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AN EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLET/
PROVINCE REHABILITATION PROGRAM

(EXCERPTS)

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...In general, highly significant progress has been made in the Strategic Hamlet - Provincial Rehabilitation program in many provinces. Progress is measured in terms of the establishment, in steadily increasing numbers, of viable hamlets with inhabitants who have the will and the means to resist the Viet Cong. There is a sharp difference between the number of such hamlets, and the total number of strategic hamlets officially listed as complete by the Vietnamese Government...

...It has become inescapably clear that, although the concept itself is excellent, execution of the program is seriously handicapped by a lack of understanding of the concept and the lack of sufficient will to put it into effect. This is especially true of provincial and other local participating officials, but is by no means confined to them. There is, almost across the board, great difficulty in grasping the idea that "the strategic hamlet is a state of mind." Conditioned by years of experience with the French, and having no prior experience in the practice of democratic methods of leadership, many feel unable to carry out the program without using methods sure to alienate the population whose support is its real objective. Significant progress has been made in improving the basic attitudes of officialdom but this progress has stemmed more from our on-the-spot insistence that the welfare of the population be considered than from Central Government direction....

...More important than what the Central Government says, however, are its actions in rewarding some province chiefs and punishing others for their progress in establishing hamlets. Here the stress has been almost entirely on quantity, not quality, which has reinforced the natural inclination of most provincial officials to create strategic hamlets "by

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command." I have accompanied the Minister of Interior, for instance, on visits to hamlets where he praised the Province Chief for having moved the population without expense to the Government; but where I found out later the Province Chief was obliged, because of popular discontent, to use two companies of Civil Guard to keep the people in the hamlets. This continues up to the present to be the main approach of the Central Government. This must be changed, for insistence by the Central Government on unrealistic requirements tends to force province chiefs into actions surely destructive to the program....

...These are problems which must be understood and which must be solved if the strategic hamlets are to be viable and effective in achieving their purpose. The evaluations which are attached highlight some of the problem areas, particularly in the Delta where they are most acute and where, except in a few provinces, the apparent progress is largely illusory.

...In conclusion, it should be added that the above comments must not be construed as reflecting undue pessimism or a negative outlook. To the contrary, the strategic hamlet program has so well proven itself in those areas where it has been well executed that there is every reason for optimism and confidence. At the same time, however, if success is to become widespread, some of the obstacles and problems involved must be realistically faced and solved. These can be solved if we have the perseverance and the intelligence to continue to seek their solution in a manner which fits the task, for the heart of this task is a psychological revolution in the way the Vietnamese Government and its officials operate.

PROGRESS IN THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM - IV CORPS AREA

General Observations

Progress in the Strategic Hamlet-Provincial Rehabilitation program in this Corps area has generally been the slowest and poorest of all Vietnam. The main problems are a lack of understanding of the program by many military and provincial officials, a lack of military support for the program and a lack of sympathy and understanding of the population and their problems on the part of many provincial officials. Particularly harmful is the lack of understanding that the voluntary participation of the population is essential to the success of the program. The scattered location of the

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population in the Delta makes building of hamlets difficult, but this problem is being compounded by movement of large numbers of people without proper forethought about whether it is really necessary to move them and without sufficient concern for their welfare. In many areas the relocation of the population is aimed primarily at securing roads for the Government, not at providing security for the population. This approach, which ignores the fact that the voluntary participation and support of the hamlet population are essential to the success of the Strategic Hamlet Program, can cause its failure.

Long An

Progress has generally been good in Long An. Provincial leadership is good and planning has been more thorough than in most provinces. The province administration is active, gets out among the population and knows how to work with the people and win their sympathy. The main problem is the training and arming of hamlet militia which had not kept pace with the establishment of the hamlets. Also, too many families are being moved too fast without adequate prior preparation. It is estimated that 30% of the hamlets in the province have developed a spirit of self-defense in the hamlet, adequate to justify calling the hamlet complete, that a total of 60% provide a minimum of security and that the remaining 40% are hamlets in name only.

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