central government and of the Americans would then be mainly to give these communities economic assistance.

This concept, amounting to a decentralized, non-Communist form of agrarian Socialism, is perhaps somewhat naïve politically, but as I travelled around Binh Dinh and took a look at several of the rural construction projects, I was inclined to agree with some of the Vietnamese I had spoken to, who told me they were still worried about over-abrupt, overbearing central-government participation in the rural construction program. With two American advisers of the Binh Dinh P.A.T.s, I went first, by helicopter, to a village consisting of three hamlets in the middle of the province, just west of the main north-south highway, where a P.A.T., its members dressed in jungle camouflage suits dyed purple, had been operating for three months. The hamlet in which the team was working the day we were there had a population of ninety-seven families—four hundred and thirty individuals—and the P.A.T. chief proudly showed us a preliminary census map his men had made, on which ten houses belonging to “Vietcong sympathizers”—families with relatives now in the Vietcong—were colored red, fifteen houses of families with relatives in North Vietnam were colored yellow, and several houses belonging to families of “doubtful” loyalties were also marked. One P.A.T. squad was currently on patrol, another was helping the peasants harvest rice, and the third was being held in reserve. The hamlet had been considered insecure from the spring of 1963 until the spring of 1965, when government troops conducted a campaign against the Vietcong in the area. Now, with the P.A.T. there, and some Popular Forces nearby, it was regarded as secure, but the Vietcong were known to have a regiment near the Phu Cu pass,

not far to the north, and the population, though it seemed to appreciate the presence of the P.A.T., was well aware that it was still in danger, especially since the P.A.T. was scheduled to move on soon to another village area. In this hamlet, it seemed to me, a fairly good start had been made on construction; the houses had been cleaned up, the fields were being worked, and everyone appeared busy. There was obviously still much to be done, though, in the way of rooting out the Vietcong, creating a permanent sense of security, and bringing in additional teams to assist with agriculture, education, and health.

Our next stop was the village of Hoai An, even nearer to the Phu Cu pass. Hoai An, still in a secondary phase of pacification, was little more than a fort protected by some Regional and Popular Forces, and, surrounded as it was by the Vietcong, it served as a clear illustration of the fact that it would be a long time before all or even most of Binh Dinh was sufficiently pacified to benefit from a permanent construction program. The same was true of Bong Son; an isolated airstrip at the northern end of the province, just south of where the 1st Airborne Cavalry Division and the American Marines were soon to start their sweeps in the An Lao Valley. A Special Forces sergeant we spoke with there said, “There are snipers all around us, and everything four clicks [kilometres] to the north is solid Vietcong.”

Ten days later, I flew back up to Bong Son with Prime Minister Ky, when the combined American and Vietnamese offensives both in the An Lao Valley and in the Dam Quan Valley, to the northeast, were under way and the Vietcong either had been driven off or had pulled out of the territory. The pressure on the area had been relieved somewhat, but the enormous job of completing the pacification, to say nothing of beginning construction work, remained apparent. Ky had dramatically ordered those of his top Ministers who were engaged in the construction program to follow him into the Dam Quan Valley, mainly to bolster the morale of the villagers, who had been under Vietcong influence almost continuously for a decade or more. In one village, we saw a twelve-foot-high white concrete Vietcong war memorial in the central square. Government troops had been here twice in the past three years but had not been able to stay. “We’ll stay this time,” Ky said grimly, but within a week bitter fighting had resumed in the valley, and it was obvious that convincing demon-

strations of the government's strength and real proof of its intention to remain would be needed in order to win the "hearts and minds" of these war-weary people.

IT has been said repeatedly, and with justification, that there are not only forty-three different wars in Vietnam, or one for each province, but two hundred and forty, or one for each district, and this was brought home to me during my stay in Binh Dinh. In Phuoc Hai, a fishing village of three hamlets I visited on the coast just northeast of Qui Nhon, a P.A.T. had been working for four months. The place was filled with refugees who had been driven out of fishing settlements to the north by the Vietcong. On a spit of land nearby a model village had been built for the refugees, but in Phuoc Hai itself, it seemed to me, very little had been done beyond offering the people a minimum of security and providing them with food and a few other necessities. Their reaction to our arrival by helicopter was more inquisitive than enthusiastic. The circumstances of the war and the condition of the people here were far different from what they were elsewhere in the province, one of the Vietnamese district-council officials pointed out. The primary need, he said, was a resuscitation of the fishing industry—which meant, first of all, getting some new boats, and then providing security measures that would allow the fishermen to take their catch to market.

The contrast between one community and another was further emphasized when we visited two hamlets only a few miles west of Phuoc Hai. In one, called Tho Nghia, which had been rated "insecure"—not safe from the Vietcong—a month before, considerable progress had been made by a P.A.T. that was working in cooperation with some Popular Force elements and a locally organized self-defense group. This group included a middle-aged woman who was sitting under a canopy holding a wooden pole to which two blocks were loosely attached; she was part of the warning system, she explained; if there was any report of Vietcong guerrillas around, she would sound her primitive klaxon. There was one big project in Tho Nghia in which the whole population was engaged, and that was the building of a new dam before the dry season began, in order to make sure there would be enough water to irrigate the fields. In the past, a dam in the same spot had been washed out each year by the spring floods, and an outside contractor had

been summoned to erect a new one, at a cost to the villagers of forty thousand piastres (about six hundred dollars). This year, the P.A.T. had persuaded the villagers to build a new dam themselves, with P.A.T. assistance, the hope being that next year the new self-help elements in the hamlet would repeat the project. The U.S.A.I.D. and American P.A.T. advisers had promised to bring in a tractor and a bulldozer. There was indeed a new spirit here, I thought.

I was equally impressed by the progress achieved in another hamlet, Khe Son, fifteen kilometres away. Last August, the Vietcong had made a firm stand at Khe Son, as a blasted market place and a number of shattered houses—the result of American bombs and South Vietnamese ground fire—attested. About twenty per cent of the population had either fled or been forced to leave with the Vietcong troops. Since the battle, some twenty-five hundred others had returned voluntarily. They had done so largely at the behest of Americans, particularly Richard Kriegel, the provincial A.I.D. representative, who, with two members of his staff and a few Marine engineers, had lived in the village for a month, despite the constant danger of a counterattack. First, the hamlet chief and his cohorts had been persuaded to come back and stay, and their return had inspired the return of most of the others. Since then, though the hamlet still bore many scars of the recent struggle, a considerable number of the damaged houses had been repaired with tin roofing, and so had the local school; Vietcong trenches and spider holes—tunnels—had been filled in; mines had been removed; and such rations as bulgur wheat and cooking oil had been brought in. The onus borne by the Americans and Vietnamese for the destruction had not been totally removed, but the quick action in restoring the place had made a good impression. The day I was there, Major Be, who was then still on duty in the province, handed out toys to the youngsters—the remains of nine thousand dollars' worth that the Americans in Qui Nhon had contributed at Christmas. I was struck by the fact that the children kept saying "Thank you" in English to Be, a Vietnamese.

THE problem of the over-all impact of Americans on Vietnam is one that has many subtle aspects. On the debit side, beyond the sad circumstance that American bombs and bullets and shells are killing Vietnamese

and destroying their homes, are the continued growth of a privileged class of Vietnamese who are profiting in all sorts of ways from the heavy influx of troops and money, and the soaring, and still essentially uncontrolled, inflation, caused largely by the fact that the prices paid by the Americans for everything from workers to women are much higher than the prices the Vietnamese pay. It is hoped that as the partnership between the Americans and the Vietnamese in rural construction continues to develop, the position of the Americans as friends, rather than overseers, will become clearer. So far, the Americans have tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible.

Initially, a quiet role played by a small group of American experts had a great deal to do with helping the Vietnamese untangle the administrative maze that had grown up during earlier reform efforts. Until recently, there were no fewer than thirty-nine different sorts of groups engaged in one form or another of rural construction and development. The first corrective steps were taken as far back as March, 1964, when the Advance Political Action teams, the predecessors of the P.A.T.s, were created and were put through a course at Vung Tau under the supervision of a thirty-eight-year-old Vietnamese Army captain named Le Xuan Mai. Mai, a Tonkinese who had been with the Vietminh until 1951, was quick to appreciate the wisdom of using Vietminh methods against the enemy, and, particularly, of placing undercover agents in Vietcong-dominated villages. "From the very start, with Mai, we were concerned with motivation—with how to keep a man in a dangerous village and get him to work with the people there," one of the Americans who worked on the program has recalled. "We got hold of a group of young men, most of whom had been influenced by the Vietcong, and put them through a military indoctrination course. We set the first teams down in Quang Ngai Province, just north of Binh Dinh. In mid-1965, it was decided to combine a political course with the course these people were getting, and it was then that the P.A.T. concept came into being. It was based on training forty-man teams in both political and paramilitary techniques. At the end of the ten-week course, seventy per cent of the men not only can handle a Browning automatic, a submachine gun, an M-1 rifle, a carbine, and a grenade but they can field tough political questions."

Mai is a quiet, intense man who is a

tough taskmaster. For the first week of the Vung Tau course, he lets his pupils wear ordinary green uniforms, but after that they wear the dark pajamas that are traditional for the clandestine agent and for the farmer as well. "You're peasants," he tells them. "Wear peasant clothing proudly." The first thing he does with a new group of candidates, especially if the group has been subjected to Vietcong propaganda, is to "straighten out their minds," as he puts it. "These boys come in with no knowledge of Communism or Marx, but they all talk some jargon that shows they've been exposed to propaganda," he says. "We listen to them rattle on, and then we suddenly hit them at the right moment with some facts of Vietnamese history, and we drive home the point that all invasions of Vietnam have come from the north. Bit by bit, we'll separate the truth from the legends." As the course progresses, there is a considerable amount of "self-criticism" and of Communist-style question-and-answer debate and group discussion, in five-man cells—much like an agitprop discussion run by the Vietcong. At the end of the course, Mai conducts a ceremony in front of a special shrine at Vung Tau, in which the three themes of victory, love, and sincerity are emphasized.

In addition to the P.A.T.s, twenty thousand members of which have now been trained, there pass through Vung Tau members of all the other mixed and overlapping groups of the past and present, for training or retraining. Elsewhere, in a large house on the outskirts of Saigon, there are trained what may turn out to be the most important groups of all, the Census/Grievance and Aspiration experts, who deal painstakingly with the long-term aspects of moral rejuvenation in the countryside. The members of this select group are mostly men over forty—former village or district officials or professional people, such as schoolteachers. They are specially chosen by the province chiefs and are sent to Saigon for a fifteen-day course, after which they return to their provinces as instructors themselves, selecting individual hamlet agents and giving them a repeat version of the basic fifteen-day course in preparation for their first assignment, which is to make a highly detailed blueprint of their respective hamlets. These reports are an extension of the census map work originally undertaken by members of the P.A.T. to pinpoint households with members in the Vietcong and so on. I was shown a few of the hamlet agents' surveys, and they seemed to me

a close approximation of the house-to-house canvasses that the Vietcong conduct to furnish the foundation for establishing complete control and to obtain multiple eyes and ears. Next, the Census/Grievance and Aspiration workers ascertain what the people of a hamlet want and what their complaints are. These workers, who operate independently of hamlet and village chiefs, and report directly to the province chief, could, in a sense, be considered *agents provocateurs*, though the South Vietnam government and the Americans supporting the program naturally reject the term. Moreover, although their reports are secret, they conduct their inquiries openly, unlike members of Ngo Dinh Nhu's Can Lao Party, whose identities were never known and who reported privately to Nhu alone. The emphasis now is always on the common desires of the hamlet citizens rather than on individual gripes, and American A.I.D. representatives have access to the reports. To cite two recent cases, one hamlet reported that it had no drinking water available within a radius of five kilometres, and another said that its pagoda, taken over as a headquarters five years ago by the Regular Army, had never been replaced; in both cases, as soon as the reports of the census agents were received, the province chief, with the help of his A.I.D. representative, took action to correct the situation. Some twenty-five hundred Census/Grievance and Aspiration men are now working in twenty-eight provinces, often in areas that are only semi-pacified. The effectiveness of their work is shown by the fact that about half of our useful intelligence about the Vietcong now comes from them.

If long-term construction and development are to be successful in Vietnam, and some sort of hamlet-by-hamlet opposition to the Vietcong is to be built up, these ends will probably be achieved largely as a result of the progress made by the Census/Grievance and Aspiration program. This will, however, take time, and the results it comes up with are bound to be spotty at first. For example, I was far less impressed by what I saw being done up north, particularly around the big base of Danang, than I had been in Binh Dinh. The Danang section is the area of the I Corps, and it consists of five provinces, with a population of approximately two and a half million. Only about a quarter of the area is regarded as secure, the rest being about evenly divided between territory controlled outright by the Vietcong and

zones where, although hard-core Vietcong elements have been cleared out, at least temporarily, local guerrillas are still active. Much of this region, that is, is still being fought over, and the Communists, since they have more troops in the north than they have ever had before, are quite capable of attacking again in strength.

One of the major difficulties in the north is a lack of sufficient manpower, especially in the area south of Danang, where the Vietnamese have been unable to create enough of a Popular Force or other local militia to be of help in defending the population. Most of the young men in a nine-village region that, up to late last year, had been under Vietcong control for a solid decade have either gone over to the Vietcong or fled with their families to Danang, where they can get good pay working for the Americans or can otherwise make money out of them. As a result, in this particular region the American Marines are tied down by the pacification-and-construction campaign, which keeps them from going out and pursuing the enemy. The Marines are proud of their construction program, which has won many friends and has undoubtedly brought the people many immediate benefits, especially medical ones, but a number of observers, both American and Vietnamese, feel that the Marines have become overzealous in their constructive efforts and should be released as soon as possible for combat, particularly since in developing their own program they have somewhat restricted or inhibited the introduction of the central government's program.

Not long after the Marines arrived in Vietnam last spring, they became involved in pacification and construction in a village called Lei Me. Starting with the provision of medical aid for the local population, the program quickly grew and soon included assistance to the village in building or repairing roads and bridges, schools, wells, and latrines, and also in constructing showers, which the villagers had never seen before. Success at Lei Me inspired Major General Lewis Walt, the Marine division commander, and a tough fighting man with a heroic combat record, who had become sold on rural development, to create a joint council of high-ranking Vietnamese and Americans, both military and non-military. This council, which has the backing of Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Thi, the I Corps commander and the single most powerful man in Vietnam, now meets regularly in Danang to discuss and formulate pacification-and-

construction policy. Since, of the four corps commanders, Thi is the most independent, the council often serves as a convenient instrument for helping him run his corps area as he sees fit—in conjunction with the Americans when he sees fit to consult them. Thi, a fervent nationalist who has frequently been suspected of wanting to assume still more power (his disclaimer is, "I have been offered the Prime Ministership three times and turned it down, so why should I try to grab it?"), has become increasingly well disposed toward the Americans since the arrival of the Marines, but he still exhibits a sporadic aloofness toward American assistance and is firmly on record against any "Americanization" of Vietnam. Recently, he ordered all the commercial signs in English in Danang taken down, and reminded the Vietnamese there to remember their national identity.

Thi is very concerned with current manpower problems. "In order to prosecute the war as we should, including more thorough bombing of the north, we need twice as many Americans and twice as many Regional and Popular Forces," he says. "And the local forces should be paid more than they are." He has promised to strengthen his own local forces, even if he has to bring volunteers or conscripts in from outside, but meanwhile the Marines have to hold the ground, especially in the touchy nine-village area. In five of the villages, grouped together to the west, only two of twenty-one hamlets are secure; the Marines are guarding two sides of the nine-village area, and mixed elements of local forces and some P.A.T. and miscellaneous special groups are at work in the remaining hamlets. The P.A.T.s are still being used in the north more for pacification than for construction, though this is contrary to their newly defined purpose. The most troublesome village in the area has been Cam Ne. Government troops took the place in September, and between then and late December the Vietcong counterattacked three times, the Marines being forced at one point to come to the rescue of a battered Regional Forces platoon. Now, at Thi's orders, Cam Ne is being levelled to the ground, except for its fruit trees, and trenches and tunnels from which the Vietcong had fought are being filled in. The population, which has been heavily indoctrinated by the Vietcong, is being moved to an area close to a nearby road, but theoretically, at least, the people will still be able to farm their old land. When I visited the village, the Marines were

handing out clothing supplied by the Catholic Relief Services, and the various Vietnamese elements in the village, including some P.A.T. members, were trying to get the villagers to cooperate in moving their homes and belongings. I saw few smiling faces. In this area, pacification and construction had obviously made little headway beyond an area two or three hundred yards wide on each side of the road. Along the road itself there were, in keeping with Marine policy, numerous signs in English advertising laundries and similar services, most of which, I learned, had been set up with the help of the Marines and their equipment. In several huts, Vietnamese were selling soft drinks and American canned goods and rations, all of them bought on the black market or stolen. When the Marines leave the area, as they eventually must, they will be missed as much for the boost they have given the local economy as for their other contributions.

My next stop, farther south, was the village of An Trach, where another Marine company was based. An Trach was considered to be eighty per cent pro-Vietcong last September, when the Marines first got there, and at least half of the two hundred and fifty families were still regarded as Vietcong sympathizers when I arrived. So far, the Marines have established a medical program, operated by their own orderlies; have fixed up the damaged school building; have built a playground; and have distributed some bulgur wheat and other foods to the people. A ten-man P.A.T. in the village had just been reinforced by the addition of fifteen more cadre members, but it was obvious that the P.A.T. leader and the Marine captain had not yet established any rapport, and apparently neither knew quite what the other was doing. This situation was attributable largely to translation difficulties, which frequently all but nullify the good intentions of both South Vietnamese and Americans; there simply are not enough good translators, and very little has been done to correct the situation. The interpreter in An Trach turned out to be my former busboy at the Continental Palace Hotel in Saigon, a pleasant young man of nineteen who had been drafted, given a one-month crash course in English to bolster his busboy lingo, and assigned to the Marines. He was clearly incapable, through no fault of his own, of occupying the delicate position of liaison man between the Marine captain and the P.A.T. leader. Finally,

my own interpreter was able to make it clear to the captain, for the first time, that the P.A.T. leader wanted some food from the Americans, not for his own team, as the captain had supposed, but to pay off informers who were willing to give him some data on the Vietcong. The P.A.T. leader seemed out of touch with the villagers, I thought—probably because he and his team all came from another area. (In this case, since An Trach had been held by the Vietcong for so long, it had been impossible to recruit a P.A.T. locally.) The former village chief, a pro-government man who had been living for several years in Danang, had been brought back to An Trach, but he didn't seem to be doing much. The P.A.T. chief told us that there was no use appointing a village council yet, because the Vietcong would simply assassinate its members. All in all, the government presence in An Trach, which was still being subjected to sniper fire and perimeter ambushes, was little more than a holding operation, and one that would have been impossible without the Marines. The completion of the pacification process, let alone the beginning of serious construction work, was at least several months off. Colonel John E. Gorman, the regimental commander of the Marines, said, "We've picked a place that has been under the Vietcong for a long time, and it's naturally hard to figure out who's who." The Communists, Gorman added, were currently operating in small groups and—according to captured documents—were under orders to maintain as much pressure as possible against both the Marines and the government forces. Gorman, like other experienced officers there, expected the Vietcong to do what they could to wrest back this vital village complex.

The Marines, as General Walt acknowledged, simply did not yet have enough over-all strength to do more than hold on to key village areas beyond the Danang and Chu Lai airbase perimeters—the defense of these still being their primary task—and to conduct patrols in and around those areas, as they were doing day and night. Even now, they were spread so thin in some places that the Vietcong had been able to infiltrate and conduct counter-thrusts against hamlets, keeping the Marines off balance and delaying construction measures. So far, there seemed to be no cohesive Rural Construction Unit activity in this area, and the three scattered P.A.T.s—old-line outfits going back to the early Vung Tau training days—were

out of touch with the program and needed to be brought up to date. Both in this province and in the province of Quang Ngai, just to the south, the P.A.T.s had become unavoidably embroiled in regional politics, and particularly in the in-fighting going on among various factions of the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang, or the People's Fatherland Front—one of the oldest nationalist parties in Vietnam and one that had long been active in this area. Quang Ngai, which is outside the Marine area of operations, is where the P.A.T.s first started out, two years ago, and there were now some forty teams there, doing an exemplary job of protecting villages that were virtual islets in a Vietcong sea. The story in Quang Nam, however, was by no means as good, and the whole pacification-and-construction organization seemed falsely built on the presence of the Marines. There was thus an unreal atmosphere of rather tenuous progress, and one could not help feeling that the Vietcong were still very much of an influence below the surface.

One Marine experiment was bringing rather special results. Because of his part in establishing the joint American-Vietnamese council, General Walt was able to persuade General Thi to go along with him in creating a Combined Action Group, consisting of an integrated company of Marines and Popular Forces. The experiment, which was begun several months ago at Phu Bai, the communications base near Hué, north of Danang, has proved so successful that it is now being carried out around Danang as well, and, I was told, would soon be extended southward into the nine-village area, and eventually into the area, farther south in Quang Nam, where the Marines and Vietnamese hope to have control by the end of this year. At Phu Bai, which was my next stop after Danang, the joint squads, each of them led by an American sergeant, were conducting regular day and night patrols, during which the Americans and the Vietnamese used each other's weapons and communicated with each other by means of hand signals—though they had also, under stress, begun to learn each other's language. As a result of these joint patrols, the Vietcong network in four villages around Phu Bai has been measurably damaged, though the Communists still slip in eight or ten armed agents at a time to collect food and taxes from the population, and nothing as advanced as a Census/Grievance and Aspiration unit can yet function safely. Road traffic in this area has picked up noticeably,

and hamlet markets now attract buyers and sellers from as far off as two kilometres, which may not sound like much but is a lot compared with what the safe-travel radius was six months ago. The Vietcong, however, still have control of the waterways leading to and from the sea. The Marines' local medical program, incidentally, includes a unique scheme whereby medical students from Hué University come out each Saturday and join the Marine doctors in treating villagers for respiratory, skin, and other diseases and help perform operations, several of which have been to correct youngsters' harelips.

IF the Marine area in the north continues to present all kinds of construction difficulties, an equally hazardous and perhaps even more crucial area is the one forming a broad ring around Saigon and Cholon, the immediately adjacent city of several hundred thousand Chinese. This includes all or part of six provinces, and it constitutes the largest of the priority areas in the government's 1966 construction-and-development program. The province of Gia Dinh, which contains both Saigon and Cholon, constitutes a separate Central Military Region, while part of another province, in the Saigon River delta, is designated as the Rung Sat Special Zone, and comes under the supervision of the Navy. Within the Central Military Region, the Special Zone, and the rest of the six provinces, less than a third of the hamlets are now candidates for construction programs. The situation varies greatly throughout the area; several of the six provinces are under at least partial Vietcong control, particularly at night. The worst of the six is Hau Nghia, southwest of Saigon, where approximately eighty per cent of the population either is controlled directly by the Communists or is under their influence. The former province chief, who was recently replaced, commented ruefully, "There are two hundred and twenty thousand people in Hau Nghia, and two hundred thousand of them are ruled by the Vietcong, which made me a hamlet chief, not a province chief." In Hau Nghia, where it is unsafe to ride around in a jeep even in the daytime, less than half the hamlets—there are three hundred all told—are scheduled for construction; only twenty-eight, even today, have chiefs. Among the latter, only about half feel safe enough to spend the night in their hamlets. The Vietcong not only have maintained their pressure throughout this crucial area but have increased it, sometimes with hit-and-run attacks and

small-scale offensives but mostly with assassination, sabotage, and propaganda actions and incidents.

The Communists have directed many of their attacks against the National Police, the military police, and the auxiliary field, or local, police—forces that are the key to the government's pacification efforts in this region. The principal job of the police is to institute what are called "population and resources control measures," designed to try to keep the Vietcong from obtaining the supplies they want—mostly food, medicines, cement, small machines, and electrical parts—and to maintain a constant check on population movements in and out of the Saigon-Cholon area. It is obviously impossible to control the more than two million people who live in the two cities, and the war-swollen population gives the Vietcong an opportunity to infiltrate propaganda agents and terror squads almost at will. Considerable progress has been made by the various police groups in establishing checkpoints on the roads, where people, cars, and motorbikes are regularly searched—but it remains just about impossible, even with house-to-house checks and a wide use of identity cards, to determine who is and who is not a Vietcong activist or sympathizer. Control of incoming and outgoing goods is theoretically easier to maintain, but the opportunities to move things in and out of Saigon are manifold, thanks largely to a system of palm-greasing whereby the Vietcong and the government both collect taxes on the carriers of commodities. Until recently, anyone in Saigon could buy two phials of penicillin in any drugstore, and could keep going from one drugstore to the next all over the city, collecting countless phials for delivery to the Vietcong; this process will soon be controlled by a ration-card system, but some people will undoubtedly find ways to beat it. Furthermore, many other products are not so readily kept track of. The biggest problem in resources control is in Cholon, for the Vietnamese police have scant knowledge of what is going on among the Chinese population. "We haven't the slightest idea of what's what there, or who's who," one veteran American official admitted to me. Night-time house checks are now being carried on in Cholon, as they are in Saigon, to pick up draft dodgers and illegal residents, but the great majority of the people arrested are released for lack of evidence. "I'm afraid a lot of them are with or for the Vietcong, but we can't prove it," the same American said.

The fact is that, despite the improved

police methods, the Vietcong are still able to move freely through the metropolitan area, to control the waterways and many of the roads around the city, to reduce incoming supplies (and thereby increase inflation), and, in general, to keep their terror and propaganda activities going at a great rate. Within Saigon-Cholon, Communists are extremely active in at least three of the combined cities' eight wards. In fact, in these wards there have been cases of Vietcong agents' getting up at public meetings or in theatres and making speeches; the Communists also regularly attack police posts in these wards with bombs or grenades. The government, at Prime Minister Ky's instigation, has opened a big new low-cost housing project in one ward to try to bring some order into it, and is planning two more such developments. In addition, some progress has been made in community-development work, conducted by volunteer youth groups. Nevertheless, the situation remains critical throughout the Saigon-Cholon area, where the huge population provides plentiful cover for whatever the Vietcong want to do. No one underestimates the dangers of insurrection here. The question remains: Would the Vietcong risk such a step, which could lead to a bloodbath and repression by sheer force? Most observers doubt it. "They'll go on eating away at Saigon, destroying it from within, committing occasional acts of terror, and waiting for the time when it will either fall into their hands like rotten fruit or become one of their counters in the negotiations," an American told me. This is a dark estimate, but many realistic people share it, and even those who don't share it admit that the tide of the war will have to take a sharp turn for the better before the influence of the Vietcong in Saigon and Cholon can be significantly altered.

Today, out of nearly sixteen thousand hamlets in the whole of South Vietnam, some thirty-eight hundred are listed, in the earlier terminology, as "pacified," but it has been estimated that as many as half of these are still under some degree of Vietcong penetration or influence. The 1966 program prepared by Major General Nguyen Duc Thang, the dynamic Minister of Construction and Development, calls for two thousand additional hamlets to be either constructed or "consolidated." Half of these represent hamlets to be brought under construction and development programs for the first time; the other half are hamlets where programs are already under way, and in these the programs will now be reappraised and developed further. The two thousand hamlets will contain only twenty-three per cent of the country's population, which indicates how low the government is setting its sights because of the Vietcong's current control of the countryside. There remains a dire shortage of cadres, among other things. Under the Vung Tau and Census/Grievance training programs, about twenty-five thousand cadre members have now been trained or retrained; it is hoped that by the end of the year forty thousand will be available. To extend a construction-and-development scheme throughout Vietnam would probably require another hundred thousand, and nobody at this point will even hazard a guess at where they could come from in this manpower-short country. Nevertheless, whether there is a cease-fire soon or the war is prolonged indefinitely, this is the challenge that the United States and South Vietnam will presumably have to face. An accepted estimate here is that it would take ten years.

—ROBERT SHAPLEN

•

Reprinted from the NEW YORKER

March 12, 1966

AMERICAN FRIENDS OF VIETNAM

INCORPORATED

*A non-partisan group organized in support
of a free and democratic Republic of Vietnam*

234 FIFTH AVENUE • NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001 • 679-7462