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More Sieve Than Shield: The U.S. Army and CORDS in the Pacification of Phu Yen Province, Republic of Vietnam, 1965-1972

Robert John Thompson III
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MORE SIEVE THAN SHIELD: THE U. S. ARMY AND CORDS IN THE
PACIFICATION OF PHU YEN PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, 1965-1972

by

Robert John Thompson III

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of History
at The University of Southern Mississippi
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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

MORE SIEVE THAN SHIELD: THE U. S. ARMY AND CORDS IN THE PACIFICATION OF PHU YEN PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, 1965-1972

by Robert John Thompson III

December 2016

This dissertation addresses the meaning and execution of pacification during the Vietnam War in the Republic of Vietnam's Phu Yen Province. Vietnam War scholarship never defined the term, an unsurprising fact given those that directed the war itself never agreed on a lasting interpretation. Void of an analysis of the word, pacification is erroneously discussed as a separate facet, rather than the foundation, of the war. When discussed, pacification is often seen solely as the developmental aspect of the war and one far removed from the battles waged by conventional armies. On the contrary, two dissimilar and tangentially related wars never transpired in the Republic of Vietnam. To create space for the Saigon government to control the population, conventional military forces needed to evict the units of the People's Army of Vietnam and the People's Liberation Armed Forces from the countryside. Often, construction efforts commenced before the achievement of the enemy's destruction. In transpiring together, pacification existed as an ongoing process that lasted from the start to the end of the war. Consequently, this dissertation treats pacification as the umbrella term under which the entire war transpired.

Significant, yet fleeting, high levels of security were necessary to keep pacification on track. As the first study of Phu Yen Province, this dissertation uses the largely untapped CORDS Advisory Team 28 reports, which explain pacification at the

province level like never before. A province study on Phu Yen reveals how I Field Force Vietnam's maneuver battalions advanced pacification and how the gradual abandonment of Vietnam failed pacification at the most basic level. Years of efforts by conventional military forces to pacify Phu Yen amounted to a security situation that went from precarious to uncertain, with noteworthy enemy infrastructure remaining in Phu Yen's densely populated Tuy Hoa Valley at the end of 1972. As a Viet Minh province during the First Indochina War, and one that Americans and South Vietnamese authorities struggled to instill a semblance of the province being pacified under Saigon's banner, Phu Yen offers profound insight into how the Americans advanced pacification and why pacification ultimately did not work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A trip and a conversation resulted in my studying Phu Yen during the Vietnam War. After a trip to Vietnam in the summer of 2011, I knew I wanted to study the war that engulfed the Republic of Vietnam. Not yet knowing what I aspect of the war I wanted to address, Dr. Andrew Wiest suggested I look at the Courtney L. Frobenius Collection, housed at The University of Southern Mississippi's McCain Library and Archives. After reading those papers, pacification in Phu Yen Province invaded my thoughts—I had my dissertation topic.

I am indebted to my mentors at USM. From the first time I stepped foot into Andy's office as his bewildered Teaching Assistant during my first semester, he did everything possible to prepare me for comprehensive exams, the dissertation, and even fatherly advice when I myself became a father. His courses on the Vietnam War converted me to the study of that war from that of the First World War. For that and more, I am forever grateful. Dr. Heather Stur, too, played an indispensable role in modeling me into a better historian. From her praise, I realized that after much help from Andy to fine-tune my writing, I finally felt confident in my ability to do history at the professional level. Thank you, Andy and Heather for reading this dissertation multiple times and the endless enthusiasm. Thanks are also due to the rest of my dissertation committee—Drs. Allison Abra, Susannah Ural, and Col. Gian Gentile—for providing the most insightful feedback any grad student could hope to receive. Thanks are due to every committee member for taking interest in my research during the early, formative stages and for the letters of recommendation.

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The Society of Military History (SMH) is an invaluable asset for any aspiring military historian. I am grateful for SMH's inspiring conferences and for permitting me to present research on four occasions. Most significantly, I am indebted to SMH for awarding me a Russell F. Weigley Graduate Student Travel Grant for the 83d Annual Meeting in Ottawa, Ontario. The warm, encouraging atmosphere fostered by SMH cannot

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The Strategy Bridge ran a much abridged version of Chapter VI's section on the Battle of Cung Son. I am grateful for Tyrell Mayfield, Eric Michael Murphy, Erich Simmers, and the rest of the editorial team's enthusiasm and willingness to bring my account of that forgotten battle to the public's attention. What happened in Phu Yen mattered in the grand scheme of the Vietnam War. For that reason, the history of war in that province matters even more.

My path towards the doctorate began at my undergrad institution, Virginia Wesleyan College. There, my advisor Dr. Dan Margolies as well as Drs. Rich Bond and Clay Drees all played a pivotal role in shaping me into an historian. With their ceaseless enthusiasm and support, I pursued an MA and, later after a brief break, the Ph.D. Similarly, at Wilfrid Laurier University, I must thank my MA advisor Dr. Roger Sarty for furthering my academic abilities.

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DEDICATION

To my wife Corrina and our children Anton, Lukas, and Valerie.

This dissertation took shape, appropriately enough, a few miles down the George Washington Parkway from Edward G. Lansdale's former home and near George Washington's Mount Vernon, at my parent's house. My parents, Bob and Patty Thompson, opened up their home to my family for far longer than they anticipated. Without their generosity I am not sure how else I could have written this dissertation and cared for my two young boys, Anton and Lukas. To both my other sisters, Gillian and Jocelyn. Gillian, thank you for the aforementioned assistance during my time in California. Jocelyn, thank you for surrendering your desk so that I had a quiet and comfortable place to write. My better half, Corrina, sacrificed and supported me without pestering me as to when I would finish this journey. For their patience and support, this dissertation is for Corrina, our sons Anton and Lukas, and our daughter Valerie, who arrived after the completion of this dissertation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AO</i>	Area of Operation
<i>APC</i>	Accelerated Pacification Campaign
<i>ARVN</i>	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
<i>AT28</i>	Advisory Team 28
<i>CMH</i>	U.S. Army Center of Military History. Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.
<i>CORDS</i>	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
<i>COSVN</i>	Central Office of South Vietnam
<i>DPSA</i>	Deputy Province Senior Advisor
<i>DSA</i>	District Senior Advisor
<i>DTIC</i>	Defense Technical Information Center. Fort Belvoir, VA
<i>FWMAF</i>	Free World Military Assistance Forces
<i>GVN</i>	Government of Vietnam
<i>HES</i>	Hamlet Evaluation System
<i>HIA</i>	Hoover Institution and Archives. Stanford University, Stanford, CA
<i>IFFV</i>	I Field Force, Vietnam
<i>KIA</i>	Killed in Action
<i>MACV</i>	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
<i>MLA</i>	McCain Library and Archives. The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS
<i>MR2</i>	Military Region 2

<i>NARA II</i>	National Archives and Records Administration. College Park, MD
<i>NLF</i>	National Liberation Front
<i>NVA</i>	North Vietnamese Army; see also PAVN
<i>PAVN</i>	People's Army of Vietnam
<i>PLAF</i>	People's Liberation Armed Forces
<i>PF</i>	Popular Force
<i>PSA</i>	Province Senior Advisor
<i>PSDF</i>	People Self Defense Force
<i>RD</i>	Revolutionary Development
<i>RF</i>	Regional Force
<i>ROKA</i>	Republic of Korea Army
<i>ROK</i>	Republic of Korea
<i>RVN</i>	Republic of Vietnam
<i>RVNAF</i>	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
<i>SLO</i>	Senior Liaison Office
<i>TAOR</i>	Tactical Area of Operations
<i>TTUVA</i>	The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. Lubbock, TX
<i>USOM</i>	United States Operations Mission
<i>VC</i>	Viet Cong; see also PLAF
<i>VCI</i>	Viet Cong Infrastructure

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

“The discussion that followed was longer than usual. The Province Chief asked the 28th ROKs to take over ‘for a short time’ responsibility for the Chop Chai mountain in Tuy Hoa District (an enemy base area, swarming with VCI, which the GVN has never attempted seriously to clean out), thus expanding their TAOR,” Province Senior Advisor James B. Engle said of Province Chief Nguyen Ba’s remarks spoken at a monthly meeting with Allied commanders in Phu Yen Province.¹ On 1 April 1970, April Fools’s Day no less, this meeting featured a reminder that significant Communist infrastructure remained within the province’s borders; no laughing matter for the future of pacification in the province. After three years of dedicated operations by I Field Force Vietnam (IFFV) to advance pacification in Phu Yen, and at the height of Vietnamization, a de facto Communist base camp existed on the doorstep of the province capital of Tuy Hoa City. What the enemy presence at Núi Chấp Chài represented and entailed for pacification as a whole in Phu Yen is highly consequential to this study.²

Significant enemy infrastructure in such close proximity to a province capital so late in the war raises serious questions about pacification. In Phu Yen, conventional military forces fostered the image of pacification as advancing the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) towards permanent stability under the Government of Vietnam (GVN). Years of efforts by conventional military forces to pacify Phu Yen, however, amounted to a

¹ Acronyms used in the quote: ROK (Republic of Korea), VCI (Viet Cong Infrastructure), GVN (Government of Vietnam), and TAOR (Tactical Area of Operations); Advisory Team 28, Report, “Phu Yen Province Chief’s Month Meeting (April) with Allied Commanders,” p.3, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 297 / Folder: PC’s Monthly Commanders Meeting, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II).

² Note that Núi Chấp Chài is the proper Vietnamese spelling. American records commonly referred to the mountain as Chop Chai. This dissertation uses Núi Chấp Chài, except when directly quoting American sources.

security situation that went from precarious to uncertain. Between 1966 and 1969, IFFV's maneuver battalions improved security, which appeared even more significant when compared to the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) nearly overrunning Phu Yen in 1965. Yet IFFV's Phu Yen operations could not last forever and the campaign ultimately failed to destroy PAVN and People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). An official, and much larger, enemy Base Area 236 sat in the mountains on the other side of the Tuy Hoa Valley from Núi Chập Chài. With extensive Communist infrastructure in the heart of Phu Yen, the densely populated Tuy Hoa Valley, pacification worked only insofar as the U.S. had a significant military presence in the province. Once IFFV's Phu Yen operations ended, PAVN and PLAF regained and exercised sufficient control as to undermine pacification. Therefore, Vietnamization was never going to maintain security, and thus pacification, gains. In that vein, the unfolding of the Vietnam War in Phu Yen is a lens into the nebulous world of pacification. This dissertation displays the disparity between war aims and events as close to the hamlet level as primary sources permit. Arriving at the need for such an analysis stems from decades's worth of contemporary and historiographical discourse that craves further insight into one of the most controversial eras of American history.

Vietnam War scholarship has placed insufficient attention on understanding the meaning of pacification. Studies dealing with pacification have yet to define the term, an unsurprising fact given those who directed the Vietnam War never agreed on a lasting interpretation. Void of an analysis of the word, pacification is erroneously discussed as a separate facet, rather than the foundation, of the war. When discussed, pacification is often seen solely as the developmental aspect of the war and one far removed from the

battles waged by conventional armies. On the contrary, two dissimilar and tangentially related wars never transpired in the Republic of Vietnam. In practice, the entire conflict remained dedicated to the removal of Communist forces. Pacification entailed both destruction and construction. To create space for the GVN to control the population, conventional military forces needed to evict PAVN and PLAF main forces from the countryside. Often, construction efforts commenced before the achievement of the enemy's destruction. In transpiring together, pacification existed as an ongoing process that lasted from the start to the end of the war. Moreover, wartime priorities fluctuated, distorting the amount of attention American and South Vietnamese authorities placed on what one perceived as pacification.

Admittedly, pacification varied from province to province, yet in the case of U.S. Army operations and Vietnamization, focusing on Phu Yen reveals how conventional military forces advanced pacification and how the gradual abandonment of Vietnam failed pacification at the most basic level. As stated by General William C. Westmoreland, Commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), the first mission for his military forces was "territorial security, troops in support of pacification or revolutionary development."³ This dissertation investigates the Vietnam War through events in Phu Yen, which validates Westmoreland's words. A province study indicates that the actions of conventional military forces were indeed wedded to pacification. As a province steeped in Viet Minh history and one that Americans and South Vietnamese authorities struggled to instill a semblance of the province being

³ Military Briefing at Pentagon, 22 November 1967, p.5, Folder 08, Box 09, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120908026>>.

pacified under Saigon's banner, Phu Yen offers profound insight into how the Americans advanced pacification and why pacification ultimately did not work. Examining Phu Yen offers a new perspective on the war that highlights the trends that were present elsewhere in the country, albeit at potentially different levels of severity. A focus on Phu Yen necessitates the use of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) Advisory Team 28 (AT28) records, as that entity operated in the province.⁴ Since this dissertation marks the first study of Phu Yen, it also stands as the first noteworthy use of AT28 reports. AT28 documents help explain the significant, yet fleeting, high levels of security necessary to keep pacification on track towards defeating PAVN and PLAF units in Phu Yen. Relatedly, the previously untapped reports of Courtney Frobenius offer damning evidence of pacification as a failed process in Phu Yen.

Central to this study is an analysis of how various American diplomats and military authorities perceived and articulated pacification. To answer how American diplomats and military authorities perceived and articulated pacification, the modus operandi of the entire war effort, this dissertation analyzes the contemporary discourse. The Edward G. Lansdale Papers contain a trove of correspondence, memos, and reports that reveal much about contemporary efforts to explain pacification. This dissertation makes use of Lansdale's collection to advance the argument that pacification lacked a finite definition, yet still embodied the entire war.

⁴ Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support later became Civil Operations and Rural Development Support. A change dealing with semantics, rather than substance.

Pacification is inextricably tied to a milieu of terms, with Americans having used revolutionary development, rural construction, rural development, rural edification, counterinsurgency, and nation-building interchangeably. Therefore, a study of pacification cannot progress without defining pacification; one that this dissertation submits as sound security behind which allegiance to Saigon could mature, as purveyed by conventional military forces. In that vein, this study frames pacification as ill-defined during the war, yet one that the war itself posited as entailing the continued improvement of security as to create a stable state for the GVN. Pacification always existed because large unit warfare created the space in which developmental projects existed, in turn leading to the co-existence of both destruction and development aspects of pacification. The advancement of pacification hinged on the ability of conventional forces to keep Communist forces at bay. While wartime priorities changed, pacification remained paramount to MACV's aims throughout the Vietnam War. Therefore, through the study of Phu Yen and of the idea of pacification, this dissertation demonstrates that pacification and conventional warfare were inextricably tied and transpired currently with one another. For that reason, this dissertation treats pacification as the umbrella term under which the entire war transpired.

Historiography

Historian Gregory A. Daddis noted that the RVN was a mosaic of different peoples, cultures, political allegiances, and provinces.⁵ For decades, scholars have added

⁵ Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13. For further reading on the RVN's cultural and political diversity, see: Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Jessica

to that mosaic with a resulting historiography that offers readers a rich milieu of studies that cover a broad spectrum of the American experience in Southeast Asia. Falling into either the orthodox or revisionist schools, much of the discourse revisits arguments hashed during the war. Orthodox historians often point towards the moment when the United States backed France during the First Indochina War as when America's lost its war in Vietnam. Revisionist scholars argue that the United States won the war at various junctions, particularly during either Tet 1968 or the Easter Offensive of 1972. The back and forth over placing blame has produced a plethora of informative works, but at the expense of not investigating lesser studied facets of the war. Such a disparity emerged during the war itself.

As the Vietnam War raged, critics dominated the discourse on the handling of the conflict. In doing so, the orthodox school emerged during the war itself. Critics decried America's role in Vietnam, arguing that US policy makers failed to understand the Vietnamese people and the nature of the war itself.⁶ Such a position, Philip E. Catton noted, presented America's war in Vietnam as a "quagmire," where the U.S. stood no chance at achieving victory.⁷ In the years immediately following the war, Americans sought to rationalize the defeat of the RVN after decades of intense U.S. support. Historians dissatisfied with the quagmire thesis sought a more meaningful explanation of why the U.S. military lost, which expanded the orthodox school further into academia. At

M. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1968* (New York: Fawcett Premier, 1967); Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972).

⁷ Philip E. Catton, "Refighting Vietnam in the History Books: The Historiography of the War," *Magazine of History* Vol. 18 No. 5 (Oct., 2004) 7.

the forefront of early Vietnam War scholarship, George C. Herring codified many of the arguments used by future orthodox historians. According to Herring in his work *America's Longest War*, American defeat in the RVN stemmed from problematic U.S. intervention. The policy of containment, appropriate for Europe, proved inappropriate for Vietnam. As a result, Herring contends that America lacked any chance to win a war in Vietnam.⁸ In agreement with Herring, journalists reinforced the hopeless nature of the war in works throughout the 1980s. By the early 1980s, journalists began to publish accounts of the Vietnam War, in which they emphasized the futility of the conflict.⁹ Yet opposition to such orthodox sentiments materialized quickly.

The U.S. Army's performance in executing and managing the war emerged as an early and persisting focal point of contention among scholars. In 1982, Herring assessed the postwar climate as one in which American civilian and military authorities, all participants in the war, discussed "the fundamental question of why the United States failed to achieve its objectives."¹⁰ The resulting body of work attempted to justify and reconcile American actions in Vietnam.¹¹ As noted by Philip E. Catton, such works constituted the genesis of the revisionist school.¹² In advancing the argument that the U.S. should have won the war, this thesis constituted an attempt to assert blame for America's defeat in Vietnam. In his work, *On Strategy*, U.S. Army Colonel Harry G. Summers Jr.

⁸ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (1979; New York: McGraw Hill, 2002), xi, xiii-xiv.

⁹ For examples, see: Michael Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War: Vietnam: 1945-1975* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1983).

¹⁰ George C. Herring, "American Strategy in Vietnam: The Postwar Debate," *Military Affairs* Vol. 46 No. 2 (April, 1982) 57-61.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹² Philip E. Catton, "Refighting Vietnam in the History Books: The Historiography of the War," 9.

argues that civilian leadership mishandled the deployment and mission of the US military in Vietnam. Summers takes issue with the slow process of advising and, eventually, the gradual introduction of American troops into the RVN. Summers contended that the Vietnam War began with the invasion of South Vietnam by North Vietnam, thus the U.S. needed to respond with large conventional forces to properly secure the RVN.¹³ Later research by Merle Pribbenow, Lein-Hang Nguyen, and Pierre Asselin proved unequivocally that Hanoi always controlled the war in the South; politically and militarily.¹⁴ Summers additionally argued that U.S. conventional forces thwarted the effectiveness of PLAF guerrillas.¹⁵ The findings of Summers failed to persuade scholars as to the reasons for America's defeat in Vietnam. Orthodox historians bemoaned the absence of a thorough discussion of political and historical issues, ones that laid at the heart of the conflict, in Summers's work.¹⁶ The conclusions reached by these early analyses did not secure a consensus over the American handling of the war, thus Herring argued that expansion of the discourse remained a necessity.¹⁷ Since the execution of the war and pacification were inseparable, this dissertation enters that historiographical debate.

¹³ Harry G. Summers Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1982), 87-88.

¹⁴ *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 127; Lein-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013).

¹⁵ Summers, 89-90.

¹⁶ David L. Anderson, "No More Vietnams: Historians Debate the Policy Lessons of the Vietnam War," in *The War That Never Ends: New Perspectives On The Vietnam War*, ed. David L. Anderson and John Ernst (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 21.

¹⁷ Herring, "American Strategy in Vietnam: The Postwar Debate," 62.

To a lesser degree, this dissertation enters the debate over continuity between Westmoreland and Abrams. A controversial facet of the Vietnam War, U.S. military leadership offers historians a wide range of topics for discussion. In response to the thesis championed by Summers, the next wave of scholarship sought to re-establish the orthodox claim that the U.S. military haphazardly executed the war. Writing in the late 1980s, Andrew Krepinevich maintained that the U.S. Army failed to fight the right war.¹⁸ Reflecting on recent experiences, the U.S. Army prepared for future battles reminiscent of those fought in the Second World War and the Korean War. Krepinevich contended that, due to this mindset, few in the U.S. Army emphasized the need for counterinsurgency training, Westmoreland included. With American combat forces arriving in Vietnam en masse, the U.S. Army sought to wage a conventional war.¹⁹ Waging the war, Krepinevich argued, revolved around the strategy of attrition. For Krepinevich, attrition as strategy resulted from the lack of a proper plan to conduct the war.²⁰ Lewis Sorley argues that, under Westmoreland, the annihilation of the enemy defined the war as a “classical military conflict.”²¹ To that end Westmoreland waged a war of attrition, where logic centered on the belief that after suffering massive casualties the enemy would have no choice but to admit defeat. Sorley notes that this objective seemed straightforward in that U.S. and Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) units needed only to flush out PAVN and PLAF units and kill as many of their combatants as

¹⁸ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

²¹ Lewis Sorley, “The Conduct of the War, Strategy, Doctrine, Tactics, and Policy,” in *Rolling Thunder In A Gentle Land: The Vietnam War Revisited*, ed. Andrew Wiest (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 176.

possible. Making this a daunting task, argues Sorley, was the want of the Communists to fight on their terms and at times of their choosing. Such actions necessitated the implementation of search and destroy missions. Despite exacting a heavy toll on PAVN and PLAF formations, Communist resolve did not falter. Instead, the North Vietnamese assembled more men and launched the 1968 Tet Offensive.²²

The topic of generalship persisted, with scholars sparring over Westmoreland's purported lack of attention towards pacification. In *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*, revisionist scholar Lewis Sorley contends that while Westmoreland chose to wage a war of attrition, he did so at the expense of securing the RVN.²³ Only Abrams, argues Sorley, offered America the chance to win the war in Vietnam. Despite inheriting a war compounded by Westmoreland's failures, Sorley maintains that Abrams did the best he could by focusing on pacification.²⁴ In his more recent publication, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*, Sorley cites the criticisms of the officers that served under Westmoreland as evidence of the MACV head's mishandling of the war.²⁵ Most striking, the author argues that Westmoreland's war of attrition undermined pacification programs.²⁶ Yet, as Sorley's critics contend, a better war in South Vietnam never existed. Both Westmoreland and Abrams understood pacification. Daddis's *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam*, presents Westmoreland in a vastly more

²² Ibid., 176-177.

²³ Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1999), 4-5.

²⁴ Ibid., 59.

²⁵ Sorley, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 97-99.

²⁶ Ibid., 103.

positive light than Krepinevich and Sorley. Daddis argued that Westmoreland did indeed have a “comprehensive military strategy” for the war in South Vietnam.²⁷ Pacification laid at the core of Westmoreland’s strategy, Daddis contended, because the general understood the Vietnam War encompassed all facets of South Vietnamese society.²⁸ Similarly, Gian Gentile in *Wrong Turn*, challenged the narrative that a single general can change the direction of, and win, a war. In the discussion of the Vietnam War, the author notes that Westmoreland had a background in counterinsurgency theory.²⁹ Both Westmoreland and Abrams understood the symbiotic relationship between the big unit war and pacification.³⁰ For Gentile, a prime example of continuity between Westmoreland and Abrams was continued use of search and destroy missions by Abrams.³¹ Both Westmoreland and Abrams understood that only force could dislodge the Communists from the RVN countryside. Timing, wartime priorities, and language were the true differences between their handling of the Vietnam War. Hence, as proposed by Daddis, scholars need to ask better questions about the Vietnam War. Instead of seeking why America lost, historians should focus on explaining why certain decisions were made.³² A study of Phu Yen demonstrates that in the case of the Vietnam War, there were no distinct phases nor major alterations to the conduct of the war in the countryside. What is apparent are the American political processes driving pacification forward.

²⁷ Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xx.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁹ Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*. (New York: The New Press, 2013), 68.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³² Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, xxii-xxiv.

Similar to the generalship debate, the oversimplification of U.S. counterinsurgency persists as a point of contention among historians. The problem with the orthodox take on the Vietnam War rests with the acceptance of the mindset that America fought the war with the wrong tactics and did so haphazardly. Associated with this mindset is the assertion that conventional warfare fails to stymie an insurgency. Andrew J. Birtle stated that this argument requires one to ignore the successful counterinsurgency operations conducted by conventional forces in “Greece, Korea, the Philippines, and Malaya.”³³ Similarly, Charles Hill claimed that the argument that America waged a prolonged war based upon “foolish strategy and brutish tactics” exists only because some scholars simply want that conclusion to be true.³⁴ Hill argued that the United States effectively contained North Vietnamese aggression until the withdrawal of American military forces from the RVN. Pointing towards the failed 1968 Tet and 1972 Easter Offensives where conventional American and South Vietnamese armies routed conventional North Vietnamese forces, Hill contends that waging a conventional war against the North Vietnamese prevented the fall of Saigon during American involvement. If, as Hill believes, American forces had concentrated on counterinsurgency tactics, the North Vietnamese Army would have succeeded in those offensives, as happened in 1975.³⁵ Birtle added to this hypothesis by noting that PAVN outnumbered ARVN both in men and material; thus it is plausible that without U.S. conventional military forces the

³³ Andrew Birtle, “*Triumph Forsaken as Military History*,” in *Triumph Revisited: Historians Battle For The Vietnam War*, ed. Andrew Wiest (New York: Routledge, 2010), 121.

³⁴ Charles Hill, “Fighting Stories,” in *Triumph Revisited: Historians Battle For The Vietnam War*, ed. Andrew Wiest (New York: Routledge, 2010), 79-80.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

North Vietnamese could have relied on standing armies instead of guerrillas.³⁶ Yet Hill made a leap in stating that by 1972, under the guidance of General Abrams, “the war for survival of the Republic of Vietnam had been won.”³⁷ Andrew Wiest argued that despite U.S. Army and ARVN tactical successes following Tet, by 1972 Vietnamization shattered any chance South Vietnam had at survival.³⁸ Vietnamization embodied the Nixon Administration’s intent to vacate the RVN as soon as militarily and politically possible and in a manner as to preserve American prestige, yet in practice amounted to the abandonment of Saigon as Cold War politics made the RVN expendable.³⁹ That the RVN could not function without full American support is reinforced in a study of Phu Yen.

The 1968 Tet Offensive is often understood as the turning point of the war. For Krepinevich, the U.S. Army lost the Tet Offensive, positing that campaign as a North Vietnamese military victory. Noting that the U.S. Army destroyed many PAVN units and reclaimed the urban areas captured by Communist forces, Krepinevich insists that Hanoi achieved its secondary objectives. Although PAVN and PLAF troops failed to secure their primary objective of inciting a mass uprising of South Vietnamese against the Saigon government, the Communists met their secondary objectives. PAVN and PLAF units demonstrated the weakness of American pacification efforts, the vulnerability of

³⁶ Birtle, 121.

³⁷ Hill, 84.

³⁸ Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam’s Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 199.

³⁹ James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2004, 2008), 15-20; Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010, 2012), 244, 276-7.

South Vietnamese urban centers, rising US casualties, and increasing the number of refugees which placed more pressure on the South Vietnamese government.⁴⁰ Hence Krepinevich argues that the Communists won the Tet Offensive because they achieved all of their secondary goals.⁴¹ - Such a contention is supported by a study of Phu Yen.

As for how the U.S. Army managed the war, a recent addition to the scholarship provides much needed clarity. In *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War*, Daddis examines how Military Assistance Command, Vietnam's (MACV) used a wide range of numerical data to gauge the course of the war. As termed by the author, "metrics" gave MACV a framework for fighting the war.⁴² While seemingly beneficial, Daddis argues MACV struggled to rate war progress, with many U.S. Army officers encouraging inflated numbers over quality reporting. Consequently, exaggerated statistics seriously undermined America's chances at victory. Daddis pointed out that unreliable data resulted in MACV's poor understanding of the conflict and, therefore, a poorly executed war.⁴³ The problem with "metrics," however, is deeper than MACV's issues with data quality. In the case of Phu Yen, the collection and sharing of Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) data tainted perceptions of pacification in the province, which fostered an erroneous sense of progress. Compounding the questionable quality and availability of such information, on multiple occasions the PLAF launched attacks against Allied targets in Phu Yen from purportedly secure hamlets. HES proved unreliable in Phu Yen.

⁴⁰ Krepinevich, 249.

⁴¹ Ibid., 249-250.

⁴² Daddis, *No Sure Victory*, 8-10.

⁴³ Ibid., 223-228.

Historiographical discourse centered on pacification is limited. Despite pacification laying at the heart of the American approach to fighting the Vietnam War, the pertinent scholarship is thin.⁴⁴ Such works of the so-called “other war,” or pacification, downplayed the connection between conventional warfare and pacification. Typifying the contention that big unit warfare and pacification are separate foci, is Richard A. Hunt’s *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds*. In his 1995 macro study of pacification, Hunt argued that the military support for pacification is one of “semantics.”⁴⁵ Although military operations often dislodged Viet Cong cadres and brought humanitarian assistance to South Vietnamese peasants, these acts did not translate into improved relations between the countryside and Saigon. Those living in the countryside did not always equate American goodwill with the government

⁴⁴ David W. P. Elliott and W. A. Stewart, *Pacification and the Viet Cong System in Dinh Tuong: 1966-1967*, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1969; 1975); Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); James W. Trullinger, *Village at War: An Account of Revolution in Vietnam* (New York: Longman, 1980); Stuart A. Herrington, *Silence Was a Weapon: The Vietnam War in the Villages* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982); Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines’ Other War in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1989); Dale Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1990); Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); James H. Embrey, *Reorienting Pacification: The Accelerated Pacification Campaign of 1968* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997); Michael A. Hennessy, *Strategy in Vietnam: The Marines and Revolutionary Warfare in I Corps, 1965-1975* (Westport: Praeger, 1997); Mark Moyer, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA’s Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997); David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930- 1975* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharp, 2003); Kevin M. Boylan, “The Red Queens Race: Operation Washington Green and Pacification in Binh Dinh Province, 1969-1970,” *The Journal of Military History* 73, no. 4 (October 2009): 1195-1230; Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Thomas Richardson, “As If We’d Never Really Been There?: Pacification in Phuoc Tuy Province, Republic of Vietnam, 1966-1972 (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2014); Martin Clemis, “The Control War: Communist Revolutionary Warfare, Pacification, and the Struggle for South Vietnam, 1968-1975” (PhD diss., Temple University, 2015), 484, 486, 488-490; Edward A. Hagan, *To Vietnam in Vain: Memoir of an Irish-American Intelligence Advisor, 1969-1970* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2016).

⁴⁵ Richard A Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 47.

in Saigon.⁴⁶ Moreover, Hunt argued while the US Army sought to both engage the Communist forces and assist in pacification efforts, the big unit war always took precedence over pacification.⁴⁷ Hunt ultimately decided that the U.S. Army's big war did not help pacification.⁴⁸ The problem with this tack is that pacification could not happen without the big war. Hunt fails to appreciate the ability of the US Army to create the necessary physical space in which pacification initiatives occurred.

The United States and the Republic of Vietnam never really sought to win the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese civilians. Despite rhetoric about kindling warm relations between the GVN and the common people, in practice, how those nations kept the population under Saigon's banner mattered little if at all. Instead, the Vietnam War functioned as a control war rather than one of fostering warm relations between the GVN and the South Vietnamese peasants. Strikingly, Edward Miller's in *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* revealed that the GVN saw pacification as a control mechanism with which to force Saigon's authority upon the rural population.⁴⁹ Miller's *Misalliance* offers a fresh examination of America's partnership with Ngo Dien Diem. In doing so, Miller sheds ample light on the Government of Vietnam's conception of pacification. One can infer that Saigon understood pacification as matter of control, thereby making the large unit operations and developmental focused on the single goal.⁵⁰ More recently, in his appropriately titled

⁴⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁹ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 250.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

dissertation, “The Control War: Communist Revolutionary Warfare, Pacification, and the Struggle for South Vietnam, 1968-1975,” Martin Clemis took the concept of control further. For Clemis, the Vietnam War centered on the control of space. As the war produced a leopard print of areas under either GVN, NLF, or of mixed, control, the instability produced by that spatial environment proved lethal to U.S.-sponsored pacification.⁵¹ Examining the war in Phu Yen produces a similar conclusion. That the existence of PAVN and PLAF controlled territory in the province dispelled the notion of Phu Yen being pacified.

A Case for Province Studies

A province study on pacification broadens the collective understanding of the war that raged across the Republic of Vietnam. Making the connection between one province out of forty-four and the rest of the RVN is an essential step in expanding academia’s understanding of the Vietnam War. Dictated by demography, geography, and history, multiple wars occurred across this short-lived republic. Analysis of each province advances this actuality. In that vein, this province study adds another, vital piece to that mosaic by concentrating on Phu Yen. Like the rest of the historiography, this focus expands our collective knowledge of the war, rather than constraining it. Since political and military dynamics varied from province to province, one must examine pacification at the local level and not treat it as a monolith. Therefore, this study delves into Phu Yen to deepen the macro concepts of pacification and hence concerns itself primarily with that salient of the historiography.

⁵¹ Martin Clemis, “The Control War: Communist Revolutionary Warfare, Pacification, and the Struggle for South Vietnam, 1968-1975” (PhD diss., Temple University, 2015), 484, 486, 488-490.

A province study inherently contends with the assumption that it is hardly representative of anything outside the province. Yet such a perceived constraint is present in other studies of the Vietnam War. In *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*, the majority of Christian G. Appy's data is from the Boston area. This detracts from his broad assertion that the less privileged did most of the fighting, but one must admit it would be rather difficult to accumulate data from every major American city and insert it into a readable manuscript.⁵² Essentially, for the sake of a cohesive narrative, the scope of any study is constrained. In that vein, province studies are no different. These studies concentrate on a particular area of the Republic of Vietnam, while addressing multiple themes raised by historians. For example, a province study can examine the effects of American combat forces and rural development programs on the local population.

Province studies represent an informative, but underutilized, echelon of Vietnam War scholarship. Despite the vast array of written works on the war, just six are province studies; two of which cover the same province. Further still, four of those provinces fell under III Corps, with one in I Corps and another in II Corps, leaving IV Corps absent from the broader discussion. Consequently, historians know little about the variations in the war's execution that surely varied from province to province. Since forty-four provinces comprised the Republic of Vietnam, the coverage of only three provinces barely describes the Vietnam War at the local level. Maxwell D. Taylor claimed "there was not just a single war to be reported by officials and the press. There were really forty-

⁵² Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 22-25.

four different wars and you could have an accurate reporter in each one of those provinces and get forty-four different reports coming to Washington and all would be right in their own way. Yet none a complete picture.”⁵³ For that reason, this dissertation adds another piece to the broader, incomplete picture. Since it is nearly impossible to examine every facet of South Vietnam, a close look at a single province provides significant details that might otherwise go unnoticed in larger, sweeping studies.

Notwithstanding the existence of only a handful of province studies, the relevant historiography demonstrates the significant contributions of such an approach to the field. Indeed, previous province studies have revealed much about how belligerents fought the Vietnam War. A RAND study of Dinh Tuong Province conducted in 1969 by David W. P. Elliott and W. A. Stewart examined the strengths and weaknesses of the Viet Cong as well as the methods necessary to defeat the Communists. Geography, too, is key to understanding and thwarting of People’s Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) influence and infrastructure.⁵⁴ In *Pacification and the Viet Cong System in Dinh Tuong: 1966-1967*, Elliott and Stewart stressed the need to understand the PLAF as a “system” and not a monolithic entity. Rather, the PLAF consisted of different groups with specific tasks. Targeting the Local Force in a specific area, argued the authors, dramatically diminished the chance of Main Force PLAF from entering that same area.⁵⁵ Conventional forces played a significant role in this process. While Elliott and Stewart addressed how to reverse the PLAF’s territorial gains, their concentration on an extremely narrow period of

⁵³ “America's Mandarin: 1954–1963,” *Vietnam: A Television History*, WGHB, Boston Public Broadcasting (Boston, MA: WGHB, 1979).

⁵⁴ David W. P. Elliott and W. A. Stewart, *Pacification and the Viet Cong System in Dinh Tuong: 1966-1967*, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1969; 1975), 1-2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

the war meant their RAND piece could not adequately speak of persisting ramifications.

First published in 1972, Jeffery Race's pathbreaking work *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* demonstrated the value of provincial studies to the debate over US pacification efforts during the Vietnam War. Race spent time in Long An before the 1968 Tet Offensive and thus offers insight gained first-hand. In this orthodox study, Race focused on the failures of the Government of Vietnam (GVN) in maintaining control of Long An Province. Race highlighted the disparity between what the Saigon government presumed the province required and what the locals knew they needed. Unable to protect the people and their livelihoods from the PLAF, most of Long An's population supported the Hanoi backed insurgency.⁵⁶ *War Comes to Long An* is the perfect first step towards establishing the shortcomings of American forces and their Vietnamese allies before the Vietnamization period of the war. Well researched and argued, Race's book nonetheless is not enough to explain why US pacification failed across much of South Vietnam. Race placed too much emphasis on poor government as the cause of Long An's woes. Moreover, he did not fully explain U.S. culpability and the problems that persisted throughout much of RVN. Lastly, the periodization of Race's work omitted the years after the 1968 Tet Offensive, arguably the definition period of CORDS-backed pacification. Consequently, a significant portion of Long An's pacification history is absent.

Like *War Comes to Long An*, Eric M. Bergerud's *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* offers an account of a single South Vietnamese

⁵⁶ Jeffery Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972).

province. First published in 1991 and focusing on Hau Nghia Province, Bergerud expanded on Race's conclusion that poor government undermined the American and South Vietnamese war effort.⁵⁷ Blaming the GVN for the shortcomings of pacification programs is too convenient. Doing so suggests—albeit intentionally or not—that the U.S. had an incapable ally and lost the war in the countryside because of GVN negligence. Yet the key to pacification is impeccable security. During the Vietnam War, American forces executed operations to dramatically improve security in key hinterland areas of the RVN and later provided the first line of defense. Doing so relegated ARVN and FWMF units to the patrolling of areas under pacification initiatives. For ARVN, this conjured the perceptions of laziness, and more significantly, did not help prepare Saigon for an existence without U.S. Army combat forces after the end of Vietnamization. Moreover, the advancement of Vietnamization and the subordinate Accelerated Pacification Campaign, all transpired with little concern paid to the RVN's needs and limited capabilities. American decisions, not solely those of the GVN, undermined the long-term success of pacification. Works by Race and Bergerud addressed the indifference and limitations of the government in Saigon when governing the provinces. In terms of placing poor government as the central cause of pacification issues, critics of the GVN beat the proverbial horse to death. Poor political decisions emanating out of Saigon and Washington alone, however, says little about the wartime priorities of all involved entities.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics Of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 3.

⁵⁸ See also: Stuart A. Herrington, *Silence Was a Weapon: The Vietnam War in the Villages* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982). Herrington provides a first-hand account of American-backed pacification efforts during the period of Vietnamization. As an intelligence officer, Herrington was privy to

Kevin M. Boylan's work, like Bergerund's, addressed the effect of conventional military units on pacification. Boylan's study of Binh Dinh Province focused on the role of the 173d Airborne Brigade during a narrow two-year window. For Boylan, the American paratroopers played a significant role in steadying pacification efforts in Binh Dinh at a time when Communist forces exercised noteworthy power in the province. Yet security improved only as long as the 173d Airborne Brigade continued Operation Washington Green.⁵⁹ However, with a focus on just 1969 and 1970, the role of maneuver battalions in the initial expansion of pacification and the influence of such forces throughout the war, persists as largely unknown. Much of what Boylan disclosed about Binh Dinh is applicable to that province's southern neighbor and fellow II Corps province, Phu Yen. Indeed, a study of Phu Yen over a longer period of time reveals that security rested squarely with the presence of multiple IFFV maneuver battalions since, as argued in Boylan's work, the GVN's security forces remained largely unready to assume the burden of security without the support of U.S. Army combat troops.

Moving the historiography beyond placing blame, Thomas Richardson's recent dissertation on Phuoc Tuy Province warrants inclusion in this historiographical discussion. His work adds to the mosaic of the Vietnam War by examining Phuoc Tuy with a concentration on pacification in that province, and the related role played by 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) to advance that cause. Similar to Bergerund and Boylan, Richardson's dissertation revealed a close relationship between conventional military

the finer details of the Phoenix Program. In a discussion of the Phoenix Program, the author contends that South Vietnamese officials cared little about the dirty war. Indeed, the author presents a war undermined by a recalcitrant GVN.

⁵⁹ Kevin M. Boylan, "The Red Queens Race: Operation Washington Green and Pacification in Binh Dinh Province, 1969-1970," *The Journal of Military History* 73, no. 4 (October 2009): 1229-1230.

forces and pacification.⁶⁰ Both Bergerud and Richardson addressed the limitations of conventional warfare at the province level. In Bergerud's work, he discussed the connection between firepower and pacification. He argued that, although the U.S. Army needed to destroy the Communist cadres in Hau Nghia, it did so at the expense of the lives and property of the innocent civilian population.⁶¹ The ability of 1ATF to seriously diminish the power and influence of the PLAF are advanced in Richardson's study. 1ATF's ability to weaken PLAF power, as Richardson claimed, improved the lot of Phuoc Tuy's inhabitants economically and politically by separating the people from the PLAF. Yet conventional military power could only help pacification insofar as South Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces were able to assume an ever increasing burden. The major contribution of his research is that, despite the best efforts of the Australians, shortly after their departure from Phuoc Tuy, scant trace of their impact of pacification existed.⁶² Such a contention, as demonstrated with a study of Phu Yen, is applicable beyond the borders of Phuoc Tuy. By the end of the U.S. advisory mission in Phu Yen, the Americans held only vague notions of just how much of the province existed in a truly pacified state.

Methodology

To best understand pacification in Phu Yen requires accessing the ideas that both framed the perceptions and the enacting of pacification. A province study needs to recount pertinent local events while establishing linkage to the larger, national narrative.

⁶⁰ Thomas Richardson, "As If We'd Never Really Been There?: Pacification in Phuoc Tuy Province, Republic of Vietnam, 1966-1972," (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2014).

⁶¹ Bergerud, 2.

⁶² Richardson, 290-291, 294-295.

Naturally, this dissertation follows that tact through a close examination of historical records on Phu Yen. Archival sources provide the bulk of evidence used throughout this study, while oral histories offer additional, personal insight. When weaved together, the narrative of the war in Phu Yen is both grounded in contemporary reports and the lasting memories of former members of AT28. Such a source base is indicative of a methodology more firmly grounded in cultural, rather than social, history.

The impetus for this dissertation are the papers of former AT28 member Courtney Frobenius, whose papers are housed at the University of Southern Mississippi's McCain Archives. In his collection, Frobenius provides copies of, and commentary on, his inspections of various hamlets in Phu Yen in 1971. Yet alone, the papers of Frobenius do not unravel the proverbial Gordian Knot that was pacification. Since Frobenius's papers account for just 1971, to achieve the task of untying the pacification knot, this study reaches back to 1965 and ahead to 1972. Through this periodization, one sees the formation of American efforts to physically advance pacification in the Republic of Vietnam with conventional military forces and, thereafter, the gradual drawdown of military assets. Together, the deterioration of pacification becomes undeniable. Additional primary sources are required for such a contention. Found at the U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH) and the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park (NARA II) are the indispensable AT28 documents. These memos and reports are essential to understanding pacification in Phu Yen from the perspective of senior American officials in the province. Chapter I emerged from the Edward G. Lansdale Papers held at the Hoover Institution and Archives. Additionally, Texas Tech's Vietnam Center and Archive offers a wide range of primary sources that

span the entire spectrum of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. MACV intelligence reports and captured PLAF documents, made available by the Vietnam Center, add to the story of Phu Yen by revealing Communists infrastructure that always existed in the province.

The story of Phu Yen returns to the narrative of the Vietnam War due in large part to extensive archival work. Sparingly used, if at all, AT28 documents now enter the discourse because of this province study. AT28 monthly province reports, semi-monthly district reports, and various other memoranda provide a perspective on pacification that, in many instances, are quiet frank. Such reports were written under time constraints and needed to convey all vital information as succinctly as possible, thus typos and grammatical errors went uncorrected. Quotations from these reports, however, are free of misspellings.

Oral histories helped inform this study. Interviews with CORDS personnel in Phu Yen provided insight into how the war transpired at the province and hamlet levels. Conversations with Russell Meerdink, a former Province Senior Advisor, and his former deputy, Colonel Charles Varnum, shed light on the 1970 to 1971 period. Discussions with lower level CORDS advisors in Phu Yen, such as Robert Barron, Courtney Frobenius, Ronald Thayer, and Ellis Wisner, revealed much about the war at the district level.

Vietnam War historiography is rich with perspectives, many of which were established during the war itself and that continue to influence the historiographical debate. This study advances the historiography while pushing past the orthodox versus revisionist dichotomy by not blaming individuals, or even specific agencies, for Hanoi's triumph over pacification. Instead, criticism is directed towards political processes implemented by the United States borne out of a dynamic Cold War world.

Consequently, this dissertation represents an interpretation of the Vietnam War void of personal vindication and myth conjuring.

Chapters

A study of Phu Yen substantiates the orthodox claim that, although many Americans made a valiant effort, far too many issues prohibited a definitive American victory in the Republic of Vietnam. For that reason, this study is arranged into five chapters as well as an introduction and epilogue. Chapter I is thematic in structure, whereas the subsequent chapters are arranged chronologically as to best convey pacification as an ongoing process in Phu Yen. Contemporary discourse over the meaning of pacification is the focus of chapter one. Such a focus permits an analysis of pacification as an idea that lacked an agreed upon meaning. Through this chapter, pacification is demonstrated as a word often used by Americans to describe the purpose of the war, yet did so without ever agreeing on what exactly pacification meant. With the major divide being over whether pacification equated to a constructive or destructive process, there is clear indication that pacification nonetheless existed as the driving force behind how the United States fought the Vietnam War. The lack of a consensus, too, results in the need to look towards events beyond the confines of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. Indeed, the countryside itself defined pacification. Therefore, the meaning of pacification only becomes apparent in the subsequent chapters on Phu Yen.

The four remaining chapters center on Phu Yen because findings from here help explain pacification as a process borne out of conventional military operations and why pacification ultimately did not work. Together these chapters convey the argument that continuity, not change, best defines the American Vietnam War experience. While the

revisionist consensus suggests that pacification succeeded by the end of the war, events in Phu Yen contradict such a notion. Therefore, Chapter II includes a cursory overview of the province's history as a battle ground between armies. In particular, French efforts to pacify the province with conventional military forces during the First Indochina War warrant considerable attention. Moving forward, the chapter addresses the events leading up to direct U.S. military involvement in Phu Yen. The GVN, under President Ngo Dinh Diem, considered Phu Yen a model province as it had good local leadership and security.⁶³ Yet by 1965, Phu Yen seemed on the cusp of becoming a Communist province in the Republic of Vietnam. Only through extensive and numerous offensive operations executed by I Field Force Vietnam's maneuver battalions did pacification progress in Phu Yen. Indeed, search and destroy was pacification. These factors suggest that a close examination of Phu Yen will help explain large, nationwide trends.

Chapter III centers on the 1968 Tet Offensive. In covering 1967, the chapter addresses how, despite intense IFFV operations, the strategic Tuy Hoa Valley remained a contested space in Phu Yen. IFFV's operations pushed enemy main forces away from the population, but PAVN and PLAF strongholds in Phu Yen remained largely intact, which permitted PAVN free movement in the valley and its assaults against the province capital in 1968. A detailed analysis of the Tet Offensive revealed how the joint PAVN and PLAF effort to take Tuy Hoa City, albeit a failed endeavor, gravely jeopardized pacification in the Tuy Hoa Valley, thereby making the offensive a long-term Communist victory.

⁶³ Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 110-114.

Moreover, this chapter counters the prevailing argument amongst scholars that the Tet Offensive amounted to a devastating Communist defeat.

Chapter IV entails an in-depth analysis of Phu Yen after IFFV completed the majority of its operations in the province. Covering the period between 1969 and 1970, this chapter takes the dissertation into Vietnamization. In that vein, this portion of the study concentrates on the PLAF's reversion to low intensity warfare as to derail the Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC). The PLAF commenced an abduction and terror campaign that significantly undermined the GVN's image in Phu Yen while dealing the biggest blow to the American advisory mission, ever. In creating what the US Embassy in Saigon dubbed "The Advisory Crisis," the crippling of Vietnamization in Phu Yen marked the turning point for pacification in that province.

The final chapter covers 1971 and ends at the withdrawal of American combat forces in 1972. Looking at the years 1971 through 1972, chapter five presents Phu Yen as a province where—despite the best efforts of CORDS—the PLAF remained a veritable threat. This chapter covers the 1971 Battle of Cung Son as to relay Phu Yen's continued struggle with capable Communist main forces. Additionally, a discussion of the HES and the ratings of Phu Yen's many villages provides insight into how pacification measurement downplayed enemy activity and influence. While much of the province's hamlets were pacified according to HES documentation, the PLAF dramatically increased its presence among the local population. Chapter five concludes with what it meant for MACV to consider Phu Yen pacified when enemy activity continued.

CHAPTER II – SURELY PACIFICATION MEANS

Introduction

On NBC's "Meet The Press," a comment by Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey encapsulated the complexity of pacification. As heard by viewers on 26 November 1967, Humphrey said, "pacification or what we call revolutionary development" when addressing the level of progress in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).⁶⁴ Statements containing "pacification or..." were common throughout the Vietnam War. With definitions ranging from pacification as a matter of destruction or development. As a mechanism of destruction, pacification entailed the use of force to rid the RVN's countryside of Communist combat units and infrastructure. When seen as a method of development, pacification meant securing the loyalty of the people and upgrading the nation's infrastructure as to better the relationship with the Saigon government and the people it ruled over. Often, however, a mixture of these interpretations permeated the discourse, resulting in a range of definitions. Despite years of dialogue, no singular understanding of pacification existed for the duration of the war. For that reason, to advance any understanding of pacification requires a reassessment of the meaning of pacification.

Pacification appeared in studies before, during, and after the Vietnam War.

Various scholars wrote about pacification without delving into the history of the term.

Pacification and the Viet Cong System in Dinh Tuong: 1966-1967, by David W. P. Elliott

⁶⁴ Selected Statements on Vietnam by DOD and Other Administration Officials: July 1 - December 31, 1967, 11 January 1967, p.108, Folder 18, Box 01, Glenn Helm Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University (TTUVA). Available at: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=1070118001>.

and W. A. Stewart, described pacification “as control over both people and territory.”⁶⁵ In *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*, Jeffery Race essentially placed pacification, revolutionary development, and rural reconstruction as outside the purview of military efforts.⁶⁶ Eric M. Bergerud’s *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* provided insight into how American and South Vietnamese differed on their understanding of pacification.⁶⁷ Richard A. Hunt’s *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds* provided a detailed history of American involvement in pacification, yet never addressed the many definitions of pacification itself.⁶⁸ While all the aforementioned works expanded the collective understanding of pacification, none analyzed the absence of a consensus over the meaning of the term. The ramification was that a definitive definition of pacification remained elusive.

A lasting agreement over what precisely pacification meant never happened at any point in history. Thus while noteworthy studies dealt with pacification, none truly explained the sheer complexities of the term itself. Thus two truths emerged from all the studies noted above. First, there is the assumption that a common definition of pacification existed. Second, the tacit notion that pacification entailed the transformation the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) from a politically fractured state into a functioning

⁶⁵ David W. P. Elliott and W. A. Stewart, *Pacification and the Viet Cong System in Dinh Tuong: 1966-1967*, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1969; 1975), 2.

⁶⁶ Jeffery Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 242.

⁶⁷ Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics Of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 143.

⁶⁸ Richard A Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

democracy. Nevertheless, it is hard to understand pacification if the term itself is only vaguely, if at all, defined.

Prior to the war's escalation in 1966, America's foremost counterinsurgency expert returned to Saigon in August 1965. Edward G. Lansdale made his mark in Southeast Asia through his exploits in advising the French during the First Indochina War, aiding the Philippine government's defeat of the Huk Rebellion, and as a close confidant of the RVN's first president, Ngo Dinh Diem. With Saigon's war against the PLAF going poorly, Lansdale once again found himself in Saigon as a liaison between American interests and the Government of Vietnam (GVN). Pacification laid at the heart of Lansdale's mission in Saigon.

A multitude of personalities called Saigon home during the Vietnam War as they advised the GVN on pacification. Indeed, Lansdale was one of many foreigners in Saigon working to improve pacification in the RVN. Aside from Lansdale, Americans diplomats Henry Cabot Lodge and Robert Komer lent their perspective on the never resolved debate over the meaning of pacification. While not physically present in Saigon, other respected members of the counterinsurgency community, such as Briton Sir Robert Thompson and Frenchmen David Galula, Roger Trinquier, and Bernard B. Fall, influenced pacification discourse in the Republic of Vietnam.

Each of these men expressed interpretations of pacification steeped in personal opinion. Such views often fluctuated over time, which represented anything but a catholic understanding of the term. Unsurprisingly, a disconnect between war planning and execution later resulted in a tendency among scholars to frame the Vietnam War as comprised of two distinct wars: military operations and pacification. Yet the

conceptualizations of American authorities placed all the war aims under pacification or corresponding terminology. By encompassing military and civilian tasks under a single term, Americans such as Lansdale, Lodge, and Komer linked every effort to pacification. Moreover, in this context, an examination of pacification shows that the prevailing definition points towards the existence of only one war in southeast Asia.

On the South Vietnamese side, the GVN understood pacification as a mechanism with which to both defeat the growing insurgency and remain in power. Government officials, such as Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky and head of the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, Nguyen Duc Thang, voiced their opinions of pacification, often in concert with foreigners and often at odds with one another. In general, GVN officials wanted to build a secure state, which ran counter to the want of US officials to go a step further and build a nation to which the people have committed their hearts and minds. Although conversing with American advisors, the GVN vision of pacification as a means of controlling the people of the Republic of Vietnam, not winning their hearts and minds, prevailed.

How the most enigmatic individual of the Vietnam War figures into this study is simple. A controversial figure, Lansdale nonetheless provides considerable insight into what Americans meant when speaking about pacification. Lansdale, too, played a significant role in facilitating discourse. That he spent considerable time working clandestine operations on behalf of the CIA and attempting to navigate the highest political circles encompassing the White House, made Lansdale a mysterious, if not problematic, individual. Yet Lansdale fits into this study because of the position he held at the center of pacification dialog during the formative years of America's war in

Vietnam. His effect on pacification matters more in terms of the conversations generated than action taken on the ground.⁶⁹ Lansdale returned to Saigon at the behest of returning U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge.⁷⁰ His role in Saigon as chairman of the U.S. Mission Liaison Group and heading his Senior Liaison Office (SLO) placed him in the midst of American and South Vietnamese diplomatic relations. Furthermore, Lansdale and SLO generated dialogue over the meaning of pacification as they tried to explain the complex process in the clearest manner possible. Yet, and most strikingly, conversations about pacification never produced a definition that truly lasted. Thus while Lansdale's efforts in creating a unified GVN approach to improving the RVN were significant, what matters are the variations in definitions of pacification that emerged during the Vietnam War.

Correspondence among American support agencies always used pacification terminology when referring to the overall effort to build the Republic of Vietnam into a viable state. Yet a well-established definition eluded pacification, despite contemporary efforts by Americans and South Vietnamese authorities to reach a singular understanding of what pacification entailed. Authorities spoke of the importance of the military phases of pacification, yet discourse tended to further stress civic development, despite many explanations of pacification beginning with the decisive phases of clearing and security.

⁶⁹ By this juncture of his career, Lansdale held little political clout yet remained a powerful symbol of the U.S.'s commitment to building democracies in Southeast Asia. See: Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale's Cold War* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 8-10, 86-88, 124-125.

⁷⁰ Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, "Pentagon Papers Part IV. C. 8. Evolution of the War. Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967" (5890510) [Electronic Record], p. 12. RG 330 / P 760 / Box 6; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II). Available at: <<http://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-8.pdf>>.

Of consequence is how American authorities discussed pacification and did so in such a manner that the term embodied the entire war effort.

Pacification Discourse

With a *mélange* of related terms such as revolutionary development, rural construction, rural development, rural edification, counterinsurgency, and nation-building, the word pacification and its variations enjoyed widespread usage during the age of decolonization. Since the aforementioned terms ultimately entailed the same objective, the defeat of an insurgency, they were one in the same. As a strategy, pacification existed prior to the arrival of American military forces in the Republic of Vietnam. More broadly, the concept of pacification existed at the heart of post-Second World War struggles of the British in Malaya and the French in Indochina. The Americans, too, witnessed pacification in Greece and the Philippines. Pacification now sat at the center of the war between Hanoi and Saigon. Efforts to pacify South Vietnam occurred during the First Indochina War and again during the time of Ngo Dinh Diem. By 1965, American advisors, both civilian and military, used either pacification or revolutionary development to describe the stabilizing efforts in the RVN. Regardless of the term used, what lacked realization were the concepts behind the pacification or revolutionary development.⁷¹

For the British in Malaya, pacification amounted to a government, not a military, matter. As stated by Great Britain's most renowned counterinsurgency expert, Sir Robert Thompson, "An insurgent movement is a war for the people. It stands to reason that

⁷¹ Ibid., i-ii.

government measures must be directed to restoring government authority and law and order throughout the country, so that control over the people can be regained and its support won.”⁷² A small and elite military, Thompson wrote, mattered insofar as it supported the actions of the government.⁷³ Consequently, pacification was a governance issue, one that a military could only help rectify. Essentially, Thompson posited pacification as predominantly a mechanism of development. Improving the Saigon government dominated his recommendations to Ngo Dinh Diem as a member of the British Advisory Mission and, later, to the United States as he advised the Nixon Administration on its Vietnam policy.⁷⁴ Yet the war in the RVN differed greatly than that of the one in Malaya. Priorities in the RVN dictated the elevated role of American and South Vietnamese armies in advancing pacification.

Pacification discourse harkened back to France’s war to retain its overseas empire after the Second World War. France’s influence over Saigon reverberated through the GVN as evidenced by its early preference for the term Xay Dung Nong Thun, or Rural Construction, a term with French roots.⁷⁵ During the First Indochina War, the French referred to pacification as “Edification Rurale.”⁷⁶ This term, noted Lansdale in a letter to Michigan Governor George Romney, better conveyed a message of elevating the quality of life of the peasants through “a building up of the countryside”- than that of

⁷² Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1966), 51.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁴ Thompson, *Make for the Hills: Memories of Far Eastern Wars* (London: Leo Cooper Ltd, 1989), 127, 158.

⁷⁵ Edward Lansdale, “Briefing for Secretary of Defense,” 29 November 1965, p.1, Folder: Reports and Writings: Lansdale, Briefing, Pacification effort, 1966, Box 59, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

⁷⁶ Edward Lansdale to George Romney, Letter, 8 December 1965, p.1, Folder: Day File: December 1965; Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

pacification.⁷⁷ Lansdale added that, “most Americans speak of it as pacification, which it really isn’t, since this denotes a police action against a hostile population, we are actually ‘liberating,’ trying to give the people both security from the PLAF along with impelling reasons to join our side.”⁷⁸ Indeed, Lansdale reflected a reality in which the word pacification enjoyed growing usage without a firmly established meaning.

France’s experience with pacification affected American discourse. The French counterinsurgency triumvirate of David Galula, Roger Trinquier, and Bernard B. Fall exposed American readers, including those in the U.S. military and civilian agencies, to pacification. Accordingly, these three experts profoundly influenced American thinking on pacification. David Galula’s 1963 RAND publication, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958*, recalled his two years commanding a French Army company during France’s attempts to pacify and retain Algeria. Notwithstanding some 298 pages, in which Galula explained pacification efforts in Algeria, he never defined pacification itself.⁷⁹ In his subsequent 1964 treatise, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, David Galula never once defined pacification despite discussing how to combat revolutionary warfare.⁸⁰

A veteran of the First Indochina War and the Algerian War, Roger Trinquier used the tactics of these conflicts as lessons for future wars. In that vein, Trinquier’s magnum opus, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, took the discussion of

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1963).

⁸⁰ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964).

pacification further, yet never directly explained the meaning of pacification. Instead, he indirectly relayed pacification as meeting the needs of the people. As expressed by Trinquier,

Our war aims must be clearly known to the people. They will have to be convinced that if we call upon them to fight at our sides it can only be in defense of a just cause. And we should not deceive them. The surest means of gaining their confidence will be to crush those who want to oppress them. When we have placed the terrorists out of harm's way, the problem of pacification will be quickly resolved.⁸¹

What is apparent is that for pacification to work, the process must gain the backing of the people. In that vein, he argued against the notion of winning the hearts and minds.

Rather, “We know that it is not all necessary to have the sympathy of a majority of the people in order to rule them. The right organization can turn the trick.”⁸² Instead an entity like the GVN could gain the people's loyalty by providing security that protected the people, “especially from terrorism.”⁸³ Trinquier wrote of control, a process by which a government could forcibly exact the loyalty of the people. The idea of control laying at the core of pacification continued throughout the American war in Vietnam.

Bernard B. Fall spent most of his life in the midst of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. During the Second World War, he fought against the German occupation of France as a member of the French Resistance. Later, he spent considerable time studying the First Indochina War and, until his death in 1967, the Vietnam War firsthand. His academic career in the United States made him more accessible to Americans, and eventually the most well-known and respected of the French

⁸¹ Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), 67.

⁸² Ibid., 4.

⁸³ Ibid., 29.

counterinsurgency school insofar as Americans were concerned. He educated audiences on pacification, however, he, too, did not define pacification. In *Street Without Joy*, Fall wrote “the people and the army must ‘emerge on the same side of the fight.’”⁸⁴ While giving a lecture to students at the University of Hawaii’s Far East Training Center in Hawaii in December 1966, Fall taught the future USAID members his perspective on insurgency. His lecture spoke of how the PLAF quickly met the needs of South Vietnamese villagers, while the more bureaucratic USAID system took years to accomplish the same feat. Fall noted that when a village requests a new bridge, USAID starts with a survey of a potential bridge site, with the eventual recommendation that the bridge be capable of supporting a heavy U.S. Army vehicles. Such an aid process, contended Fall, would take years to complete and far exceed village’s needs.⁸⁵ Fall stated to his audience, “The point is that the VC in all likelihood will chop down two trees because the basic requirements for a Vietnamese village is that the bridge is wide enough to take two women with two carrying poles and two bags of rice, that’s all. That’s the average carrying requirement for a Vietnamese village—no more no less.”⁸⁶ Adding, “So what you then find, slow but surely, is the Viet Cong cadre will come in and build up this low level organization and this will be a system in which there will be constant involving of the people.”⁸⁷ Essentially such a process amounted to pacification.

Of consequence here is that much like the Americans during the Vietnam War, the French authorities on pacification never defined the term. Although Galula, Trinquier,

⁸⁴ Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 375.

⁸⁵ “Fall, Bernard, lecture, Far East Training Center, Hawaii,” December 1966, p.1, Folder: Subject File: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency, Box 12, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

and Fall offered valuable insight into the goals and methods of pacification, they did so without establishing clear interpretations of pacification. Therefore, an entire generation of American readers, potential students of modern warfare, matured without an established definition of pacification from which to inform United States decision making in the Republic of Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s.

Conversely, the French military did furnish a rather profound explanation of pacification. A document translated and made available by RAND to American diplomatic and military circles, *Lessons of the War in Indochina, Volume 2*, referenced a statement from a 1949 report “General X, South Vietnam,” in which pacification seemed almost beyond the purview of anyone but those directly affected by the Viet Minh. Accordingly,

For a province to be considered pacified, it is necessary for the authority of the legal government to manifest itself by the restoration of normal political institutions, for the clearing of the area to have been conducted by the people themselves, and, finally, for the centers of population to have organized self-defense units capable of protecting the critical points of their province.⁸⁸

Again citing the same 1949 report, the French document also placed pacification as a unifying strategy. Indeed, “The validity of this postulate resides in the definition of the terms ‘authority’ and ‘legal government’. Needless to say, these essential conditions were never fully attained in Vietnam. In addition, the process of pacification requires ‘...that all efforts converge toward the same goal...this being possible only if the same authority exercises both civil and military powers.’”⁸⁹ As for the effectiveness of such an approach, the French document relayed that “The complete restoration of order and a return to

⁸⁸ *A Translation From The French: Lessons Of The War In Indochina, Volume 2*, trans. Col. V. J. Croizat (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1967), 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

normalcy was an undertaking which, if not actually impossible, was at the very least doomed to end in unhappy and incomplete results.”⁹⁰ Never before was such a dower statement made about pacification.

Defining pacification never materialized, this despite years of dialog between American authorities in Saigon. The Pentagon Papers described the effect of pacification discourse on the war, “the proponents of what is called so loosely in this paper ‘pacification’ were often in such violent disagreement as to what pacification meant that they quarreled publicly among themselves and overlooked their common interests. At other times, people who disagreed strongly on major issues found themselves temporary allies with a common objective.”⁹¹ Thus achieving any meaningful definition of pacification meant overcoming the many divergent opinions; an insurmountable task. What matters, though, is how the architects of pacification discussed the term, particularly since Americans in Saigon spoke of what pacification needed to accomplish, yet talked vaguely as to what pacification entailed. Regardless of years of pacification explanations, “the curious problem of the distance between rhetoric and reality” lasted as long as the war itself.⁹²

Chatter over how the United States should confront the regional conflicts that emerged out of decolonization began before Lansdale and his team’s arrival in Saigon. The synonym counterinsurgency predated the use of pacification, allowing for

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, “Pentagon Papers Part IV. C. 8. Evolution of the War. Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967” (5890510) [Electronic Record], p. i-ii. RG 330 / P 760 / Box 6; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II). Available at: <<http://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-8.pdf>>.

⁹² Ibid., ii.

explanations of the concept. A 1962 issue of the *Army Information Digest* ran a short piece entitled “Cold War Terminology.” The editors defined counterinsurgency as including “all military, political, economic, psychological, and sociological activities directed toward preventing and suppressing resistance groups whose actions range in degree of violence and scope from subversive political activity to violent actions by large guerrilla elements to overthrow a duly established government.”⁹³ The challenge confronting the military, wrote the editors, was “to maintain or restore internal security so that other elements of the counter-insurgency program can operate.”⁹⁴ All this statement lacked was the word pacification. Nevertheless, the concept of utilizing every facet of civilian and military entities to fight a war against guerrillas formed the foundation of the Vietnam War. While the principles of this explanation remained intact, the process of understanding pacification fluctuated over the course of the war.

In 1963, the Department of the Army published Field Manual 31-22, *Counter guerrilla Operations*. Here commanders received a telling explanation of pacification. Accordingly, “Successful pacification of subversive insurgency requires the isolation of the insurgent from internal and external support.”⁹⁵ FM 31-22 also called for commanders to exercise necessary measures as to control the area of operations and the local population as to diminish the guerrilla’s presence.⁹⁶ Indeed,

The nature and scope of measures necessary to defeat the enemy in a designated area may require actions by military commanders which impinge on the liberty and property rights of the citizens of the affected area. Such actions would normally be

⁹³ *Army Information Digest*, “Cold War Terminology,” June 1962, p.54, Folder: Civic Action, Box 23, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution and Archives (HIA).

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Department of the Army, Field Manual 31-22, *Counter guerrilla Operations*, November 1963, 106. Available at: <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/maxwell1963doctrine.pdf>>.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 106-109.

preceded by an announcement of a declaration of emergency by the head of the government. Application of the strictest of population controls may be required.⁹⁷

Thus the correlation between pacification and the liberty infringing actions necessary to defeat an insurgency emerged in FM 31-22.

Pacification, too, existed in a state that prevented the emergence of a clear definition of the term. The ill-defined nature of pacification meant the term functioned in a rather nebulous world. As noted by Edward Miller in *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam*, the first concerted American and South Vietnamese effort at pacification appeared in the form of the Strategic Hamlet Program. Based on the teachings of none other than Roger Trinquier, whose ideas heavily influenced the Diem regime, the Strategic Hamlet Program sought to provide the Saigon government with the method to secure, and therefore control, the people. Indeed, as Trinquier argued in *Modern Warfare*, winning the hearts and minds was not a prerequisite, nor requirement, for getting the people to obey the government.⁹⁸

Insofar as the Strategic Hamlet Program connects with this study, the failed endeavor revealed the need, at least for Americans, to thoroughly define pacification. Later released by then former U.S. Mission Liaison Group member Daniel Ellsberg, the Pentagon Papers described how pacification lacked clarity;

A related problem arose from the uniqueness of this program in American experience — pacification by proxy. The theory of sequential phases could be variously interpreted. This is not the problem of the three blind men describing the elephant; it is the problem of men with different perspectives each moulding his own conception of a proper body to the same skeleton. If the final product were to have some semblance of coherence and mutual satisfaction it was necessary that

⁹⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁹⁸ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 232-233.

the shapers came to agreement on substance and operational procedure, not just that they agree on the proper skeleton upon which to work.⁹⁹

Phases, more so than the term pacification itself, caused considerable vagueness as to what constituted pacification. Comprised of an undefined number of phases, what pacification specifically entailed varied depending on one's perspective. Despite efforts to reach a consensus in 1963, disagreement over the steps and scope of pacification persisted throughout much of the late 1960s.

Equally revealing, the Pentagon Papers distinguished how American and South Vietnamese authorities perceived pacification. When addressing the Strategic Hamlet Program of 1963, "U.S. desires to begin an effective process of pacification had fastened onto security as a necessary precondition and slighted."¹⁰⁰ Conversely, "President Diem and his brother, for their part, had decided to emphasize control of the rural population as the precondition to winning loyalty."¹⁰¹ Although focusing on 1963, these statements held true for subsequent years. Since security meant creating distance between the people and Communist cadres and guerrillas, it seemed a near natural prerequisite for pacification to succeed. Even by the time of CORDS, the U.S. placed security as the mandatory first step towards pacification. Yet this did not mean good security always existed year after year in every province.

⁹⁹ Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, "Pentagon Papers Part IV. C. 8. Evolution of the War. Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967" (5890510) [Electronic Record], pp.i-ii. RG 330 / P 760 / Box 6, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II). Available at: <<https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-8.pdf>>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., iii.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

When encouraging the GVN to embrace pacification, the written record left by American advisors revealed the use of a myriad of synonyms of pacification. With the primary purpose of helping the GVN to develop a pacification plan for the country, SLO frequently used that word and related terms in their written work. From the start of Lansdale's appointment to the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in 1965, the word pacification became Lansdale's go to means of encapsulating the GVN's task of gaining the loyalty of the South Vietnamese people into a single word. Other members of SLO used similar terminology, while sometimes using pacification itself. Rightly so, pacification terminology dominated the daily vocabulary of American advisors. Nevertheless, what pacification precisely entailed varied from conversation to conversation. Whether used to define a concept or a phase, pacification represented an American and South Vietnamese effort to best conceptualize the preeminent strategy for fighting the war against Hanoi and its agents south of the 17th parallel.

Discourse among American authorities in Saigon largely centered on what pacification meant. While on fact finding trip to the Republic of Vietnam in 1964, General Maxwell Taylor noted that, "Pacification, like the weather, has been discussed at great length; while it would be unfair to conclude that nobody has done anything about it, charity would not seem to require that one claim that it has yet been totally achieved in Vietnam."¹⁰² In his aptly titled report "Definition of Pacification," Taylor attempted to relay back to Washington D.C. just what pacification entailed and how it should proceed in the Republic of Vietnam. He wrote,

¹⁰² Maxwell Taylor to ADJ, "Definition of Pacification," 7 October 1964, p.2, Folder: 8. Pacification/Counter Insurgency (miscellany), Box 34, Charles T. R. Bohannon Papers, HIA.

The generally accepted theory of pacification defines three phases for spreading government control outward from the secure areas (the ‘oil spot’ technique); but it seems possibly useful to reverse the...order of the steps (clear, secure, build) in order to focus...attention on beginning where we are and proceeding to where we want to be.¹⁰³

Taylor’s explanations of the three phases of pacification were by no means universally accepted. Yet he spoke of control, a term at odds with getting the populous to willingly support the GVN. The idea of controlling people remained attached to future explanations of pacification, despite overt claims to the contrary.

Counterinsurgency expert and friend of Lansdale, Charles T. R. Bohannon, did not entirely agree with Taylor’s perception of pacification. The comments Bohannon made in his copy of the report indicated that pacification was anything but rigidly defined. In one instance, he took issue with Taylor’s argument that during the secure phase, the military needed to maintain “an aggressive spirit and an aggressive fashion.”¹⁰⁴ Bohannon noted “military activities should be defensive i.e. defend the people.”¹⁰⁵ In regards to the hold phase, Taylor stated that, “The effort should be made to turn the ‘self-help’ program around so that it is responding not to the wishes and hopes, but to the felt needs, of the hamlets.”¹⁰⁶ Bohannon wrote in the margin, “What the hell does this mean?”¹⁰⁷ Upon reading the conclusion, he remained unconvinced of Taylor’s paper. “I don’t get this conclusion as stated,” Bohannon commented.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Taylor’s conclusion reiterated the three pacification phases, writing that,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 9.

pacification should assume that the three phases of pacification will proceed from building through securing to clearing areas, that building logically precedes securing and securing clearing, though there is no reason why they should not proceed simultaneously in different areas. It suggests also that the oil spot spreads by seepage and not by jumps, but that the nicest political judgement is needed in order to determine how far it has seeped, and what needs to be done at a given spot at a given moment to make it seep faster.¹⁰⁹

Seemingly advocating for two divergent approaches—strict phase order versus all at once—Taylor’s conclusion offered more confusion than answers insofar as defining pacification.

Prior to the arrival of Lansdale, by 2 March 1965, American advisory entities in Saigon—Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), United States Operations Mission (USOM), and the United States Information Service (USIS)—agreed upon a singular interpretation of pacification. As defined by MACV, USOM, and USIS in “The Concept of Pacification and Certain Definitions and Procedures,” “pacification encompasses all civilian, military and police actions to eliminate organized VC military activity, detect and eliminate the overt and covert VC political apparatus and nurture economic, political and social development of a viable economy.”¹¹⁰ Insofar as enacting pacification, the Americans specified that,

‘pacification’ is composed of two aspects. The first constitutes primarily a military problem, a problem of the GVN imposing its will upon the Viet Cong military establishment and those Viet Cong paramilitary forces which have been gathered in its support. The second aspect of pacification consists of constant and ever-expanding GVN effort particularly focused at the province level to effectively counter VC infiltration into, and the establishment of VC control over, the Vietnamese rural areas and the population inhabiting these areas. This effort aims at the provision of physical security against VC guerrilla activities in these areas through the coordinated use of military forces and police, and, through action on the socio/economic/political front beginning at the household and family level and extending up through the village and district, the arming (in the classic sense) and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, “The Concept of Pacification and Certain Definitions and Procedures,” March 2, 1965, p. 1, Military History Institute.

motivation of the population to resist Viet Cong encroachment and domination, to aid GVN forces in combatting such encroachment, and to present a hostile environment against the Viet Cong subversive effort—all of this beginning at the lowest levels of households, populated places, village and on up to districts and provinces.¹¹¹

The definition of pacification furnished by MACV, USOM, and USIS fully encompassed and expressed the entire Vietnam War. Stressing the military connections, this definition made pacification a principle problem of the American military and not just that of the RVNMF. In turn this also meant that pacification existed as anything but a peaceful process. Moreover, American authorities acknowledged that pacification had to help the South Vietnamese people. Doing so offered the Saigon government its only true means of obtaining the unyielding support of the people.

The MACV, USOM, and USIS definition also posited pacification as comprised of three phases. Together the phases of clearing, securing, and development constituted pacification. In doing so, these American entities presented pacification as a strategy in and of itself and not merely a component of the wider war effort. These agencies designated the tasks of clearing and securing as duties of the ARVN, RF, and police forces. This reflected the 1965 mindset of American advisors that the South Vietnamese needed to fight their own war, albeit with U.S. dollars and equipment. Such a view changed, albeit at the displeasure of SLO and other civilian entities, as the White House increased U.S. troop levels and MACV mounted pacification supporting operations. This extended the role of the U.S. Army in pacification, making it a key player in the clearing and, later, securing phases. Moreover, as noted in the document, events varied from

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1-2.

province to province, meaning South Vietnamese forces did not have a monopoly when it came to clearing and securing.¹¹² These agreements nevertheless failed to imbue coherence in future discussions pertinent to pacification. Indeed, the existence of a detailed US directive regarding the meaning of pacification did not prevent competing explanations of pacification. Perspectives of pacification still fluctuated between relaying the term as an all-encompassing strategy or simply as a phase.

A SLO memo, perhaps penned by Lansdale himself, conveyed pacification as encompassing the entire war. This undated memo described pacification as a process consisting of five “strategic principles.”¹¹³ These being “internal defense and security,” “economic progress to better the standard of living,” “the improvement of social services such as education and health facilities,” “the establishment of political institutions and a positive ideology,” and “the amelioration of the administrative system.”¹¹⁴ Together, these goals posited both military and civilian objectives for the long-term viability of the Republic of Vietnam. Goals that the memo noted “must be pursued with ardor.”¹¹⁵ With such an array of objectives, pacification did more than embody the war, it defined it.

Widespread understanding as to what pacification meant remained noticeably absent among American and South Vietnamese authorities. Rufus Phillips relayed this point to Lansdale, commenting that “The main problem in carrying out Rural Construction (Pacification) is that too few high echelon Americans or Vietnamese

¹¹² Ibid., 3.

¹¹³ “Memo on Pacification,” Undated, p.1, Folder: Pacification (Rural Construction), Box 61, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

understand it.”¹¹⁶ Phillips hit upon the inability of leaders, such as Lodge and Ky, to articulate clear and consistent views on pacification. On more than one occasion, these two men expressed a range, and often divergent, interpretations of pacification.

Pacification and permanence were two terms that rarely, if ever, went together. Agreements over what constituted pacification meant little insofar as those definitions lasting beyond a particular conversation or meeting. Richard Holbrooke, as a member of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, once suggested a substantial revision of pacification’s components. He proposed that pacification be the product of two phases. As stated by Holbrooke,

I recommend that we dispense with the name clearing, securing and developing for phases of pacification. In their place, let us institute just two phases which I propose to call the Destruction Phase and the Construction Phase. These two terms are inseparable. To destroy without building up would mean useless labor. To build without first destroying would be an illusion.¹¹⁷

Holbrook’s proposal demonstrated the malleability of what exactly pacification entailed. Indeed, this view presented pacification as a simpler concept than that offered by the definitions agreed upon by American entities in Saigon. Yet such a view of pacification appears to not gained traction among the various groups of American’s advising the GVN on matters of pacification.

Pacification was malleable, as demonstrated by the numerous efforts to achieve a workable definition of the term. Communication within the U.S. Liaison Group revealed much uncertainty about the meaning of pacification, particularly when dealing with Ky.

¹¹⁶ Rufus Phillips to Edward Lansdale, “Thoughts on Rural Construction Concept and Organization,” 25 September 1965, p.1, Folder: Day File: September 1965, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹¹⁷ Richard Holbrook to POL, Untitled, Undated, p.1, Folder: Cadres and Pacification (miscellaneous papers) 1965-1966, Box 34, Charles T. R. Bohannon Papers, HIA.

The RVN leader did not grasp pacification as envisioned by Lansdale, a reality reflected in Ky's public remarks. Of consequence in a 4 October 1965 memo from Lodge to Lansdale and other group members was a remark made by Ky. The RVN Prime Minister had stated, "Once we reoccupy an area, first priority is psychological warfare and rebuilding of roads and bridges destroyed by the Communists. Once we have re-established communication with the people and roads which allow people to move freely, then we are ready for other things, like schools, dispensaries."¹¹⁸ This led Lodge to ponder, "Surely pacification means: psychology, security, economic-social - - in that order. General Ky's remark seems to leave out security."¹¹⁹ The notion of security being absent from Ky's comment suggested that the South Vietnamese leader either mistakenly omitted that facet, or that such a step fell outside the purview of pacification. In either case, the GVN's perspective on pacification did indeed include security as a key facet, if not the foundation, of gaining the support of the countryside. Again, however, this did not entail winning the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese villager.

Moreover, Lodge's reaction to Ky's statement conveyed additional insight into the meaning of pacification. Going against the prevailing American idea that security preceded all other pacification phases, Lodge placed security as the second stage, after psychology. This implied that efforts to change the opinions of the South Vietnamese peasants should begin even before friendly military forces could secure their hamlets. Lodge's words also demonstrate a concerted effort by American entities to find and attach a specific meaning to pacification, suggesting that the agreed upon definition

¹¹⁸ Henry Cabot Lodge to Edward Lansdale, Office Memorandum, 4 October 1965, Folder: Memoranda. Lodge, Henry Cabot to Lansdale, Box 58, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

adopted by MACV, USOM, and USIS either did not last or did not permeate to other U.S. agencies.

A major part of Lansdale's second mission to the RVN consisted of getting the Saigon government to function in the best interests of the people. Lansdale always contended that the GVN must embrace pacification in order to build a bond between it and the nation's villagers. At a 29 September 1965 meeting between Ky and select Americans, Lansdale discussed how Ky's government intended to spread revolutionary zeal across the country. Topics of conversation included the use of cadre at the district level to work alongside locals in bettering their communities. Also, Ky and the Americans spoke of finding a "truer name for 'pacification' than 'rural construction.'"¹²⁰ Besides revealing the need for "something more inspiring," this dialog demonstrated that pacification and rural construction were one in the same. The only difference between the two terms being personal preference.¹²¹

SLO continued to influence perceptions of, and shape Republic of Vietnam's inherent dependence on, pacification. In a telegram to William Bundy and Leonard Unger at the Office of Secretary of State, Lodge forwarded a SLO paper that outlined key talking points for Ky to cover in his upcoming 11 October 1965 speech. Aside from demonstrating the influence held by SLO over the GVN, the paper revealed two items of note in regards to pacification. One, that rural construction referred specifically to the GVN's wider efforts to develop a viable country. Two, pacification functioned as the

¹²⁰ Edward Lansdale to Henry Cabot Lodge, "Pacification Meeting with Prime Minister Ky, 29 September," 30 September 1965, p.2, Folder: Day File: September 1965, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹²¹ Ibid.

means to achieve that goal. Doing so required that the people, “must see that you have concern for their well-being and that you are their friend.”¹²² Furthermore, “This pacification task in the Rural Construction program in the battle for our survival. We must hold the land liberated from the Viet Cong and patrol it so they cannot disrupt our life again with their raids and ambushes.”¹²³ As used in this document, the Republic of Vietnam’s very survival rested upon pacification.

Moreover, Ky’s talking points revealed a distinction between pacification and Rural Construction. The RVN leader placed pacification within the context of an even larger effort to modernize the nation. Rather than a peaceful process, pacification in this context meant the eradication of the Communists from South Vietnam. Pacification functioned as the method by which the Saigon Government could eject the Viet Cong through military means. This understanding of what pacification entailed permeated the ensuing discourse.

The meaning of pacification remained fluid by the end of November 1965. In a brief for the Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Lansdale cited Lodge’s summation of pacification as a means of conveying the concept. As recalled by Lansdale, Lodge defined pacification as “that part of the war which seeks to braid together all sorts of military, political, police, economic and social programs in order to root out that 65% of the Viet Cong which function as individual terrorists and in small groups.”¹²⁴ Lansdale furthered this definition in stating, “We try to give the people enough security to sleep

¹²² Henry Cabot Lodge to William Bundy and Leonard Unger, Telegram, 9 October 1965, p.3, Folder: Day File October 1965, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹²³ Ibid., 3-4.

¹²⁴ Edward Lansdale, “Briefing for Secretary of Defense,” 29 November 1965, p.1, Folder: Reports

nights. Basically, we then ask them to choose sides. To get them to choose our side, we must give them something they can really believe in. Security that will still be there tomorrow. A government they feel is theirs, that will be there tomorrow. And, some hope of a better life, tomorrow.”¹²⁵ For Lansdale, pacification meant giving the people of the Republic of Vietnam a reason to resist the Viet Cong. Democratic ideals, transplanted from America to South Vietnam, could counter the promises of change as made by the Communists. To achieve this, the South Vietnamese needed a responsible and legitimate federal government that could provide the people with economic advancement and security. America’s role in this was to provide all the support necessary while leaving the South Vietnamese to fight their own war. Lansdale proposed an idea that existed as the foundation of every perception of pacification, that only good government would win the loyalty of the people and spread the GVN’s authority over every inch of the nation. Essentially both Lansdale and Lodge accentuated the development aspects while framing pacification in a way as to include all the facets of the war in South Vietnam.

Although a vocal proponent of pacification, Lodge never revealed a concrete opinion regarding how the concept worked.¹²⁶ Correspondence from Lodge to Lansdale revealed a lack of clarity as the interchangeability of terms clouded the scope, and therefore the meaning, of pacification. In the span of eight days, Lodge’s opinion of pacification changed significantly. In a memo dated 7 December 1965, Lodge used

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1-2.

¹²⁶ Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, “Pentagon Papers Part IV. C. 8. Evolution of the War. Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967” (5890510) [Electronic Record], pp.8-9, RG 330 / P 760 / Box 6; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II). Available at: <<https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-8.pdf>>.

“Rural Construction-pacification effort,” demonstrating the apparent interchangeability of the preferred terms.¹²⁷ Used in that manner, pacification and rural reconstruction were clearly treated as concepts that encompassed subordinate phases. Yet, as understood by Lodge in a 15 December 1965 memo, revolutionary development, or the pro-GVN ideology necessary to effectively counter the promises of the National Liberation Front (NLF), encompassed pacification as one of its three phases. Rather than an umbrella term as used by others, pacification was the middle phase between military clearing and development.¹²⁸ This definition varied considerably from the explanation that pacification, or rural construction, embodied security and infrastructure building phases. Moreover, the ubiquity of pacification as defined by MACV, USOM, and USIS did not resonate throughout the U.S. Embassy.

Confusion over the scope of pacification remained infused in the discourse. In February 1966, Lansdale circulated Ellsberg’s draft paper on GVN concepts of pacification to other members of the U.S. Mission Liaison Group.¹²⁹ Ellsberg’s description of the GVN’s understanding of pacification varied considerably from that posited by Lansdale. Instead of using pacification to encapsulate the larger war effort, Ellsberg referred to pacification as the last two of three phases of rural construction. First came “clearing,” followed up by the two “securing” or pacification phases.¹³⁰ As referenced in

¹²⁷ Henry Cabot Lodge to Edward Lansdale, Memorandum, 7 December 1965, Folder: Memoranda Lodge, Henry Cabot to Lansdale, Box 58, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹²⁸ Henry Cabot Lodge to Edward Lansdale, “Roles of Different U.S. Agencies in the Three Phases of Rural Construction, that is, Military Clearing, Pacification and Development,” 15 December 1965, Folder: Memoranda Lodge, Henry Cabot to Lansdale, Box 58, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹²⁹ Edward Lansdale to U.S. Mission Liaison Group, “GVN Doctrine,” Folder: Day File: February 1966, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹³⁰ Daniel Ellsberg to SLO, “GVN Concepts of Rural Construction” [Draft], 6 January 1966, p. 2, Folder: Day File: January 1966, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

the same report, Prime Minister Ky spoke of the pacification phases as the stage “to destroy VC political and military infrastructures, and concurrently consolidate or reconstruct our infrastructures, i.e. to liberate the people from the Communist domination, help the people realize sense of duty and rise up at will to preserve the restored security.”¹³¹ Ky’s understanding of pacification placed the term in a strong military context, thus harkening back to that of Ngo Dinh Diem. To dislodge the Viet Cong from the countryside required the use of military force. Ellsberg’s draft underscored the divide between pacification being seen as a unifying concept or merely a phase.

In the same draft, Ellsberg used pacification synonyms interchangeably; “rural reconstruction” instead of “rural construction.” When using various terms in place of pacification, clarity lagged. Feedback from fellow SLO members, at the behest of Lansdale, resulted in more readable document.¹³² With the final version of Ellsberg’s report using “rural construction” consistently throughout, thereby demonstrating that consistency emerged only after discourse. More significantly, the concept and phases remained intact, as Ellsberg once more used a pertinent statement from Ky. In the words of Ky, “rural reconstruction is a work which the military, the people and the administrative officials must unite to accomplish.”¹³³ In addition to highlighting the

¹³¹ Nguyen Cao Ky quoted in Ellsberg to SLO, “GVN Concepts of Rural Construction,” [Draft], 6 January 1966, p. 2, Folder: Day File: January 1966, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹³² Edward Lansdale to U.S. Mission Liaison Group, “GVN Doctrine,” Folder: Day File: February 1966, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹³³ Nguyen Cao Ky quoted in Ellsberg to SLO, “GVN Concepts of Rural Construction,” [Draft], 6 January 1966, p. 3, Folder: Day File: February 1966, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

problematic nature of using interchangeable terms when discussing pacification, Ellsberg's draft demonstrated the malleability of pacification as a term.

The lack of consistency extended beyond Ellsberg's draft. A SLO memo on revolutionary development—another synonym—insinuated that pacification and rural development were one in the same. Indeed, evidence for this emerged from Prime Minister Ky officially replacing “rural construction” with “rural development” in the summer of 1965.¹³⁴ In describing this change in terminology, the SLO document treated both GVN terms as synonyms of pacification. Yet in the same report, the author continued to use the now replaced “rural construction.” Therefore, despite the phrasing selected by the GVN, the Americans continued to place efforts under varying terminology. Concepts and terminology mattered to those discussing pacification.

Nguyen Duc Thang's views of pacification were anything but rigid and opposed to those of Ky. At an II Corps conference in Dalat, he expressed his frustrations over ARVN, and even more generally, all conventional military involvement in pacification. U.S. Army Major General John C. F. Tillson III captured the “essence” of Thang's remarks. “Pacification is a Government function and not a military function,” recalled Tillson of Thang. “I implore that you [military] fight the war and leave the pacification to us,” Thang concluded.¹³⁵ Such words startled men like Tillson, since, “The importance of

¹³⁴ Samuel Karrick to SLO, “Background Paper - Revolutionary Development” [Draft], 24 February 1966, p.1, Folder: Day File: February 1966, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹³⁵ John C. F. Tillson, “II Corps Conference at Dalat,” 21 September 1966, p.2, Folder: Nguyen Duc Thang, (General) Box 62, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA. Tillson himself admitted to not directly quoting Thang, but instead the essences of Thang's comments.

ARVN participation should be known to Gen Thang.”¹³⁶ Yet Thang’s views at Dalat ran counter to his other expressions of the role of the military in pacification.

Indeed, Thang embraced pacification as the method of defeating the Communist cause in the countryside. Lansdale relayed to other American authorities Thang’s conclusions of what pacification should do for the people. For Thang, pacification presented an opportunity to build trust between ARVN and the people. By providing security at all costs, ARVN could give the people a choice as to which belligerent they supported. Doing so, argued Thang, would permit those residing in the nation’s hamlets an alternative to promises of freedom as offered by the VC. Thang expressed pacification as giving the people a choice. Moreover, through choice, local men could decide between joining ARVN or local defense forces. Essentially, instead of forcing or controlling the people, the Republic of Vietnam could benefit from using ARVN as a means of spreading democracy to the people.¹³⁷

Moreover, the fate of pacification and that of the RVNAF were entwined. Conversations between Lansdale and Thang reveled much about the meaning of pacification. In the often private chats at Lansdale’s Saigon residence, the two men developed a common understanding of pacification as an inclusive concept. Indeed, Thang shared Lansdale’s ethos that pacification focused on improving the lot of the common villagers and instilling the nation with a revolutionary spirit counter to that of the Viet Cong. Through pacifying the RVN, the Saigon government had its best chance at long-term stability. While they appreciated the need to dislodge PLAF influence from the

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Edward Lansdale to The Ambassador and U.S. Mission Council Members, “Vietnamese Needs,” 21 March 1966, p.2, Folder: Day File: March 1966, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

countryside, they reasoned that simply killing the enemy would not result in a better Republic of Vietnam. A 21 March 1966 report from Lansdale to the U.S. Mission Council relayed Thang's observations of pacification at the province level. In this document, Lansdale wrote "We must have a better measure of success than the number of PLAF kills by a military unit. If Rural Construction/Revolutionary Development is as important as we have decided it is, then let us use its success as the measure of military success."¹³⁸ Aside from the use of interchangeable terms in place of pacification, Lansdale's statement hit upon the reality that conventional military forces, particularly the ARVN, could help or undermine the improvement of relations between the Saigon government and the people in the countryside.

SLO's interactions with the Ministry of Revolutionary Development gave rise to yet another understanding of pacification. At the Honolulu Conference in July 1966, Thang presented the GVN's most recent view of pacification. Here, the GVN official presented an encompassing concept quite similar to ones discussed by Lansdale and SLO. In his speech, Thang told the audience of "three main policies: military offensive, rural pacification, and democracy building."¹³⁹ The concepts behind these three objectives remained largely the same as other approaches to pacification. The military dislodges the enemy and provides immediate security, which then affords the build-up of local security networks. Finishing these two tasks then permits the growth and development of democratic institutions in the area undergoing pacification. What is different, however, is

¹³⁸ Edward Lansdale to U.S. Mission Council, "Vietnamese Needs," 21 March 1966, p.1, Folder: Day File: March 1966, Box 55, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹³⁹ General Nguyen Duc Thang, "Thang's presentation at the Honolulu Conference," 7 February 1966, p.1, Folder Nguyen Duc Thang (General), Box 62, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

Thang's use of "rural pacification" and not the preferred GVN term of "rural development." Of consequence therefore is how the fundamental ideas remained intact, while the vocabulary that pertained to the efforts to pacify South Vietnam were anything but concrete.

Heightened Intensity, Unchanged Pacification

The 1966 arrival of substantial American combat forces in the Republic of Vietnam marked a key shift in the course of the war. Another changed entailed the creation of a new hybrid civil-military organization under the command of MACV, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) in May 1967. While the intensity of the war reached a new, unprecedented level and the establishment of a new advisory entity in CORDS, discussions of pacification remained largely unchanged. On balance, the existence of CORDS did not lead to a more advanced understanding of pacification. Rather the formation of CORDS represented a significant bureaucratic development and not a major shift in pacification.

On the heels of the October 1966 Manila Conference, pacification remained a term under revision. A 11 January 1967 publication of *Editorial Research Reports* posited pacification as a "process of pacifying the countryside" that "involves both military and civilian components. In general, pacification means bringing a hamlet family under government control."¹⁴⁰ Phrasing mattered, particularly with the implication of a forced GVN takeover of the peasant population. In this context, pacification did not entail

¹⁴⁰ Ingrid B. Kobrak, *Editorial Research Reports*, "Rural Pacification in South Vietnam," 11 January 1967, p.24, Folder: 18, Box 15, Victoria Schuck Papers, HIA.

good relations nor good government. Rather, pacification functioned more as a means of increasing GVN control than winning the loyalty and respect of the people.

Prior to heading CORDS, Robert W. Komer wrote often of what pacification entailed. In August 1966, he penned an article titled “Giving a New Thrust to Pacification.” Here Komer asked “What is pacification?” Stating that “‘pacification’ can be used to encompass the whole of the military, political, and civil effort in Vietnam.”¹⁴¹ This way, pacification functioned an umbrella term as it encapsulated all the facets of the war. Yet, “the term needs to be narrowed down for operational purposes, and can be reasonably well separated out as a definable problem area.”¹⁴² Used in this manner, pacification focused on a particular part of the war as to draw attention to it. Elaborating further, Komer explained,

If we divide the US/GVN problem into four main components, three of them show encouraging progress. The campaign against the major VC/NVA units is in high gear, the constitutional process seems to be evolving favorably, and we expect to contain inflation while meeting most needs of the civil economy. But there is a fourth problem area, that of securing the country- side and getting the peasant involved in the struggle against the Viet Cong, where we’re lagging way behind. It is this problem area which I would term pacification.¹⁴³

Nevertheless, pacification still encompassed the entire war effort. Komer relayed this truth accordingly,

At the risk of over-simplification, I see management of the pacification problem as involving three main sub-tasks: (1) providing local security in the countryside -- essentially a military/police/cadre task; (2) breaking the hold of the VC over the

¹⁴¹ Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, “Pentagon Papers Part IV. C. 8. Evolution of the War. Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967” (5890510) [Electronic Record], p. 66. RG 330 / P 760 / Box 6; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II). Available at: <<https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-8.pdf>>. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

people; and (3) positive programs to win the active support of the rural population.¹⁴⁴

Essentially, Komer expressed pacification as all encompassing. The versatility of the term permitted its use by Komer to focus more resources on the various elements of pacification he deemed in need of extra attention.

In regards to his assertion that pacification could be used in such a manner as to highlight a specific facet, Komer further defined what he meant by pacification. Indeed, “Chasing the large units around the boondocks still leaves intact the VC infrastructure, with its local guerrilla capability plus the weapons of terror and intimidation,” Komer wrote.¹⁴⁵ Continuing with, “winning the 'village war ' which I will loosely call pacification, seems an indispensable ingredient of any high-confidence strategy and a necessary precaution to close the guerrilla option.”¹⁴⁶ Here, pacification is directly linked to events at the village level. More directly, Komer envisaged pacification as dismantling the networks forged by Communists into the Republic of Vietnam’s communities. Yet the U.S. Army’s efforts to bring PAVN and PLAF main forces to battle adversely affected pacification at the hamlet and village level. But this did not mean the Army hindered efforts. Rather, “We had to go after the major VC/NVA units first. It was a matter of first things first.”¹⁴⁷ Priorities, not preference, dictated how pacification unfolded across the RVN.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

In correspondence to President Lyndon Johnson, Komer explained the divide between military operations and rural development. Komer wrote, "Unless we and the GVN can secure and hold the countryside cleared by military operations, we either face an ever larger and quasi-permanent military commitment or risk letting the PLAF infiltrate again."¹⁴⁸ Moreover, he foreshadowed the unified effort later provided by CORDS in stating, "Clearly we must dovetail the military's sweep operations and civil pacification. My impression is that, since the military are moving ahead faster than the civil side we need to beef up the latter to get it in phase." Yet Komer clarified the paramount importance of military forces involved in pacification; "There's little point in the military clearing areas the civil side can't pacify. On the other hand, security is the key to pacification; people won't cooperate and the cadre can't function till an area is secure."¹⁴⁹ The key phrase being "security is key to pacification." Consequently, pacification revolved around security, placing that vital facet at the forefront of war objectives.

With the combining of civilian and military efforts into CORDS in May 1967, pacification became the main priority of MACV. Granted that during the years preceding CORDS, MACV had in fact played a pivotal role in pacification. The damage inflicted on the PLAF gave way to a new opportunity to allocate more resources to the developmental phases of pacification. Chatter about pacification linked it with Vietnamization and the widespread hopes of American officials that the war was nearing an acceptable end. Indeed, by 1968, American authorities continued the dialog over the meaning and scope

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

of pacification. The combining of American civilian and military pacification efforts under the control of CORDS meant another explanation of pacification. L. Wade Lathram—a veteran of USAID, OCO, and eventually CORDS—relayed pacification as,

The military, political, economic and social process of establishing or reestablishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people. It includes the provision of sustained, credible territorial security, the destruction of the enemy's underground government, the assertion or reassertion of political control and involvement of the people in government, and the initiation of economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion. The economic element of pacification includes the opening of roads and waterways and the maintenance of lines of communication important to economic and military activity.¹⁵⁰

CORDS confirmed many of the preexisting ideas as to what pacification meant with this definition. This iteration of pacification kept the military aspects at the forefront. Thus over the course of three years, the role of the military remained that of the creator of the conditions necessary for pacification to last.

Pacification being a peaceful process for the betterment of the people existed purely as a notion. Pacification as a method of control entered the dialog as early as 1965. Thompson, explained the practice of pacification as a matter of control. When addressing the RVN's state of affairs in 1965, he explained pacification as, "All government efforts to regain control of the lost countryside (pacification) were at a stand-still and the country was in political turmoil."¹⁵¹ Such an explanation posited pacification as encompassing every method of evicting the VC from rural South Vietnam. Significantly, Thompson

¹⁵⁰ Memo, Lathram memo to Corps DEPCORDS, "1968 Pacification Planning: Definition of Terms," November 12, 1967, Komer-Leonhart Files, Box 17, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. Quoted in James Hubert Embrey, "Reorienting Pacification: The Accelerated Pacification Campaign of 1968" (PhD diss., University of Kentucky), 1.

¹⁵¹ Thompson, *No Exit From Vietnam* (New York: David McKay Company, 1969), 55.

made no mention of winning the hearts and minds of the people. Instead the operative word was control.

Lansdale asserted that pacification needed to focus on fostering trust between the people and the government. Yet the diminishment of Communist power became a focal point of MACV's role in pacification as it played out in the provinces of the Republic of Vietnam. Despite MACV's early agreement that pacification ultimately meant the improvement of relations between the people and the Saigon government, MACV perceived the eradication of the Peoples Liberation Army of Vietnam from the battlefield as entwined with pacification. Through 1965, MACV sent a series of reports to the Defense Intelligence Agency. Under the subject heading of "Monthly Report of Rural Pacification Progress and Population Control and Area Control," these documents outlined the security status of the RVN's provinces. Omitted from these reports were any mention of improved relations between the GVN and the rural populous. Rather, attention fell upon how many inhabitants and acreage were presently under the control of the GVN.¹⁵²

Control was the operative word when discussing the purpose of pacification. Especially since an U.S. Liaison Group document confirmed the controlling, not uplifting, of the people as true aim of pacification. The undated document began by stating, "The mission of military operations is to defeat the Viet Cong in order to permit the extension of GVN control over the entire country."¹⁵³ Moreover, the document

¹⁵² For example, see: "Monthly Report of Rural Pacification Progress and Population Control and Area Control for the Period 26 September to 25 October 1965," 8 November 1965, Folder: Cadres and Pacification (miscellaneous papers) 1965-1966, Box 34, Charles T. R. Bohannon Papers, HIA.

¹⁵³ "Military Operations," Undated, Folder: Cadres and Pacification (miscellaneous papers) 1965-1966, Box 34, p.1, Charles T. R. Bohannon Papers, HIA.

posited all Allied forces as the harbingers of pacification. “RVNAF in coordination with International Assistance Forces should be positioned to gain military control over the installations, population centers and lines of communication.”¹⁵⁴ Over time, Allied forces would extend their areas of control, thereby permitting favorable conditions for development. Or more clearly, “Military control over areas will permit the progressive expansion of construction and vitalization within these areas.”¹⁵⁵ Control over people and land, particularly as provided by the Allied militaries, meant that from the onset the enacting of pacification had little to do with fostering cordial ties between the Saigon government and those living in the nation’s hinterlands. Furthermore, rhetoric and reality often differed as exhibited by the GVN’s views of pacification not entirely matching-up with their methods of executing the concept.

A 1968 Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) PSYOP policy document, “PSYOP Support of Pacification,” reinforced the notion of pacification as an all-inclusive undertaking. Accordingly, “Pacification can be described as the sum total of actions designed to win and keep the support of the rural population for the government of the Republic of Viet Nam.”¹⁵⁶ The document disclosed more in noting that, “In the official definition, pacification is ‘the military, political, economic and social process of establishing or re-establishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people.’”¹⁵⁷ Incidentally the document stressed the military role,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁶ PSYOPS POLICY Policy Number 53 Psyop Support of Pacification, 22 January 1968, Folder 16, Box 13, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Insurgency Warfare, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2171316005>>.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

placing “territorial security” ahead of “establishing an effective political structure at the local level,” and “stimulating self-sustaining economic activity in the countryside.”¹⁵⁸ “For pacification to be effective,” the document revealed, “there must be the provision of sustained, credible territorial security and its integral internal security. Territorial security is defined as the provision of security from VC local forces and guerrilla units and VC/NVA main force units if any are in or threatening the area.”¹⁵⁹ Thus even in 1968, pacification elicited invaluable support from military entities while focusing on improved security above all else.

Stars and Stripes ran a story about the development side of pacification in Phu Bon Province in 1969. Quotes from Willard E. Chambers, deputy assistant director of CORDS, framed pacification squarely as improving the relationship between the Saigon government and the rural populous. In the words of Chambers, “First, you must develop a government that deserves the support of the people — and demonstrate the capability of that government (to function) with reasonable honesty and efficiency.”¹⁶⁰ Continuing with, “If you can't do that, you won't be able to do the number two thing — assure the support of the people to that government. The government must have a dialog with the people.”¹⁶¹ Lastly, “If you can't do either of those things, there's no point in trying the third thing — to enhance the enforcement of the government to where it can deal with insurgents. Those who would suggest 'get on with the fighting' don't understand the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶⁰ Hal Drake, “Pacification: Killing Viet Cong Is Not Enough,” *Stars & Stripes*, July 13, 1969. Available at: <<http://www.stripes.com/news/pacification-killing-viet-cong-is-not-enough-1.78700>>.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

nature of the insurgency problem.”¹⁶² Presented in this manner, pacification focused more on development than security actions. Indeed, Chambers emphasized the significance of gaining the people’s trust as outweighing physically combating the Viet Cong. This interpretation also continued the idea that pacification meant transforming the GVN into a stable, respect-worthy, government.

As the war inched closer to spilling into another decade, dialog over pacification remained infused with vague use of terminology. That pacification and revolutionary development were both corresponding terms and involved all efforts to execute the war gained further credence in December 1969. A staff report for the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, entitled *Vietnam: December 1969*, addressed the current situation in RVN and contained the passage, “the so-called pacification program, or Revolutionary Development program.”¹⁶³ These words confirmed that pacification encompassed various phases, rather than functioning as a phase itself.

Well into the CORDS era, pacification discourse persisted. In 1970, a two-part series by Komer in *Army* revisited pacification in South Vietnam. In “Clear, Hold and Rebuild,” Komer wrote of pacification as “basically those programs aimed at protecting the rural people and attempting to generate their allegiance to the government in competition with the Viet Cong.”¹⁶⁴ This definition mirrored the evolution of the war in Vietnam, as by 1970, and in light of Vietnamization, more MACV resources were used to

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, *Vietnam: December 1969*, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1970), p.3, Folder: Vietnamization, Folder: Vietnamization, Box 25, Allen E. Goodman Papers, HIA.

¹⁶⁴ Robert W. Komer, *Army*, “Clear, Hold and Rebuild,” June 1970, pp.16-17, Folder: Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-1975. Pacification. Komer, Robert W., Box 24, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

buttress pacification efforts. Furthermore, Komer accentuated the need of defending the lives of those living in the countryside. The implication was that security persisted as the most crucial aspect of pacification, even into the 1970s.

CORDS provided its advisors with various guides to assist them in their mission to advance pacification. District Senior Advisors received copies of the 1970 CORDS's *Handbook for District Senior Advisors*. Here readers acquired an extremely detailed definition of pacification that posited the term as encompassing the entire war. In that vein,

The Government of Vietnam is faced with the problem of building a new nation while at the same time defeating the enemy. Either of these tasks alone would be difficult, but in South Vietnam the problem is magnified by the fact that they must be accomplished simultaneously. In order to accomplish the tasks the GVN has combined the aspects of both military operations and civil nation building programs into a process which is called the "Pacification and Development Plan." It is not only a military war of opposing military forces, but a war for the allegiance of the people, a campaign to demonstrate that the Government of South Vietnam offers citizens the greatest opportunity for a free, peaceful and full life. It is not enough to defeat the enemy in the field; it is also essential to provide protection to the people of the countryside and to help meet their aspiration for a better life. Pacification is a military, political, economic and social process.¹⁶⁵

Incidentally, accomplishing this feat entailed "Establishing, or reestablishing, local government responsive to and involving the participation of the citizens;" "Providing sustained credible security;" "Destroying the enemy's underground government;" "Asserting, or reasserting, GVN political control;" "Involvement of the people in the Central government;" and "Initiating economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion."¹⁶⁶ Peculiarly, handbooks for advisors serving with the

¹⁶⁵ Handbook for District Senior Advisor, MAC-CORDS, 20 August 1970, Folder 04, Box 01, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Civil Operations, Revolutionary Development Support, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2160104002>>.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

securers of pacification, the Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF), lacked any definition of the term itself. Although addressing how Saigon's security forces figured into pacification, none of the iterations of the *RF and PF Handbook for Advisors* relayed any a definition such as the one found in the *Handbook for District Senior Advisors*.¹⁶⁷ In 1971, CORDS published *The Vietnamese Village - A Handbook for Advisors*. Despite the fact that CORDS had a definition of pacification, this document relayed the term as a solution to the PLAF insurgency without addressing what pacification meant.¹⁶⁸ The lack of a widely distributed succinct definition of pacification afforded the continuation of interpretations of the term steeped in personal opinion.

By wars end, pacification remained a term under revision. In line with what Lansdale and Komer wrote, and CORDS brought to fruition, pacification encompassed every element of Saigon's struggle against Hanoi over the future of South Vietnam.

Writing after the war, ARVN General Tran Dinh Tho explained;

Pacification is the military, political, economic, and social process of establishing or reestablishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people. It includes the provision of sustained, credible territorial security, the destruction of the enemy's underground government, the assertion or re-assertion of political control and involvement of the people in government, and the initiation of economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion. Defined

¹⁶⁷ For examples, see: RF-PF Handbook for Advisors (January 1969 Edition), 1 January 1969, Folder 18, Box 03, William Colby Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0440318001>>; RF-PF Handbook for Advisors (November 1969 Edition), November 1969, Folder 19, Box 03, William Colby Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0440319001>>; RF/PF: Handbook for Advisors, 1970, 6 February 1970, Folder 11, Box 18, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Insurgency Warfare, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2171811001>>; RF/PF: Advisors Handbook; January, 1971, 1 January 1971, Folder 11, Box 18, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Insurgency Warfare, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2171811002>>.

¹⁶⁸ Publication of Civil Operations Rural Development Support (CORDS), MACV - The Vietnamese Village: Handbook for Advisors - 1971 Edition, 1971, Folder 03, Box 01, John Haseman Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=14040103001>>.

as such, pacification is a broad and complex strategic concept which encompasses many fields of national endeavor. As a program implemented jointly with the U.S. military effort in South Vietnam, pacification appears to have involved every American serviceman and civilian who served there, many of whom indeed participated in conceiving the idea and helping put it to work.¹⁶⁹

At least by the fall of Saigon in 1975, the best explanation of pacification posited the term as an all-encompassing strategy. Indeed, the United States and Republic of Vietnam fought an entire war without a mutual understanding of to what pacification meant. Furthermore, considerable levels of opacity remained insofar as the exact scope of pacification. Similarly, agreed upon terminology did not necessarily generate clarity.

The Nonexistent “Other War”

Having defined pacification as being America’s *modus operandi* for fighting the war permits the debunking of the “other war” myth. Notions that multiple wars took place in the Republic of Vietnam between 1965 and 1972 have long dogged discussions of the Vietnam War. For some, two distinct conflicts transpired, the “big unit war” and the “other war.” The “other war” was code for the implication that conventional military operations occurred at the expense of pacification. Such a fallacy emerged from the divide as whether pacification entailed improving security or was a development endeavor. Still others perceived the war as having three separate areas of attention. Regardless of the number of so-called wars, the very idea presented pacification as a neglected task of U.S. and RVN authorities. However, only one war to pacify the Republic of Vietnam ever truly existed. Instead, priorities dictated the amount of attention MACV placed on supporting rural development.

¹⁶⁹ Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), v.

An unpublished article by Rose Kushner dismissed the notion of separate wars in the Republic of Vietnam in 1967. “There is no ‘other war,’ separate and distinct from the military operations,” wrote the lifelong supporter of Lansdale and his vision of pacification.¹⁷⁰ Writing in opposition to the narratives of *Newsweek* that pacification was merely one of many wars in the RVN, Kushner related what did happen, that pacification never left the purview of the American authorities pushing pacification initiatives. With the myriad of terms employed by all involved parties, it is unsurprising that people spoke of the absence of a singular conflict. When discussing what he saw as a major lull in the GVN’s attention towards pacification in *No Exit From Vietnam*, Thompson explained pacification as “All government efforts at regaining control of the lost countryside.”¹⁷¹ One could infer that in this context, pacification encompassed any method used to expelled the Communists from the RVN’s villages. He also argued against the false narrative of three wars—military, pacification, and nation-building—as having transpired in the Republic of Vietnam.¹⁷² Indeed, “there were not three wars...there was only one war,” Thompson stated. Pacification “lip service” by American and South Vietnamese officials, he noted, advanced the notion that only with the 1966 Honolulu Conference did pacification efforts gain the upmost attention.¹⁷³

In 1971, Komer and Lansdale exchanged correspondence over Komer’s “Was There Another Way?,” a chapter in a retrospective study of counterinsurgency in the Republic of Vietnam for RAND. Komer had sent a draft of his study to Lansdale for

¹⁷⁰ Rose Kushner, “The War in Vietnam,” 7 January 1967, Folder: Subject File: Kushner, Rose, Box 60, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷¹ Thompson, *No Exit From Vietnam*, 55.

¹⁷² Ibid., 145.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

input.¹⁷⁴ Lansdale's comments and Komer's reply centered largely on how the U.S. Army and State Department pushed pacification, albeit differently. As noted by Lansdale, the U.S. Army did back pacification, but preferred doing much of the work for the GVN.¹⁷⁵ When responding to Lansdale, Komer wrote that "there was no 'other war;' it was all one ball of wax—in our case predominately military, to our cost. I brought the 'other war' concept (which I hardly invented) only as an operational device to compete more effectively with the US and ARVN military."¹⁷⁶ As noted by Komer, after 1967, new model pacification brought with it the realization of Lansdale's and Komer's vision that the South Vietnamese would do the work, with America simply providing financial backing. New model pacification was the incarnation of pacification started by Komer, and continued by CORDS, during the 1966 to 1969 period. Moreover, two of the main influencers of pacification in the RVN placed the actions of conventional forces within the confines of pacification. Yet the U.S. Army did more than simply support pacification, albeit Lansdale and Komer perceived it as detrimental to the long-term stability of the Republic of Vietnam.

Conclusion

As both the topic of conversation and focus of physical efforts to defeat the Communists, pacification dominated American efforts to win the Vietnam War. Pacification existed in an aura of promise since it offered a means of instilling lasting

¹⁷⁴ Robert W. Komer to Edward Lansdale, 26 May 1971, Folder: Correspondence: Komer, Robert W., Box 4, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹⁷⁵ Edward Lansdale to Robert W. Komer, 30 May 1971, Folder: Correspondence: Komer, Robert W., Box 4, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

¹⁷⁶ Robert W. Komer to Edward Lansdale, 1 June 1971, Folder: Correspondence: Komer, Robert W., Box 4, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

stability in the Republic of Vietnam at the expense of the National Liberation Front. Pacification featured prominently in conversations among American officials, yet a consensus over the meaning of the term never occurred. Despite the 1965 definition of pacification agreed upon by MACV, USOM, and USIS, interpretations of pacification remained fluid and debated through the duration of the Vietnam War.

Regardless of how one defined pacification, the term embodied the Vietnam War. The approach to pacifying the Republic of Vietnam varied insofar as to whether efforts should begin with the improvement of security conditions or with socio-economic development projects. Moreover, differences over the focus and priorities of pacification mattered. They represented two diverging approaches for America in Vietnam: helping the South Vietnamese fight or fight their war for them. Yet how to best achieve this goal varied, particularly as the war escalated. Security or development first dogged wartime discussions between American civilian and Army officials in Saigon. The GVN, too, debated just how to pacify the country. As the war became MACV's war, priorities dictated that territorial security occur before developmental efforts. In practice, however, both transpired at the same time and, as often the case in the Vietnam war, multiple times. Indeed, the same locale might experience sweeping security operations, new construction projects, and Communist resurgence over and over again. Ultimately, pacification required determination and an incalculable amount of time.

CHAPTER III - HAMMER AND ANVIL, 1965-1966

Introduction

In 1979, during a taping for the *Vietnam: A Television History* series, retired general and former U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam, Maxwell D. Taylor told his interviewer, the renowned journalist Stanley Karnow, “there was not just a single war to be reported by officials and the press. There were really forty-four different wars and you could have an accurate reporter in each one of those provinces and get forty-four different reports coming to Washington and all would be right in their own way. Yet none a complete picture.”¹⁷⁷ Albeit speaking about the war during the Ngo Dinh Diem period, Taylor’s comment nonetheless correctly posited the entire Vietnam War as the amalgamation of related, yet distinct conflicts in each of the Republic of Vietnam’s forty-four provinces. A mélange of province-level wars meant the collective understanding of the Vietnam War remained incomplete without a discussion of each province; enter this study of Phu Yen.

Nestled between the provinces of Binh Dinh to the north, Khanh Hoa to the south, and Phu Bon and Darlac to the west, Phu Yen Province sat against the South China Sea in the Republic of Vietnam’s (RVN) central highlands. Phu Yen featured jungled mountain expanses, which accounted for three-fifths of the province, yet these gave way to agriculturally vital valleys, which in turn opened up into extensive plains. These features extended across the province’s districts of Dong Xuan, Hieu Xuong, Song Cau, Son Hoa, Tuy An, and Tuy Hoa. From deep within the Central Highlands flowed the Song Ba, a

¹⁷⁷ Maxwell D. Taylor, interviewed by Stanley Karnow, “America’s Mandarin: 1954–1963,” *Vietnam: A Television History*, Part 3 of 4, 30 January 1979, WGBH. Available at: <http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_B182E52F36DD4A64A65D5342CA3D69E3>.

river that zigzagged through Son Hoa District, becoming the Da Rang upon leaving the mountains and entering the rice producing valleys of Tuy Hoa and Hieu Xuong. On the Da Rang's northern bank laid the Tuy Hoa Valley, with the Hieu Xuong Valley situated on the southern bank. The river ultimately reached the South China Sea at Tuy Hoa City. On the other side of the Hieu Xuong Valley meandered the Ban Thach. Another significant river, the Ky Lo, flowed through a remote valley to which it gave its name in Dong Xuan District. Prior to entering Tuy An District, the Ky Lo became the Cai. These rivers gave Phu Yen its rich rice producing lands.

In those valleys, before the Vietnam War, resided the majority of Phu Yen's inhabitants. The GVN placed Phu Yen's population at 349,000 in 1966, but accessible data from the provincial government put the figure at 318,882.¹⁷⁸ In accordance with that more conservative number, 75,052 people lived in Tuy Hoa District, including the 46,416 that lived within the confines of the economic and political center of Phu Yen, the province capital of Tuy Hoa City. Elsewhere in the province, 19,501 people lived in Dong Xuan District, 94,702 in Hieu Xuong District, 53,922 people lived in Song Cau District, 12,609 in Son Hoa District, and 63,096 in Tuy An District.¹⁷⁹ Displacement caused by war in 1966, meant thousands of these inhabitants moved to refugee camps in Tuy Hoa City.

Phu Yen's value laid in its rice paddies. Many of the province's inhabitants made their living by harvesting rice or by catching fish. Indeed, the province annually produced

¹⁷⁸ "Provincial Briefing Folder Number 9: Phu-Yen Province," USAID Region II, Nha Trang, Second Printing November 1966, pp.2-3, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.

an average of 85,000 tons of rice and 5,000 tons of fish.¹⁸⁰ Rice production, although paling in comparison to the rice harvesting areas straddling the Mekong River further south in the country, proved significant for the region. With the second most productive rice paddies in Military Region 2 (MR2), control of Phu Yen meant access to a vast source of nourishment and income.¹⁸¹ All participants in the war in Phu Yen understood the need to control the province's rice production. Consequently, all belligerents fought over Phu Yen's fertile rice producing valleys, with emphasis on the Tuy Hoa Valley, as to influence, and hopefully ultimately control the people.

In terms of infrastructure, Phu Yen contained significant road and rail networks during the Vietnam War. QL-1, the principle transportation artery for much of the RVN, transited Phu Yen along the coastline. This paved highway connected Tuy Hoa City with Nha Trang to the north and Qui Nhon to the south. A smaller road, LTL-6B, linked Tuy Hoa City on the coast with the western interior, connecting the province capital with Cung Son in Son Hoa District. A similar road, LTL-7B, linked the district capital of La Hai in Dong Xuan District with Tuy An District.

Phu Yen's resources and geographic location attracted various powers for hundreds of years. As covered in a report compiled under the direction of Robert Lanigan of CORDS MR2, long before the U.S. Army's forays in the province, other forces fought for control of Phu Yen. Beginning with the conclusion of Chinese domination of the region in 808, the Champa filled the power vacuum in what was then Chiem Thanh. With

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸¹ Operational Report on Lessons Learned, p.7, Department of the Army, Headquarters, I Field Force Vietnam, sub: Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1966, Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC). Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=AD0390955>>.

Champa rule came relative tranquility for the next six-hundred years. Turmoil arrived with the Vietnamese invasion of 1470. Invading Vietnamese from the north swept through the region, pushing the Champa to the Deo Ca Pass, a small area of Phu Yen to the south of what later became Tuy Hoa City. Yet the Vietnamese did not occupy all of the province; instead they enlarged their province of Binh Dinh's southern border, absorbing a small portion of Phu Yen. Correspondingly, the Champa regained control over a large portion of the province.¹⁸²

In 1578, the Vietnamese returned to Phu Yen. Now under the rule of Nguyen Hoang, Vietnamese armies conquered the area from the Champa and stayed. Tension between the Champa and their Vietnamese overlords resulted in a quickly suppressed revolution in 1629. Phu Yen played a significant role in 1775, when under the rule of the Tay Son Dynasty, the Vietnamese used the province as a “staging area” for “furthering their control southward.”¹⁸³ Consequently, “Phu Yen existed under the pressure of continual war from the year 1787 until 1801.”¹⁸⁴ Phu Yen's first brush with the United States came in 1832 with the establishment of an American diplomatic mission, led by Edmund Roberts, at Vung Lan, Song Cau District.¹⁸⁵ Later, in 1885 the French imposed their control over the region, “when a number of citizens were beheaded for resisting the French incursion.”¹⁸⁶ Adding, “This painful beginning of French control was to have several offspring over the next many decades as it was not until late in the 20th century,

¹⁸² Robert Lanigan, Phu Yen Province Briefing Folder, 6 September 1971, p.1, Folder 6, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, McCain Library and Archives (MLA).

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 2.

February of 1955, to be exact, that the Vietnamese Government reassumed actual governmental control of Phu Yen.”¹⁸⁷ Later use by the Viet Minh and the next generation of Communist guerrillas, the PLAF, continued and reflected Phu Yen’s history as a stronghold of the north in the south.

After Germany’s victory over France in 1940, the French retained Indochina, albeit under the Vichy government. As the war progressed, Imperial Japanese forces occupied portions of French Indochina, yet permitted French authorities to remain in power.¹⁸⁸ Fearing an invasion by the United States, Japanese authorities called for direct control over French Indochina. On 9 March 1945, after brief fighting with French forces, the Japanese military claimed Indochina directly for Tokyo.¹⁸⁹ Direct control proved near momentary as Japan surrendered to Allied forces on 15 August 1945, with Japanese troops relinquishing Phu Yen to the Viet Minh.¹⁹⁰ Following Japan’s capitulation, Phu Yen found itself once again confronting French imperialism.

Familiar with modern warfare in the age of decolonization, Phu Yen gained a reputation as a home to capable guerrillas during the Viet Minh’s struggle against French efforts to reassert rule over Indochina. Geography mattered once more as the province laid at the confluence of mountain passes used by the Viet Minh. Consequently, many guerrillas and their families settled in Phu Yen. During the First Indochina War, the Viet Minh largely controlled Phu Yen. In 1953, French forces occupied what was then the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest For Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 14, 25, 29.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 42, 54-61.

¹⁹⁰ Robert Lanigan, Phu Yen Province Briefing Folder, 6 September 1971, p.2, Folder 6, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

village of Tuy Hoa. During this time, French authorities transferred the province capital from Song Cau to the more defensible Tuy Hoa village.¹⁹¹

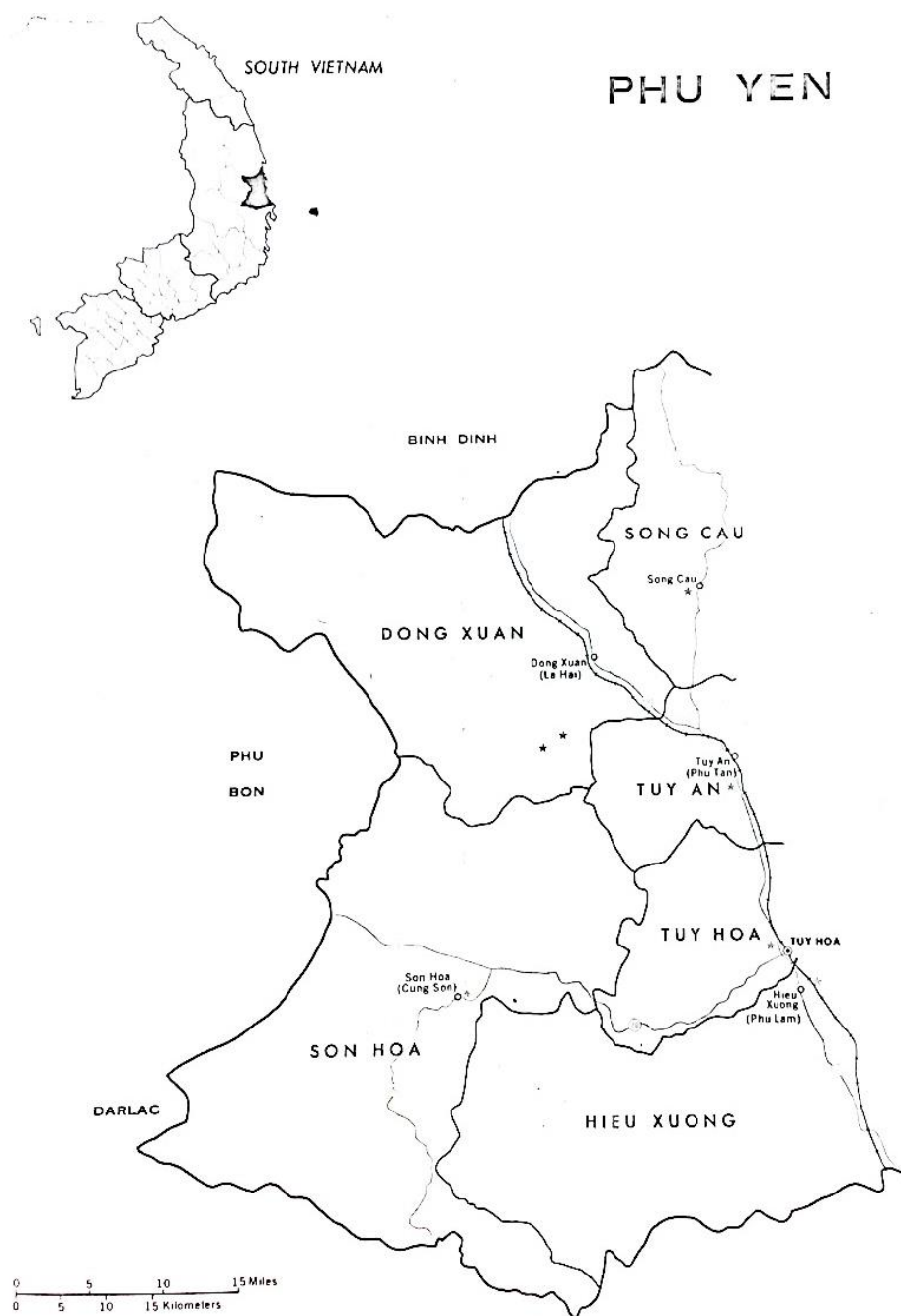


Figure 1. Map of Phu Yen Province. The U.S. Army Center of Military History.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

French efforts to envelop the region comprising Phu Yen mattered profoundly because of the use of conventional forces as the harbingers of pacification. On 20 January 1954, during the dying days of France's war to retain Indochina, General Henri Navarre launched Operation Atlante to pacify the region.¹⁹² Indeed, the French perceived Phu Yen and the adjacent coastal region as being under Viet Minh control.¹⁹³ Bernard B. Fall observed Atlante, and later mentioned the operation in his book *Street Without Joy*.¹⁹⁴ During the first phase, Arethuse, Navarre dispatched 25,000 men of the French Expeditionary Corps, with some forces landing amphibiously at Tuy Hoa village.¹⁹⁵ From the north, the French high command sent Groupement Mobile 100 (GM 100) to reopen Road 7, what the Americans later called LTL-7B, along the Song Ba River from Cheo Reo in the Central Highlands to the coast near Tuy Hoa village. The French cleared the road of mines and rebuilt destroyed bridges, all the while encountering few enemy formations. Instead, Viet Minh ambushes, mines, and snipers exacted a human toll from the French forces that slowed down the operation.¹⁹⁶

Operation Atlante marked the only time French forces exercised any control over Phu Yen beyond the confines of Tuy Hoa village during the First Indochina War. Indeed, the operation afforded France brief control of the Tuy Hoa Valley. Yet the Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu spelled the end of both Operation Atlante and France's

¹⁹² Michel Grintchenko, "Operation Atlante (January-July 1954): The Last Pacification Operation in Indochina," *Doctrine*, Issue 12, 2002, 102-103.

¹⁹³ Michel Grintchenko, *L'Opération Atlante: Les Dernières Illusions De La France En Indochine* (Paris: Economica, 2008), 22-23.

¹⁹⁴ Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 189.

¹⁹⁵ Grintchenko, "Operation Atlante (January-July 1954)," 103; Grintchenko, *L'Opération Atlante*, 142-143.

¹⁹⁶ Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 189.

ambitions in Indochina. France's defeat at Dien Bien Phu forced the premature end of Operation Atlante before the third and final phase of the campaign began as participating forces were urgently needed elsewhere.¹⁹⁷

Operation Atlante's apparition lingered as ARVN, and later the U.S. Army, launched conventional operations to pacify Phu Yen. "In the past four years, American or ARVN units have fallen into traps at precisely the same places French units did in 1954—traps often laid by the same Communist units, which succeed far more often than they should," Fall remarked in *Viet-Nam Witness, 1953-66*.¹⁹⁸ Phu Yen's reputation as a Viet Minh province, meant any inroads Saigon made depended on significant military intervention. Allied forces during the American war in the Republic of Vietnam essentially emulated the French attempt at pacifying Phu Yen, using maneuver battalions to spread pacification. While strategies in Saigon and Washington debated the niceties and definition of pacification, in Phu Yen its reality was clear from the start. Maneuver battalion battlefield victories were pacification in Phu Yen. Momentary victories for pacification, though, faded with rapidity as Communist forces remained unbroken. For that reason, to understand the war in Phu Yen is to understand pacification.

Tuy Hoa City functioned as Saigon's bastion in Phu Yen after formation of the Republic of Vietnam. During Ngo Dinh Diem's presidency, a combination of the

¹⁹⁷ The end of Operation Atlante placed GM 100 on a course towards its own demise. GM 100's mission terminated as soon as it arrived at Tuy Hoa village as the task force then moved to Kontum to counter a burgeoning Viet Minh presence in that province. Shortly thereafter, GM 100 received orders from the French high command to assist with the evacuation of French assets from An Khe to Pleiku. As GM 100 tried to rendezvous with other French units en route to Pleiku, the Viet Minh's 803d Regiment ambushed and annihilated the task force at the Battle of Mang Yang Pass. See: Kirk A. Luedeke, "Death on the Highway: The Destruction of Groupement Mobile 100," *Armor*, January-February 2001, 24-25; Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 220-223.

¹⁹⁸ Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness, 1953-66* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 340.

Strategic Hamlet Program and a pro-active Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) division placed the province capital and environs under Saigon's authority. Ngo Dinh Diem's government and American advisors considered Phu Yen a model province with good local leadership and security.¹⁹⁹ Rufus Phillips, the Assistant Director of Rural Affairs, observed and advised the Saigon government on matters of development and counterinsurgency, using Phu Yen as a showcase for pacification. In a cable to the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon, Phillips suggested the ambassador visit Phu Yen, "because much of our pioneer efforts in provincial rehabilitation were started there. This was the first province in which a coordinated military and civilian pacification effort, based on the strategic hamlet concept was started in June 1962 and where USOM placed its first Provincial Representative in October 1962."²⁰⁰ Phillips noted the security conditions as having gone from restricting the province chief's "movements to the front yard of his house" to an improved situation where travel is "relatively free throughout most of the lowland area of the province."²⁰¹ While certainly an improvement, Phillip's example cemented a common theme that ran throughout the modern history of Phu Yen, that occupation of the province capital and the neighboring lowlands amounted to sufficient control of the province. Although Tuy Hoa City remained under Saigon's banner, the rest of province served as a de facto enemy base area, affording the PLAF the means to keep pressure, overtly or covertly, on the Tuy Hoa Valley.

¹⁹⁹ Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 110-114.

²⁰⁰ Memo from Rufus Phillips to John M. Dunn - re: Proposed Ambassadorial Visit to Phu Yen Province, 2 October 1963, Folder 01, Box 02, Rufus Phillips Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University (TTUVA). Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=23970201047>>.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

The safe areas mentioned by Philips amounted to Tuy Hoa City and portions of the adjacent Tuy Hoa Valley. Yet Communist networks remained intact across the province. Phu Yen's hinterland remained a Viet Minh bastion, even after the Geneva Accords in 1954. As recalled A. Terry Rambo, Jerry M. Tinker, and John D. LeNoir in *The Refugee Situation in Phu-Yen Province, Viet-Nam*, the "nascent Viet-Cong forces" left by the Viet Minh after the agreements made in Geneva, afforded the Communists the means to exploit the GVN's meager presence in Phu Yen with great rapidity in 1954.²⁰² Even Saigon's attempt to eject these guerrillas from the province through Operation Sea Swallow in 1962 achieved only momentary results. Through the Strategic Hamlet Program, the GVN controlled Tuy Hoa City and nearby hamlets. In an attempt to better manage security, the government of Ngo Dinh Diem saw the creation of Phu Bon Province from land taken from the provinces of Phu Yen and Darlac. Phu Yen's districts also took shape during this period.²⁰³ Progress, limited as it was, came to a sudden halt as the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem destabilized much of South Vietnam, with the ensuing power vacuum leaving Phu Yen exposed to the plans of the National Liberation Front (NLF).²⁰⁴

Changes to Phu Yen's external and internal borders proved the only act of any permanence from this early time period. The other vestige of Ngo Dinh Diem's pacification efforts, the Strategic Hamlet Program, failed in Phu Yen in 1964. The PLAF

²⁰² Report - The Refugee Situation in Phu Yen Province Vietnam, July 1967, p.59, Folder 02, Box 02, Gary Larsen Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=19600202001>.

²⁰³ Robert Lanigan, Phu Yen Province Briefing Folder, 6 September 1971, p.2, Folder 6, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

seized the initiative in 1964 by mining the province's railroad.²⁰⁵ During the rest of 1964, "most of the strategic hamlets were either overrun or infiltrated by the Viet-Cong. This was brought about primarily by the introduction of large, well-armed units of North Vietnamese regulars (NVA)."²⁰⁶ The situation remained dire and "insurgent control was not significantly challenged again until the Tuy-Hoa-based 47th ARVN Regiment was bolstered by U.S. and Korean forces in late 1965."²⁰⁷ Before the arrival of Allied troops, much of 1965 entailed the Communists solidifying their position in Phu Yen. Like much of the Republic of Vietnam between 1965 and 1966, Phu Yen existed in the midst of war.

1965

"Two types of warfare died in 1965-66 in Viet-Nam, in both the North and the South: Counterinsurgency was one of them, and the national war of liberation was the other. They were both killed by the sheer mass of American firepower thrown into the conflict," Bernard B. Fall asserted in *Viet-Nam Witness, 1953-66*.²⁰⁸ Fall's statement encapsulated a notion, which continued long after the end of the Vietnam War, that the United States ignored pacification, and thereby incorrectly fought the conflict. Such a contention presented an oversimplified view of the war. As events in Phu Yen between 1965 and 1966 revealed, MACV executed a war beyond the over-expenditure of ordnance and one in line with the advancement of pacification.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Report - The Refugee Situation in Phu Yen Province Vietnam, July 1967, p.59, Folder 02, Box 02, Gary Larsen Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=19600202001>.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 60.

²⁰⁸ Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness, 1953-66*, 293.

With the disruptions caused by the termination of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, the NLF and its military arm, the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) made significant inroads into Phu Yen at the expense of the GVN. By 1965, the NLF alleged the PLAF controlled 75% of Phu Yen, a reasonable figure given that the GVN only held Tuy Hoa City. NLF figures for this time placed the province's population at 342,929, "and listed 256,400 as the 'liberated population.'"²⁰⁹ With "liberated population" equating to those living in an NLF "liberated area." A liberated area might amount to most, if not all, of a province in which the NLF exercised its own pacification process to gain control over the people. The presence of ARVN and GVN forces in a liberated area did not matter.²¹⁰ For that reason, the aforementioned figure of 256,400 living under the NLF is rather plausible. By 1966 around 46,416 lived in Tuy Hoa City, the GVN stronghold in Phu Yen, hence the NLF's number, regardless of its accuracy, indicated the NLF controlled much of the remaining population.²¹¹ Furthermore, the data produced by the NLF emphasized the fact that the PLAF held a considerable presence in Phu Yen.

Before the commencement of hostilities between American and North Vietnamese forces in Phu Yen, Hanoi prepared for war in the province. Two incidents caught the attention of American advisors, both of which involved North Vietnamese supplies reaching Phu Yen via sea routes. In 1964, North Vietnam's Navy Group 125

²⁰⁹ Viet Cong Loss of Population control, Undated, p.3, Folder 01, Box 07, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120701002>>.

²¹⁰ Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press: Cambridge, MA, 1966), 269-274.

²¹¹ "Provincial Briefing Folder Number 9: Phu-Yen Province," USAID Region II, Nha Trang, Second Printing November 1966, pp.2-3, CMH.

ferried supplies to Vung Ro in Phu Yen's Hieu Xuong District.²¹² On 16 February 1965, American and South Vietnamese forces interdicted North Vietnamese war materiel to the PLAF in Phu Yen. An American helicopter observed a well camouflaged ship at anchor near Phu Yen's coast. Recalled in the U.S. Department of State publication "Aggression from the North," "Fighter planes that approached the vessel met machinegun fire from guns on the deck of the ship and from shore as well. A Vietnamese Air Force Strike was launched against the vessel, and Vietnamese Government troops moved into the area. GVN forces seized the severely damaged ship after a bitter fight with the Viet Cong."²¹³ Upon securing the hulk, the GVN acquired a trove of significant documents and weapons. South Vietnamese forces discerned that China had recently built the ship.²¹⁴ Moreover, captured papers identified "several Viet Cong aboard...as having come from North Viet-Nam" and a Haiphong newspaper dated 23 January 1965.²¹⁵ Connections to PAVN, too, emerged, as captured documents included soldier health records, which revealed that at least one passenger served with the 338th PAVN Division.²¹⁶ All these discoveries acted as proof positive of the PLAF being an agent of Hanoi.

When itemized, the GVN's spoils of war appeared even more staggering.

Accordingly, the U.S. Department of State boasted the capture of,

approximately 1 million rounds of small arms ammunition; –more than 1,000 stick grenades; –500 pounds of TNT in prepared charge; –2,000 round of 82 mm. mortar ammunition; –500 antitank grenades; –500 rounds of 57 mm. recoilless rifle

²¹² *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 127.

²¹³ "Aggression From the North: Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign To Conquer South Viet-Nam, Washington, D.C.: Department of State, February 1965, p.15-16 in Folder: Subject File: 1943-1987, Box 23, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution Archives (HIA).

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

ammunition; –more than 1,000 rounds of 75 mm. recoilless rifle ammunition; –one 57 mm. recoilless rifle; –2 heavy machineguns; –2,000 7.95 Mauser rifles; –more than 100 7.62 carbines –1,000 submachineguns; –15 light machineguns; –500 rifles; –500 pounds of medical supplies (with labels from North Viet-Nam, Communist China, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Soviet Union, and other sources).²¹⁷

This trove of supplies revealed the serious need of supplies on part of the guerrillas. Yet the sheer number of supplies demonstrated Hanoi's ability to sustain forces even in remote locales. At the end of a long supply route, PAVN base areas in Phu Yen suffered from continuous shortages of weapons, medical supplies, and foodstuffs. The fact these supplies reached Phu Yen via the South China Sea as opposed to the Ho Chi Minh Trail demonstrated the limits of the longer overland routes.

PLAF activity increased in 1965 as the war for Vietnam's future intensified after the commitment of U.S. ground forces. A captured PLAF document disclosed an upswing in Communist activity in Phu Yen, with the PLAF nearly doubling the fighting strength of its main forces. The document placed 8,214 guerrillas in the province as opposed to the 4,373 in Phu Yen at the end of 1964.²¹⁸ Comparatively, Douglas Pike surmised between 55,000 and 80,000 guerrillas operated through the Republic of Vietnam by early 1965. The wide range in numbers, he noted, existed because, "A characteristic of a guerrilla war is that the government side never knows how many of the enemy it faces—every cyclo driver, every Vietnamese who passes in the street could be a guerrilla."²¹⁹ Back in Phu Yen, an additionally 26,630 "militiamen," or those that

²¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

²¹⁸ Captured Documents (CDEC): Translation Report of Guerrilla Warfare in Phu Yen Province, Military Region V, 15 July 1967, p.1, Folder 2522, Box 0163, Vietnam Archive Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F034601632522>>.

²¹⁹ Pike, 239.

mobilized on part-time basis, served in the province by the end of 1965; a sharp increase from 7,900 in the previous year.²²⁰ With Pike's words in mind, the guerrilla numbers for Phu Yen demonstrated a noteworthy NLF presence while furthering the GVN fear that anyone could be a member of the NLF. Out of the 8,214 guerrillas, the PLAF had only 2,253 weapons for battle. A sizable force, yet with a substantial firepower shortcoming.²²¹ Nevertheless, the near doubling of PLAF guerrillas in the span of a year meant the NLF held considerably sway in the province. Moreover, to reverse such influence entailed more Allied forces were necessary in the province.

The PLAF benefited substantially from the multitude of coupes that engulfed the RVN after the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem. The 101st Airborne Division obtained a translation of a captured enemy document, which unveiled much about the PLAF's current state of affairs in Tuy Hoa District. The English translation disclosed that,

The unstable political situation of RVN (8 coupe d'état in 1964), the many great successes of the Liberation Army, the political disintegration of the enemy and the firm belief of the people in the ultimate success of our revolution were favorable factors for the development of the guerrilla movement in the district. Our cadre's enthusiasm and the considerable efforts also greatly contributed to the success of the movement.²²²

Despite benefitting from the political turmoil unleashed by the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem, the PLAF units in Tuy Hoa District proved far from the zealous revolutionaries envisaged by Hanoi.

²²⁰ Captured Documents (CDEC): Translation Report of Guerrilla Warfare in Phu Yen Province, Military Region V, 15 July 1967, p.1, Folder 2522, Box 0163, Vietnam Archive Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F034601632522>>.

²²¹ Ibid., 1.

²²² Captured Documents (CDEC): Study of the 1964 Guerrilla Movement in Tuy Hoa I District, 29 April 1966, p.2, Folder 0666, Box 0036, Vietnam Archive Collection, TTUVA. Available at <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F034600360666>>.

As the PLAF acknowledged the GVN political atmosphere as the principle source for Communist achievements, so too did the PLAF address its failings in Tuy Hoa District. “Increase in sweep operations, bombing and shelling of the enemy (Allied forces) and their use of poisonous chemicals greatly affected the people and the guerrilla units’ moral and the development of the guerrilla force,” went the captured PLAF document.²²³ PLAF units “lacked modern weapons and guerrilla men had to rely on their own initiative and war booties to get the needed weapons.”²²⁴ Unsurprisingly, the document noted a “Lack of political motivation” and “In many instances, guerrilla men hastened to flee the scene as soon as enemy aircraft were heard.”²²⁵ The document went on to state that many guerrillas refused to attend far away training courses. The effect of poorly prepared guerrillas translated into poor upkeep of weapons, “Failure to realize the importance of primitive weapons,” questionable organization of units, and “lack of adequate military knowledge among guerrilla men and even cadre.”²²⁶ The document cited a “Lack of political acumen and sacrifice among cadre.”²²⁷ Lastly, “No careful consideration” when “recruiting of guerrilla men. It was noted that many RVN servicemen were present in guerrilla units and in several instances surrendered to the enemy and disclosed the location of their guerrilla units.”²²⁸ Far from invincible, the PLAF in Phu Yen faced serious shortages of dependable men and material.

²²³ Ibid., 2-3.

²²⁴ Ibid., 3.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

Aside from the PLAF, Phu Yen also hosted PAVN forces. In a sign of the war's escalation, in October of 1965 units of the Peoples Armed Forces of Vietnam (PAVN) reinforced their PLAF comrades outside of Tuy Hoa City. Falling under PAVN's B1 Front in Military Region 5 meant the so-called 5th PAVN Division, or Nong Traung 5, controlled Hanoi's forces in Phu Yen. Comprised of just two regiments, the 95th and 18B, instead of the normal three, the 5th PAVN Division was a division in name only. In practice, the 5th PAVN Division amounted to a sub-sector of the B1 front, with the 95th PAVN Regiment, and later the 18B PAVN Regiment, typically operating in and around Phu Yen.²²⁹ Both regiments acted "as independent regiments directly subordinate to the Central Highlands Front."²³⁰ Aiding their PLAF allies, recalled a U.S. Embassy in Saigon telegram, "an estimated five NVA battalions swept into Phu Yen, scattering RF and PF units and twice mortaring the province capital of Tuy Hoa."²³¹ The five PAVN battalions isolated Tuy Hoa City, leaving the GVN stronghold in contact with a select few hamlets and largely unable to control the province's sources of rice production. With such a large enemy presence on the edge of Tuy Hoa City, the value of conventional forces increased dramatically and necessitated the dispatching of conventional Allied forces to Phu Yen.

In 1965, McNamara and Westmoreland, in concert with their South Vietnamese allies, designated Phu Yen as a priority area for the spread of Hop Tac pacification effort. Hop Tac—first launched by the GVN in 1964 to establish a ring of pacified provinces

²²⁹ John M. Carland, *Combat Operations: Stemming The Tide, May 1965 to October 1966* (Washington D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 2000), 201.

²³⁰ *Victory in Vietnam*, 138.

²³¹ US Embassy Saigon to Department of State, "Provincial Reporting: Improved Security in Phu Yen," 27 January 1967, p.1, CMH.

around Saigon—faltered as Hanoi’s forces increased their control over the countryside.²³² Indeed, “the pacification program was overtaken by events of May and June. Prior to this, the II Corps, including the coastal provinces of Phu Yen and Binh Dinh and all of the highland provinces, was already in trouble.”²³³ In that vein, by July, the same American officials envisaged the infusion of U.S. Army maneuver battalions to “Resume and/or expand pacification operations. Priority will be given to the Hop Tac area around Saigon, to that part of the Delta along an east-west axis from Go Cong to Chau Doc, and in the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen.”²³⁴ To that end, MACV put in motion plans to use American military forces to assist Hop Tac, and thereby advance pacification through conventional warfare.

At the end of August, USOM reported an improvement in Phu Yen’s political atmosphere. USOM noted “Due to successful operations and air raids against VC strongholds conducted by our friendly forces, the political situation appears to have improved somewhat during the month.”²³⁵ The source of the improvement stemmed from Quyet-Thang 160, an ARVN operation “which restored security to various hamlets bordering on National Route #1 from Cu-Mong to Song-Cau and Song-Cau to Tuy-

²³² Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, “Pentagon Papers Part IV. C. 8. Evolution of the War. Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967” (5890510) [Electronic Record], p.1. RG 330 / P 760 / Box 6; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II). Available at: <<http://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-8.pdf>>.

²³³ Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, “Pentagon Papers Part IV. C. 5. Evolution of the War. Phase I in the Build-up of U.S. Forces: March - July 1965” (5890504) [Electronic Record], p. 54. RG 330 / P 760 / Box 4; NARA II. Available at: <<https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-5.pdf>>.

²³⁴ Ibid., 117.

²³⁵ Report, USOM [U.S. Operations Mission] - Reports of USOM Provincial Representatives for Month Ending 31 August 1965, 31 August 1965, Folder 01, Box 01, Rufus Phillips Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=23970101001>>.

Hoa.”²³⁶ In opening the lines of communication, however limited, Tuy Hoa City experienced signs of progress. Nevertheless, such military developments did not eject the PAVN and PLAF forces from the Tuy Hoa Valley nor dramatically alter the NLF’s presence in the province as a whole.

Communist troops tightened their hold in the Tuy Hoa Valley in November. Accordingly, the 95th PAVN Regiment and the 3rd PLAF Regiment sought to secure the rice paddies abutting the province capital. Yet the 95th PAVN Regiment and the 3rd PLAF Regiment met stiff resistance from the 47th ARVN Regiment. According to the USARV’s Field Force, “In the Phu Yen operations, elements of the 95th PAVN Regiment and the 3d VC Regiment reacted strongly to ARVN efforts to protect the rice crop in the area generally west of Tuy Hoa. As a result of these operations, the PAVN and VC forces again suffered heavy casualties.”²³⁷ Nevertheless, Hanoi’s forces remained in control of much of the province.

Like Phu Yen, the rest of MR2 faced a concerted Communist effort to gain territory. After Field Force Vietnam, the precursor to I Field Force Vietnam (IFFV), marshaled forces for campaigns in Phu Yen, American troops in MR2 began assisting South Vietnamese units. Indeed, “Concurrently, operations continued in An Khe Base Area, Song Con River Valley (Happy Valley) and in support of ARVN operations vicinity Tuy Hoa.”²³⁸ Field Force Vietnam spoke of using both conventional and

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters Field Force Vietnam, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 December 1965, p.7, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/390956.pdf>>.

²³⁸ Ibid., 9.

counterinsurgency methods to help Saigon regain control, not the hearts and minds, of the people residing in the RVN's countryside. In that vein,

The United States, Free World Military Assistance Force (FWMAF) and Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RNVAF) control the South China Sea, maintain air superiority in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), conduct air strikes against enemy targets in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) and are actively engaged in counterinsurgency operations against the Viet Cong (VC) and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) units that are located in the Republic of Vietnam.²³⁹

If any doubt persisted over the emphasis on control, Field Force Vietnam stated that, "Maximum effort will be made to support the GVN and its effort to extend its control over the people and the land mass of the RVN."²⁴⁰ Control entailed getting the people to do what the GVN wanted, either forcibly or through more passive efforts.²⁴¹ The maneuver battalions at Field Force Vietnam's disposal fought to advance pacification through conventional warfare through extending the Saigon government's control over Phu Yen's inhabitants. A focus on control explained why Allied forces directed much of their energy towards securing Phu Yen's most populous area, the Tuy Hoa Valley.

Aside from overt challenges to the GVN through military means, the PLAF sought to undermine GVN power covertly. To undermine GVN authority, the PLAF encouraged demonstrations against the presence of Allied forces. In Phu Yen, Brigadier General J. F. Freund, Assistant Director, Field Services, JUSPAO, stated "These VC themes were vividly illustrated when 'spontaneous' demonstrations were conducted by the people on 9 November. The themes were against US airstrikes, and US artillery and

²³⁹ Ibid., 44.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

²⁴¹ Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), 4; Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 232-233.

that ARVN soldiers not to fight beside US soldiers.”²⁴² Although the demonstrations failed to derail any Allied plans, they nevertheless underscored the level of influence the PLAF still held over the province’s population.

As a practice, pacification, with all its development goals, seemed a task beyond the purview of conventional military forces. Yet discussions placed MACV in a pivotal role. On 15 December 1965, U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge wrote Edward Lansdale, expressing that, “In the matter of the military clearing phase of rural construction, MACV’s role is, of course, pre-eminent as is its liaison and advising role with the GVN’s Department of Defense and the High Command.”²⁴³ In practice, MACV went beyond simply advising and liaising with the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). The subordinate entities of MACV, such as IFFV in the case of MR2, aided pacification by using American soldiers to both battle the enemy and secure the all-important rice harvests.

Security conditions during the spring of 1965 reflected the enemy’s effect on GVN pacification efforts. Regarding Phu Yen’s 1965 Rural Construction Program, the GVN’s plan to advance pacification for that year, the lack of military assets hindered pacification. Indeed,

Due to the unfavorable security situation in the province, the plan limits its coverage and provides priority attention to 17 selected hamlets bordering National Route No.1. Other planned activities under this program include consolidation of the 81 hamlets which were previously pacified in 1964. This course of action was

²⁴² Report, USOM [U.S. Operations Mission] - Reports of USOM Provincial Representatives for Month Ending 30 November 1965, 30 November 1965, Folder 03, Box 01, Rufus Phillips Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=23970103001>>.

²⁴³ Henry Cabot Lodge to Edward Lansdale, “Roles of Different U.S. Agencies in the Three Phases of Rural Construction, that is, Military Clearing, Pacification and Development,” 15 December 1965, Folder: Memoranda Lodge, Henry Cabot to Lansdale, Box 58, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

prompted by the inadequacy of troops which could provide security in the rural construction operations.²⁴⁴

As seen with Operation Quyet-Thang 160, ARVN's focus on the areas adjacent to QL-1 left the majority of Phu Yen under possible NLF control. Yet that operation demonstrated pacification's dependence on conventional military units. With such a restrained scope for pacification, future advancement depended on the substantial infusion of conventional military forces. Pacification undeniably existed in the realm, and a concern, of traditional armies.

More of Phu Yen fell under the NLF banner as the year progressed. Three years removed from ARVN's Operation Sea Swallow and just one year after the awakening of the PLAF in Phu Yen, the province went from a GVN and USOM showpiece to a NLF stronghold. Towards the end of 1965, the commander of MACV, U.S. Army General William C. Westmoreland focused on the disconcerting increase of PAVN forces in MR2. Accordingly,

Toward the end of the year the enemy disposition of one division in Quang Ngai, one in Binh Dinh and one in Phu Yen indicated a possible intention to retain control over large population centers and LOC's and to increase his access to rice, fish, and salt. The enemy dispositions also made it possible for him to threaten to isolate the I CTZ.²⁴⁵

PAVN and PLAF units placed most of Phu Yen under Communist control, except for Tuy Hoa City. In doing so, North Vietnamese forces placed the territorial integrity, and

²⁴⁴ Narrative Report - Status and Progress Of Activities Planned Under The 1965 Construction Program In Phu-Yen, No Date, p.1, Folder 08, Box 03, Rufus Phillips Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=23970308001>>.

²⁴⁵ Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, "Pentagon Papers Part IV. C. 6. a. Evolution of the War. U.S. Grand Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965-1967" (5890505) [Electronic Record], p. 62, RG 330 / P 760 / Box 5; NARA II. Available at: <<https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-6-a.pdf>>.

Saigon's pacification of the countryside, of the Republic of Vietnam in jeopardy. As recalled in the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division's *The First Brigade in the Republic of Vietnam, July 1965 - January 1968*,

USMACV considered Saigon and the coastal provinces of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen most important, the coastal provinces because they were not only heavily populated and important sources of VC support, but because there was a continuing threat of the VC in the area linking up with NVA units in the Central Highlands and thereby severing the country.²⁴⁶

Furthermore, Robert Lanigan's report on Phu Yen's pre-Vietnam War history noted the PLAF "had control over 90% of all the populated areas of the province and as a result American troops were introduced into the province."²⁴⁷ Such a staggering figure indicated an entire South Vietnamese province, with most of its rural population and rice production, existed under Communist control. Moreover, any reversal of fortunes in Phu Yen entailed challenging well established sympathies towards the PLAF.

American officials viewed events in Phu Yen with mounting consternation. Despite the shortcomings of the PLAF and the resilience of the ARVN, Communist forces remained in control of most of Phu Yen's territory. USOM Province Representatives relayed a grim, yet reversible, situation befalling the province at year's end. In terms of NLF versus GVN gains, the report noted,

The VC started to occupy territories which were previously under GVN control; and, however feasible, they engaged in such activities as holding of victory celebrations with exhibits of captured weapons, organization of Liberation Committees in newly occupied villages. distribution of anti-GVN propaganda leaflets, organization of training courses for new VC recruits and holding of political meetings for rural inhabitants. Although the ARVN engaged in a number of operations, it is believed that there has been no significant accomplishment in its

²⁴⁶ 322d Military History Detachment, *The First Brigade in the Republic of Vietnam July 1956-January 1968* (Tuscaloosa, AL: U.S. Army Reserve, Undated), 27.

²⁴⁷ Robert Lanigan, Phu Yen Province Briefing Folder, 6 September 1971, p.2, Folder 6, Part 1, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

attempts to repel the activities of the enemy. Thus, it can be concluded that the political situation has deteriorated during the month.²⁴⁸

The security situation proved even worse, with USOM stating,

Implications that can be drawn from the developments cited in the preceding paragraph strongly indicate that the security situation has also deteriorated. GVN-controlled areas have virtually decreased in size as a result of the VC-conducted activities and operations. Road travel has become more hazardous than ever due to VC roadblocks and sabotage. Moreover, the downtown area of the provincial capital (Tuy-Hoa) has been subjected to mortar attack for the second time on December 13, killing two and wounding seven inmates of the Catholic Orphanage. With the arrival of a fairly large unit of South Korean troops, however, it is predicted that some favorable changes in the overall security situation will be forthcoming.²⁴⁹

The only source of positivity emerged in the statement regarding the arrival of combat forces from South Korea. Indeed, any hope of salvaging the GVN's precarious position in Phu Yen depended on the actions of FWMAF units. Conventional warfare was pacification in Phu Yen.

1966

Like the French before them, the Americans now endeavored to pacify Phu Yen with conventional forces. The year 1966 saw the Republic of Vietnam inundated with Allied combat forces. Now one of two field forces in the country, I Field Force Vietnam (IFFV) dispatched maneuver battalions to Phu Yen to assist the 47th ARVN Regiment in combating the resilient PLAF and the 95th PAVN Regiment. IFFV organized intense operations in 1966 that involved American, South Korean, and South Vietnamese maneuver battalions engaging their Communist foes while safeguarding Phu Yen's rice

²⁴⁸ Report, USOM [U.S. Operations Mission] - Reports of USOM Provincial Representatives for Month Ending 31 December 1965, 31 December 1965, p.1, Folder 04, Box 01, Rufus Phillips Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=23970104001>>.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

harvests. Additionally, the South Koreans executed their own series of operations in Phu Yen. Through coalition warfare, these elements of the Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) distanced the PAVN and PLAF from the populace and the major source of food; rice. The Allied operations of 1966 in Phu Yen offer undeniable associations between pacification and search and destroy. Without question, an inseparable bond existed between conventional military operations and pacification.

The ROKA units operating in Phu Yen referred to offensive combat operations and pacification as one in the same. Major General Chung Kyu Han, commander of the ROKA's White Horse Division, later wrote that "The completion of the pacification program of Vietnam by driving out the Communists from this land is the mission of the division."²⁵⁰ Furthermore, the policies of Lt. General Lee Sae Ho, Commander of the ROKFV, separated pacification from civic action. Rather, under a section entitled "For All out Efforts for the Pacification of Vietnam," he listed that "Initiative in offensive operations should be always preserved."²⁵¹ Conversely, under "For Positive Civic Action," the commander noted "Every man and officer should become an instrument in civic psychological warfare."²⁵² Without doubt, the ROKA understood pacification as being an integral component of the war in the RVN. Throughout the coming operations in Phu Yen, the Americans, too, reflected the South Korean inference of pacification.

Pacification meant improved security. Thus the U.S. Army's role in pacification went beyond Civic Action. Inasmuch as Civic Action helped instill a positive image of

²⁵⁰ War History Compilation Committee, *Pictorial War History of ROK Forces to Vietnam, 1964.6-1970.6* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 1970), 11.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 10.

²⁵² Ibid.

military operations, the concept did not advance pacification as rapidly, nor as broadly, as the campaigns themselves. Yet together both methods demonstrated the inseparability of conventional military forces and pacification in Phu Yen. As disclosed by IFFV's 1966 campaign, operations to both protect rice harvests and annihilate enemy forces encapsulated pacification during the Vietnam War.

A year of continuous operations by U.S. Army maneuver battalions against the Communist forces in Phu Yen commenced with Operation Jefferson. Conducted between 1 and 16 January, Operation Jefferson featured the 5th Howitzer Battalion, 27th Artillery, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, ROKA 2nd Marine Brigade, and ARVN 47th Regiment. Largely a search and destroy operation, Jefferson entailed securing QL-1 between Tuy Hoa City and Nha Trang to the south in Khanh Hoa Province. Tasked with clearing the mountainous area south of Tuy Hoa, the ROKA 2nd Marine Brigade, and ARVN 47th Regiment reopened the QL-1 with the help of American firepower. U.S. naval gunfire destroyed suspected enemy occupied caves, while American aircraft conducted 184 airstrikes in support of the South Korean marines, averaging 11.5 sorties a day during the sixteen day operation.²⁵³

Most significantly, Operation Jefferson taught IFFV of the value of long duration operations. Indeed,

sustained ground operations in an area permit the development of better and more precise intelligence. This in turn contributed to more effective operations. Operations extending over longer periods provided the time needed to acquire and

²⁵³ Operational Report on Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 5th Howitzer Battalion 27th Artillery, sub: Operational Report on Lessons Learned for the period of 1 January to 30 April 1966, p.3, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/873660.pdf>>; Operational Report on Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters I Field Force Vietnam, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1966, p.10, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=AD0390955>>.

exploit captives, other local human sources, and documents. The immediate tactical exploitation of information thus contributed toward the acquisition of additional sources.²⁵⁴

Thus the reason for so many operations in Phu Yen emerged from IFFV's

forementioned realization. Additionally, American intelligence revealed that,

Despite the heavy losses suffered by NVA and VC regular and irregular forces through the II CTZ as a result of ARVN and US/FWMAF operations during the period, there were indications at the end of the period that NVA and VC forces maintained or regained their personnel strength through the absorption of replacement troops infiltrated from North Vietnam and recruitment and/or forced conscription of locals.²⁵⁵

In light of the need for further intelligence and enemy resilience, IFFV planned additional operations in Phu Yen to saturate the province with friendly forces and maintain the tempo of war against the enemy.

With the lessons of Operation Jefferson in hand, IFFV launched a series of operations, most of which centered on safeguarding Phu Yen's rice harvests. Conducted on the heels of Operation Jefferson between 19 January and 21 February, Operation Van Buren emerged as the first of many rice protection operations in the province. As much as Operation Jefferson amounted to an intelligence gathering operation, Operation Van Buren functioned as a "rice harvest protection campaign."²⁵⁶ Consequently, Operation Van Buren demonstrated the direct correlation between large unit sweeps and pacification. As recalled in *The Refugee Situation in Phu-Yen Province, Viet-Nam*,

It had been found that the Viet-Cong were using rice from the Tuy-Hoa Valley to supply units throughout the Central Highlands, while the government was forced to import some 600 tons of rice per month to feed the population of Tuy-Hoa. To

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁵⁶ Report - The Refugee Situation in Phu Yen Province Vietnam, July 1967, p.60, Folder 02, Box 02, Gary Larsen Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=19600202001>.

deny this rice source to the guerrillas, Korean Marines, U. S. Army units, and ARVN forces physically guarded the paddies during the harvest.²⁵⁷

The operation entailed the use of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, ROK 2nd Marine Brigade, and ARVN 47th Regiment to prevent the enemy from interfering with the rice harvest. The American paratroopers augmented their South Korean and South Vietnamese allies already in province, and turned their attention inland towards the rice paddies.

American forces initially faced scant, if any, contact with the enemy. As reported by Jack Foisie of *The Los Angeles Times*, “In the first day of the Phu Yen operation (called ‘Van Buren’) in the Song Da Rang Valley south of the provincial capital of Tuy Hoa, friendly forces reported only ‘light contact’ with the enemy.”²⁵⁸ While American readers learned of Operation Van Buren from the 26 January article, the operation intensified. Indeed, elements of the 95th PAVN Regiment engaged the ROK 2nd Marine Brigade on 31 January. Although the North Vietnamese soldiers failed to break through the South Korean marines, the 95th PAVN Regiment nevertheless rendered the ROK marines combat ineffective. To give the South Koreans a chance to recover, the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division assumed duties on the ROK’s area of operations. In doing so, Operation Van Buren finally provided the American paratroopers with substantial enemy contact.²⁵⁹

American forces encountered a well prepared enemy among the hamlets of My Chanh village. During the morning of 6 February in Tuy An District, a platoon from

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Jack Foisie, “U.S. Korea and Viet Forces Join in Drive on Red Units,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), January 26, 1966.

²⁵⁹ Carland, 186.

Company B, 2/502 Infantry maneuvered near the hamlet of My Canh 4 and immediately received enemy fire. The company commander dispatched two other platoons to encircle the enemy forces occupying the hamlet. When the American platoons attempted an assault, intense PAVN fire thwarted the paratroopers. Instead, thirteen airstrikes rocked the hamlet as the Americans looked on. Despite such intense aerial bombardment, the well-fortified North Vietnamese fought on until the cover of darkness when, through a network of tunnels, the PAVN force vacated My Canh 4.²⁶⁰ Such fortifications reflected the control exercised by Communist forces in Phu Yen between the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem and the rise of NLF power.

While the Americans secured the rubble of My Canh 4, PAVN soldiers in neighboring My Canh 2 fired upon elements of the 2/502 Infantry. The following morning, 7 February, one platoon from the 2/502 Infantry attempted to enter My Canh 2 from the northeast. Another platoon moved to the northwest to act as a blocking force. Yet as the first platoon maneuvered, intense enemy fire stopped its advance. In response, the second platoon tried to relieve its comrades, but enemy fire pinned it down as well. Indeed, My Canh 2 functioned more as a bunker complex than as typical South Vietnamese hamlet. In need of assistance, 2/502 Infantry requested reinforcements, with the 1/327th Infantry providing the relief force.²⁶¹

Company B and Tiger Force, the special long-range reconnaissance platoon of the 327th Infantry, comprised the relief force. Under the command of Major David Hackworth, these troops attempted to force the enemy into a trap. "It was a neat, clean

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 186-187.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 187.

‘hammer and anvil,’ right out of Fort Benning,” Hackworth later remarked.²⁶² As Tiger Force moved to the north, Company B moved south as Hackworth anticipated the enemy would soon flee in this direction. Rather than disengage, the PAVN soldiers held their ground, pouring withering fire against Tiger Force as the American’s cover of tall grass unexpectedly ended. With Tiger Force’s attack stymied, a Royal Australian Air Force Canberra light bomber struck the enemy bunker complex. Nevertheless, the well entrenched PAVN soldiers continued to fight.²⁶³ Realizing the enemy would not break contact, Hackworth ordered Company B to immediately attack from the south. Like Tiger Force, the troops of Company B found themselves in the open and sustained heavy casualties, more so than Tiger Force.²⁶⁴

As Company B’s attack collapsed, Tiger Force renewed its advance, only to falter once again in the face of intense enemy fire. With night approaching, Tiger Force’s commander, Lt. James A. Gardner, personally destroyed three of the PAVN’s four machine-gun nests before being cut down by enemy fire. Regardless of Gardner’s supreme sacrifice, for which he posthumously earned the Medal of Honor, Tiger Force remained under intense PAVN fire. To remedy the situation, Hackworth ordered Tiger Force to use the cover afforded by U.S. artillery fire to link-up with Company B.²⁶⁵ Upon linking-up, the Americans waited until the next morning before any further efforts to

²⁶² David H. Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 502.

²⁶³ Ibid., 504.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 505; Carland, 188.

²⁶⁵ Hackwork and Sherman, 506.

enter My Canh 2. Yet just as in My Canh 4, so too the PAVN soldiers had abandoned My Canh 2 under the cover of darkness.²⁶⁶

Hackworth commented that his men faced “dye-in-the-wool NVA troops complete with khaki uniforms and armed with AK47s—upon examination, members of the elite 95th NVA Regiment, the unit known to be operating in this area, whose activities during the Indochina war had given the bloody Street Without Joy its name.”²⁶⁷ Adding, “They were probably the most formidable enemy fighters in South Vietnam.”²⁶⁸ Such accolades reinforced the reality that the Americans respected the 95th PAVN Regiment. More significantly, the PAVN regiment’s history indicated that it posed a serious challenge pacification in Phu Yen—one that used Phu Yen’s seemingly endless mountain range to counter GVN control of the province’s lowlands.

Aside from engaging PAVN forces, elements of the 101st Airborne Division served pacification in another way. Through Civic Action, conventional military forces reinforced their participation in pacification along less destructive lines. Encapsulating this duality of purpose, Headquarters, 5th Howitzer Battalion, 27th Artillery, reported that “In addition to rendering fire support, this battalion provided vehicles to Tuy Hoa and Hieu Xuong District to assist the local population in transporting the harvested rice.”²⁶⁹ Equally crucial to keeping the enemy away from the rice harvest, collecting the rice made for perceivable pacification progress.

²⁶⁶ Carland, 188.

²⁶⁷ Hackworth and Sherman, 502.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Operational Report on Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 5th Howitzer Battalion 27th Artillery, sub: Operational Report on Lessons Learned for the period of 1 January to 30 April 1966, p.3, DTIC. Available here: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/873660.pdf>>.

By Operation Van Buren's end, MACV deemed the efforts of the paratroopers as successful. MACV noted "over 30,000 tons of rice was gathered by local farmers while friendly forces killed 650 enemy," as indicators for the operation's favorable outcome.²⁷⁰ Indeed, as recalled by the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion, "80% of the rice crop had been harvested by the local farmers" because of Operation Van Buren.²⁷¹ Rambo, Tinker, and LeNoir wrote that, "The operation was successful; by the conclusion of the harvest in mid-February some 30,000 tons of rice had been marketed under government auspices (compared to only 12,000 tons in 1965), and the insurgents' control in the valley districts was greatly reduced."²⁷² The presence of proactive Allied units played an integral role in pacification, at least at the province level.

Pacification entailed both destruction and construction, with the former a necessary first step that placed the latter in an endless repeat cycle. Success against PAVN and PLAF units came at the cost of the destruction of dwellings of locals during Operation Van Buren. "Unwanted results of the operation," Rambo, Tinker, and LeNoir noted, "included extensive property damage and a considerable movement of refugees into the Tuy-Hoa area."²⁷³ Engagements such as the ones that consumed My Canh 2 and My Canh 4, exacerbated the GVN's ability to provide for, and therefore control, Phu

²⁷⁰ U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam Weekly Summaries: Summary of USMACV News Events 1966, 14 January 1967, p.4, Folder 03, Box 02, Glenn Helm Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=1070203003>>.

²⁷¹ Unit History, Vagabonds of Vietnam: Tenth Combat Aviation Battalion, 1965-1966, Undated, p.IV-3, Folder 04, Box 03, Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) Collection: Unit Histories - 1st Aviation Brigade, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=3030304003>>.

²⁷² Report - The Refugee Situation in Phu Yen Province Vietnam, July 1967, p.60, Folder 02, Box 02, Gary Larsen Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=19600202001>>.

²⁷³ Ibid.

Yen's hamlets. In that vein, the exodus of many inhabitants to the safety of Tuy Hoa City created problems for the local GVN that lasted for years.

The successor to Operation Van Buren, Operation Harrison commenced on 2 February and last until 25 March. Essentially a continuation of Van Buren, Operation Harrison saw the expansion of the area of operations in the mountains west of the Tuy Hoa Valley. Since Operation Van Buren ended with the rice harvest nearing completion, IFFV envisaged Operation Harrison as a continuation, and accentuation, of the search and destroy mission component. Whereas Operation Van Buren concentrated American military efforts on rice protection, Operation Harrison focused more on the enemy's destruction. Consequently, the 1/327 Infantry, with support from South Korean and South Vietnamese forces, continued the safeguarding of the rice paddies in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Other participants, the 2/502 Infantry and the 2/327 Infantry, moved into the mountainous interior with the intention of locating and obliterating the 95th PAVN Regiment. Thus, like previous operations, the hybrid approach of rice protection as well as search and destroy best characterized Operation Harrison.

While patrolling the jungled mountains of Phu Yen, the two American battalions failed to encounter any PAVN forces. Ironically the unit left out of the offensive into the mountains, the 1/327 Infantry, brought elements of the 95th PAVN Regiment to battle, resulting in a "major fire fight."²⁷⁴ On 9 March, the 1/327 Infantry located the mortar elements of the 95th PAVN Regiment headed in the direction of Thanh Phu hamlet. In

²⁷⁴ Unit History, Vagabonds of Vietnam: Tenth Combat Aviation Battalion, 1965-1966, Undated, p.IV-4, Folder 04, Box 03, Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) Collection: Unit Histories - 1st Aviation Brigade, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=3030304003>>.

Tuy An District, approaching American forces passed by My Phu hamlet, just three kilometers from the infamous My Canh 2 hamlet. In similar fashion, the American soldiers received enemy rounds that emanated from My Phu hamlet. Instead of assaulting the hamlet, Hackworth and his fellow paratroopers allowed American firepower to flatten the PAVN positions. On the other side the hamlet, American units destroyed the enemy positions one by one. Over the course of the night, helicopters ferried in Tiger Force, which blocked the PAVN's escape route. With dawn, the Americans counted 118 enemy killed, with a possible 97 additional PAVN dead.²⁷⁵

Operation Harrison concluded following the lack of further contact between American and North Vietnamese forces. Captured PAVN prisoners disclosed that the 95th PAVN Regiment had scattered in small groups to the safety of the western mountains. Thus attention shifted away from locating the 95th PAVN Regiment to furthering of security in the Tuy Hoa Valley. As an aberration from the attention placed on rice protection, Operation Harrison demonstrated the limits of search and destroy in Phu Yen. While search and destroy placed distance between PAVN and the rice harvest in Tuy Hoa Valley, the ability of PAVN to elude U.S. Army forces necessitated further IFFV efforts to operate in Phu Yen.

The 2nd ROK Marine Brigade returned to the field after Operation Harrison. Having recovered from its earlier battle with the 95th PAVN Regiment during Operation Van Buren, the 2nd ROK Marine Brigade resumed authority over its designated area of operations in the Tuy Hoa Valley. From 22 February to 24 March, while American

²⁷⁵ Hackworth and Sherman, 517-519; Carland, 191-192.

paratroopers forayed into Phu Yen's interior in search of enemy main forces, the 2nd ROK Marines launched Operation Reconstruction, or Operation Jaekun as it was predominately a South Korean effort. Two brigades of the 2nd ROK Marines, with support from the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and the ARVN's 47th Regiment, once again used search and destroy to spread GVN control into the contested rice paddies outside of Tuy Hoa City. In doing so, the South Korean marines claimed 176 enemy killed.²⁷⁶ Moreover, Operation Reconstruction exemplified the extent of coalition warfare in Phu Yen and the widespread use of search and destroy to advance pacification.

With both operations Harrison and Reconstruction over, IFFV shifted its campaign to the areas north of Tuy Hoa City. Between 24 March and 21 July 1966, the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, ROK 2nd Marine Brigade, and ARVN 47th Regiment safeguarded the end of the rice harvest under Operation Fillmore. IFFV Headquarters "directed that the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division secure and protect the rice harvest north and northwest of Tuy Hoa while continuing to locate, fix, and destroy the remaining elements of the 95th NVA Regiment, 3d Viet Cong Main Force regiment and local Viet Cong forces."²⁷⁷ With a focus on both rice protection and bringing the enemy to battle, the first phase of Operation Fillmore called for "one battalion [to] secure and protect the rice harvest, while two battalions conducted search and destroy operations in the area."²⁷⁸ With the start of Operation Fillmore, IFFV envisaged the continuation of search and destroy to boost pacification.

²⁷⁶ War History Compilation Committee, 122.

²⁷⁷ Combat Operations After Action Report, Department of the Army, Headquarters 1st Brigade 101st Airborne Division, sub: Combat Operations After Action Report, Operation Fillmore, 17 August 1966, p.2, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/394022.pdf>>.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

Operation Fillmore began with American units continuing their operations in the same areas as under Operation Harrison and with the same focus on rice protection. Accordingly, 1/327 Infantry stayed east of Song Hoa, while 2/327 Infantry and 2/502 Infantry remained “in the central Tuy Hoa rice area and in the mountains south of Tuy Hoa.”²⁷⁹ On 25 March, 2/327 Infantry continued “saturation patrolling” of the rice paddies. Although B Company, 2/327 Infantry had “completely traversed the mountain range from south to north without enemy contact, thus far Operation Fillmore boosted security yet not to the detriment of PAVN or PLAF ranks.”²⁸⁰ As Operation Fillmore continued, by 2 April, the 2/327 Infantry operated north of Tuy An “to protect the rice harvest in that vicinity.”²⁸¹ On the night of 2 April, 1/327 Infantry arrived at Camp Dong Tre and began patrols the next day. Camp Dong Tre sat atop a hill near Dong Xuan District’s Ha Boung River Valley. The camp contained a compliment of U.S. special forces and artillery as well as South Vietnamese forces. Dong Tre monitored the suspected trails used by PAVN and PLAF units to infiltrate the southern portion of Phu Yen from enemy Base Area 200 in the Ky Lo Valley.

The pace of Operation Fillmore intensified. With 4 April came an airmobile assault by the 2/327 Infantry, with elements of the 1/327 Infantry functioning as a blocking force. Zero contact transpired between the American paratroopers and Communist units. Yet on 7 April, southeast of Dong Tre, a company from 1/327 Infantry encountered an “estimated” PLAF company, with helicopters landing the rest of 1/327 in

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 3.

an effort to encircle the PLAF. After the day long battle, the PLAF unit “withdrew suffering heavy casualties.”²⁸² The battle proved the apogee of the first phase of Operation Fillmore as IFFV withdrew the bulk of its forces from Phu Yen to Phan Thiet, Binh Thuan Province by 9 April. By body count, the operation netted 122 PLAF killed, fifty-seven of which were confirmed, with another twelve kills claimed through artillery fire, all the while claiming the lives of eight Americans.²⁸³ Headquarters, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division viewed Fillmore favorably as it “was successful in protecting the rice harvest north of Tuy Hoa,” this despite the operation accomplishing little in regards to significantly reducing the enemy’s ranks.²⁸⁴ The value of Operation Fillmore clearly laid with the dispersal of the enemy away from the rice paddies through military force.

Midway through Operation Fillmore, IFFV Headquarters further fused the link between Allied operations and pacification. Accordingly,

Since the beginning of Operation Jefferson, the 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div and two battalions of the ROK Marines have conducted continuous operations in the Tuy Hoa area, participating also in Operations Van Buren, Reconstruction, Harrison and Fillmore. Fillmore is currently in progress. Operating in conjunction, throughout this period were elements of the 47t Regiment (ARVN). The significance of the continuing operations is that a sizable amount of II Corps’ second most productive rice growing area is now under GVN control. In the February rice harvest, 33,303 Metric tons of an estimated crop of 50,000 tons were harvested and secured. The bulk of the remainder was destroyed to prevent its capture by the VC. To date also, approximately 1,500 enemy have been killed in this area.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters I Field Force Vietnam, sub: Operational Report on Lessons Learned for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1966, p.7, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/390955.pdf>>.

Although “most” of Phu Yen’s rice production now existed under GVN control, work remained to secure it further. IFFV’s assessment nonetheless cemented the securing of Phu Yen’s rice as the principle reason for American forces operating in the province. Therefore, the advancement of pacification was not lost on the minds of those directing American troops in Phu Yen.

In terms of Civic Action, Operation Fillmore did not disappoint. Medical personnel of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division treated “1,910 Vietnamese.” Elsewhere, Company A, 326 Engineers repaired 88 kilometers of QL-1 and RTR-7. Other elements of the 1st Brigade transported harvest rice. Combat elements, too, participated in Civic Action. The 1/327 Infantry provided “food and medical treatment to approximately 100 refugees and assisted in their relocation to the District Headquarters.”²⁸⁶ Moreover, the 1st Brigade participated in the “‘Back to the Village’ campaign, designed to return refugees back to their former homes after clearing the area of Viet Cong, the 1st Brigade assisted by repairing roads and bridges, and by providing security for the treatment of the refugees.”²⁸⁷ Thus Operation Fillmore propelled pacification both at the province and village level.

American civilian and military authorities substantiated the contributions of IFFV’s maneuver battalions. By the end of April, Americans Lt. Col. Jay A. Hatch, Sector Advisor; Daniel L. Leaty, USAID Representative for Phu Yen Province; Ross E. Petzing, JUSPAO Representative for Phu Yen Province; and Ray Hanchulak, OSA

²⁸⁶ Combat Operations After Action Report, Department of the Army, Headquarters 1st Brigade 101st Airborne Division, sub: Combat Operations After Action Report, Operation Fillmore, 17 August 1966, p.22, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/394022.pdf>>.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

Representative for Phu Yen Province, noted that, “The progress of the clearing phase of the Revolutionary Development Program continue to exceed the securing phase.”²⁸⁸

Allied troops pushed the enemy’s main forces from undisclosed areas faster than local defense units could secure those locales, which meant that cleared areas remained susceptible to the enemy. Nonetheless, as the harbingers of pacification, IFV’s maneuver battalions made visible progress.

During the interlude between Operation Fillmore and the next round of U.S. military operations in Phu Yen, the PLAF sought the bolstering of its main force units. American intelligence discerned “that all district mobile forces in northeastern Phu Yen have been transferred to provincial force units in order to strengthen, the VC province-wide.”²⁸⁹ PLAF’s upgrading of forces in Phu Yen indicated the pressing need for reinforcements after clashes with Allied units and the resolve to continue the war in the province. The same intelligence report revealed that the PLAF’s Phu Yen Province Youth Proselyting Section dispatched a letter to “all districts and villages of Phu Yen Province, and it urges addressees to persuade youths to enlist in the VC Liberation Army.”²⁹⁰ Going into greater detail, the PLAF letter specified an amelioration plan that envisaged “30% of guerrilla and local unit members are upgraded to main force unit members. 45% of local youths are upgraded to local force members. 20% of Vanguard Youths are assigned to main force units. 10% of good prisoners are selected.”²⁹¹ Essentially, the PLAF sought

²⁸⁸ “Province: Phu Yen Report for Period Ending 30 April 1966,” in “II Corps Special Joint Report on Revolutionary Development October 1966,” p.1, CMH.

²⁸⁹ Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Upgrading of Viet Cong Forces - Record of MACV Part 2, 29 April 1967, p.4, Folder 0589, Box 0024, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900240589>>. Emphasis in original.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 4-5.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

the replenishment of its ranks through the promotion of guerrillas from non-main force units and pressed for better recruitment numbers. Clearly, IFFV's 1966 campaign had drained the human resources of the PLAF, a sign that the U.S. Army maneuver battalions were making gains.

American military endeavors in Phu Yen resumed with operations Deckhouse I and Nathan Hale. As US paratroopers prepared for a fresh series of search and destroy operations in the province, BLT 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines executed Operation Deckhouse I. The first in a series of amphibious assaults against enemy targets along the RVN coast, Deckhouse I entailed the landing of U.S. Marines twelve miles north of Tuy Hoa City. In doing so, the Marines secured the northeast flank of the 1st Cavalry Division during Operation Nathan Hale. Lasting from 18 to 27 June, the Marine operation resulted in limited enemy contact. Yet Deckhouse I placed "211 tons of enemy rice" in Marine hands.²⁹² Unlike the Marines on the coast, the U.S. Army units involved in Operation Nathan Hale found themselves in an intense series of engagements in further south and inland.²⁹³

Extensive operations by IFFV in Phu Yen continued with Operation Nathan Hale. Although the rice protect campaign terminated with Operation Fillmore, IFFV still focused on security improvement. Accordingly, Operation Nathan Hale represented the start of more concerted effort on behalf of IFFV to crush the enemy units in Phu Yen's interior. The connection to pacification remained the crux of future American operations

²⁹² Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, 1 June 1966, p.18, Folder 001, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=1201001060>>.

²⁹³ Ibid.; Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1982), 304, 357.

because of the attention placed upon making Phu Yen a safe province. S. L. A. Marshall wrote, "Operation Nathan Hale was so little regarded that it does not receive mention in the book *Report on the War in Vietnam*, the distinguished authors of which are Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp and General W. C. Westmoreland."²⁹⁴ Overshadowed by Operations Thayer and Irving in neighboring Binh Dinh Province, Operation Nathan Hale nevertheless represented continued American efforts to pacify Phu Yen with conventional forces. Like previous operations, Nathan Hale embodied the inseparability of search and destroy from pacification in Phu Yen. Between 19 June and 1 July, the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, with support from 3rd Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division, rewarded IFFV's months of intelligence gathering by bringing PAVN to battle.²⁹⁵

Accordingly, because of intelligence gathered by 20 June, IFFV moved units to the north of Tuy Hoa District. Here, elements of the 2/327 Infantry found themselves in contact with an enemy battalion, while intelligence indicated the presence of more substantial enemy forces. By the afternoon of 20 July, the 1/8 Cavalry reinforced the 2/327 Infantry, yet contact with the supposed larger enemy force remained unfulfilled. That changed on 22 July at PSN Eagle following a "mad minute" by companies B and C of the 2/327 Infantry. The brief burst of intense U.S. fire tricked two nearby PAVN companies, authors of the after action report presumed, into thinking it lost the element of

²⁹⁴ S. L. A. Marshall, *Fields of Bamboo: Three Battles Just Beyond the South China Sea* (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), 2.

²⁹⁵ Headquarters 1st Battalion (Airborne) 8th Cavalry 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) - After Action Report for Operation NATHAN HALE, 20 June-01 July 1966, 14 July 1966, p.1, Folder 03, Box 01, Levin B. Broughton Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=6910103005>>.

surprise, thus responded with an immediate assault on the American positions at PSN Eagle.²⁹⁶

The ensuing battle at PSN Eagle proved intense. Testament to the ferocity of the clash, the attacking PAVN forces got within 6 feet of the Americans, while two U.S. Army companies found themselves engaged with the enemy for four hours.²⁹⁷ With engagements such as the one at PSN Eagle, Operation Nathan Hale provided a boon to province security. Operation Nathan Hale claimed at least 450 PAVN lives, with an estimated 300 more KIAs. Most significantly, IFFV figured it had wrecked the 18B PAVN Regiment, leaving that unit at 50% fighting strength. Such losses induced the 18B PAVN Regiment to withdrawal from Phu Yen and recover.²⁹⁸ MACV, too, shared IFFV's opinion of the operation being a success. "Operation Nathan Hale completely disrupted the plans of an NVA regiment in Phu Yen Province," MACV noted in a weekly summary.²⁹⁹ For those reasons, Operation Nathan Hale demonstrated that U.S. Army maneuver battalions could indeed improve province security and thus serve pacification.

The follow-up operation to Nathan Hale, Operation Henry Clay lasted from 2 to 20 July 1966. While Operation Nathan Hale resulted in driving the 18B PAVN Regiment from Phu Yen, Operation Henry Clay sought to hunt down and annihilate the remnants of that PAVN force. During the twenty-day operation, the 1st Cavalry Division and 2nd Battalion, 327th Airborne Infantry Regiment participated in what amounted to a fruitless

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Carland, 198.

²⁹⁹ U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam Weekly Summaries: Summary of USMACV News Events 1966, 14 January 1967, p.2, Folder 03, Box 02, Glenn Helm Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=1070203003>>.

pursuit operation that eventually took the American soldiers away from Phu Yen to the Cambodian border.³⁰⁰

With the failure of Operation Henry Clay, IFFV's attention once more turned to pacification oriented operations. Operation John Paul Jones provided another excellent instance of search and destroys value to pacification. The 2nd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and ROK 2nd Marine Brigade executed the three phase operation from 17 July to 30 August. As recalled in the after action report,

Headquarters I Field Force, Vietnam directed the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division to seize and hold vital terrain and installations in Vung Ro Pass and Highway 1 between Vung Ro Bay and the 2d Korean Marine Brigade AO, to provide protection for engineer work parties in the bay area along the line of communications, to relieve the 2d Korean Marine Brigade in the area south of Tuy Hoa and to be prepared to exploit B-52 strikes. Later in the operation the mission was expanded to include conducting search and destroy operations between Ky Lo Valley and Vung Ro Bay and protecting civilians during the initial stages of the rice harvest at Tuy An.³⁰¹

Of consequence here is IFFV's direct correlation of search and destroy with pacification; both in forms of engineering work at the Vung Ro Pass and efforts to safeguard the rice harvest in Tuy An.

Heavy U.S. Air Force firepower supported IFFV efforts to secure Hieu Xuong District's coastal area. Phase one, 21 to 30 July, of Operation John Paul Jones entailed the airmobile assault of two battalions in the vicinity of the Vung Ro Pass as to secure QL-1 for engineering work. Phase two, 30 July to 15 August, consisted of IFFV maneuver battalions capitalizing on airstrikes. One battalion executed search and destroy missions

³⁰⁰ Carland, 198.

³⁰¹ Combat Operations After Action Report, Department of the Army, Headquarters 1st Brigade 101st Airborne Division, sub: Combat Operations After Action Report, Operation John Paul Jones, 28 September 1966, p.2, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/388882.pdf>>.

west of Song Cau following two B-52 Arc Light raids in that area. Similarly, two other battalions commenced search and destroy operations after four B-52 Arc Light raids west of Dong Tre.³⁰² Phase three, 15 August to 5 September, involved two American battalions relieving the 2d ROK Marine Brigade to the south of Tuy Hoa City. These two battalions also continued protecting the Vung Ro Bay and Vung Ro Pass area, while “conducting search and destroy operations northwest of Tuy Hoa, and providing protection to the civilians in the initial stages of the rice harvest.”³⁰³ Again, the efforts of the U.S. forces concentrated on keeping rice out of enemy stomachs.

Operation John Paul Jones entailed extensive efforts on the Civic Affairs and Civic Action fronts. Insofar as control, Civic Affairs efforts hastened “the return of 1,354 refugees to GVN Control” by “Effecting coordination with local, Phu Yen Province and District, GVN Officials and their military and civilian advisors.”³⁰⁴ Civic Action resulted in the treatment of 4,366 Vietnamese by U.S. medical teams. Similarly, medical teams also conducted “two ‘Medicine Show’ operations.”³⁰⁵ Between 16 August to 5 September, American engineers regularly cleared and repaired QL-1 between Tuy Hoa City and Tuy An. Elements of the 1st Brigade transported 68 refugees back to their homes from the Tuy Hoa Refugee Center. The 1st Brigade distributed cooking and hygiene products “to needy persons and refugees.”³⁰⁶ The 1st Brigade employed “an average of 150 laborers, per day, thus providing local refugees with a source of livelihood.”³⁰⁷ Civic Action

³⁰² Ibid., 3.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 26.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

during this period also entailed the removal of “80 cows and 10 horses from areas under VC domination and returning those to GVN controlled areas, where they were redistributed to the people by the District Chief.”³⁰⁸ Indeed, not even livestock were exempt from pacification. Directly helping Phu Yen’s younger inhabitants, American soldiers “assist[ed] in the care of the orphans at the Catholic and Buddhist orphanages in Tuy Hoa.”³⁰⁹ Other elements participated in Civic Action “by replacing the roofs of 25 classrooms.”³¹⁰ Indeed, the positive effects of Operation John Paul Jones reverberated at the local level.

Before the completion of John Paul Jones, IFFV initiated Operation Seward. Between 4 September and 25 October, the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division and 1st Battalion of the 22nd Infantry Regiment once again moved about Phu Yen. Rice protection remained the primary interest of the planners of Operation Seward.³¹¹ Although a search and destroy operation, Seward embodied characteristics of an effort to accomplish far more than the destruction of enemy forces. Rather, the operation used conventional forces to occupy key rice producing areas of Phu Yen long enough as to undermine PLAF influence. In doing so, IFFV endeavored to secure more of the province’s littoral while furthering control of the rice paddies. The after action report for Operation Seward placed the effort firmly in the domain of pacification;

Operation Seward was characterized by counter guerrilla tactics, primarily encompassing small unit actions and frequent contact with small enemy forces. The search and destroy tactics utilized consisted of saturation patrolling, night

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Combat Operations After Action Report, Department of the Army, Headquarters 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, sub: Combat Operation After Action Report, Operation Seward, 5 September-25 October 1966, pp.1-2, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/386128.pdf>>.

movement, night ambushes, raids and the use of small unit stay behind forces and small unit immediate action forces. The terrain over which operations were conducted included mountainous jungles, rolling hills, dry and inundated rice paddies, sand dunes and beaches.³¹²

Thus, the operation demonstrated an approach by American paratroopers to more thoroughly weaken, not simply kill, PAVN and PLAF formations.

Accordingly, IFFV deployed its forces as to cover the rice harvests in the districts of Hieu Xuong and Tuy An. While Company A, 1/327 Infantry remained in Tuy Hoa to project its power into the nearby rice paddies of Hieu Xuong District, the 2/327 Infantry “continued the protection of the rice harvest and conducted search and destroy operations in the TUY AN area.”³¹³ Similarly, the 2/502 Infantry executed search and destroy operations in the northwest of Tuy Hoa District. Further south at the Vung Ro Pass, the 1/22 Infantry, which the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division commanded at the time, provided “defense of critical terrain and security.”³¹⁴ Such actions alone demonstrated that search and destroy served pacification rather well.

As Operation Seward progressed, it proved a concerted effort to secure Phu Yen’s rice producing areas as thoroughly as possible. Through a series of movements, American paratroopers solidified their hold on the countryside outside of the province capital. Indeed, “On 7 September, A Troop, 2/17 Cav conducted an amphibious assault with one platoon northeast of TUY HOA establishing blocking positions in support of the search and destroy operations of the remainder of the troop.”³¹⁵ After shuffling forces in and out

³¹² Ibid., 2-3.

³¹³ Ibid., 3.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

of Phu Yen, Operation Seward continued with minimal, if any, contact between American and enemy forces. Yet the enemy finally challenged American security efforts when, “On the night of 17 September the command post of Company B 2/327 Inf came under attack and was overrun by an estimated one hundred VC. Ten U.S. Army troops were killed and twelve wounded in the action.”³¹⁶

Two days later, on 19 September, the 2/502 Infantry landed northwest of Tuy Hoa City in the vicinity of Dong Tre via “airmobile assault.”³¹⁷ After landing with the 2/502 Infantry, a LRRP located a PLAF base camp. The find resulted in the 2/327 Infantry moving to an area southwest of the 2/502 Infantry’s area of operations. Additionally, two CIDG companies left Dong Tre to function as blocking forces for the 2/502 Infantry and 2/327 Infantry. With Allied forces now saturating the area, the 2/327 Infantry uncovered and documented “an extensive tunnel complex,” which engineers then blew up.³¹⁸ Following the return of the 2/502 Infantry to Tuy Hoa South, the U.S. Army airfield at Phu Hiep near the coast of Hieu Xuong District, from 28 to 30 September, on 3 October the 1/327 Infantry acted on intel acquired from an “escaped POW” and “raided a VC prisoner of war camp in the southwest portion of its AO.”³¹⁹ As a result, “twenty-three Vietnamese Nationals were liberated in the action.”³²⁰

Pacification expansion under the American paratroopers continued as they pushed further into Tuy Hoa District. With attention on securing stretches of highway 7B, the

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

2/327 Infantry airmobile assaulted into an area west of Tuy Hoa City on 7 October. Thereafter, “The battalion secured critical terrain along Highway 7B and conducted search and destroy operations in zone until 10 October when it returned to TUY HOA South. This operation was in conjunction with an engineer effort to repair the road and bridges along Highway 7B.”³²¹ Similarly, to continue the protection of the engineers preparing highway 7B, Company A, 2/327 Infantry performed an airmobile assault to the west of Tuy Hoa City on 21 October. Upon the relief of the 2/502 Infantry in Tuy An by the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division on 25 October, Operation Seward ended.³²² Once more, pacification hinged on IFFV’s offensives.

The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, deemed Operation Seward a success. For evidence, the after action report cited the protection of the rice harvests in the districts of Hieu Xuong and Tuy An, securing of the Vung Ro Bay area, and the outcomes of search and destroy missions. Accordingly, the operation inflicted 230 kills upon the PAVN and the PLAF, at the cost of 26 U.S. Army KIAs. Yet the 40.5 tons of rice secured by the American soldiers at this juncture of the operation proved more significant than the human toll incurred against the enemy.³²³ Owing to Operation Seward, “The full rice harvest in Phu Yen Province was completed on 25 October, 1966. This Brigade had protected and supported the accomplishment of this harvest, which yielded 17,343.5 metric tons or 89% of the Province goal of 19,500 metric tons of

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid., 3-4.

³²³ Ibid., 4.

rice.”³²⁴ In securing such rice tonnage, Operation Seward undoubtedly advanced pacification.

Concurrent with presenting Operation Seward as a success, the 101st Airborne Division noted some significant shortcomings. The operation did not cover the Ky Lo Valley, a place that served as a Communist stronghold in the region. Admittedly, “The 5th NVA Division Headquarters remains situated in the vicinity of the Ky Lo Valley (BQ7585). This area has not been exploited by U.S. forces and is undoubtedly a well-developed safe area in which NVA/VC forces realize complete freedom of movement.”³²⁵ Elsewhere, “The southern portion of the Hieu Xuong District is another relatively rugged and unexploited area which is presently being occupied by the 18B NVA Regiment.”³²⁶ These places existed outside the Tuy Hoa Valley, thus beyond the immediate concerns of the Allies to secure the land abutting Tuy Hoa City. Due to its remote location in northwestern Dong Xuan District, the Ky Lo Valley experienced few Allied incursions and therefore remained a PAVN and PLAF bastion always outside of Saigon’s control for the duration of the Vietnam War.

In a sense, although Operation Seward succeeded in pushing the enemy further inland, the PLAF had a voice in the matter. The PLAF succeeded in avoiding unnecessary combat with American forces. For example, the 307th PLAF Main Force Battalion strove “to avoid contact with the 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div at all cost.”³²⁷ Tasked with organizing hamlet cadre, the 307th PLAF Main Force evaded combat with IFFV

³²⁴ Ibid., 6–1.

³²⁵ Ibid., 1–1.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid., 1–4–2–1.

maneuver battalion as to achieve its mission in Phu Yen.³²⁸ Away from the rice paddies of interest to the Americans during Operation Seward, the PLAF main force simply operated in an area of little interest to the Allies.

Operation Seward saw the extension of the Civic Action advancements started under Operation John Paul Jones. Citing “the increased activities of the Battalion S-5s,” the AAR for Operation Seward noted “the enhanced capability of the Brigade to support these activities through close ties with in country agencies and the establishment of a Brigade Civic Action Supply Point at Phan Rang.”³²⁹ The 1st Brigade reported the completion of “Some 158 Civic Action Projects,” which covered the wide spectrum of health and sanitation (49), public work (17), transportation (15), commerce and industry (1), agriculture and natural resources (9), education and training (7), community relations (23), communication (13), and refugee assistance (14). The advancement of such projects stemmed from a network established by IFFV to supply Civic Action efforts across its areas of responsibility in MR2.³³⁰ Undoubtedly, Civic Action existed as a significant aspect of IFFV’s pacification campaign.

Within hours of terminating Operation Seward, IFFV initiated Operation Adams. Essentially Operation Adams continued the rice protection effort of Operation Seward, but with the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division assuming the majority of duties from the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. IFFV envisaged Operation Adams as a long duration rice protection effort. From 26 October 1966 until 2 April 1967, Operation

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid., 6–1.

³³⁰ Ibid.

Adams utilized the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division, the 28th ROKA Regiment, and the 47th ARVN Regiment.³³¹ As a prolonged search and destroy campaign, with focus on rice protection, Operation Adams continued the concentration of Allied efforts in Tuy An and Tuy Hoa districts. The operation began with the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division sending “its three maneuver battalions into the rice producing areas north of Tuy Hoa and near Tuy An area and commenced small unit patrolling.”³³² Concurrently, the 47th ARVN Regiment moved into the Hien Xuong Valley, west of Tuy Hoa City, to defend the rice harvest in that area.³³³ In that vein, Operation Adams continuing the use of search and destroy in the protection of rice production.

Simultaneous with Operation Adams, the recently relieved 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division turned its attention elsewhere in Phu Yen. Under operations Geronimo I and Geronimo II, the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division provided shorter, more directed efforts to annihilate enemy units in and near the western portion of the Tuy Hoa Valley. While Operation Adams focused on rice protection, the Geronimo operations constituted IFFV’s other goal of forcing the elusive final, climatic confrontation between the IFFV and the 95th PAVN Regiment still lurking in the western portion of the province near Ha Roi.³³⁴ Initially devised as a series of three operations, IFFV ultimately cancelled the third installment of Geronimo. Thus the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne

³³¹ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters I Field Force Vietnam, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned for Quarterly Period Ending 31 October 1966, p.11, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/390953.pdf>>.

³³² Ibid., 27.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid., 12.

Division participated in only two search and destroy operations in the interior of Phu Yen between 31 October to 4 December 1966. “After several days of maintenance, training, rest, and recuperations on the beach south of Tuy Hoa, the 1st Brigade readied for Operation GERONIMO I with the mission of exploiting intelligence indicating that the 95th NVA Regiment was operating in the mountainous areas of western Phu Yen Province,” recalled the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division after the war.³³⁵

Operation Geronimo I commenced as the 1/327th Infantry “infiltrated south of the Son Be River on 31 October.” Still seeking substantial contact with the enemy, “On 6 November, the 1-327th air assaulted to the Dong Tre area, along with the 2-327th and 2-502d. There were significant contacts with the enemy as the three battalions advanced from three different directions.”³³⁶ Contact with the 95th PAVN Regiment continued with 1/327th Infantry “engaged in a vicious fight with an estimated 100 NVA,” on 8 November.³³⁷ Between 10 and 11 November, the 5th Battalion of the 95th PAVN Regiment found itself surrounded in the Ky Lo Valley by the 2/502d Infantry and the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, which had the express mission of “finding and destroying elements of the 95th NVA Regiment by conducting a deliberate search of all trails, streambeds and probable avenues of egress along the SONG KY LO River In northwest DONG XUAN District.”³³⁸ The operation in this remote tract of Phu Yen featured “three companies operating in parallel areas of operation driving generally north to south; the

³³⁵ 322d Military History Detachment, 44.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 1st Brigade 4th Infantry Division, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned for Quarterly Period Ending 31 January 1967,” p.10, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=AD0388158>>. Emphasis in original.

SONG KY LO extended along the east flank of the operation.”³³⁹ “Light contact was made with parties of a large VC detention complex,” with the American paratroopers locating “a manufacturing site containing two forges and an extensive hospital-dispensary.”³⁴⁰ Such physical evidence of enemy activity and infrastructure revealed the Ky Lo Valley as a principle PAVN and PLAF staging area for Communist operations in the province. The American foray into the Ky Lo Valley, with “Relentless combat pressure and psychological warfare appeals resulted in 13 enemy killed, 35 captures, and large amounts of equipment confiscated.”³⁴¹ Yet poor weather robbed Operation Geronimo II of the successes seen during the previous operation. As noted in the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division’s postwar publication, torrential rainfall inundated 1/327th Infantry’s area of operations. Weather did more harm to the Americans than that of the PAVN or PLAF, as “forty-seven troopers were evacuated from the operation with foot problems.”³⁴² Nevertheless, the outcome of Geronimo I overshadowed any of the problems that befell Geronimo II.

Geronimo I achieved a goal sought by IFFV since the launching of Operation Jefferson, the weakening of the 95th PAVN Regiment. Indeed, the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division praised the outcome of Operation Geronimo I, stating “For its efforts in the operation, particularly its work in decimating an NVA battalion, the 2-502d was cited in a brigade order, a practice instituted by BG Pearson to recognize superior combat

³³⁹ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ 322d Military History Detachment, 44.

³⁴² Ibid.

performance.”³⁴³ Hackworth recalled that Operation Geronimo I rendered the 95th PAVN Regiment combat ineffective, citing the 10:1 kill ratio and “the very high weapons-to-body count ratio (143 weapons, individual and crew-served, to 149 enemy dead)” as proof of success.³⁴⁴ For Hackworth, Geronimo I revealed that “We’d be able to fight the same protracted war of attrition the enemy was willing to fight, without paying the heavy, heavy price in American lives.”³⁴⁵ Hackworth’s words proved true for Phu Yen in 1966, but events beyond IFFV’s control meant American gains were more temporary than long-term. As Hackworth himself admitted, “The enemy just went to ground and waited until the coast was clear to return and rebuild.”³⁴⁶ Pacification needed offensive operations by maneuver battalions to stay ahead of Communist efforts to create their own liberated areas. In Phu Yen, search and destroy advanced pacification so long as the operations continued. With demands for IFFV’s assets in other provinces, intense focus on part of its maneuver battalions could not last forever. Without such intense and prolonged American efforts, Allied forces produced only momentary achievements.

American advisors in Phu Yen voiced their approval of IFFV’s operations. In the “II Corps Special Joint Report on Revolutionary Development,” released on 31 October 1966, American advisors LTC. Ernest S. Ferguson, Sector Advisor; Ross E. Petzing, KUPSAO Representative for Phu Yen Province; Jess Snyder, USAID Representative for Phu Yen Province; and Ray Hanchulak, USAID Assistant Province Representative (Cadre) for Phu Yen Province, wrote that “The added military strength and expanded area

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Hackworth and Sherman, 566.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 571

of operation in creating a climate which will allow expansion of the Revolutionary Development Program into areas which were not formally considered secure enough for satisfactory progress.”³⁴⁷ Adding, “The influx of additional American troops in Phu Yen continues to have a favorable impact, except for isolated incidents in bars, etc. Businessmen feel the US troops will improve business; among the rest of the population, the feel of ‘more troops’ fewer VC and NVA prevails.”³⁴⁸ For evidence, the report cited the instance of “Elements of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division continued to protect the villagers during the recent rice harvest.” FMWAF search and destroy operations netted meager enemy kills, with 73 PLAF dead and 34 PLAF captured. Yet the report praised search and destroy actions, noting that these operations meant engineering projects prevailed in the repairing of vital lines of communication in the province.³⁴⁹ Indeed, search and destroy operations proved essential as the PLAF “placed a major emphasis on the collection of rice and other foodstuffs from the people in both GVN and Viet Cong controlled areas.”³⁵⁰

The year 1966 in Phu Yen concluded with operations Geronimo I and Geronimo II, while Operation Adams continued into 1967. Together, all of IFFV’s Phu Yen operations constituted an intense effort to advance pacification in Phu Yen as quickly, and early, as possible. While 1966 ended with enemy forces still operating in the province, IFFV’s intention to advance pacification through the use of its maneuver battalions remained clear. What these operations represented were U.S. Army efforts to

³⁴⁷ “Province: Phu Yen Report for Period Ending 31 October 1966,” in “II Corps Special Joint Report on Revolutionary Development October 1966,” p.1, CMH.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

create space between the local population and the PLAF. Although unable to outright defeat Communist main forces, the fact remained that the actions of the U.S. Army's maneuver battalions demonstrated that search and destroy was pacification.

Conclusion

The years 1965 and 1966 saw a surge in PAVN and PLAF numbers as well as the subsequent arrival of Allied combat forces in Phu Yen. Conventional warfare appeared in Phu Yen with the arrival of PAVN, U.S. Army, and ROK forces. Allied efforts to pacify the province assumed a conventional form, with search and destroy operations protecting the rice harvests and distancing PAVN from Tuy Hoa City. Indeed, search and destroy equaled pacification. As U.S. Army maneuver battalions pushed pacification forward, they expanded the Saigon government's influence into contested territory. IFFV strengthened the GVN's presence in the Tuy Hoa Valley, which provided respite for the GVN. For those reasons, IFFV advanced pacification.

Yet pushing the enemy into the virtually unpopulated areas of Phu Yen did not secure pacification for the long-term. Aside from protecting rice production, IFFV envisaged its 1966 campaign to wreck the PAVN regiments in Phu Yen. Although the operations executed by US Army maneuver battalions failed to destroy PAVN forces in the province, the operations nonetheless kept the 95th PAVN Regiment on the defensive. Through mobility, American military forces functioned more as a sieve than a shield. Instead of blocking every enemy move, U.S. Army troops swept through areas of purported enemy activity, which kept PAVN momentarily incapable of mounting efforts like those of 1965. Avoiding total destruction by IFFV, however, afforded the 95th PAVN Regiment, and the PLAF main and local forces it supported, the means to recover

and conduct low intensity warfare. As PAVN forces retreated to the sparsely inhabited wilderness of Phu Yen's interior, PLAF's networks back in the province's more populated areas remained largely intact. Away from the zones of intense Allied scrutiny, Communist main forces maintained bases from which to project power covertly or overtly into the much contested Tuy Hoa Valley. Thus both PAVN and PLAF units remained a threat to the GVN in Phu Yen beyond 1966.

CHAPTER IV – SECURITY REMAINS INADEQUATE, 1967-1968

Introduction

When speaking broadly about the state of pacification in the Republic of Vietnam in 1967, General Harold K. Johnson, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, told an audience in North Dakota that,

Many battalion-sized units are now providing security for what is called Revolutionary development—pacification work at the lowest levels. Security is the key to pacification and these forces are demonstrating their determination and skill even in the face of a stepped-up Viet Cong terror campaign. Incidentally, I view this increased, almost desperate surge of terrorist activity as an admission in itself by the Viet Gong that our Revolutionary Development program is working.³⁵¹

Aside from the explanations of pacification and revolutionary development, which ran counter to those expressed by others, the Chief of Staff's comment encapsulated the notion that the efforts of Allied forces had visibly improved the military situation in the country. Security was indeed "the key to pacification," as expressed by Johnson. In the case of Phu Yen, however, the gradual removal of IFFV's maneuver battalions did not help pacification. Moreover, that the PLAF's turn towards terrorism meant pacification was working ignored much about the enemy's method of challenging GVN control of the RVN's hinterlands. For Phu Yen, the low intensity warfare that emerged after the 1968 Tet Offensive proved sufficient in impeding American attempts to quicken pacification.

The arrival of Allied conventional forces in Phu Yen altered the balance of power, albeit temporarily, in the province in 1966. As 1967 began, American advisors either overtly expressed or insinuated the view that recent pacification gains emerged directly

³⁵¹ Selected Statements on Vietnam by DOD and Other Administration Officials: July 1 - December 31, 1967, 11 January 1967, p.211, Folder 18, Box 01, Glenn Helm Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University (TTUVA). Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=1070117001>>.

from the large unit operations of 1966. In that vein, continued Allied operations played a similarly vital role throughout 1967 and 1968. The operations of IFFV's maneuver battalions in Phu Yen demonstrated that conventional forces were intrinsic to pacification. While IFFV's operations of 1966 served to safeguard the rice harvest and wreck the PAVN battalions operating in Phu Yen, the operations of 1967 sought to make further gains for Saigon. Like those of 1966, the operations of 1967 featured Allied forces placing distance between Communist units and the province's population. Like the Allied operations of 1966, those of 1967 also demonstrated the bond between conventional forces and pacification. Yet American maneuver battalions could only improve security, and thus advance pacification, insofar as intense, and numerous, military operations continued. While a much sought after asset by Civil Organization and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), later Civil Operations and Rural Development Support, in Phu Yen, IFFV's maneuver battalions did not permanently elevate security in the province.

Concerns over province security remained, despite previous and ongoing maneuver battalion operations. For that reason, events after 1966 brought into question the extent to which pacification would turn Phu Yen solidly into a GVN province. Military victory disguised as pacification created the aura of Phu Yen as a safe province. IFFV's operations of 1966 and 1967 fostered a sense on part of American authorities that pacification worked in Phu Yen. Yet PAVN and PLAF forces remained more than capable of undermining GVN control. Despite further operations by IFFV maneuver battalions, Communist forces executed their most daring campaign, the 1968 Tet Offensive. For Phu Yen, the three phases of the Tet Offensive that unfolded in the

province proved devastating to long-term GVN pacification success. Ultimately, the events of 1967 and 1968 as whole reflected a war in which sustained pacification progress proved fleeting.

1967

The 1967 to 1968 period entailed the continuation of offensive operations against PAVN. Tasked with furthering security by MACV, IFFV received orders from General Westmoreland to “expand security in the pacification priority areas of the coastal provinces” with considerable “emphasis on Phu Yen and southern Binh Dinh.”³⁵² Such orders reflected the prevailing association between conventional military forces and the expansion of pacification. Relatedly, that the improvement of security rested with offensive operations of IFFV’s maneuver battalions meant pacification existed as a military problem. Regardless of the effectiveness, or at times the lack thereof, the top echelons of the U.S. Army in the Republic of Vietnam forever fused maneuver battalions executing search and destroy with pacification in Phu Yen.

Pacification was conjoined with offensive military operations. “It is perfectly clear that progress in Revolutionary Development in large measure can be equated directly to the scope and pace of US/Free World Forces Operations against provincial VC forces,” General William E. DePuy reported to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in a 1967.³⁵³ As the war in the hinterland of the RVN unfolded, MACV geared the operations of conventional military units directly towards the destruction of Communist

³⁵² General William C. Westmoreland in Erik Villard, *Untitled* (n.p.: Washington D.C.), 5.

³⁵³ Memo To President Lyndon B. Johnson: Review Of Robert McNamara's Draft Memo, 20 May 1967, p.3, Folder 20, Box 06, Larry Berman Collection (Presidential Archives Research), TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0240620008>>.

forces and infrastructure to spread and solidify Saigon's authority. Evidence from Phu Yen validated DePuy's comments while furthering the notion that the participation of conventional military forces served a central role to pacification.

Similarly, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon reported pacification advancements to the Department of State. Describing security in Phu Yen before 1967 as "poor," the memorandum noted that American and South Korean military forces dramatically improved the course of the war in the province.³⁵⁴ Indeed, "elements of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, and the Korean 'White Horse' Division, have neutralized the two NVA regiments and two VC main force battalions still believed to be in the province."³⁵⁵ Effectively countering the Communist threat meant "The bulk of the 'rice bowl' harvest is secure."³⁵⁶ Equally significant, the ROKA's White Horse Division opened QL-1 in late 1966, which "established land communication between Phu Yen to Ninh Hoa in Khanh Hoa Province for the first time since mid-1964."³⁵⁷ As of 21 January 1967, the ROKA's Tiger Division moved south from Binh Dinh Province to open the northern stretch of QL-1 in Phu Yen.³⁵⁸ Despite "friction" caused by the sheer number of American and South Korean soldiers in Phu Yen, specifically in terms of the adverse impact of these troops on the local economy, Lodge concluded "There is little doubt that the benefits of the increased security brought by the US and Korean troops to the people of Phu Yen far outweigh the frictions which

³⁵⁴ AmEmbassy Saigon to Department of State, Memo, "Province Reporting: Improve Security in Phu Yen," 27 January 1967, p.1, CMH.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

inevitably accompany their presence.”³⁵⁹ Yet the improvement of security in Phu Yen proved relative.

Serious security issues remained, but the province looked better than it had in 1965. This juxtaposition meant that, because Hanoi’s military forces nearly overran all of Phu Yen by 1965, for Americans, all future issues in Phu Yen immediately paled in comparison. IFFV’s operations in 1966 and early 1967 improved the GVN stance in Phu Yen, but even the Tuy Hoa Valley remained anything but secure. Therefore, because more of the province appeared under GVN control, and despite security holes in the Tuy Hoa Valley, pacification in the province seemed in better shape than ever before. Aside from the effort of conventional military forces, the creation of a civilian-military hybrid organization, CORDS offered much promise. Unsurprisingly, because of its hybrid approach and formation after the operations of Allied maneuver battalions, the establishment of CORDS propagated the myth that pacification transpired only during the late war period. In practice, however, CORDS intensified pacification efforts and improved upon earlier gains made by other entities.

Pacification was not a late-war manifestation. Pacification in Phu Yen simply entered a new phase with the merging of MACV and U.S. State Department advisory efforts under MACV in the form of CORDS on 9 May 1967. The subsequent arrival of CORDS’s Advisory Team 28 (AT28) in Phu Yen functioned as an extension of earlier efforts to pacify Phu Yen, not the start of pacification. CORDS embodied MACV’s unified approach to pacification. The formation of CORDS signaled a tighter hybrid

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

approach to pacification both in terms of its objectives and personnel. Composed of U.S. Army officers and State Department advisors, CORDS advisory teams dealt with both military and civil matters. Consequently, the presence of CORDS in Phu Yen produced more connections into the province's communities. Such links resulted in more reports, which in turn revealed far more about pacification in Phu Yen than ever before. Indeed, AT28 produced a trove of insightful reports at the district and province levels.

Back on the ground, pacification crept forward under the purview of conventional warfare. American efforts to extend improved security beyond the confines of the province capital continued. After the end of the rice harvest, by January 1967 Operation Adams shifted towards search and destroy.³⁶⁰ Mid-January entailed the 47th ARVN Regiment and supporting the 3rd Battalion of the 12th Infantry in executing search and destroy efforts in Song Cau District, continuing the 1966 emphasis of the operation on the northern extremities of Phu Yen into 1967.³⁶¹ "The operation provides the shield behind which Revolutionary Development is progressing," a MACV press release claimed.³⁶² Yet in January, the operation produced little contact between Allied and enemy forces. By month's end, however, contacts resulted in 282 enemy dead, the confiscation of 129 weapons and 113 tons of rice. That dramatic increase proved temporary as February saw 61 enemy killed and the capturing of 12 weapons. During

³⁶⁰ General 1967 MACV Monthly Summary for February 1967, February 1967, p.8, Folder 01, Bud Harton Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=168300010726>.

³⁶¹ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 1st Brigade 4th Infantry Division, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned for Quarterly Period Ending 31 January 1967, p.9, Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC). Available at: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/388158.pdf>.

³⁶² General 1967 MACV Monthly Summary for February 1967, February 1967, p.8, Folder 01, Bud Harton Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=168300010726>.

January and February, Allied airpower accounted for 181 tactical air sorties as part of Operation Adams.³⁶³

Despite the upswing in contacts caused by the ongoing Operation Adams, the endeavor nevertheless remained unable to significantly enhance Phu Yen's long-term security. "Operation ADAMS, currently in progress, seemingly has caused little, if any, decrease in enemy activity," on Tuy Hoa District's Base Area 236.³⁶⁴ Commonly called "The Hub" by AT28, Base Area 236 was located near Nui Ong La, a mountain overlooking the Tuy Hoa Valley to the east. Further information divulged by MACV in its 1 March 1967 "Targeting Branch Revised VC/NVA Base and Operations Areas" study explained that, "This base area in central Phu Yen Province is characterized by forested hill masses radiating from approximately the center of the area, broken by valleys."³⁶⁵ Moreover, "It has a fairly well developed drainage system, extending generally southward from the center. Highway 1 runs along the eastern boundary of the area at a distance of from one to five kilometers."³⁶⁶ Yet its placement in Phu Yen mattered the most because "The town of Tuy Hoa is 8 to 10 kilometers to the southeast. The area is a source of water and is suitable for installations; however, its suitability for defense and deployment is unknown."³⁶⁷ "Numerous unidentified companies, battalions, and other elements of the 95th Regiment were reported throughout the base area during January 1967. Somewhat diminished activity within the base area was noted in February

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Targeting Branch Revised VC/NVA Base and Operations Areas - Record of MACV Part 2, 1 March 1967, p.A-26, Folder 0924, Box 0023, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230924>>.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

1967,” the report added.³⁶⁸ Indeed, because Base Area 236 appeared relatively unaffected by the war, Allied campaigns to make the province safer for pacification appeared even more ineffective. When Operation Adams terminated on 2 April, the actions of the involved American maneuver battalions failed to wreck PAVN’s presence on the periphery of the Tuy Hoa Valley, an actuality that haunted AT28 in 1970.

PAVN’s three other base camps in Phu Yen remained in use in 1967. In MACV’s base area survey released in March, MACV referenced Base Areas 200, 234, and 235 in addition to the already discussed 236. Base Area 200, situated in the Ky Lo Valley, noted MACV, “fails to meet the accepted criteria as a Base Area.”³⁶⁹ The rationale was that through “Pattern analysis of unit locations and contacts; incidents, Special Agent Reports, and installation reports, in combination with terrain features,” insufficient evidence of intense enemy activity existed in the Ky Lo Valley.³⁷⁰ Such an actually would prove temporary.

Elsewhere, MACV uncovered what it considered far more bustling centers of enemy activity. Located near Nui Suoi Lun, a mountain in Song Cau District, Base Area 234 abutted QL-1 within close proximity of inhabited hamlets. “During the period January 1966 through February 1967, the majority of enemy activity, including several scattered Special Agent Reports and several reports of unit sightings up to regimental-size, occurred within a 10 kilometer radius of the base area,” the survey said.³⁷¹ “In August 1966 imagery interpretations disclosed three separate trench systems within three

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., A-14.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid., A-24.

kilometers of the northern edge of the base area,” clear indication of 234 as a well-established and active center for Communist forces.³⁷² Worse yet for GVN pacification efforts, “Base Area 234 continues to be considered a base area due to the activity surrounding it. Its proximity, to the sea and reports of unit sightings near the sea during early 1966 make it likely that this area also serves as a coastal resupply point.”³⁷³ In 1967, Base Area 235 persisted as the most disconcerting zone in all of Phu Yen. Positioned in eastern Phu Yen in Tuy An District, this base area benefited from terrain described as “rugged and forested” and that “small streams radiate from the area.”³⁷⁴ Moreover, Base Area 235 sat “one to two kilometers to the west and southwest” of LTL-6B and with QL-1 just “to the east and southeast at a distance of one to two kilometers.”³⁷⁵ Lastly, “The area is a water source and is suitable for installations.” Such assets caused MACV to conclude that “this is an important VC/NVA Base Area. The VC H65 Battalion has been reported near the base area since March 1966. Furthermore, it is possible that elements, of NT 5 are using the base area. The 18B regiment has operated in the area in the past.”³⁷⁶ With these aforementioned base areas, considerable PAVN and PLAF infrastructure reflected the province’s history as a Viet Minh bastion.

The war in Phu Yen did not exist in a vacuum. As evidenced by Operation Summerall, GVN control of the Tuy Hoa Valley adjacent to QL-1 factored into IFFV’s larger strategy of securing the littoral of MR2. W. W. Rostow, Special Assistant for

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., A-25.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

National Security Affairs to President Lyndon B. Johnson, explained to the American president that,

In II Corps, Operation "Summerall" is aimed at expanding the area effectively covered by allied forces so that there will eventually be one continuous secure area from Qui Nhon to Tuy Hoa. This would permit the opening of Highway One and the railway along the entire coastal area of II Corps north of Phan Rang. If the hamlets along the road and railway were also durably pacified, with hard core terrorists eliminated and durable local political institutions in existence, such a continuous free area from Qui Nhon to Tuy Hoa would be very significant.³⁷⁷

On balance, Operation Summerall built upon the gains made by IFFV in 1966. Yet the operation signified a shift from the focus on securing the Tuy Hoa Valley to firmly placing the principle road and rail network in the region under GVN control.

Much of the action during the operation transpired across the border in the provinces of Darlac and Khanh Hoa. Yet the operation affected Phu Yen in the form of resettlement. Under Operation Summerall, the 1st Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division flew 43 civilians from a hamlet in Darlac province to Cung Son village in the Son Hoa District of Phu Yen.³⁷⁸ Cong Son functioned as the district capital of Son Hoa and as the GVN's bastion in the western half of the province. As such, elements of the U.S. Army's 6th Battalion, 32d Artillery and Special Forces camp A-221 assisted RF companies with the protection of this district capital. Thus it made sense to relocate South Vietnamese civilians to Cung Son and well beyond the influence of the PLAF. Moreover, in placing these refugees in Cung Son, the action suggested that the Americans perceived Phu Yen as a more secure province.

³⁷⁷ Memo To President Lyndon B. Johnson From W. W. Rostow: Ambassador Lodge's Weekly Telegram, 6 April 1967, p.9, Folder 14, Box 06, Larry Berman Collection (Presidential Archives Research), TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0240614011>>.

³⁷⁸ Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*. (New York: The New Press, 2013), 69-70.

The ROKA, too, factored into the perceived improvement of security in Phu Yen. As reported to President Lyndon B. Johnson by MACV, efforts by South Korean forces in August had reduced the combat effectiveness of PAVN units operating in the region. Even though IFFV made some progress, many within the military remained painfully aware that elevated security conditions eluded the Allies. MACV's monthly assessment for August divulged that,

Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa and Phu Bon Provinces have been the scene of operations by ROK forces against the 95th and 188th NVA Regts. Operation Hong Kil Dong, the third phase of which terminated on 26 August, has netted 637 enemy killed and 88 PW's at a cost to friendly forces of 27 killed and 68 wounded. These operations have reduced a major threat posed by main force enemy units. However, local force and terrorist groups remain active on the coastal plains.³⁷⁹

Battered by the ROKA, the 95th PAVN Regiment nonetheless remained anything but wrecked. The weakening of the 95th PAVN Regiment more aptly reflected a shift in the war from one which centered on clashes between maneuver battalions to one of small unit skirmishes. Rather, the transition of the big unit war to the low intensity conflict familiar to the Communist cause.

Phu Yen's future still rested though in the outcome of events in and around the Tuy Hoa Valley. With province security described as having "varied from inadequate to adequate," the September monthly progress report noted the return of the 95th PAVN Regiment to the Tuy Hoa Valley around 29 August.³⁸⁰ Seeking the expansion of GVN influence, the report noted that the 3rd and 4th Battalions of the 47th ARVN Regiment

³⁷⁹ General 1967 MAC-V Monthly Assessment Aug, September 1967, p.5, Folder 01, Bud Harton Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=168300010730>>.

³⁸⁰ "Province: Phu Yen Report for the Period Ending 30 September 1967," Folder: II Corps TEMP For LTC. Jones, p.2, CMH.

operated in the Tuy Hoa Valley during September. Moreover, IFFV still sought its Waterloo moment in Phu Yen. Thus on 17 September, IFFV launched Operation Bolling/Dan Hoa, a long duration American-led operation to further improve security in Phu Yen. IFFV dispatched the 173d Airborne Brigade, which endeavored to bring the 95th PAVN Regiment to battle and advance pacification. Operation Bolling continued well into 1969, briefly interrupted only by the 1968 Tet Offensive. According to the after action report, “Operation Bolling is a large scale search and destroy operation begin conducted by the 173d Airborne Brigade. The operation has a two-fold mission to seekout, destroy or capture the enemy and/or his equipment; to deny the enemy the bountiful food resources available in the TUY HOA Valley.”³⁸¹ In all, Operation Bolling entailed IFFV maneuver battalions patrolling the districts of Son Hoa, Tuy An, and Tuy Hoa. Like preceding operations ordered by IFFV, Operation Bolling represented further use of conventional forces to advance pacification.

September saw Allied attempts to clear the Tuy Hoa Valley of Communist forces. At this juncture, the Tuy Hoa Valley teemed with activity as conventional forces sought the displacement of the other. On 19 September, the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) Task Force arrived in the districts of Son Hoa and Tuy Hoa.³⁸² The 173d Airborne Brigade dedicated its 1st and 4th battalions, with the 3rd Battalion participating after the

³⁸¹ Combat Operations After Action Report, Department of the Army, Headquarters 3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), sub: Combat Operations After Action Report - Operation Bolling, 14 February 1968, p.1, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/393639.pdf>>. Emphasis in original.

³⁸² “Province: Phu Yen Report for the Period Ending 30 September 1967,” Folder: II Corps TEMP For LTC. Jones, p.2, CMH.

beginning of November, to the effort.³⁸³ Together these maneuver battalions sought to “locate and destroy the 95th NVA Regt in the high ground west of Tuy Hoa.

Subsequently the 173d Abn Bde has assumed the mission of protecting the rice harvest from the Tuy Hoa basin.”³⁸⁴

Like the American paratroopers, the 3d and 4th battalions of the 47th ARVN Regiment operated in the Tuy Hoa Valley to ostensibly defend pacification efforts from interference by the recently returned 95th PAVN Regiment. Accordingly, “NVA forces of the 95th NVA Regiment moved into the Tuy Hoa Valley on approximately the 29th of August, and small elements are still being found by combined FWMAF/ARVN operations.”³⁸⁵ The 95th PAVN Regiment’s return coincided with offensive operations of the 30th PLAF Main Force Battalion. Accordingly, “The 30th [PLAF] Main Force Battalion combined with local guerrilla forces in Hieu Xuong District to exert pressure in this area.”³⁸⁶ “In spite of these major threats and attacks on the 2d, 6th, 15th and 17th of the month, ARVN, RF and PF forces performed in a highly creditable manner,” the reported noted.³⁸⁷ Strikingly, despite a long and time consuming supply network, Communist forces in Phu Yen appeared better supplied in terms of combat personnel than their GVN counterparts. Indeed, “The decline in the degree of security is attributable

³⁸³ Villard, 16; Combat Operations After Action Report, Department of the Army, Headquarters 3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), sub: Combat Operations After Action Report - Operation Bolling, 14 February 1968, p.1, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/393639.pdf>>.

³⁸⁴ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters I Field Force Vietnam, sub: Operational Report - Lessons Learned for Quarterly Period Ending 31 October 1967, p.11, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/387936.pdf>>.

³⁸⁵ “Province: Phu Yen Report for the Period Ending 30 September 1967,” Folder: II Corps TEMP For LTC. Jones, p.2, CMH.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

not to the falling of these forces, but to the constant vigilance and alert posture required within the 1-8 September period and the heavy losses which accumulated and sapped the provincial forces of their strength and offensive capability.”³⁸⁸ Clearly, PAVN and PLAF units avoided contact with the American paratroopers, while willingly engaging the perceivably weaker South Vietnamese forces. Evidence rested with the 173d Airborne Brigade’s claim of killing just two enemy combatants by the end of September.³⁸⁹

Regardless of the many operations executed by the Allies, PAVN and PLAF units remained a direct threat to pacification in Phu Yen. Indeed, AT28’s monthly progress report for September reflected the adverse effects of fighting on the GVN’s Revolutionary Development plan. The RD plan laid out for Phu Yen “is estimated to be approximately three months behind schedule.”³⁹⁰ A cause of the delay, noted the report, stemmed from “the inaction of the service chiefs, with few exceptions, the lag in expenditures, and the actions in the Tuy Hoa Valley.”³⁹¹ Essentially, the advisory mission in Phu Yen had yet to firmly establish itself. As bureaucracy did its part to slow down pacification, so too did the enemy. Accordingly,

Due to the enemy’s aggressiveness, coupled with is effective propaganda, there was a considerable exaggeration of the enemy’s posture in the province with a complementary lowering of GVN prestige during the month. The time required for ROK forces to dislodge the VC during his occupation of several hamlets enhanced the image of the enemy.³⁹²

The report delved deeper into the effect of war on the valley’s hamlets, explaining that;

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 3.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 1.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

Enemy occupation of several RD hamlets, coupled with the destruction which took place in several others in which VC/NVA troops infiltrated, increased the fear of the people for their well-being. Despite this, the general population does have a clear idea of what has happened in the hamlets that suffered the destruction and readily places blame on the VC/NVA.³⁹³

The above information revealed the successful incursion of PLAF and PAVN units into hamlets specifically designated by Saigon as targets for revolutionary development.

While unclear as to whether fighting had destroyed any RD hamlets, the report downplayed enemy activity. AT28 deemed security as “marginally adequate,” despite the continuance of warfare in the Tuy Hoa Valley.³⁹⁴

War did indeed continue in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Communist troops retained “the capability of attacking in any area of Phu Yen with up to a reinforced battalion sized force. He can reinforce with up to a regiment in a 5-10 day period.”³⁹⁵ The consequences of which the enemy displayed in September, when “he used company and platoon size units frequently. During the month of September there were: 1 battalion, 1 multi-company, 3 company, 2 multi-platoon, 5 platoon, 2 multi-squad, 4 squad, and 18 unknown size contacts.”³⁹⁶ In these contacts, Hanoi’s troops suffered 211 dead, with possibly an additional 107 killed. The Americans noted that, “The 95th NVA Regiment, although receiving replacements, has suffered heavy casualties. This should counterbalance the infiltrations that has occurred from the North (as estimated 1000-1200 men in the last 4 months).”³⁹⁷ Such optimism, however, downplayed the exhaustion of

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

ARVN, RF, and PF units at the hands of PAVN and PLAF. Enemy offensive operations took a toll on the South Vietnamese security forces. Indeed, 76 South Vietnamese troops died, with another 230 wounded. Civilians, too, felt the effects, with 16 dead and 65 wounded because of the fighting in the Tuy Hoa Valley. “There were 2 kidnappings, 1 mining incident, 4 assassinations, and 2 grenadings reported. As a result, 3 civilians were killed and 45 wounded,” further demonstrating the effects of Communist active on the valley’s population.³⁹⁸ Arguably, the war in the Tuy Hoa Valley functioned as one of attrition.

With IFFV operations having pushed enemy main forces away from Tuy Hoa City, the war for Tuy Hoa Valley nevertheless remained very much alive. Despite efforts to dismantle and destroy communist inroads in the province, PAVN and PLAF units still challenged Allied efforts to pacify Tuy Hoa District. In particular, villages on the fringe of GVN influence were subjected to intense efforts by all participants to win the war at the village and hamlet level. Those with crops in the contested Tuy Hoa Valley typically worked their field during the day and slept in the far more secure Tuy Hoa City at night. The village of Phu Sen became the focal point of Operation Bolling because of its location. Situated near the banks of the Song Ba where the western mountains met the Tuy Hoa Valley, made the village a valuable entry point into the valley. Moreover, Phu Sen sat along LTL-7B between Cong Son and Tuy Hoa City, two GVN strongholds. For that reason, Operation Bolling entailed the formation of Area of Operations Sen, with

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

American soldiers wrestling control of this passage point from the Communists as to deny PAVN and PLAF cells from using it as a possible base of operations.

Even with all the efforts to interdict and corner the enemy, the 173d Airborne Brigade Task Force produced scant contact with enemy main forces. Between 24 August and 15 October, IFFV's maneuver battalions secured the area of operations, yet not to the detriment of PAVN and PLAF manpower. To the west of Tuy Hoa City, the 4th Battalion of the 503d Infantry scoured for enemy formations. Except "The enemy was not to be found, and though enemy bunkers, rice caches and base camps were located, few proved to be fresh."³⁹⁹ "Thus for the period the enemy had no desire to either be located or to enter contact;" a now well established theme in Phu Yen.⁴⁰⁰

October saw the CORDS mission in Phu Yen in its infancy. Pacification "remains behind schedule because of the following reasons: (1) damages inflicted by VC before and after the September Presidential Election, (2) lack of aluminum roofing previously pledged as CORDS material support to construction projects, and (3) lack of aggressive action of the service chiefs."⁴⁰¹ As AT28's task in Phu Yen began, it did so under the veil of security of questionable adequacy. Despite being bloodied by IFFV operations in 1966 and subsequent clashes, elements of the 95th PAVN Regiment force remained a threat to GVN stability in the province. Reinforcement efforts proved fruitful, particularly when combined with the avoidance of large-scale clashes with Allied forces. "The enemy has

³⁹⁹ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 August - 31 October 1968), p.39, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/500664.pdf>>.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁰¹ "Province Report for the Period Ending 31 October 1967," October 1967, Special Joint Narrative Report on Revolutionary Development, p.1, CMH.

the capability of attacking in any area of Phu Yen Province with up to reinforced battalion size forces,” the report warned.⁴⁰² Yet, “Due to the September-October buildup of friendly forces, he will probably not risk large unit sized attacks. The enemy can reinforce with up to a regiment in a 5-10 day period.”⁴⁰³ Thus, as long as substantial conventional forces remained in the province, AT28 doubted the enemy would commenced any major combat actions. AT28’s view provided further proof that search and destroy was pacification. PAVN avoided battle anyway because it concentrated on “securing rice from the current rice harvest. He has divided his units into two and three man cells for this purpose.”⁴⁰⁴

Two different Tuy Hoa Valleys existed at this junction of the war in Phu Yen. The night belonged to the PLAF and the daylight to the Allies. Much of the Tuy Hoa Valley’s population slept within, or near, the more secure Tuy Hoa City each night either because of their plight as refugees or simply to avoid dealing with the PLAF. During the day, farmers returned to their hamlets to care for their crops. On 16 December, D/16th Armor relocated from Dak To in the Central Highlands to Phu Yen to participate in Operation Bolling.⁴⁰⁵ Once in Phu Yen, D/16th Armor provided security for those leaving the province capitals as to tend to their fields. On 21 October, D/16th Armor’s “3rd Platoon picked up civilian workers at Tuy Hoa North and moved to AO Sen. The rice harvesters were provided with security during the remainder of the day by D/16 Armor. A platoon

⁴⁰² Ibid., 2.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ “Quarterly Historical Report,” Company D, 16th Armor, 173d Airborne Brigade, p. 31, RG 472 / A1 1647 / Box 2, NARA II.

from B/1/503d Infantry was attached to the company.”⁴⁰⁶ After dusk, “the rice harvesters were taken back to Tuy Hoa North,” with D/16th Armor later executing “platoon size ambush patrols” in AO Sen.⁴⁰⁷

Bonds between Operation Bolling and pacification further solidified as October progressed. Between 22 and 25 October, “the company and attached elements conducted search and destroy operations throughout AO Sen.”⁴⁰⁸ During this period, “Considerable amounts of rice and other foodstuffs were found and extracted,” yet without making direct contact with enemy personnel.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, “Many bunkers and tunnels were found and destroyed.”⁴¹⁰ Although encountering physical enemy infrastructure, as opposed to the human networks established by the PLAF, combat with PAVN and PLAF units eluded the American forces. Essentially, events up to the end of October presented Operation Bolling as more of a rice harvest protection and enemy infrastructure dismantling endeavor than an effort to destroy enemy main forces. For those reasons, Operation Bolling represented the most concentrated effort to use American troops to pacify the Tuy Hoa Valley. With efforts by conventional Allied military forces to evict PAVN and PLAF units from the Tuy Hoa Valley transpiring concurrently with work of RD cadre at the hamlet level, a multifaceted approach, however troubled, to eradicating Communist sympathies among Tuy Hoa District’s villagers existed in Phu Yen.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

Little changed in terms of pacification progress during November, even with the launching of Project Takeoff, Komer's plan to jumpstart pacification.⁴¹¹ AT28's monthly progress report balanced optimism with continued concern with the state of security. The report noted that "RD plan remains behind schedule because of war damage, and to a lesser degree the November Typhoon damage, arrival of roofing material and a more aggressive attitude of the service chiefs indicate that 90% completion is possible."⁴¹² The roofing material directly affected Phu Yen's refugee situation as it stood between the dislocated populace and their return to their native hamlets. Regardless of such optimism, the report added "Security for RD is now inadequate," citing "the withdrawal of three battalions of the 173d Abn Bde (Sep). Three of the five Senior District Advisors clearly stated that district security was inadequate."⁴¹³ Although the 3/503d Infantry arrived in Phu Yen in early November, much of the 173d Airborne Brigade converged on Dak To in Kontum Province when fighting erupted at that location.⁴¹⁴ Undeniably the U.S. advisory mission in Phu Yen perceived American combat forces as integral to pacification and, now, bemoaned the loss of multiple battalion assets.

Lack of decisive contact with the enemy continued for Operation Bolling. By November, 173d Airborne Brigade intelligence suggested that the 4th, 5th, and 6th Battalions of the 95th PAVN Regiment, as well as the 30th PLAF Main Force Battalion, the 377th PLAF Local Force Company, and the 85th PLAF Local Force Battalion,

⁴¹¹ Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 99-100.

⁴¹² "Province Report," Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 30 November 1967, p.1, Folder: II Corps MACCORDS Province Reports Nov 67, CMH.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Villard, 17.

“would concentrate on gathering rice and foodstuff during the rice harvest.”⁴¹⁵ Reports placed these enemy units in or near the Tuy Hoa Valley. Yet a battle reluctant enemy meant contact with PAVN and PLAF eluded the 3/503rd Infantry.⁴¹⁶ D/16th Armor, too, remained unable to locate sizable enemy forces in AO Sen. Instead, “During the period 1 November to 6 November, the company continued to conduct search and destroy operations in the AO. In addition the company and attached elements secured the rice harvesters during the day and conducted ambushes at night.”⁴¹⁷ For D/16th Armor, the U.S. outfit continued to support pacification by continuing to protect the rice harvest. Arguably, American forces kept the enemy off balance through presence alone, yet did not diminish the capabilities of Communist forces.

Pacification remained a tedious work in progress into December. To the chagrin of AT28, pacification gains for 1967 were “behind schedule,” yet the 1968 pacification plan would nevertheless commence on 1 January 1968. With CORDS’s presence in Phu Yen in its infancy, AT28 already faced near insurmountable delays. Security, too, existed as a source of concern. “Security for RD remains inadequate in spite of the fact that one battalion of the 173d Abn Bde (Sep) returned to the province during the reporting period,” the report warned.⁴¹⁸ The battalion in question, the 3/503rd Infantry, had returned in early November to start Operation Bolling. The security situation at the end of

⁴¹⁵ Combat Operations After Action Report, Department of the Army, Headquarters 3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), sub: Combat Operations After Action Report - Operation Bolling, 14 February 1968, p.5, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/393639.pdf>>.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ “Quarterly Historical Report,” Company D, 16th Armor, 173d Airborne Brigade, p. 33, RG 472 / A1 1647 / Box 2, NARA II.

⁴¹⁸ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 28 December 1968,” p.1, CMH.

December practically mirrored that of the previous month. Furthermore, the CORDS mission in Phu Yen understood the American paratroopers as a source of stability, not simply purveyors of reliable security.

The third month of Operation Bolling brought forth further indication of unabated enemy activity in the Tuy Hoa Valley. In December, D/16th Armor continued operations in AO Sen. On 3 December, while operating in AO Sen, D/16th Armor located “a small food cache, some NVA currency and a tunnel complex.”⁴¹⁹ Throughout the day, the American armor and attached ARVN soldiers detained numerous civilians suspected of ties to the PLAF, including “one Cheu Hoi and 17 VC wives” as well as six additional suspects.⁴²⁰

Operation Bolling eventually produced significant contact between Allied forces and the seemingly elusive PAVN. On 27 December, away from the Tuy Hoa Valley, in Dong Xuan District’s remote Ky Lo Valley, the 3/503d Infantry found a well-prepared 95th PAVN Regiment. The 3/503d Infantry searched the Ky Lo Valley because South Vietnamese and South Korean units recently encountered numerous ambushes in that part of the province.⁴²¹ Ironically, MACV deemed the Ky Lo Valley’s Base Area 200 as not teaming with enough enemy activity to warrant its inclusion in the March 1967 base area study.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ “Quarterly Historical Report,” Company D, 16th Armor, 173d Airborne Brigade, p. 34, RG 472 / A1 1647 / Box 2, NARA II.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Villard, 17.

⁴²² Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Targeting Branch Revised VC/NVA Base and Operations Areas - Record of MACV Part 2, 01 March 1967, p.A-14, Folder 0924, Box 0023, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230924>>.

Far from inactive, the Ky Lo Valley proved itself an enemy safe zone bustling with PAVN troops. Upon landing in the valley, the 3/503d Infantry's scout platoon received intense enemy fire. Suspecting the 95th PAVN Regiment as the culprits firing on the Americans, the rest of the 3/503d Infantry landed in the Ky Lo Valley in hopes of bringing the PAVN foe to battle. At Xom Dap hamlet, well-fortified PAVN soldiers poured withering fire into landing U.S. helicopters, giving Company A a taste of what IFFV's maneuver battalions faced in 1966 at My Canh. Eventually, Company A cleared the PAVN bunkers one by one, with helicopters ferrying in elements of the 4/503d Infantry for additional support. The fight at Xom Dap claimed the lives of 12 Americans, with 34 wounded, for 62 PAVN dead. As the 173d Airborne Brigade continued its sweep of the Ky Lo Valley, and further contact with the enemy never materializing, the Americans uncovered vacated enemy encampments.⁴²³ On balance, the Ky Lo Valley proved itself a sprawling PAVN base area, even if not officially in 1967, and one a mere forty-four kilometers northwest of the province capital at Tuy Hoa City. From here, and the 95th PAVN Battalion's ability to melt away from the Tuy Hoa Valley when necessary, meant PAVN and the local force units it supported, continued to threaten pacification across Phu Yen. Moreover, the Ky Lo Valley remained a relatively safe zone for Communist forces until the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975. The Tuy Hoa Valley mattered more than the Ky Lo Valley, therefore the focus of all the warring participants fell upon Tuy Hoa City and the encompassing basin.

⁴²³ Villard, 17-18.

The positioning of the GVN's military forces in the Tuy Hoa Valley in late 1967 revealed much about the overall focus of security in that contested space. An evaluation of the 3d Battalion of the 47th ARVN Regiment by U.S. Army advisors between 28-31 December, disclosed much about the security situation in the Tuy Hoa Valley by year's end. At the end of 1967, the 47th ARVN Regiment bore primary responsibility for the Saigon government's pacification effort in the Tuy Hoa Valley. "Three of the 47th's four battalions are deployed to protect this campaign area," with the fourth in Binh Dinh Province, the American advisors noted.⁴²⁴ Adding, "The 2nd Battalion guards against the main enemy avenue of approach into the Tuy Hoa Valley. The 1st Battalion has served as a mobile tactical reserve. Only the 3d Battalion has been assigned by CG, 22d ARVN Division to direct support of RD in Tuy Hoa District, Phu Yen Province."⁴²⁵ Essentially, behind the purported shield of IFFV's maneuver battalions and the ROKA forces, operated three battalions of a single ARVN regiment, just two of which operated outside of the province capital.

The AO of the 3/47th ARVN Regiment hardly improved security in Tuy Hoa District. Since the safeguarding of RD cadre in Tuy Hoa District existed as the primary task of the 3/47th ARVN Regiment, the placement of this force matters profoundly. While lacking "operation control over all the military and para-military forces within his AO," the battalion commander dealt with troublesome boundaries.⁴²⁶ "Furthermore, the boundaries of his AO do not contain all of the hamlets within which the RD Cadre of the

⁴²⁴ Ltc. William A. Donald to MACCORDS Reports and Evaluation Division, Evaluation Report Working Draft, "3d Battalion, 47th ARVN Regiment, 22d ARVN Division In Support Of RD," 28-31 December 1967, p.1, CMH.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

campaign are now working.”⁴²⁷ Instead, “Some teams are protected variously by mobile companies of the 2d Battalion, as well as PF platoons and ROK units.”⁴²⁸ The concentration of the 3/47th ARVN Regiment also draws particular attention towards the part of the Tuy Hoa Valley seen as must crucial to the GVN’s efforts to control that area of Phu Yen. Indeed, this ARVN unit operated along LTL-7B as to keep that LOC free of enemy interdiction and thus a prominent symbol of GVN strength in the province. Doing so, however, left the northern tracts of the Tuy Hoa Valley, those abutting the mountains and PAVN cells living there, free to enemy movement. In part because of location and command limitations, parts of the Tuy Hoa Valley existed in spaces removed from concentrated security. Unsurprisingly, PAVN used this open fringe zone to its advantage during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

The role of the 3/47th ARVN Regiment in pacification offers another glimpse into the Tuy Hoa Valley. The evaluation of that unit addressed enemy opposition, revealing that an enemy, firmly entrenched in the Tuy Hoa Valley both mentally and physically, confronted GVN pacification. Accordingly, “the 95B NVA Regiment and the 85th VC Local Force Battalion have avoided large-scale actions. They are estimated to be near full strength. Local infrastructure is deeply embedded in all but a few hamlets (those closest to Tuy Hoa City).”⁴²⁹ The commander of the 3/47th ARVN Regiment and his American advisors speculated that one enemy platoon, plus VCI, directly challenged ARVN efforts in the area.⁴³⁰ “During November and early December, the local enemy made light (three

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

and four-man teams) sporadic attacks at night while foraging for rice, medical supplies, ammunition and other military staples,” the report noted.⁴³¹ Following a brief pause, enemy actions escalated after 25 December. What the Americans and South Vietnamese soldiers reported amounted to Communist efforts to recover from, and work towards reversing, the long list of Allied operations against PAVN and PLAF main force units in Phu Yen. Indeed, “the attacks resumed with increased frequency by an estimated reinforced platoon.”⁴³² Moreover, “The enemy’s most recent reaction to the RD program in Tuy Hoa has been limited to attempts to discredit and disrupt the work of the cadre. The battalion advisor believed that NVA/VC activity was entering a transitional phase.”⁴³³ While limited, such enemy efforts represented the continued ability of the PLAF to hit pacification at its most vital, yet weakest, point, the hamlet. For that reason, the operations of Allied maneuver battalions did not dramatically alter the balance of power in the province, much to the opposite of what the higher levels of the American leadership proclaimed.

With the security situation as described above, it is unsurprising that GVN pacification in Tuy Hoa Valley progressed slowly. American observations of the 3/47th ARVN Regiment also unveiled the GVN’s scope of pacification in the much contested, and most heavily populated of Phu Yen’s lands, the Tuy Hoa Valley. At the time of the publication of the report, 10 *Ap Doi Moi* (ADM), or New Life Hamlets upon the full realization of pacification; 7 *Ap Binh Dinh* (ABD), or the hamlets in the middle of

⁴³¹ Ibid., 4.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

pacification efforts; and 5 *Ap Cung Co* (ACC), or the hamlets about to embark on the pacification process, fell inside Tuy Hoa District.⁴³⁴ The end of 1967 also entailed the formation of pacification goals for the next year. The Saigon government's Ministry of Revolutionary Development (MRD) approved a 1968 pacification plan that called for the elevation of security in 71 hamlets in Phu Yen. Specifically, GVN officials both in Saigon and Tuy Hoa City envisaged the solidification of control over 28 ADM, 41 ABD, and 2 ACC hamlets. Counted separately from the aforementioned 71 hamlets, the plan noted the targeting of 53 Nuoi Duong Hamlets for pacification efforts.⁴³⁵ The province's recent history as a bastion of Communist resistance towards outside influence ensured limited pacification gains for the GVN. Considering the already troubled security situation in the Tuy Hoa Valley, the aforementioned goals marked an ambitious pacification plan. Thus on the eve of the 1968 Tet Offensive, little stood between the GVN on the Tuy Hoa Valley's eastern end and the PAVN and PLAF elements in the valley's western mountains.

1968

1968 proved a climatic year for the Republic of Vietnam. For Phu Yen, 1968 featured the apogee of combat operations by Allied maneuver battalions as American,

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ "MRD Review of RD Plans in Phu Yen and Phu Bon Provinces," undated, CMH, 1. Curiously, the GVN adopted the term *Ap Binh Dinh* (pacification hamlet) perhaps because upon conquering the province from the Champa, the Vietnamese named their new territory "Pacified Settlement," or Binh Dinh. As noted by Edward G. Lansdale, the first large-scale pacification efforts in the Republic of Vietnam incidentally transpired in Binh Dinh Province. Indeed, pacification was synonymous with that province. Lansdale also claimed that PLAF units even shouted "Binh Dinh" when challenging the GVN's RD cadre near Hue in 1967; a direct reference to pacification in Binh Dinh Province. See: Ed Lansdale to Ambassador Porter and Mr. Hart, "War Cry," 21 April 1967, Folder: Day File: April 1967, Box 57, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution Archives (HIA).

South Korean, and South Vietnamese conventional forces repulsed the Communist Tet Offensive. The year also marked the province's entrance into the nebulous world between being perceived as pacified and, in practice, a fertile ground for PLAF activity. PAVN and PLAF buildup of troop strengths and forays into the purportedly secure areas of Tuy Hoa District suggested the province had a long way to go before being pacified. Most strikingly, despite these troubling occurrences, the Nixon Administration commenced Vietnamization in 1969, which drove pacification forward all the while reducing MACV's footprint in the RVN. The removal of U.S. forces, the enactors of pacification, ensured Phu Yen would be pacified in name only.



Figure 2. Tuy Hoa City, circa 1967 to 1968

Note Núi Cháp Chải behind the city to the right and the Tuy Hoa Valley to the left. Photograph by Tom Bigelow, used with permission.

By 1968, the primary U.S. Army ground asset in Phu Yen amounted to D Company, 16th Armor of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate). While other IFFV units operated in Phu Yen from time to time, D/16th Armor remained in Phu Yen until the end of Operation Bolling in 1969. This American outfit supported the 47th ARVN Regiment and operated predominately in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Consisting of three platoons of M113 armored personnel carriers, with about 69 men, and no tanks, D/16th Armor typically found itself tasked with convoy escort duty and kept away from the offensive operations of IFFV's maneuver battalions. With limited supplies and isolated from the other units of the 173d Airborne Brigade, soldiers of D/16th Armor themselves felt unwanted by the brigade. On balance, D/16th Armor functioned as a symbolic gesture on behalf of IFFV to the GVN in Phu Yen.⁴³⁶ Yet the daily logs of D/16th Armor offer essential insight into the Tuy Hoa Valley's security conditions before, during, and after the Tet Offensive. Moreover, this armor unit played a significant role during PAVN's last gambit to take Tuy Hoa City in March 1968.

Evidence that IFFV's 1967 offensives had not fully improved the security situation in the Tuy Hoa Valley took the form of the 1968 Tet Offensive. As IFFV directed its gaze elsewhere in MR2, the 95th PAVN Regiment re-established itself in close proximity to Tuy Hoa City. Indeed, Headquarters of the 173d Airborne Brigade later noted that,

Since November 1967 when the majority of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep) departed the TUY HOA area to participate in Operation MACARTHUR in DAK TO/KONTUM area the 5th Bn 95th NVA Regt had moved back into the

⁴³⁶ Captain Frank C. Foster, "Summary of the Taped Combat After Action Interview With D Company 16th Armor, 173d Airborne Brigade on 4 March 1968," 24th Military History Detachment, p.1, CMH; Foster, "Additional Information for CAAI with D Co. 16th Armor (4 March 1968)," 24th Military History Detachment, CMH.

mountains (vic CQ 010541) where they could operate in a group of hamlets in the NW corner of TUY HOA Valley. Here they continued to get rice from the Hoa Quang Village and operate 10 - 15 kilometers west of TUY HOA City.⁴³⁷

From the safety of those mountains, elements of the 95th PAVN Regiment put Tuy Hoa City in direct threat of enemy attack. Moreover, in positioning the 5th Battalion in such a location, PAVN presented a clear indicator of intentions to dramatically alter the tone of the war.

“February 1968 will be recorded in the chronicles of Vietnamese history as the month of Viet Cong’s Tet Offensive,” the CORDS Field Overview began.⁴³⁸ With a focus on capturing province capitals, much of the attention shifted to these centers of GVN governance and away from the countryside. Affecting the lowest level of pacification, individual hamlets, “the enemy stalked the villages and hamlets, most of which had been left unprotected through the withdrawal of friendly forces, particularly RF and PF, to the province and district towns.”⁴³⁹ Accordingly, the PAVN and PLAF 1968 Tet Offensive, or *Tet Mau Than*, posed the biggest challenge to pacification since 1965. Characterized by three separate assaults on Tuy Hoa City, the offensive consumed the first three months of the year. The enemy’s first thrust into the province capital entailed the 5th Battalion of the 95th PAVN Regiment’s attempt to seize Tuy Hoa North Airfield—an old French airstrip updated by the U.S. and from which U.S. Army helicopters and light aircraft operated—on the northwestern fringe of the city on the night

⁴³⁷ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February – 30 April 1968),” p.59, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/392519.pdf>>.

⁴³⁸ “CORDS Field Overview, February 1968,” Undated, Folder: 501-08 Corps Overviews - Feb 68, p.1, CMH.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

of 30 January.⁴⁴⁰ “The 5-95th Regt (NVA) received orders to move down and strike the district capital of TUY HOA on the morning of Tet (30 Jan 68). They were to strike the American Artillery base at TUY HOA North, destroy the airfield there and celebrate Tet with the people of TUY HOA,” the 173d Airborne Brigaded reported.⁴⁴¹

PAVN positioned itself with relative ease for the Tet Offensive. Originating from Base Area 236, the 95th PAVN Regiment’s 5th Battalion moved freely through the valley under the cover of darkness. PAVN soldiers traversed the relatively ARVN-free northern extremities of the Tuy Hoa Valley from Nui Ong La to Núi Chấp Chài, and did so despite encountering local inhabitants. Aside from dominating the northwest landscape just outside of Tuy Hoa City, Núi Chấp Chài served PAVN and PLAF as a de facto base camp on the very edge of the GVN’s source of power in the province. After the fact, intelligence obtained by the 47th ARVN Infantry Regiment on the movement of the 5th Battalion explained that,

The Bn moved out of the mountains (vic CQ 010540) beginning about 1800 hours, at 1900 hours they had reached canal No. 1 on the valley floor (vic CQ 050490) and pushed on pass the Dong Hoa Church (2000 hours) and arrived at the foot of CHAP CHAT mountain at 2130 hours. The local people encountered on the way caused no trouble. From CHAP CHAT they moved into the delta (rice fields) and crossed a shallow river, here they split up with the 1st and 2d company (plus supporting forces and the Sapper/Recon force acting as security for the Bn H) moved to the south of the airfield and the 3d company moved to the front of the American Artillery position. The Battalion had arrived in front of the airfield at about 0100 30 Jan 68. The attack was supposed to have started at 0100 but according to the NVA POW the local guide took too long to get them there.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ “Status of Pacification - Phu Yen (10) Province (Tet Offensive), 25 March 1968, p. 1, CMH.

⁴⁴¹ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February – 30 April 1968),” p.59, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/392519.pdf>>.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 60; The quoted account actually refers to Núi Chấp Chài because Chap Chat is likely a typo in the primary source itself.

In doing so, the unopposed movement of the PAVN battalion demonstrated the fleeting security situation still undermining pacification in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Consequently, PAVN stood poised to commence the Tet Offensive in Phu Yen.



Figure 3. Núi Cháp Chài, 1968.

Photograph by Patrick Hardesty, used with permission.

Devised as a two-pronged offensive into Tuy Hoa City, Hanoi envisaged two Communist battalions executing a pincer attack and quickly enveloping the key areas of the province capital. The PAVN effort focused on the northern environs, principally the airfield and prison. Concurrent with the PAVN thrust to the north, the PLAF element intend to strike the city center. A twenty-minute enemy bombardment of the 47th ARVN Regiment camp alerted American authorities to a possible enemy assault, which placed the 173d Airborne Brigade on high alert. Yet the recon element of the PLAF's 85th Local Force Battalion suspected a GVN ambush along the intended route of attack, thus the

PLAF quickly abandoned any further effort to press on into Tuy Hoa City.⁴⁴³ After waiting two hours for the never-to-materialize PLAF assault, the 300 men of the 95th PAVN Regiment's 5th Battalion commenced their onslaught.⁴⁴⁴ The assaulting PAVN force split into two groups, with 3rd Company moving upon the U.S. artillery firebase near Tuy Hoa North Airfield, while 1st and 2nd Companies headed towards the nearby prison. The PAVN troops attempting to liberate prisoners held at the adjacent GVN prison failed to make headway as the South Vietnamese guards stymied the PAVN attack.⁴⁴⁵

Slightly northwest of the airfield, PAVN overran the perimeter at the firebase operated by Battery C of the 6th Battalion, 32d Artillery. In penetrating the firebase's defenses—which consisted of barbed wire and four bunkers with a machine gun in each—the PAVN soldiers captured the number three bunker, damaged an artillery piece, destroyed a powder magazine, and occupied the radar site. Aside from bunkers, two Dusters, with dual 40 mm cannons, provided the compound with defensive firepower. With the perimeter breached, one of the Dusters advanced “and blew the captured No. 3 bunker away.”⁴⁴⁶ Ultimately, the assaulting PAVN companies “pushed about 30 meters into our perimeter” while men of Battery C established a new defensive perimeter and continued to hold out for reinforcements.⁴⁴⁷ Accordingly, Companies C and D of the

⁴⁴³ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February – 30 April 1968),” p.60, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/392519.pdf>>.

⁴⁴⁴ Villard, 9.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid; Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February – 30 April 1968),” p.60, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/392519.pdf>>.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

4/503d Infantry, as well as a command group, arrived by helicopter and moved towards the firebase as to reverse the precarious situation befalling Battery C. The arrival of these American soldiers halted any further PAVN advance. “When the paratroopers came in at 0030 we pushed them out into the rice paddies and worked them over with MG and 40 mm fire,” SFC Vernon Skille, Chief of Firing Battery, C 6-32d Artillery, said of that moment of the battle.⁴⁴⁸ Additionally, a “Puff (C-47) came by and opened and swept the rice paddies to the front with mini-gun fire,” recalled SSG Roscoe Fraizer, a member of 2nd Platoon, D Company of the 4/503d Infantry.⁴⁴⁹ The failed PAVN assault left “19 dead NVA in the perimeter and a ROK sweep in front found 43 more NVA, of the 100 artillerymen, four were killed.”⁴⁵⁰ The four American KIAs included the artillery battalion’s commander, LTC Robert E. Whitbeck.⁴⁵¹

Having arrived via helicopter, two companies from the 28th ROKA Infantry Regiment moved to the north of the U.S. artillery to establish a blocking position. A battalion of the 47th ARVN Regiment positioned itself to the west of Tuy Hoa North Airfield to thwart any possible moves by the enemy in that direction. Together, these Allied forces hemmed the now beleaguered PAVN attackers into an ever shrinking mass. In turn, the U.S. infantry companies pushed the enemy force away from the firebase and airfield and into the adjacent rice paddies. With the attack now thoroughly repulsed and the cover of darkness dissipating with dawn, elements of the 5th Battalion of the 95th

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 62.

PAVN Regiment retreated to the nearby hamlet of Binh Tin.⁴⁵² In that hamlet, during the interlude between the failed assault on the firebase and the Allied counterattack, PAVN soldiers dug firing positions and used the various buildings to shield themselves from the weapons of the gathering Allied forces. Concurrently, 173d Airborne Brigade commander General Leo H. Schweiter, 4/504d Battalion commanding officer LTC James H. Johnson, Deputy Senior Providence Advisor LTC Vernon Walters, and Province Chief Nguyen Van Ba orchestrated what they envisaged as the destruction of the 5th Battalion.⁴⁵³

The ensuing engagement at Binh Tin entered 173rd Airborne Brigade lore as the battle of “Shit Hill.” After bitter fighting in an attempt to rid the hamlet of the PAVN occupiers, mounting casualties and seemingly endless enemy resistance caused D Company to pull-back to higher ground and await the results of U.S. firepower.⁴⁵⁴ D Company of the 4/503d Infantry took up positions on what they initially saw as a typical sandy hill. As U.S. efforts to get the enemy to surrender failed, which included the use of loudspeakers and tear gas, men of the 4/503d Infantry made efforts to entrench themselves as to avoid the shrapnel from exploding U.S. Air Force bombs. These soldiers’ shovels quickly revealed that the paratroopers sat atop the dumping ground for the hamlet’s human waste. As recalled by Antoine Roy of C Company, 4/503d Infantry,

So we get our entrenching tools and we start digging in the sand and start finding these little clotted things. Then everybody realized all at once, you know with these villages and the like, they don’t have plumbing. This sand hill was the toilet. So to the 4th Battalion of the 503rd 21 Parachute Infantry Regiment and of course

⁴⁵² Villard, 10.

⁴⁵³ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February – 30 April 1968),” p.63, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/392519.pdf>>.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 69.

we're talking about the Tet Offensive here, it was known to us as the Battle of Shit Hill. You talk to anybody who was there and they'll always call it the Battle of Shit Hill. But we had to dig in and I remember all these dried up little turds and everything, throwing them away.⁴⁵⁵

As the Americans discovered what they sat upon, the tear gas dropped on the hamlet allowed the remaining South Vietnamese residents to flee under a veil of confusion. Shortly thereafter, U.S. Air Force F-100 Super Sabres delivered 250 and 500 pound bombs, as well as napalm, into the hamlet, obliterating the structures and much of what remained of the 95th PAVN Regiment's 5th Battalion.⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, the first sortie placed bombs directly into the 5th Battalion's command post.⁴⁵⁷ Throughout the ensuing night, ARVN assaults and further U.S. airstrikes battered enemy holdouts. By morning, soldiers of the 47th ARVN Regiment and two RF companies attacked and cleared the cratered hamlet, bringing to a close the first phase of the Tet Offensive in Phu Yen.⁴⁵⁸ The fight for the U.S. Army firebase and the GVN prison, as well as the resulting battle of Shit Hill left 189 PAVN soldiers dead, with 31 captured, to the cost of the aforementioned 4 artillerymen and now 14 men of D Company, 4/503d.⁴⁵⁹

As the smoke from the shattered hamlet of Binh Tin dissipated, American attention returned to Operation Bolling. Conversely, Communist forces remained fixated

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with Antoine Roy, 8 January 2003, p.188, Antoine Roy Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0255>>.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.; Villard, 10-11.

⁴⁵⁷ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February – 30 April 1968),” p.71, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/392519.pdf>>.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid; Press Briefing, 1968 Tet Offensive In II CTZ, 17 April 1968, 17 April 1968, p. 4, Folder 10, Box 11, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131110019>>.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, 61; Villard, 11.

on capturing Tuy Hoa City. A captured PAVN soldier offered prophetic words, “If we weren't successful we were to retreat, rest, then return and hit TUY HOA again.”⁴⁶⁰

Although mauled by Allied units, the 95th PAVN Regiment, elements of the 5th Battalion included, would return to Phu Yen’s capital.

In early February, American intelligence placed significant enemy forces in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Accordingly, “reliable agents have reported the following units within the TUY HOA area or close enough to have influence upon the BOLLING Area of Operations.”⁴⁶¹ The units in question revealed a sizable congregation of PAVN within striking distance of Tuy Hoa City. Indeed, the Headquarters of the 5th PAVN Division, the 95th PAVN Regiment—including its 4th, 5th, and 6th Battalions—the 18B PAVN Regiment, the 95th Artillery Regiment, the 30th Main Force Battalion, the 85th Local Force Battalion, the K-65 Engineer (Sapper) Company, and the K-76 Engineer (Sapper) Company marked the continuation of the Tet Offensive.⁴⁶²

The second enemy assault on Tuy Hoa City transpired between 4 and 5 February. Envisaged initially as the southern pincer of the Communist’s 30-31 January effort to envelop the province capital, the abandonment of that operation by the PLAF’s 85th Local Force Battalion resulted in a delayed second strike against Tuy Hoa City. The PLAF unit in question, now reinforced with PAVN rifle companies, struck south of Tuy Hoa North Airfield and entered the city center. The PLAF’s gambit proved the most successful of the efforts to take Tuy Hoa City because for the first time during the

⁴⁶⁰ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February – 30 April 1968),” p.59, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/392519.pdf>>.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

Vietnam War, Communist forces occupied a portion of Tuy Hoa City proper. Indeed, the combined enemy force temporarily controlled the portion the province capital astride QL-1 and the Song Da Rang, amounting to half the city. AT28 reported that, “This force was finally ejected on 7 February after concerted action by territorial units and one ARVN battalion.”⁴⁶³ This second endeavor to conquer Tuy Hoa City claimed 26 PLAF lives.⁴⁶⁴ Such a relatively light number of KIAs, too, meant the majority of the attackers lived to harass the GVN another day, thus reinforcing the argument that this second attempt to take the province capital as being the most successful.

During the interlude between the second and third phases of the Tet Offensive in Phu Yen, American forces uncovered enemy infrastructure deep in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Elements of D/16th Armor “found bunkers and positions in the village of NGOC SON,” in Tuy Hoa District on 19 February.⁴⁶⁵ Upon scouring the village for further signs of the enemy, the Americans found a tunnel complex. Never during its time in the village did elements of D/16th Armor encounter actual PAVN or PLAF members.⁴⁶⁶ Such a discovery suggested that Communist forces had positions in the contested Tuy Hoa Valley from which to execute future operations against the GVN and Allied troops. Three days later on 22 February, D/16th Armor and an EOD team blew-up the tunnel complex in Ngoc Son.⁴⁶⁷ Whether or not the enemy constructed these fortifications before or after IFFV’s 1966 operations matters not. Instead the fact that PAVN and PLAF units had

⁴⁶³ “Status of Pacification - Phu Yen (10) Province (Tet Offensive), 25 March 1968, p. 1, CMH.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ “Quarterly Historical Report,” Company D, 16th Armor, 173d Airborne Brigade, p. 7, RG 472 / A1 1647 / Box 2, NARA II. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

[illegible]

Map by Captain Frank C. Foster, "Summary of the Taped Combat After Action Interview With D Company 16th Amor, 173d Airborne Brigade on 4 March 1968," 15 May 1968, Inclosure 3, CMH.

A month long pause by PAVN featured the replenishment of its ranks and regrouping for another attempt on Tuy Hoa City. Intelligence acquired by the 173d Airborne Brigade “indicate that the 5th NVA Division has received replacements and is nearing the posture to launch offensive operations.”⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, the brigade surmised that PAVN had “4 combat effective battalions” ready “in northern central PHU YEN Province.”⁴⁶⁹ These units included the 95th PAVN Regiment’s 3d, 4th, and 5th Battalions as well as the 85th PLAF Local Force Battalion.⁴⁷⁰ Concurrent with that break from conventional warfare, PAVN and PLAF cells instigated chaos across Phu Yen. AT28 reported that PAVN and PLAF cells “maintained pressure throughout the province by executing 34 separate attacks,” after which the 95th PAVN Regiment resumed efforts to conquer Phu Yen’s capital between 4 and 5 March.⁴⁷¹ Now the enemy launched its third, and final, assault on Tuy Hoa City. In this effort, the 85th PLAF Local Force Battalion and the 5th Battalion of the 95th PAVN Regiment, with elements of the 17th Mortar Recoilless Rifle Company and the 25th Recon Sapper Company, skirted around Tuy Hoa North Airfield and attempted to enter the city from the north along the coast. In attempting to capture the provincial headquarters—the primary objective of the combined enemy force—the Communist troops clashed with two RF platoons and elements of the 47th ARVN Regiment, near that unit’s garrison in Tuy Hoa City. Like the two preceding assaults, this endeavor, too, failed. Encountering stiff resistance from these South

⁴⁶⁸ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), sub: Operation Report Lessons Learned (1 November 1967 - 31 January 1968),” p.4, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/390165.pdf>>.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ “Status of Pacification - Phu Yen (10) Province (Tet Offensive), 25 March 1968, p. 1, CMH.

Vietnamese soldiers, the PAVN attack turned into a withdrawal. By morning, elements of the 47th ARVN Regiment largely contained the retreating PAVN force, as it headed inland, in the hamlets of Ninh Tinh village. The M113s of D/16 Armor provided the armor punch needed by ARVN, and led the Allied efforts to crush the PAVN remnants occupying hamlets 1, 2, and 3 of Ninh Tinh village.⁴⁷²

Yet the now fortified PAVN force, equipped with B-40 rockets, proved a tough opponent. Indeed, the second M113 of the second platoon, 2-2, burst into flames from a B-40 rocket strike as it entered “Indian Country,” marking D/16th Armor’s entrance into the battle.⁴⁷³ As explained in the Combat After Action Interview, “When 2-2 was hit with the B-40, it was a vehicle’s length off the road. The front end of it was a vehicle’s length off the road. In other words, we had crossed the road and that was it. And all hell broke loose.”⁴⁷⁴ With air support from 335th Assault Helicopter Company and, from Tuy Hoa South Air Force Base, F-105s of the 308th and 309th Tactical Air Squadrons, American and South Vietnamese ground forces shattered what was left of the PAVN force. The confrontation resulted in at least 250 PAVN dead and seven fatalities for D/16 Armor.⁴⁷⁵

When AT28 began the process of analyzing the Tet Offensive, the Americans found significant problems befalling pacification in Phu Yen. Most prominently, the

⁴⁷² Captain Frank C. Foster, “Summary of the Taped Combat After Action Interview With D Company 16th Amor, 173d Airborne Brigade on 4 March 1968,” 15 May 1968, p.1, CMH; “Status of Pacification - Phu Yen (10) Province (Tet Offensive), 25 March 1968, p. 1, CMH.

⁴⁷³ “Combat After Action Interview With Members of Company D (Airborne), 16th Armor, 173rd Airborne Brigade,” Interviewed by Captain Frank C. Foster, 4 March 1968, Phu Hiep Army Base, Phu Yen Province, Republic of Vietnam, Transcribed by David Curtis, January 2016, p.10, Personal Collection of David Curtis; Curtis’s transcript is a more complete version of the CAAI found at CMH.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 2; D/16th Armor earned a bronze start unit citation for their heroic actions at Ninh Tinh village.

preceding Allied operations had not improved the security situation as much as once thought. Despite suffering considerable casualties during those operations and during the Tet Offensive, PAVN and PLAF losses proved negligible. The lasting effects of the Tet Offensive in Phu Yen, too, proved particularly noteworthy. Rather than offer an opportunity to rapidly advance pacification, the aftermath of the Tet Offensive significantly delayed pacification. Indeed, AT28 surmised that the first and second enemy assaults put pacification efforts in the Tuy Hoa Valley two months behind schedule. The third attack, noted the advisory team, complicated efforts to pacify the Tuy Hoa Valley even further.⁴⁷⁶ Between 31 January and 1 March, fighting resulted in 812 homes razed, with the 4-5 March battle leaving approximately 75 additional dwellings either “destroyed or severely damaged.”⁴⁷⁷ In other terms, “Over 3900 persons were made homeless by the three major battles and intervening clashes during the Tet Offensive.”⁴⁷⁸ If pacification truly entailed the advancement of the common people, then the destruction of whole hamlets surely worked against that end. Thus paltry progress defined CORDS-backed pacification during this period, producing only delays and frustration.

The enemy efforts during the Tet Offensive relied heavily upon Phu Yen’s history as a Viet Minh province. The Communists assumed that the common people would overtly support the attacking PAVN and PLAF units. Captured PAVN and PLAF fighters revealed that they “had the mission staying in Tuy Hoa [City] for 5-7 days.”⁴⁷⁹ Rather than a prolonged occupation of Phu Yen’s capital, Communist intentions amounted to

⁴⁷⁶ “Status of Pacification - Phu Yen (10) Province (Tet Offensive), 25 March 1968, p. 3, CMH.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 1.

breaking ARVN's hold on the city, which presumably would evict the GVN and its backers from all of Phu Yen. For that plan to work, PAVN and PLAF units needed popular support. PAVN certainly had the assistance of local guides, yet as demonstrated during the first assault against Tuy Hoa City, the city itself did not rise-up in support of the Communist cause. Although the citizens of Tuy Hoa City failed to rally around the Communists, that did not mean they fully endorsed the GVN but rather backed the victor.

The Tet Offensive in Phu Yen unveiled more than the enemy's intentions. AT28 acquired a better sense of Phu Yen's sympathies from the turmoil unleashed by the offensive. Singularly, the collective sentiment of the people placed into question the very existence of pacification. Daniel L. Leaty, formerly of USAID and now the Province Senior Advisor for AT28 in Phu Yen, disclosed that, "The province was under VC control as recently as 1965. The attitude of the people now is to get along peaceably with whatever side is in power. They have shown a curiosity about captured VC weapons on display, but little interest in exhibits of VC bodies at the city soccer field."⁴⁸⁰ With Communist rule a recent memory, the neutral attitude of the people, as perceived by Leaty, meant that pacification had so far failed to ally the South Vietnamese peasant with the Saigon government. In other terms, pacification occurred around the common people in that it did not make them feel fully, if at all, incorporated with the Republic of Vietnam. So long as the possibility of the NLF replacing the GVN as the sole arbiter of Phu Yen remained plausible, pacification could not permanently induce the inhabitants to favor Saigon's cause.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 2.

Undeterred by their failure to topple the GVN in Tuy Hoa City, PAVN and PLAF cells created havoc elsewhere in Phu Yen. The CORDS Field Overview for March 1968 echoed and expanded the conclusions reached by AT28. “In Phu Yen Province, enemy activity was primarily directed toward disrupting renewed RD efforts through the use of terror tactics and kidnapping members of the local populace,” the overview divulged.⁴⁸¹ “Of significance was the middle of the month kidnapping of approximately 500 civilians from a refugee camp in the vicinity of Dong Xuan. Subsequently 116 returned,” a sign of future troubles for pacification.⁴⁸² More immediately, however, “Earlier in the month, the 5th Bn, 95th NVA Regt, and the 85th LF Bn, supported by various other local force groups, inflicted light damage on the civilian communities in the Tuy Hoa North and basin areas; while suffering heavy casualties themselves.”⁴⁸³ Yet “FWMAF appears to have restored some degree of security to the Tuy Hoa basin area during the past several weeks through concerted efforts at establishing more security for civilian communities.”⁴⁸⁴

The Tet Offensive did not result in a clear Allied victory in Phu Yen. Although PAVN and PLAF units failed to take Tuy Hoa City, their actions wrecked the Tuy Hoa Valley. By the end of March, Americans in Phu Yen could not deny that the Communist offensive successfully obstructed GVN pacification efforts. In particular, the Tet Offensive displaced many of the province’s Tuy Hoa Valley residents. As noted in the monthly progress report for March,

⁴⁸¹ “CORDS Field Overview, March 1968,” 13 April 1968, p.5, CMH.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

Enemy attacks and subsequent military engagements during the month resulted in the displacement of 583 families (3,166 persons) and the damaging or destruction of 502 homes. Since the Lunar New Year a total of 1,451 homes have been destroyed or damaged and a total of 1,451 families (8,178 persons) displaced as a result of military hostilities.⁴⁸⁵

Ongoing warfare certainly hampered the rapid advancement of pacification at the hamlet level in Phu Yen. The hampering of pacification, albeit seen as a temporary setback in 1968, eventually proved an unrecoverable problem for the province.

Conversely, casualties incurred during the Tet Offensive jeopardized the combat abilities of the PAVN forces in Phu Yen. Although able to gather reinforcements and dodge the majority of Allied efforts to finish off the battered elements of the 95th PAVN Regiment, April proved a disastrous month in Phu Yen. Encounters with ARVN and FWMAF forces sapped the PAVN unit of fighting strength, causing the majority of the regiment to withdrawal from the Tuy Hoa Valley. "On the night of 4 April, two NVA Battalions entered Phu Loc, My Thanh and My Hoa Hamlets. They entered these hamlets at approximately midnight and by daybreak were well-dispersed and dug in with excellent overhead cover and concealment," Major Arthur K. Wimer, DSA for Tuy Hoa District, recalled in his advisor report.⁴⁸⁶ Continuing, Wimer noted that hamlet residents "having experienced a similar situation in September, 1967, and knowing their homes would be destroyed, notified the 47th Regt (ARVN) of the NVA presence."⁴⁸⁷ Adding, "elements of the USAF, the 47th Regt (ARVN) and the ROK White Horse Division

⁴⁸⁵ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, "Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 31 March 1968," p.1, CMH.

⁴⁸⁶ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, "District Senior Advisor's Report - Tuy Hoa District, Phu Yen Province (Period Ending 30 April 1968), CMH.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

accounted for 259 NVA KIA, and 24 captured.”⁴⁸⁸ “Since that time significant sightings and contact with the enemy has decreased sharply. This, perhaps can be attributed to increased operations by the ARVN, ROK, and RF forces or possibly the enemy suffered a worse defeat than we realize and is now in hiding re-building and re-supplying his units,” the DSA concluded.⁴⁸⁹

Other units situated themselves away from the Tuy Hoa Valley in order to recover, yet remained a hindrance to the Allies. Headquarters of the 173d Airborne Brigade concluded that “the 85th LF Bn is apparently regrouping and attempting to rebuild its combat effectiveness for continuing operations in TUY AN District,” while “the 30th MF Bn will probably continue to conduct limited, small scale harassing operations in eastern HIEU XUONG District.”⁴⁹⁰ With the bulk of Hanoi’s main forces focused on recovery by the close of April, Phu Yen entered a near seven month period in which Saigon and Washington could perceivably advance pacification quicker than ever before. Yet this period also marked a shift from conventional to unconventional warfare, the former of which posed a serious threat to the very foundations of pacification in the province as it meant the targeting of GVN symbols of control at the hamlet level.

PAVN’s weakness after the failed Tet Offensive was offset by insufficient IFFV resources in Phu Yen. Allied forces lacked sufficient resources to truly capitalize on the Tet Offensive. Notwithstanding the enemy’s battered state after the three failed forays into Tuy Hoa City, IFFV’s assets in Phu Yen proved capable of restoring the balance of

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February – 30 April 1968),” p.15, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/390165.pdf>>.

power, yet not expanding it to new levels. In April, AT28 reported that, “Seventy percent of the recorded population resides in hamlets with some degree of security. Regression of hamlets in the province since the TET offensive has occurred in Tuy Hoa, Tuy An, and Song Cau Districts.”⁴⁹¹ Adding, “This resulted from continued VC/NVA attacks, the lack of sufficient FWMAF to conduct continuous offensive operations outside the secure areas, and the insufficient number of RF companies available to the districts for inner security of the pacification effort.”⁴⁹² Consequently, conditions similar to those before the Tet Offensive returned to Phu Yen, and did so rather quickly. Additionally, “Despite the inadequacy of security for the total pacification effort, security in Phu Yen Province is qualitatively better now than before the TET offensive.”⁴⁹³ Such sentiment reflected the status quo that engulfed the province.

As for D/16th Armor, the unit spent much of April near Phu Sen. On 17 April, D/16th Armor traversed the stretch of LTL-7B between Phu Sen and Cung Son as a convoy escort.⁴⁹⁴ At 1530 hours, approximately two unspecified enemy platoons ambushed the convoy. “Air strikes were called at 1545 hours and 11 500 lb bombs were dropped,” in response.⁴⁹⁵ The following morning, D/16th Armor’s 2nd and 3rd platoons “departed at 0830 hours to search the ambush site for possible KIA’s and also a 500 lb bomb dud that was reported to us by air cover. Upon seeing 200 - 300 people in the ROK

⁴⁹¹ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 30 April 1968,” p.1, CMH.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ “Quarterly Historical Report,” Company D, 16th Armor, 173d Airborne Brigade, p. 11, RG 472 / A1 1647 / Box 2, NARA II.

⁴⁹⁵ “Quarterly Historical Report,” April - June 1968, Company D, 16th Armor, 173d Airborne Brigade, p. 1, RG 472 / A1 1647 / Box 2, NARA II.

AO we were denied permission to pursue.”⁴⁹⁶ The rest of the month featured D/16th Armor keeping roads clear of enemy activity and relatively uneventful patrols near Phu Sen.

May proved no different than April. Pacification in Phu Yen neither advanced nor regressed, yet the perspective of CORDS in Saigon perceived events differently. “Your program receives high marks. Excellent,” Komer wrote in a letter dated 7 May 1968 to Leaty.⁴⁹⁷ High praise from the head of CORDS, however, did come with two caveats. One, that AT28 in Tuy An District needed a new S-2. Two, that the District Intelligence Operations Coordinating Center in Tuy Hoa District “needs improvement,” without stipulating why, but only that the local GVN should provide “pressure.”⁴⁹⁸ Such brief commentary from Komer obscured the deeper, underlying security shortcoming that affected the province as a whole. AT28 explained that, “Significant progress has been made this month in the execution of both the recovery and pacification programs. However, the continued diversion of materials into recovery efforts continued to prevent the RD program from complete reinstatement during the month.”⁴⁹⁹ Moreover, “Security remains inadequate. Regression of four hamlets was recorded during the month. At the same time, the security condition for eight hamlets was upgraded.”⁵⁰⁰ May demonstrated that progress on the pacification front as neither fast nor permanent. Rather, impermanence went hand-in-hand with pacification.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Memo, R. W. Komer to Daniel L. Leaty, “Evaluation of Pacification in Phu Yen,” 7 May 1968, CMH.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 31 May 1968,” p.1, CMH.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

With June, pacification remained a process void of capitalizing on the Tet Offensive. “Pacification continues to progress in a satisfactory manner especially in the heavily populated coastal area encompassing Hieu Xuong and Tuy Hoa Districts,” AT28 noted for June.⁵⁰¹ Yet the positivity gave way to concerns about the ever apparent trends of insufficient security and absence of accumulating progress. Accordingly, “Security remains inadequate. Regression of ten hamlets was recorded during the month. At the same time the security condition of forty-one hamlets was upgraded.”⁵⁰² Essentially, the problems detected in prior months appeared more as the new normal than aberrations. The enemy situation, however, reinforced the perception of poor security in the province. “The enemy’s capabilities remain unchanged. During May there were 8 company, 4 multi-platoon, 8 platoon, 10 squad and 12 unknown size enemy attacks,” this while PAVN and PLAF main and local forces focused on anything but contact with the Allies.⁵⁰³ Moreover, such enemy efforts equated to losing “251 KIA (BC) and 26 captured.”⁵⁰⁴ Though the more revealing figures were those of civilian loses. “Guerrilla forces concentrated on terrorist activities, as shown by the large number of assassinations and kidnappings during May,” with “22 assassinations reported, 100 persons kidnapped, and 12 mining incidents.”⁵⁰⁵ “The attack on the infrastructure has continued to show good results,” AT28 offered as a sign of some pacification progress.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰¹ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 30 June 1968,” p.1, CMH.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 1.

Yet the only clear source of headway during May, Operation Bolling, continued during the reporting period;

the 173d Airborne Brigade (-), Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf, continued Operation Bolling II in Phu Yen Province, with the continuing mission of locating and destroying the 95th NVA Regiment, providing security for the continuance of the all-important Vietnamese rice harvest (in conjunction with the 28th ROK Regiment and the 47th ARVN Regiment), providing security for the 577th Engineer Battalion and 173d Engineer Company for their mission of construction and mine-sweeping along Highway 436 and Routes 68 and 2D, and constantly providing AO Bolling with an infantry rapid-reaction company.⁵⁰⁷

As noted above, concurrent with 4/503d Infantry's efforts, U.S. Army engineers, with additional assistance from D/16th Armor, continued the improvement of the province's roads through Operation Rebuild.⁵⁰⁸ Such a complex mission on part of IFFV's assets in Phu Yen reinforced the bond between conventional forces and the ongoing pacification effort in that province. "But the enemy forces, after taking heavy casualties from US, ROK, and ARVN combat operations in middle and late April, were not easily located," meaning even Operation Bolling could only advance pacification insofar as PAVN permitted.⁵⁰⁹ Through coalition warfare, pacification in Phu Yen appeared oriented towards progress, veiling the deeper issues that inhibited lasting success.

CORDS solidified the inseparability of the American and South Korean forces in the pacification of Phu Yen. Aside from the added security, which protected pacification, Allied troops also provided resources to the development aspect of pacification. IFFV's overview for July 1968 noted that, "ROK and US forces are the major participants in the

⁵⁰⁷ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 May - 31 July 1968)," p.34, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/394510.pdf>>.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

Phu Yen Civic Action program. Their activities encompass the entire sphere of the pacification program.”⁵¹⁰ That statement both relayed pacification as all-encompassing and a major concern for conventional militaries. The overview noted that, “Units from the Tuy Hoa Subarea Command are presently engaged in the construction of classrooms in Hieu Xuong District.”⁵¹¹ Adding,

Combined with this activity is a special vocational training program designed to instruct selected Vietnamese in the skills of carpentry. Air Force personnel, working with EDCON advisors in the Dong Tac Refugee Camp, have significantly improved the standard of living of camp residents. US and ROK forces, concentrating in another area, youth and sports, have provided equipment, instructors and some funds for the formation of Junior RD Cadre Teams.⁵¹²

The aforementioned activities mirrored those performed by IFFV’s maneuver battalions in 1966. Such a connection demonstrated that pacification continued along lines established before the arrival of CORDS, which consequently buttressed a new trend that little changed throughout the war.

Between June and late July, interactions between belligerents demonstrated the shortcomings of Operation Bolling. During this period, 173d Airborne Brigade “intelligence data revealed that the 95th NVA Regiment has been unable to rebuild its fighting strength after its heavy losses in the month of April and, due to steady and successful allied pressure on the regiment, has also been unable to re-develop a workable supply and logistics system.”⁵¹³ Therefore,

the 95th NVA Regiment, in early and middle July, began to withdraw out of the TUY HOA City and the Bolling area of operations, moving westward toward and presumably into the Tri-Border Area, thus hoping to be able to re-equip itself with

⁵¹⁰ “CORDS Field Overview, July 1968,” 14 August 1968, Headquarters I Field Force, p.11, CMH.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 35.

greater ease with new replacement personnel and supplies prior to returning to the Bolling area of operation. The 95th NVA Regiment left one of its three infantry line battalions, the 6th Bn 95th NVA Regiment, in the area to serve as a blocking force if needed.⁵¹⁴

Yet the removal of the bulk of the 95th PAVN Regiment from the Tuy Hoa Valley did not lessen the abilities of the PLAF. Accordingly, “On 29 July at 0159 hours, at Tuy Hoa Air Force Base, and enemy sapper team was successful in infiltrating the Air Force position of the base perimeter defensive network and placing an estimated six demolition charges at various strategic areas inside TUY HOA Air Force Base itself.”⁵¹⁵ The PLAF sappers succeeded in damaging two C-130 transport planes and one F-100 Super Sabre fighter, yet the PLAF attackers succumbed to retaliatory American gunfire. The 173d Airborne Brigade warned that “This attack emphasized again the increased emphasis that the enemy is placing on sapper-type activity as a prelude or part of the expected third general offensive.”⁵¹⁶ In a way, IFFV’s concentration on annihilating PAVN distracted American maneuver battalions, permitting small PLAF cells to execute sapper missions steeped in symbolism.

That all the preceding events in Phu Yen dramatically improved security in the Tuy Hoa Valley neglects the emergence of the area as a middle ground between all the belligerents. Notwithstanding operations to physically alter security conditions in favor of the GVN, the Tuy Hoa Valley remained a fertile ground for PLAF activity. While D/16th Armor uncovered bunkers and tunnels in the vicinity of Phu Sen earlier in the year, elements within AT28, too, noted indicators of trouble in the Tuy Hoa Valley as a whole.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

Local GVN officials already realized that much of the valley existed as anything but pacified, a fact not eagerly shared with the Americans. Robert Barron, DSA in Tuy Hoa District between August 1968 and August 1969, explained the Tuy Hoa Valley was a place safe in name only. Barron perceived that Dai Uy Lam, the District Chief, and Ellis Wisner, a civilian advisor under Barron's command, truly understood the dangers present in the valley. As later recalled by Barron,

Dai Uy Lam would say, everything's safe, everything's safe, but the[n] Ellis would say, if you drive out there by yourself, you're going to have your head handed to you, so I would ask Dai Uy Lam, I said, do you really think this is safe and Dai Uy Lam would say something and the interpreter always said oh, yes, completely safe, completely safe. And I would say, well why don't we got out there? No, it's not a good day to go out there, that kind of thing.⁵¹⁷

Physically and psychologically, Allied operations in Phu Yen failed to transform the much contested Tuy Hoa Valley into a GVN stronghold. Equally significant, the perception of the Tuy Hoa Valley as a dangerous place intensified during the next two years, before solidifying as fact. Other occurrences in the Tuy Hoa Valley added validity to what Barron learned.

The Tet Offensive all but faded into history. Events in Phu Yen ran counter to the so-called obliteration of PLAF combat strength, a common theme during the war itself and in the ensuing historiography.⁵¹⁸ The longstanding argument that the PLAF suffered terrible human losses, thus the sapping of Communist abilities to counter GVN pacification efforts, did not apply to Phu Yen. The latter part of 1968 posited the three

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Robert Barron, 21 April 2001, p.35, Robert Barron Collection, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0163>>.

⁵¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of this contemporary and academic discussion, see: Thomas C. Thayer, *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 30, and James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 79-81.

failed Communist thrusts into the province capital as a short-term military defeat, but long-term military victory. The PAVN and the PLAF endured the heavily losses inflicted upon them by Allied forces to such a degree that visible signs of Communist resurgence started within six months of the last Tet Offensive assault on Tuy Hoa City. Indeed, August brought with it indicators of the PLAF rebounding from the setbacks it experienced earlier in the year, but in such a manner as to make AT28 surmise that pacification had the upper-hand. “Despite increased assassinations, taxation, and general harassment by VC forces during the month, pacification activities proceeded at a steady pace,” began AT28’s monthly province report for August.⁵¹⁹ AT28 downplayed the all critical indicator of Communist plans to defeat pacification at the hamlet level. A reversion to low-intensity warfare suggested that the PLAF intended to continue to challenge pacification, albeit in a manner that short-term data could not reveal. Unsurprisingly, the PLAF’s shift towards small unit actions created a false sense of Communist weakness.

Events in September compounded those of August. Regardless of signs of the enemy’s quick and growing resurgence, the correlation between PLAF losses and weakened enemy combat capability continued as truth. AT28 perceived the enemy’s reversion to unconventional warfare as evidence of the PLAF having little negative influence on pacification. In September, “an increase in highway and railway minings was noted, primarily in Tuy An and Tuy Hoa Districts.”⁵²⁰ Yet because these PLAF

⁵¹⁹ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 31 August 1968,” p.1, CMH.

⁵²⁰ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 30 September 1968,” p.1, CMH.

activities did not seriously disrupt lines of communication in the province, AT28 remained largely unconcerned. Ironically, the same province report later revealed that,

Although enemy activity was primarily confined except for one multi-company size attack against elements of the 47th (ARVN) Regiment, to stand-off mortar attacks and small scale contacts with RD teams and PF platoons, the majority of enemy-initiated contacts has been in hamlets located well inside the perimeters of what are considered to be secure areas. The objective of these enemy attacks appears to be to undermine confidence in the ability of the GVN to provide adequate security in pacified areas. An increase in assassinations and terrorist activities was noticed concurrently with the increase in enemy attacks into secure areas.⁵²¹

The report also speculated that the PLAF would continue embarrassing the Saigon government via symbolic strikes. “Reliable intelligence indicated that the primary targets for enemy attack during October will be Tuy An and Tuy Hoa District Headquarters and hamlets located close to Tuy Hoa City,” AT28 cautioned.⁵²² Moreover, “The ultimate objective of enemy forces remains population control of key areas, including Tuy Hoa City. An equally important enemy objective during October will be the control of the September-October rice harvest in Tuy Hoa, Tuy An, and Hieu Xuong Districts.”⁵²³ Even with mounting evidence, unbeknownst to AT28, the PLAF’s effort to inhibit GVN pacification remained largely unaffected by the Tet Offensive.

October, too, displayed omens of future pacification troubles. Unhindered buildup of Communist forces both demonstrated a robust enemy and the mounting inability of the Allies to effectively counter such a threat. The monthly province report for October disclosed, that,

⁵²¹ Ibid., 1-2.

⁵²² Ibid., 2.

⁵²³ Ibid.

Intelligence reports, however, continue to indicate an increased enemy buildup in the VC controlled mountain regions of the Province. The return of one US and one ARVN Battalion to the Provincial forces made it possible to conduct several large scale offensives into western areas of Tuy Hoa and Tuy An Districts in addition to protecting the bountiful rice harvest. These operations have served to keep the enemy off balance, although producing no concrete results.⁵²⁴

Worse yet, “Reliable intelligence indicates that the enemy infiltration groups are still moving into Phu Yen Province, but are remaining in the relative security of the mountains of western Tuy An and northeastern Son Hoa Districts. Indications are that the enemy’s primary concern will be to continue gathering rice and taxes from people in GVN controlled areas and to continue small unit harassment.”⁵²⁵ Despite the use of “but,” the enemy’s avenues of concentration revealed that not all was well in Phu Yen. The remote tracts of the province existed as self-sustaining communities for PAVN and PLAF troops. Which, relatedly, meant the Tet Offensive had not dramatically improved the GVN’s position in the province.

Signs of a revived PLAF at best went unnoticed, or at worst downplayed, by the higher echelons of American leadership. CORDS equated the unprecedented enemy losses as indication of the PLAF’s inability to effectively counter high tempo pacification. In face of the perceived weakening of PLAF power after the Tet Offensive, American authorities sensed an opportunity to rapidly expand GVN control. For that reason, CORDS devised the Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC). As envisaged by CORDS, the APC offered the GVN a means of simultaneously filling the political void at the hamlet level across many hamlets. That signified a major break from the previous

⁵²⁴ II Corps MACCORDS Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 31 October 1968,” p.1, CMH.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 2.

approach towards pacification that featured the gradual spreading of GVN control from the cities into the countryside, or “oil spot” technique; a process championed by the French and now RVN President Nguyen Van Thieu. Since the APC called for the quick placement of thousands of hamlets under Saigon’s banner, Thieu expressed concern over the viability of such an audacious program. ARVN allayed fears of the strain such a program would place on South Vietnamese RD cadre and security forces, perceiving itself as having sufficient assets to back the APC.⁵²⁶ Thus Saigon reluctantly adopted the APC, or *Le Loi* as it was called in South Vietnamese circles, with the initiative commencing on 1 November 1968. In doing so, CORDS authorities expected the APC to elevate the rankings of at least 1,000 hamlets all across the Republic of Vietnam to relatively secure status by the end of January 1969.⁵²⁷ Specifically for Phu Yen, CORDS authorities designated an initial total of 29 Target Hamlets for the APC, with AT28 noting “Increased physical security has been accomplished in 22 of the 29 Target Hamlets.”⁵²⁸ Thus Leaty commented that, “While it is still too early to evaluate the degree of successes or failures of the APC in Phu Yen, the program has already produced some concrete results.”⁵²⁹ In Phu Yen, the APC began in earnest and certainly placed an even greater strain on security.

⁵²⁶ Hunt, 156-7.

⁵²⁷ Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 150.

⁵²⁸ II Corps MACCORDS, Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 30 November 1968,” p.1, CMH; Advisory Team 28, Province Report, “Monthly Province Report for Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 30 December 1968,” p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 1 / Folder: 101-07 Phu Yen, NARA II.

⁵²⁹ II Corps MACCORDS, Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 30 November 1968,” p.1, CMH.

With the APC very much in its infancy, the rapid nature inherent to the initiative assured a PLAF response. What that response could entail went unaccounted for by American planners. “As you may have heard, I have left ‘my bed of roses’ at the Embassy for a ‘nest of thorns’ in the Pacification business at MACV,” George C. Jacobson, now with CORDS, began his letter to Edward G. Lansdale.⁵³⁰ One of the architects of the APC, Jacobson recounted the start of the program, noting,

we moved out fast and far, and the 1969 Pacification Plan envisages more of the same. I don’t pretend to know what the VC reaction will be, but it is all but certain that they must react in some way. The crux of the problem in my opinion is what our response will be to that VC reaction if and when it occurs. If we permit ourselves another ‘barbed-wire complex’, e.g. a totally defensive attitude, the psychological impact worldwide will be much the same as Tet 1968.⁵³¹

With all 29 Target Hamlets in Phu Yen experiencing physical security by the end of December, evidence suggested that the APC worked. Yet like the caution expressed by Jacobson, so too did Leaty note that “Some evidence of political maneuvering on part of the NLF has been evident during the month. The low level overt military activity against APC hamlets has caused some concern that this political activity may be having some success.”⁵³² “Propaganda in support of APC has remained inadequate,” which compounded the nascent reaction of the NLF to the APC.⁵³³ Leaty highlighted the better cooperation of GVN agencies in Phu Yen as evidence of the APC’s contribution to pacification.⁵³⁴ Improved GVN synergy, however, did not mean the South Vietnamese

⁵³⁰ George C. Jacobson to Edward G. Lansdale, 11 February 1969, p.1, Folder: Vietnamese Conflict, Pacification and land reform / General, 1964-1969, Box 23, Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, HIA.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² II Corps MACCORDS, Provincial Reports, “Phu Yen Province, Period Ending 30 November 1968,” p.1, CMH.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

were ready for increased security strain brought forth by the APC. Moreover, the PLAF response loomed on the horizon.

Jacobson's words, as well as those of Leaty, on the possible Communist response to the APC proved prophetic. The PLAF did react and, in the case of Phu Yen, a "defensive attitude" took hold with both the local GVN and, later, the U.S. advisory mission. For the APC, the concept of quickly planting the RVN flag in contested villages outpaced the ability of the South Vietnamese and the Allies to defend large tracks of new territory. Both these symptoms seriously jeopardized pacification for the remainder of the war. Yet for the months immediately following the failed final Communist thrust into Tuy Hoa City, the effect of the Tet Offensive appeared temporary.

Although the 1968 Tet Offensive resulted in a colossal military failure on part of Hanoi all across the Republic of Vietnam, it did not assist Saigon's long-term pacification of the countryside. On the contrary, as in the case of Phu Yen, the damage caused by the Tet Offensive set pacification back months and created problems that fatally undermined the GVN's control of the province. The APC, too, did not remedy the ills now firmly embedded in the pacification program in Phu Yen. Instead, the start of the APC marked a negative change in Phu Yen that brought forth far more perils than those unleashed by the Tet Offensive. Indeed, the union of Vietnamization and the APC exacerbated the security issues already noted in prior months by AT28 documentation.

A month into the APC and American and South Vietnamese forces found further evidence of enemy activity in the Tuy Hoa Valley. With Operation Bolling still underway, and as the end of 1968 loomed on the horizon, D/16th Armor and various RF companies spent much of December patrolling near An Nghiep hamlet near the western

mountains that marked the end of the Tuy Hoa Valley.⁵³⁵ Throughout the month, these Allied forces encountered traces of the enemy in the valley. In the mountains, American and South Vietnamese troops located and swept some of the caves. In one instance, they found only “much blood was around the entrance.”⁵³⁶ On 12 December, D/16th Armor identified eight PLAF, calling in helicopter gunships which “Fired up area around perimeter at 1945 RF’s will sweep area using illumination.”⁵³⁷ The following day, 13 December, D/16th Armor uncovered a company-sized enemy base camp, yet made no physical contact with the enemy. Indeed, the PLAF maintained its avoidance of contact with Allied forces. When D/16th Armor called in artillery strikes against a group of PLAF members on 17 December, the “Enemy moved into mountains.”⁵³⁸ Two days later, “1st platoon and RF’s made contact” with the PLAF, resulting in two enemy dead.⁵³⁹ The unravelling of pacification between 1969 and 1970 would come from those mountains.

Conclusion

Conventional warfare and pacification remained wedded into the 1967 and 1968 period. Yet by the close of 1967, conventional warfare had not transformed Phu Yen into a secure province. Although American officials correlated IFFV’s operations with pacification advancement, Allied maneuver battalions only furthered province security so long as those operations continued. Pacification in Phu Yen made Tuy Hoa City a GVN island awash in a sea of contested space. While Tuy Hoa City remained a GVN city,

⁵³⁵ “Quarterly Historical Report,” October - December 1968, Company D, 16th Armor, 173d Airborne Brigade, p. 3, RG 472 / A1 1647 / Box 2, NARA II.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

despite multiple efforts by PAVN and PLAF units to rectify that reality, the encompassing Tuy Hoa Valley remained un-pacified. As demonstrated by the Tet Offensive, Allied forays into the Tuy Hoa Valley did not prevent the use of that space by Communist forces. Moreover, the Tet Offensive marked the high-tide of conventional warfare in Phu Yen. After 1968, the war in the province reverted from one of offensive-spirited maneuver battalions to a low-intensity struggle that dogged the advancement of pacification.

With the close of 1968, doubts remained as to the extent, and pace, of pacification. Considering the damages caused by the Tet Offensive, and the enemy's ability to mount such an action, all the perceived gains of preceding years proved less significant. The perceived punishment inflicted upon the enemy by American maneuver battalions, proved largely overstated. Indeed, the efforts of IFFV to build upon the gains of 1966 in 1967 and 1968 amounted only to reinforcing Saigon's position in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Two significant themes emerged during the 1967-1968 period. One, that conventional forces were correctly seen by American authorities as enmeshed in pacification. Two, that despite playing such a vital role, maneuver battalions never remained in Phu Yen long enough as to consistently advance security.

CHAPTER V – THE SPECTRE OF 1954-55, 1969-1970

Introduction

“The Vietcong have reappeared with a vengeance in central Vietnam’s Phu Yen Province,” Robert G. Kaiser informed readers of *The Washington Post*.⁵⁴⁰ In his 18 March 1970 article, the journalist added “The Communist sudden revival has been simple, inexpensive and dramatic. Some Americans here think they may be experimenting with a new form of protracted war in Phu Yen.”⁵⁴¹ The 1969 to 1970 period marked the critical time for pacification in Phu Yen. What Kaiser wrote of was the apogee of the war in Phu Yen; a climax of pacification and the PLAF response to Vietnamization.

Conventional armies remained as entwined with pacification between 1969 and 1970 as they did in years prior. This two-year period included the apogee of U.S. Army ground forces at MACV’s disposal and intensified efforts to spread GVN authority. The Nixon Administration’s efforts to disengage from the war in Vietnam took hold in 1969 with Vietnamization. As to preserve American credibility while extricating the nation from the grossly unpopular war, the rapid drawdown of American combat units, or Vietnamization, entailed shifting increasingly more security responsibilities upon South Vietnamese shoulders.⁵⁴² Vietnamization, together with its subordinate Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC), occurred at a time when the PLAF seemed at its weakest.

⁵⁴⁰ Robert G. Kaiser, “New VC Tactics Turn Optimism to Bitterness in Phuyen,” *The Washington Post*, 18 March 1970, A14.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2004, 2008), 15-20; Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010, 2012), 244, 276-7.

Nevertheless, stepped-up rural development intensified the need for quality security forces during a time of decreasing American ground forces.

Together, Vietnamization and the APC processes placed a facade over the continued back and forth struggle between belligerents in Phu Yen Province in the name of Allied progress. The need to shift the burden of war onto the South Vietnamese military and security forces, or Vietnamization, existed as a top priority for MACV during this stage of the war. The APC provided a method to keep pacification on par with the rapid drawdown of U.S. Army participation in the ground war. The quick placement of contested hamlets under the banner of the GVN benefited public relations, as it made National Liberation Front activity in South Vietnam appear as little more than nuisance.

Between 1969 and 1970, Vietnamization and the APC did not advance pacification in Phu Yen. The three layers of Allied defense—U.S. Army operations, ARVN and ROKA operations, and RF/PF patrols—protecting the strategic Tuy Hoa City remained in place. Yet I Field Force Vietnam's (IFFV) contribution dwindled dramatically as IFFV's attention shifted towards Binh Dinh Province. Compounding IFFV's decreased interest, with the APC, these layers expanded to encompass more hamlets, ones ceded to GVN influence after the setbacks endured by PAVN and PLAF during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Yet the enemy remained anything but broken, as demonstrated by its penetration of these layers with great frequency as it challenged the APC via low intensity warfare. As the struggle for individual hamlets continued into 1970, widespread instances of abductions, taxation, and ambushes by the PLAF challenged the spread and quality of the APC.

Following the planned change in MACV leadership and the window of opportunity afforded by the failed Communist Tet Offensive, General Creighton Abrams encouraged a rejuvenated pacification effort. Naturally, MACV amplified its attention on pacification, providing more military assets to revolutionary development. Conventional forces played a role in this process with an explicit focus on holding and clearing land within their areas of operation. Speaking at the Sixty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Robert W. Komer, now a RAND consultant and no longer head of CORDS, noted that military forces provided “sustained territorial security,” which was the “indispensable first stage of pacification.” He added that previous efforts to pacify the countryside had suffered from the absence of “adequate security resources.”⁵⁴³ Across much of South Vietnam, the 1968 Tet Offensive resulted in the widespread depletion of PLAF ranks. Consequently, Allied forces pushed the Communist forces out of many hamlets they once controlled.

Generally, Hanoi’s forces suffered tremendous personnel losses during the Tet Offensive. The failed Communist bid to cause a widespread insurrection in the Republic of Vietnam during the 1968 Tet Offensive left many PLAF forces shattered. Such a reality held true in Phu Yen, where the aforementioned offensive had depleted the PLAF and PAVN of valuable frontline troops. Overt maneuvers by Communist forces waned after Tet as the remnants of the PLAF main forces and PAVN units retreated back to their jungle strongholds in the mountains overlooking Tuy Hoa Valley. Back in their base

⁵⁴³ Robert W. Komer, *Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1970), 5. Available at: <http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/papers/2008/P4443.pdf>.

areas, the Communists reverted to the first stage of revolutionary warfare and convalesced. Nevertheless, they maintained the ability to project power, albeit at lower levels than before. Although numerically weakened, PAVN and PLAF units in Phu Yen retained enough personnel to execute small unit level incursions into areas nominally under the GVN flag.

As the APC entered its first full year, American authorities placed considerable pressure on signs of fast progress. The APC in Phu Yen entailed CORDS authorities tasking Advisory Team 28 (AT28) and the provincial government with improving the rankings of a total of 29 hamlets for January.⁵⁴⁴ Yet the APC gains were noticeably slow in Phu Yen as the initiative initially netted more concern than safe hamlets as the province failed to meet the APC goals set for the end of January. As the new year began, local GVN officials were fixated on keeping military and civilian personnel on alert during Tet celebrations as well as preparing for upcoming elections. These factors contributed to the slow collection and dissemination of information pertinent to the APC. Despite South Vietnamese authorities giving the 29 target hamlets of phase one the HES ranking of “C,” or relatively secure status, AT28 speculated conditions were worse. Rather, because of “incidents or elements of adversity,” some of the 29 target hamlets had not met all the strict criteria to achieve “C” ratings.⁵⁴⁵ By the end of February, 17 target hamlets achieved relatively secure status. This brought the total of “C” rated hamlets to 27. Seemingly good progress, these results nonetheless placed Phu Yen behind the expectations of American civilian and military authorities in the RVN. CORDS head

⁵⁴⁴ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 January 1969, Phu Yen (1969 - Feb 1970), p.1, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH).

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

William E. Colby, I Field Force Vietnam commander General William R. Peers, and CORDS deputy James Megellas visited Phu Yen to encourage better APC results.⁵⁴⁶

Province level GVN secrecy created frustration amongst CORDS advisory personnel early on in 1969. Colonel Nguyen Ba, the GVN Province Chief for Phu Yen, dismissed and then had his most able district chief, Captain Be, arrested for exceeding his powers. Captain Be had overseen Tuy An for three years, transforming the district from “solidly red” to a place “more than 70% relatively secure.”⁵⁴⁷ AT28 perceived him as having effectively suppressed VCI in the district. The loss of Be, feared AT28, might mean a reversal of fortunes in Tuy An District. As a result, APC commenced with an inauspicious start in Phu Yen.

Years of fighting in the province’s most populous region, the Tuy Hoa Valley, had forced thousands of peasants out of their villages and into refugee camps closer to Tuy Hoa City. Thanks in part to the 1968 Tet Offensive, the refugee situation remained unresolved as resettlement initiatives progressed slowly. As of 28 February, James B. Engle, Phu Yen PSA, estimated that 14,000 to 14,500 displaced persons had “voluntarily resettled themselves.” That number, noted Engle, included just a few registered refugees. The implication being that people were returning to their communities on their own accord.⁵⁴⁸

What encouraged refugees to return were the efforts of conventional forces to elevate the security conditions of the APC hamlets. In advancing target hamlets, Allied

⁵⁴⁶ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 28 February 1969, p.1, CMH.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 6-7.

soldiers made these communities safer for returnees. Operations of the 173d Airborne Brigade both caused and helped defuse Phu Yen's refugee problem. Although designed to foster an atmosphere of safety in target the APC hamlets, ongoing efforts by the U.S. Army to engage PAVN and PLAF cells caused many refugees to remain in the safer areas near Tuy Hoa City. Yet, operations conducted by the 173d Airborne Brigade permitted the return of civilians to the APC hamlets. Conventional forces pushed Communist infiltrators away from contested villages, thereby improving local security conditions. Doing so made Allied units integral to the long-term goal of extending GVN control beyond Tuy Hoa City.

Indeed, when in concert together, proactive Allied units proved valuable to pacification. The goal of elevating target hamlets to relatively secure status meant these communities were predominately in the hands of the GVN, yet not completely removed from Communist interference. Consequently, conventional forces played a critical role in population security. Particularly, operations by conventional forces greatly increased security in Tuy Hoa Valley. Engle argued that, "The continuous operations of the US 173d Brigade, the 47th ARVN and the 26th and 28th ROKA Regiments against enemy forces in the mountains continue to be a major factor in the progress of pacification here."⁵⁴⁹ Indeed, as American, South Korean, and South Vietnamese troops maintained the offensive and pressed Communist forces close to their base areas, HES rankings gradually improved for the APC target hamlets. The creation of the physical space by the

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 1.

aforementioned Allied units proved essential for the GVN and CORDS to begin the rehabilitation of target hamlets.⁵⁵⁰ Engle relayed this point when he wrote,

Since I attribute major credit for the great recent improvement in Phu Yen to the success of spoiling operations against enemy main and local force units in the mountains (thus keeping them out of the populated areas), I would have to revise my estimate downward if (1) the number of US, ROK, and ARVN forces in Phu Yen were reduced, or if (2) these forces were kept defensively in the valleys with the main mission of intercepting enemy squads en route to hamlets, rather than attacking enemy base areas.⁵⁵¹

What Engle spoke of were three overlapping Allied operations in enemy Base Area 236 in the mountainous area overlooking the Tuy Hoa Valley.

IFFV's operations retained a pivotal role in the future of pacification in Phu Yen. All four operations—Bolling, Wainwright, Darby March I, and Darby March II—helped expand rural development and further pacification in the districts of Tuy An and Tuy Hoa. Similarities abounded, as all three operations focused on security enhancement in the same the area of operations. As in years prior, the operations of 1966 through 1969 concentrated on protecting the rice harvest and expanding GVN influence at the expense of that of the National Liberation Front (NLF), while destroying enemy units. The first of these operations, Bolling, began on 19 September 1967 and terminated on 31 January 1969. With a focus on rice security, Operation Bolling demonstrated continuity in how IFFV sought to weaken enemy capabilities in 1969 the same way they had in 1966. The multiyear duration of AO Bolling alone showed how little the war had changed over time. Over the course of the operation, the 1st Cavalry Division and the 173d Airborne

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. 2.

Brigade participated in reconnaissance in force and search and destroy maneuvers against enemy units.

Tantamount to prolonged search and destroy operations, the operations of IFFV in Phu Yen after 1968 remained fixated on engaging enemy forces. Just as the operations of 1966 and 1967 sought to distance the PLAF and PAVN from the South Vietnamese population, so did the operations of 1969 and 1970. As described by Major Robert A. Doughty in his study of U.S. Army doctrine, MACV adopted new phraseology in April 1968. Connections to aimless pursuit of evasive enemy units and wanton destruction, caused MACV to replace search and destroy with terms not yet tainted by years of war.⁵⁵² Enter clear and search, which denoted a closer association between military operations and pacification. On paper, search and destroy entailed the annihilation of PLAF units, while clear and search focused more so on keeping the enemy off balance. Additionally, clear and search amounted to mopping-up actions against the remnants of larger enemy units bloodied by search and destroy.⁵⁵³ Heightened attention on pacification meant clear and search fell more in line with the direction of the war under Abrams. The nuances are important insofar as military perceptions of pacification, but one should not assume the war in Phu Yen suddenly became more dedicated to pacification. In practice, both approaches involved U.S. Army soldiers seeking battle with their PAVN and PLAF foes with time restraints still in place. Indeed, events on the ground indicated that, although new phraseology entered MACV's lexicon, the war in 1969 remained closely similar to that of 1966.

⁵⁵² Robert A. Doughty, *The Evolution of US Army Tactical Doctrine, 1946-76* (Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College; Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 1979), 31.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 32.

Insofar as providing the muscle required to advance the Accelerated Pacification Campaign, conventional forces played a critical role. February began with elements of IFFV mounting operations to push the enemy away from areas targeted by the APC in former AO Bolling. Now designated as AO Dan Phu/Wainwright, the 173d Airborne Brigade's 4th Battalion, 503d Infantry and D Company 16th Armor operated in this area to the northwest of Tuy Hoa City to enhance area security as part of Operation Dan Phu/Wainwright. Explicitly, MACV designated these American units "to support the PHU YEN Province chiefs accelerated Pacification Program objectives and to provide Phu Yen Province with a combat element to be utilized as a rapid reaction force."⁵⁵⁴ This entailed "locating and destroying enemy forces in the area of operations."⁵⁵⁵ American paratroopers and tankers provided security for U.S. Army's 577th Engineer Battalion as the engineers cleared highway QL 7B from Tuy Hoa City to Cheo Reo in Phu Bon Province. The 4/503d left the AO temporarily to conduct operations elsewhere, but returned to Wainwright on 22 January. Upon their return, the paratroopers further advanced pacification by conducting reconnaissance in force and HAWK team patrols into contested areas west of Dong Tre.⁵⁵⁶ Such activity marked the continuation of prolonged IFFV operations, beginning in 1966 with Operation Jefferson, thus insuring Tuy Hoa District stayed at the forefront of Allied military activity.

⁵⁵⁴ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February 1969 - 30 April 1969), p.22, Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC). Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/506708.pdf>>. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

American paratroopers fought in an area of operations that encompassed a large swath of Phu Yen. The mountainous areas of Dong Xuan, Son Ha, Tuy An, and Tuy Hoa fell under AO Dan Phu/Wainwright.⁵⁵⁷ At stake in AO Dan Phu/Wainwright were an estimated 150,000 inhabitants. Although only about 5,000 people lived under People's Liberation Armed Forces control, approximately 13,000 resided in contested hamlets.⁵⁵⁸ In 1969, Allied and Communist forces challenged one another directly for control of those 13,000 civilians, and indirectly for the other 137,000 inhabitants.

Improved security status of target hamlets existed as the first major goal of the APC in Phu Yen. Accordingly, conventional forces operated in and around target hamlets as a physical means of pushing back PLAF influence. One such instance occurred at An Nghiep hamlet in the southwest corner of Tuy Hoa District. Situated towards the edge of the Tuy Hoa Valley, An Nghiep sat in contested country. As a hamlet targeted by the APC, An Nghiep became a focal point of activity as D/16th Armor conducted patrols alongside RF/PF companies.⁵⁵⁹ These Allied units sought confrontation with the enemy's sizable presence in the area of operations. IFFV suspected that Nong Traung 5, also known as the 5th PAVN Division, directed PAVN and PLAF units in Phu Yen. Nong Traung 5 functioned as PAVN's subregion forward headquarters in MR5.⁵⁶⁰ Under this headquarters division, the K 91st Sapper Company, DK 7 Local Force Company, DK 9

⁵⁵⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 28 February 1969, p.3, CMH.

⁵⁵⁸ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February 1969 - 30 April 1969), p. 22, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/506708.pdf>>.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Erik Villard, Untitled (n.p.: Washington D.C.), 16.

Local Force Company, 6th Battalion 95th PAVN Regiment, 30th Main Force Battalion, and 85th Local Force Battalion all operated in AO Dan Phu/Wainwright.⁵⁶¹

Nong Traung 5's forces moving in and out of AO Dan Phu/Wainwright posed a direct threat to pacification. Albeit weakened from long supply lines that slowly provided new equipment and personnel, Nong Traung 5 had sufficient resources to derail the expansion of Allied pacification efforts. The headquarters of the 173d Airborne Brigade surmised that the units under Nong Traung 5 could undermine pacification gains through the use of sapper teams to harass GVN assets. The intelligence acquired by the 173d Airborne Brigade echoed feelings of the 1968 Tet Offensive, in that enemy forces were "capable of attacking population centers and allied installations in multi-battalion strength, utilizing the 4th 5th and 6th Bn, 95th NVA Regiment and the 85th LF Bn. Principal targets are TUY HOA City District Headquarters and allied airfields."⁵⁶² The 95th PAVN Regiment posed a threat simply because Allied intelligence had yet to locate the force.

Communist attacks posed a grave psychological threat to the APC. More specifically, 173d Airborne Brigade headquarters noted the derailment of the population's confidence in the GVN because of PAVN and PLAF raids. As recalled in the operational report,

The enemy retains his ability to continue interdiction of communication lines, mining of primary and secondary routes of travel, sabotage operations and small-scale operations against such targets as the bridge at CQ 201351, as this is the primary crossing across the SONG BA River at TUY HOA City. The enemy can also attempt company-sized attacks, reinforced by local forces, on weakly-

⁵⁶¹ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February 1969 - 30 April 1969), p. 6, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/506708.pdf>>.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 10.

defended district headquarters and outposts, as a victory for propaganda means and to harass the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam pacification efforts.⁵⁶³

Physical damage inflicted against GVN infrastructure would pale in comparison to the GVN's loss of credibility amongst the civilians caught between Saigon and Hanoi. The possible exposure of the APC as a paper tiger justified the use of 173d Airborne Brigade elements to seek out and engage elements of Nong Traung 5 and damage them before they could sabotage the APC.

What began as an effort to enhance security for the hamlet quickly turned into two larger operations to weaken the enemy in AO Dan Phu/Wainwright. Operations Darby March I and Darby March II marked a continued Allied effort in enhancing province security outward from Tuy Hoa City. Explicitly, "These operations were in conjunction with pacification programs in Phu Yen Province."⁵⁶⁴ Both operations involved the 4/503 Infantry, yet the ROKA's 26th Regiment participated in only Darby March I. Aside from duration, the major difference between these operations was the involvement of the South Koreans.⁵⁶⁵ Concurrent operations by the ARVN's 47th Regiment replaced those of the ROKA during Darby March II. Together, Darby March I and Darby March II amounted to a concerted Allied effort to keep the pressure on PAVN and PLAF units mauled during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Both Darby March I and Darby March II accentuated MACV's aim to more easily connect the destruction of the enemy with countryside development. In that vein, clear

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

and hold operations as well as hunter-killer teams, called Hawks, played a role in both operations. Typically squad sized, Hawks were tailored to more easily surprise and harass “small enemy squads, couriers, liaison teams, and logistical carrying parties” via night ambushes.⁵⁶⁶ Essentially, Hawks had the capability to battle local force People’s Liberation Armed Forces. Inasmuch as Hawks demonstrated a new approach to engaging their Communist opponents, their purpose remained that of American units in previous years, the destruction of the enemy. Specialization aside, these teams were still part of a conventional force, the 173d Airborne Brigade. Artillery and helicopter gunships kept HAWKS under the protection of the quintessential MACV response; firepower.

Using search and clear to back the APC, Darby March I commenced on 1 February and terminated 8 February 1969. Hawk teams and companies the 173d Airborne Brigade conducted activities around Tuy Hoa City’s environs. Concurrently, D/16th Armor focused its attention on the areas encompassing Tuy Hoa North Airfield.⁵⁶⁷ As noted in the Lessons Learned Report, “This operation was based upon maximum utilization of intelligence sources and was in support of the Phu Yen Province Pacification Program.”⁵⁶⁸ Actually, both Darby March operations “were in conjunction with pacification programs in Phu Yen Province.”⁵⁶⁹ Contact between the 4/503d and its PAVN and PLAF foes was light during Darby March I, with six relatively brief

⁵⁶⁶ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February 1969 - 30 April 1969), p. 32, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/506708.pdf>>; Shelby L. Stanton, *Rise and Fall of an American Army: U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), 326.

⁵⁶⁷ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February 1969 - 30 April 1969), p. 15, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/506708.pdf>>.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 23.

engagements.⁵⁷⁰ Albeit limited, contact with the enemy indicated the need for further efforts to battle the enemy. Therefore, the follow-up operation, Darby March II, began immediately on the heels of Darby March I.

Encounters with the enemy proved more numerous during Darby March II. The majority of engagements took the form of brief exchanges of gunfire between elements of the 4/503d and unspecified PAVN and PLAF units. American firepower played a role reminiscent of that provided in operations during Westmoreland's tenure as MACV head, with artillery and helicopter gunships providing the 4/503d's companies and Hawk teams with an added layer of protection. Over the course of Darby March II, companies of the 4/503d made fifteen contacts with the enemy. Most of the contacts typically involved a single company or Hawk team engaging with a squad-sized enemy force. That said, on a few occasions larger battles erupted as the Americans brought heavy firepower to bear. The first such instance occurred on 16 February at 1635 hours, as artillery and helicopter gunships supported D Company 8km west of Tuy Hoa City. Similarly, on 21 February at 1700 hours, an estimated ten to twelve enemy soldiers fired upon Hawk 441. Artillery and helicopter gunships provided fire support for the Hawk team, and D Company entered the engagement. In a later firefight on 25 February at 1430 hours, A Company encountered a well prepared foe. A 173d Airborne Operations Report recalled that "17km WNW of Tuy Hoa," a "well fortified" unspecified enemy force of an undetermined size engaged A Company from a distance of 20 meters.⁵⁷¹ As A Company withdrew to better call-in artillery support, B Company moved in to act as a blocking force. Helicopter

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 24.

gunships also moved in to engage the enemy. At 1740 hours contact broke, leaving 7 KIAs and 10 WIAs in A Company and an unknown number of enemy casualties.⁵⁷²

By the time Darby March II terminated on 3 March 1969, the small Allied units backed by heavy firepower had inflicted minor casualties amongst PAVN and PLAF ranks. Records indicate that U.S. forces claimed 25 enemy kills, the capturing of 14 small arms, and a small assortment of other equipment. The biggest gain of the operation came with American forces capturing a total of 1.5 tons of rice.⁵⁷³ Thus the operation did rob the enemy of much needed food and kept the enemy off balance. AT28 viewed the operations favorably, reporting that the actions of Allied units “added greatly to the overall security situation by striking at the enemy’s main forces and operating bases (6th Battalion of 95th NVA Division and the 85th Local Force Battalion).”⁵⁷⁴ Together, Bolling and the Darby March operations disrupted enemy maneuvers in AO Dan Phu/Wainwright. Yet the operations of Allied forces did not prevent future incursions of PLAF squads into populated areas of the province.

When inaugurating the APC, CORDS authorities anticipated rapid gains across all of the RVN. Therefore, as pacification gains in Phu Yen failed to meet the prescribed achievements, higher echelons of CORDS and the GVN mandated revised the APC goals for the province. By the end of March, Phu Yen’s officials countered growing concern over sluggish APC results with revision, reducing the APC plan from three to two phases. The revised plan targeted 44 hamlets by 30 June, with another 24 hamlets by September’s

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁷⁴ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 28 February 1969, p.3, CMH.

end. By 31 March, 26 of these hamlets scored a “C” for security conditions, with 27 hamlets receiving an overall “C” status.⁵⁷⁵ All of these gains occurred because the GVN and CORDS spread security forces out to cover all the target hamlets. With plans revised, GVN influence expanded into target hamlets, albeit at the ability of conventional forces to retain the tempo of war.⁵⁷⁶

Yet expansion remained an uneasy task as the enemy challenged the APC. Indeed, enemy resistance exposed the limits of securing as the APC grew. Tuy Hoa District reported that “an increasing enemy effort during the month,” yet nothing of note materialized.⁵⁷⁷ Elsewhere in Phu Yen, however, enemy activity proved more troubling. Son Hoa District experienced, “four sniping incidents resulting in the death of two PF and two CIDG soldiers. A VC squad ambushed five civilians killing one who was a PF soldier acting as intelligence agents. A minor standoff B-40 rocket attack was conducted against the District Headquarters with negative effect.”⁵⁷⁸ Yet the most alarming news entailed PLAF interactions with civilians in the more remote areas of Son Hoa District. “Food collection efforts continue in the outlying Hamlets and intelligence reports indicate the enemy is passing money to selected villagers in an effort to have them buy foodstuffs for them. The enemy has also offered to give receipts for cattle claiming they are redeemable after they win the war,” AT28’s Son Hoa District team noted.⁵⁷⁹ In Dong Xuan District, PLAF conducted “an unsuccessful attack against the Subsector Compound

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 March 1969, Incl 1, Folder: Province Reports: Phu Yen (1969 - Feb 1970), CMH.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., Incl 2.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

on 15 March.”⁵⁸⁰ In the same district, PLAF local forces successfully mined the National Railroad on 15 and 27 March.⁵⁸¹ “Enemy initiated activity has increased considerably during the month as indicated by 13 friendly KIA and 20 WIA with only one VC soldier killed,” in Tuy An District. Moreover, in the aforementioned district, “The VC have increased their normal pattern of harassing activity including booby traps, mining, sniping and small scale infiltrations.”⁵⁸²

IFFV’s support of pacification continued after Darby March II. On 14 April 1969, the 173d detached the D/16th Armor, with the unit becoming the Tuy Hoa Provisional Tank Company. While the 503d assisted pacification efforts outside of Phu Yen, D/16th Armor remained in AO Dan Phu/Wainwright. D/16th Armor operated out of An Nghiep in concert with the 4/47th ARVN Regiment to advance pacification in the province. Together, the American and South Vietnamese soldiers focused on improving the security conditions of Nui Mieu and Phu Sen hamlets.⁵⁸³ In actions after Darby March II in late March and much of April, D/16th Armor rarely found itself in direct combat with Communist forces. Instead, mining incidents proved the typical interaction between the Americans and their foes. These enemy harassment operations resulted in one deadly mining incident. On 26 April at 1850 hours, an American M113 armored personal carrier detonated a mine, causing three U.S. fatalities. The blast hurtled the ARVN soldiers riding atop the M113 off the vehicle and onto another mine. The detonation of that mine

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., Incl 3.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Ibid., Incl 5.

⁵⁸³ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters 173d Airborne Brigade, sub: Operational Report Lessons Learned (1 February 1969 - 30 April 1969), p. 25, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/506708.pdf>>.

wounded nine ARVN soldiers. A second M113 struck a mine as it attempted to assist the first armored personnel carrier, resulting in another five ARVN wounded.⁵⁸⁴ Indeed, PLAF mines accounted for more loss of life and equipment damage than the Darby March operations combined.

Maneuvers by conventional units and territorial forces did not solve all of Phu Yen's problems. Long-term security issues remained, even as Darby March II concluded. IFFV determined that as of 30 April 1969, Communist forces in Phu Yen remained capable of attacking "population centers and Allied installations in reinforced battalion strength."⁵⁸⁵ Additionally, the enemy could launch standoff, terrorist, and sapper attacks against areas purportedly under GVN control. Lastly, the report noted that the enemy had the ability to interdict lines of communication.⁵⁸⁶ AT28 confirmed such suspicions in its monthly province report for May. Accordingly, AT28 acknowledged heightened PAVN and PLAF activity with "the enemy launching his Summer Offensive on the morning of 12 May. During this offensive the enemy succeeded in hitting several locations with attacks by fire, and in making several small ground probes against friendly outposts, all of which were successfully repulsed."⁵⁸⁷ Failure, noted AT28, befell PAVN because "While the enemy has increased his troop level in Phu Yen it would appear from the contacts made and from his lack of ability to mass and coordinate for any large scale offensive that the present replacements are not of the calibre of previous NVA forces."⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁸⁵ Operational Report Lessons Learned, Department of the Army, Headquarters I Field Force Vietnam, sub: Operational Report of Headquarters for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1969, p.5, DTIC. Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=AD0503840>>.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending in 31 May 1969, p.2, CMH.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

Yet the enemy's shortcomings proved short-lived as both PAVN's May Offensive progressed and later in June when the PLAF embarked on its own campaign.

Sufficient safety measures remained fleeting, as substantiated in a monthly province report for June. This report confirmed that, despite a few engagements in Tuy Hoa Valley, the two battalions of the 10th PAVN Regiment actively avoided combat. The report suggested that the PAVN were "training, regrouping and perhaps also deliberately economizing their forces for the time being."⁵⁸⁹ Most strikingly, however, the same report stated that "Enemy strength is believed to be unchanged, or perhaps somewhat greater than a month ago."⁵⁹⁰ Regardless of whether or not PAVN increased its presence in the Tuy Hoa Valley, PAVN maintained sufficient numbers after the 1968 Tet Offensive to present a major hindrance to province security.

Indeed, enemy abductions of civilians undermined any notion of improved security in Phu Yen. In June, PLAF cells abducted 63 South Vietnamese civilians; a massive increase from the five taken in May. While "About 90% of the abductees were returned after less than two days, following indoctrination," AT28 noted, "The principle reason why the enemy manages to spirit these persons out of the hamlets untouched is that witnesses including local officials fear that a tactical response will cause injury or death to the abductees."⁵⁹¹ Although AT28 claimed, "There is still no evidence of a systematic enemy campaign against the 1969 target hamlets," the American advisory mission had the first indicator of an enemy abduction campaign.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁹ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 June 1969, p.2, CMH.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

As the Communist's May Offensive ensnared many Allied units across South Vietnam, it insured conventional warfare remained on the minds of CORDS personnel in Phu Yen. In a report dated 17 May 1969, the Senior Operations Advisor for AT28 in Phu Yen, Major Francis M. Williams, wrote that, due to enemy activity, all U.S. and South Vietnamese personnel were on alert and prepared for attacks by the enemy. Williams stated that "Commanders at all levels have been reminded that this offensive provides an excellent opportunity to engage and defeat possible large enemy forces."⁵⁹³ Compared to the rest of the country, the May Offensive proved relatively subdued. Engle reported, "May was perhaps the best month in the history of pacification in Phu Yen Province."⁵⁹⁴ Adding, "Overall enemy activity was somewhat lower, and friendly forces gave a good account of themselves in the engagements that did take place. In most of the province, security improved noticeably."⁵⁹⁵

On the surface, the APC rapidly spread GVN influence beyond Tuy Hoa City. Each month brought forth new numbers that reflected ever improving security conditions in target hamlet areas. Monthly progress reports for May, June, and July extolled pacification gains and weakening enemy activity. AT28 personnel pointed to rising HES scores and the number of resettled refugees as evidence for pacification success. In the May province report, Engle's cited the return of "several thousand more displaced persons to their homes and plowing their disused ricelands" and "enemy activity was somewhat lower" as indicators of pacification success.⁵⁹⁶ Insofar that 35 of 44 target APC

⁵⁹³ Advisory Team 28, Report, "Response to current enemy activity," RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 283 / Folder: Enemy Activity Reports / AT #28, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II).

⁵⁹⁴ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending in 31 May 1969, p.1, CMH.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 May 1969, p.1, CMH.

hamlets earned “relatively secure status,” improved HES numbers suggested target APC hamlets were meeting prescribed security goals. Add to the improved security scores thousands of peasants returning to such hamlets, Phu Yen’s hinterlands appeared to finally fall under GVN control.

The rapidity with which the APC placed new hamlets under GVN governance raises questions about the permanence of their “secure” status. That the APC incurred measurable gains overlooks the ramifications of the program on Phu Yen’s security forces. The APC never removed the threat posed by PAVN and PLAF, nor was it ever supposed to. Rather, the Accelerated Pacification placed a greater burden on security forces to safeguard more hamlets with the same amount of defense personnel. Moreover, the lack of large scale enemy activity reflected more of a PAVN and PLAF effort to avoid battle than a rolling back of their influence by the APC. As soon as conventional units ended operations, the enemy moved once more into contested areas.

Signs of APC success proved deceptive by June, as small formations of PLAF and PAVN units entered villages in Tuy Hoa Valley. Hereafter the security status of Phu Yen appeared anything but improved. Indeed, a province report for June noted the enemy did not deploy all of the soldiers at its disposal. Rather, “viewed in relation to the size of enemy forces that intelligence indicates to be present in the mountainous base areas, would suggest that quite a substantial proportion are not presently engaged in operations.”⁵⁹⁷ Adding, “the 10th NVA Regiment and other large units are training, regrouping and perhaps also deliberately economizing their forces for the time being.

⁵⁹⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 June 1969, p.2, CMH.

Enemy strength is believed to be unchanged, or perhaps somewhat greater than a month ago.”⁵⁹⁸ Essentially, despite all of the Allied efforts to support pacification had done nothing to improve the province’s long-term security.

By August, AT28 deemed the enemy’s May Offensive a “failure.” “For the first time ever, an enemy offensive achieved practically nothing in Tuy Hoa Valley and Tuy Hoa City, which are always prime objectives. There is still a respectable number of enemy in the extensive mountainous areas of the Province,” AT28 reported.⁵⁹⁹ Allied forces effectively contained the PAVN and PLAF threat. Like in years prior, PAVN and PLAF offensives did not produce a military victory in Phu Yen, yet these forces remained in the province. Moreover, the spontaneous, and often purely political, movements of ARVN battalions in and out of Phu Yen lessened the blow of the failed May Offensive on PAVN and PLAF cells. From its mountain sanctuaries, Communist cells shifted towards small unit actions and the direct targeting of individuals and hamlets.

That Phu Yen’s territorial security depended heavily upon the presence of quality conventional forces is an understatement. Indeed, the presence of Allied units made pacification possible. When operating in the Tuy Hoa Valley, American paratroopers improved security conditions, albeit temporarily. With U.S. Army airborne units frequenting, but never permanently based in, the province, South Vietnamese and South Korean soldiers were a valuable source of stability; especially so since the ARVN and ROKA constituted the second layer of defense around Tuy Hoa City. The ARVN’s 47th Regiment helped instill confidence amongst the population of Tuy Hoa District, the AO

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 August 1969, p.1, CMH.

for the regiment. Still, its effect on the district last only as long as the ARVN troops remained on deployment. The four battalions of the 47th Regiment never stayed on deployment for very long, at times leaving their screening positions in Tuy Hoa Valley after just a few days and without notice to CORDS officials. In September, with ARVN's creation of the 220 Mobile Task Force, II Corps removed two battalions of the 47th Regiment from Phu Yen, both of which were safeguarding APC target hamlets in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Engle noted that the ensuing disruption entailed "leaving vital parts of the valley exposed to the principle enemy forces in Phu Yen."⁶⁰⁰ "There was no adequate time to readjust before a third ARVN battalion was suddenly pulled out of the Valley and airlifted to Phu Bon," Engle added.⁶⁰¹ A solution, noted Engle, emerged in the form of better coordination between II Corps and the Province Chief, wherein the Province Chief maintained operational control of the two remaining battalions in Phu Yen.⁶⁰² Engle reminded readers of his report that, historically, "Pullouts have been sudden, usually causing panic on part of the people living in the remoter areas and temporary shifting of hundreds of homes back toward Tuy Hoa City."⁶⁰³ The mere presence of conventional forces, particularly mobile ones, had a strong physical and psychological effect on pacification. As iterated by Engle, Allied units provided added security as they pushed enemy formation away from hamlets. Conventional units also afforded a psychological victory as CORDS noticed the improved security.

⁶⁰⁰ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending in 30 September 1969, p.1, CMH.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 1, 9.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 9.

Stable security, the major concern of pacification, remained amiss. In November, monsoon rains grounded pacification efforts to a halt, much to the dismay of AT28. “The pace of pacification progress in Phu Yen slowed still further in November,” the monthly progress report began.⁶⁰⁴ “The heavy almost continuous rains not only kept the ROKs from confusing operations in the mountainous enemy base areas...but gave RF/PF commanders a pretext, which the Province and District Chiefs seemed to consider sufficient, to keep under cover at night and not maintain all their ambushes,” the progress report added.⁶⁰⁵ While the poor weather offered an easy excuse for slowed security, AT28 perceived Province Chief Nguyen Ba as the genesis of these problems. For that reason, Engle included the following in the progress report,

But again, as in October, the decisive factor in stalling progress was the euphoria and overconfidence of the Province Chief, who in recent months has been living in an imaginary world. The tempter of the Province and District administrations during November was one of contentment, self-congratulation and relaxation. The leadership coasted the earlier gains, and were reassured by the continued shower of compliments from Saigon and Pleiku, in part the result of false reports of achievement that they themselves sent to higher headquarters.⁶⁰⁶

What AT28 disclosed in this progress report marked the beginning of increased scrutiny of the province administration. By the end of 1970, concerns over the Province Chief proved well founded.

The nadir for security in Phu Yen for 1969 happened in December. AT28 related this in that,

There has been a further slump in Pacification efforts during the month. Pacification at this time of the year when most programs are inactive is practically synonymous with security, which reached a low point just before the holidays as a

⁶⁰⁴ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 November 1969, p.1, CMH.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

result of enemy successes in Tuy An District. The enemy has been quite active in Tuy An District and on the morning of 16 December succeeded in overrunning RF Company 735, causing considerable loss of lives, weapons, and equipment.⁶⁰⁷

Considering the back and forth nature of security in the province, AT28 expressed optimism in the final monthly progress report for the year that security would now naturally trended upwards away from further deterioration. Indeed, “It is felt that the recent reversals in Pacification in Phu Yen are beginning to ‘bottom out.’”⁶⁰⁸ For evidence, the report cited “the worst weather is believed to be over and more offensive operations should be forthcoming,” heightened activity by South Korean and South Vietnamese troops, and a decrease in the theft of oil from the Vung Ro Bay to Phu Hiep pipeline.⁶⁰⁹ Most significantly, “the attitude of Province officials has been considerably sharpened and focused regarding security. They now acknowledge that recent regressions have not been a difference of opinions on HES rankings but rather due to enemy activity. They are presently taking steps to correct the situation.”⁶¹⁰ These developments, argued AT28, permitted the South Vietnamese and their American advisors to concentrate more on the developmental aspects of pacification.⁶¹¹ A change in attention of security assets and those of AT28, however, played into the intention of the PLAF as events in 1970 would demonstrate.

At years end the mood in Phu Yen reflected a war in which the APC seemed to catapult pacification gains. Allied operations near enemy base areas had netted some

⁶⁰⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 December 1969, p.1, CMH.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

gains as the mobile Allied units kept the enemy off balance and, in some cases, away from the APC target hamlets. Understandably, improving HES scores overshadowed concerns accumulated over the course of the year. On the whole, problems in 1969 directly contributed the explosion of troubles that plagued Phu Yen in 1970. Indeed, 1970 marked the toughest year for Allied forces in the province since days of the Viet Minh.

1970

The ups and downs of pacification that dogged Allied efforts in Phu Yen during the 1960s persisted into the 1970s. As much as 1969 unnerved CORDS with indicators of the limits of pacification in Phu Yen, 1970 proved more troubling. Issues of the previous year—particularly enemy incursions into populated areas and their overt challenges to GVN security—amplified throughout 1970, proving that the problems of 1969 were trends and not merely random occurrences. Needing manpower to support operations in the province, Communist teams abducted civilians in record numbers and much to the alarm of CORDS. Indeed, the resurgent PAVN and PLAF ramped-up operations against province security and infrastructure, casting into doubt CORDS’s reported APC gains. As the war regained its intensity in Phu Yen, the Tuy Hoa Valley would once more take center stage.

In an August 1970 RAND piece on the status of pacification across the Republic of Vietnam, Komer asserted that the war had “become largely localized.”⁶¹² For thirty-three provinces, the intensity of the war declined. The big unit war continued in the sparsely inhabited regions of South Vietnam, while PAVN infused PLAF units conducted

⁶¹² Komer, 14.

terrorism in select population areas. For eleven provinces, Phu Yen included, “insurgency-type activity or VC incursions into populated areas” still typified the nature of the conflict.⁶¹³ As a member of this select group of troubled provinces, Phu Yen’s late-war record adds a valuable piece to the pacification puzzle. For Phu Yen, the districts of Tuy Hoa, Song Cau, Dong Xuong, Tuy An, and Hieu Xuong all exhibited evidence of a war that remained noticeable. Events in these districts, particularly Tuy Hoa, raised concerns over the lasting viability of security in the province. By 1970, PLAF activity reached the highest levels post-1968 as the Communists interdicted the inroads made by the GVN into Phu Yen’s villages.

What Komer discussed in his RAND piece, MACV had monitored throughout South Vietnam during the first two weeks of January. “The spectre of 1954-55 has reared its head again in Phu Yen Province,” warned a Strategic Research and Analysis (SRA) Division intelligence report.⁶¹⁴ The NLF sought to use Phu Yen much like their Viet Minh predecessors had by using the province as a nexus of political power in the region. In that vein, NLF activity indicated Communists forces within Phu Yen were rejuvenating. With a long-term focus, the NLF formed the new cadre around “regroupees,” whom it tasked with recruiting Phu Yen’s youth for training in North Vietnam. Additionally, the VCI within Phu Yen had established a “military proselytizing school” in the district of Son Hoa to cultivate the next generation of GVN foes.⁶¹⁵ The

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Report, Intelligence: DIP - Bi-Weekly Summary of VCI Activities - Record of MACV Part 1, 4-17 January 1970, p.8, Folder 0675, Box 0019, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University (TTUVA). Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015800190675>>.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

report warned that Hanoi expected these future cadre to “wear down the ARVN's strength thereby negating the positive successes of the Vietnamization and pacification programs.”⁶¹⁶ Aside from developing new cadre, three PAVN battalions took-up residence in Phu Yen.⁶¹⁷ Now Phu Yen faced local PLAF forces reinforced with PAVN regulars. Most alarmingly, the report claimed the NLF's proselytizing school in Son Hoa District had “58 enemy cadre and candidates,” all of which were “ARVN soldiers, officers, and GVN district and village administrative cadre who have rallied to the VC ranks, some as early as 1963.”⁶¹⁸ Indeed, the province appeared dangerously close to falling into a Communist abyss.

Communist activity in 1969 demonstrated the enemy wanted to restrict GVN control to the province capital, Tuy Hoa City. As the center of governance and trade in the province, Tuy Hoa City served as the GVN's bastion in Phu Yen since regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. Undoubtedly the safest area in all of Phu Yen, the province capital enjoyed a state of peacefulness that eluded the rest of the district. Security conditions in Tuy Hoa City were not representative of the province, or even the district itself. Indeed, the district encompassing the capital reflected a province in which the PLAF maintained its Viet Minh roots. Separated from the city by a highway, a railway, and a river, Tuy Hoa Valley, the scene of vicious battles between American airborne and PAVN forces in 1966, remained a dangerous place well into 1970. Bruce W. Clark, a Deputy District Advisor for Tuy Hoa, substantiated perceptions of Tuy Hoa Valley as a dangerous place.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

Clark recalled, “how secure the valley was at night was anybody’s guess. And if you went far from the town into the woods or the jungle during the day you could be asking for trouble.”⁶¹⁹ Decidedly, incidents concerning Tuy Hoa Valley made pacification in Phu Yen seem anything but complete.

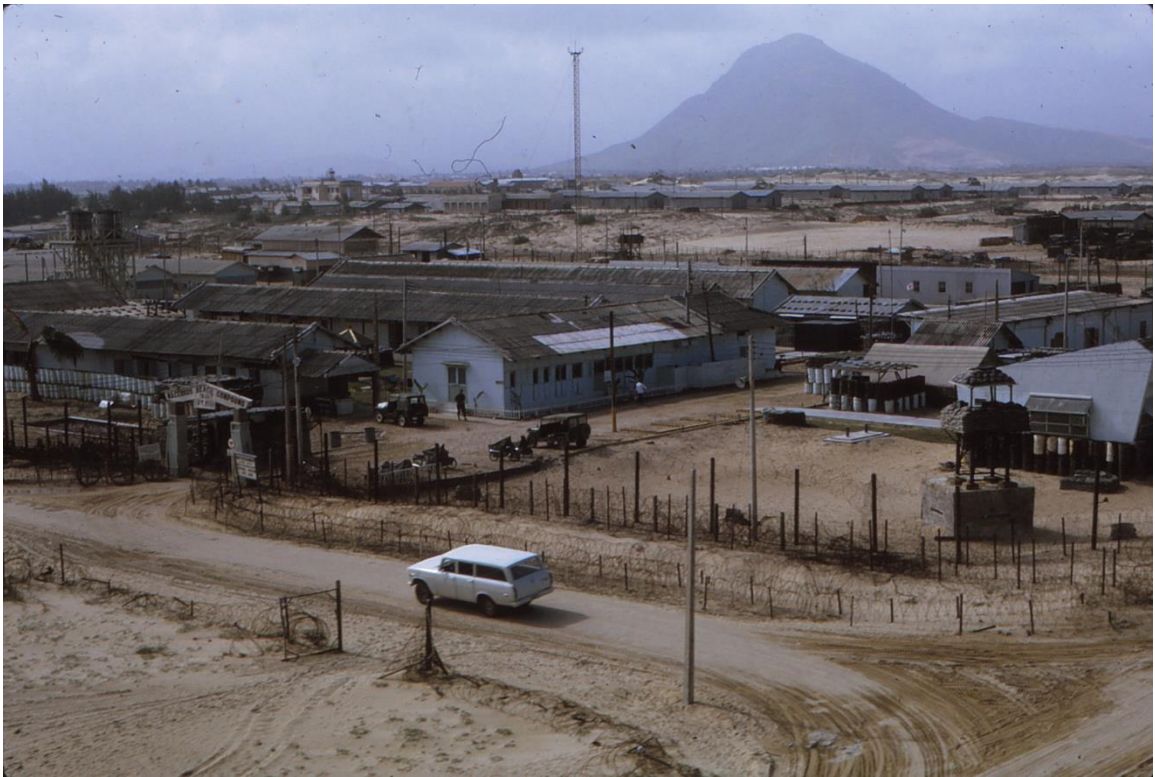


Figure 5. Advisory Team 28 Tuy Hoa City Compound, 1970

Photograph by Steve Dike, used with permission.

Pacification in 1970 began with a murmur in Tuy Hoa District. Indeed, “The new year seems to have started at the same snails pace with which 1969 ended,” began the first district report of the year. While the 1st, 3rd, and 4th battalions of the ARVN’s 47th Regiment patrolled the district, only the PLAF obtained positive results. “Despite the

⁶¹⁹ Bruce W. Clark, interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, June 4, 2002. Available at: <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Clark,%20Bruce%20W.toc.pdf>.

presence of friendly elements, the enemy continue to move throughout Tuy Hoa Valley, indoctrinating and taxing the populous,” wrote Major Eugene E. Fluke, DSA in the same district report.⁶²⁰ What Fluke hit upon was just the beginning of turmoil for his district in year that defined pacification in Phu Yen. Furthermore, calamity also existed outside of Tuy Hoa District. For example, Dong Xuan District experienced a PLAF controlled war. For January, events included minings of the railroad that transited the district and PLAF attempts to collect rice from local farmers.⁶²¹

Security persisted as the main source of concern for Tuy Hoa District throughout 1970. That year, Tet marked a particularly active time period for People’s Liberation Armed Forces local forces in the province. A semi-monthly report furnished by Captain Lewis R. Williams, Tuy Hoa DSA, referred to the security situation as “insubstantial and worm-holed.” Despite prior warning of People’s Liberation Armed Forces movement in the district, local RF/PF forces failed to prevent the PLAF from firing mortars on Allied buildings at North Field. The report indicated that the PLAF dictated the tempo of activity, adding “the security situation in Tuy Hoa District is much more dependent on what the PLAF choose to do or not do—rather than what the local forces can prevent.” Consequently, the report called for the re-evaluation of the district’s hamlets, noting that, “it is clear that many rural people may in fact not live in relative security.”⁶²²

⁶²⁰ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Tuy Hoa District Bi-Weekly,” 10 January 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶²¹ Advisory Team 28, Report, “Province Feeder Report,” Dong Xuan District, Period Ending 10 January 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶²² Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report,” January 25 - February 10, 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

Additionally, the report addressed the contact between the PLAF and the RF/PF. An aggressive PLAF force initiated nine of twelve contacts, two of which the reported noted as “well coordinated.” The presence of seven crew-served weapons during these engagements substantiated that claim. Five mining incidents along routes LTL 7B and QL-1, as well as the assassination of nine civilians by the enemy, meant the PLAF were particularly active during this reporting period.⁶²³ Moreover, the PLAF had clearly recovered from losses incurred during earlier phases of the war.

To the west of Tuy Hoa District, and on the other side of enemy Base Area 236, an upswing in enemy activity threatened the GVN presence in Son Hoa District. The DSA for Son Hoa District, Captain Richard J. Malvesti, reported that “Enemy activity during this report period was greater than during any equal period over the past nine months.”⁶²⁴ Both the PAVN and PLAF were on the prowl in Song Cau. On 1 February, a company-size PAVN detachment assaulted the Son Hoa District Dispensary. By 11 February, a PLAF squad infiltrated Van Hoa hamlet. The infiltrators raised a PLAF flag and “left a note stating they could attack anywhere in the district and easily capture district headquarters.”⁶²⁵ The report also noted “numerous sightings of VC/NVA units both north and south of the river by agents and friendly units.”⁶²⁶ Undoubtedly, the

⁶²³ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report,” February 10-25, 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶²⁴ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Song Cau District Semi-Monthly Feeder Report,” Period Ending 11 February 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

enemy maneuvered to quarantine the GVN presence in Cung Son, the capital of Son Hoa District.

Keeping Cung Son linked to the outside world proved no easy task for the American advisors. As evidenced by the mining of LTL 7B, the link between Cung Son and Tuy Hoa City, PLAF cells exercised considerable freedom of movement in Son Hoa District, a point of great propaganda value for the PLAF. “In addition, a report was received from a VC relative in Thanh Binh Hamlet that the VC boasted of overrunning the district in February, occupying it for 24 hours, and returning the people to their old hamlet areas,” Malvesti stated in his report.⁶²⁷ While a little overstated, in that the PLAF had not even entered Cung Son, the PLAF were indeed “free to roam the district at will to within 2 kilometers of the populated area.”⁶²⁸ The PLAF had yet to occupy Cung Son, the district capital, but inched closer to doing so because of the placement of local defenses. On 5 February, the U.S. Army’s C Battery, 6/32 Artillery left Cung Son for Tuy Hoa City. To offset this substantial loss of firepower in the district, two 155mm howitzers from the 22nd Division occupied the fire base vacated by the previous American artillery unit. “Why these new howitzers occupied the old fire base is a puzzle for all personnel in the district,” Malvesti wrote.⁶²⁹ Adding,

For months before this move was made, the District Chief, RF Group Commander, and US Advisors in the district recommended that the ARVN occupy the RF Group Camp. This was the most secure base in the district and would allow for excellent coordination and economy of forces. By occupying the old fire base, however, the RF Group has been forced to deploy one company (-) to protect them. This means that all RF Companies in the district are now tied down to defense of base camps and the district headquarters. There are no company elements free to

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

conduct offensive operations! This is a most dangerous situation and a definite regression from the plan to get as many units out on operations as possible.⁶³⁰

Enemy movement so close to the district capital and the inability of RF troops to mount offensive operations, did not bode well for pacification in Son Hoa District.

February wore on, and conditions in Tuy Hoa District remained in a dubious state. In a semi-monthly district report for 10-25 February 1970, Fluke summarized the situation best, stating that “In the city all was well; in the countryside, however, the VC were able to take advantage of the GVN’s weakness and undermine the people’s confidence in the government’s ability and will to react and protect them.” Describing the GVN’s security as “more sieve than shield,” Fluke noted that over the course of five days the PLAF abducted 124 civilians and marched them to the mountains without making any contact with Allied or local defense forces.⁶³¹ Alarming, future abductions seemed inevitable as the hamlets of My Hoa, My Thanh, Phong Nien, and Phu Luc “were left completely unguarded by any sort of force during most of this period, even after they lost abductees.”⁶³² The only positive news the report offered was that the ARVN 47th Regiment engaged and killed some of the PLAF operating in the district.⁶³³ Killing members of the PLAF operating within the district only removed a symptom, as the causes of the Communist incursion remained relatively untouched. Moreover, the PLAF proved capable or replenishing its ranks with its unimpeded abduction efforts in Tuy Hoa District.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Ibid.

PLAF incidents, noted the same February report for Tuy Hoa, indicted serious problems with local defenses. The report mentioned eighteen cases where the PLAF mined local roads, with ten of those directed towards hampering local civilian traffic. Aside from planting mines, PLAF local forces sought to bloody their primary target, the PSDF. The PLAF did so with booby-traps and small unit level firefights. The tempo of war, too, remained under PLAF control as the enemy initiated five of the eight engagements.⁶³⁴ Essentially, concluded the report's summary, "None of the above bodes well for the progress of Vietnamization in this district. The troubles...do not augur well for much progress in the other major pacification programs either."⁶³⁵

Elsewhere in Phu Yen, security concerns dominated district reports. A litany of overt enemy activity outside of Tuy Hoa District confirmed the deterioration of security across Phu Yen. Like Tuy Hoa District, Song Cau District experienced abductions and assassinations. Despite a quiet January, February marked a period of noteworthy enemy aggression. A DSA for Song Cau, Captain Joseph C. Casey, wrote that, "The District's defensive shield crumbled in several places during the reporting period as the VC successfully conducted several assassinations and captured eight (08) PSDF and eleven (11) weapons."⁶³⁶ PLAF infiltrators assassinated five civilians.⁶³⁷ PLAF ramped-up its

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁶³⁶ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Song Cau District Report," Period Ending 12 February 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

activity, as indicated in a subsequent district report. By February, the PLAF conducted village raids, and abducted seven civilians from the area of Trieu Son hamlet.⁶³⁸

February in Tuy An District proved far more eventful. “Incidents include indirect fire, ambushes, mining of railroad, and kidnapping civilians,” wrote Captain John A. Dunn, DSA. Worse still, noted Dunn, the enemy maintained “the ability to make limited attacks or probes without serious casualties to himself.”⁶³⁹ Going into more detail, he noted that PLAF teams twice mortared Dong Tre, and abducted four civilians. Furthermore, an emboldened PLAF conducted daylight ambushes of RF soldiers within sight of the district compound. While PLAF interdiction of the railroad resulted in minimal damage, the PLAF scored larger moral victories by its planting of PLAF flags on the hills overlooking nearby villages. Compounding matters for CORDS, noted the DSA, were “no increase in intelligence reports” in spite of the clearly visible escalation of Communist audacity.⁶⁴⁰

As February turned into March, the situation in Tuy Hoa Valley remained unchanged. As March began, the abductions continued unhindered. Between 9 and 10 March, the PLAF nearly overran a local RF company. The civilian side of pacification, too, did not escape criticism. Fluke remained critical of the situation in the district, stating, “The civilian side of pacification has shown no forward movement except for the

⁶³⁸ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Song Cau District Report,” Period Ending 25 February 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶³⁹ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Province Feeder Report,” Dong Xuan District, Period Ending 14 February 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

growing of rice, which proceeds with or without directives.”⁶⁴¹ CORDS personnel found the GVN’s lackluster performance “a bafflement and disgrace.”⁶⁴² Falling under the GVN, the ARVN, stated the report, wasted valuable time doing relatively little during the reporting period. Save for operations in the Suoi Chai Valley, the 47th did nothing to improve district security.

Another one of Phu Yen’s districts, Hieu Xuong, provided CORDS with instances of poor security. As the PLAF flexed its collective muscles throughout Tuy Hoa District, the effects were felt in neighboring Hieu Xuong District. VCI teams assisted squad-sized PLAF elements in crossing the river from Tuy Hoa District into Hieu Xuong’s Hoa Binh village. Once across, the infiltrators gathered rice and building materials with several encounters with Allied forces. The local GVN District Chief viewed the low intensity PLAF incidents as a sign that an escalation of activity loomed over Hieu Xuong.⁶⁴³ Despite the Communist infiltration of Hoa Binh village, Alfred R. Barr, DSA, reported on 25 March that unlike the rest of the province, his district remained predominately pacified. He noted that HES scores indicated “one hundred percent of the district’s population enjoys A or B security status.”⁶⁴⁴ Yet, as feared by the District Chief, the PLAF, were preparing to intensify the war in Hieu Xuong.

⁶⁴¹ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report,” 25 February to 12 March, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

⁶⁴³ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Semi-Monthly District Report,” Hieu Xuong District, 12 March 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶⁴⁴ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Semi-Monthly District Report,” Hieu Xuong District, 25 March 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

By this juncture of the war in Phu Yen, two truths emerged. One, the PLAF were not finished after the 1968 Tet Offensive. Two, the war was not becoming more conventional. During the 12 to 25 March reporting period, an emboldened PLAF greatly impeded pacification efforts in the countryside outside of Tuy Hoa City. Fluke disclosed that out of seven contacts between the PLAF and PSDF, five were initiated by the Communists. With 71 abductions and one assassination in mid-March alone, enemy activity remained high. By this juncture, PLAF local forces conducted attacks in battalion strength and employed sapper teams. Now, going beyond abducting local civilians, the PLAF routinely interdicted QL-1. CORDS recorded seven cases where the PLAF had mined this invaluable transportation artery.⁶⁴⁵ By now, news of the events in Tuy Hoa District reached II Corps CORDS officials.

In his district reports, Fluke wrote of GVN neglect of the area outside of the province capital. Specifically, he noted that,

The GVN needs to be shaken from its complacency – especially in regard to its control of the rural population. It is willing to tolerate VC activities in the rural areas that it would never put up with in Tuy Hoa City. The government forgets that population control is fine, but popular support must be the final goal. The security of Tuy Hoa City, containing slightly over 50% of the population, is a crutch upon which the officials lean too much. For the rural people, however, the GVN furnished security must be as illusionary as the emperor's new clothes.⁶⁴⁶

Fluke's criticism got to the heart of pacification perceptions. For the GVN, control of Tuy Hoa City, with its sizable portion of the province's population and its centers of

⁶⁴⁵ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report," 12-25 March," p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶⁴⁶ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report," February 1-25 1970, p.2, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

governance was sufficient. In contrast, popular support of those living beyond the confines of the province capital mattered little. As much as CORDS pushed the APC and the rapid placement of recently won hamlets on maps, the act of doing that clearly rested with American-led military forays into the countryside. Moreover, Fluke's detailing of the GVN's lack of concern for PLAF activities in Tuy Hoa District embarrassed both province officials and CORDS personnel.

Only the arrival of American and South Korean troops appeared to improve district security, a point noted by both AT28 and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. To combat the burgeoning PLAF influence, six platoons of the 173d Airborne Brigade arrived in Tuy Hoa District on 13 March. The paratroopers arrived as part of Task Force Talon.⁶⁴⁷ As noted by the *Los Angeles Times*, the 3d Battalion 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade and ROKA forces commenced operations in the central plain area west of Tuy Hoa City.⁶⁴⁸ Explicitly, the purpose of Operation Darby Talon was security. Task Force Talon sought to retrain RF/PF units in Tuy Hoa District to create space between the PLAF and the local population.⁶⁴⁹

Aiding local forces translated into re-training and getting the RF to stand its ground. This objective, however, proved troublesome on political and military levels.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.; U.S. Embassy Saigon, Report, Theodore G. Shackley to General Creighton W. Abrams, "Situation in Phu Yen Province," 6 April 1970, p.5, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG 472 / A1 462 / Box 14 / Folder: Memos & Messages / Mr. Jacobson / Visits, NARA II.

⁶⁴⁸ Advisory Team 28, Newspaper Article, George McArthur, "Reds Making Inroads In 'Secure' Viet Province," *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday March 22, 1970, p.3, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 285 / Folder: Advisory Crisis in Tuy Hoa District, NARA II.

⁶⁴⁹ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report," 12-25 March, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II; U.S. Embassy Saigon, Report, Theodore G. Shackley to General Creighton W. Abrams, "Situation in Phu Yen Province," 6 April 1970, p.5, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG 472 / A1 462 / Box 14 / Folder: Memos & Messages / Mr. Jacobson / Visits, NARA II.

Politically, the GVN appeared disinterested with events in Tuy Hoa District. As summarized by Fluke, “the much needed redeployment of troops from the overprotected Tuy Hoa City to the rural areas still did not seem to interest Sector.”⁶⁵⁰ The reluctance of GVN authorities to commit troops to the troubled tracts of the district indicated an over reliance on American and South Korean soldiers. Worse still, Fluke suggested that the reduction in abductions owed more to the decisions of local GVN authorities to simply stop reporting the incidents—a point proven correct by a subsequent U.S. Embassy level inquiry into the province’s woes.⁶⁵¹

Abductions damaged the relationship between CORDS and GVN officials, especially that of CORDS’s ability to work with Colonel Nguyen Van Ba, the Province Chief for Phu Yen. Pre-existing tension certainly did not help matters as Advisory Team 28 already viewed Colonel Ba with great suspicion. Local GVN officials did not readily share information on PLAF activity in Tuy Hoa District, nor did they like the fallout when the CORDS DSA exposed such a reality. Moreover, in exposing security and communication flaws, it became apparent that the relationship between Advisory Team 28 and the Province Chief was precarious at best. *The Los Angeles Times* article on the abductions compounded issues by bringing further unwanted attention on the advisory effort in Phu Yen. The article claimed that following the “local disasters a South Vietnamese inspection team came down from II Corps headquarters in Pleiku.” Colonel Ba “entertained the inspectors at his seaside villa and they never saw the militia

⁶⁵⁰ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report,” 12-25 March, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

outposts.”⁶⁵² American and South Vietnamese officials in Saigon now expected changes in Phu Yen.

In response to the rapidly deteriorating GVN presence in the Tuy Hoa Valley, ARVN executed what at best amounted to a show of force exercise. Between 12 to 20 March, the 3rd Battalion of the 40th Regiment of the 22nd ARVN Division moved into the depths of the Tuy Hoa Valley, commencing what AT28 viewed as a futile effort. Engle wrote that “The ‘operation’ into the hills represented a waste in helicopter assets - everything we had in the area was tied up - and everyone understood in advance that there was little likelihood they would see any enemy. In any case, helicopters were unnecessary; the battalion should have walked those few kilometers up hill. The 22nd Division's insistence on an ‘operation’ bore no relevance to the prevailing pacification requirements.”⁶⁵³ Worse, Engle recounted a list of issues associated with the movements of the ARVN unit. Accordingly,

36 abductions occurred in the hamlets directly behind their positions. This was an increased number of abductions from that area. The GVN did not report all of them, but we found out about them. The exit and return routes of the abductees, according to interrogation reports, was through the so-called ‘bowling alley’, which runs across the middle of the 3d of the 40th’s AO. Enemy sapper activity continued on QL-1, along the edge of that AO. One mine exploded on that stretch of the road on March 13, damaging a truck of the 84th Engineer Battalion.⁶⁵⁴

Instead of reversing PLAF gains in the Tuy Hoa Valley, ARVN decisions exacerbated the now expansive scope of abductions. Yet conventional forces, albeit from IFFV and the

⁶⁵² Advisory Team 28, Newspaper Article, George McArthur, “Reds Making Inroads In ‘Secure’ Viet Province,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday March 22, 1970, p.3, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 285 / Folder: Advisory Crisis in Tuy Hoa District, NARA II.

⁶⁵³ Advisory Team 28, Report, “Major William H. Pretto’s After-Action Report of March 25 on Task Force 22 from March 12 to 20, 1970,” p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 297 / Folder: ARVN 4th Regiment / Phu Yen, NARA II.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis in original.

ROKA, provided some respite. The PSA added that “The enemy became more cautious when the 173rd Airborne Brigade’s Hawk Teams fanned out with the RF in the valley, and infiltration became reduced when, beginning March 19, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 28th ROK Regiment established a screen across the mountains rimming the valley.”⁶⁵⁵ Nevertheless, pacification remained in jeopardy.

The American public, too, heard of Phu Yen’s downward spiral. An article published by the *Los Angeles Times* informed the American public of the significance of events in Phu Yen. On Sunday, 22 March 1970, readers learned of the significance of events in Tuy Hoa District and the province’s history as a bastion of the Viet Minh. The writer, George McArthur, noted that, prior to the abductions, Phu Yen ranked among the most secure provinces in the country. Yet the abductions made Phu Yen as “one of three or four of the worst provinces in South Vietnam.”⁶⁵⁶ Equally startlingly, many of those taken by the People’s Liberation Armed Forces were not actually abducted. Rather, purported abductees willingly joined the ranks of the PLAF.⁶⁵⁷ The article hit upon a vital point that “the abductions indicate that the war is going badly in Phu Yen province, a test area for the ‘Vietnamization’ process where the confrontation is largely between old-fashion Communist guerrilla forces and militia of the Saigon government.”⁶⁵⁸ McArthur noted that the U.S. government anticipated problems with Vietnamization and that events in Phu Yen could not be understood as a complete reversal of pacification.⁶⁵⁹ But the

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Advisory Team 28, Newspaper Article, George McArthur, “Reds Making Inroads In ‘Secure’ Viet Province,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday March 22, 1970, p.2, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 285 / Folder: Advisory Crisis in Tuy Hoa District, NARA II.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

ability of the enemy to mount attacks against the RF/PF—as demonstrated by two successful PLAF assaults against RF/PF hilltop positions in which the Communists killed thirty militiamen—in addition to the rash of abductions, placed Phu Yen under intense scrutiny.⁶⁶⁰

The situation befalling Phu Yen besmirched the GVN, and by extension, pacification plans and the American withdrawal. Having abducted a number of civilians from Tuy Hoa District, the actions of the PLAF exposed security problems in the most politically valuable district in the province. Fallout from nearly two months of unimpeded enemy activity included a special report on the district's security situation. In a 23 March report to CORDS II CTZ, Douglas McCollum, Public Safety Division Advisor for Tuy Hoa, addressed the vulnerability of the district, affirming "The area is classified as insecure and the enemy has had relatively free movement."⁶⁶¹ Upon investigating, the CORDS district advisors found that People's Liberation Armed Forces teams came down from the mountains and used fifteen crossing points to enter the district. The report noted the existence of underwater bridges, which permitted the PLAF to cross the canal and gain access to the district's hamlets. Besides abductions, "squad-sized" PLAF infiltrators collected food, taxes, and recruits. Summoned by letters, locals willingly responded to the PLAF's orders for them to report and turned-up with requested goods. The presence of five police stations in the vicinity of the infiltrations did nothing to halt the People's

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁶¹ Advisory Team 28, Report, "Abductions in Tuy Hoa District," p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 285 / Folder: Advisory Crisis in Tuy Hoa District, NARA II.

Liberation Armed Forces. The free movement of the PLAF, and a lack of reporting on such activities, within the district exposed wider problems with the advisory effort.⁶⁶²

Militarily, RF companies remained tepid to the idea of battling the PLAF. Years of reliance on American soldering and firepower, combined with questionable RF leadership, resulted in ill-prepared RF companies. Fluke noted “friction” between the 173d and the RF/PF, writing “that the RF/PF resented being asked to perform their duties again.”⁶⁶³ One particular PLAF assault did more than kill Americans and South Vietnamese. At Minh Duc on 1 April, an RF company took flight in face of a PLAF attack, leaving U.S. soldiers and a RF sergeant to fight the enemy.⁶⁶⁴ Between the night of 31 March and the early morning hours of 1 April, a PLAF unit attacked an RF company on a hilltop just outside of Tuy Hoa City near Núi Cháp Chài in the Minh Duc area of Tuy Hoa District. Atop that hill sat the 112th RF Company and a seven-man advisory team from the 173d Airborne Brigade from Task Force Talon. In the face of the PLAF attack, the RF company fled their positions and five paratroopers died.⁶⁶⁵ A subsequent inquiries by the 173d Airborne Brigade and AT28 found that between midnight and 2am, the seven U.S. paratroopers had fended-off approximately three assaults before the PLAF overran the hill. Claims from the surviving Americans noted that the RF soldiers fled after the first PLAF onslaught. Such accounts ran counter to

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report,” 12-25 March, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 5-6; Advisory Team 28, Report, “Visit to Phu Yen of MG Quang, DCG II Corps - 20 April 1970,” 22 April 1970, pp.1-2, Folder: 10 Phu Yen, CMH; Advisory Team 28, Report, “Action of US 173d Airborne Brigade and RF 112 Company at Minh Duc on 1 April 1970, pp.1-2, Folder: 10 Phu Yen, CMH.

those of the RF company's commander. The RF commander contended that the American fatalities all occurred away from the frontline, implying that some of the U.S. paratroopers fled, too. The surviving U.S. Army sergeant found his five dead countrymen in their original positions from which they had initially repulsed the PLAF attempts to take the hill.⁶⁶⁶ At this juncture significant discord existed between the Americans and South Vietnamese. This led Fluke to later conclude that "the presence of the 173d will be of decreasing value."⁶⁶⁷ An observation not missed by fellow Americans.

The calamity at Minh Duc encapsulated the souring mood across the Tuy Hoa Valley. In another example, Captain Joseph C. Casey, DSA, reported that, despite the presence of Allied forces, "the VC made their presence known in Hoa Dinh Village by using cow bells, 'bull horns,' and weapons shot into the air in order to call the populace together for a propaganda rally. The RF Company refused to react even though they were only 500 meters from the area."⁶⁶⁸ More broadly, much needed ARVN RF/PF units remained in locations away from PLAF contact.⁶⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the fallout from the Minh Duc incident proved the final, devastating blow to the advisory effort in Phu Yen. While a disastrous showing for the RF and an upset to the mission of Task Force Talon, Colonel Ba pinned the hilltop affair squarely on Fluke, arguing that the DSA had refused

⁶⁶⁶ Advisory Team 28, Report, "Visit to Phu Yen of MG Quang, DCG II Corps - 20 April 1970," 22 April 1970, pp.1-2, Folder: 10 Phu Yen, CMH; Advisory Team 28, Report, "Action of US 173d Airborne Brigade and RF 112 Company at Minh Duc on 1 April 1970, pp.1-2, Folder: 10 Phu Yen, CMH.

⁶⁶⁷ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Tuy Hoa District Semi-Monthly Report," 25 March to 12 April, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶⁶⁸ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Tuy Hoa District Bi-Weekly Report," 25 April to 12 May, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

to take command of 112th RF Company. Without sufficient time and orders from his superiors, Fluke did not accompany the South Vietnamese troops. Nevertheless, Colonel Ba demanded Fluke's removal from the province.⁶⁷⁰ Now "The Advisory Crisis" transformed into a problem that jeopardized the entire premise and image of Vietnamization.

April Fools was no laughing matter in Phu Yen. Hours after the disaster at Minh Duc, an event not yet widely known, Allied commanders met with the Province Chief. During Colonel Ba's monthly meeting with Allied officials on 1 April, the Province Chief proposed remedies to cure the current ills befalling Phu Yen, but in doing so he accentuated the grave security problems. Colonel Ba asked for, and later received ROKA support in areas that included Tuy Hoa District's Núi Chắp Chài and Tuy An District's An Ninh village, both of which had been the responsibility of the GVN's forces. Even in 1970, Núi Chắp Chài functioned as "an enemy base area, swarming with VCI, which the GVN has never attempted seriously to clean out."⁶⁷¹ An Ninh, the report continued, "has been mostly under VC control again in recent months; there have been various RF/PF/RD cadre disasters there."⁶⁷² As argued by Engle, Colonel Ba endeavored to resolve a GVN dilemma with an ROKA solution.⁶⁷³ Indeed, the PSA pointed towards a more recent request of Colonel Ba that called for the ROKA to assume security of An Nghiep, a long troubled hamlet. Engle commented that "he called for the 28th ROKs to take over from RF/PF the valley area around An Nghiep hamlet (SW Tuy Hoa District), which enemy

⁶⁷⁰ Eugene Fluke. Interview by author. Telephone interview. 25 September 2015.

⁶⁷¹ Advisory Team 28, Report, "Phu Yen Province Chief's Month Meeting (April) with Allied Commanders," p.3, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 297 / Folder: PC's Monthly Commanders Meeting, NARA II.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 3.

squads have entered and pillaged the last two nights.”⁶⁷⁴ In terms of security and the advancement of pacification, the admission that unchecked PLAF influence in close proximity to the province capital meant that Phu Yen looked eerily similar to the province on the eve of IFFV’s operations of 1966.

As Allied conventional forces tried to eject PAVN and PLAF elements from the Tuy Hoa Valley, the scope of the abductions resulted in “The Advisory Crisis.” The Tuy Hoa District abductions had surprised Engle and his advisors as Colonel Ba and province officials kept the scale of problems befalling the district to themselves. Once the intelligence gathered by Fluke reached the desk of Engle, the relationship between AT28 and Colonel Ba created larger regional problems. Upon learning that a lack of communication between AT28 district personnel and local GVN authorities resulted in a slow response to the PLAF incursions into Tuy Hoa District, American authorities endeavored to improve cooperation with the GVN. Higher echelons of CORDS, including William E. Colby and his staff, involved themselves in events in Phu Yen.⁶⁷⁵ On 2 April, Willard E. Chambers, Deputy for CORDS in MR2, and Lieutenant General Arthur S. Collins, commander of IFFV, visited Tuy Hoa District to mediate an end to the crisis. During their time in the district, they ascertained significant discord existed between AT28 and Colonel Ba. The Province Chief requested the removal of Fluke, the DSA responsible for reporting on the widespread abductions across Tuy Hoa District, from Phu Yen. But Chambers defended Fluke’s findings, noting that relieving Fluke would amount to CORDS accepting Colonel Ba’s stance that all was well in Tuy Hoa

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁷⁵ Advisory Team 28, Report, Report, “COL Ba, Province Chief, Phu Yen, and the situation in Tuy Hoa District,” p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 285 / Folder: Advisory Crisis in Tuy Hoa District, NARA II.

District.⁶⁷⁶ In his memo to Colby, Chambers wrote that “I can’t imagine a way in which things could be much worse.”⁶⁷⁷ Chambers concluded with the suggestion the Colonel Ba be replaced or that he at least permit his deputies more executive authority.⁶⁷⁸

The U.S. Embassy in Saigon, too, entered the discussion of Phu Yen. On 6 April, Theodore G. Shackley, special assistant to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, forwarded a high level CORDS report on Phu Yen to Abrams. Schackley prefaced the report by noting that Phu Yen faced a multitude of challenges. While intelligence issues played a part, the “solution to Phu Yen’s problems lies not in the intelligence field but in a broad Mission Council approach to the basic ills which affect Phu Yen.”⁶⁷⁹ The report itself put events in the province in much starker terms.

The data alone shared in the report shook the very foundations of pacification in the province. Between 1 June 1969 and 31 January 1970, MACV recorded the abduction of 115 individuals by the People’s Liberation Armed Forces.⁶⁸⁰ From 1 February to 30 March 1970, the PLAF abducted another 550 South Vietnamese. Most of those targeted during this period were the “families of GVN officials and relatives of ARVN and RF/PF/PSDF personnel.”⁶⁸¹ Those taken experienced “two to five days of political indoctrination and proselytizing instructions. Political indoctrination stressed that the US is withdrawing its troops after military defeat and the people of South Vietnam must now

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁷⁹ U.S. Embassy Saigon, Report, Theodore G. Shackley to General Creighton W. Abrams, “Situation in Phu Yen Province,” 6 April 1970, p.1, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG 472 / A1 462 / Box 14 / Folder: Memos & Messages / Mr. Jacobson / Visits, NARA II.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 2.

move to VC areas.”⁶⁸² After indoctrination the PLAF released most abductees, save for “some of the younger abductees” whom were kept for use as laborers and additional indoctrination.⁶⁸³ The report noted that the rate of abductions decreased “greatly” for the following reasons: the Viet Cong completed their campaign, the arrival of MACV’s response to the crisis in Task Force Talon, the return of ROKA soldiers, and “termination of reporting of abductions by GVN officials.”⁶⁸⁴ Arguably, the PLAF themselves played the central role in both starting and ending “The Advisory Crisis.” Yet the complicity of the GVN and its security forces in Phu Yen bore the brunt of the blame, at least insofar as CORDS was concerned.

The report emphasized the absence of sound GVN leadership and the perceived uselessness of the South Vietnamese forces purportedly protecting the province. “Lack of resistance by the RF/PF/PSDF has allowed the VC to enter villages and hamlets at night almost at will,” which essentially meant GVN security existed in name only⁶⁸⁵. In Tuy Hoa District, the RF and PF did not “normally conduct patrols and ambush activity at night.”⁶⁸⁶ The PSDF, too, failed to impress as they “either bury their weapons or leave them with relatives or friends in Tuy Hoa City.”⁶⁸⁷ This was unsurprising conduct, given that the PLAF targeted the families of these military forces. On the night of 1 April, CORDS personnel in Tuy Hoa District monitored the numbers of NPFF, RD cadre, PSDF, and RF/PF members entering Tuy Hoa City, counting a total of 950. The

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 3.

following night, 2 April, CORDS counted 887 personnel from those aforementioned RVN entities as entering Tuy Hoa City. Not to be left alone and unprotected, between 7,000 and 9,000 South Vietnamese, village officials and civilians, vacated Tuy Hoa District for the safety of the province capital every night.⁶⁸⁸

Refusal to challenge the PLAF confounded American authorities. In Tuy An District, the RF/PF typically avoided contact with the People's Liberation Armed Forces. In one instance, the RF/PF retreated to the district capital from a hamlet with a HES ranking of "A." The People's Liberation Armed Forces then proceeded into the hamlet for the purpose of abducting targeted residents. The report forwarded to Abrams stated the "Lack of resistance to the VC is further evidenced by the fact that there have been no casualties to GVN security forces or to the population as a result of efforts to prevent VC abductions."⁶⁸⁹ Worse, the conventional force operating in Tuy Hoa District, the 4th Battalion of the ARVN 47th Regiment, had zero effect on PLAF activity. The report noted that both the PSA and the DSA for the district, regarded the ARVN unit as "worthless" as it executed "no operations and is understrength. It is being retained in province by GVN officials, although it was scheduled to join its regiment in Pleiku Province."⁶⁹⁰ The PLAF encountered little resistance in a province once regarded as secure. Task Force Talon, noted the report, helped get RF and PF units out on patrols. The report also referenced the 31 March hilltop disaster at Minh Duc in which an RF

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 5.

company fled the PLAF, leaving five American paratroopers dead.⁶⁹¹ Task Force Talon alone could not, and would not, remedy Phu Yen's woes.

Ten days after the monthly commanders meeting in Tuy Hoa City and the debacle at Minh Duc, American and South Vietnamese authorities in Saigon discussed the fate of the advisory effort in Phu Yen. "The most important and first item of discussion" at 10:00am, Saturday, 11 April in Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem's office was "The Advisory Crisis."⁶⁹² Here CORDS's George D. Jacobson, Colby's chief of staff, and Clay McManaway, chief of plans and programs, discussed the dire situation befalling Phu Yen with the Prime Minister. During this meeting, the CORDS officials relayed events in Phu Yen "as extremely bad and deteriorating."⁶⁹³ "It appears though the enemy is carrying out COSVN Resolution #9 and doing it well," Jacobson added.⁶⁹⁴ As the meeting progressed, Jacobson and McManaway referenced the articles by Robert W. Kaiser and George McArthur as indicators of the growing outside interest in the tumultuous events befalling Phu Yen. "The situation will be placed inevitably in the context of Vietnamization with the clear implication that the Vietnamese can't go it alone," Jacobson commented to Khiem.⁶⁹⁵ With Jacobson admitting "the worst of it all is that the stories are all true."⁶⁹⁶ Those two statements succinctly encapsulated the failure of Vietnamization. When presented with Chambers's earlier suggestion of new province leadership, Khiem agreed

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 5-6.

⁶⁹² MACCORDS, Memo, "Meeting between Mr. Jacobson and Mr. McManaway and the Prime Minister," 12 April 1970, p.1, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG 472 / A1 462 / Box 14 / Folder: Memos & Messages / Mr. Jacobson / Visits, NARA II.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

with Jacobson and McManaway that Phu Yen needed a new province chief and promised to discuss the matter with President Nguyen Van Thieu.⁶⁹⁷ Shortly thereafter, Colby visited Tuy Hoa City and met privately with Fluke. Over a bottle of Johnny Walker Red, a gift Colby said Fluke thoroughly deserved, the ambassador thanked the DSA for his work and divulged that he had intelligence that indicated enemy radio traffic going in and out of the Province Chief's residence. Moreover, Colby informed Fluke that the GVN would replace Colonel Ba only if the U.S. removed Fluke from Phu Yen. Ultimately, Fluke spent the remaining few months of his tour inspecting other advisory teams as Phu Yen got a new Province Chief.⁶⁹⁸ Nevertheless, events in Saigon did not produce a more secure Phu Yen.

Province security conditions barely changed between March and the 25 April to 12 May reporting period. Resolving the discord between Advisory Team 28 and the local GVN had not slowed down the activities of the People's Liberation Armed Forces. Abductions, asserted Casey, were "by no means to be taken as an indication of strengthened GVN authority in the Valley. The security of Tuy Hoa District is much more dependent on what the VC choose to do or not do than what the local forces can prevent."⁶⁹⁹ Such sentiment echoed Williams's earlier assertion that the PLAF alone dictated the events in the district. Indeed, as noted in the report obtained by the U.S. Embassy, one of the reasons why the abductions ceased came about because the PLAF had achieved its goals and ended that specific campaign.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Eugene Fluke interview.

⁶⁹⁹ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Tuy Hoa District Bi-Weekly Report," 25 April to 12 May, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

Operations by IFFV forces in Tuy Hoa District continued, yet such maneuvers did not crush the PLAF presence. Between 13 and 27 May, CORDS recorded the PLAF initiated two of the five contacts between friendly and enemy forces, and successfully planted two mines. The villages of Hoa Tri and Hoa Thang found their way into a CORDS bi-weekly district report, after the PLAF abducted 72 inhabitants. Despite the repositioning of forces by the District Chief, “in Hoa Thang, the elusive enemy has not been hampered.”⁷⁰⁰ At the Tuy Hoa Air Base, security concerns remained. In his report, Casey stated that “The defensive barrier along the eastern side of the air strip would not even prevent the VC from breaking stride, if he was charging at a dead run.” Casey also noted that the PLAF remained capable of launching battalion sized attacks.⁷⁰¹

Operation Darby Talon ultimately netted few positive results. The presence of Allied units forced the RF/PF to become proactive and engage the PLAF with ambushes. Although the task force re-trained RF companies and pressured them to engage the enemy, these changes were neither catholic nor permeant. Rather, as one report contended, “the RF ‘relapse factor’ is still high.”⁷⁰² Casey reported that during the height of Operation Darby Talon, the seven RF companies in the district “averaged upwards of 60 ambush locations in any given night.” This number dropped significantly following the departure of the task force, as nine RF companies averaged “between 35 and 45 ambush sites at night.”⁷⁰³ Clearly, the APC significantly pressured the RF and PF to

⁷⁰⁰ Advisory Team 29, District Report, “Tuy Hoa District Bi-Weekly Report 13 May to 27 May,” p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Tuy Hoa District Bi-Weekly Report,” 13-25 April, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

protect pacification gains strained these units. This reality laid at the heart of Phu Yen's trouble. With PAVN and PLAF attention turned towards safeguarding base areas and convalescing, Allied forces in Phu Yen focused on the quick expansion of pacification efforts. In turn, the protection of these gains fell upon the shoulders of the RF and PF units as well as the CORDS personnel tasked with their advisement.

The completion of Operation Darby Talon left Tuy Hoa District in the same atmosphere that existed before the arrival of the task force; uncertainty. Notwithstanding the increase in firefights with the enemy, the task force provided no long-term fixes to the district. Operation Darby Talon demonstrated an underlying problem with how MACV fought the Vietnam War. The operation featured American troops continuing to bear the burden of war fighting, with local South Vietnamese forces relegated to supporting roles. Indeed, the reluctance of the RF to perform their duties was a symptom of MACV's handling of the war and not necessarily a problem caused directly by Saigon.

Local RF/PF forces remained unready for a war without American support, a problem borne out of American shortsightedness. Years of American funding had not dramatically improved the quality of local defense. RF/PF units lacked sufficient training and suffered from misuse. Rather, the reliance on conventional Free World Forces meant RF/PF platoons lacked sufficient combat experience. The PLAF, realizing that it could choose between engaging well-trained forces, like an ROKA contingent, or a green RF company, always picked the latter. Rarely did the RF men fair well against their attackers.

Local defense therefore remained a sticking point, and one that the United States never solved. In June, the PLAF remained in control of the situation in Tuy Hoa District.

A district report covering 28 May to 14 June noted the abduction of 53 civilians, with 27 taken from An Nghiep hamlet, by the 96th PLAF Battalion.⁷⁰⁴ While these numbers indicated a decline in enemy activity, this marginal lull occurred because the PLAF chose to do so.⁷⁰⁵ The tempo of war belonged to the PLAF, a reality that had little impact on the decision making process in Phu Yen. With the expansion of the ROKA's area of operations (AO) into the more troubled parts of Tuy Hoa District, local RF units were almost guaranteed to bear the brunt of future PLAF aggression. This reality troubled CORDS personnel for two main reasons. One, according to the R&D Plan for 1970, the ROKA were tasked with operating in the province's PLAF infested mountains. Jesse H. Denton, DSA, added during its time in the new expanded AO, the battalion-sized ROKA force had little to show for its support of pacification save for 15 PLAF KIAs. Two, by widening their AO in Tuy Hoa District, the ROKA provided a "'corridor' for enemy movement" between the stronger South Korean units and the weaker RF companies.⁷⁰⁶

Indeed, by May, the PLAF ramped up its exploits in other districts to levels almost on par with Tuy Hoa District. Moving beyond the acquisition of resources, the PLAF conducted operations against Allied infrastructure. Home to tactical air assets and oil reserves, Hieu Xuong District offered a plethora of possible targets for Communist forces. Attackers from K-65, a PLAF local force sapper company, breached the "sieve-

⁷⁰⁴ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Tuy Hoa District Bi-Weekly Report," 28 May to 14 June, p.3, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 3

like” perimeter of the Army Airfield at Phu Hiep on 3 May.⁷⁰⁷ At that juncture during the war, the U.S. Army’s 268th Aviation Battalion operated out of Phu Hiep. On another night, K-65 struck again, successfully mortaring the airfield and 26th ROKA headquarters in the district. Shortly thereafter, this PLAF unit retreated to the safety of the nearby mountains. A semi-monthly district report emphasized that all of the aforementioned attacks emanated from “our HES 70 ‘A’ hamlets.”⁷⁰⁸ The fact that the PLAF used purportedly safe and secure hamlets as launching points for its attacks raises doubts about the reliability of HES; particularly long-term dependability of hamlet data.

Equally damaging, revealed the same 1 May report, were questionable ROKA security measures. Tasked with security in Hieu Xuong District, ROKA units here typically produced positive results. Yet, as the report surmised, “the enemy is either by-passing the ROKA ambushes or ambush sites are being reported that in fact do not exist.” Additionally, ROKA forces refused to respond to two previous requests to engage enemy units spotted near ROKA positions.⁷⁰⁹ Between 7 and 8 May, PLAF infiltrators struck at five different locations in Song Cau District, inflicting twenty-two kills on the PSDF with minimal casualties. By 12 May, PLAF teams assassinated four civilians.⁷¹⁰ Back in Hieu Xuong, ROKA security of the district troubled CORDS personnel. Despite the presence of the nearby 29th ROKA Regiment, local peasants pilfered fuel from a vital pipeline

⁷⁰⁷ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Semi-monthly District Report,” Hieu Xuong District, 1 May 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Song Cau District Report,” Period ending 12 May 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

unhindered. Additionally, the People's Liberation Armed Forces struck nine times, severing the pipeline on each occasion.⁷¹¹ Engle's successor as Phu Yen PSA, Russell Meerdink remarked that the pipeline was hit so many times that one could see oil in the drinking water.⁷¹²

By the end of June, Son Hoa District found itself increasingly isolated from the rest of the province. According to the DSA, Captain Richard E. Botelho, "we are also waiting for the order, 'OPEN THE ROAD'" something the Province Chief stated 'would be done.'⁷¹³ Yet, it "looks like shades of Ba, many words and no action," which Botelho noted "something the people resent."⁷¹⁴ Moreover, "pacification programs this month have taken a nose dive, our effort has been build the fort," which meant furthering Cung Son's existence as the GVN bastion in the district.⁷¹⁵ In the same report, which Botelho reminded readers was his last as a DSA, he voiced his displeasure with the state of affairs in Son Hoa District. "Several problems existed in the district which I was given the mission to correct," Botelho remarked.⁷¹⁶ These included correcting the lack of offensive operations by RF companies, a problem corrected by June, and "the damn road clearing and securing mission of 7B to Tuy Hoa."⁷¹⁷ While intermittent traffic traversed LTL 7B, Botelho stated that Province Chief Colonel Nguyen Ba "promised...he would open the

⁷¹¹ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Semi-Monthly District Report," Hieu Xuong District, 26 May 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷¹² Russell L. Meerdink. Interview by author. Telephone interview. 9 December 2012.

⁷¹³ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Semi-Monthly Report (My last one)," Son Hoa District, 26 June 1970, p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

road on a daily basis, we asked for semi-monthly, it's been five weeks since the last convoy and looks like we're back to the American will provide the plane for you bit."⁷¹⁸

"This not only Americanizes the President's Vietnamization policy, but, has brought about a negative attitude toward the Province Chief and the GVN by the people of Son Hoa," Botelho added.⁷¹⁹ The GVN appeared unready, if not ill-prepared, for a war in Phu Yen void of direct U.S. support. The DSA concluded with a damning string of words, "YOU MAY WIN THE BATTLE, BUT LOSE THE WAR."⁷²⁰ Just like Tuy Hoa District, the war in neighboring Son Hoa District progressed poorly as that portion of Phu Yen seemed as isolated as it had been in late 1965.

Back in Tuy Hoa District, by September, enemy activity spiked once more. A report noted the PLAF had resumed rice collection and abductions in the outermost western reaches of Tuy Hoa District in the hamlets of Cam Son, Mau Lam, and Phu Thanh.⁷²¹ Again, as in previous district reports, the lack of adequate security undermined the effectiveness of pacification in the district. With his frustration palpable, DSA Denton wrote "Last week this District had four (4) night combat patrols, but they were all conducted by the VC."⁷²² Denton's report explained that within the ROKA AO, it appeared as if no war was being fought by Allied forces. With one ROKA company responsible for 9,000 meters of territory, it lacked sufficient manpower to thwart PLAF infiltrators. Taking advantage of this situation, PLAF units moved through the gaps in

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁷²¹ Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Tuy Hoa District, Monthly Report, Period ending 27 September 1970," p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷²² Ibid.

ROKA AO. Only “the complete application of all principles of war,” Denton stated, would remedy the dire security situation.⁷²³ More specifically, he called for the adoption of economy of force by Allied units in the area, noting the proper use of assets would offset personnel shortages.⁷²⁴

To improve the security conditions in Tuy An District, IFFV looked at the 4th Infantry Division as a solution. IFFV directed the 1st Brigade to dispatch a battalion to the district to conduct joint operations with local defense forces. Headquarters selected the 1/12 Infantry for this task. Yet the ROKA refused to permit the placement of 1/12 Infantry in the district as it fell under the South Korean’s area of operations. The report stated, “The ROK Field Command had developed its own plans for increasing the security of the populated areas and for upgrading the territorial forces, and literally did not want any US Forces interfering with their plans.”⁷²⁵ Instead, a month passed before elements of the 4th Infantry Division operated in Phu Yen at all.

Eventually, IFFV identified Phu Yen’s border with Phu Bon as an area where the 1st Brigade could contribute to pacification. Unsurprisingly, the war in Phu Yen affected the neighboring province of Phu Bon. Elements of the PLAF’s Phu Yen Provincial Unit had established themselves in the outreaches of Song Cau District along the western border between the provinces of Phu Yen and Phu Bon. Between 8 September and 1 October 1970, the 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division participated in Operation Wayne Forge. Transpiring just over the border between the two provinces, U.S. Army

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

soldiers engaged in a small action against enemy forces. The after action report stated, “As predicted, elements of the PHU YEN Provincial Unit were discovered in this area. This was shown by documents and personal letters taken from hootches and enemy KIA’s. One detainee, captured by C Co, stated that a large number of the PHU YEN Provincial Unit was located not far from his place of capture.”⁷²⁶ Although a small operation, as reflected in the number of captured PLAF weapons and supplies, Wayne Forge was by no means insignificant. Rather, “Contacts during this period were numerous and were made with groups of 2-3 individuals. The enemy was more aggressive in this area of operations than the enemy contacted by this battalion previously.”⁷²⁷ Thus, at the height of CORDS’s support of pacification in Phu Yen, conventional forces continued to play a central role in creating the space necessary for the GVN and AT28 to conduct developmental initiatives.

In the grand scheme of the Vietnam War, Operation Wayne Forge paled in comparison to larger operations that transpired elsewhere in the Republic of Vietnam. Nonetheless, Wayne Forge disrupted PLAF plans and momentarily restored the balance of power in the area. Additionally, what Wayne Forge lacked in intensity it made up for in demonstrating the threat still posed by the PLAF. Able to project power, Phu Yen’s PLAF demonstrated that the sparsely populated hinterlands of the province were essentially NLF domain. Regardless of Wayne Forge, AT28 advisors in Tuy An District reported “no significant damage to the VC Infrastructure or military units has been

⁷²⁶ Combat After Action Report, “Operation Wayne Force,” Department of the Army, Headquarters 2d Battalion 35th Infantry Regiment. Available at: <<http://www.cacti35th.org/regiment/history/aars/aar235/aarwayneforce.htm>>. Note that this copy mistakenly refers to Operation Wayne Forge as Operation Wayne Force.

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

noticed.”⁷²⁸ Consequently, long-term security conditions remained unaltered in Tuy An District.

The disintegration of security continued in Phu Yen. Higher echelons of MACV were aware of the dangers befalling the province’s more populated locales. Indeed, Phu Yen appeared in the fourteenth revision of MACV’s “VC/NVA Base Study Area Study” as Communist forces maintained a noteworthy presence in the province. Compiled from data collected between 1 April and 1 October 1970, the MACV study detailed the status of enemy base areas and corresponding PAVN and PLAF activity. Situated in the mountains overlooking the western extremity of the Tuy Hoa Valley, the Communists still operated Base Area 236. From here, the K-13 PAVN Local Force Infantry Battalion orchestrated its operations into Tuy An District. Also from 236, the 96th Local Force Infantry Battalion launched forays into the nearby districts of Tuy Hoa and Hieu Xuong. Noting a slight upswing in enemy activity in between April and June, the study reported the presence of “30 Confirmed and 34 Unconfirmed Intelligence Reports, 3 ground-to-air fire incidents, 450 foxholes, 6 contacts, 1 mine incident, and 1 unit sighting.”⁷²⁹ As “compared to 48 Unconfirmed Intelligence Reports, 3 ground-to-air fire incidents, 1 AA/AW position, and 30 foxholes during the first quarter” noted by intelligence in April. By June, intelligence confirmed increased activity and indicated expansion of the base area, with “13 Confirmed and 28 Unconfirmed Intelligence Reports, 1373 foxholes, 8

⁷²⁸ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “District Report, Tuy An District, Phu Yen Province, Reporting Dates: 27 September to 26 October 1970,” p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷²⁹ “Study, Research and Analysis Studies - VC/NVA Base Area Study - Record of MACV Part 2, 5 January 1971,” pp.15-16, Folder 0185, Box 0027, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900270185>>.

AA/AA positions, 13 mortar positions, 8 ground-to-air fire incidents, and 3 secondary explosions.”⁷³⁰ This upswing in base area activity reflected a Communist resurgence in Phu Yen, one that took direct aim at stymying Allied pacification in Tuy Hoa Valley.

Other occurrences in Dong Xuan District raised questions about the effectiveness of pacification. The lack of intelligence sharing between the GVN and CORDS, as seen during “The Advisory Crisis,” was a province problem and one not limited to Tuy Hoa District. Reliable reporting, too, proved a problem in Dong Xuan District. HES, the increasingly relied upon metric used by MACV to gauge pacification progress, proved itself untrustworthy. In a September monthly district progress report on Hieu Xuong District, Captain George E. Harris, DSA, emphasized the questionable intelligence reporting. He noted that “It appears as though we (advisors) don’t get information on all the assassinations, abductions and collections of the V.C.”⁷³¹ MACV used such data when computing HES rankings, therefore the absence of complete intelligence surely undermined CORDS understandings of certain hamlet conditions. According to Harris, the lack of complete information “could account for the high ratings of some hamlets that actually have VC in them every night.”⁷³² Indeed, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon inquiry confirmed that local GVN officials stopped reporting damaging information to AT28.⁷³³

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁷³¹ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Monthly Report District Level, Hieu Xuong District, period ending 26 September 1970,” p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ U.S. Embassy Saigon, Report, Theodore G. Shackley to General Creighton W. Abrams, “Situation in Phu Yen Province,” 6 April 1970, p.2, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG 472 / A1 462 / Box 14 / Folder: Memos & Messages / Mr. Jacobson / Visits, NARA II.

That “The Advisory Crisis” pertained only to Tuy Hoa District omits the problematic sharing of data elsewhere in the province. In a report for Dong Xuan District, the DSA emphasized the lack of complete intelligence. Harris reported that between 1 and 18 November, twelve PLAF cells initiated incidents of abductions, assassinations, and tax collection, went unreported to CORDS district personnel. Moreover, “the VC entered a hamlet approximately 3 miles from District Headquarters and routed a PF platoon.”⁷³⁴ The lack of communication between AT28 and GVN province officials compounded the incidents committed by the emboldened PLAF.

Similarly, in Hieu Xuong District, Walter Kyle, DSA, wrote a letter to Meerdink, informing the PSA of the severity of the intelligence situation befalling that area of Phu Yen. A lack of reporting by local GVN authorities hid from CORDS’s view all the PLAF activities in the district. Having thought the district as pacified, Kyle shockingly discovered the apparent peacefulness of Hieu Xuong existed in thought only. Kyle noted that “Few hamlet officials actually live in their hamlets and many hamlet residents, RD Cadre and even PF sleep in Phu Lam and Dong Tao.”⁷³⁵ The reason why became apparent as MAT teams questioned villagers, the American advisors learned that PLAF cells frequented many hamlets at night and taxed inhabitants. Kyle reported that with the onset of darkness, the enemy “virtually controlled” the three villages of Hoa Tan, Hoa Vinh, and Hao Xuan. More alarmingly, platoon sized PLAF formation entered villages during the daylight hours. As stated by Kyle, “In one instance the PF platoons knew a VC

⁷³⁴ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Monthly Report District Level, Hieu Xuong District, period ending 26 November 1970,” p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

unit occupied a village office, however, they made no effort to intervene. The VC proceeded to burn records and furniture in the building. It's significant that the District did not inform me or my teams of the incident."⁷³⁶ Aside from the clear absence of regular communication between AT28 and province officials, Kyle's report brings into question pacification at this juncture of the war. With the knowledge of events elsewhere in 1970s Phu Yen, pacification appeared far from complete.

Equally damaging were reports about how the PLAF interacted with civilians in Hieu Xuong District. Local GVN authorities released captured VCI members as quickly as they were apprehended, since "A sum of money can easily gain their release," wrote Kyle. Moreover, local GVN officials "are quick to claim a KIA as a VCI."⁷³⁷ Deeper still, contended Kyle, the success of the PLAF resulted from their interactions with district residents. The PLAF taxed and collected supplies from district inhabitants working at American military installations around Tuy Hoa City. Local authorities found few people willing to speak about enemy activities, thus leaving the GVN with little to report to CORDS. Considering that District authorities collected pacification measurement data, Kyle surmised that HES results were untrustworthy.⁷³⁸ In that vein, pacification itself rested upon a bed of fabrication and lies borne out of a lack of regular communication and, more significantly, high expectations on part of the United States.

Events in Phu Yen proved troubling for many American authorities. As 1970 progressed, the news of a resurgent PLAF reached II Corps Headquarters and even the

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

U.S. Congress. Towards the end of January, Representative John G. Schmitz made remarks on the instances of PLAF violence as reported by South Vietnam's National Police.⁷³⁹ Schmitz listed the PLAF actions that transpired in November and December of 1969 in the Congressional Record, which included attacks on hamlets, murders, and abductions throughout Phu Yen.

Attacks by the enemy against South Vietnamese forces, too, undermined perceived pacification gains. In Dong Xuan District, PLAF members hurled grenades at a PSDF position in Phuoc Hoa Hamlet on 27 November.⁷⁴⁰ On 28 November in Son Hoa District, one PSDF soldier and one civilian were abducted from Xuan Phong village.⁷⁴¹ A late-November district report for Song Cau noted that "the VC still make their presence known and felt" with interdictions of QL-1 and efforts to enter hamlets.⁷⁴² One such incident occurred on 29 November, when, as recalled in Representative Schmitz's remarks, the PLAF infiltrated Khoan Hua Hamlet and killed the hamlet chief and two members of the RD cadre.⁷⁴³

December also proved eventful as the enemy maintained its harassment campaign against GVN infrastructure. In Son Hoa District on 1 December, the PLAF abducted one

⁷³⁹ Terror in South Vietnam - The Pulping of a People - III: Congressional Record, 30 December 1970, p.1, Folder 13, Box 16, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131613156>>.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁴² Advisory Team 28, District Report, "Song Cau District Report, Period Ending 26 November 1970," p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor's Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷⁴³ Terror in South Vietnam - The Pulping of a People - III: Congressional Record, 30 December 1970, p.E10875, Folder 13, Box 16, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131613156>>.

civilian.⁷⁴⁴ The district of Hieu Xuong also experienced PLAF activity, with the kidnapping of six 15 year old boys and one 14 year old girl from Phuoc My hamlet on 1 December.⁷⁴⁵ On 1 December, the PLAF took a civilian from Dong Xuan's Trieu Son hamlet.⁷⁴⁶ The next day, 2 December, the PLAF fired mortars that wounded five civilians in Song Cau District.⁷⁴⁷ Assassinations resumed when a PLAF platoon moved into Chanh Tuc hamlet and killed one civilian on the 11 December. Then on 14 December, a PLAF platoon entered Tu Nham hamlet, assassinating a civilian and leaving another wounded.⁷⁴⁸

For Tuy Hoa District, Representative Schmitz's remarks noted the following events. On 2 December, the PLAF mortared Chi Thanh Hamlet, and a PLAF mine detonated near Vinh Phu hamlet. On 5 December, two female PLAF members assassinated the hamlet chief for Chi Duc hamlet. At An Nghiep Hamlet, the PLAF abducted a civilian on 5 December. A civilian, too, was kidnapped by the PLAF from the Dong Xuan District's Phuoc Hue hamlet on 5 December.⁷⁴⁹ On 9 December in Tuy Hoa District, the PLAF abducted a PSFD member from Binh Chanh hamlet, and, later, four civilians from Tan Long hamlet on 11 December.⁷⁵⁰ Clearly, troubling events in the district of Tuy Hoa dominated the information relayed to Congress.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., E10876.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., E10875.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., E10877.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., E10876.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

A December district report for Song Cau maintained a bleak view for 1970. Starting his report with, “The walls are crumbling around us and the Deputy Province Chief’s orders are to retreat to your forts and pray,” Donald M. Scher, DSA, stated that the PLAF had made noticeable gains.⁷⁵¹ Albeit skeptically, Scher wrote that the PLAF “chopped off 1/3 of XUAN THINH Village by dispossession of TU NHAM Hamlet while apparently controlling TUY LUAT and VINH CUU AN.”⁷⁵² Moreover, “If the above is even close to factual, the VC are steadily realizing their stated objectives of control of the countryside while pinning sub-sector forces in defense of the District Headquarters.”⁷⁵³ Scher added a layer of credibility by noting that as of 1 December, HES indicated Song Cau District went from one “D” rated hamlet to six. The PLAF fared well in December, with, in addition to the above, six “indirect fire attacks,” two convoy ambushes, and three “coordinated ground attacks.”⁷⁵⁴ Like the ordinance expended by the PLAF, the year concluded with a thud.

Even after “The Advisory Crisis,” Meerdink found himself in charge of an American advisory effort fixated on completing Vietnamization. Meerdink, a young man of only 29, found himself advising a province not markedly different than the one his predecessor had inherited. GVN resistance to fully battling the Communists still plagued the province despite the arrival of Nguyen Van To, Phu Yen’s new Province Chief. The enemy still infiltrated hamlets, though interest in that reality waned considerably.

⁷⁵¹ Advisory Team 28, District Report, “Song Cau District Report, Period Ending 26 December 1970,” p.1, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 275 / Folder: District Senior Advisor’s Monthly Reports, 05/1969 - 12/1970, NARA II.

⁷⁵² Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁵³ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

Security therefore persisted as an unresolved issue. Pacification efforts, despite the best efforts of CORDS personnel and abundant U.S. funding, remained undermined by security lapses.

The incidents from all across Phu Yen defined the province's 1970 experience. Much of what transpired in 1970 appeared abnormal in comparison to events in previous years. Yet regardless of IFFV operations to push the PAVN and PLAF forces away from Phu Yen's communities, the Communists remained capable of undermining GVN legitimacy. The intensity of Communist resolve amplified as they infiltrated and harassed the Accelerated Pacification Campaign on multiple levels; physically and psychologically.

Conclusion

The APC proved more a facade than a true means of elevating province security. In that vein, the APC laid at the center of Phu Yen's progress and problems. In the face of rapidly decreasing U.S. support for the ongoing ground war, or Vietnamization, the APC did more to advance the image of a GVN with vast inroads into the countryside than placing peasants under GVN control. With that in mind, the troubles that persisted in the province highlighted the limitations of American and South Vietnamese power to the extent that, in spite of four years of war, province security displayed meager signs of improvement. Years of Americanization meant local GVN authorities in Phu Yen could not seamlessly implement Vietnamization. Assuming the burden of increasing province security without the once ever present U.S. ground forces, damned the local GVN into a position of appearing recalcitrant; an easy scapegoat for American's increasing frustration with the direction of the war. As events in 1970 demonstrated, Phu Yen's

security lessened as the APC placed too great a burden on local securities forces. By the close of that year, evidence pointed towards a war in which PAVN and PLAF dictated the tempo, and thus the outcome.

Concurrent with the APC were the operations of conventional U.S. Army forces. Like in years prior, U.S. Army units under the command of IFFV played an integral role in the pacification of Phu Yen, though with significantly fewer battalions. Throughout the 1969 to 1970 period, the presence of elements of the 173d Airborne Brigade and 4th Infantry Division instilled stability and furthered province security, albeit temporarily. As security conditions wavered across the province during “The Advisory Crisis,” IFFV executed operations to keep the enemy off balance while training local defense units. Offensive actions by Allied maneuver battalions made pacification seem close to completion, yet such operations failed to fully derail PAVN and PLAF plans. Inasmuch as dependable American forces elevated security conditions merely with their presence, doing so gave a false sense of lasting stability in Phu Yen. IFFV’s maneuver battalions, while a boon to security, did not expunge Communist influence.

Similar to previous years, operations by conventional forces dictated the quality of security in Phu Yen Province. Improved security persisted only as long as conventional operations pinned enemy formations near their base camps and away from the province’s hamlets. As elements of IFFV moved in and out of Phu Yen, security conditions in the Tuy Hoa Valley wavered. Moreover, with Vietnamization in full effect, the future of pacification in Phu Yen depended more and more on the ability of local defenses. Indeed, the eventual absence of units like the 173d Airborne Brigade made pacification seem anything but lasting.

CHAPTER VI – APPEARANCE LIES, 1971-1972

Introduction

“The central Vietnam coastal provinces—Binh Dinh, Quang Ngai to the north, and Phu Yen to the south—represent the last heavily populated areas not under government control,” Rowland Evans and Robert Novak reported in their 16 September 1971 *Los Angeles Times* article.⁷⁵⁵ “If control could be imposed here, Saigon’s and would be strengthened immeasurably in any future negotiations with Hanoi,” the journalists added, a point that encapsulated the 1971 to 1972 period in Phu Yen.⁷⁵⁶ Control was the operative word, for at this point in the war much of Phu Yen existed in contested space. In Phu Yen, this time period revealed that Vietnamization and a resurgent PLAF heavily restricted the GVN’s ability to advance pacification.

If the years 1965 to 1969 crescendoed into “The Advisory Crisis,” then the diminuendo transpired in 1971 and 1972 as subpar province security conditions failed to derail Vietnamization. “The Advisory Crisis,” although officially over, haunted the remaining years of the U.S. advisory mission in Phu Yen. The Battle of Cung Son, the largest in the province since the 1968 Tet Offensive, both advanced and impeded pacification in Phu Yen. Other events, such as the botched closure of Phu Hiep and the expansion of Communist influence on the eve of the Paris Peace Accords, posed serious problems that CORDS simply could not remedy. Indeed, reports on deteriorating hamlet security conditions, particularly in Tuy Hoa District, suggested that despite years of American efforts to improve security, by the close of 1972 it seemed as if the Americans

⁷⁵⁵ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Red Stronghold a Testing Ground of Saigon’s Control in the Provinces,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 September 1971, D6.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

had never really been in Phu Yen. Thus the final period of the CORDS's mission in Phu Yen encapsulated the problems with the United States's efforts to pacify the RVN countryside.

Vietnamization at any price undermined pacification in Phu Yen. As much as 1969 and 1970 indicated clear problems with the expansion of pacification in the form of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign, 1971 and 1972 proved such issues as more than momentary. Pacification at haste created a scenario in Phu Yen where measurement data suggested progress, but in fact conditions remained eerily similar to those of 1969 and 1970. While HES portrayed favorable hamlet ratings, the People's Liberation Armed Forces continued to make inroads into APC target hamlets. Indeed, PLAF remained markedly intact and known to CORDS personnel in province. Ironically, American authorities, either knowingly or unwittingly, adopted the GVN's stance of accepting the continued Communist presence in the South Vietnamese countryside.

Binh Dinh Province continued to divert attention away from Phu Yen. Still seen as strategically more significant than Phu Yen, Binh Dinh occupied more of II Corp's time than its neighbor to the south. In September 1971, pacification in Binh Dinh floundered, becoming the least pacified of the RVN's forty-four provinces.⁷⁵⁷ For this reason, IFFV and ARVN devoted more time and resources to pacifying Binh Dinh as the completion of Vietnamization loomed closer. For Phu Yen this meant looking better by comparison, and therefore everything that transpired in the province could never overshadow events in Binh Dinh. More than a sideshow, however, Phu Yen persisted as a

⁷⁵⁷ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Red Stronghold a Testing Ground of Saigon's Control of the Provinces," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), September 16, 1971.

prime example of how a low intensity conflict endured despite the overwhelming economic and military assets of the United States. All the major military events of 1971 in Phu Yen involved Allied units destroying highly visible enemy forces in near pitched battle. Notably, these engagements did not entail evicting the People's Liberation Armed Forces nor VCI from the province. Consequently, acts of terrorism persisted in the province as the emboldened enemy gained ground well into 1972.⁷⁵⁸

1971

Hanoi's Liberation Press Agency heralded 1971 as full of Communist victories in Phu Yen. Reportedly,

The liberation fighters leveled a series of important positions including Nui Sam, Nui Tranh, Han Sac, and Ca Lui strongholds, demolished one artillery site in Cung Son area, destroyed the Phu Lam and Cung Son towns and wrecked 142 military vehicles. They also shot down and damaged on the ground 44 aircraft of various types, derailed 13 engines and 66 wagons, demolished 12 howitzers and 12 105mm artillery batteries, blew up 96 pillboxes, 277 barracks and 12 bridges including the Da Rang bridge, set afire 18 ammo dumps and one fuel dump.⁷⁵⁹

Of course the Communists embellished their gains and omitted certain details. For instance, the attacks against GVN controlled communities occurred at the expense of PAVN and PLAF lives. Nevertheless, there were kernels of truth to the propaganda as in the case of the Da Nang bridge. As revealed in Advisory Team 28's (AT28) monthly province reports, 1971 proved anything but a banner year for pacification in the province.

⁷⁵⁸ For more on Binh Dinh Province during this period, read Kevin M. Boylan, "The Red Queens Race: Operation Washington Green and Pacification in Binh Dinh Province, 1969-1970," *The Journal of Military History* 73, no. 4 (October 2009): 1229-1230.

⁷⁵⁹ LPA reviews 1971 victories in two provinces, 18 January 1972, Folder 04, Box 19, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University (TTUVA). Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131904116>>.

In Phu Yen, 1971 commenced the same way as 1970 ended. “The Phu Yen advisory effort has had little to cheer about over the past year and has learned to deftly move from crisis to crisis,” Russell L. Meerdink wrote in his 31 January 1971 province report.⁷⁶⁰ Despite this dour opening line, Meerdink injected a sense of positivity as referenced the South Vietnamese. “For the first time in many months, friendly units were in the enemy strongholds for extended periods,” Meerdink said of South Vietnamese security forces.⁷⁶¹ Outpacing the ROKA, RF units “combat assaulted” into areas such as the “Hub,” Ky Lo Valley, and Ha Roi Secret Zone, places once deemed “too dangerous for such forces to venture into.”⁷⁶² Even ARVN, often criticized for its lack of urgency, brought battle to those three PLAF strongholds. Operation Bai Dong I, launched on 16 January, featured the insertion of RF units into PLAF sanctuaries and quickly improved the image of the GVN in Phu Yen. With an offensive spirit not normally associated with the RF in province, the South Vietnamese outpaced the 26th and 28th ROKA, South Korean forces once noted for their effectiveness. Indeed, Meerdink asserted that the Province Chief sought to make Bai Dong I the benchmark for future operations.⁷⁶³ The follow-up operation, Bai Dong II, however, faltered because of coordination problems between Allied forces. Poor communication between South Korean and South Vietnamese officials meant each other’s forces stumbled into the others ambushes. Moreover, the ROKA denied RF units access to South Korean areas of operation.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶⁰ Advisory Team 28, Province Report,” Period Ending 31 January 1971, p.1, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH).

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁶² Ibid.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid.

Allied spoiling operations were indeed helpful in maintaining pressure on the PLAF. Distracting the PLAF's attention from interfering in hamlet affairs provided only a momentary advantage, though, as the rewards of Allied spoiling operations lasted only as long as Allied forces maintained the offensive. Furthermore, Allied activity in enemy base areas did not necessarily mean removing the Communist threat from the district, let alone the province. Rather, it dispersed the PLAF and disrupted its plans, but doing so did not prevent the PLAF from regrouping. Operations by the Allies near enemy strongholds in 1969 did not prevent the occurrence of "The Advisory Crisis," nor did later Allied actions alter the province's future. Simply because South Korean and South Vietnamese soldiers found themselves fighting deep into People's Liberation Armed Forces territory did not spell an end to People's Liberation Armed Forces activity in Phu Yen. Particularly in the case of PAVN, Allied victories against the PLAF did not stop Hanoi's conventional forces from probing Phu Yen's defenses.

Abductions decreased to low levels by the end of January. Meerdink referenced a sharp decrease in abductions, just seven for the month, for which he credited the efforts of Mobile Advisory Teams (MAT) operating in the Tuy Hoa Valley. Indeed, MATs orchestrated successful ambushes of the PLAF's K-13 Battalion. American forces also pressured the People's Liberation Armed Forces. In southern Hieu Xuong District and the Ha Rai secret zone, the C/75 Rangers killed six PLAF in limited contact with the enemy. However, communication mishaps involving the Rangers, the Province Chief, and ROKA prevented the Rangers from exploiting one contact with the enemy. Living among the rural population, the MATs anti-abduction campaign proved somewhat successful, as the PLAF abducted just five civilians in a 75 day period. The end of January also marked

the end of the anti-abduction campaign in Tuy Hoa District as attention shifted towards Tuy An District.⁷⁶⁵

All of the perceived accomplishments of January did not mean pacification was working. Like Allied units on the offensive, HES, too, uplifted the perception of pacification in Phu Yen. With overly optimistic ratings, HES proved troublesome to both the PSA and the Province Chief. “The HES reacted favorably (perhaps, in fact, over-reacted) to the GVN success and Viet Cong failures and startlingly declared that 91 percent of Phu Yen’s population now resides in secure areas and 72 percent in A and B hamlets,” Meerdink reported.⁷⁶⁶ “This headquarters believes,” Meerdink continued, “that the Viet Cong are presently placing great emphasis on the development of their infrastructure and the GVN has not yet demonstrated a capacity or willingness to meaningfully cope with this threat.”⁷⁶⁷ Despite alterations to HES to better account for VCI, which pleased Advisory Team 28, Province Chief Lt. Col. Nguyen Van To “does not share this enthusiasm for the change.”⁷⁶⁸ Rather, “he declared that as a man of few vices, ‘the HES is the only lottery’ in which he participates!”⁷⁶⁹ For Meerdink, HES scores better reflected a moment in time than dependable long-term identifiers of a hamlet’s development or decline.⁷⁷⁰ In the case of Phu Yen, high HES scores did not necessarily translate into stellar security. As before, what the People’s Liberation Armed Forces chose to do and not do played the deciding role in Phu Yen’s future.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁰ Russell L. Meerdink. Interview by author. Telephone interview. 12 September 2012.

The successes of January did not drastically alter the prevailing sense of skepticism in Phu Yen. In that vein, “At month’s end, the most startling of all pronouncements was made: ‘We will open Highway 7-B in February or March!’ One’s knees begin to tremble at the heady thought that after losing the previous rounds to points, the local GVN may be going for a knockout in the closing minutes!”⁷⁷¹ Evidently, much skepticism remained regarding the capabilities of the GVN. Save for brief moments, the highway in question remained predominately under the control of local PLAF units for much of the remainder of the war.

By February, events in Tuy Hoa District appeared in *The New York Times*. On 1 February, “Ten mortar rounds struck the military advisors’ compound at Tuy Hoa air base.”⁷⁷² Yet the enemy did more than conduct a mortar attack during the month. On at least two occasions, enemy forces challenged GVN resolve in Song Cau District. Each time, RF/PF and U.S. Army helicopter gunships thwarted Communist advances. Here, the image of a revitalized province continued into February. Efforts by GVN forces to improve province security received a major boost on 3 February, as the 9th PAVN Battalion found itself trapped by Allied forces on a small peninsula in Song Cau District. “Early on the morning of 3 February, elements of the 9th NVA Battalion (Gold Star Division) made another of its amphibious assaults in the rocky coves adjacent to Vinh Hoa hamlet, Song Cau District,” Meerdink recounted in the monthly progress report for February. Adding that the PAVN unit probably intended to take-up positions in the nearby hills before launching an attack the following evening, the PSA wrote, “A PF

⁷⁷¹ Advisory Team 28, Province Report,” Period Ending 31 January 1971, p.2, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH).

⁷⁷² “Six G.I.’s Reported Killed in Attacks by Enemy,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 1971.

platoon operating (we'll give them the benefit of the doubt) in the hills discovered the NVA presence and radioed the district for help."⁷⁷³ Subsequently, and unfortunately for this PAVN force, solid communication resulted in the quick arrival of gunships from the 134th Aviation Company. With helicopters inserting two RF companies and providing fire support, Allied forces trapped the PAVN contingent on the peninsula. Americans and South Vietnamese killed somewhere between 57 to 98 North Vietnamese regulars. The large discrepancy came from two different body counts, with U.S. figures placing the number of enemy killed at 57, while the GVN claimed 98.⁷⁷⁴

A second, similar incident occurred on 12 February when a PLAF company tried to cross a sand bar near Vinh Cou Phu village, approximately one mile northeast of the town of Song Cau. As recounted in a history of the 134th Aviation Company, "Song Cau massacre" as they called it, featured the entrapping of the PLAF company by American helicopters and South Vietnamese troops. At Vinh Cou Phu, helicopters from the 134th Aviation Company inserted ARVN soldiers on the northern end of the peninsula. Effectively blocked by the ARVN, the PLAF company attempted to retreat to the safety of the nearby hills. Machine gun and rocket fire from the helicopters thwarted the enemy's retreat, thereby forcing the People's Liberation Armed Forces to dig in and fight. After an hour and ten minutes, the Americans and South Vietnamese accounted for 41 PLAF dead.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷³ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 28 February 1971, p.1, CMH.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁵ Annual Supplement History of 134th Aviation Company (Assault Helicopter), 268th Combat Aviation Battalion, 1st Aviation Brigade, 1 January 1971 - 31 December 1971, p.14, Undated, Folder 19, Box 04, Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) Collection: Unit Histories - 1st Aviation Brigade, TTUVA. Available at: <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=3030419002>>.

MACV data for March 1971 indicated that Phu Yen remained a troubled province. Thomas C. Thayer, Director of the U.S. Department of Defense's Southeast Asia Division between 1967 and 1972, wrote in his book *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam*, that according to MACV numbers, "estimated communist clandestine strength" was 2,183 individuals, therefore 3.3% of the national total.⁷⁷⁶ Worse, Phu Yen found itself in a group of five abutting provinces teaming with PLAF activity. "The grouping suggests pockets of strength and the ability to provide mutual support and operating flexibility," Thayer deduced.⁷⁷⁷ For the members of AT28, these numbers meant that pacification in Phu Yen faced a well devised late war Communist insurgency. Thus in early 1971, pacification seemed as far from complete as ever before.

The ghosts of "The Advisory Crisis" lingered in Phu Yen as February turned into March. Ominously, the monthly province report began with,

The Phu Yen Viet Cong leadership certainly must be composed of some of the most thoroughly inspired officers ever to have engaged in warfare. Their tenacity in the face of overwhelming odds is truly remarkable. As the reader might surmise, from the GVN point of view, it was another bad month in Phu Yen.⁷⁷⁸

While operations by the ROKA in the "Hub" exacted a heavy toll on the People's Liberation Armed Forces, it did so to the detriment of long-term stability. ROKA forces claimed 450 PLAF killed, with Advisory Team 28 figuring most of the dead were rear support personnel since the South Koreans confiscated only 100 weapons. The PLAF's response made Meerdink write, "It is possible the enemy's actions are based on seasonal

⁷⁷⁶ Thomas C. Thayer, *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Annapolis, MD: The Naval Institute Press, 2016), 207.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 March 1971, p.1, CMH.

change or perhaps he has been reading Shakespeare. At any rate, the Ides of March signaled the start of another abduction campaign.”⁷⁷⁹ To replace the losses caused by the ROKA operation, the PLAF initiated another abduction campaign. By the end of the March reporting period, the PLAF abducted 107 inhabitants from the western portions of the Tuy Hoa Valley. Unsurprisingly, the area targeted by the PLAF was not covered by the GVN’s anti-abduction campaign.⁷⁸⁰ In Phu Yen, solutions to problems propagated more problems.

Equally revealing in the March province report was the discussion of the PLAF’s reversion to Phase I of guerrilla warfare. As directed by COSVN, PLAF units in Phu Yen reverted to harassment techniques to challenging the GVN’s influence in the province. Abductions, disruption of communication lines, mining of roads, and snipers amounted to the PLAF’s small scale attacks against the GVN. Yet on the night of 28 March, the People’s Liberation Armed Forces launched multiple attacks; mortaring the “GVN District Headquarters at Song Cau, Tuy Hoa Army Airfield, ROKA bases in Hieu Xuong District, and a combined sapper-mortar attack on the Hieu Xuong District Headquarters.”⁷⁸¹ While the Hieu Xuong District Headquarters remained in GVN hands, the structure “was virtually destroyed as well as the three vehicles and approximately 100 M-16 rifles.”⁷⁸²

As the PLAF balanced its peculiar Phase I approach, local RF/PF units appeared to adhere to COSVN’s avoid battle directive. Reportedly,

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁸² Ibid.

The spur of enemy activity was matched by virtual cessation of activities by RF/PF forces. Citing lack of air assets as the most common excuse for not leaving the shadow of the flagpole, Territorial Forces made only one foray into the highlands that resulted in no contacts. As could be expected, the favorable kill and weapons ratio of previous months dropped to a 1:1 on kills and an adverse 1:2 on weapons.⁷⁸³

Thus the best source of gauging enemy activity, and therefore the health of the province, were the MATs. Indeed, “much of the enemy activity in the areas that MAT habitually visited would not be reported except for these teams. Since they only occupy a small portion of the province, one conjectures as to how much enemy activity is taking place in our supposedly secure areas that is not reported.”⁷⁸⁴ If any criticism from Advisory Team 28 damned the situation in Phu Yen, surely it was that remark by Meerdink.

March reflected security issues similar to those preceding “The Advisory Crisis,” yet events in April suggested a near complete reversal to conditions associated with 1969 and 1970. “‘Disaster’ is the only word which can be used to describe the situation in Phu Yen during the month of April,” began the monthly province report.⁷⁸⁵ Indeed, the PLAF “initiated 85 incidents vs 46 in the prior month.”⁷⁸⁶ In Tuy Hoa District, the PLAF retook much of the territory ceded to the GVN after the efforts of Task Force Talon. Advisory Team 28 blamed the district chief, Lt. Do The Tan, for not matching the aggressiveness of the PLAF with improved security. Despite calls from Province Chief Lt. Col. Nguyen Van To requesting the removal of the district chief, the GVN did nothing. As the leadership did nothing, GVN security forces refused to engage the People’s Liberation Armed Forces. In western Tuy Hoa District, “on four separate occasions Vietnamese

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 April 1971, p.1, CMH.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., 2.

units broke and ran after establishing contact with the enemy (twice leaving their American advisors behind to fend for themselves).⁷⁸⁷ Moreover, “On these same four occasions, the enemy’s position was well fixed at nightfall only to have the GVN forces call off the war for the day and return home.”⁷⁸⁸ For example, a single PLAF unit,

stood off 3 RF companies, 4 sets of gunships and 2 airstrikes in western Tuy Hoa, with the last sound of battle being the enemy machine gun that initiated the contact at 0830 firing at the last RF company returning to Tuy Hoa at 1600 (0830-1600 being the normal working hours for the RF in Phu Yen). The machine gun and operator are still there as of this writing.⁷⁸⁹

With instances like this, all the conventional military power wielded by the Allies could not overcome the low level insurgency waged by the People’s Liberation Armed Forces. More alarmingly, “Within one month, most of the hard fought for improvements in Tuy Hoa over the past year have been lost.”⁷⁹⁰ Yet the trouble extended beyond Tuy Hoa District.

Events elsewhere in Phu Yen compounded those in Tuy Hoa District. In Hieu Xuong District, “virtually no military facility escaped some kind of enemy attack.”⁷⁹¹ Here, “the enemy launched attacks by fire and/or ground against nearly every major Vietnamese, Korean, and American military installation in the area.”⁷⁹² In that vein, the words choice of Meerdink proved precise, as “disaster” indeed epitomized the month of April in Phu Yen as pacification problems solidified as the new normal.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁹² Ibid., 1.

PLAF activity remained intense as April rolled into May. While a new District Chief made a positive impact on Song Cau through the use of air assets to resupply the district, the PLAF intensified its efforts to interdict the GVN's lines of communication in Phu Yen. The PLAF devoted considerable attention towards mining the province's highways.⁷⁹³ On one occasion, a convoy encountered enemy ambushes and mines on highway LTL 7B, resulting in the destruction of seven vehicles. Thus the GVN's promise of opening LTL 7B by February or March remained largely unfulfilled by April. Phu Yen's principle highway, QL-1, felt the wrath of the PLAF as the enemy attacked three bridges; destroying one and using snipers to harass traffic over another two. Yet, for AT28, the enemy's attacks on LTL 6B amounted to the most serious. Previously considered a safe and secure road, multiple ambushes and mining incidents changed LTL 6B in a particularly dangerous stretch of asphalt. In the most severe incident during the reporting period, the Dong Xuan District Medical Advisor died and a District Senior Advisor, who severely injured, left Phu Yen via medical evacuation. Enemy activity peaked on 24 May, as it launched seven major attacks throughout Dong Xuan District. On 26 May, two civilians died when a mine exploded at the Phung Tuong market.⁷⁹⁴

The observations of Advisory Team 28 at the hamlet level offer invaluable insight into the deteriorating situation that unfolded in Phu Yen in 1971. Sent to Phu Yen in 1971, during the height of Vietnamization, U.S. Army Captain Courtney L. Frobenius found himself attached to AT28. Tasked with advising the PSDF and, later, RF/PF in Phu Yen, Frobenius's duties caused him to visit and evaluate the current security conditions

⁷⁹³ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 May 1971, p.1, CMH.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid.

of the province. During his inspections of local defense units, Frobenius found pacification shortcomings. In his reports, Frobenius called attention to the activities of the PLAF and the enemy's continued hold on the province. Noted were the shortcomings of the GVN, limited use of Allied troops, and unchecked enemy activity. These three factors displayed the U.S. Army's withdrawal from South Vietnam in an extremely negative light. Essentially, Frobenius's findings harkened back to those of Fluke during "The Advisory Crisis."

Frobenius's reporting revealed the significance of keeping Tuy Hoa City physically linked to the rest of the province. As LTL 6B linked the inland district of Dong Xuan to Tuy Hoa City, whomever controlled this artery essentially ruled the district. Frobenius expounded upon the significance of LTL 6B to Dong Xuan District's existence under the GVN. "All supplies, both in and out of the District must flow over this route," Frobenius noted.⁷⁹⁵ Indeed, as a landlocked district, Dong Xuan relied solely on LTL 6B as a connection to the rest of the province. "A 20% rice deficiency in Dong Xuan District makes overland route even more zenith in importance," Frobenius continued.⁷⁹⁶ The psychological value of the GVN maintaining full control of this artery mattered even more. "If 6B were to be closed by the enemy, a psychological blow of hurricane proportions would not settle easy on the population of Dong Xuan. If 6B were closed the population could not travel either in or out of Dong Xuan, but would be forced to remain immobile. The closing would also represent a drastic blow to the GVN in the

⁷⁹⁵ Cpt. Courtney L. Frobenius, Dong Xuan District Highway 6B, Undated, p.1, Folder 21, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, McCain Library and Archives (MLA).

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

eyes of the populace,” he warned.⁷⁹⁷ Vietnamization, too, complicated matters since any sustained enemy interdiction of LTL 6B would test the GVN’s ability to maximize its limited assets in Phu Yen. Frobenius surmised that “All supplies would have to be carried in by air, something that the GVN can ill afford with the evaporation of American withdrawal.”⁷⁹⁸ Conversely, Frobenius suggested that the GVN could force convoys through LTL 6B, a method he noted as being employed on highway 7B. Yet doing so would happen at a price, as Frobenius noted that each time the GVN reopened 7B, they lost equipment. “The last time 7B was opened to Song Hoa District, a total of 13 vehicles were destroyed along with a bulldozer,” he reminded his superiors. Indeed, a steep price for a temporary reopening.⁷⁹⁹

Frobenius pondered about the future of LTL 6B because, as he saw it, the enemy had realized the value of the route. Essentially, the People’s Liberation Armed Forces’s “whole plan in Dong Xuan depends upon the closure of this road.”⁸⁰⁰ To support such a claim, Frobenius referenced the plight of Xuan Son, one of five villages in the district, yet the only one adjacent to LTL 6B. Xuan Son’s “infrastructure has tremendous depth and width,” Frobenius reported.⁸⁰¹ Worse still for the future the GVN in Dong Xuan District, the enemy maintained a visible presence in each of the village’s hamlets; Phu Hoa, Phu Long, Phu Vang, and Ha Bang. With Xuan Son almost entirely under its control, the PLAF had “a vital base of intelligence, supplies, food, rice, labor, and money, and

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

men.”⁸⁰² The PLAF’s possession of Xuan Son did not bode well for the GVN’s prospects of keeping LTL 6B safe from enemy activity.

Deeper still, Frobenius wrote of the current state the railway that traversed Dong Xuan District. He reported the railway as “nominally open thru the District. But this is at great risk to the traveler. Railroad cars can be seen among the twisted track laying alongside of the railroad lines.”⁸⁰³ After each successful enemy mining, “the track is repaired and the next train is rolling thru at the next scheduled time. A type of Russian roulette.”⁸⁰⁴ Furthermore, Frobenius accentuated the effect of the enemy interdiction of the lines of communication in the district. In that vein, he commented that the reports of mine detonating typically went, “Victor Charlie mine was detonated at Grid coordinates Bravo Quebec 003755, killing 12 civilians, 3 soldiers, wounding 16 civilians and 4 soldiers. The mine was believed to be command detonated. The railroad is impassable until repairs can be made. 1 railroad car totally destroyed.”⁸⁰⁵ “Not exactly Union Pacific travel brochure material,” Frobenius quipped.⁸⁰⁶ LTL 6B, Frobenius remarked, “reads the same. Hulls of vehicles can be seen resting upside down, shattered, and burnt out, over craters that were obviously made by an anti-tank mine.”⁸⁰⁷ Although not referring a specific incident, Frobenius nonetheless relayed the new normal for those traveling on LTL 6B.

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

Placement of local security compounded the situation of Dong Xuan District. Indeed, Frobenius reported that the bridges received the bulk of attention, with bunkers astride both sides of the approaching track. While such security made sense, it occurred at the expense of the rest of the railway. "Sweeps are made daily of the track to find mines, but often this prove to no avail. While the troops huddle inside of their bunkers, the Viet Cong have freedom to roam at will where the troops are not located. Because of the enemy's domination of the hamlets, he has excellent intelligence as to where the mobile government troops are at night. He can easily skirt these positions and plant his mines on the road and on the railroad," Frobenius stated.⁸⁰⁸ On a slightly more positive note,

1 Korean company, one RF Group Headquarters along with two of its companies and two PF platoons are situated along 6B and given the mission of its defense. They have artillery support located just outside of the village boundaries to the West. A total of 8 Kilometers of road must be defended by these troops, not a bad batting average. The troops seek to evade the civilian population at night and generally move away from them. If they didn't the enemy would have exceptionally correct intelligence and could remove them.⁸⁰⁹

Movement of friendly forces appeared as the main factor in keeping the area even marginally under GVN control. Ending his report, Frobenius bemoaned the continued hindrance of Dong Xuan District's transportation arteries. "The minings continue. The people continue to use 6B. People die from minings, and equipment is destroyed. How long can it continue? How long will it continue? If the enemy were to insure that each time a vehicle traveling 6B and the railroad were mined, the game of Russian Roulette just wouldn't be any fun anymore and it wouldn't be worth the chance," Frobenius warned his superiors.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

Back in Tuy Hoa District, events there remained far too similar to those of 1970. Here both the ROKA and 2/44 ARVN Battalion concluded operations. The ROKA's regimental sized operation netted 264 KIA, while capturing just 50 weapons. Worst still for long-term district security, the ROKA commenced the closure of all of its platoon sized fire bases. Confidence in the district's future under the GVN shook further as reports circulated on the "VC's entry into fringe hamlets without being engaged." Consequently, the enemy had "the same freedom of movement he enjoyed in the latter part of 1970."⁸¹¹ As for the ARVN, the 2/44's sweep of highway 7B ended with poor results as indicated by the continued interdiction of the road by the People's Liberation Armed Forces.⁸¹² Indeed, like LTL 6B, highway 7B still remained under the constant threat of enemy interdiction.

As much as the previous few months placed pacification in Phu Yen on the cusp of ruin, two events demonstrated that the province existed in the nebulous world between GVN and COSVN control. In favor of the GVN, a single event in June temporarily altered the mood at advisory headquarters. Temporary being the operative term since the battle that transpired in Son Hoa District did not reverse the downward spiral of pacification in Phu Yen. Instead, the engagement revealed Phu Yen falling to COSVN was not a forgone conclusion. Until 1971, Son Hoa District existed as one of the province's more tranquil areas. Yet on the eve of complete U.S. withdrawal from the RVN, the war engulfed the heart of Son Hoa District. Lieutenant Colonel Charles S. Varnum, the Deputy Senior Province Advisor, wrote, "A tenacious defense all night by

⁸¹¹ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 May 1971, p.2, CMH.

⁸¹² Ibid.

the RF forces held until morning when gunships, airstrikes and a reaction force inflicted the heaviest losses upon the enemy since Tet 1968.”⁸¹³ The combined power of the Americans and South Vietnamese overcame the Communist ploy to decapitate the GVN in Son Hoa District; recalling scenes of the Battle for Shit Hill and foreshadowing the 1972 Easter Offensive. Nevertheless, events in Son Hoa District did not dramatically alter the course of pacification in Phu Yen.

On 1 June, PLAF elements maneuvered towards Cung Son, Son Hoa District. The GVN obtained intelligence that an enemy company or battalion neared the vicinity of Cung Son. To spoil PLAF intentions, RF Group 53 launched recon operations that killed 52 PLAF soldiers. Additionally, on 15 June, the Province Chief Lt. Col. Nguyen Van To authorized Dai Bang Campaign 7, “to break down VC High Point.”⁸¹⁴ An American AAR noted the lack of “intelligence of an impending attack, however the units were alert due to the number of contacts that they had prior to this time. It was found out later that there were 2 VC/NVA Bn’s involved, 2 sapper units involved, all supported by a Provincial Artillery Company.”⁸¹⁵ Three days later the underestimated PLAF assaulted Cung Son.

On 18 June, the biggest engagement between Allied and Communist forces in Phu Yen since 1968 transpired in Son Hoa District. The sounds of impacting mortar rounds and B-40 rockets marked the start of the attack of the PLAF’s 96th Local Force Battalion, K-13 Local Force Battalion, C-25 Sapper Unit, 202 Sapper Unit, and 167th Artillery

⁸¹³ Advisory Team 28, Province Report,” Period Ending 31 June 1971, p.1, CMH.

⁸¹⁴ “Author’s Notes on Son Hoa A/A Rpt,” Undated, Folder 25, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA, 1.; Note: This document is actually the GVN AAR and not Frobenius’s notes.

⁸¹⁵ GVN Son Hoa After Action Report, 18 June 1971, p.1, Folder 24, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA. Note: This document is the US, and not the GVN, AAR.

Company.⁸¹⁶ Of interest to the enemy was the allure of overrunning the GVN assets at Cung Son; which included the Son Hoa District Headquarters and the adjacent airstrip as well as RF Group 53 Headquarters and firebase.⁸¹⁷ Accomplishing such a feat would effectively evict Saigon's presence from Song Hoa District, thus giving the NLF full control of western Phu Yen. To reach the GVN facilities, enemy forces descended on an area to the northwest of the district. Here, 15,000 South Vietnamese lived near the river banks of the Song Ba with highway LTL 7B on the other side of the hills to the north. Roughly two kilometers to the northwest to the Song Hoa District Headquarters, sat Hon Ngang, a hill which dominated the terrain around Cung Son. Atop the hill stood RF Group 53's headquarters and firebase with three 105 howitzers and one 50 caliber machine gun mounted in a gun tower.

The Battle of Cung Son began at 0230, as the PLAF's 167 Artillery Company commenced with a mortar barrage. Captain Ronald Thayer, District Senior Advisor, had been on the job for just a few hours. In need of a replacement after the last DSA vacated via medical evacuation—the jeep he was riding in had struck a mine—Thayer served as the main U.S. advisor in Son Hoa District in a temporary capacity until his departure from the RVN. With just two weeks remaining on his tour, Thayer filled in as the DSA in Son Hoa District for approximately five days because of both his familiarity with the area and his friendship with the South Vietnamese District Chief, Major Nguyen Phu Hieu. As the

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.; "Author's Notes on Son Hoa A/A Rpt," Undated, p.1, Folder 25, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸¹⁷ Military Region 2, Military Region Overview, Period Ending 30 June 1971, p.2, CMH; Ronald Thayer. Interview by author. Telephone interview. 15 December 2015; "Author's Notes on Son Hoa A/A Rpt," Undated, p.1, Folder 25, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

enemy launched its attack, both Thayer and the Hieu quickly rallied their forces to confront the numerically superior enemy.

By 0300, the PLAF launched a two-pronged ground assault, targeting the Son Hoa District Headquarters and airstrip as well as the nearby RF Group 53 Headquarters and firebase atop Hon Ngang. As the C-25 Sapper Unit attacked the airstrip, the 202 Sapper Unit assailed Hon Ngang, engaging two RF companies defending the RF Headquarters. Meanwhile, the K-13 Local Force Battalion entered Song Long hamlet to prevent the South Vietnamese from reinforcing the district headquarters. Soldiers of the 96th Local Force Battalion moved on Son Ha hamlet to thwart possible South Vietnamese attempts at relieving Hon Ngang from the southwest.⁸¹⁸

Thayer's experience as an artillery officer during two previous tours payed dividends. Indeed, he helped direct precise mortar fire, breaking up the enemy attack against the GVN assets.⁸¹⁹ The ardent RF defenders, too, slowed the PLAF advance. Nevertheless, the enemy retained the advantage. Upon realizing the precariousness of the situation, Hieu radioed for immediate assistance. Hieu had much at stake; being North Vietnamese by birth and choosing to fight for Saigon almost assuredly meant his demise should he fall into PLAF hands.⁸²⁰ Assistance materialized in the form of Huey gunships of the 134th Aviation Company. Affectionately called "Demons," fully loaded helicopters sat ready on a tarmac at Tuy Hoa Army Airfield. Alerted to the crisis unfolding in Son Hoa, these gunships set out to Cung Son. As Demons from the 134th

⁸¹⁸ GVN Son Hoa After Action Report, 18 June 1971, p.1, Folder 24, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸¹⁹ "Award of the Bronze Star," 29 December 1971, in Ronald Thayer's possession.

⁸²⁰ Ronald Thayer interview.

Aviation Company provided much needed fire support, other helicopters, or “Devils,” eventually ferried in reinforcements. In the meantime, events in Cung Son remained precarious.

Concurrent with efforts to capture the airstrip and District Headquarters, two PLAF battalions had occupied nearby hamlets. As the K-13 Local Force Battalion entered Song Long hamlet, the 96th Local Force Battalion did so in Son Ha hamlet. In moving into Son Ha, the K-13 Local Force Battalion displaced RF 995, which then repositioned its platoons in a defensive parameter along the southeastern border of the hamlet. Similarly, at 0400, the 96th Local Force Battalion caused the RF in Song Long to take-up a defensive posture along that hamlet’s southern tip. At 0515, a helicopter carrying Meerdink and the GVN’s Deputy for Security arrived overhead and the pair assessed the unfolding battle below. Simultaneously, Demons of the 134th Aviation Company engaged the enemy in and around RF 53 Headquarters.⁸²¹

The PLAF’s assault continued unabated by 0600, with RF units continuing to engage the enemy on Hon Ngang. Here, RF artillery fired at zero elevation with “bee-hive” and HE shells, which “greatly deterred the enemy access to the artillery positions.”⁸²² “Although close to being overran during the engagement,” read the U.S. after action report, RF artillery crews “met the enemy face on and used their artillery pieces in the most outstanding defensive role.”⁸²³ Additional gunships arrived on scene at 0700, as those already engaging the enemy expended their munitions. Yet the enemy

⁸²¹ GVN Son Hoa After Action Report, 18 June 1971, p.2, Folder 24, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸²² Ibid., 1.

⁸²³ Ibid.

dislodged two platoons of RF 996 from south of the Song Ba to south of the RF Headquarters. RF 994 moved to reinforce the RF Headquarters by taking-up positions on the overlooking the hill to the east. For reconnaissance purposes, two RF platoons moved to the western extremity of Son Long village. Similarly, another RF recon element ventured to Son Hoa village. At 0730, Meerdink and the GVN's Deputy for Security landed at the District compound. Following the observations of the FAC of substantial enemy movement to the north of the RF Headquarters, Hieu and Thayer requested airstrikes. The subsequent airstrike hit the enemy just north of Hon Ngang, causing a secondary explosion. The American AAR noted that two days after the battle, 31 PLAF bodies from the 96th Local Force Battalion were found in the vicinity of that airstrike.⁸²⁴ The presence of such a number of enemy dead was testament to the ferocity of fight for the RF Headquarters.

The arrival of RF Mobile Battalion 206 turned the tide of the battle. The insertion of RF Mobile Battalion 206 occurred between 0900 and 0930 hours to the north of Son Ha village. Concurrently, American gunships received incoming enemy rounds from Son Long village, responding with machine-gun and rocket fire. Thirty minutes later, two companies of RF Mobile Battalion 206, companies 389 and 988, entered the battle and simultaneously made contact with the enemy on Hon Ngang.⁸²⁵ The actions of these two companies resulted in five PLAF kills, the capture of an 82mm mortar, and Hon Ngang "resecured."⁸²⁶ With the PLAF attack on Hon Ngang now completely shattered and the

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁸²⁵ GVN Son Hoa After Action Report, 18 June 1971, p.2, Folder 24, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

hill firmly under RF control, the enemy no longer threatened the 53d RF Headquarters and firebase. The fight on Hon Ngang claimed the lives of 28 PLAF and 14 RF troopers. With its attack stymied, the remnants of PLAF's 96th and K-13 local force battalions took cover in the buildings of nearby villages.⁸²⁷

Now on the offensive, South Vietnamese forces moved to encircle the villages, with American gunships circling overhead. At 1000 hours, four PF platoons acted as a blocking force by taking-up positions along the southeastern border of Son Long village. Additionally, helicopters inserted one company of RF Mobile Battalion 206, which moved to the village's northwestern extremity and awaited reinforcements. Between 1030 and 1100, the remaining elements of the reaction force arrived and assumed positions to the left of the first company. With South Vietnamese forces now encircling the K-13 Local Force Battalion's positions within Son Long, at 1200 Hieu and Thayer requested a PSYOP mission to encourage the village inhabitants to evacuate. Surprisingly, the enemy permitted the inhabitants to leave, knowing full well that the absence of non-combatants meant airstrikes.⁸²⁸

Before airstrikes against the village commenced, gunships engaged enemy targets in Son Long. Concurrently, a company of the RF Mobile Battalion 206 attempted entry into the village, but fell back in the face of intense enemy fire. Another company of the RF Mobile Battalion 206 moved further west in order to attack the village from that direction. Nevertheless, RF assaults between 1400 and 1500 hours did not break through the enemy's wall of fire. Gunships, too, failed to dislodge the enemy from the village's

⁸²⁷ "Author's Notes on Son Hoa A/A Rpt," Undated, p.2, Folder 25, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸²⁸ Ronald Thayer interview.

buildings. Yet the gunships fought on and an RF company made one last effort to enter the village; this time from the north. These attacks also proved unsuccessful, thus by 1630, the Forward Air Controller (FAC) requested an airstrike. At 1715, an airstrike rocked the village, with some PLAF attempting to break-off contact by moving northward. In doing so, however, the PLAF quickly encountered fire from RF soldiers. Between 1745 and 2000 hours, the battle reached its apogee as an RF unit entered Son Long and battled the remaining PLAF in a series of firefights. Nightfall ended the intense exchange, with fire resuming, and the battle ending, the next morning.⁸²⁹ Province Chief Lt. Col. Nguyen Van To surmised that the RF won the day partially because the enemy had nothing but contempt for their South Vietnamese foes, which meant the Communists had not anticipated being outflanked by Saigon's forces.⁸³⁰ Ultimately, between 127 and 187 PLAF perished in the battle of Cung Son.⁸³¹ The attack against GVN assets in Cung Son "virtually annihilated" the K-13 Local Force Battalion.⁸³²

For Thayer, the battle proved a momentous end to his service in the Republic of Vietnam. Throughout the battle, Thayer and the District Chief coordinated the Allied response while exposing themselves to the enemy. Indeed,

After learning that a large force of the enemy had moved into the hamlets of Son Luong, Phuoc Hoa and Van Hoa, Captain Thayer and the district chief, constantly exposing themselves to enemy fire, consolidated and placed the Popular and

⁸²⁹ GVN Son Hoa After Action Report, 18 June 1971, p.3, Folder 24, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸³⁰ "Author's Notes on Son Hoa A/A Rpt," Undated, p.2, Folder 25, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸³¹ GVN Son Hoa After Action Report, 18 June 1971, p.3, Folder 24, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.; "Author's Notes on Son Hoa A/A Rpt," Undated, p.2, Folder 25, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA. Note: The American and South Vietnamese AARs differ on the number of PLAF killed. The Americans placed the enemy KIAs at 127, while the South Vietnamese put the number at 186.

⁸³² Military Region 2, Military Region Overview, Period Ending 30 June 1971, p.3, CMH.

Territorial Forces around the three hamlets, allowing none of the enemy to escape. Due to his presence and leadership, the enemy lost almost an entire Battalion.⁸³³

For such actions, the U.S. Army awarded Thayer a Bronze Star, with the ARVN bestowing him with a Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star.⁸³⁴ Hieu, too, proved himself a deft opponent of the enemy. Already well respected for his leadership, he now found himself requested by John Paul Vann for a posting in Binh Dinh Province; a request that he graciously declined as he felt needed in Son Hoa District.⁸³⁵

The effects of the battle of Cung Son reverberated throughout the province and MR2. For CORDS, both at the province and corps levels, the battle demonstrated that Phu Yen's defense forces could take on the enemy and win. The aggressive spirit on part of the RF and local GVN leadership pleased the American advisors.⁸³⁶ The firepower wrought by the American helicopters proved indispensable, with the deft maneuvering of the RF providing the *coup de gras*. In doing so, the 134th Aviation Company demonstrated the indispensable nature of U.S. airpower, even at the local level. Therefore, events at Cong Son unveiled a truth about the war in Phu Yen and the Vietnam War in general; the South Vietnamese could defeat a sizable PAVN and PLAF force, but with U.S. airpower. With Vietnamization nearing full realization, the likelihood of future battles having the same outcome as Cung Son, seemed exceedingly unlikely.

⁸³³ bid.

⁸³⁴ "Award of the Bronze Star," 27 December 1971, in Ronald Thayer's possession.; RVN Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star, 16 July 1971, in Ronald Thayer's possession.

⁸³⁵ Advisory Team 28, Meerdink to Major Alfred W. Baker, 27 September 1971, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 3002 / Folder: Bio / Reports Son Hoa, NARA II.

⁸³⁶ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 June 1971, p.2, CMH.



Figure 6. Cung Son the morning after the battle.

Note the burned-out buildings. Photograph by Hans-Jürgen Underwood, used with permission.

High intensity combat once again proved a friend and foe to pacification. The battle of Cung Son resulted in “the destruction of 228 homes, many cattle and hogs and the deaths of 8 civilians. Nine hundred seventy people were made homeless.”⁸³⁷ While supplies were quickly flown into Cung Son, nonetheless such devastation meant rebuilding, not advancing, pacification. MR2 posited Cung Son as a hollow victory, citing the destruction wrought by the battle. The Military Region Overview for June revealed that, “although a victory for the GVN” the battle of Cung Son “demonstrates some similarity to the Phu Nhon battle in Pleiku in March in that there was occupation of hamlets from which the war was waged with the inevitable result of a setback in the

⁸³⁷ Ibid., 4.

pacification program for the district.”⁸³⁸ Similarly this proved true for Son Hoa District, as the battle left large portions of Cung Son utterly devastated.⁸³⁹ Thus for Phu Yen as a whole, bloodying the enemy at Cung Son occurred at the cost of long-term pacification progress. Additionally, the battle of Cung Son resurrected images of IFFV’s operations of 1966 in that destruction was inextricably attached to pacification. A return to 1966 did not bode well for the advancement of pacification during the twilight of Vietnamization.



Figure 7. The Da Rang bridges after the PLAF attack.

Note the armored personnel carrier in the middle of the sunken highway span. Fold3:
<https://www.footnotelibrary.com/image/270439446>.

Although victorious at the battle of Cong Son, the GVN and the American advisory effort faced embarrassment ten days later. As Meerdink later remarked, the

⁸³⁸ Military Region 2, Military Region Overview, Period Ending 30 June 1971, p.1, CMH.

⁸³⁹ Hans-Jürgen Underwood, *Cung Son the morning after!*, 19 June 1971, <http://134thahc.com/CungSon.html>.

PLAF “dropped the goddamn bridge.”⁸⁴⁰ In fact the PLAF targeted two bridges on the night of 28 June, as “the VC blew both the railroad and newly constructed Da Rang river bridges.”⁸⁴¹ By blowing up the bridges, the enemy demonstrated that Phu Yen remained susceptible to lower intensity attacks. According to Varnum, the PLAF attached charges to both bridges, detonating the one on the railroad bridge in the early morning hours. To view the effects of the explosion, crowds, including an armored personnel carrier, gathered on the highway bridge. The enemy then detonated the charges on the highway bridge, plummeting two spans and the armored personnel carrier to the river below. John Paul Vann flew down from MR2 headquarters in Pleiku and, upon seeing the damage, asked Varnum what he saw in the water. Varnum responded that he could see an armored personnel carrier, to which Vann said something to the effect of, “no Charlie, what you see down there is Colonel To’s eagle, his full colonelcy.”⁸⁴² In addition to destroying GVN infrastructure and setting back pacification, the PLAF proved equally adept at ruining the careers of those serving Saigon. The following morning, inhabitants resumed use of the railroad bridge. Yet Varnum estimated at least six weeks of reconstruction before the reopening of the highway bridge. Varnum noted that the destruction of the new Da Rang bridge, “was a great psychological victory for the enemy, particularly in view of the recent pomp and pageantry of the bridge dedication.”⁸⁴³ Indeed, Varnum later recalled that, approximately two days prior to attacks on the bridges, the President of the Republic

⁸⁴⁰ Russell L. Meerdink interview.

⁸⁴¹ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 June 1971, p.2, CMH.

⁸⁴² Charles S. Varnum. Interview by author. Telephone interview. 29 November 2012.

⁸⁴³ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 June 1971, p.1, CMH.

of Vietnam had attended the ceremony to open the highway bridge.⁸⁴⁴ Headquarters, Second Regional Assistance Group supported such an assertion, stating, “the enemy avenged his defeat at Son Hoa by destroying two spans of the new Da Rang highway bridge in Tuy Hoa; certainly a psychological victory.”⁸⁴⁵ Meerdink later commented that the destruction of the new Da Rang bridge during his absence from Phu Yen to visit his pregnant wife, saved his job.⁸⁴⁶ The destruction of the bridges signaled that province security still favored the cause of COSVN.

The rapid drawdown of America’s military presence in the Republic of Vietnam neared full realization. A part of Vietnamization included the transfer of military facilities to the South Vietnamese. In Phu Yen, Vietnamization included the handover of Phu Hiep, the former epicenter of U.S. Army activity in the province. Yet the transfer of this sprawling base revealed serious problems with American execution of Vietnamization and the relationship between American and South Vietnamese authorities. “The wholesale plunder of the Phu Hiep Airbase,” recently turned over to RVNAF, by South Vietnamese military personnel smothered much of the remaining faith that Phu Yen would survive Vietnamization.⁸⁴⁷ As emphasized by Meerdink in the monthly progress report for July, American authorities decided the fate of Phu Hiep in a matter of weeks, with both AT28 and the Province Chief omitted from the planning sessions. As much as GVN corruption striped Phu Hiep of every valuable asset, poor U.S. decision making prevented a proper closing of the base. Furthermore, Meerdink feared a similar fate might

⁸⁴⁴ Charles S. Varnum interview.

⁸⁴⁵ Military Region 2, Military Region Overview, Period Ending 30 June 1971, p.3, CMH.

⁸⁴⁶ Russell L. Meerdink interview.

⁸⁴⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 July 1971, p.1, CMH.

befall the far more modern Tuy Hoa Airfield.⁸⁴⁸ Fallout from the “Phu Hiep caper” entailed the reassignment of fifteen RF soldiers to the ARVN 1st Division at the DMZ, and “the periodic unannounced absences of various sector officers who are known to be under interrogation in Saigon.”⁸⁴⁹ By July, GVN investigations found a total of eighteen ARVN officers guilty of participation in the plunder of Phu Hiep. Most prominently, LTC Le Van Trong, the district chief of Hieu Xuong in which Phu Hiep sat, found himself dismissed from his post by the GVN.⁸⁵⁰

While the relationship between the Allies in Phu Yen returned to the abysmal levels of “The Advisory Crisis” era, operations of the ROKA returned focus to pacification. In July, the ROKA executed operations to a degree not recently seen in the province. ROKA forces targeted the Sui Lanh Valley and the border area between Song Cau and Dong Xuan districts. In the Sui Lanh Valley, the ROKA killed 42 PLAF members, while efforts along the Song Cau-Dong Xuan border resulted in 207 PLAF deaths.⁸⁵¹ As ROKA soldiers collected only 80 weapons, one might surmise that many of the PLAF killed were Phu Yen civilians pressed into service by the Communist to serve as support personnel.

Yet by far the most telling of the situation in Phu Yen were the observations of pacification at the hamlet level. At Hoa Tri village in Tuy Hoa District, Frobenius found a village tainted by PLAF influence. Despite the presence of the 2/29 RF Group Headquarters in Hoa Tri village, the enemy held noteworthy influence. While three of the

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

four hamlets experienced GVN control, a fourth hamlet existed under PLAF rule.

Frobenius reported that “Viet Cong incidents are one the upswing in this Village, and there seems to be no counter moves by the GVN. The GVN is a reality in three of the 4 hamlets of this Village.”⁸⁵² While the most of the village benefited from quality GVN security efforts, the presence of one troublesome hamlet raised concerns.

In his 28 July 1971 inspection of Long Tuong hamlet in Tuy Hoa District, Frobenius noted that, despite the presence of a RF company, the inhabitants were subject to frequent abductions and assassinations by the PLAF. This RF contingent made an appearance for four hours each day but conducted no military operations. Frobenius summed-up the effects of hamlet’s questionable security as follows: “7 people were abducted five days ago. 1 was killed 15 days ago, and 10 more previous to that. When the VC come to the Hamlet, they evidently use the school as a base of operations.”⁸⁵³ The PLAF conducted business openly, as also indicated by the rundown state of the seemingly disused hamlet office, the supposed epicenter of GVN authority. Further demonstrating the enemy’s control over Long Tuong was the population’s daily abandonment of the hamlet between 0800 and 1600 hours. Many inhabitants sought refuge away from the hamlet and the threat of PLAF violence. Clearly, those who remained had “made their peace with the Viet Cong.”⁸⁵⁴ Frobenius poignantly added, “The GVN does not govern here. If you sleep there and cooperate with the GVN, you’ll find yourself looking into the barrel of the gun.”⁸⁵⁵ Validating Frobenius’s report, “Notes

⁸⁵² Courtney L. Frobenius to LTC. Charles S. Varnum, “Status of Security at Hoa Tri Hamlet,” 28 July 1971, p.2, Folder 8, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid.

on Tuy Hoa District” added that “Long Tuong Hamlet has always had a very active VCI infrastructure...the VCI have started to operate more overtly both at night and during the daylight hours.”⁸⁵⁶ The lack of sound security meant government offices were abandoned, thus little to no means of fostering a positive relationship with the locals. Seeing no alternative, it is no surprise that the inhabitants worked with the PLAF and against Saigon.

As covered in the “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” the PLAF totally governed Long Tuong hamlet. The PLAF “have been very successful in getting people to move from Long Tuong hamlet to old Phong Nguyen hamlet.”⁸⁵⁷ Alarming, Phong Nguyen hamlet “has not been recognized as a legal GVN hamlet for over three years now. Approximately 150 people have moved back to this area. This hamlet is completely under the control of the VC cadre.”⁸⁵⁸ “Several meetings, village and district, have been held in this hamlet,” continued the notes.⁸⁵⁹ Furthermore, “VCI infrastructure is Hoa Tri Village is now rebuilding at a very fast rate. They currently have two action arrow teams working in the village combined strength approximately 15 people.”⁸⁶⁰ Why Hoa Tri village inched closer to PLAF domination emerged from “the economic situation and because of the location.”⁸⁶¹ The village sat in the Tuy Hoa Valley to the west of Tuy Hoa City within

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁷ Advisory Team 28, “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” Undated, p.12, Folder: Phu Yen 210, CMH. Note: CMH has both the rough draft and the final copy of the notes. Citations in this chapter reference the final copy of the notes.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid.

relatively close proximity to other villages.⁸⁶² Lastly, “Starting in March the security within Hoa Tri village has deteriorated to the point that VC cadre and action arrow teams can move throughout these hamlets with relative freedom.”⁸⁶³ The lessons from Long Tuong hamlet being that the PLAF had turned the hamlet into a nexus from which to expand their control.

A symptom of the relationship between American assistance to the South Vietnamese, the lack of proactive leadership from Saigon, plagued pacification efforts throughout the war. The very nature of the United States’s relationship with the Republic of South Vietnam made pacification all the more difficult in Phu Yen. Years of flooding the RVN with U.S. dollars and military hardware, now combined with Vietnamization, meant the Saigon government found itself awash in responsibilities. In pressing the GVN to accept accelerated pacification, American authorities inadvertently created problems that reverberated to the hamlet level. When touring the three hamlets that comprised Hoa Dinh village, Frobenius found a community suffering from the lack of GVN interest. Situated in the southwest corner of Tuy Hoa District along highway 7B, Hoa Dinh was the scene of heavy fighting during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The village’s recovery seemed questionable as Frobenius noted that he only came across the village chief and none of the government officials that should have been there. Holding nothing back, he wrote, “From all appearances, one might rightfully say that it is a progressing Village. Appearance lies.”⁸⁶⁴ While Hoa Dinh lacked any clear trace of Communist influence, the

⁸⁶² Frobenius to Varnum, “Status of Security at Hoa Tri Hamlet,” 28 July 1971, p.2, Folder 8, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers M396, MLA.

⁸⁶³ Advisory Team 28, “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” Undated, p.13, Folder: Phu Yen 210, CMH.

⁸⁶⁴ Frobenius to Varnum, Security in Xa Hoa Dinh, 26 July 1971, p.2, Folder 10, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

PLAF occupied positions in the surrounding hills. Frobenius surmised the PLAF lacked the troops necessary to mount an incursion into the village. Yet no officials slept in the hamlets, instead they returned to safety of Tuy Hoa City every night. As a consequence, little coordination transpired between government officials and the Regional Force.⁸⁶⁵

Frobenius's report on Hoa Dinh village caught the attention of Major Myron K. Rice, DSA for Tuy Hoa District. Rice forwarded a copy of Frobenius's original report to Meerdink and Varnum, along with a letter outlining his opinions. The DSA wrote that Frobenius's "report is one among several that I have received within the last week that is indicative of the Security Situation in Tuy Hoa District. I feel that if something is not done in the very near future the overall situation of security and pacification will be in jeopardy."⁸⁶⁶ Rice's comments went even deeper than Frobenius's observations. Indeed, the DSA stated that "The HES report ending on 30 June does not truly reflect the true security situation within Tuy Hoa District."⁸⁶⁷ Continuing, Rice specified that the villages of Hoa Dinh, Hoa Quang, Hoa Kien, and An Chan all exhibited signs of poor security. For Hoa Dinh and Hoa Quang, the DSA noted the two villages "have easy access routes which are currently being used by the enemy."⁸⁶⁸ Hoa Kien, too, had "Easy access routes and virtual absence of security which is reflected by the mobile population."⁸⁶⁹ As for An Chan, Rice informed his superiors that "The situation is so bad that the hamlet chiefs of Phu Thanh, Phu Quy, and Phu Phong rotate entering their hamlets. The population here is

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁶ Advisory Team 28, Myron K. Rice to Russell L. Meerdink, "Status of Security in Hoa Dinh Village," 27 July 1971, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 300 / Folder: Eval Reps - PSA I, NARA II.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid.

also mobile.”⁸⁷⁰ Frobenius later visited and confirmed the status of these other communities. For Rice, “the current security problem is partially attributed to the fact that there has been a rapid turnover of both District Senior Advisors and District Chiefs in Tuy Hoa District within the last 6 months.”⁸⁷¹ In confirming Frobenius's report, Rice offered additional credibility. He placed some responsibility for the worsening security conditions on the routine personal changes to the advisory system. Yet Rice did not diminish the obvious, that the PLAF was making inroads into strategically significant villages in Phu Yen's most vital district, Tuy Hoa.

Further validation of Frobenius's findings appeared in other district material. “Situation in Hoa Dinh Village is still very serious,” began the description of the community in “Notes on Tuy Hoa District.”⁸⁷² The reasoning being that “VCI and VCM move about through the village both day and night with all kinds of freedom.”⁸⁷³ The presence of two RF companies and many pro-GVN officials did not improve the situation as “The Hamlet Chief of Thanh Nghiep Hamlet, Hoa Dinh Village, is currently operating openly for the VC.”⁸⁷⁴ Proof was that the hamlet chief “has operated for the local action arrow team on two occasions during the month of April. He has also been seen attending local propaganda meetings which have been held in his hamlet for the local VC cadre.”⁸⁷⁵ The village's PLAF members “have been instrumental in getting people from Phu Sen,

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

⁸⁷² Advisory Team 28, “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” Undated, p.9, Folder: Phu Yen 210, CMH.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid.

and Cam Thach Hamlets to move back out to their old hamlet locations.”⁸⁷⁶ Indeed, “The VCI infrastructure currently working in and living in Hoa Dinh Village is one of the strongest in Tuy Hoa District.”⁸⁷⁷ Additionally, “The control of the VC over the Hoa Dinh population is to a point now where they can positively sway the people in any election either local or national.”⁸⁷⁸

Aside from intense influence, PLAF operating from Hoa Dinh village actively engaged the local GVN. “On two occasions the VC have used 60mm mortars and M79 grenade launchers to fire CS gas into the security forces night locations. This has caused nothing but havoc.”⁸⁷⁹ The results were that the nightly withdrawal of two RF companies to the safety of the more secure Hoa Thang village. To the west of the village, the PLAF operated “a rest haven, refurbishing area, and R&R center for units not only located in Tuy Hoa District, but also through the province.”⁸⁸⁰ “Over the past year, there have been three times as many sightings in the western part of Hoa Dinh Village,” as numerous PLAF units from Hieu Xong District passed through the village en route to Tuy Hoa District.⁸⁸¹ Ultimately, the unspecified author reported “that the VC plan is to make Hoa Dinh village a VC combat village.”⁸⁸² To that end, Hoa Dinh functioned more like an enemy base than as a GVN village. With PLAF influence incubating at the hamlet level,

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid, 9-10.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸⁸² Ibid., 11.

the guerrillas remained a serious threat to the presence of the Saigon government in Phu Yen.

For the GVN, August brought forth renewed PLAF activity. Regardless of having launched a campaign to expand GVN control over more territory, GVN forces in Phu Yen made little headway. “The Dong Khoi campaign must have sounded good to the VC since he immediately starting pushing on all fronts,” Meerdink wrote.⁸⁸³ Indeed, the GVN’s campaign to improve province security only encouraged further enemy activity. The PLAF conducted 62 attacks, a sharp increase from the previous month’s 27. “On the night of the 24-25 August, supposedly the start of the GVN Dong Khoi II campaign,” noted the report, the PLAF “initiated 13 contacts in province, climaxed by his mortar-sapper attack on Nui Son Company HQ in Hieu Xuong District.”⁸⁸⁴ Like at the battle of Cung Son, “Only the prompt arrival of 17th Combat Aviation Group gunships which killed a known eight in the wire and a possible 20 more, averted another major disaster.”⁸⁸⁵ With the removal of all U.S. ground forces, American airpower remained an indispensable asset to pacification. Indeed, the reliance on American airpower to halt enemy advances was an ever apparent reality in Phu Yen throughout 1971.

The ROKA, too, had an active August. A two-week long operation in base area 236 netted the 28th ROK Regiment 325 enemy kills. Colonel Lee, the 28th ROK Regiment’s commander, “privately confided, however, that productive workers made up the majority of the kills and the main force units.” The killing of more PLAF logistic

⁸⁸³ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 August 1971, p.2, CMH.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid.

personnel, surely meant future abductions by the PLAF. Thus by August 1971, the ROKA established a theme of conducting operations that looked beneficial on paper, but adversely affected the hamlets their actions supposedly protected. In attacking rear echelon PLAF, the ROKA acquired easy kills, while ultimately harming province security. Even when exacting a human toll from the People's Liberation Armed Forces, it occurred at a steep cost to the local population and did not necessarily improve security. Yet as for August as a whole, Meerdink surmised that, "were it not for the actions of the 28th ROK Regiment in Base Area 236, it would have been a very bad month in Phu Yen."⁸⁸⁶ At least the aggressiveness of the ROKA made pacification for the month look good on paper.

Back at the hamlet level, Frobenius encountered more discouraging indicators of the direction of the war. Control of people and their rice afforded the PLAF a vital source to keep their movement very much alive. While touring Hieu Xuong District's Hoa Thanh village on 10 August, Frobenius came across Phu Xuan, a hamlet he remarked as "among the worst that I have seen."⁸⁸⁷ Here, Frobenius found that the PLAF taxed each family ten kilos of rice and 1,500\$VN per month. With approximately 280 families in the hamlet, the PLAF collected from them 2,800 kilos of rice and 420,000\$VN. Frobenius estimated that the PLAF consumed 15 kilos per person, thus this was enough rice to feel

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁷ Frobenius to Varnum, "Status of Security of Xa Hon Thanh Hieu Xuong District," Undated, p.4, Folder 12, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA; Frobenius does not specify which Phu Xuan hamlet he visited (i.e. Phu Xuan 1, Phu Xuan 2, Phu Xuan 3, or Phu Xuan 4). Nevertheless, the hamlet in question is most likely Phu Xuan 4 as it was the most remote of the Xuan Phuoc village's hamlets.

about 187 guerrillas. Food and taxes made this hamlet nearly indispensable to PLAF operations.⁸⁸⁸

On Tuy Hoa District's western frontier sat another village that troubled Frobenius. Situated in the furthest reaches of the Da Rang River Valley, Hoa Quang village and its eight hamlets were north of An Nghiep, east of the mountains, south of Hoa Kien village, and west of Hoa Tri and Nui Sam. "Being the Frontier, it suffers accordingly," Frobenius remarked his notes on the village's security.⁸⁸⁹ "Once the traveler crosses Nui Sam, the picture changes almost immediately. The sense of security leaves," went the report.⁸⁹⁰ Despite the presence of a hilltop ROKA compound, the South Koreans overlooked a "'New Life' hamlet, that offers anything but new life."⁸⁹¹ Frobenius explained that the hamlet in question, Ngoc Dong, functioned more as a "way station" for people as they came only to work the fields, with all the young South Vietnamese vacating the area at dusk. In addition to Ngoc Dong, the hamlets of Mau Lam and Phu Thanh fell under the ROKA area of operations. Regardless of the ROKA presence, nighttime security proved nonexistent as the inhabitants of these hamlets fled to the sanctuary of Tuy Hoa City every evening.

Further still, the most telling sign of the poor security conditions in the area were the abductions. "Within the past 15 days the following abductions have taken place: 3 women from Ngoc Dong, 8 men from Nho Lam, 1 killing in Long Tuong, and several

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁹ Frobenius, "Xa Hoa Quang," Undated, p.1, Folder 16, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid.

abductions from Qui Hau,” Frobenius reported.⁸⁹² Compounding matters, he noted that none of the officials assigned to the hamlets remained onsite at night. Instead, “the RD Cadre, the National Police, and in some cases the PSDF” moved to safe areas to sleep. Frobenius noted that the hamlet of Nho Lam’s twenty PSDF personnel left before nightfall. Similarly, out of Hanh Lam hamlet’s eleven PSDF personnel, two left at dusk.⁸⁹³ For Frobenius, such occurrences indicated clear problems with security.

Hoa Quang’s Phu Thanh hamlet offered Frobenius another striking picture of a community untouched by pacification. Poor roads and questionable GVN oversight kept Phu Thanh isolated. While visiting the hamlet on 3 August 1971, Frobenius noted that access to Phu Thanh consisted of a narrow muddy trail on which a well-built roadblock obstructed entry into the hamlet. According to Frobenius, “at the outskirts of the hamlet, I was unable to travel any further on the road for a barricade across it was a deterrent for my entering the hamlet (both physical and psychological!).”⁸⁹⁴ The quality of the obstruction’s construction left Frobenius suspecting the PLAF as the likely builders, though he did not rule out the local population as being responsible. Yet the People’s Liberation Armed Forces would have benefited the most from such a barricade. Quite literally the route into Phu Thanh afforded the PLAF a means to restrict traffic into the area and thereby strengthen its hold over the hamlet. Moreover, the barricade “does give indication to the fact that the VC...can enter the hamlet and build something like this

⁸⁹² Ibid.

⁸⁹³ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁴ Frobenius to Varnum, “Status of Security of the Hamlets of Mau Lam, Ngoc Dong, and Phu Thanh,” 3 August 1971, p.3, Folder 11, Part 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

during the daylight (it would be difficult to build something like it at night),” Frobenius noted.⁸⁹⁵

Unable to access the hamlet, Frobenius sought information from a blind man he encountered. From him, Frobenius discovered the hamlet’s chief was rarely present and the hamlet lacked RD cadre. With that, Frobenius left the vicinity. Later, when he returned with an unnamed member of the Tuy Hoa District team, Frobenius’s interpreter stopped an old man as he passed by. The old man warned the interpreter that, “I think you better leave the area fast.”⁸⁹⁶ Such a warning gives further credence to the PLAF as controlling the hamlet. Immediately thereafter, everyone, including the old man, vacated the area. At the end of his report to Varnum, Frobenius remarked, “I wouldn’t be surprised if the NLF flag were raised any time now and the VC pledge of Allegiance was flowing from Phu Thanh’s populace!”⁸⁹⁷

PLAF activity also posed a problem for Hoa Quang and its hamlets. As reported by Frobenius,

The Village office of Xa Hoa Quang was destroyed by the People’s Liberation Armed Forces recently. The Village Chief simply taxed the Village people that he knew had ties with the People’s Liberation Armed Forces for money in order to rebuild it. The Village office is rebuilt, but the basic problem still remains.....security. In all likelihood other Hamlet offices will continue to be destroyed unless security is brought to the area. The population is in a transient status. There is a mass exit into the more secure hamlets in the Valley and into Tuy Hoa City every night. And this will continue until security becomes a reality.⁸⁹⁸

Frobenius hit upon the security problem that had troubled Phu Yen throughout the Vietnam War. Yet by 1971, solving such a dilemma proved less likely than ever before as

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

American withdrawal neared completion. Years of pacification efforts yielded marginal improvements in Phu Yen's overall security as the safety of those residing beyond Tuy Hoa City remained under threat of enemy encroachment.

At Mau Lam, the PLAF's interaction with the local population confounded Frobenius. Despite falling under the ROKA AO, Hoa Quang remained largely untouched by security efforts. Here, "when the VC come to collect taxes, they collect at least 2 kilo's or rice per family (that is enough to feed 20 men a month for one month)."⁸⁹⁹ Frobenius concluded that the hamlet "is nothing more than a Viet Cong way station at night."⁹⁰⁰ For all intents and purposes, Mau Lam further solidified Hoa Quang village as a burgeoning PLAF center of power in Tuy Hoa District.

The mere presence of the ROKA complicated matters for local defense forces. Like Mau Lam, Ngoc Dong sat in the AO of the ROKA. Yet the presence of an adjacent ROKA firebase did not make this hamlet secure. While evaluating Ngoc Dong—a purportedly vibrant hamlet—on 3 August 1971, Frobenius wrote, "It is the 'New Life' hamlet that seems to be anything but new life."⁹⁰¹ A hamlet of mud huts and no foliage, Ngoc Dong experienced routine taxation by the PLAF. "The VC have a tax base and a support base out of this Hamlet. Frequently the VC come into the [hamlet] (there is no one to stop them!). Propaganda meetings, taxing, food collection, and abductions take place in regular intervals in this hamlet," Frobenius reported to his superiors.⁹⁰² Poor coordination among the Allies continued to harm pacification. Ngoc Dong faced a

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁰² Ibid.

security conundrum as the hamlet fell under the ROKA AO, which meant the GVN could not place its own forces in the hamlet. As for the South Koreans, they “do not seem anxious to execute their responsibility in the area. Possibly because the ROK’s do not have enough forces to do so.”⁹⁰³ Instead, the South Koreans focused on “securing the area that is within their barb wire.”⁹⁰⁴ Consequently, because nothing challenged the PLAF, the hamlet remained anything but under GVN control. More significantly, alliance problems at the hamlet level left pacification province wide pockmarked with blemishes for the PLAF to exploit.

Ultimately, his experiences in the hamlets comprising Hoa Quang village left Frobenius questioning the purpose of pacification and, more generally, the war itself. A frustrated Frobenius bemoaned the general situation befalling Phu Yen, writing,

My ‘war’ ends in 24 days, these peoples war may not end for a long time yet, but that is thru their own choosing, not mine. Many American’s have been killed here, some of them have been my friends and my soldiers. I see no reason that Americans should continue to risk their lives in any fashion at all, until some of these gross inequities are corrected by the South Vietnamese. Too many excuses have been offered to the listening American: these excuses should not be accepted any more. No more rapport needs to be made. For they have the arms, the ammunition, the organization, the knowledge, to do it themselves. I think that now is the time to tell them to get off their asses and start doing what so badly needs to be done. Some day we may be sitting back and watching our TV sets back in America and see the National Liberation Front Flag being raised over Saigon if these people don’t start doing what they are supposed to do.⁹⁰⁵

Frobenius’s remarks, however, placed the blame for pacification failings on the South Vietnamese and not the Americans whom overburdened their allies with Vietnamization. With the protection afford by US Army forces long gone, Phu Yen’s local defense forces

⁹⁰³ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid., 5.

found themselves in need everywhere all at once. On balance, the fast expansion of territory for the Saigon government to pacify and administer alone overburdened the South Vietnamese tasked with providing security.

Substantiating the points raised by Frobenius, the anonymous “Notes on Tuy Hoa District” revealed more about the troubled village of Hoa Quang. In that vein, the unnamed author of the notes perceived “Hoa Quang Village to be under the control of the VC at night and is debatable whose control it is under during the daylight hours.”⁹⁰⁶ Regardless of the security provided by two RF companies and five PF platoons, “the village administrative committee [and] the village council, and most hamlet administrative boards, all have people located in them which are currently actively working for the VCI.”⁹⁰⁷ Worse yet, “The Village Chief, the Deputy for Security and the Village council Chairman for Ho Quang Village are ex Chieu Hoi’s and are reoperating for the VC. Their current contact is Nguyen Lu who is the VC Village chief of Hoa Quang Village.”⁹⁰⁸ “Notes on Tuy Hoa District” confirmed Frobenius’s earlier mention of the mass abandonment of the village by all pro-GVN officials, as well as RD Cadre and the National Police.⁹⁰⁹ The trend of leaving the village for safer places to sleep, “has now been going on for over a year.” An emboldened “VCI, VCN, and action arrow teams are able to move about with real freedom with no fear of GVN forces.”⁹¹⁰ Without any threat to their operations, the PLAF “have the people completely under their control

⁹⁰⁶ Advisory Team 28, “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” Undated, p.5, Folder: Phu Yen 210, CMH.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid.

mainly out of fear.”⁹¹¹ With such power, “The VC themselves have set up and given monies to the Nho Lam Hamlet Chief’s to build a rice mill in Nho Lam Hamlet. The rice mill in Nho Lam Hamlet was partially built from funds supplied by the VC. They currently plan to buy two tractors and several water pumps which are to be used by the hamleteers located in Hoa Quang village.”⁹¹² Indeed, the situation in Hoa Quang village proved even worse than when Frobenius made his observations. In taking over Hoa Quang, the PLAF controlled a significant foothold in Tuy Hoa District.

A secure village did not mean all of its hamlets existed outside of PLAF influence. As indicated in a visit to Xuan Phuoc village in Dong Xuan District on 18 August, Frobenius noted that noteworthy security existed in close proximity to the village. The Dong Tre camp and its RF companies had the capability to keep the entire village secure, yet the troops instead opted to protect themselves.⁹¹³ The inaction of RF Group 54 and its three companies essentially permitted the hamlet of Phu Xuan to fall to PLAF control. Indeed, Phu Xuan was “a VC dominated Hamlet entirely,” at not the C rated hamlet as presented by HES.⁹¹⁴ “In this war the battleground is the ‘people,’ and therefore the places that they live,” Frobenius stated. A reality amiss in much of Phu Yen.

Tuy Hoa District’s Hoa Kien village offered Frobenius considerable insight into the failure of pacification in Phu Yen. During his undated inspection of Minh Duc hamlet—the same hamlet near Núi Cháp Chài where the hilltop disaster of 1 April 1970 that helped spur “The Advisory Crisis” occurred—Frobenius found a community without

⁹¹¹ Ibid.

⁹¹² Ibid.

⁹¹³ Frobenius, “Xa Xuan Phuoc,” 18 August 1971, p.4, Folder 15, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M196, MLA.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid., 3, 6.

dependable defenders and leadership. Despite the presence of “two platoons and the headquarters element of RF 947,” the majority of the hamlet’s inhabitants left the area for the safety of Tuy Hoa City every evening.⁹¹⁵ Included among those leaving before nightfall included all government officials. The RD assigned to the hamlet, Frobenius remarked, “like all others, it does nothing except show up during the day to prevent being red-lined.”⁹¹⁶ Void of reliable hamlet officials, the population lacked the leadership necessary to act against possible PLAF aggression. Unsurprisingly, Minh Duc “is reputed to be a ‘Hideout’ of the VCI.”⁹¹⁷ Frobenius added, “even though the major portion of an RF company is stationed there. The ones that stay there must have made their peace with the Viet Cong.”- “Fear is paramount in this hamlet,” Frobenius asserted.⁹¹⁸ Compromised security did not bode well for the pacification in the district nor province.

At Hoa Kien village’s Tuang Quang hamlet, Frobenius uncovered another community untouched by pacification efforts. In the middle of the afternoon, Frobenius noticed the hamlet lacked a hamlet office and the hamlet chief was gone. The PSDF and RF troops that were meant to defend the population refrained from patrolling the hamlet. Moreover, the hamlet RD platoon did not exist. After sunset, only five out of one-hundred inhabitants remained in the hamlet. Clearly, this hamlet was “not a community of people at all.”⁹¹⁹ “Because this hamlet does not have the makings of a hamlet it should not exist,” Frobenius suggested. He added, “I believe that the people moved out of this

⁹¹⁵ Frobenius to Varum, “Xa Hoa Kien,” Undated, p.3, Folder 13, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

hamlet to get away from the war, both the Viet Cong and the GVN soldiers who stole from there. Because this hamlet vanished indicates a failure on the part of the GVN to provide security for its people.”⁹²⁰ Continuing his damning report to Varnum, Frobenius stated,

The PSDF—if indeed they do exist—should have all of their weapons taken away. The Hamlet should be taken off the HES and what is left of it should be incorporated into Quang Thrieu Hamlet for administration. The RF and PF should at least be required to sweep the Hamlet at least once a day at a minimum. If, and only if, the GVN were to provide a certain degree of security would this hamlet be able to come back to life.⁹²¹

The conditions in Tuang Quang offered another instance of a hamlet suffering from inadequate government supervision and poor defense.

The status of Hoa Kien village as a whole did not please AT28. Aside from Frobenius’s observations, those addressed in “Notes of Tuy Hoa District,” placed Hoa Kien as a village literally teeming with PLAF activity. “There is very high increase of enemy activity which can be attributed to Pham Lu, Action Arrow Leader, Tuy Hoa City, responsible for Lien Tri, Ninh Tinh and Tuy Hoa City. He is the individual who heads the most wanted list in Tuy Hoa District,” went the report.⁹²² Moreover, “abductions, increase in taxation, rice collection” typified PLAF activity.⁹²³ The PLAF also “put the word out that no 3-wheeled Lambrettas will be allowed on the Phuoc Hau, Minh Duc, Ngoc Phong Road, or the Tuong Quang, Quang Trieu road. Reason for this, to stop the people from taking the rice into more secure areas from Tuy Hoa District such as Ninh

⁹²⁰ Ibid.

⁹²¹ Ibid.

⁹²² Advisory Team 28, “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” Undated, p.1, Folder: Phu Yen 210, CMH.

⁹²³ Ibid.

Tinh or into the hamlets of Tuy Hoa Village.”⁹²⁴ Village officials compounded issues since they dabbled in corruption with the “selling of hamlet positions,” which “occurred four different times in Hoa Kien.”⁹²⁵ Specifically, “The village chief has replaced [the] deputy for security in the following hamlets: Ninh Tinh, Quang Trieu, Tuong Quang, also in Ngoc Phong. These particular positions are going for approximately 40 to 60,000 P per position. Individuals who are now filling these positions are X-RD Cadre.”⁹²⁶ “X-RD Cadre” being former members of the entity created by the GVN to spread revolutionary zeal to those residing in the hamlets of the RVN. The report continued with mentioning that the village’s Quang Trieu hamlet hosted VCI, with the Communists having “cadre meetings, action arrow meetings and VC cadre meetings” here.⁹²⁷ Essentially, Hoe Kien served the PLAF and not the GVN.

Nearby Hoa Kien village at Núi Cháp Chài, a PLAF base provided another safe area for the Communists. The base at Núi Cháp Chài offered “action arrow leaders, VC cadre and VC” a safe haven as its “east side is known to have several bunkers, tunnels, and access routes running east and west all the way into Tuy Hoa village and back up the northwestern part of Hoa Kien (V).”⁹²⁸ Back in the village proper,

VCI action arrow teams are constantly in the village, operating overtly at night. In the western part of the village, there is a definite lack of information coming into district or American headquarters due to the fact that there are no hamlet officials, no village officials, RD cadre or National Police. The only GVN presence we have on occasions is RF and PF forces. These forces, especially PF platoons, have in the past and are still currently, pulling back to more secure areas or else linking up

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

⁹²⁵ Ibid.

⁹²⁶ Ibid.

⁹²⁷ Ibid.

⁹²⁸ Ibid., 2.

with other RF and PF units to secure themselves and not the hamleteers in the areas.⁹²⁹

Indeed, as damning as Frobenius's findings were, conditions in Hoa Kien village were in fact much worse. The presence of formidable PLAF infrastructure so close to Tuy Hoa City indicated that even so late in the war, pacification remained largely confined to the province capital. The lack of sufficient intelligence out of the village also did not improve the GVN's influence in the area.

Attempts to inspect the village of An Chan provided Frobenius with disheartening observations of security conditions. Indeed, he began his undated report with "Because of the situation in Xa An Chan and the deterioration of the PSDF, I was not able to report solely upon the PSDF, as there would be nothing but hopelessness to report on."⁹³⁰ Bordering Tuy An District, An Chan was Tuy Hoa District's northernmost village. Nine hamlets comprised the village, three of which sat on Hon Chua Island.⁹³¹ The isolation afforded by the island meant those communities were "refuted to be a draft dodgers paradise."⁹³² Nevertheless, security on the island proved sufficient during Frobenius's travels. Elsewhere in the village at Xuan Duc and Long Thuy hamlets, however, security appeared in trouble. Rather, "Since the hamlet chiefs do not sleep in the hamlets, the fear is transmitted right down the line to the RD and the PSDF who also leave the area at night."⁹³³ Yet Frobenius faced the most troublesome sights at Phu Phong, Phu Quy, and Phu Thanh hamlets. At these three hamlets, the hamlet chiefs, like their counterparts at

⁹²⁹ Ibid.

⁹³⁰ Frobenius to Varnum, Security in Xa An Chan, Undated, p.1, Folder 14, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁹³¹ Ibid., 2.

⁹³² Ibid.

⁹³³ Ibid., 4.

Xuan Duc and Long Thuy hamlets, did not sleep there. Instead, they went to Tuy Hoa City and often remained away “for several days at a time.”⁹³⁴ This resulted in Phu Thanh’s RD “not doing anything, nor did they plan to do anything.”⁹³⁵ Such a conclusion came from a RF platoon leader. Making matters worse, the one RF and one PF platoons meant to defend Phu Phong hamlet refused to go there “out of fear.” Upon requesting the RF platoon leader to “accompany me and the answer was an emphatic ‘no.’”⁹³⁶ Consequently Frobenius figured “The VC influence undoubtedly is high in this hamlet.”⁹³⁷ He added, “This is the most serious problem in Xa An Chan. It should be given first priority. To show the flag in Phu Phong would be an absolute priority.”⁹³⁸ “The situation is such, that if something is not done in the near future, these three hamlets will drop to a D HES, if not a V HES, and worst yet, all that has been gained will be lost in a short time.”⁹³⁹ Indeed, An Chan village appeared on the brink of existing outside of GVN control.

The GVN’s position in An Chan village never improved. Rather, the “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” deemed “the VC control to be stronger than in other locations of the district.”⁹⁴⁰ “The VC exert much control of the people and could actually force the people to vote their way either in a hamlet and village election or a national election. The people in An Chan village are like reeds in the wind. Depending on the current enemy and GVN

⁹³⁴ Ibid.

⁹³⁵ Ibid.

⁹³⁶ Ibid.

⁹³⁷ Ibid.

⁹³⁸ Ibid.

⁹³⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁰ Advisory Team 28, “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” Undated, p.5, Folder: Phu Yen 210, CMH.

situation, they would bend themselves to either side,” the notes cautioned. Most alarmingly, “3/4ths of the village migrates to either Hon Chua island, Chin Nghia Hamlet or all the way into Tuy Hoa Village at night because of their fear of the VC because of fear of being abducted, taxed, or assassinated.”⁹⁴¹

As some South Vietnamese moved to Hon Chua Island, so too did the PLAF. Although Frobenius perceived Hon Chua Island as secure, “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” relayed a different picture of the island. In the time after Frobenius’s visit, the island’s hamlets underwent “an upsurge of VCI activity.”⁹⁴² Such happenings entailed the PLAF having “dropped leaflets, conducted propaganda meetings, and destroyed 2 fishing boats on the island.”⁹⁴³ Moreover, “there are approximately 10 to 15 VCI currently living on Hon Chua island. The people on this island are currently being taxed by VC elements, VC Cadre and VC agents. They are being taxed in the form of rice, fish, and monies.”⁹⁴⁴ Transportation, too, felt the effects of PLAF influence as “The VC are charging the boat owners a tax for ferrying people from Long Thuy ferry site to Hon Chua Island.”⁹⁴⁵ Lastly, the notes revealed that,

The hamlet chief of Me Qunag Hamlet located on Hon Chua Island has been known to operate for the VCI in the past and on two occasions during the month of May has informed the VCI and the deserters located on Hon Chua Island of friendly operations which were to be conducted and were conducted by RF and PF units. This information came to us via agent reports from Hon Chua.⁹⁴⁶

⁹⁴¹ Ibid.

⁹⁴² Advisory Team 28, “Notes on Tuy Hoa District,” Undated, p.4, Folder: Phu Yen 210, CMH.

⁹⁴³ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., 4-5.

The deterioration of security on Hon Chua Island nonetheless validated Frobenius's warning that the An Chan village would fall further away from GVN control without prompt countermeasures.

Yet Tuy Hoa Village appeared as anything but a safe haven. Here, the PLAF "targeted the hamlet office of Binh Tinh and Binh Hoa. On numerous occasions explosives have been set inside both hamlet offices."⁹⁴⁷ Efforts by the National Police and RF Mobile Battalion 206 to curtail enemy activity, netted "45 category A and B VCI in Tuy Hoa Village."⁹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, "there are three 5-man sapper elements that are operating in Tuy Hoa Village. Their mission is to destroy GVN facilities and assassinate GVN and Free World Forces and officials located within Tuy Hoa Village."⁹⁴⁹ Although attacks against such targets had not materialized, "There have been numerous instances of vehicles being damaged or blown up which can possibly be attributed to the sapper elements or to the local cowboy or veteran elements."⁹⁵⁰ Harassment nonetheless reinforced the sense that the PLAF indeed sought to supplant Saigon's authority in the village.

During an undated inspection of An Ninh village in Tuy Hoa District, South Vietnamese security measures once again troubled Frobenius. In a scene all too familiar to Frobenius, a dire political and security situation engulfed all of An Ninh's hamlets. With scant trace of GVN authority, the People's Liberation Armed Forces controlled the area. As contended by Frobenius,

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid.

In the Village of An Ninh it would be ridiculous to assume that the ‘insurgents’ are the People’s Liberation Armed Forces. The GVN is the ‘insurgent’ in An Ninh from the eyes of the people. In the eyes of the people the GVN is the one that disrupts the Village by having its soldiers occasionally sweep thru on an operation to clear the area of the enemy! After the GVN’s troops leave, all returns to normal and life goes on.⁹⁵¹

An Ninh functioned as a center of PLAF power. Frobenius ascertained that People’s Liberation Armed Forces’s DK 7 Local Force called An Ninh home and had operated from there as far back at 1940 as part of the Viet Minh. Indeed, “The Village has given its sons and its store of food to the Viet Minh and to the Viet Cong more recently. It shares a heritage with the ‘enemy’ that cannot be overlooked, nor underscored enough to emphasis that it is a bastion enemy strength.”⁹⁵² Besides, GVN units were well aware of An Ninh’s history and DK 7, fearing the unit so much that they avoided engaging it in battle.⁹⁵³

Other than the significant security dilemma in An Ninh, Frobenius reported on how the village, like all communities in Vietnam, served as the foundation for Vietnamese lives.⁹⁵⁴ Frobenius had this to say about the centrality of the community not only to Vietnamese society but also to winning the war. Despite the ongoing conflict, “The elders are still respected and the ancestors are still worshiped. The village’s function in Vietnam remains paramount.”⁹⁵⁵ Furthermore, “If any war is to be fought in Vietnam, the Village must be paramount, for within its confines lies the ‘key’ to any guerrilla war: the people. If the people are controlled and loyal, the guerrilla is denied a source of food,

⁹⁵¹ Frobenius to Varum, An Ninh Village, Undated, p.3, Box 3, Folder 18, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁹⁵² Ibid., 1.

⁹⁵³ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid.

shelter, labor, and intelligence.”⁹⁵⁶ Such insight never affected the decisions made by the higher echelons of American leadership. The Vietnamese people remained misunderstood and Allied hope for victory stayed out of reach.

Frobenius’s reports revealed pacification in Phu Yen as a seriously troubled endeavor. While the communities visited by Frobenius constituted only a small portion of the many villages and hamlets in Phu Yen, the problems in these locations proved that Phu Yen remained far from the pacified province American authorities desired. In that vein, the poor security conditions reported by Frobenius indicated the resilience of the PLAF and the limits of GVN power. More accurately, the presence of even a few failing hamlets demonstrated the resurgence of the People’s Liberation Armed Forces on the eve of Vietnamization’s completion. As for Frobenius, jaded over his findings, he requested and received an early dismissal from his duties in Phu Yen and the U.S. Army.

Vietnamization continued in Phu Yen, regardless of Frobenius’s reports and the “Notes on Tuy Hoa District.” September began quietly, but ended with a thud. For the first half of the month, People’s Liberation Armed Forces activity amounted to “a gathering of virtually all the Tuy Hoa District VC apparatus in the Western Tuy Hoa. Other than that, silence!”⁹⁵⁷ On the typically contested highway 7B, the enemy “seemed satisfied with firing a B-40 at the convoy once each day as it passed.”⁹⁵⁸ The opening-up of the highway finally occurred, albeit because the enemy permitted it. On a more positive note, for the ROKA September entailed executing “two battalion sized and one

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 September 1971, p.2, CMH.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid.

regimental operation in the Ky Lo Valley. The latter operation accounted for 174 KIA plus 74 weapons and virtually decimated the DK-9 Battalion.”⁹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the enemy ultimately dictated the tempo of the war. On 21 September, the PLAF mortared the major installations in Phu Yen.⁹⁶⁰ Like many prior months in Phu Yen, September demonstrated the shortcomings of pacification in the province.

Events in October produced mixed results for Phu Yen. The monthly progress report began with “October is spelled F-R-U-S-T-R-A-T-I-O-N.”⁹⁶¹ Before delving into the disappointing events of October, the report noted “sage of Capt. Nguyen Hong Long.”⁹⁶² To the astonishment of both CORDS and GVN authorities, Captain Nguyen Hong Long, the commander of the PLAF’s K-14 Battalion, rallied to the cause of the Saigon government. From him, American and South Vietnamese authorities confirmed that K-14 operated out of Hieu Xuong District’s mountains.⁹⁶³ Yet the weather thwarted attempts to exploit this intelligence in an attack against K-14’s base camp. As the base camp fell under the ROKA’s area of operation, they had first right to mount an operation. In the midst of a change in command, the ROKA deferred to the ARVN. “The 22nd ARVN Division volunteered to conduct a two battalion operation in the area after numerous flaps over the type of ordnance to be used to blast the landing zones in the

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁶¹ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 October 1971, p.1, CMH. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁶² Ibid.

⁹⁶³ Ibid.

dense foliage,” Meerdink wrote.⁹⁶⁴ Torrential downpours grounded all aircraft and the soil too wet for artillery shells, thereby “rendered the vast planning academic.”⁹⁶⁵

The rain, too, caused considerable flooding in Tuy Hoa City, with flood waters reaching five feet in some portions of the province capital. Much to the chagrin of Meerdink, the local GVN failed to act upon the PSA’s earlier calls for improved flood prevent countermeasures. “The GVN made its annual promise to do so and following historic precedent, failed to follow through,” Meerdink stated.⁹⁶⁶ His comment smacked of contempt for the GVN and foreshadowed his departure from Phu Yen later that month. Later, Varnum wrote that his and Meerdink’s departure stemmed from heated exchanges with Province Chief Lt. Col. Nguyen Van To over his political motives when handling of province affairs. The Province Chief’s complaints to Saigon resulted in CORDS’s promoting Meerdink and Varnum out of the province. CORDS sent Meerdink to II Corps headquarters as the chief of operations under Vann. Varnum found himself in Quang Duc Province as the PSA.⁹⁶⁷ LTC Willard A. Holbrook III replaced Meerdink as the PSA and Gerald L. Floyd replaced Varnum as the DPSA. Having arrived in province in June, Holbrook was keenly aware of the province’s suspect security conditions.⁹⁶⁸

As Holbrook took over as PSA, the Northeast Monsoon drenched the province. Despite the torrential rains, significant security related events did occur. Although resistant to the heavy rainfall, the railroad transiting the province proved less resilient to

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁷ Charles S. Varnum interview.

⁹⁶⁸ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 November 1971, p.1, CMH.

enemy explosives. The PLAF interdicted the railroad four times during the first two and half weeks of November. “While this display provided a touchingly warm welcome for the new PSA, DPSA, and Sector Deputy for Security...the last incident was nothing short of insult added to injury: a repair train blown up on its way to clear the roadway of the previous day’s wreckage,” Holbrook stated in the province report.⁹⁶⁹

After a brief hiatus, PLAF attacks against the railroad resumed in December. “The hapless train was attacked twice on the 10th and again on the 17th, resulting in two friendly KIA, six cars derailed, and ten meters of track destroyed,” Floyd reported.⁹⁷⁰ In other news, between the 18th and 25th of December, the enemy assailed four hamlet offices in Tuy Hoa District and two in Hieu Xuong District.⁹⁷¹ Together, these enemy actions paled in comparison to previous attacks during 1971, thus making December a relatively quiet month in Phu Yen. PLAF activity in December nonetheless posited Phu Yen was as far away from being secure in 1971 as ever before.

At the close of 1971, PAVN and PLAF units still maintained base area 236, a fact known to AT28. Varnum stated that the team had considerable intelligence on the PLAF chief in Phu Yen. They knew his family lived in Son Hoa District and that he spent most of his time in the remote jungle with his fighters. On one occasion, Americans visited his home to gift a brand new television to the PLAF chief’s hysterical his wife out of hope to discredit his reputation among other PLAF members.⁹⁷² Such an act is highly

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁰ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 December 1971, p.1, CMH.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid.

⁹⁷² Charles S. Varnum interview.

representative of the status quo that spread across the province as Vietnamization progressed with, or usually without, lasting indicators of improved security.

1972

PAVN's 1972 Easter Offensive, or the Nguyen Hue Offensive as termed by the North Vietnamese, plunged much of MR2 into the throes of fully blown conventional warfare. Such a level of intense fighting transpired in Phu Yen, albeit not as intensely as in other areas of the RVN. Instead a different brand of warfare transpired as PAVN and PLAF cells continued a harassment campaign across the province. Thus as other parts of MR2 experienced a mechanized invasion, frequent low intensity enemy activity typified the Nguyen Hue Offensive in Phu Yen. Similar to the previous two years, Communist forces directed efforts at disrupting and reversing pacification. Although monitoring the upswing in enemy activity in the province, the principle task of Advisory Team 28 consisted of withdrawing the mission to complete Vietnamization.

AT28's Newsletter for 1972 highlighted the major occurrences for the year. Much of January and February passed quietly as time was "spent preparing for a Tet offensive that never came."⁹⁷³ Nevertheless for some, February proved anything but dull as a jeep traversing QL-1 hit a mine on 27 February, resulting in the medical evacuation of the driver, Sgt. John N. Crawford. Two unnamed South Vietnamese occupants were killed, while "Sgt. [David R.] Dalton was blown free of the vehicle."⁹⁷⁴ By April, the relative quiet that hung over Phu Yen lifted as "the long awaited enemy high point got off with a

⁹⁷³ Newsletter, "Advisory Team 28 Newsletter," August 1972, p.2, Folder 42, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid.

bang.”⁹⁷⁵ Indeed, Hanoi had commenced its Nguyen Hue Offensive on 30 March, with the new effort to derail the GVN pacification effort reaching Phu Yen shortly thereafter.

Pacification in Phu Yen remained as tenuous as ever. “The province erupted with enemy activity in the early morning hours of the 13th,” began the monthly progress report for April.⁹⁷⁶ In five of Phu Yen’s six districts, the PLAF fired upon GVN targets. At four places, the PLAF ceased fire and initiated ground assaults.⁹⁷⁷ Two such attacks transpired in Tuy Hoa District and Dong Xuan District. Accordingly, Carroll L. Floyd, Acting Province Senior Advisor, reported,

20 plus sappers penetrated the Nui Sam artillery location in Tuy Hoa under the cover of a mortar attack. In addition to 11 bunkers and ban coup equipment being destroyed; friendlies sustained heavy casualties. 4 enemy were killed. The same morning Dong Xuan District Headquarters was hit with 82mm and 60mm mortar fire, 75mm and 57mm recoilless rifle fire, B-40, B-41, automatic weapons, small arms and tear gas. 3 sappers were killed in the wire. This began a two week plus siege that well ventilated the team house and eventually resulted in the evacuation of Xuan Lanh Village and fall of the Dong Tre camp. Traveling 6B remains unhealthy.⁹⁷⁸

Floyd noted these attacks were “the opening of two weeks of continued harassment, with district seats, RF/PF outposts, and LOC’s all receiving their full share of PLAF attention.”⁹⁷⁹ Additionally, Holbrook reported that, “Three bridges on QL-1 were dropped by enemy sappers but quickly repaired by local engineers.”⁹⁸⁰ As recounted in the Advisory Team 28 Newsletter for 1972, “The Chi Thanh pass ambush site saw a lot

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁶ Advisory Team 28, Progress Report, Period Ending 30 April 1972, p.1, CMH.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁸ Newsletter, “Advisory Team 28 Newsletter,” August 1972, pp.2-3, Folder 42, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁹⁷⁹ Advisory Team 28, Progress Report, Period Ending 30 April 1972, p.1, CMH.

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid.

of activity and two spans of the Ngan Son bridge were dropped,” in Tuy An District.⁹⁸¹ Presumably the bombing of the Ngan Son bridge accounted for one of the three dropped bridges reported by Floyd.

PLAF activity subsided towards the end of April. Instead of fighting, PLAF shifted its attention towards rice collection. April, too, entailed alleged collusion between GVN hamlet officials in the western tracts of the Tuy Hoa Valley and the PLAF.⁹⁸² As for PAVN, Floyd noted that despite numerous reports of PAVN movement in the province, no physical evidence validated such claims. Rather, “there has, as yet, been no actual evidence that we are dealing with enemy force other than those organic to the province.”⁹⁸³ The implications being that the local PLAF were sustaining themselves through abductions and taxation. Nevertheless, for the PLAF to conducted attacks across the province, surely it had boosted its ranks through the infusion of PAVN regulars and locals.

Deteriorating security in Phu Yen continued into July. “Territorial security continues as usual to be the name of the game in Phu Yen,” began the monthly progress report for July.⁹⁸⁴ The situation befalling Dong Xuan District demonstrated the failure of pacification. Indeed,

Effective GVN influence in beleaguered Dong Xuan remains limited to the area around the district capital of La Hai and a small section of the Song Cai river valley dominated by the headquarters of the ROKA 1/26 battalion. Route 6B, the main LOC to Dong Xuan, is closed to military vehicles and is traversed only by intermittent civilian traffic.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁸¹ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁸² Ibid, 2.

⁹⁸³ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁴ Advisory Team 28, Progress Report, Period Ending 31 July 1972, p.1, CMH.

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Elsewhere in the province, waning security conditions plagued the western most portions of Hieu Xuong and Tuy Hoa districts. Tuy Hoa District as a whole exhibited “disturbing signs of even further deterioration in security.” In Tuy An District, “heavy VC military pressure” remained noticeable.⁹⁸⁶ In that vein, the People’s Liberation Armed Forces’s D-9 and K-13 battalions “occupied Phu My hamlet and failed in a plan to destroy the Ngan Son bridge. 63 of the enemy were put to rest.”⁹⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the worsening security conditions occurred while the enemy reduced its activity. According to Holbrook, Phu Yen’s “lackluster performance in both pacification and development is even more discouraging when viewed against the fact that the number of significant enemy incidents in July declined to the lowest level this year.”⁹⁸⁸ While the GVN presence in the province seemed to disintegrate in front of the PSA’s eyes, it did so with seemingly minimal Communist effort.

Enemy activity in September revealed the back and forth nature of the war remained intact. PLAF mortars and rockets struck Tuy Hoa City, National Police Headquarters, and the Tuy Hoa Sub-Sector compound. This attack, noted Holbrook, diverted attention away from K-96 Main Force Battalion’s entrance into the western reaches of Tuy Hoa District. “By midday 28 September the K-96, supported by elements of the 204 Sapper Company, occupied almost all of the hamlets in the district west of grid line 13 and south of grid line 45,” read the monthly province report for September.⁹⁸⁹ Yet

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁷ Newsletter, “Advisory Team 28 Newsletter,” August 1972, p.3, Folder 42, Box 2, Courtney L. Frobenius Papers, M396, MLA.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁹ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 September 1972, p.1, CMH.

the GVN responded to the enemy's assertiveness with heavy artillery fire and airstrikes, with battalions of troops slowly pushing K-96 back into the foothills of western Tuy Hoa District from which it came.⁹⁹⁰ While the GVN in Phu Yen quickly retaliated against overt enemy activity, the bold advance of the enemy reaffirmed the Communist's ability to physically challenge the GVN despite years of conventional Allied operations to break PAVN and PLAF power. Thus the enemy still controlled the tempo of the war, with the GVN reacting to Communist activity.

Enemy activity for much of 1972 produced sobering problems for pacification. A September CORDS's report on PAVN's Nguyen Hue Offensive revealed that enemy effort's effect on pacification. Accordingly, CORDS's Field Evaluator, Major Larry D. Budge, produced statistics on the GVN's population control losses, with Phu Yen among the worst. "In MR 2 four of the northern province sustained moderate or serious regressions (Phu Bon – 19%, Binh Dinh – 34.8%, Phu Yen – 36.3% and Kontum – 96%) while the fifth province, Pleiku, regressed on 8.6%," Budge reported.⁹⁹¹ By October, he revised this numbers, with Phu Bon decreasing to 10.4% and Phu Yen increasing to 40%. The other provinces of MR2 retained the same numbers from September.⁹⁹² "Progress is likely to continue in much of southern MR 2, but recovery remains tenuous in the northern provinces," he noted in both reports. For at least one of those northern MR2 provinces, Phu Yen, such losses in population control aptly reflected its existence as a

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁹¹ Evaluation, "Impact of the Enemy Offensive on Pacification," 16 September 1972, p. 2, RG 472 / A1 462 / Box 42 / Folder: 1601-10A/Study/Evaluation/Enemy Offensive Impact on Pacification/1972, NARA II.

⁹⁹² Evaluation, "Impact of the Enemy Offensive on Pacification," 5 October 1972, p. 4, RG 472 / A1 462 / Box 42 / Folder: 1601-10A/Study/Evaluation/Enemy Offensive Impact on Pacification/1972, NARA II.

largely un-pacified province. That distinction gained further credence throughout the ensuing months.

October saw a decrease in enemy activity as the People's Liberation Armed Forces took its share of the rice harvest. Indeed, "a sizable number of lower level enemy cadre have been occupied with completing the final stages of the September - October rice harvest."⁹⁹³ Arguably the gains made by IFFV's maneuver battalions in 1966 and 1967 were now undeniably reversed as the PLAF infiltrated the province's rice harvest. "October was an unusually quiet month for Phu Yen," stated Holbrook in the monthly progress report.⁹⁹⁴ "Enemy initiated incidents numbered 7 which is the lowest number since January 1970," the PSA reported.⁹⁹⁵ Monsoon weather, too, meant an expected halt in enemy movement. As indicated in the monthly province report, the People's Liberation Armed Forces shifted attention towards preparing for the time after the Paris Peace Accords. In that vein, PLAF activity entailed preparations for attacks against GVN facilities and defenses as well as the production of propaganda materials.⁹⁹⁶

In Holbrook's last monthly progress report, the PSA described a war in Phu Yen that hinted at turning in favor of the GVN. Successful operations conducted by RF units during November indicated a new found resolve amongst the province's local defense forces. Indeed, RF 221 fought-off "an ABF and three sapper attacks by elements of the D-9 Battalion [on] 6 November against the key Ngan Son Bridge on QL-1 in Tuy An

⁹⁹³ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 October 1972, p.1, CMH.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid.

District.”⁹⁹⁷ Similarly, RF 220 “administered a severe beating [on] 4-6 November to units of the D-96 battalion which had attempted to take over several hamlets in the western portion of Tuy Hoa District.”⁹⁹⁸ In doing so, RF 220 killed D-96’s chief of staff, and C-2 Company’s commander and political officer.⁹⁹⁹ Both instances demonstrated that RF units could fight well and that the PLAF remained anything but invincible. Regardless of these RF victories, November proved a relatively quiet month because of the looming ceasefire. For November, both the GVN and PLAF placed greater emphasis on propaganda as each side prepared for a ceasefire as part of the Paris Peace Accords.

Regardless of the quiet that seemed to engulf the province, a reflection on the year posited 1972 as anything but a year that ended well. The final AT28 report offered a telling summation of 1972 in Phu Yen. The province’s last PSA, LTC. John M. McDonald, began the report with, “The GVN Community and Local Development effort the past six months has been characterized by only limited progress on the security front but more encouraging advances in the development field.”¹⁰⁰⁰ Little changed in Phu Yen’s security, with “The end result is that the GVN finds itself pretty much in the same position at Year’s end as it was at the beginning of the year.” McDonald elaborated further, adding that,

This factor combined with slow but continual progress in the province’s development program has enabled the GVN to contain the VC insurgency; however, the Province’s pacification and development efforts still sorely lacks spirited leadership and decisive implementation required to forge into an effective weapon for getting at the roots of the enemy’s insurgent system.¹⁰⁰¹

⁹⁹⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 30 November 1972, p.2, CMH.

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 December 1972, p.1, CMH.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid.

Here, pacification is presented as separate from development. Even as the war ended for the Americans, pacification lacked a precise meaning. Moreover, the main concern of pacification, security, remained unachieved even as the American war in South Vietnam concluded.

As McDonald's report progressed, he discussed PLAF activity. McDonald reported that the enemy's spring offensive failed, resulting in the resumption of efforts to undermine GVN influence in the districts of Hieu Xuong, Tuy An, and Tuy Hoa by other means. The enemy endeavored to temporarily interdict QL-1 and occupy GVN facilities in the aforementioned districts. Yet, "The highpoint of enemy activity came during the three months of July, August, and September, when 148 terrorist incidents and 665 abductions were reported along with 76 significant enemy initiated military incidents."¹⁰⁰² Although the enemy lacked sufficient strength to capture Tuy Hoa City or any of the district capitals, "the enemy still posed at year's end a serious threat to the security of the province."¹⁰⁰³ Indeed, the Communists maintained,

considerable influence in the rural villages and hamlets throughout the province, and especially in the western Tuy Hoa Valley and in the northeast and northwest section of Tuy An District. The enemy also still denies the GVN the use of Route 7B, effectively isolating Son Hoa District from the rest of the Province. Enemy pressure on Route 6B has practically closed it to regular military traffic and PLAF harassing tactics even makes QL-1 hazardous to travel at times.¹⁰⁰⁴

While the PLAF failed at the battle of Cung Son in 1971 to wrestle control of Son Hoa District from the GVN, the Communists practically realized such an objective in 1972 by

¹⁰⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid., 1-2.

cutting-off the district's access to the rest of the province. PLAF posturing at the end of 1972 suggested dim prospects for the RVNs future.

The isolation of Son Hoa District revealed all that was wrong with pacification in Phu Yen as the American war ended. McDonald's Senior Debriefing report was emblematic of Phu Yen's security through the war. He specified the PLAF's ability to cut off Son Hoa District from the rest of the province as one of three problems plaguing the province at the end of CORDS's mission.¹⁰⁰⁵ The other two problems consisted of the enemy's interdiction of communication lines and, most alarmingly, no one, save for maybe the PLAF, knew how much territory fell under GVN control. McDonald noted that, on the eve of the Paris Peace Accords, such an absence of information posed serious problems for the province's long-term stability. Indeed, the PSA wrote,

Lack of knowledge as to just how much territory in Phu Yen is physically controlled by the VC-NVA. While the GVN has successfully controlled 80-90% of the population and the critical crop-lands (20%-30% of Phu Yen's land), there has been little or no attempt to operate in the remaining landmasses. Consequently, no one knows just how much of Base Area 236, the Cay Vung (Ky Lo Valley), the Ha Roi and the Hon Cheng areas are, or have been under VC-NVA physical control. If claimed by the VC-NVA it will be difficult for the GVN to refute their claims.¹⁰⁰⁶

Such a revelation also brought the execution of the war into question. Despite the operations of conventional Allied forces, noteworthy enemy influence, and possible extensive control of Phu Yen's interior, remained intact. Relatedly, the lack of certainty on just how much of the province fell under Communist control suggested that in spite of all various measurement data at CORDS disposal, intelligence on territorial control

¹⁰⁰⁵ LTC. John M. McDonald, "Province Advisor's Completion of Tour Report," 19 February 1973, p.6, Department of the Army, Office of the Adjutant General, Washington D.C., Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC). Available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/531081.pdf>>.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid.

remained spotty at best. McDonald's statement further encapsulated pacification as the folly it had become.

Doubts, too, persisted over the quality of Phu Yen's local defense forces. For Advisory Team 28, the province's RF companies remained timid of battle and too dependent on artillery and aircraft support when engagements with the enemy arose.¹⁰⁰⁷ Ironically, this reliance on fire support stemmed from how the Americans crafted all of the RVN's military forces.¹⁰⁰⁸ McDonald perceived the province's local GVN leadership as largely unconcerned with the lives of those residing in the villages and hamlets. The PSA connected his view of a disinterested leadership with August HES data that showed "an alarming 129 DEV hamlets in the province including 38 'V' rated hamlets."¹⁰⁰⁹ Yet, as noted by McDonald, local GVN authorities did eventually take interest in village and hamlet affairs, a shift noticeable in more recent HES data. Though the PSA qualified that observation by noting that because the enemy recognized the approaching ceasefire, it curtailed its military operations in favor of focusing on political activity.¹⁰¹⁰ As in years prior, the choices made by the enemy controlled the war in Phu Yen. The security concerns essentially exposed the fundamental flaws of American influenced pacification in Phu Yen as truth and not simply as an anomaly. Ultimately, 1972 and the advisory mission as whole, ended with much doubt as to the accomplishments of pacification and Phu Yen's future.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 December 1972, p.2, CMH.

¹⁰⁰⁸ See: Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (The Johns Hopkins University Press; Baltimore, 1986) for a more detailed appraisal of how the U.S. devised the RVNAF to the point of utmost dependence on American support.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Advisory Team 28, Province Report, Period Ending 31 December 1972, p.2, CMH.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion

The ups and downs of 1971 and 1972 were in line with those from prior years. As in previous years, setbacks followed every Allied victory. Even the momentous triumph at the battle of Cong Son in 1971, where the RF proved it could defeat the enemy, albeit with U.S. airpower, became overshadowed by PLAF gains in 1972. Essentially the problems of 1971 and 1972 traced back to the start of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign. The push to rapidly expand the number of hamlets under Saigon's control greatly exceeded the ability of the South Vietnamese to adequately govern and retain target hamlets. The reports of Frobenius revealed to all the inability of the GVN to keep up with Vietnamization. Instances of the GVN's inability to protect hamlets from PLAF influence is more of a result of years of dependence on U.S. support, a byproduct of the nature of American interaction in the RVN, than a lack of concern on part of the South Vietnamese leadership. Essentially, and in spite of the best efforts of AT28, dwindling American assistance and interest doomed Phu Yen.

By the end of America's war, the problems befalling Phu Yen were emblematic of pacification as a whole. Imbued with the sense of completing the rapid withdrawal from the Republic of Vietnam on schedule, senior American leadership appeared adverse towards events that challenged the abandonment of the RVN. As much as the occurrence of abductions after "The Advisory Crisis" and continued erosion of GVN influence in the province exposed serious problems with American aims in the RVN, the absence of reassessment reflected a view of acceptance with the status quo that engulfed Phu Yen by the end of 1972. Just like the French before them, the American war ended in Phu Yen with pacification incomplete.

CHAPTER VII – CONCLUSION

“The situation will be placed inevitably in the context of Vietnamization with the clear implication that the Vietnamese can’t go it alone,” CORDS’s George D. Jacobson said to Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem, adding “the worst of it all is that the stories are all true.”¹⁰¹¹ These words, spoken after security in Phu Yen Province essentially existed in name only, encapsulated the plight of pacification in that province. This dissertation is an analysis of how and why pacification collapsed in Phu Yen. Province Senior Advisor, James B. Engle revealed much when he disclosed the continued presence of a de facto enemy base area at Núi Chập Chài on the edge of Tuy Hoa City in 1970.¹⁰¹² The much larger enemy Base Area 236 sat to the west of Núi Chập Chài, firmly in the middle of the Government of Vietnam’s (GVN) bastions of power, Cung Son and Tuy Hoa City. Significant enemy infrastructure in such close proximity to Tuy Hoa City, the province capital of Phu Yen, at this late juncture of the war suggested serious security issues plagued pacification. An analysis of the war in Phu Yen is necessary to explain such circumstances, which enhances the collective understanding of the Vietnam War itself.

Pacification laid at the core of the United States’s execution of the Vietnam War. The pertinent historiographical discourse covers a broad spectrum of the war in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), yet questions on pacification remain largely unanswered. As demonstrated by this province study, a focus on pacification in Phu Yen does

¹⁰¹¹ MACCORDS, Memo, “Meeting between Mr. Jacobson and Mr. McManaway and the Prime Minister,” 12 April 1970, p.1, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG 472 / A1 462 / Box 14 / Folder: Memos & Messages / Mr. Jacobson / Visits, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II).

¹⁰¹² Advisory Team 28, Report, “Phu Yen Province Chief’s Month Meeting (April) with Allied Commanders,” p.3, RG 472 / A1 690 / Box 297 / Folder: PC’s Monthly Commanders Meeting, NARA II.

engender itself to broadening our collective understanding of the Vietnam War.¹⁰¹³ A closer examination indicates that to better understand a war that engulfed all forty-four provinces of the RVN, requires looking at individual provinces. Prior works addressed pacification at the province level, but many more provinces lack any such analysis. Maxwell D. Taylor claimed “there was not just a single war to be reported by officials and the press. There were really forty-four different wars and you could have an accurate reporter in each one of those provinces and get forty-four different reports coming to Washington and all would be right in their own way. Yet none a complete picture.”¹⁰¹⁴ For that reason, this dissertation adds another piece to the broader, incomplete picture of the war. Since it is nearly impossible to examine every facet of the RVN, a close look at a

¹⁰¹³ For studies that deal with pacification, see: James W. Trullinger, *Village at War: An Account of Revolution in Vietnam* (New York: Longman, 1980); Stuart A. Herrington, *Silence Was a Weapon: The Vietnam War in the Villages* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982); Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1989); Dale Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1990); Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); James H. Embrey, *Reorienting Pacification: The Accelerated Pacification Campaign of 1968* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997); Michael A. Hennessy, *Strategy in Vietnam: The Marines and Revolutionary Warfare in I Corps, 1965-1975* (Westport: Praeger, 1997); Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997); David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharp, 2003); Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Martin Clemis, “The Control War: Communist Revolutionary Warfare, Pacification, and the Struggle for South Vietnam, 1968-1975” (PhD diss., Temple University, 2015), 484, 486, 488-490; Edward A. Hagan, *To Vietnam in Vain: Memoir of an Irish-American Intelligence Advisor, 1969-1970* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2016). For province studies, which also cover pacification, see: David W. P. Elliott and W. A. Stewart, *Pacification and the Viet Cong System in Dinh Tuong: 1966-1967*, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1969; 1975); Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Kevin M. Boylan, “The Red Queens Race: Operation Washington Green and Pacification in Binh Dinh Province, 1969-1970,” *The Journal of Military History* 73, no. 4 (October 2009): 1195-1230; Thomas Richardson, “As If We’d Never Really Been There?: Pacification in Phuoc Tuy Province, Republic of Vietnam, 1966-1972 (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2014).

¹⁰¹⁴ “America's Mandarin: 1954-1963,” *Vietnam: A Television History*, WGHB, Boston Public Broadcasting (Boston, MA: WGHB, 1979).

single province provides significant details that might otherwise go unnoticed in larger, sweeping studies. Like the rest of the historiography, this a concentration on a single province expands our collective knowledge of the war, rather than constraining it. Since political and military dynamics varied from province to province, one must examine pacification at the local level and not treat it as a monolith.

Pacification, both its meaning and execution, laid at the center of this dissertation. Through a focus of Phu Yen, this study addressed the security shortfalls that ultimately undermined pacification. Placed in the context of larger U.S. geo-political goals, such as Vietnamization and the subordinate Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC), this study revealed that superficial information drove the perception of pacification advancement and not the data that indicated otherwise. In doing so, this study aligned itself with the historiographical argument that the United States abandoned the Republic of Vietnam. While the revisionist consensus suggests that pacification succeeded by the end of the war, events in Phu Yen contradict such a notion. As substantiated throughout this study, a concentration on Phu Yen revealed the issues that made pacification a difficult task.

This study began with an analysis of the meaning of pacification. Generally, Vietnam War scholarship placed inadequate attention on understanding the meaning of pacification. Erroneously, pacification is often seen solely as the developmental aspect of the war and one far removed from the battles waged by conventional armies. American diplomats and military authorities perceived and articulated pacification as the *modus operandi* of the entire war effort. Contemporary discourse contained in the Edward G. Lansdale Papers helped relay pacification as lacking a finite definition, yet the term embodied the Vietnam War. Therefore, chapter one focused on pacification discourse

emanating out of American diplomatic circles in Saigon. Yet such discourse did not entail a collective understanding of what pacification entailed exactly. Consequently, with pacification lacking an agreed upon definition, only events in a province like Phu Yen could effectively reveal the meaning of pacification.

As covered in this dissertation, two dissimilar and tangentially related wars never transpired in the Republic of Vietnam. The entire conflict remained dedicated to the removal of Communist forces, with pacification existing as an ongoing process that lasted from the start to the end of the war. Pacification always existed because large unit warfare created the space in which developmental projects existed, in turn leading to the co-existence of both destruction and development aspects of pacification. A study on Phu Yen and of the idea of pacification asserts that pacification and conventional warfare were inextricably tied and transpired currently with one another. Pacification was the umbrella term under which the entire war transpired.

Events between 1965 and 1972 revealed much about the war in Phu Yen. Pacification proved entwined with conventional military units in a manner that blurred the lines between warfare and developmental efforts. Addressed in chapter two, in 1965, Phu Yen seemed on the cusp of being overrun by PAVN and PLAF troops. Extensive and numerous offensive operations by I Field Force Vietnam's (IFFV) maneuver battalions, however, expanded the GVN control in the province. IFFV's operations to secure Phu Yen's rice harvests, the second largest in the region, while expanding the control of the Saigon government, posited pacification firmly in the realm of conventional warfare. As operations like Jefferson and Van Buren demonstrated, conventional military forces

advanced pacification. Later, elements of IFFV offered a vale of security behind which pacification expanded.

Yet by 1967 intense IFFV operations failed to fully secure even the strategic Tuy Hoa Valley. Chapter three therefore examined what transpired after IFFV's operations decreased in number. The effects of that restriction permitted PAVN free movement in the valley and its assaults against the province capital during the 1968 Tet Offensive. A detailed analysis of the Tet Offensive revealed how the joint PAVN and PLAF effort to take Tuy Hoa City failed, yet gravely jeopardized pacification in the Tuy Hoa Valley, thereby making the offensive a long-term Communist victory. U.S. Army maneuver battalions ultimately did not permanently advance pacification, as Vietnamization brought forth security issues that the fledging South Vietnamese state could not remedy single handedly.

The removal of such security in late 1969 left pacification in Phu Yen dangerously exposed to PLAF harassment. It was no coincidence that, as covered in chapter four, "The Advisory Crisis" of 1970 began after the removal of IFFV's mobile assets in Phu Yen. That the removal of U.S. Army maneuver battalions laid at the center of the province's troubles neglects the role played by American political objectives. The manner in which the United States approached the war itself weakened efforts to build a stable and resilient Republic of South Vietnam. Vietnamization and its subordinate Accelerated Pacification Campaign hastened pacification, a process that made pacification appear successful. Indeed, the rapid expansion of pacification merely created a false sense of a war being won. That, however, does not discount the efforts of those,

both American and South Vietnamese, that sacrificed time and perhaps themselves, for the Washington and Saigon.

The uncertainty that engulfed Phu Yen at the end of U.S. advisory mission reflected the questionable gains of pacification. As addressed in the final chapter, the 1971 to 1972 period solidified Phu Yen as a province where—despite the best efforts of CORDS—the PLAF was in position to effectively challenge Saigon’s authority. This chapter covers the 1971 Battle of Cung Son as to relay Phu Yen’s continued struggle with capable Communist main forces. Additionally, a discussion of the Tuy Hoa Valley as the center of renewed PLAF activity demonstrated pacification as no closer to completion than in any previous years. With considerable tracks of the province under Communist control after nearly seven years of U.S.-backed pacification in Phu Yen, the confused existence of enemy base areas near Tuy Hoa City demonstrated the impermanence of the Saigon government's pacification endeavor in the province. After years of attempts by IFFV and Advisory Team 28 (AT28) to improve province security, pacification amounted to naught as it did not strengthen the GVN’s position, both physically and in the minds of the populous, in Phu Yen.

Through a study of Phu Yen, this dissertation posited pacification as the means of executing the war in the Republic of Vietnam. As evidenced through the myriad of security issues raised in AT28 documents, pacification in Phu Yen lasted only as long as IFFV sustained numerous offensive maneuvers in the province. Events in Phu Yen effectively posited conventional military forces as the advancer of pacification. Despite the efforts of IFFV and AT28 to transform Phu Yen into a GVN stronghold in the region, processes such as Vietnamization and the APC ensured the disintegration of pacification

gains and the return of the province to a state similar to that seen in 1965. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the remarks of Jacobson proved true; the South Vietnam could not maintain pacification in face of the United States's dwindling military presence and geopolitical interest in the RVN.

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