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# DEBRIEF OF A CORDS AGRICULTURAL ADVISOR

## KIEN PHONG AND KIEN TUONG, VIETNAM

## 1968

### Background

I received my Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture from West Virginia State College in 1943. After a tour of army duty in Europe in 1946, I entered Michigan State and did my graduate work. I received my Masters in animal husbandry in 1947. I worked in Michigan for a couple of years and in 1949 I returned to my alma mater, West Va. State College to begin work as a 4-H Club agent and agricultural agent in West Va. State College. I worked there until 1955, and then I was sent to head up the state 4-H Club camp as its director from 1955 until 1961 at which time I was called back to Charleston, West Va., where West Va. State College is located, to take over the position of state leader of extension work. This lasted until the fall of 1961 at which time we integrated extension service as a result of a Supreme Court decision to integrate schools and activities of education. All of our extension program came under West Va. State College before integration, but now that integration has come about, we all went under West Va. University. So I was more or less transferred to West Va. U. as program development leader. While at the University in July of 1964 I went over to East Africa in the International Program of West Va. U., which was funded by AID.

We began this program under the leadership of Dr. Ernest J. Nesius. He was director of Extension and instituted this program for East Africa and set up the International Program for West Va. University for the countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. In 1964 we got a contract request from Peace Corps for the University to furnish the person to head up a program for agriculture of Peace Corps volunteers. I went through Syracuse training with these volunteers--18 of them in agriculture--and I went to East Africa with my family. We stayed there from July 1964 until August 1966. Of course, during this time I also had an opportunity to travel through Kenya and do some work in Kenya and Uganda. We were building libraries, schools, and programs in agriculture alone in all these three East African countries. We lived in Arusha, Tanzania which is near the Serengeti National Park. It was about 170 miles southeast of Nairobi and 500 miles north of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, off the Indian Ocean. My wife taught in the African schools which had about eight different nationalities of children: African, Greek, Danish, German, Norwegian, English, and French. She was fortunate at this time to have the son of the country's president in her class in Arusha, Tanzania. We stayed there and worked with the Public Works administration. We also had volunteers with the various agricultural departments to include schools, such as the Tingaru Institute and the old Montoni foster camp and the Entomology Lab. I had responsibility for all of

these in what was formerly under the British colonial program called the northern province. Although we were a private contract funded by AID for West Va. University, we still cooperated in many respects such as putting in culverts and over 2,500 miles of roads with our Peace Corps volunteers doing the supervising and advising. After my contract had expired in August 1966 I rejoined West Va. University and went into the University program as the resource development leader in extension until January of 1968.

While at W. Virginia in 1968 I was called by the Federal Extension Service several times to go overseas again. I wanted to continue with my extension program, but the challenge attracted me to this position. Also I had not been to Southeast Asia. I saw that we had run ourselves out of a job in extension now that agriculture in America had become big business. I felt that in order to get into programs of grass roots agriculture, we should go to a country that's undeveloped. It would mean a great deal there. For instance when we had a meeting in Vietnam on say, a rat control program, we called a group for a meeting. Unlike in the States where 20 people would be a pretty good number, it was nothing to have 200 people coming out to a meeting. These would be all farmers and rural people in my province of Kien Phong and various districts. In making the decision to go I thought about it and talked it over with my wife and decided,"Well, this is the type of thing that I really like, being in basic agriculture. Well, this would be the thing for me."

## USAID, USDA, and PASA

Officially I'm PASA employee on a two-year leave of absence from West Va. University. I'm supposed to return there in the spring or late winter of 1970. From what I understand, the relationship between USDA and AID is roughly as follows. The Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman had previously discussed with AID a request for USDA to give some assistance in this program of need and agricultural development in Vietnam. As a result of this, there was a need for more agriculturists and more technical help. The question came up: where to get it? So they turned to the USDA and in turning to the USDA, the USDA said, "Well, we need people who qualify. Where are we going to get them?" They got people like myself who were in Federal Extension work. So in taking a leave of absence in this program from West Va. I agreed to come here as a part of the committment of the USDA to become a PASA participating agency to help get this agricultural and pacification job done in Vietnam. As I understand the Federal Extension Services was part of USDA, and had the money and the contract from AID to find us, so they started to find people with the training that was needed to go to Vietnam. With this contract the Federal Extension Service, through the USDA, tells AID, "Okay, we will furnish these men and we will supervise them." Consequently my personnel supervision was mostly done through Washington. My reports were sent to Washington. In Vietnam my trip home to visit my family was processed by AID/Saigon, but things like my checks and my records were processed by the Federal Extension Service in Washington.

The only time that I was with AID in Washington was when I went through the early two-week orientation training that was coordinated through Federal Extension and AID.

## Training

### General

The training in Washington was a general sort of housekeeping, processing and things to do orientation. It also had more or less a history of the country, hitting on health, our shots, and our means and methods of moving about in the country. We saw movies on the culture of the country, activities and things of this sort. We were given the information on security and on ways and means of approaching corruption, how to help to assist in correcting them in Vietnam, and how not to get involved. We were given more intensive training in Hawaii at the A.T.C. At the Asia Training Center we had a program in tropical agriculture and training in Vietnamese language.

I don't think there was any duplication of information or instruction between the two weeks in Washington and the time I spent at ATC. Here we went into the language and the agriculture program, tropical agriculture. We visited the various departments while in Hawaii and had in-depth training programs in language, and on the island of Molokai had intensive training in agriculture. As well run as it was, I think it would really be better if all of the training could be coordinated under one roof as much as possible. I think we could go to Washington for a few days with our parent agencies such as Federal Extension Service and get our personnel information lined up. But after those few days, I think it would be a waste of time to go to Thomas Circle in D.C. and to get information on the history of the country. I did quite a bit of intensive library reading right at the ATC on the beginning of the Chinese rule in Vietnam for 939 years and down through the program including the Geneva Convention and then the International Commission. But I think the time could be cut and after our normal processing with our parent agencies that our passport documents and health records and things of this sort could be coordinated and done under one roof.

### Language

The most valuable thing that I received at ATC was Vietnamese training--language training. At the same time a knowledge of the history of the country. I reflect back and when I see statements that are made by Prince Sihanouk resulting from decisions made for instance at the Geneva convention, I can intelligently talk to my Vietnamese friends, because I know a little about it. I try to talk to the Vietnamese in the best Vietnamese language I can muster. I made FSI-1, but I've made considerable improvement in my language unlike some who didn't have an opportunity to use it too much. We call a meeting and there are 200 people at

this meeting in this village and I'm able to talk with the young kids and adults. However when I walk up to one of them and say "chao em" (Hello child) or "chao ong" (hello sir) the child or the adult is not concentrating when I'm talking because they have no idea that this guy who is an African or a black man is talking his language; this doesn't register with them. They really don't have their mind in deciphering my enunciation of Vietnamese. I guess this is normal.

At any rate, I think that we in agriculture should have language training. Without it I couldn't, for instance, be by myself. My interpreter was with the Filipino community development advisor one day, and I went on a five mile Mekong Delta motorboat trip with my ag service chief, who speaks very little English. I had my MACV doctor with me too. We got in the motorboat, went on and stayed all day long. I had no difficulty whatever in general Vietnamese. We went through various areas of discussion with the district chief. I got along perfectly well without an interpreter. I could go into any village now and get along generally without an interpreter. I just couldn't do this if I had not taken language training. Speaking Vietnamese means a lot to these people, especially the older people. They see me walk into a community or a meeting and speak some Vietnamese and start speaking to me and telling me that I speak like a native. I know that I don't speak that well but, nevertheless, I can communicate and find my way.

While we are on language I've found that the Vietnamese are very much oriented in the French language. This is one of the first things many of them will ask us. Do you speak French? I have a friend who has done a tremendous job in Nigeria, Tanzania, and Morocco. He received some of the top AID awards in his work in Nigeria in the Poultry program. So a couple of months ago he came to Vietnam to assist in the protein program in poultry and swine. He doesn't speak any Vietnamese, but I've been with him in and out of Saigon in discussions in the eight agricultural protein setups in our office, and also out in the offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Director of the Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers cooperative program. When he gets to talking with the Vietnamese he talks to them in French. He gets along as well as I do. They just seem to be so elated that he could speak French. He got along with them very well. I feel that many of us have come in contact with our counterparts and their friends and that French seems to be very well liked by the Vietnamese. If there were an opportunity to just institute just a little basic French in our orientation it might be helpful.

## Position and Programs

### Personal Viewpoint

In terms of my regular job, basically I'm still doing the same thing that I would have done if I were back in the States, only it's on a sort of a more pioneering level, and more on a local level insofar as the people are concerned. I can get a lot out of it because they seem to really need

it more, not that they appreciate it more than many of our Appalachian area people of West Virginia, but I think that if I were in West Va. I'd be doing the same type of developing work, but only a higher level. That is work in some other areas such as agricultural businesses and other businesses, and even with church programs, community development and youth and adult education programs. We haven't really gone that far into it yet in detail in Vietnam. Basically the programs I'm involved in now are strictly grass roots agriculture programs. These people in Vietnam and Africa really need these types of help.

As far as my previous experiences, I don't think they have hindered me in my work in Vietnam. Often I had certain examples that I would refer to and I referred to them wondering if they would apply to the same type of situation in Vietnam. In undeveloped countries in my experience in Africa or even in Appalachia, poor people are poor, and I think that if they are in need of assistance they will accept it. If they're given education whether in 4-H Club work, in social activities, psychological activities, or camping activities, whatever they can start to help themselves.

Through my experience in Africa considering other people's values has grown to be a part of me. Since I have been in Vietnam, I really don't see too much difference in getting poor people to react to their needs if we put it right. That's why I believe that it's sort of the same approach that we would normally use any place in getting to people, more or less, in need of help. I don't believe that different techniques should be used on people in underdeveloped situations, however we must know how to treat them, we must know how to approach them, we must know that we must respect them as human beings and individuals, and that they have certain values and certain desires and that we must condition them for decision-making roles in what they think they need and what we feel we can make them understand is worthwhile. If we can do this we can reach the hearts of most of the people of underdeveloped countries. It's just human nature that people want to improve themselves and if given an opportunity to, they will. If we can make things better around them, they can see how they can improve themselves, their homes and their families. I think they will grasp at an opportunity for education for their children. This is the situation that has existed down through the years in these underdeveloped countries where you might say, "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer."

## Fishery Program

There are a couple programs that have just started. First, the fishery program has a long ways to go. There hasn't been too much stress on the fishery program, even though this is a tremendous source of protein. Fisheries have not been organized as a service. It's just a part of the revolutionary development program that was going on in the province. As a result they were not given the time or attention that the other services were given. However we have a tremendous opportunity in fisheries on the Mekong Delta, its tributaries, and the sea on both sides of South Vietnam.

There are all kinds of fish. Right now we are working with fish ponds with the Fishery's Department. It's just a matter of implementing programs and they will not have to import fish from Japan and Taiwan. We want them to produce them, can them, and process them, themselves as a product. After all there is a tremendous market for fish in Vietnam.

## Land Reform Program

Secondly, the land program deserves better attention or greater attention. Land reform, as I understand, in some of the provinces is beginning to take hold. But whether all of the people are satisfied and whether the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, I don't know. I haven't worked too much with it because they work with the land reform services. Although I am very interested, I don't think this is a part of agricultural responsibility. Our land reform program in Kien Phong seems to be getting off to a pretty good start. I know the land reform chief very well. I think he is a good man and really gets around and tries to do a good job. I think in the land program there is fairness and encouragement for the average poor man, or for the person who even owned the land. If he didn't own any land he would still be able to have an opportunity to buy the land that he was on. If this is the case, it's going to mean a great deal to the various provinces and to the villages and hamlets. But if the rich are going to get richer and take over the land, then it's going to be cause for some great dissension. I don't know how this would affect the hearts and minds of the people.

## Refugee Program

We have quite a few refugee camps in our province, especially in the My Tho district of Kien Phong province. There's a great need for help in the Refugee Program, and that need has not yet been met. This is one of the reasons we're going into My Tho. They need teachers, schools, housing, agricultural projects and a health program. They really need help and if we're going to do some work, this is where we better concentrate. We can't close our eyes to it, and it'll do us well to get in this area and help them as soon as possible. By getting some of this affluence out of Saigon and the other big cities and into the countryside we might win.

The GVN gave some lip service and a little support to the Refugee Program. Actually my work does not involve the refugee program except maybe with an ag project such as we are going into now. My American refugee counterpart in the office next door to me seems to be a pretty good man, and he is just getting into the program. He recognizes the problems. He has discussed and written up quite a report on the refugee situation, and it is sad--sad, indeed, in my province. CORDS must get into the program if we are really going to make some headway.

## General Outlook for Agriculture

The rice program is okay, but other countries are also getting good results with IR-8. They have rice, but they have so many other products that they are exporting and producing. The IR-8 miracle rice has been a tremendous success. Rice is the biggest product in my province. However we are launching into poultry, swine, rabbits and fish, fishery industries in addition to some other small agri-businesses and things of this sort. Rice is primarily the product. We are more or less at stand still, but I think we have to really get into other types of agricultural production as well as human development like 4H Clubs. It's with these young people that the future of the country lies. And I didn't want to get into it, but I've gotten into the equivalent 4H Club program which we call over there "Bung T" or the 4T's. We've had training programs in poultry raising. With and through my counterpart, we're teaching them how to vaccinate day old baby chicks and maintain sanitation. I hope to introduce a rabbit program when I get back.

In poultry we had the New Hampshire breed. We had that in Africa in our Peace Corp Program; and it did wonderfully. They have been acclimated to most of the tropical countries now. Another experience with poultry was once when we got our counterparts and our local farmers ready and motivated to build poultry houses and start demonstrations. We were having a very difficult time trying to get chickens unless we bought them on the local market and in Saigon. The prices were exhorbitant. For instance, I bought some for my Special Forces group and I had to buy them in Saigon; a three day old chick cost 120 piasters--in other words, once chick was approximately a dollar. I got the money from the AID (Aid-in-Kind) Fund. This was for a demonstration project to teach the other local Vietnamese in the community so that they might get the idea and go out on their own and utilize the AIK resources or their own resources and do the same thing we were doing. The soldiers and the Vietnamese worked to take care of this project. But in order to do this they built their own huts and I bought the chicks out of our AIK fund as approved by our province senior advisor and through our Civic Action Program.

I'm optimistic in feeling that I'm on the road to getting something done. I've gotten the people pretty much worked up in my area of what they can achieve if they really get interested and what is possible. We have a very good farm cooperative. If we could get a farm cooperative going in all the provinces this would be a tremendous help--where they could buy in bulk at much cheaper prices such as the farm cooperatives have done in the United States. This would be a good thing. In my Farm Cooperatives, the Farmers Association in Kien Phong, we got off to a good start. They had already begun to stock up and they had a warehouse. I imagine by January, we will be getting quite a bit of fertilizer, seed, and insecticides stocked up for the benefit of the farmers in the area. This will lower the prices of the support commodities for farms in the province.

## General Evaluation

As an overall evaluation, I think the American assistance is expensive, but successful. There are certain areas we could cut corners. In any area you are going to have corruptions and vice, and this is one of the areas we are going to have to overlook. Overall, I most recognize that we are doing a job for them that otherwise would never be done under Communists, Socialists or any other type of setup. The average one appreciates it. The Vietnamese will be ready to stand on their own feet when we get the pacification program going and they are sufficiently taught to carry on for themselves. It's important that we continue this pacification program and even to speed it up and to keep professional people in there and competent people who are dedicated. If I were in a position of full authority I'd make the ag program more or less be set aside from the military, in other words, keep an extension type of program directly under AID without the military supervision. I would more or less design an agriculture program on the basis that we were so successful in designing and doing here in America. As it is now, everything is under the CORDS program. There are quite a few problems involved, especially with the system of MACV and CORDS coordinating problems together, programs together. If the agriculture program could be set up as a separate entity, an agriculturalist could go on his own and devise a program and work directly with Vietnamese counterparts with the programs they wanted and have more say and leverage in deciding what to do and how to approach and carry out certain programs. I would also try to change the logistics problems. We had to share vehicles with three or four people. About 300 new Fords and Falcons came to Saigon, the Scouts were to be released to the provinces. Some of them came, but many of us didn't see them. Certainly we have to have them if we're going to do our job.

The third change would be to eliminate some of the reporting. We spend over half our time working on reports. Reports coming from every specialist in the region. The AID people in Saigon depend on us to do research for them and get information from the province that they want to compile. We make up these reports or obtain this information from Vietnamese officials in our province to send into the requestor. At times these reports can get pretty heavy. All in all though I guess you have to take the bitter with the sweet and do the best you can. If we continue to hammer away at our commitment we'll be successful. Right now a lot depends on peace talks, and what the South Vietnamese, the Americans, the North Vietnamese, and the NLF, decide to do as far as getting together.

## Vietnamese and Relations with Vietnamese

I've talked with my counterparts and I try to keep good rapport with them. We were on a first name basis, and I have had tremendous success with this so far. I've tried to make myself well known to their staff. Frankly, I've acted natural, and I find that these people are just like

anyone else, in spite of their culture. We can't influence them any more than they want to be influenced.

W've been told many times that the Vietnamese appreciate what we're doing, that we're helping them. They appreciate and ask questions about certain things. While I don't draw up or make any comparisons with the VC, once in a while the VC subject matter will come up. Since we are raising all this rice, the VC are in there so they are getting this rice in tax. There, tax is in rice and money. They can't have a farm program because if they started one then they might be out the next week on military operations. They had to depend on the production of agriculture in South Vietnam and on what success we're having. So they tax the farmers and get their part. We have certain alerts that we have to watch for, farmers who might be storing rice to supply the VC. I haven't come across this yet, but we are on the alert to it that there are suspicions that this is happening. But without a doubt, I know we have to accept the fact that they're going to get some of our products. But this is part of gaining the victory. I guess we're going to have to go through with it until we get them out.

The Vietnamese really want to improve their country. We are making headway with the Pacification Program. Without the Pacification Program we couldn't get very far, and consequently couldn't succeed without the military. So it's going to take a coordinated effort. I do feel that this Pacification Program is the thing that is going to cement the hearts and minds of these people, that we are going to achieve their allegiance in this respect.

The Vietnamese realize that education is important. While education is at a very low ebb in Vietnam now, lack of schools, lack of teachers, they know that this is the important thing that's really going to mean anything to the country. The ap doi moi is helping this too. It is all part of the pacification effort. We denounce the VC and help the people gain that much more confidence in our program.

The greatest frustration in relations with the Vietnamese is in the attitudes of the Vietnamese themselves towards other Vietnamese. I get out on a program and I expect the Vietnamese to come out and support me. But I find out that I can't find them. If they have a holiday, let's say on Friday, and we are scheduled to train some young people in our poultry program for our 4-T work, and we're supposed to have this training program on Sunday, and we're supposed to have the meeting for final planning on Saturday--Friday, Saturday and Sunday everybody takes off, nobody works. I mentioned to them that you just don't disappoint children this way, especially if we had promised them that this program would be coming up. They were expecting it. I had used vehicles to transport them and we had chickens that we had purchased through the AIK fund for demonstration purposes, and because the holiday came up on Friday, a Vietnamese holiday, then nobody works on Saturday and Sunday. They called it off before Sunday, but they let me know that they were calling it off on Sunday and didn't have the program. There were approximately 100

children diappointed. They were really looking forward to coming here for this training program. They had indicated and certainly accepted the fact that they would be getting this training and start some projects in 4-T work. I just told the staff, my counterpart staff and the women that you just don't disappoint children in this way. They had anticipated this and had looked forward to it. It didn't make any difference. They didn't do anything except to stay off for three days, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. None of them worked. We don't know what this will do to the hearts and minds of these children either when they have something like this that they expect. You know, to go on with their work, to be built up that this is going to happen and then it's called off because there's a holiday on Friday and nobody's around on Saturday and Sunday. This is one of the frustrations. Of course, as long as we're there as advisors I know we're going to have to do some things for ourselves. I mean to initiate programs because they won't. They really have to be pushed a great deal.

## R.D. Cadre

There are not too many RD cadres in Kien Phong. When I was in Go Cong province, from July up until the end of September, the RD cadres were very effective because the Ministry of Agriculture of Vietnam was issuing pigs into the swine program into hamlets and villages to perpetuate pig raising. The RD cadres delivered 65 pigs between August and September, to different hamlets and villages in Go Cong province. At each one, the RD cadre was there to organize the people, to help supervise and guide the program. The provincial council chairman always travelled with us too. The program started somewhere around 1963 or 1964. It would have gone further, but there was a lull and it became dormant. The reason for it was the lack of money on the part of the Ministry of Agriculture. They had to buy these pigs and they just didn't have the money to provide pigs for these many and varied hamlets and villages. As I see it, the RD cadres were doing a pretty good job. In each area where we stopped, they were all there and they were helping to keep the peace among the people. All we had to do was move in and let the RD cadre and the ad hoc chief and his staff do all the work.

## The Filipinos

Most of the communications are done in the CORDS program through the Filipinos. They send messages and carry messages from one province to the other over the radio. If I want to go to Saigon to the Ministry of Agriculture with my counterpart, then he makes the arrangements for me to get on the Air America planes to go to Saigon, to get me on the manifest. There's not much difference between the Filipinos and the Vietnamese. They are received well. Insofar as the military is concerned, the Filipinos are not involved in combat and fighting the Vietnamese. Therefore there isn't fear about serving them in restaurants. I think this fear is only natural. They see Americans come in and they refuse

to feed the Americans. I've been told by Vietnamese that a restaurant near me will not serve Americans. They say this is because the VC will get them. They don't know whether the VC are going to win in the end. If the VC do win, they feel they are done for.

## Security

I crossed the river in Kien Phong about a mile from where I live. When you cross this bridge you go into the community of My Phu, a hamlet. I understand that in May it was strictly VC territory, just across the river from me. Of course the province senior advisor, the military man, encouraged me in trying to get my counterpart to launch out into the areas, hamlets and villages to try some little projects. My counterpart would refrain and pull back saying, "No, that's VC territory." But the PSA seemed to feel that given time and all, the VC will be out of there. Since I've been home I've heared quite a bit about the VC along the Cambodia border now. I haven't heard any name of a place that I'm familiar with yet, so evidently they aren't near me or near Cao Lanh where the VC activities have been stepped up.

Insofar as VC activities, I've been out and into the villages and into the rice fields, driving the Scout outside of town, not too far because I can't drive it very far. If I decide to drive any further, it would always be toward Sadec or going toward Can Tho, the regional headquarters. But as far as the farms are concerned, I can only go so far, maybe two or three miles at the most outside of Cao Lanh by car, while I go to the districts by motor boat on the Mekong Delta and by helicopter and plane. This was the only way we could go to some places such as the Plain of Reeds, the floating rice area of Kien Phong province.

Personally I haven't experienced any VC activity. On the outskirts of town at night we might get an alert, it could be in one part of town, or the Special Forces in another part of town, or Vietnamese companies in another part of town. All the civilians were under one roof in our offices--refugee advisor, agricultural advisor, community development advisor, and public safety advisor, PSD, PSA and two more advisors. We ate in the Army mess hall, and I visited and socialized with the soldiers after working hours up until after the movie at nights when I went home. I came home at night at 10:30 or 11:00, back to my headquarters alone, driving through town. We all did it and we never experienced anything, not since September anyway.

I understand there was quite a lot of activity at Tet 1967, before me. This was what I hear, that there were VC in the area, but I haven't seen any VC in the area--only when we get an alert when the fliers go up at night. Of course, we civilians are supposed to move into the bunkers or into our quarters and let the military take over. But we are interested and we do want to see what's happening. Being an ex-soldier in World War II and in quite a little bit of combat at that, I wouldn't be one just to go in. I'm able to observe and see that we are able to contain any efforts of the VC to come into town. Whether

they want to come in or not, I don't know, or whether they are that strong or not, I don't know. Whether they are strong enough for an offense is left up to the military to decide.

I have access to a carbine which was issued by Special Forces. We did have arms in our quarters where I lived. It was for our own protection in case something happened. We had it all in one room there and had access to it. We could go in and get it should there be a need. We had often discussed that we hoped that we could get some arms, and I hope that I can. I wanted one to carry with me because most people tell me I'm carzy to go out without arms. In fact, I don't carry any when I go out on field trips and into the districts and so forth. But I do plan to.