DEBRIEF OF AN ASSISTANT
AREA DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

BLAKE W. H. SMITH
SADEC PROVINCE, VIETNAM
1967 - 1968
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He did not have a good impression of the AID interviewers in Washington because they did not have the capacity to explain his job in Vietnam. This was his first indication of the puzzlement with which most Americans face the job in Vietnam. No one really knows what the job out there consists of or what should be done.

Preparation and Orientation for Position 2

The three-week orientation in Washington was reasonable, but not memorable. The instruction given on the organization and purposes of AID was irrelevant to Vietnam. He was hired by AID, paid by AID and worked for CORDS. He was disappointed with the counterinsurgency training in Hawaii, but again, that was because no one understands counterinsurgency, even in Vietnam. One good aspect of the training in Hawaii was the case studies of interviews with the Viet Cong. To understand the VC is to understand Vietnam. The last part of his orientation, which was in Vietnam, was pragmatic and relevant to Vietnam.

Language Training 6

It is essential to have language training. Fluency in a language enables the people to understand that you appreciate them. In addition, you cannot completely trust your interpreter to relay your thoughts accurately.
Profile of Sadec Province

Sadec was re-created in 1966 as a concession to the Hoa Hao Delta group. The leaders of the province must have been carefully picked because they are quite good. The VC control sizable portions of two of Sadec's four districts. The VC base was established in 1939 and has progressively grown. The Tet offensive was their last major gain.

Corruption

The National Police were good and fairly free of corruption. In Sadec province, although there was little corruption at the provincial level, there was malfeasance at the district level. He states, "I heard that the old Duc Ton district chief at one point was actually pocketing the salaries of some village council members and he certainly seemed to take a large part of the money appropriated for RD projects." Eradicating corruption is a matter of leadership. Although Diem's administration was rather free of corruption, things have been very lax since then. Perhaps President Thieu will tighten controls throughout the system.

Opinion of the ARVN Troops and the Popular and Regional Forces

The ARVN has embittered the people against them. They have been known to go on rampages of robbery and looting such as they did in Vinh Long province during Tet. The Regional and Popular Forces are closer to the people and therefore are more likely to respect them.

Events Since Tet

The Tet offensive had the beneficial effect of shaking up the leaders of Vietnam. Prior to Tet, the war only concerned the villages, for whom the leaders had no feelings. He says, "I think one can say that a great number of people were in favor of the continuation of the war in order that they could continue to get rich in their safe urban areas."

The Village Development Plan

The popular democracy as advocated by Ben Ferguson at the village level is the best that could be hoped for in Vietnam. Ideally, there should be a
higher level organization to discipline the village organization, which is the way the VC operate. Unfortunately, there is no dedicated leadership at the district level to discipline the village properly.

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There is not much hope for Vietnam. He says, "All of the people I work with and love are probably going to be killed by the Communists when they take over about a year from now. That is a very disturbing thought, because in working with these people... I know that in asking them to do a good job I am simply increasing the chances of their assassination in the long run."

The Americans have no coherent philosophy which explains why we are in Vietnam and what we should be doing there. The military advisors think we are there to fight an enemy. They do not know who the enemy is. The AID people think we are there to assist economic development. Economic development is one of the most politically disruptive sorts of activities which a society can engage in. The answer lies in the neglected political sphere of rural politics.

As in most underdeveloped countries, there is a village culture and an urban culture. A villager has virtually no chance of advancing to any position above the village level. The VC have broken this barrier and recognize a man on his merits and permit him to rise in their organizations. This is why organizations like the National Liberation Front will probably be successful throughout South East Asia.

Several things are needed in order to win against an organization such as the National Liberation Front. The cleavage between the village and the positions of power must be closed. It will be necessary to mobilize the people to get them working within an organizational framework. The village mentality demands justice and righteousness above all else. An organization to dispense justice is completely lacking. The American intellectual community must address itself to the sadly neglected field of political development. This desire for the proper ordering of human relationships can usually be seen in their religion.

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He is trying to organize the women in Phu Huu village to give them a feeling of involvement and
promotion. A public works program was started to mobilize the people. Regarding his third recommendation, which was for justice, he was attempting to get a full scale judge into Sadec province to adjudicate rural disputes.
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.

In order to obtain frank and open discussion, interviewees are promised that every effort will be made to prevent disclosure of their identity. For that reason, debrief reports are identified by a code number, unless explicit permission is granted to reveal identity.

In the event, for some legitimate reason, responsible persons desire additional information regarding material presented in this debrief, the ATC in Hawaii will attempt to contact the person involved to obtain the required information or establish
direct contact. Requests for additional information, or direct contact, should outline the reasons for the request and should indicate what use will be made of the information, if obtained.

Material contained in this report may not be quoted in publications or cited as a source of information or authority without written permission from the Agency for International Development and the University of Hawaii.
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REGIONS AND PROVINCES OF SOUTH VIETNAM
DEBRIEF OF AN ASSISTANT AREA DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

BLAKE W. H. SMITH

SADEC PROVINCE

VIETNAM

1967 - 1968

Joining AID

In 1965-66 I held an Africa-Asia Fellowship and was stationed at the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, where I was doing studies of the economics of rural cooperatives. I heard through the newspapers that people were being recruited for work in Vietnam, and it was said that the best people in all of USAID and in all of the world were being sent to Vietnam. The jobs that were open were in Rural Affairs, which fit my plans very well. I had intended to pursue the rural work I had been studying in Pakistan, and I felt that I was in need of training under skilled supervisors who were familiar with rural organizational work. These were the sort of people I had heard were going to Vietnam. It's also true that I contemplated the alternatives of working as a rural development worker in Vietnam or working as a U. S. soldier in Vietnam, and decided that I would rather be stationed in Vietnam as a civilian. I considered myself, however, as performing some sort of alternative service; therefore, I intended from the beginning to serve a two-year tour in Vietnam, since military people serve half that length of time.

When I flew home for my sister's wedding in June of 1966 I stopped by in Washington for a few days. It was then that I was interviewed and signed up with AID before returning to East Pakistan to complete the last two months of my tour.

I didn't have a good impression of the interviewers in Washington. One of the interviewers had actually been to Vietnam but the other two hadn't. They didn't seem to have the capacity to explain the job in Vietnam, but as I look back on it, this may have been simply my first indication of the puzzlement with which most Americans do face the job in Vietnam. Nobody really knows what the job out there does consist of or what it should consist of.
Actually, I didn't think very deeply about the whole selection process. I felt that it was a matter of chance and good luck that I happened to be selected. At the time, I was still very much concerned with Pakistan and didn't really have an idea of what Vietnam was all about. I would say, however, that I have been interviewed by the Ford Foundation, and I've had a much clearer picture drawn by the Ford Foundation employment people as to what I would be doing than when I was interviewed by the Agency for International Development. Of course, it was such a very long time ago and, as I said, I was still so much wrapped up in Pakistan and my sister's wedding, which had just taken place, that I really didn't give that half of a day very much thought; I couldn't make any grand statements of recommendation based on just half a day's experience.

Preparation and Orientation for Position

After returning for good from Pakistan and taking a three weeks' vacation at home, I spent three weeks in Washington, where I was given a preliminary orientation before coming to Hawaii for my language training. This orientation consisted of a number of lectures given to a large audience. Some of these were quite entertaining and some were boring but I thought they were decent lectures. They didn't really have much to do with the work in Vietnam; they were pitched to a broad group of Americans which were in the audience, including nurses, people who were going to take technical jobs, and people who were going to take jobs such as I was interested in. The orientation was directed at an ordinary American audience rather than at an audience of very well-informed and particularly motivated people. I felt, as an American in the audience, that they were reasonable lectures, although none of them was all that memorable as far as Vietnam is concerned.

The instruction we were given in the organization and purposes of AID was quite irrelevant to Vietnam. I was hired by AID and paid by them, but the Agency for International Development has had almost no influence on my work in Vietnam--I work for CORDS. At the present time I'm working for a lieutenant colonel and not for anyone employed by USAID.

Following the Washington orientation, I spent five and one-half months at the then Far East Training Center as a member of Cycle III. We had had no language training in Washington, and I thought I was going to be taking language most of the time in Hawaii. I was somewhat surprised at the amount of other material in the course. I was told that the supplementary
nonlanguage material would focus on the theory and methods of counterinsurgency. I'm afraid I was rather disappointed by what was given in the way of counterinsurgency, but, again, that's simply because nobody understands what that's all about, even in Vietnam.

Among the favorable impressions of my training in Hawaii were lectures by a few outstanding speakers, although it seemed that the more outstanding the speaker, the shorter the time he was there. Bernard Fall was very good; General Lansdale was excellent even though he was only at the Center for about an hour between flights to Vietnam.

I thought the case studies were very interesting. We worked with a Professor J. J. Zasloff from the RAND Corporation on a set of interviews with the Viet Cong. This should have been done much, much more often. Unfortunately, when Zasloff came he didn't give us much guidance about the case studies after we had read them; he mostly wanted us to stand up and make our own analysis of the reading material. They were excellent source materials, and I keep wishing that I better remembered what was in them. Those interviews portrayed the rural people of Vietnam who had become Communists, and it's not until one appreciates those people that one understands Vietnam. In Vietnam I know that there is an infinitely small proportion of Americans who do appreciate who the VC are.

I've found that the RAND Corporation people are some of the more interesting people to talk to in Vietnam--these are the people who have actually been carrying out these interviews with the VC. I've had occasion to talk with one man who did a year-and-one-half study of the Viet Cong in Dinh Tuong province, and I've also become very close friends with Gerald Hickey who's associated with the RAND Corporation. I respect him as being one of the very few intellectuals who is sufficiently caught up by Vietnam to do research there.

When I went to the Island of Hawaii, I enjoyed the rural-training portion of the exercise very much. Luckily enough we were the first group to engage in that course; so the communities to which we went were not yet spoiled by successive, inquisitive groups of fine American manhood. I went to Pahoa and very greatly enjoyed the people I met there. I still remember them and plan to go see them again; I've written to some of them from Vietnam. This was the first time that I felt I was out of an institution and in among people to whom my presence could have mattered. It was a fascinating experience.
I still remember Mr. Arakaki, who was a labor organizer for the ILWU. He was one of the most stirring people I ever met during my six months in Hawaii. He was quite distrustful of me and one of my friends when we went to visit him, because most of the U. S. Government employees who went to his place were agents of the F.B.I. investigating him for Communist activities. He claimed he had never been a Communist. I don't know about the truth of that and it doesn't really matter. He had a wonderful store of experiences in getting poor people to work together. He was a very political man, which few of the people who had spoken to us at the Center were. He was deeply concerned about all of the political issues of the world, but particularly about the fate of the Hawaii sugarcane workers. It struck me, and also my parents, to whom I recommended a visit with Mr. Arakaki, that this was the sort of man who should be training the prospective Vietnamese field workers. This man was political. He knew how to organize illiterate poor people, people under a condition of oppression. He had experience with poverty—he was raised in a very large family under very poor circumstances—and he was a leader that the people would follow. The people who followed him were not subordinate to him in the sense that they were employees. He was a man who elicited voluntary cooperation. He knew how to fight; he had fought with the mill owners and with higher headquarters in the sugarcane union.

What impressed me least about the training in Hawaii was that the supervisors did not have an adequate perception of the type of attitude or approach to life which would be necessary for work in Vietnam. If they did, they didn't try to impose it. There was a good deal of confusion about what a good person going to Vietnam should amount to. There was a faction of psychologists who seemed to believe that it was best to be oriented toward a group and to fit in well with other people. I don't really think this is true. It is necessary to work with other people and have them cooperate with you and to be friends with them, but not simply for the sake of chumminess or immediate experience. I was revolted by the whole "T" group exercise, the sensitivity training. That suffered the great error of being run by a woman whose goals, in a political sense, were not that clear. This was offensive, I think, to many of the men. On the other hand, I admire group analysis and self criticism sessions such as are conducted by the Communists because that training is devoted to the explanation of why one is not doing adequately one's work among the people. But there was no larger purpose in our sensitivity training—there was simply psychological embarrassment. There was no purpose in it at all except the implied one of getting along
with one another, which I don't think is really necessary. There were a certain number of people in my cycle who shared my feeling. At one point in that exercise people were rated and grouped according to their degree of enthusiasm for the whole exercise, and I came out in the bottom group.

There were other things that I didn't like, but my distaste is greater in retrospect than it was at the time. The more I work in Vietnam—and I'm still working in Vietnam—the more I'm impressed with the necessity for attitudes such as humility, politeness, plainness, gentlemanliness. These things were not prevalent among our raucous group of trainees, nor were they really asked of us in a reasonable manner by the supervisors.

I think that a good bit of discipline could have helped, but I must stress that that discipline would not have been well accepted unless it had been clear why it was being imposed. I don't think that Dr. Speakman, the director of the Center at the time, had a clear idea of what sort of conditions we would be working under in Vietnam or of how we as field workers should behave.

The third phase of my orientation, after Washington and Hawaii, took place in Vietnam. When I arrived there I was shuttled immediately to Region IV through the grace of Frank Wisner, the older brother of a good friend of mine. There I met the then director of the Region IV program, Mr. Vince Heyman. He remains one of the very few Americans for whom I have great respect—a luxury in Vietnam—and I'm very sorry to say that he left the Delta two or three weeks after I arrived. He originally assigned me to Ba Xuyen province, but I never got there—the decision was made one morning and reversed the next. I was shuttled about and was finally assigned to Sadec. Rather than being sent straight to my province, however, I was posted back to Saigon for an additional two-week orientation course. That course is usually given to people after they have been in the field for several months, but on Mr. Heyman's suggestion, I took it immediately. I think it was a good idea to take the course early, but the difficulty was that I had been in orientation for six months, and two more weeks was a bit much. However, this orientation was quite different from anything I had received in Hawaii. It was much more pragmatic and had more to do with the present situation in Vietnam.

I arrived in Sadec under the aegis of OCO, the organization that preceded CORDS, and worked in OCO for about two and one-half months. For the first month and a half I was most fortunate in working as an assistant to a man named Chuck Rheingans, who
was one of the most capable people that I've been acquainted with in Vietnam. He'd been with the Peace Corps in Thailand for two years and had served in Vietnam for three years, in Vinh Long and SaDec provinces. He is an excellent work organizer who makes his Vietnamese subordinates work with him. It was once said of him by a very intelligent woman area specialist who worked for us that, "Mr. Rheingans is the only American I know who never raises his voice." She said that Vietnamese never raise their voices to each other when they're angry; they do not shout at each other. Chuck Rheingans understood that. He was also able to set down for himself exactly what he should do and what everybody else should do during the week. It was a long, long time before I began to approach his own abilities; I was very lucky to be able to work under him. I think that that on-the-job training was just about as valuable to me and certainly was equivalent to my training at the Far East Training Center.

Language Training

I didn't make as much of the language training in Hawaii as I should have. Frankly, my main experience during my six months in Hawaii was that I was in love with a young lady whom I met there. I found it difficult to concentrate on anything going on at the Training Center. I have come back to Hawaii on this vacation to marry her. It wasn't until I got to Vietnam that I really became serious about language study. I've taken on a tutor in Vietnam and am presently studying Vietnamese four nights a week for about two hours each night. I am probably approaching now the level of language competence which I really should have expected of myself after having been in language training for six months. I can't yet read a newspaper with ease, and I'm ashamed of that because that should have been a minimal standard for a graduate of a six-month language training program. However, I never really worked at the language, while I was here, and I particularly didn't work at it during the last two months. The excitement about going to Vietnam had died down, and I was worried about leaving Hawaii and being separated from my fiancée.

I'm sure that more could have been demanded of us in the language training; more could have been demanded of us by people who really knew what they were talking about. A man named Richard Watson did take over the language training program during the latter part of our training and did a very good job. Previously language instruction had been under the control of the Linguistics Department of the University of Hawaii, run by
a very irresponsible gentleman who never visited the Training Center or showed any interest in what was going on there. He, in turn, had hired a graduate student, who didn't know Vietnamese, had never been to Vietnam, and who couldn't really direct the training program at all. Although Dave was an ex-Marine, he didn't impose any discipline on the training program--he only barked a bit. Dick Watson was serious about trying to get us to learn Vietnamese, and he knew Vietnamese quite well. It was only because of him that there was some tightness produced in language training. Unfortunately, as I said, my attitude was not the best so I didn't benefit from language instruction as much as I might have. Frankly, when I got to Vietnam I did feel gypped in terms of the amount of Vietnamese I knew. However, it was just as appropriate to blame myself as it was to blame the Far East Training Center.

I do feel that language capability is important in Vietnam because if you're going to be an effective cadre, an effective politician, you have to make people understand that you appreciate them and wish to lead them within their own terms of reference. It's also true that I had a rather discouraging experience with an interpreter who worked for me about six months until January, 1967, when I fired him. I've been without an interpreter since then. This man was most intelligent and very, very capable in the English language--far above most of the interpreters in Vietnam--so I did keep him longer than I might have. However, his political sympathies were very questionable, and there were several reports, which I finally acted upon, to the effect that he was really a Viet Cong agent. I don't know in what ways he may have misled people about what I was saying. He realized that I could check him and that I understood what he was saying, but there were many occasions when I did have to halt him and remind him of what I had intended to communicate. If I had not known Vietnamese and he had worked as my interpreter, he might have made of me a truly negative presence in Vietnam.

Profile of Sadec Province

Sadec was originally, during the French period, a province in its own right, and was abolished by Diem because he was opposed to the Hoa Hao and in favor of increasing the influence of Catholics. Diem's brother was the bishop of Vinh Long at that time, and by incorporating Sadec province into Vinh Long he magnified the scope of influence of the bishop there. Sadec was re-created in December, 1966--just a few months before I arrived. In many ways, the re-creation of Sadec was
a concession to the Hoa Hao Delta group whom, at that time, Nguyen Cao Ky was trying to woo. Because it is a new province and because the people are very proud of Sadec, there is a great deal of enthusiasm among the people. There is also the opportunity to experiment and try new things which results, I suppose, from the fact that every thing is beginning from the ground. Luckily, this spirit has persisted for what is now a year and one-half--the life of the province. It's the spirit one finds in the province chief, in the deputy province chief for administration and in a considerable number of the service chiefs, many of whom are young and very talented. I think that there must have been a selection of excellent potential leaders on the part of the Vietnamese government when they brought together the officials of Sadec because they are a very good bunch.

Sadec is a fine place to work with the villagers, who tend to react quite favorably to Americans. Most of the villagers are Hoa Hao and anti-Communist. The government of Vietnam claims that the Hoa Hao make up 90 per cent of the population and the Hoa Hao claim 80 per cent; I suppose the actual figure is around 60 per cent. There is a large Buddhist group in Sadec, too--around 23 per cent--and, like most Delta Buddhists, they are not organized. They tend to be divided into followings of the particular pagodas. There's only one set of pagodas which is organized--a small sect which was founded in the early 1930s. There's also the Cao Dai sect, the largest portion of which is comprised of followers of the Tay Ninh faction. The Cao Dai number about fifteen thousand, the Catholics about five thousand. There are also Protestants and other minor religious sects and people who just don't follow any religion at all. The province is entirely Vietnamese with the exception of about two thousand Chinese people in a population of approximately two hundred fifty thousand. There are no Cambodians there--at least, I've never met any.

We have four districts and it's possible to travel to all of them. A sizable portion of two of these districts is controlled by the Viet Cong--one to the degree of 80 per cent and the other around 50 per cent. In each of these areas the Viet Cong expanded their control during the period that I was there. A large part of this advance came during Tet. Sadec, as was everywhere else in Vietnam, was taken by surprise. Luckily for us, when the government of Vietnam re-created Sadec province the National Liberation Front did not. So Sadec is still a part of the VC province of Vinh Long. When the Tet offensive was mounted, the VC provincial committee of Vinh
Long province concentrated its forces on the city of Vinh Long rather than its sister city of Sadec. Only a small sapper squad tried to break into Sadec city to assassinate General Thi, the commander of the 9th Division. That attack was easily beaten back and there were no other assaults on the city. Damage was considerable, however, in one district--Duc Ton. There the VC overthrew six of seven outposts--three of them right at the beginning of the Tet offensive and then three more of them during the month of March. They made a very strong drive for the district capital of Duc Ton. One night, about a week or two after the beginning of the Tet offensive, they very nearly overran the district compound. Security in that area has fallen.

I've made a study of the history of Duc Ton district and the control of it by the Viet Cong relative to the government. One sees that the VC have come up in waves advancing from the South to the North. The VC base in lower Duc Ton was established as long ago as 1939, and the lower portion of the district was heavily contested between the French and the Viet Minh. Again from 1956 until 1963 the government and the Viet Cong contested lower Duc Ton. In 1963, when Diem fell, the strategic hamlets, which were established about halfway down the district, fell and the VC advanced about five kilometers. The second major advance which the Communists effected was during Tet in 1968 when they advanced, I suppose, two kilometers.

**Corruption**

I don't think there are any major instances in Sadec of corruption or wrongdoing on the part of the national police. The national police are mostly in the city and in some of the district towns. I haven't had a great number of dealings with them, but they seem to get along fairly well with the people in the towns. The police do, however, engage in petty corruption at the highway checkpoints. Truckers have to stop at these checkpoints, and American witnesses have seen money being passed from hand to hand. This does cause bitterness, but the group of people affected are largely truckers resident outside of Sadec. I understand that the police chief, who has been in office about three months, has done everything he can to put a stop to highway bribes. Other than that, I have never heard any stories about the arrogance of the national police. I think it's a fairly good organization.

If there is much corruption in Sadec, it's not open to the
public. I was, for part of my tour in Vietnam, involved in the Chieu Hoi program; and I'm fairly certain that there was a gigantic scandal in the construction of the Sadec Chieu Hoi Center. The Chieu Hoi chief was the brother-in-law of the man in the Chieu Hoi Ministry who was in charge of allocating funds for the construction of Chieu Hoi centers. Sadec province was the only province in the country which was given 3.2 million piasters for the construction of a Chieu Hoi center. Admittedly, the center we now have is quite attractive, but I'm sure it could have been built for a good many piasters less—perhaps only 500,000. I don't know whose pocket the money ended up in; I suppose that a large proportion of the money went to the Chieu Hoi chief. It is possible that, as the Chieu Hoi chief complains, the province chief took some of the money from him, although that may be simply a fabrication on the part of the Chieu Hoi chief to divert suspicion from himself. However tragic the Chieu Hoi scandal may be for the American taxpayer who's being milked, the people of Sadec didn't know anything about it; I never heard anybody mention it.

The only instances of corruption that have affected the population in Sadec have been at the district level. Well, that's not quite true. There was one instance of corruption on the part of a provincial official, the director of the Agricultural Development Bank, who forced the farmers to buy water pumps which were being given on a loan basis as compensation for destruction caused by the 1966 flood. At one particular store he had arranged for the prices to be 200 to 500 piasters higher than the normal market price; he then split the profit with the store owner. However, because of popular protest which gained the attention of the province chief and even, I understand, that of Premier Ky, the Agricultural Development Bank director was transferred. That's the only instance that I can think of in which the provincial government was engaged in corrupt practices in respect to the population.

In the districts there has been malfeasance. I heard that the old Duc Ton district chief at one point was actually pocketing the salaries of some village council members, and he certainly seemed to take a large part of the money appropriated for RD projects. I count the first of those offenses as being more serious because it directly damaged the relations between villagers and the government.

In another district the district chief has been known to
supervise a gambling ring and has some part in the payoff for commodities transported from Tan Thanh village across the Bassac river to Tot Not. This became quite serious because there is a very good and honest village chief in Tan Thanh village. This village chief refused to play ball with the district chief and take part in the rake-off on the transportation of commodities, and somehow or other refused to allow the gambling ring to operate in his village. The district chief went to the point of asking for the village chief's resignation, and had it not been for the intervention of the Sadec provincial representative, who is from that village, the district chief might have had his way. Mr. Day, the congressman, went to the deputy province chief for administration and intervened on behalf of the village chief. The district chief backed off. I don't really know what the outcome was in terms of the revenues from the transportation of commodities. That district chief has just been there for too long. He is a Hoa Hao and was stationed there before Sadec was re-created. He is an entrenched, petty tyrant; he should be removed. Out of the four districts of Sadec, I would say that three have very good district chiefs. Two of them have recently replaced district chiefs who have been complained about persistently by the American advisors in Sadec for over a year. They were removed in the spring of 1968 and were replaced by very fine men. I would say that if we could get rid of that last district chief we would have a good set of people working for us.

The fact that this sort of thing happens at the district and not at the province level makes me think that it's really a matter of malpractices which the province chief is unable to control. I don't believe that the province chief or deputy province chief for administration want to get involved in any shenanigans whatsoever. I think that it's a bad testimonial for the government of Vietnam that it is possible for a district chief to get away with this sort of thing and not be effectively disciplined by the province chief. Those services that are under the direct control of the province chief are relatively free of corruption.

I think that a lot of people have a very bad approach to this sort of thing in that they get very angry at the official involved and start ranting about him—sometimes even to his face. Corruption or malpractices of any sort are an indication of the fallibility of an organization. Of course, in the first instance it is the sin of the person who did it; but in a larger sense it is the fault of the supervisor of that man for not having kept him in line and disciplining him. I think one's
first recourse should be to talk to the man who is the supervisor of the person involved. If it's the Chieu Hoi chief, then you talk to the province chief. (Unless, as in this case, the province chief might have been involved in the corruption himself.) If the supervisor is honest and the subordinate is not, you try to bring the subordinate into line by applying the authority system. If the infraction was a gross one, the punishment which one should recommend to the Vietnamese authority should be considerable. If one fails in one's attempts to discipline this person within his own system of supervision, one might then go to American headquarters and ask for help from a higher level. I think it's the fault of a great number of people that that's what they do first. They begin writing bad reports about a man and begin asking higher people in American headquarters in their own authority structure to do something about his malpractices, rather than trying to do something about it themselves within the government of Vietnam.

Corruption is really a matter of leadership--I'm sure of that. It is said that during the Diem era--although there were many deficiencies in that government in the form of religious rigidities which caused the regime to be unpopular among large segments of the population--there was less corruption because province chiefs were really afraid of being punished by the central authorities. I think that a large part of the trouble with the government of Vietnam results from the fact that after Diem there were so many years of laxity when people could get away with a lot because they were just not tightly controlled by their own supervisors. Maybe there is some hope that President Thieu will do something about this. Certainly when General Thanh came into command of IV Corps there was a different tone in the air. I can't point to any instances in which General Thanh was effective in reducing corruption, but there was certainly a feeling that I knew about to the effect that it was not the thing to do. The finance service chief of Vinh Long province told a friend of mine that when General "X" comes to Vinh Long the provincial treasury must lay out 15,000 piasters to set out a banquet for him, but when General Thanh comes he pays 150 piasters to buy his own lunch. This is the sort of thing that makes a difference. If an honest man really cares about the honesty of his subordinates and is in position long enough to promote them accordingly, that will make the difference. Unfortunately, the promotion system of Vietnam has been run on exactly the opposite principles. It's said that province chiefs have to buy their positions and in order to raise the money they have to milk the district chiefs. That's just the wrong way to run it. If
honest people come in at the top they can make the people below them honest. Whenever I see somebody who is dishonest— it's my inclination not to blame him so much—it's to blame the whole system that makes him that way.

I don't know very much about Ambassador Bunker, but from the little things that I do know I respect him greatly. He's a gentleman and a man of principle who's concerned with tightening the discipline and authority within a government which has consisted of feuding factions. I hope that he, or the likes of him, is urging the higher levels of the Vietnamese government to take action. It's the fault of the Saigon leaders and of the advisors to the Saigon leaders that there are malpractices in the government of Vietnam. Unfortunately, one doesn't have the feeling that many of the American advisors in Saigon, except perhaps Ambassador Bunker, really care about the quality of the system.

The point is, for the question of corruption, that an American in the field who appoints himself as judge for his Vietnamese counterpart is filling in for someone who should be doing that job in the government of Vietnam. He's filling in for a judge, such as the judge in Rach Gia who has prosecuted service chiefs and district chiefs for corruption, or he's filling in for the man who stands above this person in the chain of command of the Vietnamese government. It really shouldn't be the American's role to do that, and until the Vietnamese government can control itself, the people will not respect it. People will not respect a government which is disciplined by a corps of inquisitive and righteous Americans; they'll respect a government when people are imprisoned or shot by the authorities for malpractices. When the people realize that they can go to officials of the Vietnamese government and complain about corruption and get action on it, then they'll begin to appreciate the government, not when they have to go to a foreigner and tell him about it and let him do the complaining. I resent the role of "inspector" which it is sometimes assumed that I should fill. I resent the corruption also, but I don't think that its eradication is my job. There have been instances in which I have intervened in cases of corruption, but I've never carried the cases to higher American authorities. I've always handled it within the province.

Opinion of the ARVN Troops and the Popular and Regional Forces

Unfortunately, there is not a very large presence of the ARVN in Duc Ton district. It's been argued persistently by all
the Sadec advisors that it will only be possible to pacify that district to the extent that the ARVN will establish bases there. But they haven't done so and haven't even carried out very many operations there. The district is, for the most part, defended by the Regional Forces and Popular Forces, although there are occasional forays by the ARVN 9th Division. There are no U. S. army units in the area; the only U. S. units in Sadec province are those of the Navy which runs a river patrol section.

I think the Regional and Popular Forces are much better than the ARVN. I've been lucky enough not to have very much direct experience with the ARVN. I've heard many stories about them--such as what happened May 7, 1967. A village election was taking place in one of the most peaceful villages in one of the most peaceful districts, and of all things, a VC company turned out to be camped on the side of the village. It was encountered by some Regional Forces who were providing security for the election. I don't think that the VC intended to be caught--they were preparing an ambush--and I'm sure the Regional Forces didn't expect to find them. However, a large battle developed and at the end of it a company of men from the ARVN 9th Division was called right into an ambush by the VC company, which had stolen some PRC-10 radios. The VC talked the ARVN right into their lines by pretending they were the Popular Forces calling for help. About twenty ARVN soldiers died in murderous machine-gun fire which was directed at them. Surely, this was a bitter experience for the ARVN--although it was largely their own fault for being so gullible and careless--but, in retaliation, what the company survivors did was to round up five totally innocent civilians--Hoa Hao elders, as a matter of fact--from the village. They let one of them go because he was a very old man; the others ranged from middle age upwards. They murdered the four and stole all of their goods. This is the kind of carnage and injustice which embitters the people very much against the ARVN.

ARVN soldiers are arrogant, and careless of the people. They have been known to go on rampages of robbery, as in Vinh Long province during Tet. The ARVN Rangers looted not only Vinh Long city; they looted the provincial safes and stole over a million piasters from the Vietnamese government's own vaults, and did so under the supervision of an ARVN captain. They've done the same sort of thing on their operations in Sadec. The pillaging is not as stupendous in terms of stolen television sets or money, but it is equally embittering to the poor peasants who have been ravaged.
The Regional and Popular Forces, because they are closer to the people, are much more likely to respect the people. There is one Hoa Hao battalion in the Regional Forces that is led by a Major Hieu. He makes his soldiers carry their own food with them, or, if they must get food from the area in which they are operating, pay for it. He enforces this very strictly. Consequently, his soldiers are liked by the Hoa Hao people among whom they operate. The Hoa Hao appreciate the security which is given to them by that particular battalion. Popular Forces soldiers, although they are not as much imbued with dedication as are the RF in Major Hieu's battalion, are likely to be good in their relations with the community because they are of that community—they grew up there and they cannot be inhuman to people who are their neighbors. PF also end up with most of the fighting in Sadec. The fighting usually takes place in nighttime ambushes and night attacks against outposts in distant places. The PF are the ones who take the casualties.

Events Since Tet

I think the Tet offensive did shake up the leaders, which is a good thing. The reason it shook up the leaders was because it involved the towns, and the leaders are town people—they have to sleep in the towns at night. Their relatives are in towns, and some of their relatives got killed by Viet Cong mortar fire or by American helicopters during the Tet offensive. The war in Vietnam was simply not a war that had anything to do with the national leadership until the Tet offensive; it was a war that concerned the villagers, and they were other people. They were people the leaders didn't have any particular association with or any kind of feelings toward. The only relationship between the town leadership and the rural population suffering from the war before the Tet offensive was the relationship of artificial generosity in the giving of American commodities or in the direct American hiring of RD cadre which were paid by the CIA in the field. There was no charity, no conscience on the part of the urban leadership of Vietnam toward their rural brethren; there was no concern for the issues of the war before the Tet offensive. I think one can say that a great number of people were in favor of the continuation of the war in order that they could continue to get rich in their safe urban areas. They were quite free
of any qualms of conscience over the fact that many, many people were dying in the villages as a consequence of their enrichment. They liked the war and needed something to shake them up, and the Tet offensive did shake them up.

Some good things have come out of it. In the Delta—I don't know whether this was attributable to the Tet offensive or not—after the Tet offensive General Thanh did take command and did make the officers go out on many more operations than they had previously. He carried on an intensive two-and-a-half-month campaign. He made the units go out on night ambushes and actually engage themselves with the Viet Cong. I suppose the other thing I could point to is the organization of civil defense which was a consequence of the Tet campaign. The edict came down from the Ministry of the Interior on the fourth of February. This was the first instance in which the clique of urban leaders had agreed to enlist the urban populace in the defense of the country—actually giving the people arms. This is still not a gesture of solidarity with the rural populace. First, the urban officials were given arms so the government could defend itself, and then, in theory at least, the people themselves were given arms in the province capitals and district capitals. It has not yet come to pass in Sadec that any of the actual people of the city have received arms.

The other things that have happened in the government have to do with the centralization of power by Thieu, which I believe is a good thing because one can't have a government that's run by jockeying factions. I don't think that these trends can be attributed to the Tet offensive; I think Thieu would have made these moves this year anyway. Thieu has also done a lot to remove corrupt officials, and to transfer province chiefs and district chiefs. He's let two district chiefs go in Sadec, and, again, I don't think this is attributable to the Tet offensive. I think he's placing his men in power, and he's trying to place men in power that are more honest. I have enormous respect for Thieu. I think that Thieu is trying to establish a good government.

I really don’t know whether or not Thieu will have the chance to succeed. In the Delta I can say there’s a chance. The Nationalists do need our help in the form of arms—they can’t make these guns themselves. If we really give them the guns to fight the war in the Delta, I think it’s quite arguable that the Vietnamese government could at least hold its own without the American presence. But that’s not the issue that will decide the war in Vietnam. The leashes of the hounds of victory and defeat in Vietnam are in the hands of the North
Vietnamese and the American commanders. That's a war with which I'm utterly unfamiliar. There are no North Vietnamese military units operating in Sa Dec or anywhere near it--so I really have no more than newspaper knowledge of the question that really will decide the war.

The Village Development Plan

Before I came to the Asia Training Center in Hawaii I worked for a year in Pakistan, where Ben Ferguson gained all of his experience and from which he derived all of his inspiration. There were two systems in community development in East Pakistan. One was the Ferguson approach, which was implemented in the Mymensingh district of East Pakistan. The second was the Comilla approach, which was implemented in the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development whose director was Akhter Hameed Khan. Although Dr. Hameed Khan and Ben Ferguson don't like to be thought of as competitors (Ben Ferguson rather resents the comparison), it is true that these were alternative models for local development in the same country. I never did get to see Ben Ferguson in East Pakistan, although I went to Mymensingh twice in hopes of meeting him. It turned out that he was not there at the time. I studied his work from a distance by reading many monographs which had been written on the Mymensingh and Comilla approaches by visiting American intellectuals, largely from Michigan State University. I knew very intimately the alternative to the Mymensingh pattern, which was that of Comilla. I did research on 45 different villages which had been organized under the Comilla system. Many of my criticisms of what I have heard that Ben Ferguson is doing in Vietnam are related to the criticisms which I had of his work in Pakistan. I have not yet had a chance to see what he's doing on the ground in Vietnam and develop a critique of it from the perspective of Vietnam. I hope that when I leave Hawaii and my honeymoon is over and I go back to Vietnam, I will be able to take some of my government friends from Sa Dec up to Dinh Tuong to see this Ferguson experiment in action.

The apriori statements that I would make--not quite apriori, but they seem that way in Vietnam--about Ferguson and his work are that he believes in the efficacy of popular democracy through village committees. Mr. Owens, who is his collaborator, once said to me that all they insisted upon was that the people vote--they had to bring everything to a vote. It's a faith which sounds very much like the Populist democracy in the Great Plains states during the William Jennings Bryan era.
As a matter of fact, I believe Ferguson is from that area of the country and he may very well have been influenced by this kind of thinking in his boyhood. Ferguson and the Populists believe that rural democracy—smalltown farmers getting together and talking things out—is a solution to all problems. I don't believe that. I do believe that it is very important for farmers to participate in organizations and discussions with each other. It's very important for them to realize that they have a way of influencing the outcome of events, and it's very important for them to become mobilized and to work personally for the improvement of their area. All of these things are being done in the Ferguson scheme as I've had it explained to me.

However, I believe it's also necessary for organizations in the village to be disciplined by a leadership either at the village or at a higher level—preferably a higher level. In support of this statement I draw on two comparisons: one is the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, and the other is the Viet Cong. In the Academy for Rural Development we had set up village cooperatives in which there was enforced participation by the members. They all had to pay dues, and they all had to participate in discussions of agricultural plans, but they were also disciplined by a central cooperative organization organized at the equivalent of the district level. This central cooperative organization would not make loans to the village cooperative organizations if they were remiss in their dues, if they had not repaid their loans, or if their books were out of order. There was a staff of inspectors working for the central organization which went around to the meetings of the primary organizations and held them to account for what they were doing. The inspectors also gave the primary cooperative leaders instructions on how they should carry on their business. I believe in that kind of discipline of lower organizations by higher organizations. I suppose that's similar to my attitude toward corruption.

In the Viet Cong there are also a large number of village-level popular associations. There is a farmers' association which is the universal grouping at the hamlet level and just about constitutes the government in the hamlet, as much as it's formulated. I believe at the village level there are women's associations, youth associations, farmers' associations and military organizations—guerrillas and ancillary military support agencies. Every one of these groupings is disciplined by the party committee, either at the village level to which they are directly subordinate, or at the district level. Here again you have an instance of broad participation by people.
in the village and discipline by a dedicated leadership group. It's most important, of course, that that leadership group have the right kind of ideas and be honest in their workings. This is the sort of thing that is terribly lacking in the government of Vietnam. The most that one can hope for, I guess, with the government of Vietnam is the sort of loose village democracy that Ben Ferguson was trying to promote through his village committees, because I don't think that the district level leaders in the government of Vietnam, most of them being military men, have any conception of how to work with or hold to account a village-level grouping. I can't imagine a district chief doing a good job of supervising a village youth association, a village farmers' association or a village women's association. Possibly they could be trained to do these things but it would be a long, long training process. Right now they think in terms of military command; and when they think of civilian affairs, it's a matter of granting commodities, etc. rather than caring for the style of activity in groupings of people.

An Approach to Action in Vietnam

I don't think there's much hope for Vietnam. I believe that the government of the United States will withdraw after the elections. I don't believe that the American people will put up with the continuation of this war. It's incredible to me that I was in Hawaii in 1966, and it's 1968 and the war is still not won. Americans are still dying there. I believe that the next American president, whether he be Republican or Democrat, will do everything he can to liquidate the involvement there as soon as possible; and, if only for that reason, I believe that it's rather hopeless to think of how we really should be doing things in Vietnam. We won't have a chance to carry out good solutions; we are saddled with a lot of bad solutions. They haven't worked and there just isn't going to be any chance to do things right. All of the people I work with and love are probably going to be killed by the Communists when they take over about a year from now. That's a very disturbing thought, because in working with these people, like the youth service chief and the refugee chief for whom I have affection, I know that in asking them to do a good job I am simply increasing the chances of their assassination in the long run. So, if one speaks about the way things should be done in Vietnam, one really is not saying what can be done in Vietnam but what might have happened had we had better-trained and more thoughtful people in command during the earlier stage.
Ten years ago was 1958 and Ngo Dinh Diem was in power. At that time it looked like Diem was a fairly good fellow. A large part of the reason that he looked good was that the Communists had called it off for a while. They were re-grouping and retraining in the North, and there was really very little to disturb Diem except the local disloyal sects in South Vietnam which he had already controlled. That was perhaps the time, when Ngo Dinh Diem had established his control and when the Communists had not yet begun their agitations again, when we could have done something. Of course, all I know about Diem and Nhu has derived from books; but I understand that at the end they came to be a very difficult, rigid, uncompromising set of people with Nhu controlling Diem and shielding him from the world. Perhaps it would have been necessary at that time, in 1958, to make the sort of judgment we made in 1963 as to whether or not we should persist in working with the Diem government or overthrow it. It would have been rather ironic to attempt to oust a government which had just reached the summit of its power; 1958 was the prime year of the Diem regime. Perhaps we should have made a careful analysis then of the capabilities and prospects of his regime to really do what had to be done in South Vietnam to overcome the impending rebellion. We should have been able to foresee that that rebellion would take place. Anybody who knew the North Vietnamese leadership would have known that they would never be satisfied with the results of the Geneva Convention, and that they would never be satisfied with the division of the country. That would have been the first thing we should have done: make a very careful political estimate of the possibilities of working with the Vietnamese government. I don't know what we could have done if we had decided to dump Diem then. It would have been a very difficult operation to complete because at that time we didn't have the Buddhist demonstrations to justify our displeasure.

The second thing we should have done was to start advising whatever government was in power on how to reorganize the villages so as to give the village people a sense of advancement, participation and justice, and also, of course, so as to give the village people capability. Just last night I was reading the debrief interview of Mr. Fraleigh—he was very influential in the setting up of the USAID mission from 1962 onward. I understand that it was only in 1962 that the USAID mission in Vietnam actually concerned itself with the rural areas rather than with the working of the national leadership, which is what USAID does in most countries. But even in 1962, four years after the date we mentioned, we set off into the countryside on the wrong foot. We started our
rural campaign on the same sorts of economic development issues that had possessed us around the rest of the world. Admittedly, we were doing a bang-up job of it in Vietnam in comparison to other countries; we did start to have people in the field after 1962. We then initiated decentralization of our Vietnamese AID program, which had not been possible in other countries. In Mr. F Raleigh's era, we had many, many fine accomplishments in the field of rural economic progress. But he wasn't focusing on the right problem when he started. The U. S. mission was not then focusing on political problems and we're still not focusing on political problems. I think that if we had really concerned ourselves with the shape of the Vietnamese government in the rural areas as far back as 1958, or if we were to do this today in Thailand or Malaya, there might be a chance of forestalling, or even beating, the Front for National Liberation.

Everyone is talking about what we might try to do in another country in another year. I have thought a great deal about this question. I guess the first thing to say is that for two years after my college experience at Swarthmore I was a graduate student at Princeton at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. I was lucky enough to study with a very great man, Sir W. Arthur Lewis, a man of colossal intellect who works as an economic-development planner. He's not only a theorist of economic-development planning, he is also a practitioner of it. He's been an advisor to numerous governments in Africa and Latin America, working with their planning commissions in drawing up those documents and also in actually carrying them out. To listen to Sir Arthur Lewis or to hear about the way he works in the field is to see the world arranged into rationality. Sure, the problems of economic development are, in the first instance, just as puzzling to the foreigner as the problems of political control and loyalty which we are facing in Vietnam. But a man like Sir Arthur Lewis can arrange all those puzzling facts, fit them into a consequential theory—a theory, that is, which leads you to recommendations for action—and come out with a proposal which he believes, with reason, will produce certain measurable results of predictable quantity. He can reason that if you invest this much money in schools and that much money in fertilizer, you will have an economic growth rate of 3.5 per cent per year. He can do this, as a matter of fact, in Princeton, New Jersey, but he prefers to do it in the field in the country concerned. It is possible for a man like Sir Arthur Lewis to manipulate the factors which concern the economic fate of a country because he has a theory to work from.
Much of it is a theory he's worked out himself.

There is no theory of comparable validity, nothing even approaching it, in the political sphere. There is only one theory, as a matter of fact, which has any consistency at all—and that's the Communist one. The reason that the Communists are winning is that they do have a set of ideas which order reality, tell them what to do with it and predict the outcome over a period of time. That gives them a confidence and a centralization of action. It gives them all the capabilities which Americans do not have. We don't know in Vietnam what we're doing; we don't even know what we're after. At least a development economist could say that his objective is to increase the per-capita output of goods and services. An American in Vietnam, when asked what he is doing, will give you an answer derived from his own personal experience and his own guesswork. There's no consistent set of ideas. I know what we're engaged in is not economic development. I believe that economic development is one of the most politically disruptive sorts of activities which a society can engage in. Economic development moves people at a very rapid pace from the countryside to the city where they feel lost and are quite prone to become followers of Communism. Economic development changes the economy of the rural area as well, perhaps increasing the purchase of the land by richer people and better farmers, thereby also disrupting the pattern of authority and stability in the rural area. So our objective certainly is not economic development in Vietnam. Most Americans, however, who come to Vietnam have been trained to some extent in economic development. That is what USAID is supposed to be all about around the world.

The Americans who are committed to improvement in the life of foreign countries have focused only on those factors concerned with economics because that's all they've been allowed to deal with by foreign governments, and also because of the cultural prejudices of the American people. On the one hand, most of the foreign governments in the world have tried to keep us out of politics because they felt those were spheres of national sovereignty. Whenever anyone, such as some of the CIA people, engaged in anything related to politics they were greatly resented and often as not kicked out of the country. On the other hand, the administration of the United States embodies the American prejudice against direct political action. It's our belief that a democratic society is one in which the government does not interfere with the political process. That is left to the genius of the people. I think that this prejudice against politics extends very much to the way we relate to foreign countries.
It's very instructive, I think, to compare what a Communist government attempts to do in a foreign country with what the United States attempts to do. The first thing that the Communist government concentrates on is the building of a party apparatus. What that means is that they gather together people of like minds, or train people to have Communist minds, and make of these believers an organization working toward certain political ends. The American mission, however, focuses on the building of dams and fertilizer plants, on the alteration of the economic situation--if, that is, there is a sufficient budget to permit Americans to be involved in that sort of thing in the country. So that is the American who comes to Vietnam: an American prejudiced against politics; an American who, if he's devoted to change at all, thinks of change in economic variables. The other sort of American who's in Vietnam and who is, of course, very, very influential there, is the American military officer. One of the very deepest traditions of our political society is that the military shall not engage in any kind of campaigning or politicking for one candidate or another. Of course, some politics goes on within the small circles of the Pentagon and Congress, but in the broader sense of influencing the masses and taking control of the government, the American military is very carefully indoctrinated to be apolitical. That is one great limitation on the mentality of the American military advisor. Another is that the military, by its nature, lives in the past. Wars are not frequent things, thank God, and when they occur, it is after having been fought that they are studied. The American military has been studying for over ten years what went on in Korea, and they have decided that many of the errors in Korea could have been sidestepped through mobility, better communications, better logistics, and so forth. That is what they are trying to do in Vietnam. Certainly the first American advice in Vietnam was horribly Korean oriented in that the military structure was built up to defend against an invasion from North Vietnam, and utterly neglected the possibility of local insurrection. By now there has circulated back into the American military establishment a good bit of experience in Vietnam, but not enough. They're still not really fighting the war in Vietnam. To a large extent they're still fighting all the wars of the past, particularly the Korean War.

So I would say that both of the major groupings of Americans that come to Vietnam to advise the Vietnamese government are ill-prepared. They are ill-prepared because they do not have any appreciation for or any training in rural politics. On the part of the American civilian this often takes shape in
his emphasis on purely economic considerations or in providing
the sort of facilities which would promote economic development
in other countries, such as schools or water systems. On the
part of the American military man this leads him to say, "Well,
they are all the enemy out there, so we'll be quite liberal
with the bombs."

Both civilians and military are quite ignorant of the questions
of loyalty and authority and purpose in the minds of the
Vietnamese people. It's necessary, of course, for a military
man to be harsh toward those he's killing, to be callous of
them. It would be most difficult, I suppose, to have a
compassionate appreciation for the Viet Cong and at the same
time engage in the daily murder of them. But something like
that is necessary, painful as it may be to the psychology of
man. I've asked military advisors in Saigon why it is, in their
minds, that Vietnamese people, people just like the ones they
meet and work with everyday, decide to follow the Viet Cong.
Why is it that people like to work for the National Liberation
Front and the People's Revolutionary Party? What is there
that attracts people to this? Just common people. This is
a question which has never occurred to the military advisors.
Those people are the enemy; those people are the ones to be
killed. I can understand why, psychologically, it's easier
to think in those terms; but if the issue is winning the war
in Vietnam, one must understand that question. One must
understand why people decide to support the National Liberation
Front and support it with dedication and compassion. And
only when one comes to grips with that question and one no
longer thinks of Viet Cong as just the faceless enemy, only
then can one begin to derive policies which might circumvent
the attraction of the enemy.

Now, it's interesting to see that when I talk about the real
issue in Vietnam, which is the Viet Cong, I'm much more prone
to speak of military men than I am of civilians. The reason
for that is that, although military men are often thought
of as holding themselves apart from the population, military
men in fact have much more to do with the VC and with the
people in the rural areas where it's all happening than do
civilians. Military men are engaging themselves with
Communist people, not face-to-face, but across a rice paddy
with guns on either side. Even though the military are very
puzzled and very misled people, they are at least coming to
grips in some way with the problem of Vietnam. Most civilians
don't come close to it at all. I suppose that, as a civilian,
it would be said of me as well.
Well, I have spoken of the inadequacies of the American advisors and the reasons the Americans in Vietnam have proven themselves incapable of doing what the American Congress has asked of them, which is to end the rebellion. The American people and the American Congress have invested millions of dollars in shortsighted people. Because the people they've sent over have been shortsighted, the investment has been a waste. Saying that, of course, I am assuming that the American advisors have an influence on what goes on. I think they do. I think it's demonstrable that the American presence has influenced the government of Vietnam—to do the wrong things. Well, what are some of the right things that could be done? In order to outline them, I suppose I'd have to answer those very questions I was asking of the American military advisor. Why is it that people join the Viet Cong?

The first point to which I would like to address myself is the difference between village society and national society within the context of the government of Vietnam. The division is very sharp. There is a village world and there is a nationalist world above it. The nationalist world is controlled from the towns—the leaders are recruited from the towns; authority flows outward from the towns and from the great city of Saigon. People who are in power in that world—the officers, the service chiefs and the sundry government officials and cadre—are, for the most part, either urban born or urban trained. It is possible for a person from the rural area to rise to influence in the government of Vietnam, but only by going through the urban-oriented school system and playing up to the urban-oriented people who run the government. Now this is nothing exceptional in Vietnam. Almost every government in every underdeveloped country in the world, except perhaps the Communist countries, has this character of being urban dominated. And in almost every other country it's true, as it's true in Vietnam, that a man in the village, if he wasn't educated to a sufficient degree in his youth and didn't make the right contacts in his youth, will never be anything more than a villager. That was true in Pakistan, I know it's true in India, and I'm sure it's true in Vietnam. But there is the crux of it all.

A man who worked for me for a short while was a village secretary in a village in Sadec and was an extraordinarily capable man. I must admit that he was a man with a great deal of worldly wisdom derived from his experience in the city of Saigon. He had returned to his village of My An Hung to work as a village secretary because his pharmacy was there and
his family was there. He suffered a shakedown from an army officer who asked him for 15,000 piasters or his life. He gave him the 15,000 piasters and then cleared out of the village. He was also afraid, with good reason, that the security of the village was drastically deteriorating due to assassinations by the VC. He came to me and asked if I could do anything to help him get a job. I took him around to the deputy province chief for administration and social welfare chief, and they didn't seem to have any openings for him. He went to Saigon for a while and then came back, and, at the urging of a friend of his in the Revolutionary Development office, I offered him a job as my assistant. I certainly can think of no one else in Sadec who would be better qualified to work with me on the problems of local government. Well, he did get permission of the district chief to resign as village secretary, and on those grounds we hired him. He worked for me for two weeks and then it turned out that the province chief, whose signature was also necessary on his release, refused to let him resign as village secretary. The province chief's reasoning was that if people started deserting when the going got tough, the villages would suffer a large exodus from local government. So, my assistant, Mr. Hung, had to go back to My An Hung and return to his duties as village secretary, which I thought he had quit. He was trapped there. Admittedly, he will do great things for My An Hung. He has already helped organize a refugee pig project and he has dreams of rebuilding a canal in My An Hung and doing many other good things for the welfare of that community. However, it is impossible for him to ever be anything more than a village secretary. There is no position to which he can be promoted within the government of Vietnam. He is a village person and he was told by the province chief that he is a village person and will forever remain so, whatever his talents or capabilities. There are other instances. A talented PF, for instance, who decided to join the PF because he wanted to stay near his family, thereafter can never be anything but a PF. He's a man doomed to a village existence.

I say these things not as a man who advocates the transfer of village people to the city, but, instead, as one who advocates the transfer of village people to higher responsibility within rural-oriented organizations. That is exactly what the National Liberation Front, the Viet Cong, or the Peoples' Revolutionary Party, is all about. Within that organization a poor farmer who has no education, no land, no connections, none of the things that make for a chance of success within the GVN, can be recruited and can rise. The more ignorant the man is--like a tabula rasa--the better they like him; they have less
to eradicate from his mind. He will be taken in, trained, retrained, given a little bit of responsibility, started to work in the farmers' association in the hamlet perhaps. Maybe he will rise to the position of leader of the hamlet farmers' association and be asked to join the guerrillas, work as a guerrilla for five years, continually receive training and retraining. He will be criticized for all his actions: there will be critiques after every battle, something that has never been done by the GVN. Perhaps he'll be sent away to Ca Mau to study to be an officer; he might become a company commander. If he holds that rank for a while he would then, in the ideal VC system, go off for another year of training and become a company political officer. He would assume that position after a year of preparation and indoctrination. Then he might join the district level staff and become a district economic cadre commissioner and maybe rise to a position of leadership in the district committee after ten or twelve years of work—perhaps eventually rise through the party apparatus to the provincial level and to higher headquarters. It's possible for this sort of mobility to occur in the ranks of the Viet Cong. I have talked to people who have had experiences like this, and I have read many interviews of VC who have just about that sort of career pattern. The Viet Cong, in other words, have broken the barrier between the village and the rest of the world. A man who starts out in a very low level in the Viet Cong can have a chance to be recognized on his merit and rise.

This is not true in the government of Vietnam, and it's not true in most of the societies of the underdeveloped world. Because it is not true, I think that organizations like the National Liberation Front will have great prospects of success in just about every other Southeast Asian country. This, I think, is the foremost weakness of the society which we are supporting and its government: the people are not allowed a chance to improve themselves and to do the best that they can after they've been trained.

I'm not speaking of people doing the best that is in them, because what the VC does is to put things into people. They make people capable. They make men; they don't take men that are created previous to their entry into the Viet Cong. They are created in the Viet Cong. Once they join the Viet Cong they learn the virtues of leadership, they learn the virtues of command end of consequential action. Before they are in the VC they may be quite incapable. This again relates, I think, to an American prejudice—the prejudice of our politicians and our political philosophy (which has its roots in the 18th
century) that man enters the political arena already created. We say that the democratic process is that process which allows people to speak for the opinions which they already hold and to act in behalf of those opinions. The free society associated with the democratic process is that society which allows people to advance to the greatest of their capabilities. Those capabilities, however, and those opinions are assumed to be pre-existent—formed in childhood, formed in the educational system, formed outside of the political process. The Communist approach to mankind is very, very different. They take man as uncreated: they take man as a lump of clay, and they make something of him once he enters the political arena and not before. This is a very exciting thought to young people and to disadvantaged people in Vietnam—the tenant farmers who have no land, the ill-educated farmboys who never see themselves becoming officers in the government of Vietnam. The prospect is that if they join the Viet Cong they will be made into men, something in the same way that the Marine Corps in the United States promises to build men. Something will be made of them and they will have a chance to get ahead, and that's exciting.

An example of how powerful this sort of feeling can be is visible in the history of Sadec. In 1948, a Hoa Hao army was formed by the French to fight the Viet Minh. A large number of young people who were then in their late teens joined up with this Hoa Hao army and fought against the Viet Minh with great vigor. Because they did fight against the Viet Minh in those days, their villages are still secure today. It's the villages in which the Viet Minh established bases in the last war that are held by the Viet Cong today; it's the villages that were defended by the Hoa Hao army in the last war that are held by the GVN today. It was very exciting for these young people to be in the Hoa Hao army. It was very exciting for them to take part in an indigenous organization in which they could be promoted to positions of great responsibility. Today the same people are much older and they are a clique like the Veterans of Foreign Wars in America. They are backwards looking, selfishly oriented people. The old Hoa Hao officers remember the days of glory, and they, like many an older clique in many societies, are not very eager to share their power with the younger generation of Hoa Hao in those villages. These people control the village government in Sadec—these old Hoa Hao officers—and they have kept the place fairly clean of Communist influence.

That is the first point—that in order to win against an organization such as the National Liberation Front, one must close the cleavage between the village and the positions of
power. One must create a system of training and promotion through which people can have a chance of making it. It is utterly unrealistic to expect, as the Americans expect, that this will be done through economic advancement. Americans think of the poor man making it by getting rich and then buying his way into power in other spheres--social power or political power. That just doesn't happen in an underdeveloped economy. The number of people who become rich is very, very small, and the number of people who can be promoted through economic activity is minuscule in comparison with the number of people who can be promoted in a broad-based political organization.

The second point about a reasonable policy in Vietnam is closely related to the first, and that is that it's necessary to mobilize the people to really get them working within an organizational framework. This is not done in Vietnam; it was done in Pakistan, but that was very exceptional in an underdeveloped society. There was a massive public works program undertaken in Pakistan according to which millions of people were put to work building roads and dikes, the construction being supervised by the local elected governments. It's been called the largest mobilization of human labor outside Communist China. People are not asked to do much for the government in Vietnam. If they are drafted, of course, they are expected to perform military duties; but as civilians and as people within the village areas, they are not mobilized. They are not called upon to improve the welfare of their fellow man or to contribute to their own defense. This is in great contrast to a place like North Vietnam where everybody works for the good of the community and in defense of the community--in repairing bombed out bridges, for instance, or preparing bomb shelters, or harvesting the rice crop. People of Vietnam are not asked to pay taxes by the government of Vietnam, they are not asked to contribute their labor, they're not asked to do much of anything except to be peaceful and please, please don't be Viet Cong. Unless something is asked of the people they will not feel that the government is theirs; they will not feel that what has been accomplished is what they have accomplished. I'm not talking about the kind of petty mobilization which occurs in the construction of a self-help project where ten or twelve people put in some labor in the erection of a school. I'm talking about every single person being asked, first, to pay taxes and, second, to contribute a large amount of labor for community improvements and self-defense. Everybody should be mobilized in one way or another; mass civilian mobilization is just something we haven't attempted. I'm sure that the patriotism of the American
people during the Second World War was accentuated by the fact that everybody was asked to do something to support the war effort. That's just not true in Vietnam; the armed forces are supported by the American Congress, not by the local people. In the Viet Cong a local guerrilla unit is fed by the people of the area; in the government of Vietnam a local Popular Force unit is fed by money that comes down from Saigon and ultimately is handed over by General Westmoreland to General Vien, the Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Army. The people must be organized and given a chance for promotion and must be mobilized and put to work.

Another thing which is important in the rural areas is that there be justice; there is no justice in Vietnam. In Sadec we don't even have a judge. We only have a justice of the peace in place of a full-scale judge. Two years ago when I was in Pakistan, I was amazed at the popularity of the legal system which had been left there by the British. This was the thing which the British thought it was their responsibility to implant in a foreign society. Before I left for Pakistan, I attended an orientation in Oxford, England, for the new fellows in the Africa-Asia Program, all of whom were going out to former British colonies. An old British civil servant, who had been governor-general of Singapore, addressed us on the heritage of British colonialism. He spoke above all of the law—the respect for law and order—as a heritage of the British presence, and it was true. In Pakistan villagers love to take each other to court. I have one friend who was always prosecuting his neighbors for whatever he could think of: cutting down his tree, stealing his mangoes, etc. Perhaps the Bengali people are particularly prone to argumentation and adjudication, but I think it's true of all people in societies such as those of Vietnam or Pakistan. They want justice. They want a system of justice which they can refer to and where they can get recourse against actions which are malicious or uncalled for, where they can get recourse against the village officials if the village officials are corrupt, or where they can get recourse against their neighbor if their neighbor steals their cow or chops down their tree or messes around with their wife. This is the sort of thing which is central to the mentality of a village person—righteousness. Village people, I am convinced, are far more concerned with the proper ordering of human relationships and the establishment of a just, stable society than they are with building schools, the improvement of their rice crop or whatever. In every pre-Western society in the world, I think, one can see that a concern for the order of the universe, as expressed in religion usually, is the primary concern of
rural people. You can look back at the Mosaic tradition and the laws that were laid down then—the laws the people lived by and respected; these were what were most important to those people. The laws of Islam, for example, are very strict. Hinduism is not so strict, but Islamic laws are very clear and are interpreted by a group of local teachers or mullahs in the village society. These people say what is right and wrong. In Pakistan the formal Western system of justice was also extended to the village level by the creation of village courts. It had proved too expensive for the village people to resort, in most instances, to the courts in the cities which were the inheritance of the British presence. One had to hire a lawyer and one had to wait a long time—sometimes a year and one-half—to get one's case heard. That was too expensive and too tardy for the village people who had immediate questions such as whether the rice belonged to one man or to another; whether the cow is his or mine; whether he has, in fact, been doing illicit things with my daughter. In Pakistan a village-level system of justice was created whereby the village council could hear complaints of many varieties and dispense justice by making decisions which were enforceable. If there was dissatisfaction with the village-level decision, an appeal could be made to the formal, Western-type courts.

There is nothing like this in Vietnam, nothing like this at all. There is not even a Western system of courts in the towns, and there's nothing at all of any importance in the village. It was a traditional function in the village government to dispense this kind of justice, but it's a function which has not been supported by the central government and has not been given any legitimacy. It has just fallen by the wayside. People crave an ordering of their lives according to which they can know what is right and they can hold other people to account for doing wrong.

I think we should ask ourselves, "Where do Americans come from?" They're trained by and large in the colleges and universities in the United States—that's where they get their original orientation. Subsequent to that they have many other sorts of experiences which influence them, but it's in the colleges and universities that they are first given a perspective of the world. Of course, in thinking about what can be done in the colleges and universities around the country, I'm also thinking that if the United States is to project itself into revolutionary affairs elsewhere we will have to rely largely upon young people who are fairly fresh out of college and who have not been misled by the sorts of experiences which have misled the civilians and the military in Vietnam.
I've been to Swarthmore College and to Princeton University and have studied, I suspect, with some of the best intellectuals in the United States. They don't begin to appreciate the issues of rural politics—they just don't begin to. Everything that I know about this sort of situation, everything that I've said today, relates to what I've learned in Comilla, East Pakistan, and in Sa Dec, South Vietnam. Certainly the university people had an opportunity to indoctrinate me. I was interested in this sort of issue in college and graduate school. I took courses in economic development; I took courses in social modernization. The instruction just didn't come close to the question. The crime in Vietnam is largely the crime of the American intellectual community, I think, for not having given any guidance to those poor people in the field who, with their enormous power, are still just thrashing around. It's a terrible thing to believe that the Americans who control bombers—instruments of mass death—who control a multibillion-dollar aid program, who have all this great power at their fingertips, to believe that these Americans are just thrashing around. That's what they're doing. They're killing a lot of people in the process. The reason they are thrashing around is that they are poorly trained and they don't have a perspective for it all. The reason they don't have a perspective is because the American intellectual community has been a bunch of cowards with regard to Vietnam. To a man they have thrown up their hands, shuddered at the whole thing and said, "We've got to get out." The fact is that we're there; and it would have been far more fruitful if the American intellectuals had taken a responsible attitude toward our involvement and tried to show what we are doing wrong and how we could have done it better, or to have shown, in the ultimate argument for withdrawal, that we can't do it right. That's the kind of thinking that appeals to the military men and the pragmatic administrators who are in command of our policy in Vietnam.

The intellectuals don't know about this problem because they have thrown up their hands about it. I have faith in them, however; I have faith in the capacity of the American mind to come to grips with this kind of issue if only attention will be paid to it. I think that change has to start with the American intellectual community. There were a few people in political science in America when I left the study of it in 1965 who were concerned with what was called "political development"—the idea that a nation might have a course of political change which had definable stages to it, comparable to the stages of economic development. But everything that was being said was related to the political development of the
national elites, not of the rural areas. No one that I ever read about had concerned himself with this sort of issue in rural areas in villages. I believe that such thinking is within the capacity of the American intellectual. I don't understand why no one has ever thought about rural politics. Maybe it's just that American professors are very comfort-minded people, and they don't like to go through the strains of working in Peace Corps-type jobs and perhaps in war-torn areas where they are susceptible to being killed. Maybe it's something else that has to do with the nonmilitaristic orientation of the American intellectual community. I don't really understand, but I know that I work in an area of atrocious intellectual neglect. However, in its ponderous way, I suppose that the American intellectual community will respond to Vietnam. After all, we began the Point Four program and the Marshall Plan in the late 1940s when we had very little theory to go by. It wasn't until late in the 1950s and perhaps the 1960s that we finally evolved a set of ideas about economic development, which we had been active in for a long time before that. We had been doing this stuff without knowing what we were doing for many years. Maybe, maybe if the American thinkers will get over their revulsion to the whole thought of Vietnam and stop running away from it, we will evolve a set of ideas about how to deal with this sort of reality in other countries of the world. Given the way America works, the new ideas probably will have to be thought out in the academic world rather than in the directly political world. Perhaps a number of young people can be trained to carry out these ideas, as young people are being trained to carry out the ideas concerned with economic development. That's in fact what I was trained to do, and not at all what I ended up doing.

**Role and Function of Position**

As far as my personal effectiveness is concerned, you could say that for a year and a half I have been sitting on the sidelines in Sadec and haven't been able to accomplish very much. There have been several constraints from which I hope I will be free from now on. Throughout 1967 Sadec province was setting up its new government, and the services that I worked with, particularly refugees, were among the last to be established. Having been created in September the Sadec Refugee Service was reorganized by combining it with the Social Welfare service in November. Then the Tet offensive came along and until mid June of this year the social welfare and refugee service was utterly absorbed, to the complete obliteration of any other sort of work, with the
compensation of the Tet war victims. I spent the last half of 1967 trying to convince the youth service chief, without any noticeable results, to create a rural youth movement in Sadec. And since Tet he has been preoccupied with the setting up of a civil defense organization, really a popular militia, and has given very little attention to ordinary youth affairs. I hope that in this next year, because the service chiefs that I work with will be free, if they're not drafted, I will be able to accomplish much more. I really want to do something in Vietnam which will show people how it should be done.

I have started a few backdoor experiments, but they aren't very substantial yet. About three days ago there should have been an election for the village women's welfare committee in Phu Huu village in Duc Ton district. That project should portend very fine consequences. We're trying to organize the women, and women have a great influence in Vietnamese society, particularly in the war torn areas where the men have all been drafted by one army or the other or have fled. I hope that after organizing the primitive women's committee at the village level we will be able to elaborate the organization by extending it down to the household level. We're beginning with vocational training in the sewing of clothes, and home economics subjects such as child care. When the organization is really working, every woman in the village should be active in something.

Just after Tet I started a village public works program in imitation of the Pakistan village public works program. It happened in a behind-the-scenes sort of way. A shipment of chocolate milk came in by helicopter. It was a shipment directed to me, not to the refugee service, and I was to dispose of it as I saw fit. I gave some of it to an orphanage and a hospital, but the larger part of it I gave to the village council in An Tich. For several months the village leaders in An Tich had been saying to me that they wanted help in repairing a road. I told them that they should use the chocolate milk as payment for laborers who would move dirt to repair the road. Once they had the means, the village leaders proved rather lethargic about doing the job. The village chief, for one thing, was hospitalized in March and died in May. After repeated visits from me, a meeting with the village officials in the district chief's office, and an inspection of the road by the Vietnamese captain in charge of Revolutionary Development, the local officials finally got the people to working and finished the project. The repaired road is quite good-looking; it's been raised and leveled off so that
it will no longer be flooded in the wet season. There is enthusiasm in several circles in Sadec to duplicate this program in many other villages.

The women's program will give people a chance for promotion, at least within the village, and the public works program can mobilize the people. As for justice, the third point I spoke of, I can't point to anything yet. However, in CORDS Sadec I have been given responsibility for rural administration, a field which is just about as broad as one wants to make it. I hope that when the full-scale judge comes to Sadec later this year I will be able to involve him in the adjudication of rural disputes. That's just a vague idea I have at the moment; I don't really know how to carry it out or whether it would be possible.

When I leave Vietnam it is my hope that I will be able to point to what I have done in execution of principles that I hold to, and I will be able to say, "If you want to see how these things can work, just come to Sadec and take a look."