

BA DUA, SOUTH VIETNAM - AN EXAMPLE
OF PACIFICATION IN ACTION

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Ba Dua was a prosperous town in the delta of South Vietnam. The land surrounding the town was fertile yielding two crops of rice annually. In the wooded area along the canals bananas, oranges and other tropical fruit were plentiful. The canals were abundant with fish, one of the main staples of the peoples diet. The men derived additional income by working in a nearby rice mill during the dry season when the fields could not be tilled.

Before the downfall of the Diem Regime in November, 1963 the villagers had been loyal to the Saigon government. The area was well fortified by three Self Defense Corps outposts that kept the Viet Cong from dominating the region. But during the widespread confusion resulting from the coup d'tat of Diem, the Viet Cong entered the area in force killing the defenders and the village chief. They also destroyed all roads and bridges leading to the town with the intention of isolating the populace from the outside world.

Ba Dua was now very valuable to the Viet Cong. With the roads destroyed there was no way in or out except by sampans. Government forces could conduct only limited operations in the area because the numerous canals could not be forded. The town could now be used as a rest camp and staging base by the insurgents. It remained under strong Viet Cong control for one year, and finally, after a big celebration Ba Dua was proclaimed a " Viet Cong liberated area " in November, 1964.

The next day, however, the Vietnamese 7th Division converged on the town to free it from the Viet Cong stranglehold. A part of the overall scheme of maneuver was a diversion plan which led the insurgents to believe that the operation would not be conducted near Ba Dua. As a result a reinforced Viet Cong battalion was taken by surprise, trapped and defeated.

The battle was considered a major victory for the government forces and Ba Dua was incorporated into a pacification program. The program consisted of three interrelated activities: (1) military action to defeat the Viet Cong and provide security for the population, (2) psychological operations to regain the confidence of the people and inform them of government aims for their town, and (3) civic action to implement the government plans and physically aid the people.

To be effective each of the three activities had to be applied vigorously and simultaneously. In this situation the initial military action had already been successful. Further elimination of the Viet Cong infrastructure from the civilian population was pursued by Vietnamese intelligence personnel.

Psychological operations were employed during and after the battle. Loudspeaker aircraft directed indigenous personnel to safe areas where they were fed and reassured that compensation for war damages would be provided. They were also told about the government's goals for Ba Dua through the entertainment media with songs and skits. Next, operations were directed at the Viet Cong telling them that their situation was hopeless and that they should surrender.

The civic action program began the day following the battle with free food and clothing for the people. First aid stations manned by Vietnamese medics and an American doctor treated the sick and wounded. The arrival of engineering equipment to repair the roads had an even greater impact on the population. They now knew that the Viet Cong had lied about the government's attitude toward the people in the rural areas. High ranking officials from Saigon came periodically to offer encouragement and reassure the people that the government was there to stay.

To withdraw all the military forces before local popular forces could be trained would give the Viet Cong an opportunity to strike again. A Vietnamese battalion was left to provide security for the town and conduct military operations nearby. There were minor skirmishes with the enemy but with light casualties on both sides. All was relatively secure until the early morning of 10 December at which time the Viet Cong attacked furiously. With an estimated reinforced battalion using mortars, recoilless rifles and automatic weapons, the enemy penetrated the perimeter of the government forces which were providing security for the town. After gaining entrance, the Viet Cong raced from house to house warning the people to leave lest more would be killed when they returned in greater number. Wisely the government forces called for artillery fire shortly after the attack began. As the artillery began inflicting severe casualties on the attackers, friendly elements were able to execute a counterattack. At 0400 after savage fighting the enemy was ejected. Government casualties were 13 KIA and 20 WIA. The Viet Cong suffered an estimated 65 KIA and many more wounded.

Although the battle was considered a major victory for

the government forces, many of the villagers moved to safer areas. They feared the Viet Cong and doubted the ability of the government forces to protect them. Only a small segment remained in Ba Dua.

Despite the setback, a stronger pacification program was initiated in an effort to strengthen the will of the people. During the remaining part of December, eight kilometers of road destroyed by the Viet Cong were repaired. Bus service was restored to the town. Bridges throughout the local area were rebuilt so that farmers could once again market their crops. (See picture of bridge and caption). For the first time in a year newspapers were available. Ba Dua was no longer isolated from the outside world. Schools riddled by battles were rebuilt. The market place, which had deteriorated during the Viet Cong domination, got a cement floor and coat of white paint. Construction began on a village office and first aid dispensary. Despair among the villagers began to disappear and in its place hope once again existed.

The Viet Cong realized that the government's influence was becoming stronger. On 23 January, 1965 they tried to regain their prestige by launching another attack. This time, however, the defenses and the fortifications were better prepared. The attack was futile, and the enemy were stopped in their initial assault.

As a result of this successful defense the people returned to Ba Dua in great numbers for they were convinced that the Viet Cong were finally defeated. After seeing the people return in great numbers, the province chief decided to make the town an example of a successful pacification program. A school superintendent and teachers were brought

in to begin classes. A new school was built to take care of the mounting enrollment. Soldiers and civilians combined efforts to rebuild homes destroyed by the war. (See picture of soldier/civilian work project). Army medics and civilian nurses established an aid station and conducted medical clinics. The people cleared the jungle away from the town to prevent the Viet Cong from sniping at close range. Psychological operations were also directed to the outlying areas. Aerial broadcasts were conducted and leaflets were dropped. These actions were proven effective by the large number of Viet Cong who surrendered to government authorities. (See picture and caption of Viet Cong and soldiers).

By April the political, economic and military status of Ba Dua were such that local elections could be held. A larger percentage of the population voted now than had voted before the Viet Cong dominated the area. Today, Ba Dua is again a prosperous community governed by locally elected officials and protected by a well trained self defense force. We admit that the pacification program was expensive in men and materiel, but it does prove that military action, psychological operations and civic action applied vigorously and concurrently can defeat the enemy.



The metal bridge on the left is being constructed by government workers. The one on the right was used during the Viet Cong domination.



Soldiers and civilians work together to rebuild homes.



The man in black had been a Viet
Cong for many years. He decided to
surrender when he saw how the govern-
ment was aiding the people.