DEBRIEF OF A
SENIOR DISTRICT ADVISOR
NINH HOA, VIETNAM
1966 - 1968
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Content Summary

Preface .................................................. i

Map .................................................. iii

Preparation and Orientation ............... 1

The most essential part of the training was the language training. He said, "My jobs were mainly persuasion, persuasion, persuasion--so my main asset is speaking their language."

Security for Americans ....................... 6

Everyone should be given weapons familiarization, such that they learn the fundamentals of firing a weapon. Sometimes it is necessary to carry a weapon because even since Tet civilians no longer enjoy immunity.

Role and Function of Position ............... 8

He was assigned as an assistant province representative but after the formation of CORDS he became a senior American district advisor. Ninety per cent of his time was spent on RD.

U. S. Bureaucracy ................................. 10

The American presence in Vietnam is stifling. He said, "You almost had to fend off other Americans from the Vietnamese and really be an agent for the province chief to keep the mass of Americans away."

The establishing of CORDS eliminated a lot of flexibility that existed under OCO. CORDS also eliminated the distinction between the civilians and the military and opened up the USAID teams to terrorism.
Effects of the Tet Offensive ........................................ 12

The VC were very successful on many points such as the propaganda and psychological aspects. He did not feel the VC were hurt militarily, and thought the important thing to recognize was the psychological damage done to the RD program.

The one bright spot out of all of the depressing information was that both the rural and urban people became aware of the intensity of the war, and may be ready to make a commitment one way or the other.

Vietnamese Bureaucracy Revolutionary Development .................. 16

Revolutionary Development was a good thing because the country needed a shot in the arm. Hopefully, as the program becomes successful, the functions can return to the line ministries.

Although the hamlet or district constitutes the basic unit of government, the village should be the basic political administrative entity.

Approach to Action in Vietnam ........................................ 19

Americans are doing a disservice by not pushing the Vietnamese more and by adopting their pace. We have got to strike a happy medium.

GVN Officials Interpersonal Relationships ............................. 21

The American leadership in Vietnam to this day has not taken off the kid gloves in handling the Vietnamese leadership that they should have taken off six years ago.

Frustrations and Successes ........................................... 21

The day to day failures can be extremely frustrating, but several conversations he had with some young, dedicated RD cadre leaders led him to believe that if the government can exploit this maybe we can get "some of the motivation that those VC cadre teams have had for years."
PREFACE

The material contained in this debrief represents the personal observations, experiences, attitudes and opinions of the person interviewed. The Asia Training Center (ATC), the University of Hawaii, the Agency for International Development (AID) and the United States government in no way approve or disapprove of the actions reported or opinions expressed; nor are the facts or situations reported verified.

The purpose of debriefing personnel returning from Asian assignment at the Hawaii ATC is to:

1. Provide AID with management insights suggesting alterations in current policies and practices and to identify patterns, trends and problems which, when analyzed, will provide guidance for future assistance plans and programs.

2. Accumulate new or updated information for an institutional memory, for fundamental research and for application to future development assistance programs.

3. Provide material for understanding the cultural framework of a country, and the dynamics of its mode of social change. And, as a correlate, to discover customs, mores, taboos and other relevant factors which affect interpersonal relationships between Americans and members of a host community.

4. Provide material suitable for instructional purposes.

5. Obtain information which will be of value—generally and specifically—to American overseas personnel in their future assignments.

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Preparation and Orientation

I began Cycle I training in the first part of April 1966. I had had about a week of orientation in Washington, D.C. The orientation there was basically geared toward the AID employee overseas—it wasn’t that much concerned with Vietnam itself. I can’t remember too much—it was a very quick one week course; then I came to Hawaii. I was supposed to go on directly to Vietnam, bypassing the course in Hawaii. I was on the manifest for the plane, as a matter of fact. I had to see certain people and argue my case—saying that I would be of much better use to the mission, knowing my weaknesses and strengths—if I did get some language training. I knew I’d be better off with some language training for the very fact that I wasn’t a technician; so, I came here late, finished the 5½ months, then received about a seven day orientation in Saigon that was basically related to the in-country program. I was then assigned to II Corps. I was a week late in the Cycle I course and missed what they then called the D-group orientation. I continued with the group to about the middle of June when we all transferred to the Big Island for the training program over there. I’m not sure what the D-group orientation was all about—your relationship to other people and the working conditions—I did miss that. Much of the training, I felt, was undergoing birth pains—it was just starting. They were sort of searching around, I think, for what would be applicable and what would not be applicable. I think the best we got was from personalities arriving from Vietnam on their way through or in-country subject matter. We tried to get things like provincial representative reports but were unsuccessful. Generally speaking my evaluation of Cycle I would be that it was a good start—well, a start, let’s put it that way. As far as my evaluation—it was just a start. I would have to be here through many of the subsequent cycles to really give an evaluation. It’s hard to pick that one course out and give a real evaluation of it—with it’s birth pains and groping around trying to find objectives and goals.
Outside of language, cultural training was the most valuable return I got from the Cycle I. We had possibly a few times someone lecture about Oriental countries, working in under-developed countries--just the general ground rules for working any underdeveloped country. We also had some case studies on how to get a certain job done--what happened in a man's particular experience. Much of the material I've retained and I think it proved to be valuable in some respects like some of the more ad lib conversations we had, some of the generalities about someone else's experiences--somebody who was just passing through on their way to the States.

I understand that much of the training course has changed. I can see that it has changed. I can see that the language program has tightened up, male teachers have been added, and more comprehensive subject matter has been worked on. As far as some of the training in cultural attitudes, working in underdeveloped countries, the American overseas--this was good. It still should be maintained in any course like this, a very strong part of the curriculum in any course preparing Americans to go overseas. In improving the course, I would try to bring things up to a contemporary level--how do the changes affect the Americans over there now. This would possibly mean getting a lot of resource personnel from Vietnam on a TDY position for a long period of time--maybe even to a point of having them have a mid-tour transfer. At least this would keep the information up to date.

This brings in the fact that there must be some training and information on the basic organizations in Vietnam. The person going into Vietnam should have some training on the governmental structure--where he would relate in the whole ladder of positions--how he is only an advisor and is outside the chain of the Vietnamese organizations. And then he needs some basic things on a province chief's job--how he relates to his staff and the people around him; what's the daily governmental structure; the daily governmental operations in the province. This needs to be done with an attempt to keep motivation at a high level--his attention at a high level. You can only give so much information on structures, on organization--you reach a point where I think the audience or the student will level off and there will possibly be diminishing returns after a certain point. You've got to keep it contemporary--even bringing up present day issues or personnel--even how they fit to the structure. Just giving skeletal charts on structures and organizations has a limited effect I think.

Where his change must come in Vietnam is in things involved outside of his professional skills. This brings up his need
to know the cultural aspects of his operating eye to eye with others in Vietnam—his relationship to the American team, his relationship to the Vietnamese, his understanding of the political forces that are certainly present in every organization in Vietnam. From what I can see now, I would keep the language program at its present level, stress cultural aspects of the American not only working in an underdeveloped country, but working in this particular country—Vietnam, sharing its complexities that are present there and that are not present in other countries where AID is involved. Play down, to some extent, the technical training—certainly the technical training that we went through. These are basically some of the changes I would make if I were in a position to do so.

I would not stress the technical training too much, technicians come into training already with their skills. There's not that much of a change, at least from what I can say, of a technician working in Iowa or in a province in II Corps. The technical training, as far as its relation to what I've done the past 18 months, I can say was partially irrelevant. Basically, I found that the engineering, in my job, was not necessary. A small amount of basic minimal construction techniques that we were taught came in handy, but that was about it. Certainly it was not deserving of the large block of instruction and the quantity of hours that was applied to the course. It just wasn't that important. A lot of the information on agriculture also didn't tie in with what I did in the last 18 months.

As far as giving technical training, it may have its place but I'm thinking of time involved now. It was a long course—too long, I think. The language was good and some of the cultural aspects of the training were good, but much of the technical training was irrelevant. I say irrelevant because I sensed, when I talk to most of the graduates, what groundwork we were working on. It just didn't apply and didn't come up where we would have to use many of the skills which we were taught. What amount or quality of material or technical knowledge can a man remember and use and take with him and use on an assignment in Vietnam? Very little, I think.

You're taking in technicians now in the course and I think you should realize that these men already are professionals. They have skills they've already learned and they will take these skills, for better or worse, with them when they go. Basically, you should rely on placing him in a position whereby the training is directed toward the cultural aspect, the language training, and using this man as a professional overseas.
The organization has gotten bigger and we have self-help advisors over there now, whereas before oftentimes the generalist had to know about mixtures of cement, etc. Of course, that isn't really a good example, you should always know something like that. But, with certain technical things, there is an American advisor over there who is responsible for this.

I would say as far as training the technician—the engineer, the agriculturalist, the nurse—they all have these skills with them when they come. They are sent into Vietnam, of course, with these skills, but with a sufficient amount of training to place him in the perspective of the country to which he is going—how will he fit with the other Americans in that country, how will he relate to them in the organization, and the indigenous people in the country. As far as any more training of generalists, people in my category, even more so language should be emphasized, emphasize the political aspects of his being an American overseas, a diplomat. As I say, I went stripped of any technical skills—my jobs were mainly persuasion, persuasion, persuasion—so my main asset is speaking their language.

I didn't feel that the geographical relationship of Cycle I training being in Hawaii proved its case. I didn't feel its being in Hawaii served any real profit other than the fact of its proximity to the East-West Center and the potential that the East-West Center would have to offer a training course like this.

And I don't think its being in Saigon would make very much difference. I think if it were held in Saigon there might be a tendency to confuse the issues all the more. There may be the danger of confusing it all the more—taking the trainee right off the plane, putting him in this orientation, and being too specific. Being too—well, "This happened yesterday and this should happen tomorrow and this is your program." If you give structure and theory here in this training center, for instance, psychological operations or Chieu Hoi, then you can go to Saigon and get beyond the statistics report: How does it actually work? How is it going? You have the basic overhead objectives and policies, but how is it actually done? It might work out in Saigon but they first must be given the overhead titles, the policies and the directions. It could happen—it could possibly be a success in Saigon. It all depends on the personnel who would be feeding into the program—that's the most important thing. We can get second line, third line, fourth line people that have not had real touch with the program, but then we're defeating the real purpose of it being in Saigon—being close to the program.
I'm afraid that if it were given in Saigon it would just be a geographical change from Hawaii, other than the fact that you might get resource personnel there that are actually involved.

The seven-day orientation in Saigon could have been tightened up a bit, but it did name names, positions and personalities. It gave us a closer in-country view of what the programs were—such as Chieu Hoi information, etc. It put things under a closer perspective.

The language I will say, of course, I think it's a common feeling about the language course, was the most important part of the training. Especially at that point, because we were all generalists. In my particular operation it was my tool and a real asset for me. The ability to communicate with the Vietnamese in their own language breaks down barriers, set up a rapport and if the actual language itself can be impressed into your personality without changing it— you fit it to yourself and then communicate with the Vietnamese—you're well ahead. The Vietnamese are very much impressed when an American speaks their native language. I found this especially true in the rural areas when you go into the hamlets and villages.

Just from limited two-day observations of the ATC program as it is now, I would keep the structure of the language program at its present state. From talking to the people who have come into country from subsequent cycles, they themselves praise the language course—they felt it was better than all the rest of the training—they are two separate things really. Language training and the other part of the training.

I graduated with a 1 rating. Over there I reached a 2 level and possibly a 2+, I'm not sure. I didn't really set down any pattern of studying when I got there. What I did improve was the tonal quality of the words I had already learned plus the speed at which I spoke. I, fortunately, was placed four months after I arrived in the country in a new district where I was one of the few Americans. I was the only American in the district compound and as a matter of daily survival and just getting along, you speak Vietnamese. This is especially true in the districts because they've not had that many Americans through to where they can speak English. Many of the Vietnamese that do speak English go to the provincial capitals to work. Through daily activities in Vietnam, I picked up more of the language as quickly as possible.
Security for Americans

We had one day of rointation training in Hawaii on the range. We fired carbines and M-16s. I think this is a worthwhile thing to do in the training course. I think one day is needed to familiarize someone with a weapon--if he's never seen one before. It's amazing but it's understandable that if someone's never been in the service they don't know how to handle a weapon. If one day is spent in showing them the fundamentals of firing a weapon, it will introduce to them something that could be very valuable in the future. I didn't, however, ever use a weapon for operational reasons--just for practice firing.

There are all sorts of thought--pro and con--on whether we should carry weapons in Vietnam. I drew a weapon out of the provincial arms room--it was a .38 caliber. Sometimes I put it in a briefcase--other times I just left it at my home in the district. I don't know if it's common practice for Americans to be allowed to draw weapons. I was close enough to the Vietnamese--working with them in their offices--that I could get a weapon. Now if I were still on the CORDS team but not in daily contact with the Vietnamese I don't know if I would necessarily be allowed to have a weapon. I don't think it's anything that's been written out, but I do think possibly MACV weapons might be made available to responsible Americans who want to sign them out. I don't know if I would go into pocket to buy a weapon without first checking to find out if weapons are available.

When I traveled a certain road, I checked in with the MACV at one sub-sector and they would call up the next sub-sector and let them know that I was coming down the road. So, if I didn't appear in a certain amount of time they would send out a spotter. A couple of times I did take a guard with me--a PF soldier--from one district to the next district, just to have him along to make noise with that weapon if something happened or to keep the heads down so we could get out of that area.

Of course I don't know the situation of the countryside now, but I think I'd be much more careful than I was a year ago. I don't necessarily know if I would be continually armed--I would have to take a look at the area. There are certain risks you take, there are certain built-in risks in the job--you just can't spend your time always looking over your shoulder or making sure that you have a weapon strapped to your waist. I would still have to say, after 18 months, that only under certain circumstances would I carry a weapon with me. I would try to be quite aware of the area into which I was going. I think carrying a weapon has a limited, limited utilization. It's all right as a piece in your house, but to
be with the weapon constantly, no. You must also remember that in some areas they still have these local guerrillas that are poorly equipped and maybe you become a very valuable target because you have this very, very expensive brand new weapon that can be used by the VC.

Things have changed, I think, possibly because of this Tet offensive. I don't feel that we carry the partial immunity that some civilians had in some areas years ago. At times, due to intelligence reports, I switched houses, I switched locations in the house where I would sleep and took on a rifle rather than a pistol. Then after the intelligence died down there was a tendency to go back--in some cases, even being lax--to just having a weapon near me. There is a tendency often to become lax and I don't think this is a good criteria, just measuring the amount of intelligence coming in.

The disadvantages of having a weapon always on your person in the hamlets would be the Vietnamese attitude toward you. Many times I've heard a peasant saying that he had some sort of admiration for the American civilian because he always seemed to come in his Scout, alone and with no weapon. In a sense you were not branded as a military person--you had no attachment to the military forces, to the uniform that they'd seen for years and years, both of their own people and of the Americans. In some ways this attitude on their part made the job a bit easier. When the military people came in--the advisory team--they'd sometimes be flanked by guards and they'd certainly have their weapons (and rightly so, according to regulations). Their amount of success was limited by the fact that they presented this image of the military man as opposed to the fellow over there--the USAID employee.

I think it was true when I left, however, that we were possibly seen as but an element in the whole American military team in a certain area. I think I went over two years ago with the attitude that I would use a weapon solely as a defensive piece in my house and, of course, gauging the area I was in, find out whether or not I would use one or carry one when I was outside. The disadvantages were lack of full understanding of the limitations basically of the weapon: When could it be used? If you are driving a Scout alone and are fired upon or you reach a roadblock? Was it really a persuader? Was it really going to be of value to you if you're just trying to get out of that area? Going back 18 months, if you were stopped and searched and weapons were found on you then, in their minds, you were considered as a combatant--or just one of those USAID, USOM, IVS-types.
I think this has changed now--possibly 18 months ago it had some validity. There should be a weapon in the house--possibly as a defensive piece. If you're traveling with other people--at times, as I mentioned, along one stretch of road I had a guard go along just to return fire if I was fired upon to keep heads down.

**Role and Function of Position**

After something like eight months of so-called orientation to Vietnam and an orientation tour of II Corps, I was assigned to the Khanh Hoa province as assistant province representative. This is a rather large coastal province of II Corps and was relatively secure. Its provincial capital was Nha Trang which is also Region II USAID headquarters.

The province representative at that time had been in that particular province for about a year and we had a very small staff, compared, of course, to what they have now. There were three assistant provincial representatives, there was a Filipino who was trained as a self-help advisor, but, as often happens, he found himself being an administrative assistant and staying close to the office. There were two Vietnamese secretaries, a Vietnamese area specialist, a rural affairs specialist, and an agriculturalist specialist. That was about it. Later on the organization got bigger and we picked up more employees--both Vietnamese and American. We had not spread out to the districts, as far as having the district representatives--this came up three months later. We were one of the first provinces, I think, in II Corps (and possibly the country) to have a district representative. This happened in December 1966. While I remained in the provincial capital as the assistant provincial representative, the provincial representative stressed the importance of certain programs--particularly the RD program. Ninety per cent of our time would be spent on that. We were just wrapping up the 1966 program and getting into planning the 1967 program. Much of our attention was directed in that area--an area where we had, I would say, about 90 per cent of the RD budget for 1967 going into something like 47 hamlets out of approximately 380 hamlets in the province. I think this was the attitude across the country--this was the policy. RD was the program that was our main line of impact and most of our time, energy and funds were spent in that area. In some cases, too, we have gone into other areas. We had to go deep into this one area and we just didn't have time to spread ourselves thinly across the board.
Just getting things done and keeping things under control were our biggest jobs because new programs were continually coming.

About three months after that I became a district representative—actually an advisor for three districts. Again, this was geared much to the RD program—the teams were beginning to set in the calendar year of 1968 in the hamlets. I spent my time in getting certain schedules lined up, getting myself a perspective as to what my relationship was with the three district chiefs and with the provincial advisors (with whom I no longer had day to day contact). I was thirty kilometers away in a small district town. I was fortunate enough to have some good RD teams—most of them were from the district of Ninh Hoa. Again, my boss told me to spend much of my time in the RD hamlets and in the RD area, so I was able to hit the hamlets at least every other day, getting to know the cadre; more so because I wasn't an inspector. This is one thing we had to overcome—going down into the hamlets and having them relate to you not as if you were an inspector or some USAID monitor, but as someone who could come in and say, "Look, I've got access to certain information and supplies. How can I best be of use to you in the program? It's your program. I'm just here to help you." After awhile—it just took a certain amount of time—a certain rapport was built up and they treated you with that understanding. You had to watch it sometimes—possibly certain advantages were taken of you because they realized you represented a certain amount of commodities and funding, etc. My most interesting times were spent when I was in that district—I suppose this was natural. It gave you some opportunity to see some sort of success, whereas if you're far away from the end of the pipeline you possibly didn't have the opportunity to see any success.

Then, of course, the program changed into CORDS and I became the senior American advisor in the district of Ninh Hoa. It was a rather large district with around 107 hamlets and had a population of 73,000. The program got much larger—I think mainly due to the changeover from OCO (this was in the spring of 1967). My job, of course, took on more responsibility as I was put in charge of the MACV program as well as the civilian program. I continued in the RD and civilian programs and the military kept me informed of any developments that I would be held responsible for. I did not get that involved in the military activities of the MACV team, but I was held ultimately responsible for the American team in that district.
It was an interesting assignment for me because it did involve the complete U.S. actions in that particular district. It was a relatively secure district and I think that this was one of the reasons why a civilian was appointed as senior advisor. I still operated out of the same office and MACV was located outside the district compound in town. I was in the district compound in my office and my house was in the town.

**U.S. Bureaucracy**

We were located in proximity to the region headquarters, which was not a good position at times. Often I wished that we had a province far, far away from our next higher headquarters. We oftentimes would receive time-consuming projects, visitors, etc. that would just not be relevant to what we would be trying to do in the province. The provincial representative had a tendency to alienate a lot of Americans who came into contact with him if they were not involved in the province team. To some extent this was necessary—if the man was to do a good job. I'm not saying the alienation was necessary, but you almost had to fend off other Americans from the Vietnamese and really be an agent for the province chief to keep the mass of Americans away sometimes so you can see a little of the direction in which you are going. Oh, I couldn't come out and make a straight statement that there are too many Americans over there but I saw a lot of them. I think more thought ought to be given to the occupational needs over there before we send the men over there. I've met a lot of people who've just said they haven't had enough work to do at different levels of the USAID organization over there—now the CORDS organization. With the influx of Americans, however, the MACV team got larger, got more involved in some of the civilian program; the OCO team then got bigger—got more integrated and sometimes the left hand found out what the right hand was doing.

It was the provincial representative's role—and I think he did it well—to promote certain programs that the province chief was not paying attention to. I think he did well as an advisor in changing the province chief's attitude toward certain things. One thing that I remember about him is that he did encourage the technical service chiefs to get out of the provincial capital to see what the needs were in the field. He did this by his own traveling, of course, and they did follow him. The second thing that I remember about him is the fact that he made sure that there was a Vietnamese program—he didn't take unilateral American action, except
in a few situations for expediency. He made sure that the Vietnamese acted first. In that sense, he was really working for the province chief—giving advice. I think this is true policy in many cases—the Vietnamese need help, they don't need advice. He was the contact man for resources and everything else and he did a good job. I'm relating his job now because so much of what he did rubbed off on us and subsequently we acted in the right manner. Our senior advisor was a very good one, now that I look back on it after 18 months and have seen a large number of Americans advisors. He worked hard at getting the Vietnamese officials out of the provincial capital and into the districts and hamlets—especially the technical services and certainly the province chief. They had a very good relationship; they saw eye-to-eye on most projects.

I don't think OCO was given much of a chance. I think CORDS probably was a pre-ordained program and OCO was just a step in that direction. I think at OCO's very inception, contrary to what a lot of people were saying at the time, it was just a preparation for the total American team in Vietnam. I'm sure there were all sorts of reasons why OCO was shortlived and became CORDS, but I don't think OCO was given enough of a chance. I think after two or three months we were beginning to show some signs of improvement in what had been, in the USAID days, no real continuity of policy—many errors, many directions, people going different ways. What I could say about OCO, I think, is that we were gaining a certain cohesiveness, a certain quality, out of the integration of the whole civilian team.

One of the things that I think we lost when we moved from OCO to CORDS was a measure of security. The individuality that the USAID team had, before its integration with the military, in some cases and some areas maybe allowed them a certain immunity from the terrorist acts. Maybe we just weren't priority targets. We didn't have at our command artillery support; we didn't have at our command air strikes; so, maybe we weren't really priority targets in some areas of the country.

When we moved into the CORDS operation there was a certain tightening up which could possibly come through any integration, but I think the very weight of the structure now, or then, as it became CORDS, almost eliminated some areas of flexibility that were held under OCO. In just comparing the OCO and the CORDS organizations, I would say CORDS is not a retrogression. We've picked up certain improvements and we've had certain losses. Certain things were picked up and we have a total integrated voice, policy, direction—but I think at the same time, in making this integration,
that you're losing possibly some of the individuality of an American advisor. Whereas before, if he was good, he could accomplish a lot in his smaller organization with more chance for flexibility and mobility. Now, the weight of the structure itself almost dictates that this area of operations has been reduced. More responsibility is placed on the shoulders of the PSA (province senior advisor). If the PSA can work that organization, then there will be marked success and improvement possibly. But, again, the very weight of the structure may slow the program down -- by program I mean USAID/OCO -- whatever was the program then is the program now. There's a certain overhead to be paid on the whole thing, which is true in any organization when you restructure it. I think the larger it gets, the more danger one runs of reducing or eliminating some very good work on the individual basis.

In my own work under CORDS where we and the military related and where our actions and involvements were related to each other we worked it out very well. In other areas the civilian was the deputy and the military man was senior MACV advisor in that particular district. It was made known that I was ultimately responsible for the American team in my area. This was made known and, in some cases, it reduced the amount of confusion felt by the district chief as to: "Who is the American district advisor? Who is the man I go to when this problem comes up?" We worked it out well.

The bureaucracy pressured us toward overall goals and objectives and I would be critical of this because as it pressured to show certain results -- results that are recorded in data, logistical accountability. Oftentimes these reports are misused and assumptions are made from a long list of projects, or a long list of logistical data. Those assumptions have no place being made -- they shouldn't be made. So many projects completed in such and such a period of time are equal success in this particular area. I think this is a conclusion that was not necessarily true.

**Effects of the Tet Offensive**

I think indirectly the Tet offensive gave to the government of Vietnam an opportunity which, if it could be exploited, might give us something good. We could never go back to what it was like six months before -- not after that attack. It affected too much of the country. A lot of damage was done. The VC were successful on many, many points. The point that I'm making here is that we do admit a lot of those successes on the part of the VC. The one thing that I can see as a bright hope out of all the depressing information that we got, is the fact that the people in both the urban and rural areas
are now aware of the size and scope of the war. They are very much aware of what happened then--maybe they weren't bothered by it before. It may allow them to make a pro-government commitment or a pro-VC commitment. I don't think it's at that point but it's at the point that certain demands might be made of them that might force them to make a commitment and get off the fence. I'm speaking particularly of Chieu Hoi and possibly of PsyOps.

The government has four to six months to exploit and take advantage of the opportunity that was indirectly given to them by the Tet offensive of the VC. Possibly the Vietnamese citizen is more receptive now to what the government can do; maybe the government could force him to do something that he would not have thought of doing two or three months ago because he has become aware of the size and immensity of the struggle. Previously he was not. I've talked to some veterans that have been called back into the war and they seemed to me to have more of a sense of duty. Two or three years ago they might have run from their obligation but they were resigned to the fact that they were going back. I sensed that they are more aware of the necessity of going back. So the government had an opportunity to take advantage and exploit the situation.

In two particular areas--in publicizing what happened and in Chieu Hoi--I think the Vietnamese should have started exploiting immediately or they would lose their advantage. In other areas too, possibly it was the time when we could act--we could bring in a lot more forces into the government. There was more of a mobilization attitude, more of an awareness of the war. We've not much time on public opinions on that--I think if the Vietnamese sensed this and made some sort of an effort to change, something might come of it.

The question that was important to ask at that time concerned the attitude of the people, the pros and cons of it. Is the apathy still there? I'm sure that we've not much to say admirably for the Vietnamese citizens who didn't raise the cry that something was coming--but I take that for just fear. They just shuttered down their windows and stayed in their homes when they saw those NVA cadres going through their areas approaching the cities. However, I was impressed by the response in Saigon, to some measure, which would not have happened four years ago. The police responded well; the facilities in the city, the fire department, the ambulances--they all responded well.
We keep talking about lack of motivation on the part of the person representing the government of Vietnam as opposed to the motivation that we see in the VC ranks and the political cadres clear across the board. Possibly the Viet Cong cadre leaders told them that they would only be shooting at Americans. They may have been just two-week recruits, they may have been two-year veterans, but I think that right down the line many of them were very disillusioned and shocked by the response, or the lack of response. There was no general uprising. I don't think the high-ranking VC really ever thought there would be, but I think there was a certain amount of duping of their lower ranks to get them into those areas and into those cities, thinking they'd never go back to base camps, bringing provisions and their equipment along thinking they would really be well received by the urban areas or else well supported by their own ranks in the second phase. I think there was disillusionment—we would get some reports of a few VC ralliers being shot by their own ranks.

They said that VC discipline had tightened up greatly because the VC ranks still poised outside the cities were full of defectors. I think that if this discipline loosened up once they returned to their base camps there might be a potential for defection on a very large scale just from that one particular offensive. The amount of the weapons ratio to the number of bodies was sometimes questioned as far as the body count. I don't think they were hurt militarily—I think they were well equipped to mount another offensive, but their strength, of course, was largely in the civilian population.

The VC Tet offensive was, in one sense, militarily a stab at something—a shoot-out and withdrawal. It didn't necessarily mean that the security that fell in one night in a certain area didn't pick up two days later. I think the important thing was the attitude of the people and the confidence they had or did not have in the government has to be assessed. Then you can apply a program according to the results of that assessment. This is in the attitude of the people—what happened in those peoples' minds during those six, eight or ten days? Where do they stand in relationship now to the government officials? Where do some of the RD cadre stand?

I'd say the important thing to recognize here is the great psychological damage that possibly has been done that will certainly affect, among other things, the RD program. It is important to get these RD cadre teams back to the hamlets, explain to the people what happened, how it happened, explain why they left, and make an assessment right there: Find out where the cadres stand in relation to the people in the hamlet;
what the attitude is in the countryside now. Two or three months ago they were talking about building New Life hamlets with a relative amount of security and then signing over in a short period of time complete relocation of these so-called security elements and leaving the country at ease. Now, to say that the government security left the hamlets is not to say that the VC took over that real estate. I won't even say it was up for grabs; I think it's too obvious a solution to say that the government troops are not there so that must mean that it's VC—I suppose the word "contested" would be the best word. I don't think in that period of time that it became a contested area. We've got to get off this attitude of measuring the quantity of real estate—losing real estate and gaining real estate.

As far as assessment of damage to RD cadre—of course the dust hadn't even settled yet and you got statements that it would set back the RD program six to ten weeks or two or three months. So an assessment itself could not even be made as to where we stand probably for another few weeks. I think about a week after the offensive, General "X" was directed to go out to the provinces (which he did) to make an initial assessment of where they stood—how badly affected was the RD program by the offensive—also to urge the relocation of those teams back into their areas. They were just getting started on their 1968 program. Undoubtedly it did set the program back—the VC made money on it in some aspects. They were successful in some areas—propaganda area, psychological area, etc. But we, at this point, can't even make an assessment.

I think the organization itself could be generated. Of course, there would be a personnel problem. The difficulty was getting the cadre back to their assignments from their Tet leave—there was a difficulty in locating them. We didn't know this, but as far as the personnel involved I think they ran into the same problem that ARVN had run into—where are the people and could they get back to their assignments? As far as tangible damage to some projects in the hamlets, I can't quote any figures on that. I don't know. I heard that some RD hamlets underwent a lot of damage—both VC initiated damage and the Free World Forces did damage. A certain amount of mistakes were made—with reference to direction of certain attacks—this is only hearsay—I have no real facts and have no substantial data. I don't think the tangible facts of the program suffered much—I mean, damage to structures and things like that. You asked if the actual personnel of the organization could not be put back on the track. I think this is true.
During Tet I was transferred out to the established CORDS operation center—24 hours around the clock. There was the repository of all messages coming in from the field and we processed the situation report initially three times daily and towards the end, once a day. We were apparently the only unit in the CORDS organization who had the responsibility of making these reports and they were fed out to various interested divisions. The initial reports that came in were about the location of the RD teams—across the board, cadre teams (and cadre were often not affected by the Tet offensive. The VC struck at the urban centers).

In those areas where security had fallen oftentimes a province chief relocated his RF units to stand in defense of towns. I think then the RD teams followed the security elements. They were in the hamlets and, in many cases, their lives depended on the security element around that hamlet. When that security element left then the teams left. They were assigned to relief jobs, social service jobs, refugee center, etc. Some of them were assigned to static defense of the urban area, allowing some of the more mobile military units to move out. I sensed that they did all right as far as reacting. Many of them, of course, were on Tet leave. There were not too many casualties among the cadre. A group of 2,500 from Vung Tau went into Saigon and worked under the direction of the commissioner of refugees. I don't really think that they were an integral part of this whole thing; I don't think they were a targeted area by the VC. It seems to me, from the reports that we'd gotten in, that they responded well.

Vietnamese Bureaucracy Revolutionary Development

I believe that realizing the political problems and the state of the country as it was three or five years ago the line ministries, for any number of reasons, were incapable of getting to the point of raising the standard of living. Some sort of "super ministry" had to be created—you could call it anything. I think the Revolutionary Development program was a good idea at that time but eventually this concept has to work itself out of a job and its personnel, ideas and programs have to be re-absorbed into the line ministries. I think Revolutionary Development or rural reconstruction is a necessary thing. How it is designed and how it's implemented is another question, but I think basically the country needed some sort of impetus, some sort of shot in the arm to get a momentum for a few years and then to back off into the regular line ministries. I think this is the basic formula they should maintain over there.
My feeling is that the RD program is a good program and should be pursued more and then should be phased out. Then a village development plan should be phased in. The whole idea was that political necessity demanded something—a super program, like RD, but as soon as security permits and the situation changes I think village development will be a natural next step. Village development would be aligned along basic administrative structures that are there working in the country—the village leadership. The village would be the basic political administrative entity.

I think if we talked in terms of the village being the basic entity it would clarify things but actually the hamlets and sometimes the districts constitute the basic unit of government. That depends on changes that may have been made in certain parts of the country. In II Corps the villages were not that large—so they possibly felt that it would be better to constantly think of the hamlet as the entity. I would also consider—with one exception—the hamlet as being the place of residence and the village really being the final political and administrative entity. I think that any suggestions for change in that would be damaging. I think we ought to go with that, just like we ought to go with the RD program. It's a thing we're on to now and to change anything now would be wrong. If I may say something about the district—I think the district itself is but an extension in many cases just militarily as it should be—of the province chief, a direct line ideally would be from the village directly to the province; the district being but a funneling point or a collection point.

We're interested in this village development program. Village development is a natural evolutionary thing that should come after Revolutionary Development in terminology in the sense that it would do what RD is doing now but place the controls back where they belong with the leadership that is already in the village and the hamlets. In some cases it's a matching fund concept (as we use in the States)—so many federal funds match state funds or a foundation fund matches a university-raised fund. My thought is that it's a bit premature, mainly because of lack of security and possibly because of lack of sophistication among the personalities in the structure of the government to effect this. The correction element has something to do with this. However, I'm not saying that they don't know how to develop their own villages.

As I mentioned on the assessment of the RD program, it would be hard to find out how Ferguson's plan to train thousands of village elders in local administration would go on. I think they were going to go into an experimental phase of this this spring in three or four provinces—pick one particular model
village in each of the provinces. Then hopefully there would just be a snowball effect. The idea is good but, again, I think the timetable is expecting too much. The Tet offensive and how it related to rural security would certainly have something to do with it. I think we should realize that there are more ways of looking at this thing and of assessing what any program will be able to do in the near future.

We are trying the concept of rural development now in Vietnam with much of it sponsored by certain funding by certain ministries. This eliminates any stranger element (that being the RD team) being superimposed on the natural leadership of any village or hamlet. I think this is important to a program. I don't think the country should drop its security. There are some cases where there is a lack of knowledge—not necessarily basic knowledge of what the Vietnamese peasant sharecroppers get a lot of ambition, if properly motivated—but this sophistication on how, who, where, what, when, knowledge of development.

I think probably General Thanh's transfer from Minister of MND involved a sense of moving on into another area. Now we're getting into the little areas of the complexity of the political dealings involving transfers of assignment. A man can spend years in that country and barely get beneath the surface on some of those actions. However, I think it would be wrong to think that Thanh left due to failure. I think the man made his transfer for any number of reasons—I think that possibly American pressure was one of those reasons. We did definitely, as always, want to get involved in the reorganization of ARVN and improvement of the personnel in the organization get rid of the corruption element. I think we placed a lot of hope on him in doing this. The Vietnamese elements went along with the Americans' hopes for him. Once he got in the job, it just wasn't responsive. I feel, however, from a great distance—I've not met him, this is just information I've picked up—that he was getting where he intended to go.

I think we made a mistake in thinking that what he had done in RD would make it very easy for him to do the same thing in an entirely different job. I'm not saying that he wasn't qualified—I'm sure he was. I think he was getting into an area that would have involved stepping on a lot of feet, making a lot of changes, compromising a lot of peoples' positions over there, really attacking a very critical area, an important area. I think that the personalities involved wouldn't let him have his head because much that they hold near and dear—whether it's personal or professional positions—would have been damaged. So he didn't get the Vietnamese support. I think that toward the end he got very disillusioned with the whole thing and offered his resignation. They didn't accept it—I think
they put him or leave or something and gave him a new position. I think that his being made commanding officer of IV Corps was a good sign. He was appointed, I think, during the Tet crisis as the chief of the recovery committee under Vice-President Ky's direction. This was a committee that met twice daily, involving ministers who would be responding to the crisis in the situation after the Tet offensive—refugee, chieu hoi, public health, etc. I think he did well—and then he surfaced as IV Corps commander. I think he'll do a good job—it's certainly a very critical area of the country. Pacification should certainly be improved in that area.

In the province I was in, because it was relatively secure, I think we were fortunate in having a rather sophisticated group of GVN officials. I think we're to the phase where we're expecting some sort of response by people—getting them to do something in reaction to what the government is doing—for better or worse. If the team was doing a good job in a hamlet for a year, particularly what we would call a good job, and government officials had been there and they'd shown a sincere effort, then if the people—after a certain period of time—failed to respond, we'd have to re-evaluate the whole program.

**Approach to Action in Vietnam**

I think if we tread too lightly on this attitude about not getting too involved and not pushing too fast, we're doing a disservice. You've got to strike a happy medium. Certainly you should not go completely to one side to get the job done at all costs; this is not good. On the other hand, we shouldn't be so conservative in our actions that we just let everything go by the board and let the Vietnamese take them at their pace. This is not good either. There has to be a middle ground. This is up to each advisor as he measures the assets that are in front of him, measures the personalities and the positions. I used the technique of persuasion, although I did rather forcefully push some points in getting one Chieu Hoi center accepted. At another time and in another place I would have backed off and not been so involved in the program, but I felt that it was a neglected thing and that was why I got more involved in it. However I never pushed to the point of getting American personnel or American resources involved in it. It was still their program with prodding on my part. Getting the Vietnamese to change is a very, very important role of the American advisor—by his presence, by his job. Very seldom did you really see it—this change.

We programmed the Chieu Hoi center while I was still working out of the province capital, but, because of the attitude
toward Chieu Hoi that prevailed then and possibly even now, it was difficult to get this thing off the blueprints and into reality. The province representative gave me this particular job and said that we had to get it done.

We had to get a contractor and it involved my getting involved in contract negotiations. I thought the price was too high, as did the government people. Finally we did get a contract and then we had to get the basic government blueprints. That meant going to building service and trying to hurry those up. We then had to pick the location and get all those forces together to commit themselves to a starting date. There were delays—possibly labor difficulties, etc., basic hesitation on the part of government officials. Maybe some mistakes were made; I'm sure there were. We finally got this going and overcame some of the obstacles but it involved a lot of pushing—pushing through the vehicle of persuasion. We got the Chieu Hoi center started but things were continually falling back. This was basically a reflection of the attitudes on the whole policy of Chieu Hoi but there were also some very realistic and justified reasons for the program being slow. There was a certain accountability of funds; there were certain commodities they couldn't get. The lack of funds I think was because of the rise in the standard of living. The costs, I think, were out of proportion—much lower at the start than they were some months later when we finally got the thing started.

Basically through persuasion—and my job was mainly that of a persuader—Vietnamese officials got involved in this thing. Some were not officially involved so much, but I got them talking to each other. They may have been doing this as a favor to me when I first started it. Primarily I went to the RD people who were concerned with development in the rural areas (and rightly so) to the neglect of this center. I just kept "egging" them on to get this thing started before the calendar year was up. It was a matter of notifying—constantly bringing things up to these people: "Why don't we try to arrange something here tomorrow?"

Persuasion is of great value as far as to what the American advisor can do—keeping in mind the reasons why and keeping in mind the thought,"Why am I doing this?" You are doing it particularly to proceed along the policy directives as given by the mission—our whole reason for being in Vietnam. As far as the whyness of something, it's very big and very specific, it's not in intangibles at all. We hope that we're going along in the right direction. Basically as far as the RD work is concerned, we are getting this mutual exchange between the governments and the people, getting some sort of response from the government officials; getting them to make some sort of mark in the countryside.
GVN Officials Interpersonal Relationships

I maintain to this day that we, as Americans in Vietnam, politically and diplomatically have not taken off the kid gloves with the Vietnamese leadership. By taking off the kid gloves and being a little bit more forceful, I think we would find some surprises. I don't mean we need to threaten; I don't think we have to go that far, but I think we should define our policy and go at it being more forceful. I think this should happen from the highest leadership in both governments. I think the Americans have been too used, in a sense, over there. It has caused untold amounts of failures and disasters. It has left the American field personnel too much out on a limb and in doing so has not helped his counterparts—in some cases it has even damaged relationships with his counterparts. In many cases, the good province chiefs you find—you find good ones and bad ones—are sometimes held up by the organization. The Vietnamese accept us; however, they accept us as just others of their 40 American advisors and they try to "snow" us too often. I think we have enough professional expertise in our development and our experiences overseas to be more forceful than we have been in Vietnam. I think that we have enough resources at hand to lay it on the line with the Vietnamese.

I think this cannot occur outside of Saigon—it must start in Saigon at the level where it will be meaningful. Too many superiors tell their subordinates, "Well, I don't have the power to do this," or to tell you, "I'm sorry, you don't have the power, you've got to do it on your own." You've got to do it on your own—you've got to use your own persuasion to try to do it. This should not come from the bottom although other things come from the bottom, from the people outside Saigon. There is a volume coming up out of the districts; but increases in forcefulness and clear concepts of direction and policy have to come at the highest levels of that government over there. How we will operate with this foreign government has to be forcefully put down in straight rigid terms. This would be a step in the direction of what I think we should be doing. This could have been said six years ago.

Frustrations and Successes

I can give two instances, I think, that exemplify the main thought of success that I would like to convey. Daily—day in and day out, week in and week out there were a lot of frustrations. Oftentimes, after a while, we minimized these and possibly placed them in their proper position. When you reached a point where there was a minor success or an optimistic event, you had a tendency to magnify this, I think. It's human nature
to gain a proper balance, to keep your balance. There are two particular instances both of these involving our presence in Vietnam—that convey success to me. I think in both instances, it was a healthy attitude on the part of the Vietnamese with whom I was speaking.

I spoke to one Vietnamese corporal (in Vietnamese) one evening at a beer stand in a small district town—Vietnamese Special Forces units were in the town. We had gotten along in the conversation to the point where we were very frank with our impressions and opinions back and forth. I had mentioned a lot of frustrations I had about the Vietnamese attitude towards the whole situation. I came off rather bluntly with the question to him of, "What if we all go home tomorrow? What if all the American forces—the Free World military forces—go home tomorrow?" Well, he really took this as an offensive remark and responded in the sense that he possibly even swore at me in Vietnamese—I don't know. He said, "You can go home tomorrow." I asked him, "What would you do?" He said, "I'd take my wife and daughter and place them in a hamlet—probably a VC hamlet—and I'd go to the field and I'd be the guerrilla for ten or fifteen days. I won't accept defeat, I won't accept what the Communists have to give me." This was something coming from a man who was in the lower ranks in the army, and it was, in a sense, a shot in the arm. I think this was a truthful and honest remark on his part—whether or not he would ever do it when the force was against him is another factor. But this was an attitude that I was impressed by.

Another instance occurred when the regional director came up to stay overnight in one of the RD hamlets. We had dinner with some of the RD team leaders and went into a talking session that lasted three or four hours. It was certainly a staged affair—the district chief had all his forces around that particular hamlet that night and it was really the most secure area in the province at that time. I had known those cadre team leaders for eight or ten months and I knew that they were very frank with the Americans—they didn't hide any feelings or any impressions about the Vietnamese government or their attitudes towards this leader or that leader. The district chief purposely left the room during some parts of the conversation because he knew that the director just wanted to talk to those four leaders. Two of them had been in the army before and they were very frustrated with the lack of support they were getting. They would talk about the enemy—the Communists or the VC—in the sense that they knew their enemy and they didn't want anything to do with them. They had a certain sophistication that impressed me—a sophistication of understanding of the problem of development in the middle of a war like that, of trying to empathize with the peasants in that hamlet. These were young
guys who wanted to do nothing but go back to their farms after it was over—they were real kids. They knew the rural peasant and they were tough. I was impressed by their sincerity and their honesty in answering some questions that upset us. In some cases, we gained a sense of pride in talking to those guys because it was an unadulterated conversation—nothing was staged or artificial about the conversation itself; they spoke right off the hip and leveled in on a lot of areas. The director asked some very good questions.

If those Vietnamese, at their level, carried with them an attitude like that—if it was honest at all and I think in those two situations it was—if this was any evidence of a cross-sectional feeling or could be representative of other conversations—then I think there's something there. I'll remember those two conversations. I'll remember that Special Forces corporal and those RD team leaders—who'll still be in this RD business until it's over—thinking that, "My God, if there's an attitude like that someplace, I hope eventually along the way it's exploited, it's used." If it can be captured, if it can be boxed in and used, then we may be able to get some of the motivation that those VC cadre teams have had for years—the motivation that makes a man walk down the Annamite chain for three months, sit under B-52 attacks for two months and then, under malnutrition, wounds, worms and everything else, still attack a district capital. If the government can exploit some of the motivation that's with the GVN people then they may have something, then they may be able to—even at this 11th hour—grab some intangible, define it and utilize it.