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Not until this year did the coastal province of Phu Yen, situated midway between Saigon and the 17th parallel, begin living up to its name of "Peace and Prosperity." Like many other sections of Viet Nam, the province had seen two decades of war. During World War II, the pro-Communist, anti-colonialist Viet Minh, who controlled all but the provincial capital of Tuy Hoa, fought the Japanese. A long railroad and vehicular bridge was blown up by allied bombers and its cement skeletons still rise from the murky river. Later, when the French moved back into the country, the Viet Minh continued to hold the countryside and stepped up their harassment of the colonial administration in the provincial capital. ~~The~~ The French held Tuy Hoa city only by making an amphibious landing from the South China Sea, but the city was later leveled. When the war ended, the Viet Minh moved to North Viet Nam, but their sisters, the Viet Cong retained control of the rural sections of the province and Diem's government shakily occupied only the capital ~~and~~ city. Hence, rural sections of Phu Yen province had been under Communist control for twenty years.

Phu Yen province is, furthermore, a ^{topographical and ethnic} microcosm of South Viet Nam. A skinny rice-rich band of land heavily populated by Vietnamese smuggles along the South China Sea and National Highway No. 1 ~~and~~ and then funnels into the mountains, which form the Annamite chain throughout the northern one-third of the republic. Here live the 20-odd tribes of the primitive Montagnards.

A ~~year~~ year ago, the rural countryside and provincial capital were about to be captured by the Viet Cong ^{as} their headquarters, American military strategists believe. ~~Civilian~~ Civilian traffic was at a standstill. Few persons walked the mainstreets of Tuy Hoa during the daytime and none during the night. Business activity dropped. Primary school education decreased by more than ten percent.

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Then on May 8 of this year, the government initiated Operation Sea Swallow (Hai Yen), an integrated civilian-military "clear and hold operation"--the reverse concept of a "big sweep" by government forces and then withdrawal.

The first phase of Operation Sea Swallow was to secure the provincial capital and the narrow coastal rice valley along the seacoast. The second phase, which ends this month, was to move into the heavily populated fertile valleys surrounded by the mountains containing stiffer Viet Cong influence. The third phase, which begins January 1, is to relocate the Montagnards scattered ~~haphazardly~~ in the hills into sizeable, new villages, called "combat hamlets". ~~xxxx~~

The first and second phases are both ambitious and impressive. At year's end, 222 strategic hamlets (Ap Chien Luoc) will be completed. This process includes the erection of a defensive bamboo or barbed barbed wire fence, the training of village defenders and other paramilitary groups, the training of hamlet civilian hamlet cadre such as first aid men and personnel associated with civic action, information, security and social welfare; the securing of the hamlet internally by the issuing of identity cards, family photos and inter-family photos for checking the whereabouts of all villagers at all times, and finally the election of the hamlet council.

More than 4000 of these strategic hamlets dotting the entire Vietnamese countryside began in late summer to give the government the means to begin "winning a losing war."

Yet, in Phu Yen, the government, with substantial subsidies of United States funds, did even more. The province became the experimental lab for those "impact" programs for fast rural development, which, if successful, would be tried in the 40 other provinces throughout the republic. Rat poison was distributed as a means to increase crop production and to preserve stored grains. As of December, 300,000 rat tails have been chopped chopped off by farmers who used the poison. Medical kits, supplies two-way radios to improve defense, tools, seeds, fertilizer, fishing equipment and funds for paying a bounty for captured Viet Cong weapons were supplied by the U. S. Agency for International Development.

Ten thousand match books with covers eulogizing Dien's government were printed at the cost of US\$30, and their value remains is being tested. (The only match factory in Viet Nam capable of doing the work refused the job for fear the Viet Cong would sabotage the plant.)

The assumption of the ~~the~~ ~~the~~ projects is that the Viet Cong must not only be eliminated militarily, but also their principal economic arguments must be countered by improving the standard of living for the local population. Hence, textbooks maybe more as influential in defeating the Viet Cong as a bullet; a pig may be more important than an airplane pilot; a water well maybe more significant than a howitzer.

"If you have the people with you, you can defeat the Communist guerrilla," one official involved in USAID Counterinsurgency program stated. "If not, it doesn't matter how much military action you have, you can never win a guerrilla war."

Perhaps the most dazzling of the experimental impact programs attempted in Phu Yen was the Pig Project. This week (DEC. 23), the last of 600 white Yorkshire hybrid ~~hybrid~~ hogs "which grow twice as ~~big~~ big twice as fast" as the hundred-year-old ~~inbred~~ Vietnamese inbreeds will be distributed to 200 families in the province. Two feeder pigs and one breeder were distributed on credit to each family. Within 8 months, the farmer is able to sell the two feeder pigs, earning enough money to repay his initial debt, cost of feed and building of pigsty and compost pit where manure is stored until it can be used as fertilizer. The latter step is designed to increase crop production. When the breeder bears pigs, the farmer is ready to start earning profits.

The pigs hit Phu Yen province like a Sahara sandstorm. They were discussed in hamlet council meetings and in street corner gatherings. One man tore down half of his house ^{to provide land to build} and built a pigsty. In most cases, the pigties were more elaborate than the owners' houses. ~~Some~~ Their cement floors, & intricately designed concrete walls and tile roofs were in distinct contrast to the owners' houses ^{of} hard-packed dirt floors, thatch roofs and bamboo ~~and~~ siding. The pigs had clearly become the "status symbol" of Phu Yen. Some farmers washed their pigs daily, a feat which many Vietnamese children can not boast of. The weight gain and their

their feeding schedules were the talk of the hamlets as other farmers eagerly watched to determine whether they should seek pigs next year. Never has the health of a pig so greatly affected United States prestige abroad.

~~These~~ ^{total} results through the province were encouraging. The civilian population again began to stalk into the towns for marketing and socializing. Stores remain open until 10 p.m. The number of civilian vehicles on province roads increased from zero to 50.

"The government expanded its real estate holdings in the province by 20 percent since May and now it holds 65 percent of the population instead of 20 percent," one American advisor working closely with the Phu Yen project said.

"In the past three months, our intelligence information from the people has almost quadrupled--and it comes from people who wouldn't tell us anything before," he continued. "It's now almost infallible where before the information was a hit-and-miss sort of thing. It now takes twice as many Vietnamese military people to evaluate the information.

"One good example of the people's support was some villagers who stopped a convoy and told us the Viet Cong had set up an ambush along the roadside. If we can continue to win the people, the Viet Cong can't operate.

"Another good indicator is in the past four months we had ~~five~~ ^{A FIVEFOLD INCREASE IN} times the number of Viet Cong defectors," he said. "Before we were getting only four or five a month."

Yet there are enormous problems that must be overcome if the program is not to become disastrously bogged down.

"The biggest problem is the ~~apathy~~ ^{APATHY} of the Vietnamese working from the province chief down to the hamlets," one American advisor explained. "To me, this is a war. But the Vietnamese work from 8:30 to 5 with a two and half hour ~~seista~~ ^{seista}."

There is also the limited administrative and technical ability of the hamlet personnel, many of them working with less than a high school education. And there are the traditional Vietnamese habits of favoritism and "Backbitting hordeism," as one American official explained. For example, those receiving USAID pigs were the hamlet elite, primarily Catholic like the Diem regime, ^{they} were largely selected by the Vietnamese agricultural union which had a predominant Catholic membership. Yet, it is primarily ^(more) the non-Catholics who must be

awayed from Communism.

The replacement ^{SUPPLIES} for the USAID medical kits have difficulty in reaching the strategic hamlets because provincial medical authorities are reluctant to release them. (One U. S. Army Special Forces medic had to threaten to see Ambassador Frederick E. Nolting before provincial hospital ^{Personnel} would give him his allocated medicines.) Paper supplies for district newspapers are stockpiled in Saigon warehouses and circulation into the rural areas has been curtailed to 150 issues per district. Circulation had formerly been 500 to 5000 per district, depending on population concentrations. Another publication, Kien Quoc (Good Life), is written by USIS, approved by the Vietnamese Psychological Warfare Directorate, printed by USIS and then distributed by the Payver personnel. Yet five of the nine issues were stockpiled in the Payver warehouse. USIS threatened to cut off funds until they were released for distribution in the strategic hamlets. The meager, ~~2~~ thatch-roofed information huts in each strategic hamlet are humorously called ~~huts~~ "visitors bureaus" at the local level because lower class citizens are discouraged from using them. One hamlet medical cadre (whom I talked with) complained he had not been paid for six months, though funds had been supplied to the province by USAID.

One story told by American authorities in Phu Yen perhaps best illustrated the problem. One day, when the hamlet chiefs gathered for a council meeting, one of the ^{outlying} hamlets near Viet Cong territory was attacked. An American advisor tried to call the hamlet without success. "What's wrong-- are the lines out?," he asked.

"No," he was told "The hamlet chiefs carried their telephones with them to the meeting."

~~2~~ The village of Dong My (Beautiful East) (pop. 1924), ~~2~~ a "showpiece" strategic hamlet complete with elaborate bamboo fence, pigs, and a USAID supplied radio loudspeaker, was visited by a delegation of Vietnamese VIP's. The governor-delegate suddenly asked for a practice alert. A huge drum sounded the warning; instructions ~~that~~ issued from the loudspeaker could be heard only a block away; children playfully pounded hollow bamboo sticks as part of the alert system. Yet adults, instead of

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assembling in the pre-designated areas of the church and school, went on about their work. The Vietnamese VIP raged and demanded to know why the people had not moved to the central defensive posts.

"Well, we thought it was a practice alert anyway," he was told.

The incident seemed to verify the conclusion of one American major working closely with strategic hamlets throughout Viet Nam, when he said, "Without honest local leadership at the rice-roots level, you're really hurting." (Saigon newspapers for the past month have been urging an end ^{to} ~~to~~ abuses of authority in the provinces and the constant checking of the activities of lower level officials.)

When the Phu Yen experiment is projected throughout the country at a cost that could well reach nearly US\$40 million dollars when approved next year, these situations, unless corrected, could prolong the war unnecessarily or, worse yet, could be a key factor in preventing a clear-cut victory.