

DEBRIEF OF AN EDUCATION ADVISOR

VIETNAM

1966 - 1968

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He was extremely ill prepared for his position and the recruiters had no idea of what was required. If he had had language training and training in their culture and educational system, he would have been effective in his job after being there six months, instead of only the last six months.

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The Vietnamese system is basically a French system of administration where a man must constantly go to his superior to make any changes. They are not interested in making changes anyway because they do not understand what we are trying to do.

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The Mission in Saigon structured the job too much. University people know more about education than AID people.

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They keep pressing for more schools, but what they need are more effective utilization of the schools they have. He was not sure if they were going to implement this idea of tightening up administratively.

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When they started giving the blank check for the program in Vietnam, some people, including the director of education, built their own empire. After Tet, this crumbled.

The problem with the present programs is that they are not realistic. They have a film program when 90% of the classrooms in Vietnam do not have electricity.

We have a monkey on our back with the teachers from the hamlet program because we have to give them an adequate education before we can cut back on the class size.

PREFACE

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

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

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

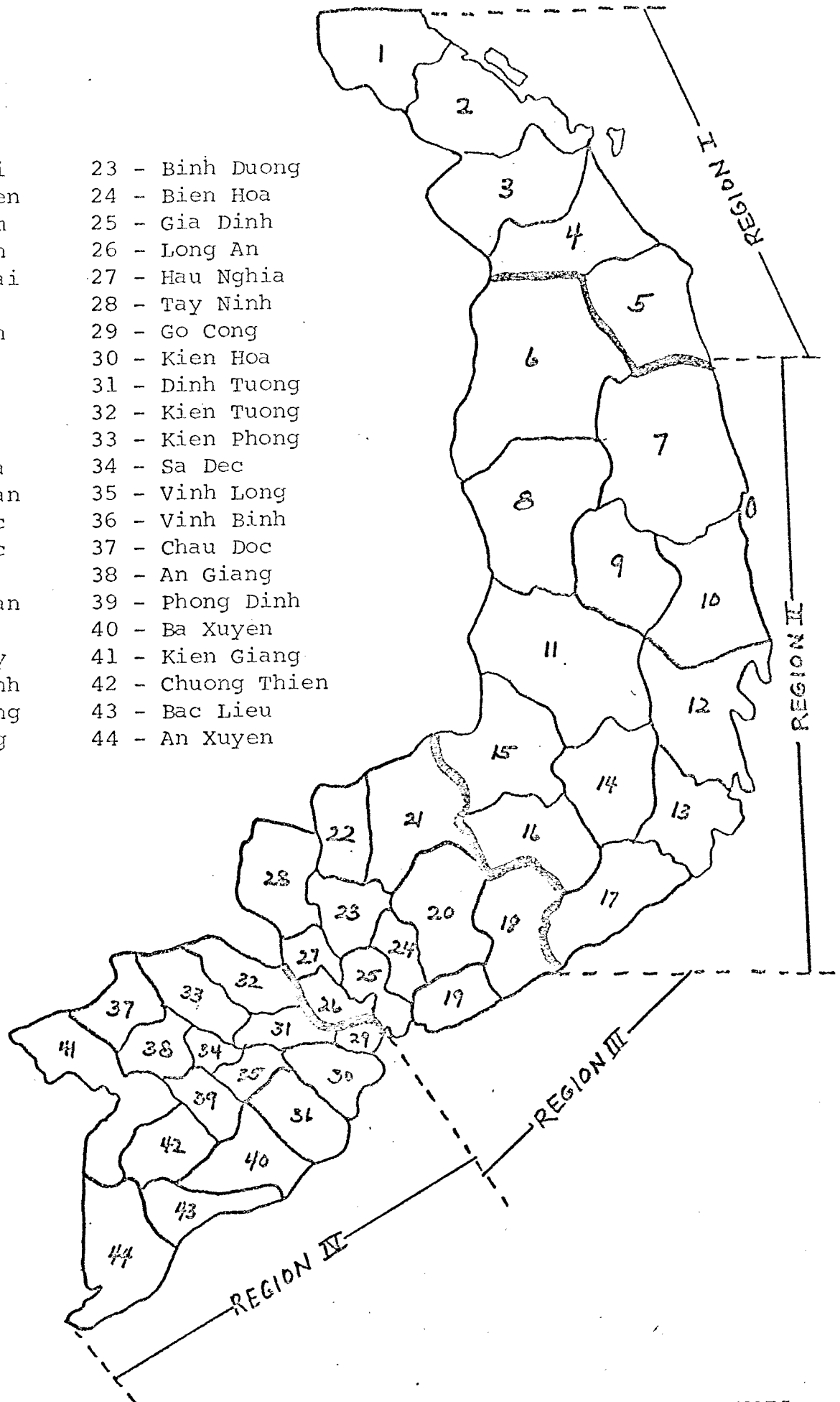
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REGIONS AND PROVINCES
OF
SOUTH VIETNAM

DEBRIEF OF AN EDUCATION ADVISOR

VIETNAM

1966 - 1968

Preparation for Assignment

In respect to teacher training in Vietnam, the biggest thing that we are doing wrong is that we are going over there without knowing enough about their educational system or their culture in general or language. One of the biggest complaints is that we don't get enough orientation before we go. I feel that had I had language training and proper orientation before I went that I would have been effective within six months after I arrived, whereas maybe I was effective only the last six months I was there. This is the sad part of it to me. We send people over there and it takes them so darn long to become effective that their tour is about over by the time they can really make any constructive proposals or understand the people well enough to get anywhere. I didn't have any orientation or language training before I went over there.

Originally I was based in Saigon but I have worked at Ban Me Thuot, Vinh Long, and Long An. There are normal schools in all of those locations. They told me when I went over that I would be an audio-visual person. Here is another one of my complaints; the people who recruited me really had no idea of what was needed or what was there. The structure of our team was such that I was really an advisor in the normal school, and this is what I should have been rather than an audio-visual specialist. I think this misconception was caused by a lack of understanding on the part of the people who were recruiting on our campus. We have had people who have had no overseas experience responsible for drafting our contracts and administrating them on campus. This isn't a good situation.

First of all Vietnam was our first contract for our university. The people that the university got in for this did not have the experience necessary to do the job. This, to a certain extent, has been corrected in that we now have some people, with experience, come to the university who understand the university policies as well as what we are trying to do in these contracts. Our new Dean of International Services, for example, has just returned from a two-year tour in Nepal. We have a

We were directly under AID. Our central office was right with AID education, which I think is a mistake in a lot of ways. In many respects we worked very closely with AID--in some ways, too close. AID education is a general agency concerned with all aspects of education. We were there as a contract to help improve the administration.

Host Country Bureaucratic Relationships

We're having some success over there, but not near as much as we would have or could have had, had we started out from the beginning and oriented all our team members before they went over. Let them speak the language, let them understand the system that they are going to be working with, its weaknesses, or its strong points and let them work from there, rather than throw them over there, and then let them learn all of this after they get over there. We had trouble really getting down to where we could understand what they were teaching. When you are only there for two years, by the time you are oriented to all these things, your tour is up. We should know the curriculum before we ever get there, but in our case we didn't. This is a weakness, I feel, of our own university. I suspect that it carries over to AID direct-hire people as well, although they are not working in the same areas as we are, but I strongly suspect that they lack the same background in curriculum that we do.

One of the problems I faced in Vietnam was the lack of ability to communicate. It's probably one of the greatest problems that we face. Another one was a lack of understanding of their systems. You need to know a great deal about something before you move in and try to make changes. Another thing I think was unfortunate was that we keep saying that we're not trying to give them an American system of education, but one of their own--here we are just kidding ourselves. They have a system of education which came from the French, and no matter what we do we have got to tear that down and point out to them its weaknesses. It's not an up-to-date French education system anyway. It's 30 or 35 years old. We're still trying to get the American concept to them. No matter what we say, this is what we are really trying to do. Let's be honest; let's come right out and say it. It wouldn't be a pure American system, no, but it would have American concepts.

lot of the problems we have had in the past will disappear. a lot of things that we have lacked before, so I am hopeful that a contract there. This man should be able to bring to the deanship

tion, organization and curriculum, in the program of elementary teacher education. We should have been, in my estimation, housed at the Saigon Normal School. We should have had an intensive effort right in the normal schools, rather than have one man in the normal school, one at the demonstration school, and one man at the in-service center. Then we have a man in Vinh Long, a man in Qui Nhon, a man in Ban Me Thuot, the chief of party and the interpreters. All of the office help is blocks away. Everything needs to be located right on the campus, and it could have been. I think we could have used the Saigon school as a model, move right in and do an intensive job there. The Vietnamese working under, once again, basically a French system of administration have to go to the man above them each time to ask for permission to make changes, and then they have to go back and ask that man to write out the order for the change etc. When we have people in the outlying areas, they aren't really effective being as they are not where the decisions are made. The people in Saigon should have been very effective in that they are right there where the Ministry of Education is.

Most of the Vietnamese educators (I think) are not interested in making a lot of serious changes primarily because they don't understand what we are trying to do. This comes back to a lack of communication, a lack of ability to communicate, which shows a general lack of orientation. I think you have got to go back to where they are training the teachers, which really gives you a small group of people to work with, which is what you want to be effective. If you are trying to go out and work with all the teachers, then you won't get very far. If you can work with a small group, and go from that small group to the decision makers in the ministry, and come right back to that group and let them work with their own teachers, then you can make some changes.

Some of these top level educators who I dealt with could speak English, but not all. But even those who spoke English, don't necessarily think the same as we do. You can teach a man Vietnamese, but unless he understands how the Vietnamese think, he still cannot convey his ideas. We sent many people to the States where they would receive a B.S. degree, or an M.S. degree or maybe both, (we even had one who got his masters and doctorate in the United States) but once they are sent back to Vietnam, the contract that we send them to the States on isn't firm enough with the Vietnamese and it's liable to be broken. To give you an example, we had a girl who was sent to Southern Illinois University and got a degree in elementary education. She would make an ideal teacher in either the normal school or in a

demonstration school: What was her assignment when she returned? Teaching English in a high school. A tremendous waste! How we could have used this girl. This was one we could have worked with. One way to get around this is to tighten up our contract provisions when we send them to the States. We need a better understanding with the Vietnamese government--in this case it should be understood that when these people come back they have to be assigned to elementary education and work specifically in Elementary Teacher Education or the Ministry of Education.

One of the big problems we have had in the past, and to a certain extent we still have, although it's improving, is a rather unstable government in Vietnam. We have had tremendous changes at the ministry level, and from one ministry to another. But if you have got it down in black and white on a contract signed by the current minister, then you have got a lever to go in to the new minister and say, "Look, here it is." Another way of helping to insure this is a closer follow-up of the participants as they return, with a provision stating they are to check in with AID or whichever group it was through which they got their participant scholarship. For example, we had a Montagnard man who was the first Montagnard to receive a college degree outside of Vietnam. He graduated from our university at home. Now the Montagnards present a whole series of problems all of their own in Vietnam. The normal school at Ban Me Thout is for Montagnards exclusively. It is a very small school, and they have an enrollment of 150. There is only one place this man should be; obviously, he should be in the normal school at Ban Me Thout--the Montagnard normal school. We followed this man with great care as he came along through our own university back home. When he was returned to Vietnam, one of our men met him at the airport and led him around place to place; to the Directorate of Pedagogical Affairs, to the ministry, and etc. And it was strictly through our efforts that he was assigned to the normal school at Ban Me Thout. This is the sort of thing I mean by following up. He takes the man by the hand and takes him to the ministry and says, "Here is a man we have just brought back from the participant training program who has a degree in Elementary Teacher Education. Where are we going to assign him?" You are subtly applying pressure to the minister. Also if you've got it in the contract you also have a little better lever. I feel this is AID's responsibility, except in cases like ours where we are charged with elementary teacher education, we are the ones who interview and recommend those for participant training, and AID does the sponsoring.

U.S. Bureaucratic Relationships

I didn't get to take advantage of the AID orientation program, but this is probably because of a lack of knowledge by our chief of party, or the people on our team. The Mission in Saigon structured our job, in my opinion too much. When you talk about Elementary Teacher Education, I think our people in the university know more about it than the AID people. Over all I think these people are better qualified than the usual AID person, but we need the support functions of AID to help us.

Our team was supposedly from Southern Illinois University but they had to go off campus and get other people because they had trouble recruiting on campus. Vietnam, of course, has been hard to recruit people for, because you cannot take your family and so forth. I am sure that a lot of our people on campus would have been willing to come even with the hardship of being separated from family, if the university would have been far-sighted enough to, let's say, sweeten it up a little bit for them--"Send me to ATC with my family for three months before going on to my post." One member of our team was recruited right out of the DOD school system in Europe, because they were cutting back there. Another member of our team was recruited out of retirement from a county superintendent office in Pennsylvania. Another man was recruited from the University of Delaware. But they were all under contract to Southern Illinois University. Most of the team people who have been there have been from our campus but as it stands right now, there are only two people out of seven who are from our campus. It just worked out that way, because we are cutting back. They started to increase the size of our team, without specifying their specialties, plus it was based partly on the basis of who they could recruit. Sad, but that's true. As a result, when I arrived in Vietnam, they really didn't know how to use me.

Program Evaluation

Now having had this experience, I would want to see certain things in the contract that were not in the original; like a more definite delineation of our jobs, for one thing. A system of orientation before we go, including language training. A thorough system of debriefing and utilization of people when they come back. A little sharper idea of what our relationship with AID is, in terms of our working relationship--things of this nature.

At one time we had twelve members on our team, but it's been cut back since. When they started giving the blank check for the program in Vietnam, my own personal opinion is that some people used this as a means of building their own empire, and the Director of Education was one. He built a fabulous empire. After Tet, it

Education Topics and Questions

In terms of my effectiveness in Vietnam, it took me 15 to 18 months to really get to know what I should have known when I got there. So I only had six or seven months to be really effective. I have made suggestions to the Directorate of Pedagogical Affairs and to the Director of all the normal schools. I think, given six months they could bear fruit.

My suggestions dealt mainly with administrative organizational patterns. These people in Pedagogical Affairs have been talking about needing more normal schools; of course I think what they were thinking was that they need more schools because they need more output, but they are also thinking in terms of AID paying the cost of their new schools, as we did when we built a school in Qui Nhon and in Vinh Long. Let's face it, we built most of their teacher training institutions. They are thinking we may continue to build for them, but they administer them very inefficiently. We don't do this at our own schools at home. We do a much better job of administering our schools, hence we are able to put many more people through them. I pointed out to the Director of Pedagogical Affairs that he needed the output, but he didn't need the schools, he needed a better administration in the schools he had. He was talking about eight new schools, and I pointed out to him that he might build one new school, and if he would change his administrative practices in all the existing schools, he could have the output of eight additional schools. He understood what I was talking about: He just had a meeting with all the directors of his normal schools. I heard a lot of my ideas coming back to me, and a lot of resistance coming back from the director, but he stayed with them. Now whether one of the other members of our team will continue with the ideas that I have been kicking around, I don't know. I think if I could have been there another six months, I could have brought it down to where they would have all understood what I was saying. As a result I think the contract period should be longer than two years. On the other hand, if they had the proper orientation before they went, maybe two years would be enough--I don't know.

crumbled which, in effect, means the feeling at home began to change. At one time he had 175 to 190 people under him, but this was cut back to something like 60 to 75. What is an adequate number? I think that should be determined by realistic programming. At the present I don't think the programs that are being developed are at all realistic. This is their problem. In my own field they had three direct hire people in audio-visual. They were primarily assigned to the textbook program. We had use of a damned good film library, plus radio, plus television, plus slides, plus your film strips. This has been cut back now to one person, but when you consider that roughly 90% of the classrooms in Vietnam do not have electricity, the film program becomes a luxury. The transportation problems are fabulous in a country at war like Vietnam. The whole approach, I think, is unrealistic. They could have directed efforts in audio-visual more constructively than they did. You have a world of non-projective material--they could have worked on charts, pictures, etc. The textbook program could have been such a program if it hadn't gotten bogged down in the bureaucracy of AID.

Vietnam is a place where radio education can become a fabulous thing. You don't have to have electricity for radio--you can use your transistor battery. You can do the same with a tape recorder. This could have been a much more important thing than trying to develop a film library. Certainly, films are dramatic--this is my business. I have run a film library for years so I am quite familiar with the media. But if you can't use it anymore than you can use it in Vietnam, then you had better use something else. You have got to understand how they teach in Vietnam, first of all, to understand a little bit of what I am saying. And that is, normally a teacher, I am now speaking of teachers from the elementary level right on up the line, who teach from notes that they have. This is copied into their copy books by the students and regurgitated to them in just that way. They do not have a library system where they can assign outside reading, they don't believe in it first of all, because then the teacher might be questioned on something they know nothing about. They give and take in the classroom; they give it and they take it back in the same way. They do not have a system where you give a concept and then let them try to find out if it is right, or if there is another way of approaching it. Now, I think eventually they will be ready for a film library. I think that AID could have worked with a small group in terms of maybe a motion picture production unit, producing films directly for Vietnam, but this will take a number of years to accomplish. This would be the forward looking part of the program, so that one of these days when the war

is over, and the power does become available in the classroom, they could be ready to have their own films. Also, you could have worked with a translation project for films creating Vietnamese soundtracks, and making it an optical track so that we could print in the language. But our government wants things they can reduce to numbers so that they can say, "We have trained 3,000 teachers in the past year or five years," or whatever. This way somebody can get up and say we have done this and done this, but without getting into depth about what these figures mean. I mentioned the figure, 3,000 teachers, that we had trained--all right, this is a figure that I am pulling out and it may not be accurate, but it's a rough guess in regards to the Hamlet Teacher Program. Now the Hamlet Teacher Program is designed to train teachers for the countryside. Actually, they are to be more than teachers, but how much training did they get? At most, three months, some of them only one month. Of course, they can only teach what we know in America as grades 1, 2, and 3, which are 5, 4, and 3 in Vietnam. Some of these people only had five years of education to begin with--some had seven. They were given one to three months education, then they were shoved out as teachers. Now, as a temporary measure this might have been all right, but this program has been running for five years, and many of these teachers are going to still be teaching 20 years from now, or 30 years from now. The same amount of effort put into a really comprehensive teacher education program would have developed over the five year period, approximately the same number of people. We would have made it possible to take people who had at least nine years of education before they started and maybe as much as 11, and if you could have given them as much as two years of training, you would have had a more adequately trained teacher, but you wouldn't have been able to make an instant impression, yet over a long range it would have been better. If we had kept the class sizes the same (60-75 students), but increased our teacher output and capability, I think we would have been a lot better off. Upgrading the curriculum and reducing class size and all of this would have been the next order. I don't think we could have made that kind of change in the beginning, when they were already short of teachers. First increase your output and your capability for output, then start cutting back.

I think now we have got a monkey on our back with all the teachers we have got from the hamlet program. Now we have got to go back and give those teachers an adequate education before we can start cutting back on class size. By the way our team has suggested several programs to upgrade teachers, but they have not been accepted yet. They had under their audio-visual program, a radio education

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plan, but it's not used as comprehensively as it should be because the teachers want to teach from notes. This is a resistance on the part of the culture to a certain extent. We have not been able to educate the teachers to use this tool yet. We are working on this, though. Although the Vietnamese tend to hold an educated person in high esteem, to them it is no problem to close down the schools anywhere from one to six months, and then just pick up from where they left off. Even in the medical school, where they were closed from the end of January, to May, there were no provisions made for the time they lost. Those doctors and dentists who they turned out just lost that much education, but the Vietnamese didn't seem to worry about it. The same is true with the teachers who they turned out--they lost all that time during Tet. No provisions were made for makeup work--they just take their exams and go on.

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