DEBRIEF OF SENIOR CIVILIAN ADVISOR TO DISTRICT CHIEF

VIETNAM

1966 - 1968

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He had a week briefing in Washington, another week of orientation to USAID structure in Saigon, and then he was assigned to be a district rep. He received most of his orientation from the military sub sector advisor. He was the first district rep in III Corps.

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He felt that any training would be a little behind the actual situation in the field, but nothing could be done about it. The training should include language and culture.

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He worked through the local officials. When directives came down from the ministries, he would get them first, then go over to the GVN official. Most of the time the district chief had not received the directive; this was a bit aggravating for the district chief. The interviewee noted that because he had data and information that the district chief did not have his (the district rep's) "hand was strengthened."

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The district chief was both military and civilian. The interviewee "forcibly dragged him around" to inspect
various civilian projects. After a while the district chief liked the role of helping the people and would come to pick up the district rep to go see some of the villagers.

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He thought that things had gotten better under CORDS. One chain of command would help in utilizing resources and personnel. Communications improved, more visitors started to come around.

A year ago the AID rep was an advisor, but now he was an executor, administrator, or magistrate. The Americans are taking over the war and the administration of the country. They are doing what the Americans want, because the Americans have the power to remove them from office.

He recommends that 1) CORDS emphasize Revolutionary Development of humans, not construction projects; 2) CORDS eliminate reports; and 3) personnel be stabilized and kept in country longer.

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The interviewee got along well with the sub-sector advisor, like a college "roommate". He noted that this is not always the case. Personality conflicts could develop over different interests or age. The area specialist was particularly good to work with.

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He would go out and inspect various projects on his own, and if he found bad construction it would be reported to the district chief. He would threaten the district chief by saying that unless the commodities (e.g. cement) were returned that no more requests would be approved.

Corruption was there, and they knew it, and the VC used it in their propaganda. Little could be done about it.
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
The interviewee mentioned that he spent 40% of his time in watchdog activities.

A lot of young people are coming to the city to get work and money. The families in the countryside accept the fact that the males in the family will have to leave, either to go in the ARVN, VC, or the city to work. Farmers are turning more to growing cash crops of vegetables to sell to allied soldiers.

He traveled by Scout vehicle and carried a weapon since he did not trust the VC. The VC might shoot an American civilian or military. He always liked to travel alone, believing it was safer. He developed a sense for telling whether everything was all right or if there were VC around. If the village or hamlet did not give a warm reception or the children were not playing he would know the VC were around and would get out.
DEBRIEF OF A
SENIOR DISTRICT ADVISOR
DI AN DISTRICT
BIEN HOA PROVINCE, VIETNAM
1966 - 1968
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DEBRIEF OF SENIOR CIVILIAN ADVISOR TO DISTRICT CHIEF

Vietnam

1966-1968

Preparation and Orientation for Position

I was first briefed in Washington. On arriving in Saigon in early December 1966, I was given a week of orientation, particularly regarding AID organization. I was then sent to Bien Hoa, III Corps Headquarters, for approximately two more weeks. At the Corps level I had a very thorough orientation, flying all over the provinces, visiting the provincial representatives, talking to them, etc. After that I was assigned to the provincial level, first as assistant provincial representative in Bien Hoa province. At that time AID was assigning district representatives for the first time, and I was given a district; I believe I was the first district rep in III Corps.

When I was assigned to Di An district I didn't know what my functions were to be or what available resources there were to work with. There was no housing available, no offices, no precedents to follow as a district representative. The only thing I knew was that I was the senior civilian advisor to the district chief, and was to be treated and respected as an equal counterpart to the senior military advisor, who had been there three months. With that directive, I went down to district to find out what was going on, what was there, what I was supposed to do, and what was available. After getting my household set up I set out to get well acquainted with the area. Being a newcomer civilian, I had to depend on my military colleagues. They gave me a description of the area, told me where I could go and could not go, and what time I should go or should not go. You have to depend on them quite a bit. So, much of my orientation actually came from the military. Once I got oriented a bit I tried to get started on my own. What I emphasized was getting a strong hand in terms of getting to know every Vietnamese official in the district level.

Opinion on Training American Overseas Representatives

I have not gone through AID training myself so I'm not at all familiar with what you are offering the trainees here at the Asia Training Center. But I think generally that there are limitations to the scope of orientation as well as in the materials and facilities available. Things are changing quite
rapidly in Vietnam in terms of organization, in terms of concept, in the role of American advisors, in the role of the U.S. Mission. So training will always be behind in times, and naturally this is accepted.

As for orientation, I think when a person goes over there he's going to be greatly confused about the AID organization. He doesn't know who's paying him, even though he is an AID man. He doesn't know who writes his efficiency report, where to get leave papers, where to get gas--the whole point of organization. It's greatly confusing. It's still confusing even for us who have been over there for a while. I think a person should have adequate knowledge as much as possible on the whole organization of the U.S. Mission, particularly at the advisory level. Another area that should be emphasized is the whole role or concept of U.S. advisors--what is expected, what has been the transition between the USAID advisor of 1965 and what it is today, and what is it going to be tomorrow.

I did not receive any Vietnamese language training. I speak just a little that I picked up myself--just greetings, that type of thing. Of course, the more language ability you have the better understanding you will have with the people and the more you will learn of what's going on. But in terms of just doing your job, you don't have to have the language. You can carry out your job in English because you have interpreters and translators. In most cases the district chief or even his subordinate staff will speak English. The language that is learned in training here is still not enough to carry out your daily work. It isn't good enough; you have to use English. But even though you may not be able to communicate in a sophisticated way, just by learning some of the language you will be able to report more effectively on the village people. I think it would be better to have the language before going out there. If you send someone out there for two or three months and then bring them back for language training they will think they don't need to learn this or that and will try to narrow down what they learn.

As for other training, I think it is very important that the technical people who will be assigned to the provincial level be briefed on the military aspects of the advisory program. They should be told about the military taboos, military language, etc. I think there should be something in this area because it is very important.
Vietnamese Bureaucratic Relationships

The district government, as it is called, has a large and adequate Vietnamese staff, but when I came they were not organized to carry out existing programs or future programs. So I spent quite a bit of time just getting the local government, particularly the district government, organized in terms of staff arrangements and the various programs to be implemented. For example, there is the Revolutionary Development Council at the district level. This is the body of appointed district and local government officials who meet and implement policies set down by the central government on Revolutionary Development.

I wanted to push the RD Program, but there was very little organization at the local level. It was organized, but hardly for implementing any kind of program for MACV because they were primarily interested in killing VC and fulfilling military objectives, and had spent very little time with the civilian or AID program. I wasn't able to get any advice on what had taken place, so I had to start all over from scratch in getting the RD program organized.

Getting a collective body like the RD Council organized and functioning is not an easy task. Traditionally everything has been decided by the central government; the orders come down and they try to implement them as much as possible. So the concept of a decision-making collective body at the district level is something new, or something that is doubtfully accepted. When memoranda came down from the ministry I usually got them first, through our channels, because our communications were much better than theirs. I took these program guidelines and various memoranda over to them, and asked them what needed to be done and what action they should take, what they think, and let them discuss it. It upset them that I got the information first. They understood and accept the fact that their channels were slow, very slow. So as you can see, because our channels were faster, the district GVN official would come to me for information on the latest programs and directives in their ministry. This strengthened my hand.

Another factor strengthening my hand was that they were very poor in gathering information for any kind of program—such as how many students are attending school this year in the district. They don't have this information. Or if they do, it is out-dated. They would come to me for such information because I made an effort to collect data for planning. I had a Vietnamese staff of my own—an interpreter, a translator, and a secretary. We went out to various villages to meet the village chief and ask him questions, or to the schools to ask the headmasters about the status of the school, or its weaknesses, and
what needs to be done. We do this periodically. As a matter of fact it's a monthly requirement now. There is what is called a hamlet evaluation every month in which you have to evaluate every hamlet on various items such as military strength, civil schools, health, and so on. In order to make adequate hamlet evaluations you have to visit the hamlets. So our information gathering is much better and more thorough than GVN's. As a result, the GVN officials quite naturally would come to us for information about their own areas. They had their own recording requirements, such as how many schoolrooms will be needed for the coming year, and, most of the time we supplied this information to them.

GVN Officials and Interpersonal Relationship

The district chief, my counterpart, had a dual role. He was the commander of the district Vietnamese military forces, and he also held a political or civil position. Being a military man, he placed quite a bit of emphasis on military problems and very little on civil problems. It took me a great deal of time and a lot of frustrations to persuade him to take more interest in the civil affairs of the district. In order to do this I had to forcibly drag him around to check on the various civilian programs.

There are several ways of getting a district chief out into the field. One way is to make reports through our channels to his superior about how he is doing. He knows that if he is insincere, corrupt, or lazy that we will report this into his command. This is a force lever you use alternately. You also use persuasion—you get on his back and say let's go out. Everytime you go someplace you stop and ask him to go, invite him to go out. Once he makes a couple of trips out to the field with you, and he talks to people and helps them, things can change. Such as in giving out PL 480 food to the needy people. If the district chief himself goes out and gives the food to the people, and the people smile at him and talk to him, he gets the feeling that he has done something good. So he will do it again because he enjoyed it. Naturally you try to develop this. After a while he liked to go out and he would come to pick me up. At first it's difficult, of course, because his culture and his position as a GVN official, as a military man, calls for sitting in his office and letting people come to him. This is a habit he has formed, but once you change this habit and get him to go out and see the countryside, see the people, then he gets to like it.
Observations on CORDS Operations

The U.S. Mission in Vietnam has gone through tremendous reorganization. Initially, I was sent as an AID representative, a district representative. In January 1967 this year, the three primary civilian agencies--USAID, JUSPAO, and OSA--were organized into one agency called OCO, or Office of Civil Operations. So then there were only two American advisory groups--MACV and OCO. In July, Ambassador Bunker decided for various reasons that they should combine these advisory organizations, OCO and MACV, into one. So on July 8th MACV and OCO in our area were combined into one advisory group called CORDS, or Civil Operation and Revolutionary Development Support. As a result of this new organization all the provincial advisory and district advisory personnel--military and civilian--belong to one agency in which military personnel are the majority. There is a great deal of question whether these two--civilian and military--can work together logistics-wise and communication-wise, because the military has better communications and logistics facilities than we do. There is a great deal of political discussion about the military getting the dominant role, and whether we're going to be emphasizing the military side of the picture at the expense of the civilian side, or whether the civilian program will be emphasized and the military will play a secondary role. This kind of friction exists very widely.

I think the situation by and large has gotten better since the inception of CORDS. Of course, I am speaking from an isolated case, only one province out of 44, and only one district. But I think the concept of having one organization channeling all your advisory resources, material, and funds in support of GVN, is a much more logical and meaningful way to conduct the U.S. mission, as large and complex as it is. By having one organization and one chain of command, I believe there is a much better utilization of resources of personnel and we are able to give better advice to the GVN. Back in 1966, even though I wasn't there, there would be one province chief with maybe four or five U.S. advisors advising on different matters and different things, and frequently they would contradict each other's advice. This left a great deal of confusion on the part of the GVN as to what advice to accept from whom. There were also agency jealousies, I'm sure. The reorganization eliminated all the petty jealousy that may have existed, and created one chain of command. So since CORDS was formed it has been coordinated. We had radio contact, we received mail every day, we had monthly meetings. At least once a week we paid a visit up to the provincial level or they came down to us. So there was no problem of coordination or communication. If anything, we had too much of this contact. A tremendous number of visitors came down to visit us, visitors from everywhere--senators, congressmen, newsmen, people from Saigon, Corps level,
CORDS, province--particularly to see the RD program and the RD cadre in action. One reason was that we were handy to get to. Another was because our Revolutionary Development program was successful.

A year ago I think the AID representative could be classified as an advisor. Today he is less an advisor and more of an executor, administrator, or magistrate in his given area. He has a great deal of budgetary power and program power. He even has the power to remove GVN officials, so he is much more powerful as an administrator than as an advisor. I think the movement has been from advising Vietnamese programs to implementing American programs. We're controlling more and more in the conduct of war and the pacification program. I think the Vietnamese are beginning to react to this in two ways. I think on the military side the Vietnamese are happy to see that Americans are fighting the war and dying. But on the civilian side, in economic and social programs where the money and the local administration is directly involved, I think they probably resent that we are taking over. They resent it because we have more control over what they can do and cannot do, and what he should do and shouldn't do. And I am not sure they are learning anything from this, from watching Americans operate. I think in my district they're doing things the way I like to see them done. This may be a learning process for them, although I feel that after I am gone they probably will go back to their own ways of doing things. But perhaps overall they will learn something.

There are a few changes in CORDS operation I think should be made. First, I recommend that the whole area of Revolutionary Development be emphasized more. This program usually loses out to physical construction programs--putting up schools and so on. Actually, AID places little emphasis on developing human institutions and leadership. We should try to put more effort, more money, more time into making the local GVN government function more effectively and efficiently. We should establish more training centers and training schools in order to develop more administrators. We are very weak in this at the present time. Second, there are too many reports. We must have spent 20 per cent of our time on reports of one form or another. All kinds of reports could be eliminated: the commodity reports; the statistical annex--a very, very lengthy, time-consuming report on figures of various levels of the program--hamlet evaluation reports, the RD Cadre Reports. I think one very good report is a special report on Revolutionary Development. I think it's the only one needed. Report requirements are laid down by USAID, by Embassy, by MACV at Saigon level, and there are other reports laid down by Corps level and provincial level. When all these chain of commands had their own report requirements laid down on us, that was a hell of a lot of reports.
They could probably clean up all these reports, which I believe they're trying to do right now, and get one report that fulfills all the requirements so a person can sit down once a month and do all these reports at one period and get it over with. As it was we had reports every Saturday, a couple of times during the week, special reports, a whole slew of other reports: Chieu Hoi reports, VIS reports—all kinds, you name them, we got them. We had one reports officer come out. We had our gripes and we gave them to him. He said there was nothing he could do and there would be more reports coming.

Finally, there is the problem of turnover of advisory personnel. You cannot get anywhere with a rapid turnover. If you can get a stable advisory team in an area for any length of time your advisory effort will be more effective. I think a person should stay in a given area for a minimum of one year. If he is there for 18 months, I think it would be worthwhile for him to transfer the last six months to a different area. He would get to know Vietnam a little better, he would get to test the techniques that he has developed, and he would have the chance to broadcast his techniques. So I think staying in a couple of areas would be ideal.

**U.S. Interpersonal Relationships**

I think the basic reason our RD program is successful is because our advisory team was effective and could get along. Regardless of how good a program an agency may have, that program may never get off the ground if your own team members do not have a good working relationship. If you can't work together as a military-civilian advisory team, your program will not get off the ground. I think we had a very, very fine advisory team in my district. We just developed into a good team. Military sub-sector advisors are usually Army majors, and luckily the sub-sector advisor and I got along very well from the start. His being of the same age as I am helped a great deal, and he had personal habits and likes very similar to mine, so we got along like friends or roommates in college. Sometimes this situation doesn't exist. You will find a young civilian advisor at the district level, and a sub-sector advisor who is a little older. Personality conflicts arise very easily in these circumstances. But in my district we have gotten along very fine. And being a small group like that you have to forego traditional treatment of NCOs and enlisted men. You are working as a team of Americans and you have to forget about all rank and status and just work as a team. As I said, we worked very well, and as a result we got our programs implemented with very little conflict. When you have a conflict within your own advisory team, your organization will be confused and you won't know who's going to do what. You end up spending most of your time trying
to take care of your own team, your own members, while what you should be doing is advising and implementing programs and seeing what's going on in the countryside. Because we were well-organized we could spend most of our time in the field overlooking our programs.

Another good thing was that I had an excellent area specialist, and could rely on him to explain detailed matters to the Vietnamese. It took about two months to establish a relationship with him to the point where he was really useful. I got to know his capabilities, his habits, his interests, and particularly his sense of dedication to me. He fulfilled all qualifications for a very good area specialist, so I gave him much of a free hand in all things. As a matter of fact he was more my assistant. He even made decisions when I was not there, and I trusted him. Men like him are hard to get. Luckily I was able to keep the same one, which was a great asset.

The Misuse of Resources

The control of commodities is a big problem. They will disappear like mad. Of course, as a CORDS representative, my job was to monitor the use of all USAID commodities. The Vietnamese try to hide the misuse as much as possible. Of course, I frequently went out to visit the people, often to see the hamlet chiefs. When I was with the district chief we went to the village chief first, just to pay our respects. Sometimes when I went out alone and the village chief was there, I would try to take him along. But normally if I knew the hamlet well, or the hamlet chief very well, I would go directly to the hamlet chief. I usually went out for a number of reasons, although the most important was to see the self-help project. I went for the purpose of monitoring commodities or to see if the construction of a classroom, market, or well was up to par. I wanted to see if all the materials that were shipped for that particular school were there. Sometimes I counted the bags of cement or inspected the construction. Very frequently the mixture of cement and sand was not according to the plans, and I would feel around and tell them that they had too much sand in the cement and put more cement in it. If I found something wrong with the construction or if the USAID commodities had been removed from the construction site I went back and told the district chief and he would start looking for it. My main purpose was to see that the commodities sent for the project were used, nothing stolen, nothing sold.

I don't have an engineering background, but I spent some time in the Peace Corps as a community development worker, so I know good cement and good construction when I see it. It's very easy to distinguish good construction from bad construction.
For example, they were building a water tower near one of the markets. When they told me that the tower was finished I went down to see it. I grabbed the edge of the tower and snapped a piece right off it. And when it snapped the sand sort of crumbled down from inside. This is bad construction—not enough cement. When you don't put enough cement into the sand, it crumbles. You can rub your hand against the wall and sand will rub out. After that I went back to the district chief and told him it was bad construction, that I wanted it alleviated right away, and that I would not approve additional cement for it. So it was up to him to call his staff together and find out why the construction was bad. If somebody sold the cement, then it was up to the district chief or his staff to get the cement back, or buy some or steal some from somewhere else. In this instance they relocalized the cement, or stole it somewhere else, and fixed the tower. They scraped off a good portion of the walls and recemented it in.

When you do locate misuse of commodities the Vietnamese start blaming it on someone else; they claim they didn't know about it or they point the finger at somebody else. The district chief would usually say, "I have a bad staff, they're no good," and that's about it. Here's an example. One of the Vietnamese staff in district who was in charge of implementing self-help projects was relieved of his duties. I told the district chief that this guy was pilfering all the commodities and did as much as possible to get rid of him. So he got rid of him, or rather, he assigned him to a menial paper job within the district. This is not considered severe discipline from our point of view, but from theirs it is. He lost face. Everybody knows why he got removed, so he lost face. Theoretically he was placed in a position where he wouldn't have an opportunity to misuse commodities anymore. That is what we were led to believe. But regardless of your position you are able to pilfer.

Now we are making a major effort to stop corruption, but stopping it entirely is impossible. We'll never stop corruption. However, there are certain steps you can take to make corruption more difficult. In order to do that, we may have to become more like colonialists—we will have to take a much stronger hand in controlling funds and commodities in the future.

I'd say I spend at least 40 per cent of my time in this sort of watchdog activity. I insist that the district send me weekly reports on the status and the use of U.S. commodities or aided funds. I also have their agreement I must sign off before the U.S. commodities leave the district warehouse or leave district hands. I don't control the warehouse physically, however; the Vietnamese keep their own records. But now we are coming to
the point where we are going to control the warehouse, too. Some provinces have initiated a dual control or physical control of the warehouse. The latest membrandum I got from higher up was that they want me to have dual control, physical control of the warehouse.

The peasants just accept the corruption. You can't count on them to back you up if you try to stop it. Normally the peasants say that the government officials are corrupt, and the VC are definitely using this in their propaganda. GVN officials are corrupt; they say, they are not for the people, they just want power. They make a great deal of propaganda out of this. Of course the VC have corruption in their own ranks, but they deal with it very severely. If they find a corrupt official the penalty could be death. So they actually have very little corruption, much less than the GVN. And they also have less material to work with. Usually in the VC chain of command they know exactly how much there is, who is responsible for it, and where it goes. On the GVN side the U.S. is pouring in so much material and funds that it's hard to keep track of where they are and where they are going.

The Effect of War on Vietnamese Society

In a sense Bien Hoa province is urbanizing rapidly. Mainly because the air base is there. The Vietnamese are putting up bars and stores to attract GI money. There is some trouble between the GIs and the people but not as much as one might expect. In fact, there is very little friction. Of course, the Vietnamese storeowners want the Americans to buy things and they welcome them every chance they can; they use all sorts of methods to attract them for their money. But Bien Hoa has been placed off limits after 8 o'clock and after then everything is dead. The rural population is being attracted to the city kind of life. The reasons are quite understandable. The money is good in the city and jobs are good, so a large portion of the population—particularly teenagers and those in their early 20s, male and female—are coming to the city for money. I assume that in some ways the Vietnamese family pattern is breaking down. But probably all families accept the fact that the husband or son has to go away for one reason or another. If he stays in the hamlet and if he's a teenager or in his early twenties the VC or the GVN will recruit him. So the family accepts the fact that he's going to leave—one way or another. If he doesn't leave, it's a miracle. The economy is such that somebody has to go out and work. The average farmer cannot keep up with the changing economy and price of goods. He just can't farm. He has to get out and work. Farmers are now turning more towards cash vegetable crops that can be sold to the allied forces.
Travel and Security

When I went out I travelled mostly by vehicle, by Scout. In my district all the roads were open and secure in daylight hours. There were a couple of places that I had to fly by chopper, but generally, I travelled by Scout. There are some hills and the higher ground, but no jungle area to speak of. I was shot at so I always carried a weapon. During orientation, of course, they said that as U.S. civilians we were classified as non-combatants. But we reasoned it this way--the VC are out to kill, out to get Americans, and they don't distinguish between whether you wear a uniform or whether you don't. You're an American and you're there to affect the war one way or another, so the VC are not going to say, well we won't shoot him because he's a civilian, but we'll shoot this guy because he's military. So purely for self-defense, we carried weapons. I carried a .38 pistol or a carbine, depending on where I was going. If I were going to a more secure area, I always carried a pistol. If it was to a more questionable area, I carried a carbine.

When I went out I liked to go by myself. I didn't like to go with a large force of troops, even though they were available for personal security. Anytime I went I could request a platoon or squad of Vietnamese soldiers, RF or PF, that are assigned to the district. But it was safer to go alone. When you accompany a sizable unit, the VC know you're coming and they will try to inflict some casualties. If you go alone you surprise them because they don't expect a lone jeep or Scout. Also, if you get to know the area, the village chief, the hamlet chiefs and the tea houses, you can stop and drink tea and chat and they will tend to be protective towards you. If you go with a force the people will forget about you. If you go alone, however, they will take a more personal interest in you, and if something is wrong, they will tell you. They won't tell you outright to go but they will make some gesture indicating not to stop but to go on. I learned the lesson that when you go alone to visit a hamlet, it is always best to take the village chief or hamlet chief along on your tour. He in some cases may be a VC himself or VC sympathizer, so if you go with him he won't let you get shot. When everything's all right and normal the chief will greet you with a Vietnamese "salaam," pull up a chair, sit down, and automatically order tea or coffee for you. But when something's wrong and the VC are around he won't do this. He'll give you a very cold reception. I could recognize this and take off. Another indication that something is wrong in an area when you come in, children playing in the streets will immediately leave. Then you've got to get out of there. If the children just continue playing and say something in greeting then it's all right to stay.