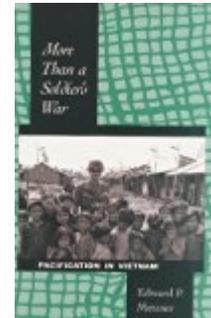


Edward P. Metzner. *More Than a Soldier's War: Pacification in Vietnam.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995. xi + 201 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-89096-666-2.



Reviewed by David Eyman

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The Viet Cong drew part of its strength from its ability to exist in the villages of the Vietnam countryside. Either through the support of the villagers or by methods of coercion, the VC controlled many areas within the country. It was evident to the South Vietnamese government and to the Americans as well that in order to counter this support and to deprive the VC of their operating base some effort would have to be made to build popular support for the government among the villagers. These efforts were known collectively as pacification.

For the most part during the 1960s, pacification in South Vietnam was the practice of placing American military personnel trained in propaganda and social services into the villages to assist in all the myriad tasks necessary to build popular support for the government. Such efforts were, essentially, attempts to protect the people from the Viet Cong. By the mid-1960s, the concept had a certain familiar look. In 1967, the name given to this concept was the Revolutionary Development Program. Under Diem, the concept had been seen in the Strategic Hamlet Program. Even the French

had built networks of forts and watchtowers. By 1967, the efforts were being brought together under one organization conceived by Robert Komer and known as Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS).

In this book, Edward Metzner has written of the pacification program from the point of view of a participant. In 1964, after attending crash courses to qualify as a psywar officer, Metzner left for Viet Nam and what would be the first of four tours of duty covering seven years in that country. His first assignment was to the ARVN 7th Infantry Division headquarters in My Tho, the provincial capital of Dinh Tuong Province south of Saigon. He viewed this first assignment as a learning experience, since he realized among other things that the training he had received was inadequate. He writes, " ... it became painfully apparent that I was not psywar qualified ... Western perceptions of how to communicate with and advise Asians were irrelevant to the job I faced" (p. 4).

Metzner left in 1965 but returned to Vietnam in 1967, after a shortened tour at the Pentagon, to serve first as a pacification advisor at Pleiku in

the central highlands, then as senior advisor in Dinh Tuong Province. After an illness, which might have sent him to Japan and thence back to the United States, he schemed to remain in country and was eventually assigned to Chuong Thien Province in the southern part of the country.

By 1968, he had finished his second tour in Vietnam and was back in the United States. But not for long. By mid-1969 he had returned to Vietnam as a Province Senior Advisor in Kien Giang Province, located in the far southwest corner of the country. In August 1970, he was transferred to Vinh Binh Province at the request of the ARVN corps commander, who was also making that move.

In 1971, he returned to the United States to attend the War College. But by January 1972 he was back in Vietnam, again serving as Province Senior Advisor in Kien Giang Province. In early 1973, as the American military was winding down efforts in Vietnam, Metzner was appointed to a position in the Defense Attache Office (DAO) as chief liaison to the Vietnamese Joint General Staff. Metzner worked for the DAO until August 1974, when he departed Vietnam.

While this simple listing of assignments is impressive, it serves best to establish Metzner's long acquaintance with, and interest in, Vietnam. When he writes of Vietnam, he writes with knowledge and experience. The real strength of this book lies in the author's descriptions of his duties as an advisor and his associations with various ARVN officers. His encounters with the Vietnamese military are presented here, warts and all, in a manner that permits the reader to gain a better understanding of the types of relationships that existed between American advisors and ARVN. One reads here of both the successes and frustrations of those relationships, of Vietnamese honorable and less than honorable.

If there are problems to be found with this book, they lie in the areas of what Metzner has not said and in a perhaps overly inflated view of

his importance. As an example of the former, although there is frequent mention in this book of CORDS, its creator Robert Komer, and even of John Paul Vann (who in 1969 was serving as IV Corps deputy senior advisor for CORDS), there is no mention at all of the darker side of CORDS: the accelerated pacification program, the Phoenix program, or William Colby, Komer's replacement as DEPCORDS in 1968. While it may well be that Metzner had no contact with nor knowledge of those aspects of CORDS operations, their omission in a book which contains an abundance of other detailed information is interesting, to say the least, and certainly makes this a less-than-complete picture of pacification in Vietnam, as its subtitle suggests.

As for Metzner's view of his own importance, in this book the reader sees him as one who rarely makes mistakes and who is widely admired by his Vietnamese colleagues. Perhaps that is so. But the reader has an uneasy feeling that some of the author's achievements might have been somewhat inflated in what John Keegan has called "The Bullfrog Effect" [John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, New York: Viking Press, 1967, p. 33]. To cite but one example, when the US 9th Division moved two battalions into Chuong Thien Province to conduct heliborne assaults into VC bases in the nether reaches of the province, to no effect, Metzner writes,

... operations went on for several weeks, with unnecessary casualties and minimal results. Had the decision makers at Corps and Saigon conferred with [Major Le Minh] Dao and me beforehand, we might have saved them the trouble and the losses ... The U.S. military was out of touch with Vietnamese realities in general and with the goals and objectives of the political conflict in particular (p. 100).

These objections aside, this book is worth examination. On balance, Metzner has provided us with interesting insights into the life of an American officer in the pacification end of the Vietnam

War. As such this book may be considered a valuable and quite readable addition to the literature of that conflict.

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