

DEBRIEF OF A  
PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATIVE  
PHU YEN PROVINCE, VIETNAM

1967 - 1968

No. 16683

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## PREFACE

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1. Provide AID with management insights suggesting alterations in current policies and practices and to identify patterns, trends and problems which, when analyzed, will provide guidance for future assistance plans and programs.
2. Accumulate new or updated information for an institutional memory, for fundamental research and for application to future development assistance programs.
3. Provide material for understanding the cultural framework of a country, and the dynamics of its mode of social change. And, as a correlate, to discover customs, mores, taboos and other relevant factors which affect interpersonal relationships between Americans and members of a host community.
4. Provide material suitable for instructional purposes.
5. Obtain information which will be of value--generally and specifically--to American overseas personnel in their future assignments.

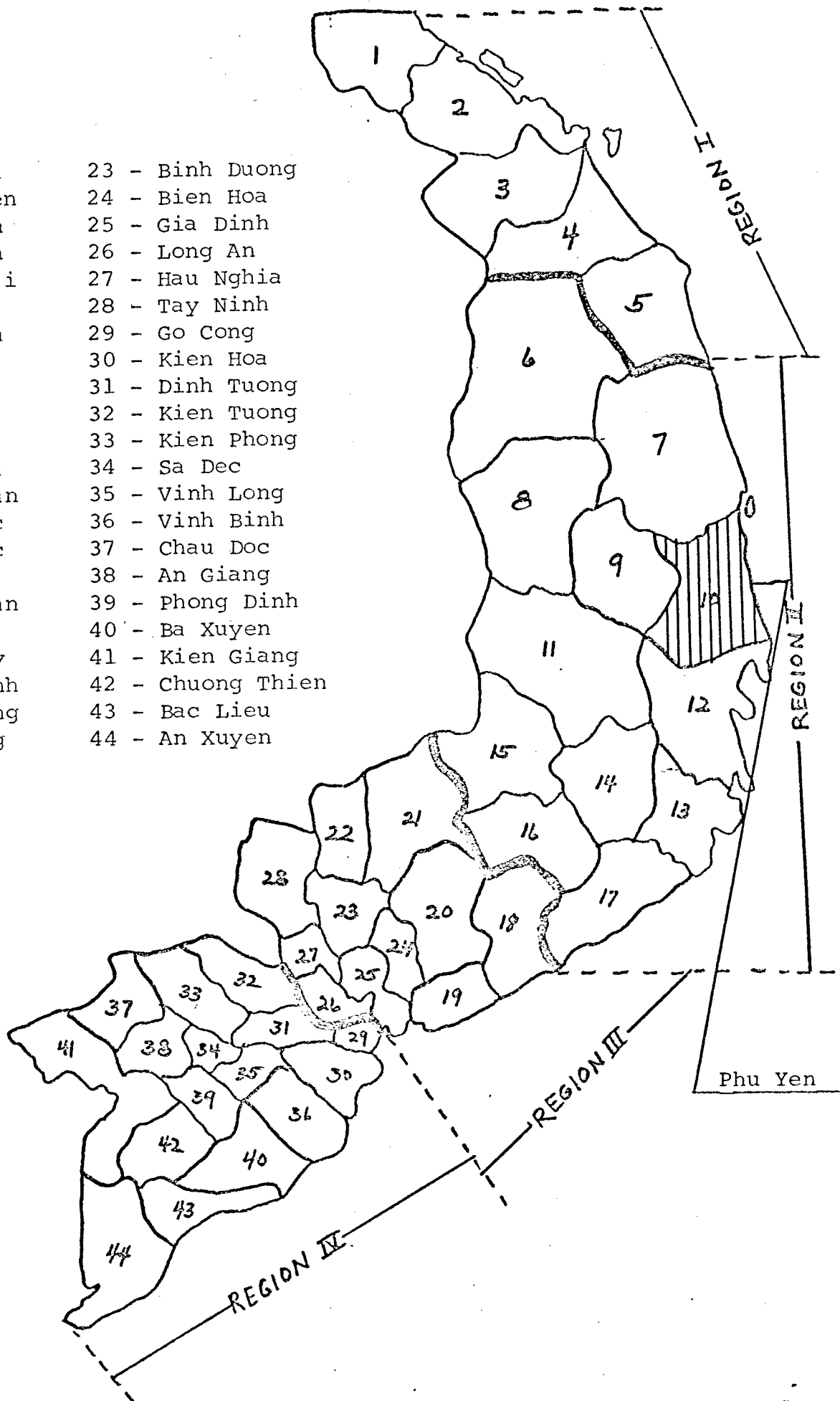
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Evaluation of the Asia Training Center

I wasn't directly recruited. The recruiting team came through Oregon in the fall of 1966 and I made some inquiries, and then I went to Washington in December and made further inquiries, and finally recruited myself. I then entered school here in February of 1967 as a member of Cycle IV.

We had two weeks of orientation, I believe, in Washington. As I recall it was about one week too long, which may have been necessary because of all the forms to fill out and things like that. It seemed awfully long for what we got. We heard a number of lecturers about Vietnam, about speech, history, background, many of the things that we expected to get here and did get here. For those who were going on to the Training Center, I felt that the two-week orientation in Washington was too long. If you were going directly from Washington to Vietnam, then, of course, it made some sense. I would think that for someone going on to a training center, one week in Washington should be time enough to do all of the personnel work, and get sworn in; it would be more than enough time.

I had a general idea that my ATC training would be language study, and that it also would involve many things about Vietnam: history, culture, philosophy, what we were trying to do and hoping to do, and things of this nature.

At the time I was at ATC there were a number of people (well, it might have been only two or three) from Washington who I could sense were evaluating the Center. Although many of the students got into the habit of acting like evaluators instead of students, it was always my position that as far as I was concerned the Training Center was doing an excellent

job on language, and that's what we were primarily here for. In other areas I thought that the case-study method was fine. Some of the lectures were not as good as others and some were excellent. I was a strong supporter of the school, one of the reasons being that I felt we got an extra 20% of effort at ATC that we wouldn't get in Washington, D.C. because of the difficulty there in getting to class, getting away from class back home and the other distractions you have. I know that I have had 20% more time studying in Honolulu on campus than I would have had at a training center in a city in the States. My feeling was, and, by and large, I think it was the feeling of the whole class, that we were happy with the environment and with the course. I think it was a mistake when they moved the so-called generalists from here back to FSI. I said so at the time.

Insofar as the area and operations training was concerned, the case studies and the little exercises we went through that forced you to think in a different vein were particularly good. The lectures that involved people who had been to Vietnam and related their experiences were also very good. I enjoyed the so-called philosophical lectures about oriental cultures, about the history of Vietnam, and about some of the things that we're trying to do over there. Those that I didn't particularly enjoy were those on the psychological level where they were trying to train you to be a leader. There is nothing in an orientation program that would develop personalities. Then there were some lectures that were just plain boring: some of them sat when they gave their talks, some of them said, "Well, I don't know exactly what you want me to say so ask me some questions."

Some of the better lecturers were a Professor Ito, I think, from the University of Hawaii; Sir Robert Thompson, who was an excellent lecturer and gave us some very valuable information; George Tanham from the RAND Corporation; Dr. Britton; Bert Fraleigh and Frank Scotten. Cross-cultural communication was something that I don't consider as being too beneficial. Any student, whether he's a generalist or a specialist, has got to be interested in the involvement in Asia or else they wouldn't even be going there. They might not feel like talking about it all the time, but I'm sure they are very interested in what our objectives are. The Center did not really provide us with the knowledge of what our objectives are and what our roles were to be.

It's very difficult to imagine from a classroom what you're going to be doing in Asia. What the training did do was keep you wondering what it was you were trying to do.

Of course there was a great deal of frustration--just general frustration about the world in general and day-to-day projects. There were times when we were bored, but there were also times when we were excited. These are things you can't really imagine until you go through them. For instance, we studied the organizational outline, although we never heard anything about some of the most important people we would have to deal with, such as the management and the chief of the division. We knew that reports were necessary, and I agree that nothing is more important than accurate reporting, but we had no idea of the number of them or how much time it takes to do them. Then there's the frustration of having a project that you've worked on get blown up, etc. You should certainly be made aware that you will be frustrated, and you will get angry.

A number of students in our particular cycle got the idea that they were involved in policy and they were constantly evaluating the Center and its administration. It should be made very clear, right at the beginning, that, while you might have a lot of experience, when you are in this school, you are students. The very first day they should just come right out and say it. I think the director should say it. It should also come from AID because, while you are in school you might be hired as an FSR-3, but that has nothing to do with it--you are a student. I think if it were just said that way that's all it would take. Not that you're going to muzzle the students, because the staff was very interested in the students. Just as long as it's understood that the policy is made by the school and the people who are running the school.

I think any curriculum can be improved--there is no such thing as a perfect curriculum. I also think lecturers can be improved, but it cannot be done in the middle of the stream. After the term is over, the people can make any kind of evaluation they want. It's true that two people can have an honest disagreement about the benefit of a particular course--they can both be completely honest in their evaluations and still be on opposite ends of the pole. But there's just not going to be any system to the situation if you're



going to permit it to happen right in the middle of a course. This is an extreme example of what I'm trying to say. Recently someone came through my province and was very critical of the ROK (South Korean) regiment and how they handled the Tet offensive and some of the things they had done. In reply to that I recall saying something like, "The strategy and tactics of the allied defense force in South Vietnam is very complicated at best, but one thing we do know is that when the heat's on there can only be one regimental commander." I feel the same way about when you're going through something like an intensive training course. Of course, this isn't anything like a battle, but when you're in the process of doing something you can only have one direction on your chart. You can change it afterwards but you can't have this constant questioning while you're doing something.

It's very difficult to say how the curriculum should be amended. I don't know how we could emphasize language any more. I do think some homework in the language department could be involved. We all have our own methods of discipline-- not only in language but also in some of the other areas-- and are inclined to do what we think we have to do. I think it would be a good thing to have definite assignments that involve homework. Many of the students did study at night and many others did not. I think the emphasis is about correct on language. The balance is trying to find out as much as you can about the job. I might lean a little bit more toward practical things.

In our province we have three Asia Training Center alumni I can think of right off hand. In fact, the young man who is currently the NLD officer and who is doing a great job, was in Cycle V. Two of our district advisors came through the ATC. One from Cycle III has done exceptionally well. Another district advisor from Cycle III is Terry Seaborn. By and large they were very satisfied with the Training Center and enjoyed being there. There were a few who were not and were very critical of the area and operations curriculum, although they were not critical of the language training. Specifically, some of them were very critical of the rural phase on the Big Island and critical of some of the lecturers we had. These were in a definite minority.

Something that surprised me is that there is quite an esprit de corps, once you get over there, among students who were

in the same class. You might have hardly said "Hello" at the Training Center, but you are interested in what they're doing in Vietnam, and are quite anxious to talk to them when you see them.

### Language Training

Speaking specifically about language training, I was disappointed in my rating. I only got a 1 in verbal and a 2 in reading, but on the other hand my language aptitude is so low that I don't think I could really learn the language well anyway. However, I'm very happy that I got as much language knowledge as I could. I hope I've improved on that. Even if you're a poor language student, and even if you are limited, the fact that you struggle in trying to communicate with someone in Vietnamese establishes a rapport that I don't think you'd ever get otherwise. Even if you're so limited that all you can do is exchange pleasantries and ask directions and ask where you work and these very simple things, this establishes a relationship with the Vietnamese that might otherwise take months, if it's ever established at all. Perhaps a Vietnamese will be more sympathetic because he knows how difficult it is to converse in a foreign language. But most of the people that you talk to know some English. Those that you work with, anyway, are civil servants. So as far as I'm concerned, if the student wants it, even if he's a very poor student, he's a lot better off ending up with a 2 or a 1+ than if he was never taught at all. Most of the people on our team over there have had a very difficult time ever getting started learning the language in country if they have had no previous training. Those that have had some training by and large continue working with it and continue improving themselves. The closer they are to district-level work and the farther down in the government structure they are, the more they use the language.

I, myself, didn't use the language as much as the district advisors (those who worked at the district level), but more than any military people there. The situations in which I used Vietnamese were mostly social ones. The people I worked with, the province chief, his deputy for security, and his deputy for civilian affairs always insisted on using English, and they spoke very good English. But once in a while at a social affair with them I could use Vietnamese. Occasionally, in the district or in dealing with the Vietnamese

interpreters and the office help, I used Vietnamese, although it was limited. It wasn't as if I had to find out something, and the person I was talking to knew only Vietnamese. In my job I wasn't forced to communicate with the Vietnamese in their language, which the district advisors are forced to do. I'm sure those in my province went on ahead to a 2 language rating, and in a year's time will rate a 3 or better.

I think someone who has a knowledge of the Vietnamese is much more effective in the use of an interpreter. You have good ones, mediocre ones and bad ones. You can spot the bad ones real quick, even if you have a limited knowledge of the language. If they're bad they either get sloppy or smart, but I don't think they misinterpret intentionally.

Language training could very well be better if it were conducted right in Vietnam. You would have more opportunity to use the language off-campus in the evenings or during your free time. If it could be done, I think it would be more effective in Vietnam. I can think of a number of practical problems, though, that might make it very difficult, for instance, getting a location, developing a curriculum, and keeping the students. There's always a shortage of good people, and I don't know how you would keep students in a class long enough to learn something before someone stole them away from the school because they were needed elsewhere. It would be difficult doing it in Vietnam. If it could be done, fine. For instance, I'd ask, "Where are you going to put it?" Saigon has offices scattered all over town as it is; there's just not enough space, although Saigon would be the logical place to put it. I just don't know about the feasibility of it.

#### Role and Function of Position

I was recruited as a provincial representative, although at the time it was explained to me that there was no guarantee that there was going to be a slot there waiting for me when I got there. But this is what I was hired as--a prov rep. Of course OCO was followed by CORDS, and it involved a kind of a different role for the prov reps.

When I first arrived in Vietnam, I was appointed as the assistant senior advisor for civilian affairs and also as NLD officer, because we didn't have one. This slot included

the RD cadre and psychological operations. This job also included such things as personnel officer for the Americans, third country nationals, and DOD; compound officer; motor pool officer; and all the nuts and bolts of your own house-keeping. Somebody's got to do these things and, as the senior civilian, it was my responsibility to see that they got done. It was an administrative headache that you get, no matter what kind of job you've got. It's a little complicated over there because of the distance in terms of supplies, logistics, communications, etc. As a matter of fact, the most frustrating part of my job was the inordinate amount of time I spent in what I call "housekeeping." As I said, this amounted to just keeping the organization going-- the compound, the vehicles, the personnel problems, the impress fund, listening to the local people and taking care of them, and making reports. Reports are very necessary, but I thought there was a lot of duplication. There are days and days that go by, and as far as your communicating with the Vietnamese and trying to get these programs going and helping your own subordinates, you feel you've accomplished nothing. That was the most frustrating part. The overriding frustration is wondering whether what you're doing you're doing well.

My purpose in being in Vietnam was as an administrator to carry out the programs that were already in being. There was an RD cadre program, an RD program, an NLD program and a psychological operations program. Except for some very unfortunate happenings, both in September and October and the Tet offensive, we were reasonably successful with these programs. In fact, I think we had one of the best psychological operations in the whole country: We had a good RD cadre program; I think the NLD program would have gone quite well if they had not been so limited in personnel; we also had one of the best public health programs. I thought that administering these programs was my job. These were the programs that were laid on. If I saw room for improvement, it was certainly up to me to mention it, but you just can't have people jumping in there from space and saying, "No, this program is all wrong, I'm going to substitute my own." Things like that mean anarchy.

I didn't initiate any programs personally. There are already plenty of established AID and CORDS programs. It's a matter of choosing what you think is the most important,

and that's what you push. Public administration included the election reporting and the election analysis. That was one of my jobs for the presidential and the house elections.

#### Problems, Successes, Strategies and Frustrations

In the everyday course of my job, I had only one run-in (I guess you could call it that) with the Vietnamese officials. That was because they wanted to use bulgar wheat and oil to pay the people who were unloading the refugee materials that came up in trucks from Nha Trang. There was a directive out on it that you couldn't use PL-480 foods in lieu of wages. These people had to be paid wages.

I don't know exactly whose idea it was to use the bulgar and oil for payment. There is always a little bit of a dispute between refugees and RD. The RD has a budget and the refugees have a budget--it's kind of like our bureaucracy. The RD people don't want to use their budget or their people to do things like unload refugee commodities. It seems kind of trivial but it's just the way bureaucracies work.

The whole thing came to my attention when a requisition slip for so many containers of oil came across my desk for my signature. When I got a translation of it and found out what it was going for, I refused to sign it and wrote a letter, anticipating there would be a little bit of a hassle, setting forth the particular USAID memorandum prohibiting this practice. This went through the finance chief and then through someone else. I talked to the province chief about it, and he told me there wasn't any money. It finally came to a head, and the trucks sat there all day. One of the assistants to the province chief came up and said, "Well, we have no money to pay them so we can't unload." I said, "All right, send them back. The law is that you can't use bulgar and oil in lieu of wages."

It was there all for their benefit so I just couldn't see that they would let the trucks go back with a load on. There must have been a conversation with one of the service chiefs--maybe the finance chief. Within an hour or so one of the interpreters came in and said they wanted to have a meeting. As I recall there were some province chief's assistants, the finance chief and the refugee chief, the RD cadre. We all sat down, and they explained their budgetary problems to me--how the RD couldn't do this for refugees.

It developed pretty quickly that the refugee chief had some kind of budget they could use. The result of the meeting was that I understood that they had some problems, but that the trucks would be unloaded and they would not be paid in bulgar and oil. I think that when they made the proposal in the first place they knew they could handle it in terms of money if they wanted to. There had to be an out for them too and I think that's what the meeting was about. There's always the possibility that maybe they had used bulgar and oil to pay workers, and somebody got hold of the payroll. Anytime you have payrolls being paid in kind I always wonder about it.

If I may generalize from this concerning the Vietnamese approach to things, I think they're much more direct than I thought they would be. In our training here we were pretty much impressed that you approach the subject from all sides and never head-on. I don't know whether it's been a result of their dealings with Americans over these many years or what it is. They're usually pretty direct about what they want and what their problems are.

That was the last time I heard of the issue and I think it was just a test of will. They figured if I gave in on that there would be other points where I would also give in. That was the only place in my sphere of activities where there was a confrontation.

I think the hardest thing I had to face was the loss of a village by our own bombs. The NVA (North Vietnamese Army) came in and dug in in the village. We tried to get them out but couldn't, so it was bombed. Incidentally this was a model Ap Doi Moi where we took visitors. I got there in August and three weeks later it was flat. There was one building left standing--the market. Twelve hundred homes were destroyed. I just could hardly believe it. A remarkable thing is that the place has been 90% rebuilt already.

When we went back to that hamlet I naturally expected that we would at least get some dirty looks, but we didn't get that. You get both reports. They understand it's all the VC's fault because they came in there; and the other side is that they're mad because they know it was the Americans' plane that dropped the bombs. They're very stoic. Sometimes I think that after 20 years of war they've developed an attitude much as I might have towards the plague: If you

get hit by the plague it's tough, but it's really nobody's fault. I think they really don't want to be bothered by anybody. What they need is security from losing their homes or their lives no matter what the cause.

I was in Phu Yen--Tuy Hoa city during Tet. There were three different attacks and they were all three repulsed with a minimum of loss. Unfortunately, the overall result is that the people became frightened: Civil servants are frightened as to what is going to come; the hamleteer is frightened that his village is going to become a battleground. Those who cooperated with the GVN are possibly frightened that they are going to be assassinated. There is a great deal of fear.

If I may be a bit facetious, my most successful project was the day I convinced the military people that it was time for them to start saying in our progress report that our security was inadequate. They had been reporting that it was adequate. That's not altogether facetious either, because I think I made a contribution to their re-examining all the time what it was they were trying to do. In other words, they began giving it a little bit more of a philosophical bent, instead of just killing off people. In October, we initiated what we called the Phu Yen Recovery Program, and we started rebuilding these homes I mentioned earlier. We just made an arbitrary decision to allow so much cement, so much roofing, a temporary sewage system. We got the ROKs involved as manpower help and stormed right ahead. It had the effect of keeping these people out of the refugee camps. They just put up little hooches right where they were and rebuilt their homes. Getting that thing in gear was gratifying, although, as I said earlier, it was rather a shock to see the village destroyed.

#### Opinion of CORDS and An Approach to Action in Vietnam

I just don't know about the future. The Tet offensive certainly slowed down progress in Revolutionary Development and pacification. I can't say that it stopped it. As far as I'm concerned there should be more of a change in emphasis. It's pretty obvious that if our objective is to destroy the enemy, it will never happen. We will never destroy the enemy in one hundred years unless you kill them all. We are never going to win the hearts and minds of the people, and we've

spent years trying to do that. The only way this thing is going to be won, I think, is to get involved in those programs that convince the average hamleteer that it's to his own best selfish interest to support the government in Saigon. This involves pacification to the extent that you're improving his economy and putting money in his pocket--irrigation projects, public health, education--all of the things that we've tried to do and have never really gotten off the ground.

I don't mean to say that we ought to give up. I think the biggest mistake that could be made in the next few months is to take the position of "all is lost, all is lost, let's go home." On the other end of the pendulum is to say, "It really didn't hurt us at all," because I think we got a good clout on the head. The powers that be who make the policy had better look it over pretty hard.

What we or the government of Vietnam have never done is to convince the people that it's in their own best interest to get behind the government and support it. If you look at the pacification program in terms of the total effort, the pacification effort has gotten little more than a pat on the head from my point of view, as compared to the total effort and expenses incurred in fighting the military war. The proportion of publicity that pacification gets is all out of proportion to the pacification effort in personnel and dollars. You'd think that there are really two wars going on over there--one military and one pacification, side by side. In our province we have 80 people on the CORDS team, half of whom are involved in guard duty, etc. There are 12,000 American military men in that province. You start figuring out how much money is involved in maintaining 12,000 military people in a small province. We had a big air base there. But for the amount of money it takes to keep those men in Phu Yen province for one year you could almost bribe the people in Phu Yen province to support the Saigon government. I don't know how typical that is, but that was the case in that one province. According to what you read, you would think that pacification in Phu Yen is getting the same emphasis as the military effort and it just simply isn't true. We have neither the personnel nor the dollars going into it.

Theoretically, when OCO changed to CORDS in July 1967, this kind of thing was supposed to be solved to some extent.



CORDS makes sense organizationally, but the impression is left that military personnel and assets will also be involved in pacification programs. Military units have their civic action teams, and in the sense that they are trying to gain control over additional territory. In that sense that is pacification. But CORDS is a very, very small part of the COMUSMACV organization--a very important one, but a very small part. But in the total number of people involved in the CORDS office as compared to the rest of the people in COMUSMACV I'm sure is less than 10%.

In parts and in places I think AID's objectives were being met up till this time, that is, where they were permitted to do their jobs. I think these objectives are the objectives of many other underdeveloped countries--to provide technical and economic assistance to help people help themselves. That seems to be a very reasonable objective. The objectives of USAID have gotten very, very complicated. There's a USAID organization, a CORDS organization, a military organization and their objective is the same--they want this war to end. If the objectives of USAID were to win the hearts and minds of the people then someone is being pretty ridiculous because that's never going to happen.

As far as my own effectiveness goes, I never got too close to the RD cadre program. This was run by an RD cadre advisor who did a very good job. I've always been a little bit skeptical of the RD cadre system. Maybe I'm skeptical because I never really got involved in it. I don't think you can use a temporary measure such as an RD team to bring local government people closer to their national government. The team is only there six months, and then they're gone and the people are right back where they were. I think we're kidding ourselves a lot with this RD cadre program. On the other hand, it wasn't up to me to decide that it wasn't any good.

#### GVN Officials and Interpersonal Relationships

The Vietnamese with whom I worked most were, of course, the office people and the province chief, whom I saw once or twice a day--evening and morning. Most of the time I was there the deputy for administration was not in existence. I dealt with the deputy for security regarding any civil matters. When I went out to the districts I talked with the district chiefs and the district officials. I worked with

the technical service chief for RD planning quite a bit. The people I worked with mostly were the service chiefs at the province level and only incidentally at the district level. I found their chain of command easy to work with, at my level at least. They have 33 service chiefs existing and they have a lot more breakdowns than we would have in the government at that level, but I can't be critical of it.

I never had any real difficulty in dealing with the Vietnamese people as far as coming up against them like a stone wall. We had some communications problems because, even though you both are understanding the words, they might not be aware of how much emphasis we put on them and vice versa. As an example, the 1968 pacification plan was a joint plan which was to take effect the first of the year. It took several weeks of talking with the man who was in charge of that and trying to get through to him that this involved more than the 1968 RD plan. What we were trying to get at was a plan that involved all aspects of pacification. Once we got the emphasis straightened out then the thing leveled out. I don't know whether that was a result of my pushing or whether it got pushed from down the ladder in his chain of command. That's probably what happened. He probably got the word from his people to get on with it.

I've got to say that of the various Vietnamese officials I've dealt with, Lieutenant Colonel Ba is outstanding in terms of honesty, integrity, energy, ability, etc. He's one of the best administrators I've ever run into--American, Vietnamese or any other kind. He's the province chief and very strict. Very frankly, he's not a popular man with the people. Whether it's because of his strictness or something else, I don't know. I have to rate him pretty high. Then there's a Captain Ngoc in charge of the RD program and planning, who is also outstanding.

#### Personal Adjustments and Living Conditions

My family circumstances are probably a little different from most others. My family and I have been quasi-separated for ten years; I've been divorced for ten years. I have youngsters and I see them about every four to six months. This has been going on for a number of years so there's no problem there with me. Generally speaking, those on the team that have their families in the States are under more pressure than those who have them in a safe haven post. You're an awful long ways away. We lost a couple of men who resigned because of the pressure from home. I could be all wrong, but I have the feeling that was the cause. I think that having arrangements to have the families in safe haven posts is better than having them in the States. They can generally visit them about once a month there. It's much easier.