I n t r o d u c t i o n

This book explores the conduct of 'pacification' in the Republic of Vietnam's Phuoc Tuy province between 1966 and 1972. In this context, the term 'pacification' refers to the effort made by both the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and external 'Free World' allies such as the United States and Australia, to defeat the communist-led National Liberation Front (NLF) insurgency within the Republic's borders. Although no single comprehensive definition of pacification existed during the Vietnam War, by 1965–66 a broad consensus had emerged among relevant parties around the meaning of the term. To these actors and agencies, the term referred to a process designed to win the allegiance of the populace to the government of the Republic through not only military action but also political, economic and social reform.[1] This belief in the need to reshape society to defeat the insurgency stemmed not just from the particular conditions present in Vietnam but also from wider US engagement with decolonisation in the wake of the Second World War. It is partly as a result of this key context that this work uses 'pacification' rather than contemporary synonyms such as 'counter-revolutionary warfare' (CRW) or 'counterinsurgency' (COIN). Unlike those expressions, 'pacification' is not a generic term; it locates its subject in a particular time and place.[2]

Many important post-war commentators, most notably Colonel Harry Summers in his 1986 work *On Strategy*, argued that the major threat to the Republic came not from the insurgency but from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's (DRV) army – rendering scholarly and historical investigation of the pacification process all but irrelevant.[3] This view is,

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however, misguided. Throughout the war US policy-makers, soldiers and diplomats consistently stressed the importance of pacification in achieving their goal of creating an independent and stable Republic of Vietnam. From 1965 onwards, the commander of US forces in the RVN, General William Westmoreland, made it clear that the aim of US operations was not simply to defeat the enemy on the battlefield but also to create the conditions in which pacification could take place.[4] Speaking in February 1966, US Ambassador to the RVN Henry Lodge summarised the conclusions of many policy-makers and military practitioners when he declared: 'We can beat up North Vietnamese regiments in the high plateau for the next twenty years and it will not end the war – unless we and the Vietnamese are able to build simple but solid political institutions under which a proper police can function and a climate created in which economic and social revolution, in freedom, are possible.'[5] Lodge, Westmoreland and other US leaders understood that the RVN's long-term survival could not depend on US military power but rather on the stable, indigenous government that it was hoped pacification would produce.

Yet despite the importance of pacification, comparatively little of the Vietnam War's sprawling historiography has been devoted to chronicling or examining the program. Richard Hunt's *Pacification* (1995) provides something of a general overview but is primarily concerned with the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) command, set up in 1967 to coordinate US advisory support for pacification. Thomas Ahern's declassified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official history, *CIA and Rural Pacification*, edited and commercially published in 2010 as *Vietnam Declassified*, serves a similar function by chronicling the Agency's considerable involvement in pacification. Other areas of focus have been on particular parts of the pacification effort – notably the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program – and the memoirs of participants, ranging from CIA officer and CORDS head William Colby to US advisers at district and province levels.[6] Although they are often excellent works on their own terms, as a body of work they fall far short of the kind of exhaustive or even adequate coverage provided of other aspects of the war.

Moreover, much writing purporting to be about pacification is in reality about the performance of the US Army in Vietnam – often with the objective of winning contemporary doctrinal battles rather than establishing historical truth.[7] During the war and after a number of officers were vocal in their view that the Army did not understand the nature of the war in Vietnam and that this had been a significant factor in

their defeat.[8] In 1986 Andrew Krepinevich gave this view an academic treatment in *The Army and Vietnam*, writing: '[T]he [US] Army's conduct of the war was a failure, primarily because it never realized that insurgency warfare required basic changes in Army methods to meet the exigencies of this "new" conflict environment.'[9] Krepinevich, a serving officer at the time of publication, made clear that the book was designed to counteract what he perceived to be the Army's institutional whitewashing of its failure in Vietnam; rather than acknowledge its unwillingness to adapt, the Army had in the aftermath of Vietnam blamed its political leadership for not delivering it the kind of war it wanted to fight.[10]

The argument of Krepinevich and other so-called 'hearts and minders' found a new audience after 2001, as the United States became embroiled in insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan.[11] Soldier-scholars such as John Nagl repeated Krepinevich's basic criticism that the Army had failed in Vietnam because it had failed to adapt – with the obvious inference that if the United States was to succeed in Iraq and Afghanistan it had to adapt to the realities of counterinsurgency. US military and political leadership enthusiastically embraced this argument at the time, not because it was necessarily true but rather because it provided a simple narrative device that explained changes in US strategy and doctrine.[12] As one critic put it, Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife* 'shoehorn[ed] the American experience [in Vietnam] into a narrowly constructed social science model without thoroughly analysing how the army conducted operations on a daily basis'.[13] Rather than being carried out on its own merits, research into pacification has, in recent times, been increasingly conducted in order to provide evidence for predetermined views regarding the correct course of action in Iraq and Afghanistan. The result was a distorted picture that lacked both detail and context.

In contrast to such historians as Krepinevich, an increasingly vocal revisionist school emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, which argued that the pacification program had succeeded in its aims. Historian Lewis Sorley argued in *A Better War* (1999) that the US Army had been failing at pacification until the arrival of General Creighton Abrams as Commander Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) in mid-1968. In Sorley's view, Abrams understood pacification in a way his predecessor Westmoreland had not, and by implementing new tactics was able to defeat the NLF. Mark Moyar's *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey* (1998) ostensibly focused on the Phoenix program, but in reality amounted to a defence of the morality and the success of pacification. In addition

to these specific works, a number of more general histories of the war have adopted a similar position.

Unfortunately, this school also suffers from conceptual problems. Sorley in particular has received sustained criticism from other historians for an overreliance on oral history, selective use of sources, insufficient archival research and a 'tendentious rendering of American strategy in Vietnam'.[14] Although this is not true of other revisionist historians, the broad issue of the standard of evidence remains. Many use MACV-generated metrics – such as the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), number of Front cadres neutralised and citizens enrolled in the People's Self-Defence Force (PSDF) – to demonstrate the defeat of the Front. Although these metrics are not necessarily wrong, numerous studies have highlighted the way in which they need to be treated with caution. They could be the product of short-term trends, for example, or simply falsified altogether.[15] Like all statistical measures, they require context – a context difficult to provide in the works not dedicated to pacification, or the history of the program within a single province.

The historiography of pacification in Vietnam could therefore be characterised as reasonably shallow, and to some degree distorted by institutional interests. What is required are works that, to borrow Sir Michael Howard's terminology, trade width for depth.[16] In 2007 Canadian historian Terry Copp recounted the exasperated reaction of an American colleague to the publication of his book *Fields of Fire*, about the Canadian Army in Normandy: 'When will you Canadians stop endlessly analysing your three division army? No one else knows the names and personalities of divisional, brigade and even battalion commanders. Why don't you look at the larger picture?'[17] Yet by 'endlessly analysing' one comparatively small force in depth, Copp was able to demonstrate that much of the accepted orthodoxy about the nature of combat in the Normandy campaign was false.[18] This book adopts a similar approach. By focusing solely on one province over an extended period, it aims for the depth necessary to challenge some of the orthodoxies regarding pacification.

Several other such case studies exist, but although these works are generally of high quality, they do not necessarily fill the historiographical holes outlined above. Jeffrey Race's *War Comes to Long An*, for example, is a sophisticated analysis of the origins of the insurgency in South Vietnam that is rightly regarded as a classic. But Race's primary interest is in building a theoretical model that explains revolutionary dynamics, and his book – grounded as it is in contemporary field work rather than archival research – is in many ways more a work of anthropology than

history.[19] On the other hand, Eric Bergerud's *Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* is an excellent case study that, focusing as it does on pacification and the interaction of external 'Free World' forces with the program, serves as something of a model for this work. Yet, having first been published in 1993 and never subsequently updated, *The Dynamics of Defeat* suffers from its lack of access to twenty years of scholarship – particularly regarding the communist side of the war, which has become increasingly well documented as relations with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have become normalised. Consequently, there is still a need for further provincial case studies focusing on pacification.[20]

The choice of Phuoc Tuy province as the location for this case study is also important. Between 1966 and late 1971, the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) was based, and primarily operated, in Phuoc Tuy. This presence is in one sense well documented, but the historiography of Australia's military involvement in Vietnam has its own problems. The field is dominated by veterans' memoirs, accounts of individual engagements – notably Long Tan in August 1966 – and unit histories.[21] The latter continued the tradition begun after the First World War of veterans documenting the stories of their units – largely individual battalion tours of the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) but also the likes of the Special Air Service (SAS) and Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV).[22] Although the quality of these works varies greatly from excellent to mediocre, the vast majority are narrative histories that emphasise the experience of the individual soldier, in keeping with the tradition of 'democratic' Australian military history.[23]

The dominance of this 'democratic' history has meant that there is a general lack of context for Australian operations in Phuoc Tuy, particularly concerning pacification. Some histories, notably Frank Frost's *Australia's War in Vietnam* and John Murphy's *Harvest of Fear*, have attempted to provide this context by discussing the nature of the insurgency and the Australian response to counterinsurgency. But pacification is not the primary concern of either work and both are somewhat dated, having been published in 1987 and 1993 respectively. The three relevant (and superb) volumes of the official history series *Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–75* also provide background to, and some analysis of, the pacification program in Phuoc Tuy.[24] At the same time their primary concern remains chronicling the operations of 1ATF. Consequently pacification in Phuoc Tuy remains a subject discussed only in the context of its impact on the Australian force rather than on its own merits.

It might seem strange to complain that Australian military history
focuses too much on Australian experiences. But the laser-like focus on
Australian individuals and units and the engagements they fought has
resulted in increasing distortions of their success or failure. In his *Vietnam:
The Australian Story* (2007) Paul Ham argued that 1ATF 'won a tactical
victory over a small Vietnamese province', citing comments made by
Major General Michael Jeffery in 2002 as evidence: '[W]e Australians had
everything under control in Phuoc Tuy Province and one wonders if those
tactics could have been employed throughout the rest of South Vietnam,
whether the outcome might not have been different.'[25] But what defined
victory, and how could it be the sole responsibility of 1ATF? The Task
Force was but one part of a larger Free World presence in the province
that included South Vietnamese troops, paramilitary units and police, US
and Australian advisers and US combat units. The comments of Ham and
Jeffery point to the way in which the 'Australian' in Australian military
history obscures the broader picture and distorts our understanding of
what actually happened.

This book therefore addresses several problems stemming from two
related historiographical issues. It aims to establish the nature and
methodology of the pacification process in Phuoc Tuy and the extent
to which it succeeded in achieving its objectives. As a subset of this, it
also examines the role 1ATF played in pacification. In doing so this work
will contribute to both a better understanding of pacification and the
activities of 1ATF over the course of its deployment. This is of impor-
tance because, as outlined above, the experience of pacification continues
to be invoked in the ongoing debates around the nature and efficacy of
counterinsurgency. This work aims to provide a clearer picture of the
reality of pacification and in doing so to contribute to the accuracy of
these debates. At the same time, it is important that relevant institutions
such as the Australian Army are able to learn from their past. Much is
now being made of the way in which the British Army, based on a flawed
understanding of past operations, entered the conflicts in Afghanistan
and Iraq believing it had mastered counterinsurgency and that this belief
consequently resulted in poor performance.[26] By placing the activities of
1ATF in a broader context, this work will help prevent incorrect lessons
from being derived from Australia's involvement in Vietnam.

To achieve these goals this project has drawn on a wide range of
archival sources. Research was undertaken in the United States National
Archives and Records Administration, which holds the records of Mili-
tary Assistance Command Vietnam and specifically CORDS Team 89, the

US advisory presence in Phuoc Tuy. Extensive work was also done into the archives of the Australian Army, held in the Australian War Memorial. Research was also undertaken in the National Australian Archives, accessing the records of the Australian Embassy in Saigon, which are particularly valuable given that they often focus on the non-military aspects of pacification. Owing to barriers of language and access, research has not been undertaken in Vietnamese archives. However, this book benefits to a great extent from the work of Ernest Chamberlain, who has begun translating (and making freely available) local histories from the Phuoc Tuy area.[27] Although these works suffer from some prominent limitations, not least their need to observe political orthodoxies and their grounding in memory, they nonetheless provide a valuable insight into the activities of the Vietnamese Workers' Party in Phuoc Tuy. It has also drawn, to a limited extent, on the digital collections of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and the Vietnam Archive of Texas Tech University.

In conclusion, this work explores the conduct and assesses both the achievements and failures of 'pacification' in Phuoc Tuy province between 1966 and 1972. It does so in the first instance in order to improve scholarly understanding of the policy, the study of which has been increasingly distorted in recent times by institutional concerns. In the process the book seeks to challenge existing preconceptions about the nature of Australia's war in Phuoc Tuy. It explains how pacification was influenced by both the practical experience of counterinsurgency in the post-war period and the theoretical models of modernisation and development produced by Western academia in the late 1950s – models that called for Vietnamese society itself to be rebuilt in order to defeat the communist insurgency. It seeks to show how these theoretical models often produced unexpected results when implemented in practice in Phuoc Tuy, and how rural society in the province proved stubbornly resistant to many of these changes. Finally it explains why, although pacification ultimately did help to change Phuoc Tuy's social, political and economic structure, it never fully succeeded in its ultimate aim of defeating the National Liberation Front.

CHAPTER | **1**

PACIFICATION

AN INTRODUCTION

In June 1961 Walt Rostow addressed the graduates of the US Army's Special Warfare Centre's counterinsurgency course in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. A former Professor of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Rostow was best known for his use of modernisation theory to explain the growth of newly emerged nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. At first glance, the choice of an economist as commencement speaker for a group of elite soldiers from around the globe seemed incongruous. But, as Michael Latham argues, Rostow was specifically chosen by the Kennedy Administration (which he had joined as Deputy National Security Adviser in 1960) to give the speech and make 'the connections between military strategy, counterinsurgency, and modernization explicit'.[1] Rostow was the public face of a generation of American policy-makers who understood that the communist-led insurgencies that had emerged throughout the decolonising world since 1945 were the product of deep political, social and economic change, and that defeating those insurgencies would require political, social and economic solutions. Yet these policy-makers also believed, largely because of the work of Rostow and social scientists like him, that they had understood these changes and had the right solutions to the problems they caused. This attitude would profoundly shape pacification.

This chapter serves as a primer on pacification: how it evolved, the problems it faced, and the administrative structure that grew up to implement it. It examines the ideological forces, such as modernisation theory, and the practical experience of counterinsurgency that helped shape

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attitudes towards pacification. It is important to understand this combination of the practical and the theoretical because together they provided a framework for pacification, shaping it in certain ways. Both Vietnamese and US authorities believed that Vietnamese society would need to change if the communist threat was to be defeated. What these changes were, and how these authorities believed they should be accomplished, is the subject of this chapter.

On 25 May 1961, President John F. Kennedy addressed a special joint session of the US Congress. This speech is best remembered for Kennedy's commitment to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade, but the President opened it on a much more sombre note. He drew his audience's attention to the 'rising peoples' of 'the whole southern half of the globe – Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East'. The United States, Kennedy stated, supported the desire of these peoples to 'end . . . injustice, tyranny, and exploitation'. He cautioned, however, that the forces of communism threatened to hijack this movement throughout the developing world. They would do so not through conventional armies but through 'guerrillas striking at night, by assassins striking alone', and pointed to the growing violence in Vietnam as an example. This was a challenge that the United States could not shirk, Kennedy warned.[2] He had in effect publicly committed his Administration to winning the Cold War in the Third World.

Kennedy has been commemorated by historians as the driving force of this engagement with the developing world: the would-be counterinsurgent who saw combating the threat of guerrilla warfare as one of his most pressing policy challenges and who had to force his agenda on a reluctant and conservative military establishment.[3] But this ignores the fact that by the time Kennedy was elected in November 1960, the US Government had been grappling with the problem of communist subversion and insurgency in Asia for nearly fifteen years. Kennedy was more vocal about the threat posed by communist insurgency than his predecessor Dwight D. Eisenhower, but his interest was a product of existing US engagement with the problem.

This engagement had derived from the challenge faced by the US Government in the immediate post-war period. The Second World War destabilised Europe and weakened the colonial system throughout Asia and Africa. US leaders began to warn of the challenges posed to the international order by the emergence of the developing world, eager to achieve the independence and material wealth of the West. 'More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery,'

President Truman cautioned in his 1949 inaugural speech, and 'their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas'.[4] In Asia in particular, Americans worried about the political inclinations of a peasant majority emerging from European control. By the time Truman was delivering his speech in January 1949, India and Indonesia had both achieved independence and US advisers were assisting local forces in fighting communist-led insurgencies in Korea, the Philippines, China and Indochina.[5]

The outbreak of these insurgencies and the potential for destabilisation throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia attracted the attention of both policy-makers and social scientists, who collaborated in an effort to understand the problem and to devise solutions.[6] The solution to this problem was what came to be known as 'development' or 'nation-building'. As Nick Cullather has argued, existing forms of diplomacy could not adequately address questions such as 'how and on what terms Asia's population would be integrated into the world economy, whether fragile postcolonial states could extend mechanisms of taxation and authority over vast ungoverned hinterlands, and whether poverty on this scale even could be ameliorated'.[7] The provision of foreign aid in the form of material assistance and expertise offered potential solutions to these problems. Development could tame the 'rising expectations' of Asia's peasant mass by feeding, clothing and educating them; not only that, it could also create the political and economic institutions necessary to keep them within the Free World.[8] US leaders therefore came to see 'development' as a crucial part of Cold War strategy and as being intimately connected with counterinsurgency.[9]

There was little doubt as to whose institutions would be exported to these emerging nations. As Odd Arne Westad has bluntly put it, development was often translated as 'becoming more like America'.[10] Yet the question of which US institutions would be exported remained a matter of debate. As Edward Miller has outlined, splits that had emerged within Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal over how best to transform American society in the 1930s and 1940s carried over into the development programs of the 1950s and 1960s. Those whom John Scott termed 'high modernists' saw the answer to Asia's problems as large, carefully planned projects run by government that would change landscapes and the societies that inhabited them.[11] Their primary inspiration was the Tennessee Valley Authority, a program of the New Deal era that had helped to transform the economic condition of a large swathe of the southern United States. The TVA's dams and hydroelectric power plants had brought