NOTICE: Given the sensitive nature of the personal comments made herein, the author requests that (1) no further circulation beyond the recipient be given to this document; (2) it be returned to him after reading; and (3) no citations be made without his permission.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE "NEW MODEL" PACIFICATION PROGRAM — 1966-1969

R. W. Komar

May 7, 1970
This analysis of pacification organization and management in South Vietnam is believed to be the first comprehensive systematic treatment of the pacification program. It evolved from a three-day seminar at RAND in November 1969, which included an extensive question-and-answer session with two U.S. Army historians who are doing the official history of the Vietnam War. The basic question-and-answer format has been retained, but extensively restructured, edited, and added to by the author to provide a more coherent and analytical account.

While the time frame covered includes all pacification efforts beginning with the French after World War II, and continuing into 1970, the emphasis is on the period 1966-1968 when the present "new model" pacification program was conceived and organized, and encountered its first setbacks and successes.

The paper concentrates on the organization and management of this essentially Vietnamese (even if largely U.S.-sponsored) pacification effort -- a unique large-scale experiment in how to cope with insurgency war. For this reason, but also because of the background of the contributors, it is written mostly from a Saigon and Washington viewpoint. It is designed as a contribution to a RAND analysis under ARPA auspices of U.S. government organization and performance in counter-insurgency war. Since Vietnam is a recent example of active large-scale insurgency (it was more too, of course), the 1966 and later pacification program represents one major aspect of how we attempted to cope with it. How did we organize? What were the chief problems and constraints? What did we accomplish? What lessons can be learned? This paper attempts some preliminary answers.

A word about the participants. The initial interview questions (since added to extensively) were prepared by Mr. Thomas W. Scoville of the Current History Branch, OCMH, Department of the Army (who also served in the CORDS Evaluation Branch in Vietnam) and Dr. Charles H. MacDonald, Chief of the Current History Branch, OCMH. Replies were made by Colonel Robert H. Montague, former Executive Officer to Deputy for CORDS to COMUSMACV; R. W. Komer, former Deputy for CORDS, and Special
Assistant to the President; and Richard Moorsteen, former senior member of the Special Assistant's White House staff and then Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State. Everything not otherwise attributed was written by the author.

Both a strength and a weakness of this paper is that it represents the views of actual participants in certain phases of pacification and "other war" management. Without this firsthand knowledge it would be extremely difficult to reconstruct a coherent analytical account of what actually took place and why. Moreover, especially in a study that seeks to analyze organizational and management problems, only participants can provide the full flavor of the environmental and bureaucratic constraints and other factors involved. Indeed one of the great advantages of having been a participant is a heightened sense of the limits of the feasible, of what can and can't be done under the circumstances of the time. Of course, a corollary weakness is the inevitable tendency of participants to see the very planning, launching and execution of policies and programs, or the creation of new institutions as accomplishments in themselves, instead of looking at them from the standpoint of what, if anything, they actually achieved.

The author tentatively plans to flesh out this study, with the help of others, in order to produce an even more detailed analytical report on a unique experiment in how to cope with active insurgency, which could then become a book.
# CONTENTS

PREFACE .......................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter

I. PROBLEMS IN WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ................. 1
   Difficulties of objective historical research .......................................................... 1
   Need to include pacification .................................................................................. 2
   Good sources vs. poor ones .................................................................................... 3
   Over-conventional U.S. approach ........................................................................... 3
   Pacification as a Vietnamese Program ................................................................... 6
   Role of personalities .............................................................................................. 8
   Role of innovation or lack of it ............................................................................... 9
   Fragmented nature of Vietnam war ....................................................................... 10
   Importance of organization, management, resources ........................................... 12

II. EARLY PACIFICATION INITIATIVES -- 1956-1965 ........................................... 13
    Failure of Strategic Hamlet Program .................................................................. 13
    USOM/MACV coordination -- 1964-1965 ............................................................... 15
    Role of Jim Killen .................................................................................................. 16
    Hop Tac experiment -- 1964 ................................................................................. 17
    OSA vs. MACV concepts ....................................................................................... 19
    Lansdale influence ............................................................................................... 22
    Single manager experiment in three provinces .................................................... 23

III. INCREASING FOCUS ON PACIFICATION -- 1966 ........................................ 24
     Warrenton Meeting -- January 1966 ................................................................... 24
     Honolulu Conference -- February 1966 ............................................................... 25
     New role for Porter .............................................................................................. 25
     New White House Special Assistant for "Other War" .......................................... 26
     Komer staffing pattern ....................................................................................... 28
     Roles and Missions (Jacobson) Report ................................................................. 30
     Mission Priorities Study ..................................................................................... 31
     PROVN Report .................................................................................................... 32
     August 1966 Komer proposals ......................................................................... 32
     Genesis of Civil/Military Integration Concept .................................................. 35
     Porter/MACV/Washington relations ................................................................. 36
     McNamara Reorganization Proposal -- September 1966 ................................. 37
     The OCO Counterproposal .................................................................................. 39
     Manila Conference -- Ky Offer of ARVN Battalions ........................................... 41
     Long An Pilot Program ....................................................................................... 42
     Abortive NSAM on war strategy ......................................................................... 42
     MACV role in RD ............................................................................................... 43
     Evaluation of OCO ............................................................................................. 45
     Work of Komer WH/Office -- 1966-1967 ............................................................ 47
        Devaluation of June 1966 ............................................................................... 47
        Piaster Ceiling on U.S. expenditures .............................................................. 47
        AID/DOD transfer program ............................................................................ 48
        Post-hostilities planning started ..................................................................... 48
        Land reform .................................................................................................... 48
Vietnam Training Center.......................... 48
Cracking Saigon port bottleneck ................. 49
AID Vietnam Bureau .................................. 50
The Sub-Cabinet "Non-Group" ....................... 51

IV. REORGANIZATION AND BUILDUP -- 1967 .......... 52
  Guam Conference March 1967 ....................... 52
  Working out of Komer role ....................... 53
  NSAM 362 Concepts .................................. 54
  Final Komer Memo to President on Vietnam ........ 57
  Komer status in MACV ............................... 58
  MACV Directive 10-12 creates CORDS .............. 61
  Removing U.S. Division Advisors from Command chain 62
  Putting territorial security on the map ........... 63
  Launching Project TAKEOFF ......................... 64
  Performance in TAKEOFF priority areas .......... 66
    Improving 1968 pacification planning ............ 66
    Accelerating Chieu Hoi Program .................. 67
    Starting attack on VCI ............................ 67
    Improving RVNAF Support of pacification .......... 67
    Expanding Nd team effort ......................... 68
    Increasing refugee care .......................... 69
    Revamping National Police ....................... 69
    Pressing Land Reform ............................. 70
  Problems of land reform in wartime .............. 70
  Evaluation of 1967 Nd priority areas .............. 72
  Increasing emphasis on pacification .............. 73
  MACV attitude toward improving RVNAF ............. 74

V. THE TET 1968 SETBACK, RECOVERY, AND THE FIRST
  ACCELERATED PACIFICATION CAMPAIGN ............... 76
  Advance Warning of TET Offensive ............... 77
  TET setback to pacification ..................... 78
  Positive TET impact on GVN ....................... 80
  GVN general mobilization ......................... 80
  Mobilization impact on CORDS programs .......... 81
  Civil defense revitalized ....................... 82
  Operation Recovery ................................ 82
    Field expedients -- 10/10/5 program ............. 83
    Special recovery fund ............................. 83
    Joint Recovery Committee and staff .............. 84
    Operating Dong Tom ................................ 85
    Saigon Civil Assistance Group .................. 86
  Genesis of the first APC .......................... 86
  Essential features of APC ........................ 88
  Relationship of "big unit" war to pacification .... 90
  Comments on Sir Robert Thompson's views .......... 90
  Komer picks his own successor .................... 92
  Results of first APC .............................. 92

VI. PACIFICATION IN THE LARGER CONTEXT ............... 94
  Washington War Management ....................... 94
  LBJ and McNamara roles ........................... 96
Joint command over ARVN? ........................................ 97
Policy against using U.S. forces in pacification .......... 100
U.S. troops in quasi-pacification roles .................. 102
Marine CAPs .................................................. 102
Army MATs .................................................... 103
Deployment of U.S. troops to Delta ......................... 103
Problems in using U.S. troops ............................... 104
Role of ARVN forces in pacification ....................... 106
Quality of RVNAF support .................................. 107
Improving RVNAF performance .............................. 108
Role of ARVN Division Commanders ....................... 110
RVNAF reorganization ...................................... 111
Revamping GVN central pacification structure .......... 112
Close CORDS and Komer relations with GVN ............. 114
ROKs and Aussies in pacification .......................... 118

VII. RURAL ECONOMIC REVIVAL AND OTHER ECONOMIC ISSUES .... 120
Rationale for CORDS economic revival efforts ............ 120
New Life Development and Village Development Programs 121
Stress on Opening roads and waterways .................. 122
National Highway Program .................................. 123
SEABEE teams .............................................. 123
Delta rock program ........................................ 123
Opening Mang Thit Canal .................................... 124
Resource control -- plus or minus? ....................... 126
Central Logistic Agency .................................... 127
GVN Joint Medical Program ................................. 127
AID's Economic Stabilization Program ....................... 128
USAID role in rural improvement .......................... 129
Hamlet School Program ..................................... 129

VIII. THE REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ............ 131
Origin and development of 59-man teams ............... 132
1966 attempt to bring RF/PF under RD .................. 133
Bringing Thang and RD teams under JCS .................. 134
Confusion between pacification and RD .................. 134
CORDS/CIA/DOD relationships ............................ 136
The 11 criteria and 97 tasks ............................... 137
Role of RD Ministry and of Thang ......................... 137
The Vung Tau Training Center ............................. 139
Redirection of RD team effort -- 1968-1969 .............. 141
Census grievance cadre ..................................... 143
Montagnard cadre program .................................. 143

IX. THE USE OF LEVERAGE ................................... 144
Komer views on leverage .................................... 144
Abolition of Joint Signoff -- 1964 ....................... 145
CORDS use of Leverage -- 1967-1968 ...................... 146
Use of the ATK Fund ....................................... 147
Wartime corruption in Vietnam ............................ 153
CORDS efforts to cope with it ............................ 155
Pressing removal of corrupt officials .................... 155
Case of Colonel Vuong ............................... 156
X. PHUNG HOANG: THE ATTACK ON THE VIET CONG INFRASTRUCTURE ........................................ 158
Precursors to Phung Hoang ........................................ 159
Reasons for ICEx design ........................................ 161
GVN attitudes ........................................ 163
Program strengths and weaknesses ........................................ 164
National ID Card Program ........................................ 166

XI. POLICE, CHIEU HOI, REFUGEE, LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, AND PEOPLE'S SELF-DEFENSE PROGRAMS ........................................ 168
Importance of police in counter-insurgency ........................................ 168
U.S. advisory program ........................................ 168
Why not a constabulary? ........................................ 169
Inadequacy of Police Field Forces ........................................ 170
Getting behind the Chieu Hoi Program ........................................ 172
"National reconciliation" ........................................ 172
Armed propaganda teams ........................................ 173
Kien Garson Scouts ........................................ 173
CORDS efforts to help refugees ........................................ 173
Policy against refugee generation ........................................ 175
Resettlement proposals ........................................ 178
CORDS tries to improve local administration ........................................ 179
Purging Province/District officials ........................................ 179
Improving pay and allowances ........................................ 179
Restoring village/hamlet autonomy ........................................ 180
Improving GVN administration ........................................ 182
Village-Hamlet elections ........................................ 183
Genesis of PCDF ........................................ 184
Propaganda, psywar, and information ........................................ 185

XII. CORDS MANAGEMENT, REPORTING, PERSONNEL, AND ADVISOR SELECTION ........................................ 187
Komer management philosophy ........................................ 188
CORDS management techniques ........................................ 189
Komer relations with Westy, Abe, Bunker ........................................ 192
The pacification planning process ........................................ 193
CORDS reporting -- in field and Washington ........................................ 194
CORDS Evaluation Branch ........................................ 197
How measure performance ........................................ 198
The Hamlet Evaluation System ........................................ 198
Critique of HES critics ........................................ 199
TFES -- keeping tabs on RF/PF ........................................ 202
Over-optimistic reporting? ........................................ 203
Quantitative vs. qualitative measurement ........................................ 207
Was CORDS over-staffed? ........................................ 209
Getting top-notch personnel ........................................ 211
Quality of military and civilian personnel ........................................ 213
Getting logistic support for advisors ........................................ 215
Schooling of CORDS advisors ........................................ 217
I. PROBLEMS IN WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR

KOMER: The Vietnam War may prove to be the most difficult one in modern history to research. It presents a problem in historiography that we have never had before in our history, because the secondary and tertiary sources are ghastly — and because of the incredibly fragmented nature of the war. Moreover, passions have been so inflamed that the participants will be almost invariably unable to resist the temptation to square the accounts, to explain why they really did a good job rather than a bad job, why all the critics were wrong. Separating the wheat from the chaff is going to be an incredible problem and that's where we can be useful, not just on pacification. We had box seats on a lot more than that. Perhaps even more useful, we know who will be reliable sources as opposed to highly unreliable sources.

MACDONALD: We are planning a 10-subject history; we don't call it a 10-volume history because each subject may take several volumes. One of them will be a broad overall history, which we intended to do last. But General Westmoreland is anxious to get something in print fairly soon, so we have had to transfer that last volume up to the first. That's the one I'm involved in — a broad overall history of the Army in Vietnam. He wanted a history of MACV, which the Army historians simply can't do. The other services won't stand for it; so I've convinced General Westmoreland that since the Army is involved in everything, we can tell it peripherally just as we did in World War II with the Allies or the Marines and still get the story.

KOMER: That's right, because MACV was 85-90 percent Army.

MACDONALD: So that's why I'm here — for what I can pull out of these conversations. Tom [Scoville] has started a monograph on pacification in the early years. I am quite convinced, as I think others of the office are, that we're going to have to have at least one volume on pacification per se.

KOMER: There are real virtues in taking the post-1966 period when pacification really began amounting to something and getting that structured and researched before your sources begin to disappear. Moreover, my own sense is, perhaps parochially, that pacification is going to
look like one of the few bright spots in an otherwise fairly grey area. Thus there would be some virtue in getting the story of the real pacification program, real in the sense of scale and resources, in fairly early. When you go back to before 1963-1964, for example, it's going to be hard to find people. My experience has been that after about three or four years, people's memories really drop off. But they don't drop off like this [downward sweep of hand], they go down to a lower plateau. So a guy who is five years out of date may be as good ten years from now as he would be five years from now.

You're naturally concerned mostly with the period when the U.S. military, in effect the U.S. Army as executive agent, took over the pacification program, which dates roughly from May 1967. That's the only time when pacification really functioned.

This serves your volume too, because I'm sure you're going to want to devote at least a chapter to pacification. We're being heavily criticized for fighting a political/military war with almost exclusively military means. One of the few programs not subject to that stricture is pacification. So to the extent that we can show we finally did take pacification seriously, we present a much more accurate picture. The greatest problem with pacification was that it wasn't tried seriously until too late, or if not too late certainly very late in the day.

Another general comment on the importance of separating the real from the paper. An awful lot has been written about pacification in operational memoranda, conference reports, research studies, the works. You asked about the Warrenton Conference. It produced a lot of paper. You asked about the PROVN Report; it produced a lot of paper. A flood of memoranda. Research the files and you will find that people were writing about loads of things. Indeed, our little group in Washington was by no means the least articulate. For example, if you look at our files for just the period May 1966 to May 1967, the year we spent in the White House . . . we covered the waterfront. You would gain an impression from my memoranda to the President, which were read by the President (those were not things that somebody started up the line and hoped that maybe they'd hit the top decisionmaker) -- if you read the paper mill that we produced, you'd think wrongly . . .
MONTAGUE: That we had all the solutions.

Komer: There were things in there such as we don't need more U.S. troops; we're not Vietnaming the right way; we ought to do this; we ought to do that. The difference between what people said and what was actually done is immense. This is one of the lessons of this war -- how little we learned in the process. And you will be amazed how many people made excellent critical studies, made good suggestions, that never went anywhere at all. In writing the history of what actually happened, you must distinguish between these and the things that really connected up -- that led to actions (and above all to actions on more than an experimental scale). If you look at the documents alone, especially the informal ones, you'll arrive at a totally warped picture.

Let me give you a classic example. After each of his visits, McNamara usually wrote a trip report in the form of a memorandum to the President saying what he thought needed to be done, what was going wrong, what was going right, etc. These are among the most important action documents on the war . . . infinitely more important than all the JCS papers put together, which end to end would cover the world. But McNamara's trip reports could give the unwary reader a quite mistaken impression of what we actually did, because many of his recommendations were not implemented. In other words, McNamara did say frequently that we have to do more in the way of pacification; we've got to do more in the way of clear and hold; do we really need all this bombing?

MacDonald: Bob, this is the thing you constantly hear . . . way back I know when I was there in 1967 . . . we are doing this; we are going to do this; plans for each year, and we're going to do all this . . . But there seems to have been some kind of lethargy. Is this because of the Vietnamese, or why is it?

Komer: It's a very, very complicated question, Charlie, and it comes to the nub of one of the real problems we had in Vietnam. Why is it that we fought this war so poorly? I think the press is hopeless on the subject. Many military are hopeless on the subject, too. It wasn't that the Americans flubbed; it was that our troops were trained, equipped, and motivated to do a rather different thing. One of the reasons was the difficulty of moving the Vietnamese, but I would not rank
that first. . . . There is some very interesting work being done out here at Rand. A young chap named Brian Jenkins, former captain in the Special Forces, now a Rand researcher, has been asking this question. He served on Don Marshall's Task Force that was getting going just as I left. He says that basically a bureaucracy does its thing. We sent over a European-style army with tactics, doctrine, equipment, everything else designed for fighting a central war-type scenario in Western Europe. We plunked it down in the middle of Vietnam. By the way, it had a Western Europe-style air support. We fought a conventional, European-style war in Vietnam, and it was unsuccessful against a very atypical quasi-conventional Vietnamese force. Now why did we do this? Because it was what we had! I'm not inclined to be unduly critical. Did we have a Vietnam-structured force ready to go to Vietnam? Hell, no! We had a European-structured force ready to meet the main threat, which was to reinforce NATO in the event of a Russian attack. And we had to take that and put it over in the jungle and in the mountains, fighting a bunch of quasi-guerrillas who fought in a completely different style. I'm not blaming them. If you and I were the commanders and we were told to intervene, what do we intervene with? We intervene with the troops we have. And the troops we had were European-style troops, and the Air Force we had was a European-style, central war-configured Air Force . . .

MONTAGUE: Plus the intervention was at a time when the enemy had developed rather large semi-conventional units.

KOMER: Yes, which compounded the error. He fought a hit-and-run type war, and we just were not set up to . . . This is not a complete answer, because you can then ask, well, we were there for four years; why the hell didn't we learn? I can ask the preliminary question, why didn't we learn from the French? Why didn't we learn from the period 1959 to 1965 before we intervened? We had enough people out there as advisors, etc. Why didn't we learn that Vietnam was different?

MONTAGUE: We did, but the instructions didn't pass down. There was this decentralization in operation . . . people did not put out a directive, even from Washington to MACV, from MACV to . . .

KOMER: Bob is right. I think you'll find it very hard to identify the strategic directions going from Washington to Saigon. That's why
I'm saying, look out for McNamara's trip reports to the President. They were not sent to Westmoreland, or to the Ambassador. You'll find great discontinuity between them and what came out from the President and from Wheeler. Look out for the documents, even the most sensitive ones, even with the imprimatur of people on them who played a major role. I illustrate with my own experience. We wrote some brilliant analyses, plenty of mistakes in them but in general high quality, which stand up in hindsight. I adopted the McNamara technique and wrote a memo to the President each time I came back from Vietnam. Though there was a lot of nonsense in them, by and large they look pretty good, even with the wisdom of hindsight. But don't think that Komer told the President and the President then turned around and issued an order to do this, this, and this. It didn't happen that way.

MACDONALD: Westmoreland told me, contrary to what the press was saying, that he recalls only one direct contact actually with the President. This was after TET, when the President seemed to think he needed bucking up ... but he simply did not issue things directly from the White House.

KOMER: That's right. The President gave the word to McNamara, Rusk, Wheeler, Bundy, or Rostow ... they passed it out. The President did not communicate directly. But there's nothing wrong with that. If the President jumped the circuit, then there would be all sorts of ... Remember that the President's great favorite was Robert McNamara, and McNamara is a very prickly man. If Lyndon Johnson had started giving direct orders to the troops in the field, I'm sure McNamara would have resigned as Secretary of Defense.

All of my remarks to this point are gratuitous advice on methodology, on knowing what and what not to look for. This is why I urge you to look at programs more than planning, to look at what happened more than at what was written. The terrible tendency of the historian to rely on the written documents (a) because they are usually collected and available and (b) because we're trained to deal with written documents ... is to be resisted more in the case of Vietnam than almost any other conflict I can think of. And never is it more true than in pacification.

MONTAGUE: I suspect that the information is available fairly readily on each of the programs. Take RF/FP — you can trace back when
the decisions were made to increase RF/PF; then how long did it take before they started to increase; how did they build up; how were they used; was there any change in direction on the use of RF/PF and their weaponry? Trace that through, and you can sort of trace how security grew in the countryside.

When I denigrate documents, I am talking about memoranda, reports, recommendations; I'm not talking about decision documents. For example, there is MACV Directive 10-12 that set up CORDS. That's an action document. Or there was a NSAM that put me in business. That's an action document. Those were followed up, because they usually ratified decisions that had already been made informally. Or the directive for the 1968 Accelerated Pacification Campaign. That was carried out. But loads of memoranda that we wrote saying let's do this, let's do that . . .

MONTAGUE: We said they should have an APC in about May, but then on 1 November they started it.

KOMER: We were pretty damn fast as it was on that, and by the skin of our skinny, skin, skin. Let me return now to the thesis that we couldn't do anything because of the Vietnamese! Pacification was a 99 percent Vietnamese program! Every operating element of pacification was run by the GVN with GVN personnel. We had roughly speaking a 100 to 1 ratio of Vietnamese to advisors. Nor were we in the command channel. We did things behind the scenes, but mostly by informally and very discreetly cluing the Vietnamese top management. I couldn't issue any orders to the Vietnamese, nor could Westmoreland. Thus in pacification we did get a truly Vietnamese program going on a really major scale!

And remember, we had the lowest grade Vietnamese assets. When we say that we did make a Vietnamese program work from behind the scenes, it looks all the more impressive when you realize that what we had to work with were the ragtag and bobtail of the Vietnamese assets. We got the local militia, not the ARVN. We got the crummy "White Mice," the police, not the fancy military intelligence guys. We got what was left; we got the local officials, not the hot-shots who were big wheels in Saigon. In other words, we built pacification with the assets that were really not being utilized. This never appears in the documents!

MONTAGUE: In fact, we guarded against over-Americanizing it, because anyone who came along with a solution, like the Marine CAP teams,
automatically said that the way to do it better was to add a lot more Americans...you know, a half to a third of the force ought to be Americans. Once you could do that, it worked very well on a very limited scale. But if you had to think of doing that countrywide, you could see that the suggestion was ridiculous. You just couldn't get those kinds of assets. So we actually tried to guard against U.S. takeover of even a piece of the program, because of the resources it would require.

MACDONALD: What you're saying is that it is a fallacy to say that the Vietnamese cannot do it.

KOMER: Yes! While we put pacification on the map, we did it by selling it to the Vietnamese, getting the right Vietnamese put in the right places, dealing with those Vietnamese (including Thieu) who were sold on pacification. It was their program, even though we exerted an immense behind-the-scenes influence on concepts, structure, planning, etc. If we could do that with pacification, it could be done with ARVN. Maybe it is being done with ARVN at long last. We actually got Vietnamese officials fired, by mounting a campaign with the top people. In this case it had to be President Thieu, because at least initially nobody was willing to act without the President. We got a whole slew of them fired -- more than half the province chiefs, and, as of the time I left, a third of the district chiefs.

MONTAGUE: It's gone up to about two-thirds of the district chiefs now, because we kept going on that program.

KOMER: So the idea that you cannot "intervene" if you do it discreetly, that you cannot influence the Vietnamese to do what needs to be done, is a hypothesis which I feel disproved by our pacification experience.

MACDONALD: So your feeling actually, Bob, is that in the early years we did not do enough...

KOMER: We did not. I will go further and say that at the present we're still not doing enough. The key to Vietnamization in my judgment is leadership. If you could get 50 key officers fired in the ARVN right now, and 50 good guys put in their places, it would make more difference to the success of the Vietnamization program than any other single act. It would be more important than all the 8-inch howitzers, 155 millimeter
guns, advanced jets, and tanks that we're giving them. We focused on people because in pacification the target was people, and we were operating on them with people.

MONTAGUE: People didn't want to be province chiefs, because that was an end as far as promotion was concerned. People didn't want to be district chiefs . . . the job was too hard, and you got forgotten. The ARVN officers didn't want to go into pacification because it was a dead end. So you can only pick out, amongst this large group, a few fellows who were seemingly interested, motivated, and then really work on them, get them increasingly up to higher spots . . . like BG Hon, very poor commander but understands pacification very well, interested in it and has worked up to the top. We put him up to the top, really.

Komer: Since pacification was targeted on people, and really depended so heavily on the right people in the key spots, I hope that your history will give considerable attention to personalities. There were three or four dozen Vietnamese who made a whole of a difference in pacification and maybe two or three dozen Americans. The role of John Vann must not be minimized, nor the role of Nguyen Duc Thang, or Colonel Than, who was appointed post-TET as province chief in Thua Thien. The history of pacification was a history of people impressing their wills and ideas on programs and making them go. Because our assets were mostly human resources -- a half-million RF/PF, police, RD cadres, etc. -- names like Major Sauvageot and Colonel Be are very important. It was less a question of organization, bureaucracies, than it was key people. For example, we had a large Plans and Policies section in MACCORS. But I dealt with only two or three people in it, and those two or three were infinitely more important than the whole rest of the thing put together. One guy happened to be the chief of the office, Clay McManaway, one of the unsung heroes of Vietnam.

MONTAGUE: He had to use about three-quarters of these people just to feed into MACV plans that were not carried out.

Komer: Next, you historians must take into account the political context of this basically political conflict. It helps to explain a great deal. Take just one example, the decline and fall of Diem. However politically essential, it so destabilized the situation on our side
as to contribute directly to the VC gains of 1964-1965, which in turn led to U.S. intervention as the only alternative to collapse; and it literally took years after the fall of Diem to reconstitute an even modestly functioning GVN. Even pacification was affected. The Strategic Hamlet Program of 1961-1963, which seemed to be gathering steam, faltered and then disappeared in the decline and fall of Diem. In the hiatus that followed, there wasn't really another major pacification effort until we came along in 1966-1967. Of course, the advent of the "main force war" as the VC and NVA closed in for the kill also deflected interest from pacification.

Also don't neglect the role of innovation. Contrary to the general view, our performance in Vietnam is replete with experiment and innovation — military as well as civilian. The tragedy is that so few of these experiments got adopted and pushed on a large enough scale to make a significant impact. However, I think our record in pacification is rather good on this score, as I'll explain. It would be hard to find the key examples from the records alone, especially the conventional military records, but they are there. The role of innovation in pacification in particular deserves historical mention. It's one of the few areas in Vietnam where we did really innovate on a large scale. One reason why was not just because we had a vigorous, flexible, imaginative group doing it, but because there was no precedent! There was no pacification program in a real sense before we got in the act. There was no doctrine already well laid down. We wrote the bible and made up the program as we went along. The very fact that nobody else had done anything in a big way made it much easier for us. In contrast it was the fact that the U.S. military already had a long history of preparing to operate in a different way in a different theater with different doctrine, different tactics that made it so hidebound in Vietnam.

MACDONALD: Fortunately for the military historian, World War II was run in a more regular manner. You had separate headquarters turning in such and such at each level, and then you knew that you found this at that level . . .

MONTAGUE: Well, maybe you were just following military operations. I suppose if you want to follow military operations in this war, you have all the after-action reports of the people that were . . .
MACDONALD: Probably pretty easy. There's no problem there, I agree.

KOMER: No, even military operations are difficult. The real war was incredibly fragmented, and really fought at the small-unit level. There weren't many great offensives. It would be hard if you wanted to document a big operation like Junction City in early 1967.

MACDONALD: But to find out how this thing was originally planned is the problem. Although Westmoreland assures me that for anything big like that there was always a planning conference at the corps level, which he attended, and he required them to make a memo for the record; I'm not really concerned about the tactical operational history as much as I am . . .

KOMER: While Westy required a memo for the record, it was very brief: planning conference was held; General Westmoreland indicated that he had in mind a major three-division concentric offensive in III Corps in the next monsoon season; the objective would be to . . . and then give a sentence or two, e.g. he directed CG, II Field Force to develop outline plan for submission to him within ten days or two weeks, or more likely, for briefing him when he next visited III Corps within ten days or so. And that's it. That's what a memo for record is. We used to read them, because he required them to file these by cable.

MACDONALD: But even that is a fairly simple thing to decipher as compared with what we've been talking about today. This pacification thing you were doing is something entirely different.

KOMER: But even the military side of the war will be difficult to reconstruct. I think that there are few wars in which the command efforts to collect historical documents at the various levels will be less useful to the professional historian. You can get a unit journal saying what they went out and did, and what relationship that has to what the real war was all about is zilch. You know as well as I do that you are not going to be able to write a history which will only get one or two critical comments. When you write about Vietnam, your book will be absolutely excoriated unless you offer some measured judgements as to our military performance. And let me tell you, our military performance in Vietnam is a very spotty thing.

MACDONALD: But because an operation is inconclusive doesn't really make it difficult to write about the operation.
KOMER: You're writing the description of what happened. But you have to write more than the description of what happened — why it happened. And what was the result? This is an extremely difficult problem.

MONTAGUE: A guy out in MACV made a big try at history about 1964-1965 — Bill Stroud. Stroud was a non-historian, but really leaped into the job. I don't know if you've ever gotten his stuff. But his big thing was to get the experts in some area together, like pacification, and use a tape recorder and ask a lot of stinky questions. We even got so far as to get U. Alexis Johnson together with him in an evening session. He'd write up papers for you to critique. He really worked hard at it. Now your volume will be the useful, definitive work on pacification. We really haven't had anyone yet sit down and look at it broadly. People from time to time write impressionistic treatises on pacification. You get a Nighswonger — he'll write a great big thick book just sort of griping about the things that went wrong.

KOMER: All I say is don't critique the pacification program of today in terms of 1964-1965. There's no comparison. Look at what there was before us, and compare it to what we achieved by 1969 or so. At least the trend is in the right direction.

SCOVILLE: The biggest thing I've learned is the fact that, as an old CORDS evaluator, I tended to see something wrong in everything. But nothing is perfect. Therefore the whole thing really couldn't be as good as you were saying. Yet if you look at it with the perspective, the fact that 20 percent is wrong and 80 percent is right ...

KOMER: We'll settle for 70/30.

SCOVILLE: Then everything else comes into a different perspective, but one that I think is valid. You can't tell what's going to happen in the future — whether you will be completely vindicated. One may have been dealing with a problem that just couldn't have been solved.

KOMER: And maybe our "new model" pacification program is fairly good, but other things are very bad. So we benefit by the comparison. But I have the grim feeling that we may end up with a disaster in Vietnam. If it ends disastrously, the pacification effort will be engulfed with all the rest. At which point nobody, except possibly professional historians, is ever going to be able to delve in and find out that maybe
the whole thing collapsed, but the pacifiers at least were on a reasonably promising track.

Another reason I want to be helpful is because you fellows, as professional military historians, will focus much more on the essential organizational, logistic, management aspects. You know that wars aren't just won by charismatic generalship, that it takes lead time to build up, and organize, and train, and deploy. You've got to clean up the port before you can start bringing in all the supplies you want. You've got to take good care of your pacification advisory teams in the field and make sure that they're not spending 50 percent of their time scavenging when you want them to spend 100 percent of their time advising.

Lastly, I hope your history will be analytical as well as descriptive. In assessing programs, it is indispensable to look at resource allocations too. Make a simple input-output analysis. Look at what we invested in the big-unit war. Look at what we invested in the bombing war; and then look at what little we invested in pacification — the hamlet/village war. If you look at it in terms of the slender resources we had, we did pretty well. So even though the overall results may not be too impressive, in terms of output who did half as well? Given the small proportion of total U.S. resources we got, and the fact that pacification was wholly Vietnamese from the outset, I'll contend that it was clearly the most cost-effective major U.S.-sponsored program in the Vietnam War.
II. EARLY PACIFICATION INITIATIVES -- 1956-1965

While the subject of this interview is the post-1965 period, you have remarked on the reasons for the failure of previous pacification efforts, especially those under Diem. Could you elaborate on these reasons?

KOMER: I can't comment on the earlier French period. The French probably coined the term "pacification," and their experience goes all the way back to Bugeaud, Gallieni, and Lyautey in Indochina, Madagascar, and North Africa. General Ely's 1955 final report has a bit on pacification, with emphasis on winning the people and territorial security to supplement the mobile forces, but I have the impression that the French did not have a systematic, structured program. They left it largely to the initiative of individual commanders at various levels.

There are three high points in the U.S. experience post-1955, one of which really stands out -- the Strategic Hamlet Program under Diem in 1961-1963. That seems to have been the only truly major pacification effort with a plan, central direction, etc. ever attempted before the "new model" pacification of 1967. The secondary sources on that and causes for its failures ought to be plenty good. Through the French and American period up to 1964 the one big program was strategic hamlets. Unfortunately, it had a very brief life because it got caught up in the demise of Diem. The life really went out of it by the end of 1962 when Diem was getting into deep trouble.

MONTAGUE: It was a program that probably was fairly well conceived, particularly for the period in which it was being applied, but wasn't really given the resources needed. The Americans put in ten million dollars worth of plasters -- just a drop in the bucket. The Vietnamese turned the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps over to the Strategic Hamlet Program, but they didn't throw the RVNAF in. The Vietnamese didn't throw in their real leadership, except at the top and the bottom ends. They left great big gaps. So even though the program was well conceived and the people who were concerned with it did quite a good job, it was doomed to failure because of the limited attention and effort put into it.

MACDONALD: A lot of the blame, if I'm right in the usual secondary sources, is due to over-extension. The Vietnamese tried to move too far too fast.
MONTAGUE: Yes, but the idea behind that was that you had to go out and show all the people quickly before the enemy could wake up and resist you. It was a gamble. I think the gamble was well picked, because they almost did it. If they'd gotten some more resources, they could have really . . .

KOMER: The resources must always be considered. This is why the official histories are frequently much better, despite their official character, than other histories, because the official historians understand things like logistics. It isn't just George Marshall looking at the map and saying, we ought to hit them in North Africa. And then boom, two weeks later the armada descends. My God, what has to go into major operations! It's the same way with these programs. One of the reasons for the success of the later pacification program was that it was the only one even halfway properly backed up with resources. Bob says ten million worth of piasters for Strategic Hamlets. We ended up in 1968 spending several billion piasters, a huge increase even allowing for inflation. Second thing to look at before 1964 is the Agrovilles, an earlier attempt at pacification.

MONTAGUE: They started off in 1959 and fell apart in 1961.

KOMER: A major conceptual difference between these two programs and the later RD and CORDS effort was that these stressed relocating population into more defensible areas. We decided against that because the people objected. Our concept was to take protection to the hamlet rather than vice versa. Third was a precursor of pacification — the earlier effort that began with Michigan State and AID in the early days of Diem. The police program started then with Michigan State assistance. Your source might be John Manopoli from the Public Safety Division of AID. He was out there. And there was Wolf Ladejinsky's land reform of 1957-1958. All this was an attempt to get the GVN to do things which were by and large sensible.

MONTAGUE: Actually, Michigan State has put out a series of books that cover it very well. I think we also want to cover the U.S. advisory buildup 1955-1964. We put people into the provinces and the districts; we increased the number of people with the ARVN and gave them responsibility for regional and popular forces in addition. They were called
by a different name then. But there was an attempt by the U.S. to help
the Vietnamese do it themselves, and there are certain good and bad points
about that program.

How much agitation and interest was there in 1964-1965 in coordinating
USOM and MACV in pacification?

MONTAGUE: There was very close coordination between USOM and MACV
throughout the period. The Interministerial Committee on Strategic
Hamlets was attended by both MACV and USOM, and on the U.S. side they
had a Mission committee that brought the U.S. participants together so
they could input properly to the Interministerial Committee and could
carry out the responsibilities given to the U.S. as a result of the
Interministerial Committee's meetings. General Stilwell was very heavily
involved in the coordination. He understood pacification. He is a very
thoughtful fellow . . . got along with Vietnamese extremely well, as he
proved in his later tour in Vietnam when he was XXIV Corps Commander.
He was a leader on the MACV side. He was first the J-3, and then Chief
of Staff.

MACDONALD: What was your job during that early period?

MONTAGUE: In 1964-1965 I was Special Assistant to General West-
moreland for Pacification, and also in the J-3 section, because I said
you couldn't be a special assistant and get anything done.

KOMER: No wonder you're talking so positively about this period!
Those committees didn't do a damn thing!

MONTAGUE: That's not right. They put out good direction, and
there wasn't anything at the other end to take the orders. But the
orders were sensational. This was the period where USOM had experts
like Rufus Phillips and Bohannon. George Tanham came out during the
period. USOM wanted to work in the pacification field, and they did
manage to work with Stilwell. There was, of course, always a good deal
of animosity between the rank and file in both headquarters because both
were competing for resources, and they didn't understand really what was
being done by the fellows at the top. So I don't see a big case that
there was a chasm between the two elements of the Mission.

KOMER: But it sounds like a failure of top management to get their
subordinates in line.
MONTAGUE: True. It was partly due to lack of understanding of what pacification was. The program was not clearly laid out. It didn't have sub-programs with clear goals attached. Thus it was almost impossible to go down somewhere in MACV and determine by talking to people what pacification was all about; they didn't know. In the same way, if you went over to USOM, down at the lower echelons they were all upset because they weren't getting enough money for hamlet schools. The money was going to barbed wire, and they said schools were more important than barbed wire. So they were unhappy; they hadn't been told why . . .

KOMER: Until you put the barbed wire around the hamlet, forget about the school. Otherwise they'll blow it up as soon as it's built, as they did so many times.

MONTAGUE: Yes, They didn't understand why the priorities were lined up like they were.

SCOVILLE: Was there any pressure during this time for a sort of "single manager"?

MONTAGUE: No real pressure for single management that I can recall. General Westmoreland thought that you ought to have single management, but he didn't want to broach the subject. Actually I wrote a paper on this following General Westmoreland's trip, which I went on, to Malaysia. We went with Sir Robert Thompson. Of course, Thompson was talking about organization all the time. We came back and General Westmoreland asked me to put together a paper which would make him the executive agent for pacification. This was probably mid-July 1964. I put together this very short paper, with a bunch of charts, so that we could brief the Ambassador. General Westmoreland said, well, let's take it easy; let me talk to the USOM people about this. I think that he explored it with them informally, got sort of a negative reaction, and we just buried the idea. It wasn't until he tried Hop Tac as an experiment, one aspect of which was more centralized management, that we raised the idea again.

Could you discuss the role of Mr. Killen as Director of USOM in Vietnam during this period?

MONTAGUE: Killen had come to Vietnam with directions, I think, to cut back on AID programs. He had been extremely successful in doing this
in Korea, and had made quite a name for himself as an excellent manager. So he came to Vietnam at the wrong time -- the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time. He took a great interest in things that were going on way out at the village end; he took an interest in people; he was very gruff and brusque, and he didn't exert the kind of leadership people were looking for, but nevertheless he wasn't blind. He really got with his directors in the field; he got with his province representatives; he talked to them; he made it a point to understand what was going on. But he either had directions from Washington or else he had decided himself that he ought to go a different direction, and he tried to constrict USAID activities. One of the most important things that he did on the minus side was to tell his people to let the Vietnamese run the programs more themselves; his people as advisors should sort of sit back and help only when asked for help. In other words, at a time when it was needed most, he withdrew U.S. advice, support, and most of all, push . . .

SCOVILLE: The joint sign-off . . .

KOMER: Yes. Under different circumstances, Killen's approach would have been the best one. Given the time, 1964-1965, it was the worst one, because that's just when they needed us most. Note the sharp contrast between Killen's approach and ours when we came along. But the Killen approach lasted on in USAID, those parts that were not under our control.

Could you discuss the importance and results of the Hop Tac Program around Saigon? Whose idea was Hop Tac?

MONTAGUE: I was always told it was General Westmoreland's idea. He went out to see Colonel Jasper Wilson, Senior Advisor at III Corps, and said we've got to do something about the area around Saigon. Colonel Wilson said: "What we've got to do is reorganize the area. I've got fragmented responsibility out here; my corps commander has fragmented responsibility; everybody is wandering around without any clear-cut direction and management." Westmoreland came back and gave me some general directions to write a paper which laid out the Hop Tac scheme. Then he
went back to Jasper Wilson, and we worked out on the U.S. side an outline plan, which Westmoreland took to the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese actually thought this was a good idea. And so we formed (out at Headquarters III Corps) a joint U.S.–Vietnamese planning task force, and developed the Hop Tac plan. We calculated the requirements, and it looked to us on the planning group that we needed about 50 percent more forces than we then had. The Vietnamese stirred around on a plan to reinforce with the 25th Division, which they were going to bring down from II Corps and introduce into the Hop Tac area to create this new environment where they would have sufficient forces around the critical Saigon area. But as they got the 25th Division on the road, they started moving other people out. The overall result was that even after the 25th Division came down, there was a net decrease of about a battalion. And the 25th Division was totally unready to do anything, because when you move a Vietnamese division, you're moving all the dependents; you're moving the bases; and you're putting them in a whole new environment. They just didn't function for months and months. This being the situation, Hop Tac was doomed to failure from the outset. Things didn't go backwards; but things didn't improve nearly at the rate which we had anticipated.

**SCOVILLE:** LTC Suplizio said to me that he wrote a long thesis on this; is that worth getting hold of? He said that a lot of the documents were listed. Was he working out there with you?

**MONTAGUE:** Paul was in the Combat Operations Center working for General DePuy.

Did the idea of priority areas grow out of Hop Tac and Westmoreland's idea of extending it to other Corps (14 November 1964)?

**MONTAGUE:** That's right. Hop Tac was a concept to establish a national priority area. It seemed to be the right thing. You were getting coordination between the police and the ARVN; you were saving on checkpoints ... you had ARVN and police checkpoints together rather than having ARVN and police checkpoints separately. You had them at the same spot ... small things. Because it seemed to be going well, General Westmoreland thought we ought to include in the 1965 plan a similar national priority area in each corps, so that resources could be drawn together and put under centralized direction.
On 29 November 1965, General Lansdale wrote Ambassador Lodge recommending that OSA or USOM be assigned executive responsibilities for U.S. liaison with the RD Cadre Program. How was this resolved?

Komer: As I recall, OSA got it. That was a very sound choice.

In terms of program management, OSA looks very good throughout the American intervention in Vietnam.

Reportedly there were wide differences over the program between OSA (Mr. Da Silva) and the military at this time. Could you discuss this?

Montague: They mainly revolved around: (1) who should control the cadre, and (2) should you have centralized direction of pacification, or should it be centralized? Da Silva wrote a paper in which he advocated 44 separate province wars. It was clear that this was what he wanted. He said that each province was different and that central direction from Saigon could never reach all the way down to the provinces, i.e., let's have province wars. I thought this ridiculous, because you didn't have the leadership down at the province; you didn't have the resources to go around; and the enemy could have defeated you piecemeal, because he was operating under a centralized strategy. He was very good at whipsawing the Americans and Vietnamese by attacking first in the north and then switching down to Saigon, and then hitting that Special Forces camp up in the hills, and then hitting Qui Nhon down on the coast. It would have been asinine.

Da Silva also visualized a very large-scale cadre effort, with the cadre taking over largely the role of the Popular Forces. In other words, being not only a nation-building force but a defensive force. He drew this concept from the experience with the PAT Teams, the People's Action Teams, which started out with Popular Force platoons. Scotton and his friends went out to a PF platoon, gave them some berets, gave them a flag, gave them better weapons, taught them how to help the people, and converted them from a PF platoon into a People's Action Team, and Da Silva wanted to adopt this everywhere.

Scoville: Scotton may have gotten that idea from Diem's brother in I Corps who had something called the force populaire, and I think the antecedents to this go even further back.
KOMER: Let me interject. The division between military and civilian responsibility -- the military responsible for the war and security and the civilians responsible for pacification -- led to a whole series of mistakes. One basic problem was that the military had all the assets, in that the RVNAF had the RF and PF plus the ARVN and everybody else. Because the military were not paying enough attention to pacification, the civilians tried to generate new forces. The PAT Teams, then Da Silva's cadre program, were such an attempt by the civilians, because the U.S. and GVN military were not giving them local security for pacification. Another civilian attempt to generate such forces was the National Police Field Force. There began to be, and it got more painful in later years, a competition for manpower. This is very important -- the civilians trying to get an effort going on a substantial scale, but not getting very far because the military were sopping up most of the available manpower.

SCOVILLE: But did they try to work this through the American military? Or was the American military also standing firm in refusing to . . .

KOMER: You had two fights. You had the fight within the GVN, where the GVN military wasn't devoting much resources to pacification, and also within our Mission. The reason I raise this is because it became clear to me as early as August 1966, that I had been in business for three months, that the competition for resources was getting us nowhere, because the military had already won that battle. They had almost all the resources, Vietnamese and American. Therefore, the only way to make pacification work was to get military resources, particularly RF and PF but even ARVN, which we did later. And the only way to do this was to put pacification under the military. But many of these programs that were started and never got very far were attempts on the part of the civilians to get resources to do the job in the countryside that was not being done by the military, largely clear and hold on a permanent basis with territorial-type forces.

MACDONALD: This seems to me not only important but absolutely basic. It goes back to the MAP program when first instituted and approved by Congress that this would be a mistake . . . that the Ambassador will be the head. Now something happened here that even the Ambassador is not exercising sufficient control over the military, or the military are avoiding it some way?
MONTAGUE: I don't think it was so much that. At this time pacification on the Vietnamese side (and don't forget that pacification is a Vietnamese program) was under the Vietnamese military. I worked out at the Joint General Staff compound with Colonel Lac and General Thang. They ran pacification for the GVN. So I advised General DePuy and General Westmoreland, when Da Silva proposed a large FAT Program: "This sounds ridiculous, because the Vietnamese are not going to support it. What we're trying to do is to have the Popular Force platoons do the job better, and what we need are more PF platoons. We don't need a separate program, because a separate program will be a U.S. program, because the Vietnamese Army is in control of things, and they don't want this outside force. So let's throw our effort behind making the Regional and Popular Forces better." That argument was made by General DePuy at a meeting with Ambassador Taylor where Da Silva made his case, probably in spring 1965.

MACDONALD: There tends to be throughout a kind of proliferation of new forces . . .

KOMER: Not throughout! Until we came along and pulled them all back together again . . .

MONTAGUE: Da Silva and his people made a persuasive presentation, while we from MACV were arguing against this seemingly wonderful concept that had worked out very well under close control and scrutiny in a few places. But we were looking at a longer-range thing. What we'd worked out (MACV working with USOM) was a cadre program that had five-man Hamlet Action Teams working under the village chief, that would be sent out to the hamlet . . . sort of back to where we are now in 1969 where we split up the RD cadre team into five-man groups and send them out to the hamlets. We said that's how we ought to do it, and we would be happy to have the OSA input to these particular small groups because they did need motivation, better training, better equipment, and more money than USOM had to give them. So that was the argument. Da Silva won, and the RD Cadre Program was set up under U.S. control. And since that time we've been working very hard to get it back under Vietnamese control. The second problem with OSA was their reluctance to talk to people about what they were doing. Da Silva's organization was super-secretive.
Could you assess the role and effectiveness of General Lansdale and his staff?

**Komer:** Lansdale arrived the second time in 1965. Frankly, I think that Ed Lansdale and his group, during this second tour in Vietnam, were very frustrated people. I do not believe they were given, after Cabot Lodge came, much scope...

**Montague:** The big problem was Habib.

**Komer:** Basically by the time Ellsworth Bunker arrived, the die had been cast. Phil Habib, who ran the political side for Lodge... he and Lansdale just didn't get along... jurisdictional conflict mainly. Bill Porter wasn't terribly happy about the Lansdale operation either. I would say offhand that the Lansdale role in this period was limited.

**Montague:** I know a good deal about it, even though they came as I was leaving. They were there when I got back of course. They focused really on political developments, and in that respect they were not too connected with pacification as it was going then. Lansdale's group was looking at politics at sort of the central level. However, he had several experts who had been involved in strategic hamlets, in pacification—so they looked at what was going on and criticized it. They said you ought to do it this way; you ought to do it some other way. But they weren't operators in the system, and so their criticism was largely rejected, mainly because it was not susceptible to being carried out. In other words, they would suggest "make the cadre better." Great! "The popular forces ought to be under greater control of the village chief." Swell! I agree, but you couldn't do that just by issuing an order, because the order wouldn't be followed. So they really had very little influence on pacification. They certainly didn't retard it. Most of their ideas were logical and probably good—just couldn't be carried out at the time.

**Komer:** It's too bad that they were not used more effectively.

What was the significance of the Honolulu Conference in 1965 for pacification?

**Komer:** I wasn't there. I don't know what pacification significance it had. April 1965 was all about the American intervention and
what we were going to do. We were attempting to stop a rout. There
wasn't much focus on pacification in April 1965, was there?

MONTAGUE: No, it was the next conference.

During the late summer and fall of 1965, the U.S. Mission experimented
with the single manager concept in three provinces. Who was responsible
for this idea? What were its results? Why was it scrapped?

SCOVILLE: Frank Wisner was the deputy to the one in Dinh Tuong;
they had a State guy in Darlac, and an AID guy in Ninh Thuan or Binh
Thuan. And then a military person in Dinh Tuong. Apparently Westmore-
land scrapped it for "inconclusive results." The State guy didn't work
out because he fell into the midst of the Montagnard revolt. I just
wondered if you felt that this should have been continued.

ROMER: I emphatically think it was a sound idea. We did it later
in CORDS countrywide. But this is the trouble with so many of these
little experiments. There were lots of good ideas and a fair number
of interesting experiments, but they didn't seem to go anywhere.

MONTAGUE: This was another idea that General Westmoreland had.
I wrote up the papers again, and then worked with Sam Wilson, who was
over in AID at that time. We finally took it to the Ambassador, and
he approved it. But we didn't have any structure above those fellows
out there, so they kept getting instructions from all directions. And
when evaluating the results, everybody evaluated them from their point
of view. The AID fellow said that the hamlet school program didn't im-
prove and the OSA guy said the cadre weren't used properly. And the
military guy would say we had to fritter our forces away.
III. INCREASING FOCUS ON PACIFICATION -- 1966

By the end of 1965, after U.S. military intervention staved off GVN collapse and the U.S. buildup continued, greater attention began to be paid to reviving some form of pacification to complement the "main force war." The increasing stability of the Ky regime facilitated this effort. The new Ministry of Revolutionary Development under Thang was created, and the RD program slowly evolved. The February 1966 Honolulu Conference laid stress on the "other war." It led to Ambassador Porter's designation as field program coordinator and then creation of a Special Assistant in the White House to manage the Washington end. In December 1966 came the creation of OCO -- pulling together all U.S. civilian agency pacification support. Ambitious plans for 1967 were conceived. But the effort, though growing slowly, could best be described as modest, and the results spotty at best. As late as mid-1967 U.S. measurements conceded that well over half the rural population was still VC-controlled or contested.

Could you discuss the 8-11 January Warrenton Conference? What were the results of this conference for pacification?

MONTAGUE: The Warrenton Conference suggested centralizing Washington responsibility for all such nonmilitary matters in Vietnam as pacification, aid, land reform, etc. There was a discussion about organization. Pacification was the central theme. They went over the ideas that everyone had accepted but had been unable to carry out up till that time.

KOMER: The conference papers had some interesting things in them. There were some quite sensible ideas, but we had already started down that track. So Warrenton was not too significant in my thinking on pacification, but it may have influenced the creation of my White House job. I just don't know. This is one of the curses of our performance in Vietnam. All sorts of interesting ideas were advanced, reports written, conferences held, critiques made, research done, experiments started, but somehow there was all too little follow-through from all this ferment. No one grabbed the ball and ran with it, as far as I can tell.
Could you discuss the 7-9 February Honolulu Conference? Why was this called? What was the degree of direct Presidential pressure on the Vietnamese for pacification results?

Komer: Conferences were called throughout the Vietnamese War for a combination of political and decisionmaking reasons. I would stress the political. Having participated in several of them, they were much more a rendering of accounts by the various participants, especially the Vietnamese and the Americans, to show that we were together and seriously trying to do something. Decisions coming out of these conferences were seldom very highly structured or direct. These were much more generally taken as part of side conversations between Ky, Thieu, and Johnson. However, one high point of the second Honolulu Conference was a high degree of direct Presidential pressure on the GVN for pacification. I don't know where it came from. I suspect it was McNamara and Bundy selling the idea that we had to do something more than just running around with fire brigades and bombing the north. The phrase, the "other war," was coined there. General Thang made a very favorable impression with his description of what the RD Ministry was doing, and the cadre program. Land reform was stressed. Elections were stressed -- a number of things. They are on the public record. I would say that the 1966 Honolulu Conference was one of the chief precursors of the "new model" pacification program.

Montague: It got visibility at this conference, and Vietnamese understood Americans were going to support this program with greater vigor. They themselves began to get a little bit more concerned.

Scoville: You two were both there?

Komer: Neither of us. Was the Bundy trip before or after the Honolulu Conference? I think Mac went from Honolulu to Vietnam. I don't know what he did in Vietnam on pacification.

On 20 February the President sent a message to Porter on pacification. Frank Wisner has stated that the language of this message is very important.

Komer: The decision in February was to give Bill Porter the overall responsibility for RD activity. I think this came out of the Bundy trip and reflected the feeling that there was no centralized management of all these "other war" activities. There was also a lot of backbiting
between AID and OSA over their respective roles in the cadre program. I think the decision made was simply to get somebody to hear arguments and decide these issues. Porter was by all odds the logical man.

MONTAGUE: Yes. That had been first raised at the Warrenton Conference. And because the Vietnamese had created a Minister for RD by the time of the Honolulu Conference, this then seemed to be logical.

KOMER: I don't know how this was received by other agencies in Washington and Vietnam. I doubt that there was too much resistance. Bill Porter was widely liked and respected -- a very able man.

SCOVILLE: He may not have interfered directly with their activities.

KOMER: He did not. He governed with a much looser rein than I did, as Wisner no doubt told you, although it is interesting that it was Wisner and Holbrooke out there with Porter who were constantly pressing him to do more of the things that I kept telling him needed to be done. As a footnote to history, Porter was sent to Saigon partly on my recommendation. Bundy came around and asked did I know Bill Porter? Nobody else in the White House knew him. He was on a list of four or five people being recommended as the new Deputy Ambassador. I said Bill Porter was outstanding from his performance in Algeria, under very difficult circumstances.

In May 1966 you were put in charge of the Washington end of pacification. Could you discuss this in detail?

MACDONALD: May I ask just how did you get into this White House thing? Do you mind talking on this?

KOMER: You'll have to ask McNamara and Bundy, because I believe they were the people who recommended me for the job. My appointment as "Other War" Special Assistant really became effective at the beginning of May 1966. As I understand it, there was a growing feeling in Washington that the other side of the war which the President had made so much of at the Honolulu Conference in February 1966 was just not being well managed from the Washington end or in Vietnam. I think this feeling grew out of McNamara's and Bundy's trips in February 1966. I don't know whether Bundy came back and recommended that a single manager be appointed in Washington for all of the noncombat aspects... nonmilitary aspects. It's hard to define what the "other war" is because naturally it had a
good deal to do with security -- the police, the RD cadre -- these were armed; these were the civilian armies for pacification. But from somewhere came a recommendation to the President that a key man be appointed to pull together all of these aspects of the "other war." The big argument was over whether he should be a special assistant to Secretary Rusk or to the President. McNamara and Bundy argued vigorously that only from the White House could he pull the necessary weight, especially in dealing with DOD and CIA. This argument apparently lasted on into April -- finally decided against Rusk and in favor of McNamara-Bundy. The President called me into his office and told me I was taking over the "other war" in Vietnam. I do not think I asked what I should have, "What is the 'other war,' Mr. President?" I simply said, "Yes, sir."

SCOVILLE: You were working for Mr. Bundy at that time?

KOMER: Mac left the end of February 1966. As Bundy's senior deputy, Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, I was occupying ad interim Bundy's job. This is not widely known, but I was the Acting Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, without the title! Sitting at Bundy's desk and doing his job was the most painful six weeks in my life.

SCOVILLE: You had no inkling that this was going to happen until the President called you in?

KOMER: None. Except Bundy kept trying to drag me into the Vietnam business, and I kept saying, look, there are too many cooks stirring that pot; a few of us ought to watch the rest of the world. That always shut him up. He did drag me down to the Ranch in December 1965 for the fascinating discussion which resulted in the long bombing pause.

My White House job is doubly interesting as a managerial innovation. Look at my charter -- NSAM 362. I believe I was the only Special Assistant in the history of the White House who had a written directive from the President saying that he was to "manage and supervise," not advise or coordinate. In other words, I was not just a staff officer to the President. I was delegated powers to manage and supervise, not to coordinate. This was put in, interestingly enough, at the express request of Secretary McNamara, who said you can't run a railroad unless you have the authority. By the way, I drafted NSAM 362, and I had put in "supervise and coordinate."
McNamara, as I recall, added "manage." None of us knew quite what the "other war" was, but this mandate was unique in American history. I think anybody in Washington will tell you that we really "managed" it, to the extent that it was manageable from Washington. Of course, the influence we had was largely a function of my direct relationship to the President and my position on the President's personal household. Washington does tend to move when the White House speaks.

MONTAGUE: If you had been over in the State Department, you'd have gotten nowhere.

KOMER: Nowhere! I think unquestionably the decision was sound. I doubt that I could have done the job if it had been in State. This is no criticism of State. It is just that one bureaucracy cannot manage several others on the same level.

MONTAGUE: It wouldn't have worked in Defense either, because you would have gotten tied up with the JCS and everybody.

SCOVILLE: Hadn't they also tried the inter-agency Vietnam Working Group under Mr. Unger?

KOMER: Yes. There had been a Vietnam Coordinating Committee under Len Unger, who was deputy to Bill Bundy. It had been strictly a coordinating and information-exchanging group. I took over the VNCC, upgraded it, and made it an advisory committee to me that met periodically. But I didn't believe much in committee meetings. We had plenty of authority and influence to act without this.

Now, my staff. The State Department, having expected to get the new special assistant job, had already done up an elaborate organization chart that called for 69 people—military, civilian, AID, State, CIA, etc. When I went to call on Mr. Rusk, he said that it might be helpful to me. Then Bill Bundy and Unger recommended that I set up this organization right away. I took one look and decided that if I had 69 people, I'd spend most of my time managing this staff instead of managing the "other war." So I thought I'd better start small, with carefully selected people, and only later if it became necessary, to build up a big operating headquarters. I wanted to stay light-footed. At peak we ended up with six or seven professionals and a few secretaries. I will say (I think without fear of contradiction) we did more managing with those six or seven guys than with a hundred-man staff.
Another interesting thing -- when I talked with John McNaughton, he said that I had to have a military assistant to deal with the Pentagon, and that nobody lower than a major general could possibly find out what was really going on. So John said he'd get me whatever major general I wanted. I said maybe I should get a junior guy who is more familiar with the problem. My experience in the Pentagon has been that the majors and light colonels get around a lot faster than the generals. I ended up calling the Army War College to get a guy who Dick Holbrooke told me was the secret to success in Vietnam. This was Westmoreland's former special assistant for pacification. I called the Army War College and asked Lieutenant Colonel Montague to come down. Montague and I talked for about ten minutes, at which point it was perfectly clear to me that he was my man.

Montague and the rest of my staff were really an outstanding, experienced group, who really educated me. To make State happy, I asked Rusk the very first day for a man of whom I had a very high opinion, Bill Leonhart, who had served in Vietnam in the Fifties and was just back from being our Ambassador in Tanzania. He was my deputy, and then my successor in the White House job, though the White House operation sort of declined after we left for Vietnam. Unfortunately, Bill Leonhart never had my personal relationship with the President; moreover, he wasn't long on "manage and supervise." I brought over Dick Holbrooke on Bill Porter's recommendation; he was a brilliant youngster just back from being Porter's special assistant, which made it ideal for him to be mine. We got two guys from Rand who were outstanding -- Chuck Cooper and Dick Moorsteen (on a year's leave of absence). They handled the economic stuff, which was very important, and a lot more. Later on we got Al Williams from the Budget Bureau. We got Peter Rosenblatt from the White House staff and briefly John Sylvester from State. He was there for only two months, though he later did an excellent job in Vietnam.

MONTAGUE: That's right. He's a province senior advisor now.

Komer: So you see we really had, besides myself, six people. We used consultants. We got as our outside economic advisor Bob Nathan, who was running his own economic consulting business and who had been head of OPA. Bob would come in and help us out occasionally. He was
excellent. I also used to talk a lot with Bernard Fall. We tapped
everyone we could.

What were your working arrangements with other government agencies and
with Ambassador Porter in Saigon?

KOMER: As to other government agencies, usually we worked out
informally by phone what we thought needed to be done. Then we drafted
and cleared many of the cables. We worked closely with all the agencies
involved. Rud Posts at AID and McNaughton and Dick Steadman at DOD/ISA
were especially helpful. Word was sent out to Porter that we were in
charge of the "other war" at the Washington end, but the question of how
responsive he should be to our advice was never satisfactorily resolved.
We wanted Bill to do a lot of things he didn't do. In most cases I think
this was because it was impossible to do them. He just didn't have the
power and the resources out there to do them. Others may be less chari-
table than I.

MONTAGUE: But then you solved that partially. You sent me out to
work in his hip pocket.

KOMER: That's right. When we couldn't get Porter to move, I sent
Dick or Chuck or Bob out to move him, and it often worked. Bill probably
thinks that our relations were more edgy than I do. We were constantly
pressuring, and I think that there was considerable resentment of the
fact that Komer and his "wild men" were constantly breathing down their
necks. I got some of this from Westy too. Incidentally, I went out to
Vietnam seven times in one year -- that year in the White House I prac-
tically commuted to Vietnam. Wisner can probably give you a better feel
for the Porter-Komer relationship.

Could you discuss the influence and importance of the following studies:
(a) ROLES AND MISSIONS - why was it not accepted, MACV's position on
this study; (b) MISSION PRIORITIES STUDY (Robert Klein); (c) PROWN -
why did the Army do this study and what was its reception? Were these
studies coordinated with GVN?

KOMER: Roles and Missions was an outstandingly useful, action-
oriented report, which we call the Jacobson Report, though he had a
very able group writing it (including Dan Ellsberg).
MONTAGUE: Not really used much, because they didn't really have the organization to implement it. In fact, Ambassador Porter never sent it to Ambassador Lodge. It never got approved. It was just in limbo. It talked about how you should use ARVN, how RF and PF should be improved. But MACV said they were already doing these things.

KOMER: MACV did not reject the whole report, but they were quite negative on parts of it. Most unfortunately, both Lodge and Porter interpreted this as a MACV rejection of the Jacobson Report. The big problem was no follow-through. Nobody took this report and said: "Okay, here are some good things; let's trash these out. Let's implement recommendations 1, 3, 8, etc. and have the following other recommendations further studied, but let's move on this thing."

SCOVILLE: Would this be due to Porter's not having wanted to push it very much?

KOMER: Well, there was a big argument between Porter and myself . . .

MONTAGUE: He knew Lodge wouldn't push it, so why send it up to someone who's not going to do anything.

KOMER: This was one of the problems in all candor. Bill Porter was stymied because the authority rested in Lodge, and Bill, a good foreign service officer even though he was an ambassador in his own right, was not going to disagree with the "old man." But the "grand old man" had a very good intuitive sense of what the war in Vietnam was all about. I worked well with him and feel we should have raised more issues for him to take on.

MONTAGUE: That's right. He said the right things but never gave orders.

KOMER: Anyway we picked up a number of things from the Jacobson Report, and later carried them out. But the Mission Priorities Study made little contribution to anything. I paid no attention to it.

MONTAGUE: It meant something to AID, in that it cut down the number of programs. Criticism was always leveled at Vietnam . . . that you were doing too many things at once. So the Mission Priorities Study did narrow this down and say that you had to . . . really support pacification activities more and worry about long-range development less.

KOMER: Now, PROVN . . . it was done by Washington, right?

MONTAGUE: That's right -- on instructions from General Johnson, who had a pretty good feel for the Vietnam war.
KOMER: I thought he did too.

MONTAGUE: And he could see that it wasn't all fighting the main force. He understood, at least partially, pacification. So he got a group of young lieutenant colonels and majors together. They were even able to get some help from the civilians in Washington to put together a study. The title PROVN stands for pacification and operations in Vietnam. But it was rejected by MACV as unnecessary, over-detailed guidance.

KOMER: PROVN was rejected by MACV! I don't know whether Lodge ever saw a copy, do you?

SCOVILLE: According to the MACV Command History, in late 1966 Lodge heard about it and demanded of MACV that if they didn't give him a copy, he would go to much higher sources and make them give him one.

KOMER: General Johnson gave me a copy of PROVN when I came on the job in May 1966. I had already read it.

MONTAGUE: Holbrooke probably got it from Volney Warner, a member of the PROVN study team.

KOMER: None of these studies were coordinated with the GVN on the grounds that until they were accepted on our side, there was no point in trying to get the GVN signed on. But discussions with GVN officials may have been the genesis of a lot of ideas. It's very hard to find where an idea originated. The Jacobson and PROVN reports, written by people with plenty of field experience, did have a real impact on me. They were the source of a lot of ideas that I carried out. PROVN called for unified management in the field; I thought that sound. PROVN called for unified management in Washington; my office was in part designed to go in that direction. But PROVN called for a general staff under a guy in the White House with four stars who'd run the whole Vietnam operation. That was a little beyond the pale. Soon thereafter, in any case, my team and I began firming up our own thinking on what was needed, and selling it in Washington and Saigon.

How did your early thinking come out?

MONTAGUE: Here is sort of the key document where Mr. Komer set out the thinking that was pretty well carried through in the years to follow. In August 1966 you told Holbrooke and me to draft this thing and you gave
us a lot of direction. We all spent over a month of rather tough work on this particular paper. This is where you first suggested that pacification be put under COMUSMACV [Draft 3, 7 August 1966, "Giving a New Thrust to Pacification"]. It was one of three organizational alternatives, but the alternative that we loaded with the "pros." By this time we were clear on the ideas. From here on out it was just pushing these same ideas, with very few new ones added.

ROMER: Read these August 1966 proposals:

... The campaign against major VC/NVA units is in high gear, the constitutional process seems to be evolving favorably, and we expect to contain inflation while meeting most needs of the civil economy. But there is a fourth problem area, that of securing the countryside and getting the peasant involved in the struggle against the Viet Cong, where we are lagging way behind. ... The statistics -- inaccurate though they may be -- are enough to tell the tale. Though we have the military initiative everywhere in Vietnam, only 54.3% of the population is yet regarded as being under GVN control. ... Why stress pacification? Possibly we can achieve a satisfactory outcome in Vietnam without rapidly accelerating the pacification process. Success in destroying the main VC/NVA units and in attriting Hanoi's infiltration may in itself lead the enemy to fade away or negotiate. Or it may lead to a disastrous drop in local VC morale. ... But few argue that we can assure success in Vietnam without also winning the "village war." Chasing the large units around the boondocks still leaves intact the VC infrastructure, with its local guerrilla capability plus the weapons of terror and intimidation. The VC can always revert primarily to guerrilla action [which is what they are doing now] ... so winning the "village war," which I will loosely call pacification, seems an indispensable ingredient of any high-confidence strategy and a necessary precaution to close the guerrilla option. ... Moreover, we have now reached the point where we must seriously examine the situation we'd confront in the event of negotiation combined with a military stand-down on both sides. ... 

SCOVILLE: Whom was this written to? I think I saw McNaughton.

ROMER: It was McNaughton first, then a cleaned up version to the top echelon. We were trying to get Defense on board first, before we sent it to the President. After tickling off all the things wrong, I wrote:

... Last but not least, neither the US nor the GVN have as yet developed an adequate plan, program, or management
structure for dealing with pacification. The JCS and MACV are so preoccupied with operations against the major VC/NVA units, that they are not able to pay enough attention to the local security aspects of pacification. For example, despite the importance of this aspect of pacification operations, there is no general officer in JCS or MACV primarily tasked with overseeing this job. There is no unified civil/military direction of pacification within the GVN. A similar divided responsibility prevails on the US side. Nor does there appear to be a well-understood chain of command from Porter even to the civilians operating in the field. There is no integrated civil/military plan for pacification on either the GVN or the US side. In sum, the GVN/US pacification effort suffers from numerous deficiencies in concept, planning, unified management, money, and manpower—which taken together critically reduce our ability to [win the village war].

How do we step up pacification? As pacification is a multi-faceted civil/military problem, it demands a multi-faceted civil/military response. Provide more adequate, continuous security [for the villages]... devote more effort to breaking the hold of the VC over the people [the VC infrastructure]... Carry out positive [RD] programs to win active popular support. Establish functional priorities for pacification. Better area priorities [go for the priority areas first]... A greater stress on pacification logically means greater stress on the Delta—where 60% of the people are and most of the rice is grown. Concentrate additional resources on pacification [police, RD cadre, cement, roofing]. The US agricultural effort should be stepped up [because Vietnam is primarily agricultural]... Chieu Hoi... Village/Hamlet Administration... set more performance goals. Set tough targets [to shoot at] and ask for concrete plans to meet them. Even though the history of pacification in Vietnam is replete with examples of goals set and goals met without substance or meaning, this is no reason not to keep trying.

MONTAGUE: Yes, everyone always argues that you shouldn't set goals, because they'll meet them willy-nilly with paper. My answer is set the goals and then check to make sure they're not meeting them on paper.

KOMER: "Rapidly extend the security of key roads. Ambassador Lodge points to the close correlation between Vietnamese belief that the war is being won and the degree of security on important roads such as Route 15 to Vung Tau and Route 20 to Da Lat." Lodge really had the feel, but he never did much about it. "Systematize the flow of refugees." Now this will explain to you what I had in mind, because we'll get to it later:
Refugees are handled in a haphazard manner by a weak GVN organization backed up mainly from the US side by commodity and other forms of support. Little, if any, attention is given to using refugees as a systematic weapon in the war. The proposition is simple — deprive the VC of needed bodies and add to the GVN manpower pool at the same time. Do this by selecting specific groups of people as targets ... induce them using a whole range of possible measures to abandon their homes, process them through temporary centers, sort them to convert usable skills into GVN assets, and resettle them in accordance with overall pacification plans.

Well, we never got that approved, and I soon got off of that hook. That was me going back to Agrovilles and strategic hamlets. Who sold me that refugee garbage?

MONTAGUE: Holbrooke and Montague didn't. That was something you stuck in. We couldn't even take care of the refugees we had, so why make more?

KOMER: At any rate, I had completely changed that view by the time we got to Vietnam. Indeed we reversed course. Next, "how can pacification be managed more effectively" First:

Restructure the GVN. ... Place RF and PF under the RD Ministry. ... Establish a single line of command to the province chiefs. ... Remove the division from the pacification chain of command. ... Strengthen the authority of the province chiefs. ... Appoint civilian chiefs. ... Parallel strengthening of the US structure is essential. US leadership has often sparked major pacification steps by the GVN. ... three broad alternatives ... two of them are based on the principle of a "single manager" ... by assigning command responsibility either to Porter or to Westmoreland. The third accepts a continued division ... and calls for strengthening. ... Alternative No. 1 -- Give Porter operational control over all US pacification activity. ... Alternative No. 2 -- Retain the present ... civil and military command channels but strengthen the management structure. ... Alternative No. 3 -- Assign responsibility for pacification, civil and military, to COMUSMACV.

MACDONALD: This paper preceded your recommendation of September?

KOMER: Right. This was the sort of study that led me, after my September visit, to make a decision to plug for civil/military integration of the advisory effort.

SCOVILLE: Colonel Montague said that this was shown to the President. Can you remember his reaction?
Komer: No. I sent it to him; he sent it back or maybe he didn't. In any case, it was the genesis of the CORDS reorganization proposal. Its other ideas had little direct impact at the time, but in most cases it was the forerunner of a whole series of actions I later initiated on pacification. I remember now why we wrote the organizational alternatives in rather bland terms. My purpose was to have this draft version taken out by my deputy Bill Leonhart, and shown to Lodge, Porter, and Westy only. And I knew that if I voted on one of the three, I would just be prematurely raising problems. So when I sent this over to McNaughton, I called him and said that my own preferences were for "3" but I was going to hold off until I heard what Leonhart's report was. Leonhart came back and said that Lodge and Porter didn't think much of putting everything under MACV or under Porter. They favored continuing more of the same. Westy said, "Look, I'm not asking for it, but if I'm told to manage pacification, I'll do it." It was at this point that I reported to McNamara that I thought we ought to go in this direction. By the way, there were some dissents within my own little group to our scheme. Holbrooke was quite negative, and weren't you sort of "iffy" about it?

Moorsteen: Yes.

Komer: The only guy really "gung ho" besides myself was Montague. So we divided along civilian/military lines.

What were the reasons for the growing Washington dissatisfaction with Ambassador Porter in the late summer and early fall? Why was Porter unable to work effectively? How did Porter get along with MACV and other agencies? To what degree was there Presidential dissatisfaction?

Komer: I wouldn't say that dissatisfaction is the word, or at any rate dissatisfaction with Porter. We were dissatisfied with the progress being made in getting the "other war" organized and moving, including pacification. I think there was realistic understanding on our part as to why Porter was not able to do more along these lines. Porter had two jobs. He was also the DCX, the number two man in the Embassy. Cabot Lodge believed in handling only the high policy, and in delegating all the routine of making our largest single embassy work to his subordinates. This was a very heavy burden on Porter, to whom everyone came. Porter had a more than full-time job administering the Embassy and running it
day to day, except in the political field, which was handled by Habib. It was perfectly clear that Porter should be relieved of one responsibility or the other. He couldn't do two full-time jobs. Second, Porter did not have any authority over the military. Here you run up against the basic problem that most of the pacification assets and resources were military, yet the civilians were tasked to run the show without having any of the wherewithal to do it. Porter got along fairly well with MACV, but it was much more of an arms-length relationship than satisfied me.

At this point it is worthwhile bringing in an abortive effort of ours. I told Westy that I thought Bill Porter needed a military deputy to handle this liaison; Westmoreland agreed and in the fall of 1966 assigned BG Crittenberger to the job. I sold the idea to Bill Porter, after seeing whether Westy would be willing. Crittenberger came, sat in the office for two months, and did nothing . . . because Porter didn't give him anything to do. So our attempt at forming an effective link between MACV and the Embassy failed because of the passivity of Crittenberger and the fact that he wasn't given anything to do.

MONTAGUE: Crittenberger felt lost, because he was in an office with all these "pacification experts" and he didn't know a thing about it.

KOMER: To what degree Presidential dissatisfaction with Porter? Great Presidential dissatisfaction, largely stimulated by me, with the way in which the "other war" wasn't really being pushed hard enough or moving fast enough. But to my knowledge no Presidential dissatisfaction with Bill Porter himself, as proved by the fact that the President appointed him to Korea as Ambassador, with thanks for a job well done.

MONTAGUE: I think that you've laid it out very fairly. Porter was good. He did have difficulty operating in the environment that he was in, and he got support from you in Washington, but that was the end of it.

And that was Presidential support. He didn't get too much help from any of the other agencies directly -- including the State Department.

In September 1966, McNamara proposed that single managership of the program be placed under COMUSMACV who would have a full-time deputy to command all U.S. pacification activities. Was this the first such proposal? Was it McNamara's idea or was it given him by others? Was there military pressure for the solution? What was the President's feeling?
Who opposed the idea? What was your position?

KOMER: In reality, I started the process. After Leonhart came back, I told Bob McNamara that, in my judgement, we ought to combine civilian and military pacification resources and have a unified single management. Since the military resources were 90 percent and the civilian were 10 percent, it was obvious that it ought to be put under the military. Moreover, Westy had the clout with SVNAF and the GVN. Next, the men in Washington who were really pushing hardest on Vietnam were Robert McNamara and his people, like McNaughton. If you wanted pacification to work, you wanted strong auspices behind it, and in my view DOD was far stronger behind pacification than State -- not that State didn't understand it but the State people just weren't doing anything. In terms of getting programs going, DOD was infinitely more dynamic and influential.

SCOVILLE: But it was also a question of attitude and not just a question of power in Washington?

KOMER: Both power and attitude, and know-how too. How do you get things done? I discussed this with McNamara, and having McNamara make the official proposal was a tactic worked by McNaughton and myself.

MONTAGUE: Then we went through the exercise where we worked with Bob Gard and some of the other DOD people. We turned out these huge charts. McNamara gave McNaughton some directions, and McNaughton was carrying out these directions, and it really got rather kind of fuzzy there. They were doing it the wrong way. They were going to try to take EVERYTHING and squash it into one huge organization.

KOMER: But I had already revealed my own solution in general to the President ... as part of my trip report. However, this was not the first time unification was proposed. McNamara himself said to me he had raised it in 1964 or 1965 and had gotten nowhere. I do not know how far McNamara had gone with it the first time. He told me he had gotten shot down by State and the other civilian agencies, and so he pulled back. Whether it was actually a staffed out proposal, how far it went, I don't know. I suspect it was more a "Tuesday lunch" sort of thing where McNamara, Rusk, and the President were talking and McNamara said you know we ought to combine all of this. But mine was the first action proposal.

There was no military pressure for this solution, with the exception
of General Harold K. Johnson, who on an individual basis (based on the PROWV study) was arguing for this. But his was not an Army view. The Army staff was opposed and, much more important, MACV was not looking for this either even though Westmoreland, as Bob says, had much earlier thought of it. By this time the Army saw that pacification would be a big, new responsibility. The top command at least didn't want any added responsibilities. They were having enough problems of their own. So there was no corporate military pressure. The JCS did not come along and propose that we ought to do this.

In any event we and DOD firmed up Option (3) and sent it around for concurrence as a McNamara proposal. McNamara said let's try it out for size. We discussed it with the President. The President said I think you guys are right. Then the paper was worked up by my office and McNamara's and was staffed out with the civilian agencies.

MONTAGUE: Actually, DOD did the framework, and we advised them on filling out some of the blanks. We wouldn't have suggested that framework at all. But this turned out well, because their proposal took all the fire. CIA said it was no good; AID said it was no good; State said it stunk.

On 29 September you wrote Secretary McNamara stating "unified management on the U.S. side seems to me essential to giving a real push to pacification."

Komer: My 29 September 1966 memo to McNamara was my formal response to his formal proposal. In essence, I was putting on the record my formal endorsement of the pacification proposal worked out between us in advance. However, because of the varying opposition of the civilian agencies, the President in effect said to put it on the back burner. His implication was that we'd wait a little while for the psychological moment. Meanwhile, recognizing that the existing organization was quite unsatisfactory, AID and State had made a counterproposal for unifying the civilian agency programs under Porter, a halfway house so to speak. Instead of being only under his coordinating and supervisory authority, they would actually be combined into one organization, both in Saigon and in the field down to province. This was the genesis of OCO.
SCOVILLE: Was this Porter's idea, or did this come from other elements?

KOMER: It came first from Washington, as I recall. Indeed, I believe it sprang initially from Option (2) of the paper I did in August, which Rud Poats in AID with some modifications used for a counterproposal. Porter also came back to Washington just at this time; he was undoubtedly told about our proposal, and undoubtedly expressed his views as being opposed to a unified organization under the military. State was naturally more worried about putting it under the military than unifying the organization. It is entirely understandable that civilian bureaucracies didn't want their people in the field to come under the military. So in early October the President decided to put it on the back burner, and instead we'd try out the State/AID alternative. However, he said give those guys only three to six months to shape up. I said they can't do it in six months, but the President said that doesn't bother me. He deliberately gave them a very short deadline. In other words, this new organization had to prove itself in six months or the situation would be "reviewed," which was an implied threat that the President would then go ahead with the Komer-McNamara recommendation.

MONTAGUE: Right. Then we wrote up the Washington directive to set up the Office of Civil Operations, and you sent me out to help work out the details in Porter's office.

SCOVILLE: So you think that this was the way the President used to defuse the opposition? The President never really expected it to work?

KOMER: That's right. McNamara told him it wouldn't work. I told him, in spades, it wouldn't work. So he stacked the deck. In other words, the President bought the State-AID counterproposal ad interim, but in effect said you guys have really got to set yourselves up and prove you're a going concern in three to six months. This led to a long series of messages from me to Porter saying for Christ's sake, Bill, get on the stick. How are we going to give this thing a fair shot if you haven't even set it up yet? It wasn't until 1 December that OCO got set up.
Could you discuss the October 1966 visit by McNamara to Vietnam? Any comments on the significance of a reportedly "weak" briefing given him by Ambassador Koren? Was it at this point that mental (at least) commitment was made to a unified U.S. effort, despite the temporary experiment of OCO?

**Komer:** During McNamara's visit to Vietnam in October 1966, he was given an atrocious pacification briefing by Barney Koren. It was a bit unfair because Barney had only recently arrived, and had to take Bill Porter's place because Bill was back in Washington. The fiasco probably confirmed McNamara's feeling that we should integrate pacification under the military, even though his mental (at least) commitment to unified effort was made back in September. He thought Koren was incompetent and ought to be fired. That's why Koren was sent up to I Corps, to save him. I went to Vietnam with McNamara and then to Manila. McNamara said pacification is your baby; you're going to stand or fall on it, and I'm not going to go out there and do your business for you. So he would haul me along. Now he was perfectly willing to front for me where I needed it. And as far as pacification was concerned... one senior guy in Washington who was really with it, aside from the President himself, was Robert McNamara. Walt Rostow also strongly supported unification of pacification management and our programs in general.

Who attended the Manila Conference in October 1966? What were the main points of discussion? What were the results?

**Komer:** Everybody and his brother attended -- the heads of all six troop-contributing countries, and their staffs. The main point of interest was LBJ's Manila troop withdrawal offer. We'd get out in six months once the NVA did the same. It was one of those formal conferences in which all six participants gave long briefings on progress of the war.

The big thing from a pacification standpoint was Ky's announcement that half the ARVN infantry battalions would be used to provide security for priority RD areas. ARVN had been used occasionally on this mission back in the early sixties before the war really heated up. Now, that the U.S. was there in strength and bearing the brunt of mobile operations, Bill Porter in particular wanted underemployed ARVN units to support RD more. We strongly backed him. The Jacobson Report also talked about putting ARVN battalions under province control for the purpose. But the
real mover was General Thang, who got Ky to back the idea.

I suspect the President also asked Westmoreland at Manila whether he would take on pacification. I urged him to. At any rate, I'm sure McNamara asked him either during his prior Vietnam visit or at the conference. I do not recall any big pacification decisions being taken, but there was a progress report on what had happened since Honolulu in February 1966. The chief speaker on that subject was Ky, and my main function was to write a big section of the President's closing remarks.

Could you discuss the pilot program for the unified direction of the RD effort in Long An Province announced in November?

KOMER: I think this was sold to Cabot Lodge by Colonel Sam Wilson. Here we were pressing from Washington: will you guys please get a handle on this problem; will you please unify management? Sam Wilson was an ideal choice to run an experiment, because he was an Army colonel (a Green Beret to boot) and also quite familiar with the political and AID side of the war because he was Mission Coordinator. In fact, Sam promoted this deal largely so he could get out of Saigon and back into the field for at least a month or two. Generally, I thought the experiment a success -- how much this is attributable to Wilson's personality and seniority, how much to the merits of single management, is moot. At any rate, if you want an experiment to succeed, put as good a man as you can in charge.

SCOVILLE: I've heard so many people... you mention Sam Wilson's name and they immediately say "ugh."

KOMER: Regrettably, Sam grossly oversold the results he achieved in a brief period in Long An. The experiment was much more successful in terms of lessons learned for integrated management than in terms of effective pacification. However, you could hardly pick a tougher province in Vietnam than Long An. If you were going to try to achieve quick results, that was hardly the place to start.

Did you work with Rostow on his draft NSAM that he circulated on 10 December? Do you know why this NSAM was never adopted or promulgated? What was the Defense response? An earlier DOD study stresses this document heavily as an indicator of the programs and policies in pacification that were to be adopted in 1967. Do you agree?

MOORSTEEN: You did the first draft... the proposed NSAM on
U.S. objectives in Vietnam, isn't that the one?

**SCOVILLE:** Yes. I got this from an earlier DOD study draft, and it said that you'd have to search far to find a document that so closely foreshadowed the steps that were taken in 1967. It didn't say why it wasn't taken up.

**KOMER:** At least it was an indicator of future directions in pacification, since I wrote it myself and I was the one who was promoting these new directions later. I have a little note, "I think I was the originator." I concluded that we didn't have laid out anywhere what the hell our goals were, how we were going to run the Vietnam war. So I proposed to Walt that we float a NSAM, after first clearing it with the President so we weren't doing something he didn't want to do. I wrote the first draft. Walt re-did it, but not much as I recall. We then flashed it by the President, and he agreed to let us see if it would fly. Then Walt put it out.

**SCOVILLE:** Do you know why it was never accepted?

**KOMER:** Well, State wasn't overly happy with it. But mainly the chiefs objected because we hadn't gone big enough on the military side. We ran into all sorts of flak from the JCS and DOD.

**MOORSTEN:** Not from ISA. Systems Analysis had a lot of big issues; they played it mostly in the direction of tightening SECDEF control over military operations and stuff like that.

**SCOVILLE:** They mention an increased effort against the infrastructure -- both ISA and the others put more emphasis on it than there had been in the original NSAM.

**KOMER:** With which we couldn't have agreed more. Anyway, that's the genesis of the Rostow Memorandum, which maybe ought to be called the Komer Memorandum.

Would you comment on the importance of MACV in Revolutionary Development prior to the formation of CORDS? Influence and liaison with MORD? Support given to pacification in general and OCO in particular? Importance within the U.S. Mission? Did J-33 fill part of a vacuum created by the lack of a larger, organized staff on Ambassador Porter's side?

**MONTAGUE:** I think that, starting with General Westmoreland's interest in 1963, MACV had a leading role and was in the forefront. We did it by
stationing people right with their Vietnamese counterparts. I started it when I went out to JGS in the fall of 1964, and we gradually built up an office there. BG Ed Black finally came out there too, and we had a full functioning organization right with them. Then it started waning when U.S. troops started coming in, and MACV became preoccupied with the big unit war. It went further down when Porter got his coordination responsibilities in February 1966. They then concentrated the MACV effort into J-33 . . . this one group of fellows sitting down at the Ministry and sort of removed from MACV as a whole. MACV's influence jumped back up, of course, when CORDS was formed in 1967.

KOMER: MACV influence and liaison with the RD Ministry I thought were good. MACV support to pacification in general and OCO in particular I thought modest but fairly significant. In 1966-1967 the J-33 people worked fairly closely with the OCO people. Westy finally put one of his brightest young generals, BG Bill Knowlton, in charge of J-33 (later renamed RD Support Directorate).

MONTAGUE: That's right. They always helped Ambassador Porter before that quite well. Colonel Hollis, Knowlton's predecessor, was very good. He sort of served as an extra man in Porter's office.

KOMER: Yes, I remember Hollis. He was replaced by Colonel Powell, wasn't he?

Did the J-33 fill part of a vacuum created by the lack of a Porter staff? Yes. In fact, you could say that they and OSA and the AID Office of Field Operations under Len Maynard were the staff. Bill preferred to have only a small group of two or three personal assistants, and to operate through existing agencies. His little group, which was very good, was just absolutely swamped (as was Bill Porter, as I pointed out earlier). This was a long-standing disagreement between Porter and myself. I thought Porter should have a bigger staff with more good people like Wisner and Holbrooke. I told you about our getting General Crittenden over there and how he was never used. Bill Porter knew just as much about pacification as anybody, including myself. I think Porter understood what needed to be done. But his performance in terms of
getting it done was not very effective, partly because he did not have the resources really under his command, and partly because he was not a manager. Third, and perhaps most important, because the poor guy was already doing a 24-hour job as Lodge’s Chief of Staff running the Embassy.

However, Porter’s office, MACV J-33, and my office (I sent Montague out in late 1966 to serve as Porter’s chief planner working on 1967 planning) did good work on getting pacification into AB-141, the 1967 Combined Campaign Plan. We were insistent that for the first time it have adequate coverage.

MONTAGUE: That’s when General Westmoreland and General Rosson got mad at me, because I criticized the lousy corps plans as too vague. Also, I carried the word you told me to carry over, and which I believed in, that AB-140 stunk because it didn’t have any specific objective.

KOMER: We and Thang also worked to tie down the use of all the ARVN battalions Ky had promised at Manila. Thang again evolved the idea of creating special 1967 RD Campaign Areas (e.g. Ba Tri), where one or two battalions would be assigned to protect the hamlets being worked by the RD teams. We pushed for province control, but it varied. We got at different times 50-55 battalions, which also underwent a special training course. This interim measure was at least a step in the right direction, although performance was rather spotty in 1967.

How would you judge OCO? What were its accomplishments and failures? Would you agree with the statement that its accomplishments were organizational and American and not revolutionary and Vietnamese? To what degree was your office involved in setting it up?

KOMER: Our office wrote the directive from Washington setting up OCO. Also, I had Montague and Holbrooke out there writing the directive implementing OCO in the field. So we really pitched in loyally when our scheme was not accepted. Was OCO’s creation a stay of execution? Yes, in a real sense. Did I feel that it was doomed to failure from the start? Yes. Was it at all realistic to expect results in so short a time? No. Was its creation allowed only as an interim measure? Yes.

MOORSTEEN: They couldn’t believe in Saigon that they really only had a 90-day trial run.
SCOVILLE: I thought it was six months.

MOORSTEEN: Ninety days. Then there was talk about maybe six months—nobody really knew. They were out there saying that's ridiculous; 90 days—-we're not going to pay any attention to that. People from Washington kept saying take it seriously; it's really 90 days. They would reply it can't be 90 days.

SCOVILLE: So that's why they didn't get going until December 1st?

MOORSTEEN: I wouldn't say that. They really couldn't do anything in 90 days, therefore they couldn't believe it and still live from day to day and go into the office and try. But it really was 90 days.

KOMER: The very people who set up OCO weren't really sold on it, but rather had bought it as a State/AID and Embassy Saigon counterploy to our proposal for unification under the military. Since it never really got much of a try, it's hard to judge its accomplishments and failures. True, OCO was not promulgated until 1st December and the decision to go ahead with full unification was made in early March 1967 at the Guam Conference. But OCO lasted till CORDS was set up in May 1967—-a full six months. Porter put a competent AID manager, Wade Latham, in charge of pulling together the pacification activities of AID, JUSPAO, CIA, and State. Len Maynard from AID was his deputy. My impression is that they managed with a fairly loose rein. From dealing with them my own strong feeling is that OCO was not terribly successful, that it suffered from all the weaknesses of being a halfway-house, concocted by the civilians to prevent military "takeover."

SCOVILLE: Do you think it made your job much easier when you had to set up CORDS?

KOMER: Yes. It was a halfway-house toward CORDS, so probably it was an essential preliminary tactical stage that had to be gone through. The President's sense of the politics of the matter was rather better than mine and McNamara's. OCO's accomplishments were organizational and American and not revolutionary and Vietnamese. In sum, the OCO experience was organizationally important to the formation of CORDS. It did pave the way tactically. Secondly, it showed that you could construct a system which would integrate the field personnel of different Washington agencies.

SCOVILLE: As for the personnel you got from OCO, were they largely carried over?
Komer: Yes, we just took over the whole kit and caboodle. Then we started firing people, restructuring everything, and redesigning the whole pacification effort. However, returning to the fascinating subject of organizational innovation, I want to stress in the Pre-CORDS 1966-1967 period the unique nature of the Porter and Komer operations, organizationally at any rate. First giving Porter coordinating authority in February 1966, then setting up OCO in December 1966, meanwhile setting me up as Special Assistant in April 1966, with unique authority to manage rather than just coordinate, etc.

What were the main accomplishments of the Special Assistant for the "Other War" during May 1966 through April 1967?

Komer: One of our star performances, really our first major one, was the devaluation of June 1966. The key movers of this were Roy Wehrle in Saigon, the IMF man Mladek who sold it to the Vietnamese, and Chuck Cooper, who pressed me to ram it through on the American side. The big problem was to get immediate action, and I went out and urged it on Ky personally. Here was an example of the clout provided by setting up our White House office. We overwhelmed the slow-moving bureaucracy. Getting the Vietnamese and Americans to move promptly on devaluation, about which there was a great debate, was our first major accomplishment.

Moorsteen: You had a prior accomplishment that I think was more important on the economic front, and that was getting the plaster ceiling on American expenditures. That really contributed more than the devaluation did to economic stabilization there.

Komer: Right, the plaster ceiling. In order to combat inflation, which seemed a key problem by mid-1966, we insisted that MACV had to stop treating plasters as a free good. We invented the notion of putting quarterly ceilings on U.S. expenditures. We negotiated the ceiling with Bob McNamara, who was quite laudatory about our idea. This was in May-June 1966. Didn't we get it saved off that early, Dick?

Moorsteen: Yes. You got agreement with McNamara at that time. I don't think we began implementing it until either the third or the fourth quarter of 1966. The target goal was holding plaster expenditures to the rate of the first quarter of 1966, I think.
KOMER: Among other things, let me stress our frequent visits to prod the field. I sent almost everyone out; I went out myself seven times in one year. Our concept of management was that you can't really run the "other war" from eleven thousand miles away. You've got to really get out to the field. McNamara was great about this. He said you're absolutely right; you ought to spend as much time out there as you can, and to make it easy for you, I'll give you an airplane any time you ask for it. So we were occasionally able to go out in style.

The AID-DOD transfer program . . . since AID, with a tight budget ceiling, was not able to fund a lot of programs that we thought needed to be pushed in the "other war," we got DOD to put in . . . I think around $69 million in FY 1967, wasn't it? We initiated and successfully negotiated the AID-DOD transfer of funds.

We initiated the post-hostilities planning study by a joint Vietnamese-U.S. team. It was the President's personal idea to get Dave Lilienthal to run the U.S. side. It was a damn good idea, not least for the psychological impact of showing that we were looking ahead to an end to the war. Also we were big land reformers . . .

MOORSTEEN: Wasn't this over my dead body?

KOMER: Well, I was a big land reformer then, with Moorsteen telling me I had rocks in my head! But Holbrooke and Montague, who were simple-minded like myself, were also big land reformers. At that time I was pushing land reform very hard, and getting nowhere fast. Not until I got to Vietnam and saw the problems of executing land reform did I pull back. We pressed the Mission hard and the Vietnamese, and we got land reform into the Manila Conference. We were constantly suggesting simple wartime techniques like a rent moratorium or a land freeze (see Chapter IV).

We focused on the need to train people for pacification. Neither the Army nor the State Department educational system were producing the kind of training we thought we needed. So we set up our own Vietnam Training Center at the F.S.I. (see Chapter XII). This was originally Holbrooke's idea.

MOORSTEEN: Why don't you say something about how our office communicated with Porter's? That's kind of an unusual story. We were on the telephone every day . . . to try to bridge the difficulty of communicating by cable. Cables just put people's backs up, and when you try to resolve
by cable an issue in which there's disagreement between the field and Washington, you usually just make it worse. So we would be on a half hour to an hour a day by telephone, talking to individuals that we knew well. This is a very unusual method of communication. There's no rule against it, but you can see that it's very different from a cable, which has concurrences and copies going out.

SCOVILLE: And nobody at the end of the day would sit down and put down what you discussed each day?

KOMER: No, we were operating too fast. We were very busy. We also had an extensive back-channel cable traffic with Porter, which is probably available in the Johnson Library. I think Dick is right. We did much better by phone than we did when we had to put it down in cold, hard print. No matter how artfully we tried to phrase these things, they did get people's backs up.

MOORSTEEN: We would work up to an important cable with three or four days of telephone conversation, so that they wouldn't feel offended if a cable came in that they didn't agree with.

KOMER: We also did a lot in promoting police-constabulary programs (see Chapter XI) and on beefing up the RD cadre in an attempt to generate more territorial security forces. Also remind me to tell you about the June 1966 episode, where we backed the attempt to bring the 300,000-old REF/FF under the RD Ministry. It flopped (see Chapter IV). In general, my Washington group was much stronger in pressing the territorial security need as first priority than was Porter's. This was another reason why I moved toward putting the advisory effort under MACV. If you couldn't lick 'em, join 'em.

MOORSTEEN: We also got the port to work.

KOMER: That was one of our very first big things — paving the way for clearing up the Saigon Port backlog. By early 1966, port congestion from the U.S. military buildup was crowding essential civilian supplies off the docks. I raised hell, but was told the new military port being built to relieve congestion wouldn't start functioning till spring 1967. Port congestion impacted most upon the economic and pacification programs, because military cargo naturally had absolute priority, and the backlog was really contributing to the inflationary pressures. In other words, we had goods programmed to come in, but we couldn't get them in. After
on-the-spot investigation in Saigon, I concluded that AID's proposals for improving civil port operations would be mere palliatives, and that the U.S. military port operation (using Vietnamese stevedores) was far more efficient than AID's port operation working through the SVN. So I proposed U.S. military takeover of responsibility for the whole port. AID objected, but I convinced McNamara to take on the job and got the President's backing. Westy agreed to take over, and we so directed. After a series of hot exchanges, we overrode AID and the Embassy and charged Westmoreland with cleaning up the port. He moved in a couple of transportation battalions and a lot of cranes and other stuff. It worked beautifully and broke the port bottleneck within six months or so. I was very proud of this accomplishment, and it was one of the things that later led me to propose civil/military integration of pacification. It showed how the U.S. military were better at getting things done in a wartime situation.

Port takeover, devaluation, plaster ceiling all were part of our first big "other war" problem after we got set up: dealing with inflationary pressures of the war on the Vietnam civil economy. All in all, given the wartime handicaps under which we were operating (which in turn were superimposed upon a Vietnamese economic infrastructure that was feeble at best), economic stabilization is one of the bright spots of the U.S. performance in Vietnam.

MOORSTEEN: It's hard to remember those problems today because they've all gone away. We forget they were intensive at the time, and they were really getting in the way. Also, we worked on rice a lot, but that was just a question of supervising a difficult import problem. PL 480 rice imports became very large at that time.

KOMER: Finally, I might mention two steps I engineered to improve Washington handling of the war. It early bothered me that, though AID had the second largest stake in Vietnam after DOD (Vietnam was taking over one-fourth of AID's budget), it was handled by AID Washington as part of its FE Bureau. This impeded program focus and quick response. When Bill Gaud wanted to move his able FE chief, Rud Poats, up to Deputy Administrator, I prevailed on Bill to set up a separate Vietnam Bureau and to bring home AID's outstanding Mission Director in Turkey -- Jim Grant -- to head it. He got Roy Wehrle, one of the heroes of economic stabilization in Vietnam
1965-1967, to serve as his deputy. This strong team gave us excellent support.

I was also concerned at the lack of adequate systematic Washington focus on the war. More than once I complained to the President that I was the only relatively senior U.S. official working full-time on Vietnam. Not even at deputy assistant secretary level was there any other full-timer in Washington. Nick Katzenbach's appointment in late 1966 led me to propose to the President that he be made chairman of a highly informal sub-cabinet "non-group" composed only of Nick, Cy Vance, Walt Rostow, and myself, which would meet at least weekly to discuss candidly some of the larger issues and make recommendations to the President, Rusk, and McNamara. Unfortunately the press of other business made it hard to get together often before I left for Saigon. Later the non-group became more regularized, with more members too.
IV. REORGANIZATION AND BUILDUP -- 1967

Consolidation of all U.S. support for pacification under CORDS single management in May 1967 (to be followed by the parallel SVN consolidation over the next few years) inaugurated the first really comprehensive countrywide pacification effort on a scale commensurate with the needs of the highly atypical Vietnam War. This is not to denigrate prior efforts, especially the Strategic Hamlet Program or the RD Program which got going really in 1966. But none of them were on a large enough scale to have the necessary impact, and many promising small-scale programs were diffused among competing agencies. Most of all, neither the U.S. nor SVN military were really backing pacification. It was regarded by them as essentially a civilian problem, to be handled by the remnant SVN civil ministries backed by the U.S. Embassy, AID, and CIA — whereas the military were chiefly focused on the "main force war." Yet most of the resources in country were controlled by the military (money, manpower, supplies, transport, the works). Without the military, territorial security in the countryside could not be expanded rapidly enough to exploit anti-main force successes.

Our solution to this problem was to saddle the military with pacification responsibility, and to create a unified civil-military management on the U.S. side under MACV. Reorganizing the Vietnamese side was harder, but a major step toward it at end-1967 was the RVNAF reorganization, which helped put the RF/PP on the map as the essential territorial security component. Such a major restructuring and buildup took time, however; results down at the critical hamlet level were unimpressive in 1967.

Could you discuss the impact of the 20-21 March 1967 Guam Conference on pacification? Was it here that the President chose you?

Komer: Guam was mostly progress reports. But that's where Komer got bushwhacked. I was asked by the President in February, would I go to Vietnam? Of course I said, "Yes!" But it wasn't firmed up till Guam in March. You can't imagine how many people have said to me, why didn't you quit; why did you go on such an enterprise that was being so mismanaged, etc.? I said, you know, the thought never crossed my mind. As a professional of 25 years' service, when the President says go and
do a job, I'll try to do it. It's simple professionalism.

Why was I sent to Vietnam? I built a better mousetrap. I had proposed a reorganization and rejuvenation of the pacification program, and somehow I was so busy recommending that I didn't realize that the guy who designs a better mousetrap always gets chosen to put his finger into it first. McNamara recommended it, I believe. I couldn't understand how I had managed to dig myself into that hole. However, I'd said often to the President and others that the real problems were not in Washington any longer but in Vietnam; that we could not manage the "other war" from 11,000 miles away. So I may have added to the digging of my own grave by pointing out that the problem was one of field execution, not Washington organization.

SCOVILLE: Do you know when McNamara suggested this to the President?

MOORSTEEN: It would have to have come two or three months after the formation of OCO. Why was the Guam Conference called?

KOMER: At the Manila Conference, only four months before Guam, the President had said something about a meeting every six months. But Guam was strictly a bilateral meeting. Let's see, when were the GVW elections? September 1967? So, the Constitutional Referendum had just been held.

MOORSTEEN: It was called on only about a week's notice.

KOMER: I was down in Guadeloupe getting a last vacation with Gerry before I went off to Vietnam. While I was down there, the Guam Conference was announced. It was a real last-minute affair. One reason was to introduce Bunker, who had been chosen just before Guam. Bunker also approved my new job.

Right after the Conference I went down to Saigon to work out with Westmoreland the way pacification would be run. Since I had advance warning, I had written down exactly how I proposed that it be done. My basic point was that the key to this integration scheme was that the chief pacifier, as deputy to Westmoreland, should be a civilian, and that it should be a mixed civil-military team all the way down the line. In effect, I should be the president of the subsidiary corporation called pacification, and in good managerial practice he would delegate his authority to me. As I put it to him: "Westy, if I screw up, you tell me so and fire me. If I'm over my head and need guidance from higher authority, I'll come straight to you. But the management of pacification, if it is going to go anywhere
and I'm going to come out here and run it, should be lodged in me."

I'm the only deputy Westmoreland ever had up to that time to whom he
gave that kind of authority. I think Westy's reaction was admirable.
Here he was being saddled with pacification. One of the ideas we had in
reorganizing — though not the only one — was to charge the military with
the responsibility, because they were neglecting this aspect of the war.
And Westy knew it. So he wasn't averse to getting a deputy who had the
ear of the President and who seemed to know something about pacification.
Also, my relations with Westy were very good. He and I had always gotten
along well. So I think Westy was happy to have me come out. And I think
he shrewdly recognized that if this crazy new idea didn't work, then if
Komer was the guy making the decisions, he could be sacrificed; in fact,
I think I put it to him that way. But the way Westmoreland handled the
thing was one of the basic reasons why CORDS worked. He deserves a great
deal of the credit for decentralization of pacification advisory manage-
ment, and for the support he gave us on every issue that did not involve
taking something away in the way of forces.

My going back to Washington at the end of March was to report that
Westy and I had worked this out and to lay on a number of final things,
including getting the revised Phoenix Report from CIA, so that I could
get that show on the road. Porter wasn't leaving or Bunker arriving out
there until April, so there was a brief hiatus period. It was then I
wrote my final report to the President, and drafted the formal Presidential
directive putting me in business — NSAM 362.

Who wrote NSAM 362? Were there any differences or discussions on this
while you were in Washington?

KOMER: I wrote it. NSAM 362 was the Presidential directive setting
up my Saigon job under COMUSMACV. As I recall, there were no serious
issues remaining to be thrashed out, because the prior groundwork had
already been laid as I described.

MONTAGUE: I brought an interesting document, which illustrates this
key point. This is the backup document you wrote to National Security
Action Memorandum 362 that you took out beforehand to show to General West-
moreland. It cites our governing concepts for the organization . . . the
first one was the "U.S. role in pacification must remain primarily advisory and supporting. We do not intend to take over what the GVN and ARVN must do as an essentially Vietnamese task." So that was the principle from the very beginning.

The single manager concept should guide the reorganization at every US level from Saigon down through region, province, and district. This means: (a) a single chain of command; (b) integrated civil/military planning, programming, operations, evaluations, logistics, and communications; and (c) one voice in speaking with the Vietnamese. ... Within the "single manager" concept, however, we should seek the least discombobulation of what is already a going concern. [You know, don't start from scratch.] ... The new deputy should be a manager, not an advisor. ... Nor is it the President's purpose to make Ambassador Komer just a "political advisor" to COMUSMACV, or to relegate the top civilians at region and province to similar roles. The President and his advisors envisage the new Deputy COMUSMACV as having management and supervisory responsibility under COMUSMACV for all military as well as civilian aspects of the US role in pacification. ...

... Komer is not being sent out just to manage OCO (which already has a competent director in Lathram), or simply to ensure OCO coordination with RDSD [that's the MACV Revolutionary Development Support Directorate] -- which is already good. ... The principle of unified civil/military pacification responsibility up and down the line should have as its corollary the principle of putting the best man in each job.

You see, this was essential, because otherwise we'd have gotten into big arguments, such as since the military guy was running the most people in the province, he ought to continue as the Province Senior Advisor.

Oh, this is an interesting thing:

... at the corps level, the US military commanders must be in charge of the US side of pacification as well as military operations. So in I, II, and III Corps regions, the senior civilian should be Deputy for Pacification to the Field Force Commander ... not just a staff section head. IV Corps may be an exception, because it has at one and the same time the least sizeable US military establishment and the largest and most important OCO establishment.

We had the thought that maybe we'd be able to put a civilian in charge for the whole corps area.
KOMER: And Westy agreed in principle when I proposed Barry Zorthian. He authorized me to try it out on Zorthian, but then old Barry wiggled out. He was universally recognized as the most experienced hand in Vietnam after Westy. He'd been there four years. Widely respected.

MONTAGUE: "Since pacification is primarily a GVN job, the new deputy must have full liaison with the GVN agencies involved." In other words, you shouldn't be held back by either COMUSMACV's relationship with the Chief of the RVNAF or the Ambassador's relationship with the Chief of State. Unless we had been an oponent on politics and problems, we could never have written something that was so positive, that would have permitted the organization to function. It was not a reorganization that could have been done in Washington by a committee; you just couldn't have come up with that kind of definite policy direction.

It has been reported that the President had promised you direct access, but that on arriving in Saigon after Guam you found that MACV had redrawn the lines of command so as to prevent this. If this is true, what was your reaction and what action did you take?

KOMER: That is dead wrong. The President did not promise me any direct access whatsoever. MACV never redrew any lines of command.

SCOVILLE: This is a comment somebody gave me and said toss it out and see what . . .

KOMER: The arrangements were precisely those that I drafted originally, and that Westy had approved. To have direct access to the President when I'm working for Westy and Westy is technically working for Bunker, and both of them are working for McNamara and Rusk, makes it a little awkward. I had to change gears from being a Presidential advisor and manager to being a major program manager in Vietnam. And I played the game. I didn't call Rostow every night and brief him to tell the President what was going on. I did none of that. And almost the only times I dealt directly with the President were on my trips back or at conferences.

SCOVILLE: Do you think it helped in your relationship out there?

KOMER: Definitely! Let me put it very simply. If Bunker and Westmoreland had concluded that I was out there as the President's spy, my ability to get pacification rolling would have been compromised. So I made it a point to tell them that I was not out there as the President's
spy . . . that I was not sending any separate stuff back. And I didn't. Now at staff level we communicated a lot on detailed operational matters.

SCOVILLE: You mean with Ambassador Leonhart, etc.?

KOMER: With Bill's group, and with a lot of other people. We maintained quite an effective operational liaison. But that's a staff channel, which is very different from a policy channel.

Could you discuss the circumstances surrounding your 27 April Memorandum to the President? Why was it written? Was it to counteract MACV pressure for increased troops?

SCOVILLE: It's a memorandum that the Task Force History reproduces from page three onwards. The general gist is that rather than sending 200,000 more troops and bringing it up to 670,000, we could get the same done with more emphasis on pacification. Then you ticked off various programs . . . in a way it was sort of a summation of what you would do, and what you were for . . . I didn't know what the reason was for this . . . how strong the pressure was for more troops at this time . . . if this was a factor that helped keep it down . . .

KOMER: The first two paragraphs are the best. COMUSMACV was apparently asking for 210,000 men no later than June of 1968, and roughly 100,000 as soon as possible. This issue came up again in early 1968 after the Tet Offensive. But I'm delighted that as I left Washington my final view was for more pacification and Vietnamization rather than more troops. I have no idea, since I left for Saigon promptly thereafter, whether my memo had any top level impact. Of course, the crunch point, which probably contributed most to the shelving of any request for 200,000 more troops, was that it would require a reserve call-up and partial mobilization. This was apparently politically unacceptable. My intent was less to counteract MACV pressure for more troops than to argue against over-militarization and over-Americanization of the war. I felt from the year I'd been in business (I think we all felt) that pacification and "other war" programs could make a far greater contribution than had been permitted up to that point. And that a difference in the weight of emphasis of our effort, a different balance in our effort, was much more indicated than just adding on more U.S. military strength. But it really was the case for pacification as much as the case against more bombing or
more U.S. troops, etc. There were those who were far less equivocal about bombing than I. Dick Moorsteen was always negative . . . and his friends in Systems Analysis. I was playing it cool because all I had to do was to start fighting the bomber war, and I'd have a lot of enemies in the pacification war. You have to know which issues to mix in and which not.

Also notice the theme through all of these papers how I zeroed in on the VC as the vulnerable element in the enemy lineup. We couldn't stop the NVA from continuing to come south, but we could snuff out the revolution in South Vietnam by getting after the VC. All through, I'm targeting on the VC. I argued this with Westy and with Abrams and everybody (see Chapter VI). For example, I switched pacification area priorities to give first priority to the Delta. Note my first concrete recommendations -- insist on jacking up RVNAF leadership at all levels; also expand RVNAF as a substitute for more U.S. forces . . . Vietnamization!

What did you do to increase the status of your office and CORDS within the MACV structure?

SCOVILLE: Like putting four stars on your license plate! Don't think you were going to escape from that one!

KOMER: I kept driving around with Westy, and he got through everywhere with those four stars. So I said to the Chief of Staff, "Put a plate on my car with four stars." He said, "Mr. Ambassador, you can't have a plate like that because you're not a four-star general. The regulations are very explicit." And I replied: "For Christ's sake, we've got a war on out here. I'm functioning as a four-star general." So the Chief of Staff invented a new license plate. He said: "You have a unique job. We will design a unique plate for you." Those plates were great for getting through Saigon traffic, and for getting in the gate in the morning.

SCOVILLE: Were there any other things that you did?

KOMER: In a military headquarters the best way to really get moving is to do it like the military do. So I modeled myself on Westmoreland in this sense. If Westy wants to talk to the Chief of Staff, he calls and says come on up to the office. Or has some aide do it. I handled it exactly the same way. I wrote directives, or I called the guy in and said I want you to do that. When we occasionally got into a few arguments,
I said, "Look, I'm giving you an order. If you disagree with this order, you take it to Westmoreland, because he's the guy I'm working for." We went through a few exercises like this, and it had the necessary impact.

Here is another innovation. I think I'm the only ambassador in the history of the United States who ever served directly under a military commander. There were political advisors such as Bob Murphy. We had the whole POLAD structure in World War II, but the POLAD had independent means of communication; the POLAD was receiving his instructions from the State Department on diplomatic business; he was an advisor to the men making the decisions, but he was not in the direct command chain. I was directly under Westmoreland's orders. He was my superior officer.

MACDONALD: I certainly know of no other case.

MOORSTEEN: What happens when there is a theater commander and in his theater there are countries in which we have ambassadors?

MACDONALD: This whole business in Vietnam was so unusual, because I can't remember anything like it in World War II, for example. Eisenhower was theater commander, but the ambassador was not so involved as he is here. Robert Murphy down in North Africa was not under Eisenhower; he was directly under the State Department.

MOORSTEEN: How about Muccio in Korea, under MacArthur?

ROMER: It was a mixed thing. If we had a purely political matter to take up with the government of Korea, it went direct from State to Muccio and from Muccio to the ROK government. In other words, he had an independent role; maybe he was simultaneously political advisor to General MacArthur, although I don't think so. I think MacArthur had his own political advisor in Tokyo, also separate from the Embassy. All I'm saying is that I really served in what you would call a military role. I had a military title and a military function, and I thought the way to make pacification work with the military was to operate like the military.

MACDONALD: I think we should, at least in my volume, go into some comparisons of earlier experiences on this.

MOORSTEEN: This may be the first war where we ever had civilian elements in an operational role. Normally I guess we would have military government, and everybody would be in uniform.

MONTAGUE: We put CORDS on the map by action, not by trappings.
MOORSTEEN: As I recall, you landed in Saigon with a list of actions that you were going to take, because we met at your house that day. Chuck and I were in Saigon when you arrived; we'd been there about a week, hearing the trepidations of the ICO staff as to what this was going to mean.

KOREN: That's right. We did up a list before I got there. But the confrontation that really put us in business — the first big "to-do" I had with the MACV staff — was on the question of ICEX (later Phoenix). I had brought out proposals for starting the attack on the Viet Cong infrastructure. I discussed this with Westy, who thought it probably on the right track. Westy suggested that we give the staff a few days to look it over, to see if they had any problems, before we decided finally to go ahead. The staff massaged it for two or three days. Then we had a session in Westy's office with myself and several generals. They had all sorts of objections to Phoenix. The Chief of Staff, with all the other generals nodding their heads wisely, said the idea of attacking the infrastructure makes sense, but this scheme that calls for a combined civil-military effort, bringing CIA expertise onto the scene, having a civilian director under you as DEFCORDS, and all that sort of thing, is wrong. The staff thought all the neat gimmicks that we had put in there were terrible. They couldn't spare the people. The military shouldn't participate, but at the same time J-2 should run it as a regular military operation. After they had gotten through these limp criticisms, I held forth. First, they didn't know anything about the problem, whereas I'd been working on it for eight or nine months, yet they had tried their best to throw monkey wrenches into the works. Our failure to get anywhere against the VCI to date was ample proof that giving the job to the regular military intelligence people would fail — because they were targeted primarily on OB, not people. It was really a police-type job, and had to be done by the GVN. Americans couldn't do it for them. I'll say this for Westmoreland. He turned to the Chief of Staff, in the presence of all the generals, and said the Ambassador is right; he seems to know a lot more about it than you do and I think we ought to do it his way. And that was it (see Chapter X). They all filed out, and from that time on my power position in MACV was solid. This happened in early June.

MACDONALD: That's the way he operates.
KOMER: Yes. The minute it was perfectly clear that Westmoreland was behind me I was in business. I remember marking that as the time when Westy made it clear that if I had a good case, he was on my side. Incidentally, he was on just about everything but force allocations.

MACDONALD: It's a really very unusual situation, where you've got a civilian like you, Bob, giving orders, specific orders ... I see the more you talk how specific they were ...

KOMER: I figured the way to function in a military system was to accept the system -- to do it their way.

Was MACV Directive 10-12 (28 May 1967) on the organization and functions of CORDS a product of your office? Were there any differences of opinion over this?

KOMER: We wrote MACV Directive 10-12. It established a separate chain of U.S. pacification advisory command. The division senior advisors were taken out of the chain. Also, it is very important who writes the efficiency reports. If you're going to write a guy's efficiency report that helps determine his promotability, then he is going to be loyal. We put in explicitly that the civilians would write the efficiency reports of the military under them, and vice versa. I think Westy made a few editorial changes in our draft, but that was all.

MONTAGUE: There was a whole lot of military opposition during the writing where you had General Raymond fired and General Knowlton was involved, and everybody tried to water it down.

KOMER: Yes. I don't think we had any civilian dissents. We just turned off the hearing aid. If any civilians dissented, they didn't have the nerve to say so. But the military were quite unhappy. Our basic way of dealing with that was to point out that since MACV had acquired the responsibility, it was essential that MACV give the civilians a fair shake. If we're going to have a unified organization, we want to promote on the basis of merit; we want to put guys in charge on the basis of merit. So we generally layered it military-civilian, military-civilian. Westy was COMUSMACV; I was the Deputy for Pacification; my deputy in turn was a major general. We put our four corps commanders as the senior pacification advisors; we gave each of them a DEFCORDS, so that they had a senior civilian who ran pacification for them just as Westy had me. And we
carried it on down. And we made sure that these guys were given sufficient power and authority. Writing a directive like that is hell . . . then is when you really get into the bureaucracy of the thing.

The advisor mix . . . I worked out a deal with Westy that the Province Senior Advisors, whom we regarded as the key men since province was the key field level, would be 50/50 civilian-military, roughly (and that we wouldn't argue whether it was 26 civilians/23 military, or vice versa). And that all Province Senior Advisors would be chosen personally by me and countersigned by him.

Could you discuss the controversy over the role of U.S. division advisors in the RD chain of command?

KOMER: This was on my agenda when I came out to Vietnam. It was something I learned from Montague, Holbrooks, Volney Warner, and others while we were back in Washington. Moreover, the 1966 Saigon Embassy Roles and Missions Study and John Vann strongly recommended elimination of U.S. division advisors from the chain of command. They all convinced me this was critical. Therefore, we put this in MACV Directive 10-12 right off the bat. I insisted on it. This was part of getting the military to stop interfering with sensible pacification procedures. We were never going to emphasize "clear and hold" as long as we had a bunch of gung-ho, big-unit war guys fussing around telling the province advisors how to function. The division senior advisor's job was to get the ARVN divisions off their butts and out fighting the big-unit war, a job which most big-unit advisors did miserably (with a number of glittering exceptions, such as Jack Cushman and Montague down in the 21st Division area in the lower Delta).

MONTAGUE: And we ran the province advisors then. I told them what to do, and made their efficiency reports out, but later the division senior advisors became the worst group of U.S. colonels, because the best guys went to the U.S. units and they got clods down as advisors. They weren't oriented towards pacification one little bit. So they were getting in the way.

KOMER: Whereas the Province Senior Advisors were much oriented towards pacification, and they were under my direct control, through CORDS.
As a realist, I sought to bring as many U.S.-supported rural programs as possible under the CORDS umbrella in order to get unified management and to get our hands on enough resources to provide sizable cumulative impact in the countryside. Some saw it as empire-building, but they'd have to admit we took on most of the headaches too. Our real aim was to get our hooks on assets that we could then re-jigger and reallocate. So we embraced under the pacification rubric almost all the diffuse and overlapping U.S. and GVN programs that were under way, many for years, without having much independent impact. We merged OCO at the Saigon level with MACV's RD Support Directorate, making Wade Lathram of OCO the AC/S CORDS and BG Knowlton his deputy. You could define "pacification" as a practical matter as the sum of the programs we took over -- Chieu Hoi, Public Safety, Refugees, Field Psyops, Civic Action, New Life Development, RD Cadre, etc. One of my first big problems was to get everyone to realize that pacification was a lot more than RD (see Chapter VIII).

Perhaps the most important thing we did was to bring under CORDS via MACV Directive 10-12 the RF/FF Directorate, which was at that time sort of an orphan child located over at JGS and reporting to J-3 MACV. This was our first move toward building up RF/FF as the chief local security element for pacification. The second major step was the later RVNAF organization engineered largely by us, which put RF/FF back on the map on the GVN side. We saw the top priority problem in pacification as being to generate enough local security to permit the other aspects of pacification to live in the hamlets, which meant enough assets to provide a permanent presence in vulnerable rural areas. Lack of such a permanent presence had been a major previous flaw. The RF/FF, as a substantial though neglected asset in being -- over 250,000 men already organized on a territorial basis -- seemed a much better bet than depending only on the slow and painful buildup of RD cadre teams and police then under way, but which would take years. In a real sense, we were the first ones in the long history of the Vietnam War -- though there were several previous attempts -- to actually put the territorial security concept of clear and hold and territorial forces on the map on a scale commensurate with the need.

Isn't it refreshing, Charlie, the way we approached such problems? I don't think we came up with any concept that was bright, new, and original in Vietnam -- in pacification or anything else. Other people had long
since thought of those things, in many cases way back to the French period. You could find intellectual progenitors of almost anything that we came up with. The striking difference between us and our predecessors was that we were action-oriented and management-minded. We went out to make these things work. For example, we didn't just write more memos saying we'd better attack the infrastructure. We began asking how do you go after the infrastructure? Let's talk to Bob Thompson; talk to some of the guys who worked in Malaya; get some of the bright fellows; ask CIA. During my Washington period, I tasked CIA to come up with an action program. They first came up with an analytical study, and I said: "Look, fellows, this isn't actionable. You've got to tell me how many people we need; how we slot them; what the techniques are, etc. Go back and re-do it." They re-did it, and we had several critiques. After they did the ICEx-Phoenix Study, I changed it around considerably. We put more action items in the study than they did.

MONTAGUE: We turned out an action program on Phoenix that described how many DIOCCs we should have by what time; how many people should be in a DIOCC; how the province was to be organized; how the corps was to be organized. Then we'd go out and check. You also had to set up reporting systems on each thing. That's the only way to keep people doing it month after month. Make them report on what they accomplished the month before.

Could you discuss the importance and influence of Project TAKEOFF in pacification in 1967?

KOMER: Project TAKEOFF reflected my desire to give a stronger thrust to pacification. Once CORDS was set up, my effort was to re-order the priorities, to clarify direction, push to really get the show on the road. We chose a fairly corny device, an eight-point action program to galvanize pacification. In a real sense, TAKEOFF was the guideline directive for the new pacification program and priorities. It was the bible for what we pressed on the Vietnamese all up and down the line. It unified our key advisory guidance from Saigon level to district.

SCOVILLE: Wasn't there a Project TAKEOFF Study? An earlier DOD study said there definitely was a study, and said it also contained a lot of history in it.
KOMER: You're probably referring to the full-scale detailed assessment of where we stood that I asked Clay McManaway and his planners to prepare for me. This was one of the first things I did on arrival in Saigon. It was a massive, candid, and very revealing job, which pointed out clearly what problems had to be tackled. But Project TAKEOFF itself was conceived by me, and written up by Montague and myself in about three days. I had most of this sort of directive writing done in my office to make sure it was done right, rather than by the 600 people we had down in MACORDS.

MONTAGUE: TAKEOFF was supposed to give pacification focus, because everyone had their own ideas. You had to come out at the top with a clear set of ideas that everyone had to adopt. I went around and briefed all the corps commanders, and we distributed documents all the way down to the districts and this type of thing.

KOMER: I went and had a meeting of all the province senior advisors in each region to lay it out to them. Then I gave a briefing to all of Westy's commanders at a commanders' conference. We really went all out to sell TAKEOFF.

How was the TAKEOFF Program received by the Vietnamese?

MONTAGUE: Ambassador Komer took the program over and talked to PM Ky about it to get his ideas. His reaction was favorable, but not detailed. He just gave his vague blessing.

KOMER: Yes. So we worked it out with the Vietnamese too, although we never sold the Vietnamese a package called TAKEOFF. I designed it originally to motivate all of the American advisors, to get our U.S. sense of priorities ordered, to get our programs reorganized on the thesis that we could then go to work on the Vietnamese. We had to get our own house in order first. Then the last half of 1967 was six months of educating the Vietnamese and bringing them along in the individual TAKEOFF and other programs. I think we did a fairly good job; they bought all the parts in principle, but with varying degrees of responsiveness. Phung Hoang was slowest of all to get started.
To what degree were we successful during 1967 in improving U.S. and GVN performance in the eight TAKEOFF areas?

Komer: Performance was spotty. In every category, performance significantly improved, but we were coming up from around zero. In some categories it improved far more than others.

In general, 1967 should be looked at as a period of buildup, education, development of doctrine, restructuring of the U.S. and Vietnamese pacification structure. In my view, a real pacification program on a big scale did not even begin in Vietnam until the creation of CORDS in May 1967. Since it was already May 1967 before we set up the unified U.S. advisory structure, we'd lost five months of the year, and we were already saddled with programs that had been laid on at the end of 1966 -- a program for how many hamlets were going to be pacified, how many RD cadre teams, etc. We had participated in framing that program, but it had not been ours.

Nonetheless, we had a modest impact in 1967, owing both to earlier programs and TAKEOFF. Relatively secure hamlets increased by 638, from 4702 at end-January to 5340 at end-December. There was too much "churning," however (some hamlets regressing while others improved). Relatively secure population went up from 62 percent to 67 percent (around 1.3 million people). Perhaps more important, our pacification assets -- military, RD teams, police, funds, supplies -- increased substantially and laid a foundation for the post-TET surge in 1968.

Turning to the specific TAKEOFF priorities, how well did we do in each?

1. Improving 1968 pacification planning. I think we made an order-of-magnitude improvement. Our 1968 target was to pacify 1480 hamlets, using RD teams and CM teams. We shifted the priority areas for 1968 around too. Westmoreland had a new concept of focusing militarily on the upper Delta first and the lower Delta second. So we revised the pacification priority provinces to fit. I had decided that priority areas that were different from provincial and district boundaries didn't make any sense. After all, pacification was organized on a sort of territorial basis -- in 4 regions, 44 provinces, 243 districts. So to set up area priorities that did not follow the administrative divisions was just silly, since we allocated resources by province and districts. Therefore, in 1968 the corps priorities started with IV Corps first and then went north, with priority provinces in IV Corps mostly in the upper Delta, etc.
2. **Accelerating the Chieu Hoi Program.** Highly successful. We went up from 20,000 hoi chenh in 1966 to over 27,000 in 1967, and the program was sort of doubled and tripled in resources, people, advisors, etc. (see Chapter XI).

3. **Mount attack on the VCI.** Very poor performance. It was largely a period of trying to sell the GVN on setting up the right kind of organization. While Westmoreland and then Bunker had approved the new Phung Hoang Program (see Chapter X), the process of selling the GVN and getting them to do something about what was really their program took us from June to December, when we finally got a GVN Phoenix directive from PM Nguyen Van Loc. Some DIOCCs had already been started at our initiative.

**SCOVILLE:** It wasn't until 1968 that the first SOP was issued.

**KOMER:** Yes. We had just an awful time getting the Vietnamese moving. Once again, easy agreement in principle that Phung Hoang was vitally important but very poor follow-through in terms of organization and performance. We practically did it all for them. We even sold them the name "Phung Hoang" (Phoenix), which had been adopted by the GVN people up in I Corps. We set up a little advisory staff; we wrote up the directives, plans and organization; we organized the DIOCCs. So the attack on the VCI did not gather much momentum during 1967, though the buildup was indispensable to the progress in 1968.

4. **Expand and improve RVNAF support of pacification.** You'll recall that as an interim measure we had gotten 50-54 ARVN battalions assigned temporarily to direct support of RD (DSRD) as part of the 1967 Combined Campaign Plan. Though holding on to them and getting them to function properly was a constant problem, these battalions actually provided some local security support in 39 RD Campaign areas for the first time. During 1967, 14 mobile training teams gave a sloppy two-week RD course to these battalions and 64 RF training teams covered most RF companies. This was the first major new security force input into pacification. Under the RVNAF Reorganization Plan we helped engineer by end-1967 these battalions were technically put under the authority of the province chief, although in many cases this was clouded. That was one of the basic problems.

But the RF/PF improvement program was perhaps the most important single thing which we got started! We started in late 1967 a 36-point
program that covered everything from soup to nuts. We focused on things like improving pay, rice allowances, fringe benefits, NCO and officer increases, better equipment, etc. We found out, for example, that the PF platoon leader didn't get any stripes or even more pay. How can you run an outfit like that? We started fielding the MATS and MALT teams (the latter a mobile logistic advisory team -- an excellent Abrams initiative). We also went for additional RF/FF advisors on the province teams. In my debates with Abrams and Westy the one thing on which I used to lose was getting as many RF/FF as I wanted, at the expense of ARVN if necessary. They were insisting you had to keep down RVNAF force levels, that it was a long-term buildup, dictated by both manpower and plaster constraints. So first priority should go to ARVN, and the RF/FF couldn't be expanded much. We said, look, they're not competing so much directly for manpower; people prefer to go into RF/FF because they're local forces and Vietnamese like to stay home, in the home province or even the home village.

**SCOVILLE:** Didn't you mention getting the chief upgraded from a colonel to a lieutenant general?

**KOMER:** RF/FF were handled over at JGS as nothing serious. They had Colonel Cau as chief RF/FF. We pressed in late 1967 a switch from the 1966 effort to get RF/FF put under Thang as RD Minister. This time we decided to play it smart and get Thang over in JGS as Vice Chief of Staff and Commander RF/FF, bringing RD along with him. This reverse pitch worked, with Ky's support. But after a few weeks or so Thang began taking over from Cao Van Vien; a spat ensued and Thang resigned. However, Thieu appointed as successor to Thang a three-star general, Nguyen Van La, the senior general officer in point of service in the ARVN. We worked very closely with La, who did almost everything we wanted. Part of the RVNAF reorganization was to improve province span of control over RF companies by both strengthening province headquarters (sector) and creating new RF Company Groups (light battalions) in larger provinces. But La had wild ideas of going further and creating battalions, regiments, even divisions of RF/FF (see Chapter VI).

5. **Expand and supplement the RD team effort.** Only fair. We didn't have enough RD cadre. We could only train so many at Vung Tau. RD teams increased from 361 to 555 and Truong Son cadre teams from 84 to 108 in 1967.
But we didn't want to expand so fast we'd lose quality for quantity (see Chapter VIII). We did try substitute techniques, primarily civil-military teams on the Binh Dinh model. They were started by Major Chon in Phu My District, and I thought they were the greatest thing since ice cream, since they got the GVN civil and military people together. Besides which, we were running into serious problems on availability of RD cadre personnel. We couldn't get enough RD cadre or civil servants; the military were mobilizing a lot of these guys. So I saw the C/M teams as a potentially major supplement to the RD teams, or even a superior substitute which would meld PF and RD cadre and local administration all in one group. But I couldn't get them to take, except II Corps. We did get civil-military teams formed in a few other places, but I deeply regret that we didn't get further with this promising substitute for RD teams. One holdup was that General Thang refused for a long time to approve the C/M concept and put out nationwide directives. It took me three months to bring him around. Our idea was to upgrade 1000 PF platoons in 1968. We'd send the PF platoon leaders down to Vung Tau to give them quick training. We started the course, but we never got very far. Of course, variants of it are being employed right now in 1969 -- in a sense, the village chief having the PF platoon under his control, and the policeman and the RD cadre working for him -- that's a civil-military team. In April 1967 there were also elections in 984 villages and 4600 hamlets -- a start at restoring local administration.

6. **Increase capability to handle refugees.** This was becoming a critical problem, not just because criticism was mounting in the U.S.
We managed to get more USAID money, more PL 480 Title II food, and an increase in refugee advisors. We also got more U.S. Army assets. The number of new refugees in 1967 was held to about half that in 1966, and for the first time in years, the November 1967 resettlement rate exceeded the creation of new refugees. But it was slow going in 1967; I was quite unhappy and frustrated (see Chapter XI).

7. **Revamp police and PPF.** We made a major effort to improve the police force, quantitatively and qualitatively. Police strength went up 20 percent to 73,300 in 1967. The PPF were re-targeted on the VCI -- at least on paper. But I would say performance during 1967 was only marginally improving. Here was another area where it was clear a much
longer-term, more extensive effort was necessary (see Chapter XI).

8. Press land reform. I put Shep Lowman of my staff onto it. We kept trying, but we just were getting nowhere over GVN and AID opposition. In fact, I soon concluded that pushing land reform would have to be put to one side until we got more response from the GVN. It was almost entirely a U.S. initiative . . . just getting nowhere with the Vietnamese (only one candidate for the Presidency, Phan Quan Dan, ever even mentioned land reform). I regard pressing for land reform as one of my failures in Washington and then in Vietnam, 1966-1968 (see Chapter III).

We also had a jurisdictional dispute with USAID. One fellow in particular, John Cooper, who was the great land reform expert was constantly raising bureaucratic obstacles. So I said to AID Director MacDonald: "Look, we'll give AID the Saigon-U.S. responsibility for promoting land reform. We'll back you; we'll do what we can, but I'm not going to waste my people on this thing until we go somewhere. It's basically a Saigon problem of trying to convince the GVN. You take the leading edge."

MONTAGUE: Actually, land reform was hardly in TAKEOFF at all, other than that we were going to put five land reform advisors out in five delta provinces. We were just going to start it.

In your 27 April 1967 Memorandum to the President you mentioned that we should "press harder for radical land reform initiatives." By "radical" what did you have in mind? How would you assess the performance of the GVN in land reform? To what would you attribute its successes and failures? How hard did we press on land reform?

KOMER: Nobody tried harder than I during my White House tenure. May 1966-April 1967 to get something practical moving. We bombarded Porter with schemes. But soon after I got to Vietnam, we pulled back because it was clear we weren't getting anywhere in the short run. Also AID was constantly arguing with CORDS as to who was responsible. So I gave it to them.

SCOVILLE: What was the U.S. Government position on land reform? In the 1950s, USAID had been reluctant to really push land reform for fear of antagonizing conservative members of Congress. Does this still hold true? That was a really important factor.

KOMER: I don't think so. I never heard this mentioned. But in 1957 Wolf Ladejinsky promoted, and the GVN did develop, a land reform program.
This was cutting to a hundred hectares any individual holding. I had Leonhart ask Ladejinsky in 1966: "Look, how about going out to Vietnam and designing a new land reform program?" He said: "It's not necessary. I went out there in 1956-1957 and designed a perfectly good land reform program, and it was executed."

It was really the interference of the war that led to a de-emphasis on land reform, because it wasn't administratively feasible. We don't know yet whether land reform is feasible in wartime. There have been a lot of big ideas, and Thieu has made a lot of big speeches, but I will believe that land reform is actually being implemented when they hand out thousands of land titles. In fact, there were a lot of areas where paperwork had already been done, and they hadn't even delivered the certificates. If you're practical, you want something simple that can be carried out in wartime. Doing new cadastral surveys -- that is not easy in wartime. Here again, legalism comes in.

A lot of theoreticians were pushing land reform schemes that, in my view, were impractical. I pushed instead for very simple schemes that could be executed in wartime -- first, a complete moratorium on any land rents. Don't pay the landlord anything in wartime; make that his contribution to the war effort. Landlords by definition are richer people. Or a freeze on all land tenure. Whoever is sitting on the land can stay there and doesn't have to pay rent. In other words, not until after the war will we allow the landlords to come back and argue that they should get their land back. Or a simple freeze on land rent. To me, these were the kind of things that were administrable. Instead, many Vietnamese and Americans wanted complicated land reform schemes depending on involved cadastral surveys, careful paperwork . . . hell, you can't do that in wartime. There were times when we really pressed the GVN quite hard, and I think that Thieu's land reform program that he announced about the middle of 1969 is a direct result of U.S. pressure . . . since at least the Honolulu Conference in February 1966.

Why was there no HES-type system for land tenure and reform?

Komer: We did spend two million bucks on an air mapping technique. We are using the computer right now to issue land titles. We didn't have
an HES-type system, because Americans couldn't read Vietnamese, so they wouldn't know what the hell the documents were.

**Montague:** I think we should add a *ninth category -- opening roads and waterways.* Whether or not it was part of TAKEOFF, we did a lot of this (see Chapter VII). We got FY 1968 highway funding increased to about $67 million.

What had been the 1967 priority areas in AB 141 and in our RD planning?

**Montague:** They still had national priority areas in AB 141. We shifted to IV Corps as first among the corps areas.

**Komer:** First we set up our priorities in terms of corps -- IV, III, II, I -- the exact reverse of the 1967 military priorities, where I Corps came first and IV Corps last. This is very important. We reversed pacification priorities from the big-unit priorities, and I got Westmoreland to approve this by pointing out that pacification should concentrate where the rural people and the rice are, and that they happen to be mostly in the Delta, and least in I Corps. So my priorities were different and I wanted to employ my assets differently, and he agreed. We later moved in 1968 to selecting priority provinces, again mostly in IV Corps.

Various sources have remarked that General Thang's 1967 RD priority areas were perhaps too ambitious. Could you discuss this?

**Komer:** Yes, Thang's 67 RD areas were too ambitious. What was the 1967 goal? Some 1300-odd hamlets to be secured. Each RD team was to upgrade two or three hamlets a year. This was a tall order.

**Montague:** Yes, some complained about Ba Tri and other over-extension in certain areas, because they were worried about the enemy ... taking the strategic offensive. But we weren't really involved in designing Thang's 1967 program.

**Komer:** We were not. But with the wisdom of hindsight, by the time the end of 1967 rolled around we granted that we had maybe bitten off much more than we could chew in the 1967 RD program ...

**Montague:** Because we did not get additional RF/PF like we had hoped, and the ARVN battalions did not perform as we had anticipated. But basically we went along with the 1967 plan. We didn't go to Thang in May 1967 and say "revise the RD plan."
KOMER: By the end of 1967 my view too was that it had been too ambitious. It was obvious by then that we weren't going to meet the targets. Now if we had been there an extra year before then, I think we would have made Thang's 1967 program go. We might even have done more, not an APC -- not a big short-term surge, but a more regularized program.

Incidentally, the field guys (young fellows like Pfeiffer, Wisner, Holbrooke, etc.) constantly took the side "we're pushing too hard; we're over-structuring; we're trying to do too much." They are not managers. They don't see the problem in the round. Bear in mind that in pacification you're running 44 provinces. It doesn't do much good to say concentrate our whole effort in 10 provinces and let the other 34 provinces go hang, because the other 34 provinces have province teams; they have assets; they have RF/PF; they have some RD; they have all these locally recruited assets. Why shouldn't you give them targets too?

MONTAGUE: Yes, that's why Thang went out and made a campaign in every province. So people said "over-extension." They had a campaign in Quang Duc, "that's ridiculous." It wasn't ridiculous, because otherwise the assets in Quang Duc would not have been used.

Do you feel that there was an increasing MACV and Washington level emphasis on pacification in 1967 as it became clear that there was a ceiling to how many U.S. troops could be sent?

KOMER: Not for this reason. Indeed, the ceiling on U.S. troops and resources made the Command and the field commanders less likely to give up resources to pacification rather than more.

MONTAGUE: In fact, we immediately started getting flak on the ARVN battalions assigned to pacification. JCS and MACV staff wanted them back.

KOMER: Whenever constraints were placed on the U.S. posture, this made pacification, which was regarded as the low man on the totem pole, made it that much harder for pacification to get resources.

SCOVILLE: You mean that pacification never did have priority over the . . .

KOMER: Never, except in a few cases where I forced it on the fringe. Now there was increasing MACV and Washington-level emphasis on pacification in 1967 largely because we gave it. This was our job, after all. We sold pacification in Washington; we sold the reorganization. Then we came out
and built up a bright alert outfit that stood head and shoulders above the run-of-the-mill in Vietnam. That's one reason why pacification got more attention in 1967.

During this time, was the MACV attitude that improving RVNAF was distinctly a second choice compared to the attention given U.S. forces?

KONER: The answer is yes, but rather than "second choice," it should be "longer term." If you wanted early results, you really had to bring in more Americans. Besides which, it was easier to manage American forces. The heavy emphasis on American forces -- the Americanizing of the war -- after February 1965 was partly a function of Americans doing what came naturally. It is much easier to handle American divisions through American communication nets; they are responsive, same doctrine and tactics, etc. There is an inevitable tendency to bring in as many of your own forces as you can get, rather than using foreigners. Like Pershing in World War I insisting that Americans be kept together. It wasn't just for prestige; it was partly political; but it was also because Westy could fight them more effectively.

A second factor probably was also very important. In my view, there was an unstated feeling that we had to get this war over before the 1968 election. The only way to get a quick fix was with Americans, because at the time it was believed that achieving an ARVN buildup was a much longer-term task.

Did you find that your estimate of your being able to accomplish changes and move the Vietnamese was mellowed slightly after spending several months confronted with the working realities of the situation?

SCOVILLE: That's due to an earlier DOD study ... this was the Advisory volume. It could be Colonel Siegel, but I'm not quite sure.

MONTAGUE: That's a Wisner story that paints you as a rather impatient person sitting in Washington, forcing Ambassador Porter ... and then it says that once you got out to Saigon that your estimate of what could be done out there changed quite a bit, and you were writing back saying "don't expect results so soon." In contrast to those hot messages that - you ...
HOMER: At any rate, I think the point valid. This was one reason why I said the real problem was in the field. Of course I mellowed. Of course we came to realize that the practical problems just look a lot different when you're out there on the implementing end instead of up at the high policy level, eleven thousand miles away. However, I will divide the honors on that. I think we proved when we got to Vietnam that you could just do a hell of a lot more than was being done before we got there. If I was impatient in Washington, let me assure you I was no less impatient in Vietnam. We were hard chargers out there. But we did mellow.
V. THE TET 1968 SETBACK, RECOVERY, AND THE FIRST ACCELERATED PACIFICATION CAMPAIGN

Whether we eventually win out or lose in Vietnam, 1968 will show up as the crucial year. It opened in an aura of GVN/U.S. confidence. However false previous optimism, the legitimization of the GVN in the September 1967 election, economic stabilization, U.S. and ARVN military successes, the erosion of VC strength, even a start at serious pacification — all augured that the GVN and U.S. were at last achieving the upper hand. Indeed, Hanoi may have arrived even earlier at the same judgment, as suggested by the very nature of its radical shift from its previous rural-oriented strategy. In what many see as a desperate gamble to reverse this adverse trend, the VC/NVA launched a brilliant surprise offensive under cover of the TET holiday. They tried to storm 34 towns and cities, and penetrated 20. Despite VC/NVA failure with staggering losses, the TET Offensive — plus MACV's presumed request for 200,000 more troops — proved the breaking point in the U.S. commitment to the war. That almost 500,000 U.S. troops and massive bombing of the north as well as south could not forestall such an attack finally destroyed Washington and Saigon's eroding credibility with the U.S. public. In Vietnam by contrast, the TET Offensive plus realization that the U.S. had reached the limit of its commitment finally galvanized a dawdling GVN. It led to general mobilization and other measures that substantially enhanced GVN effectiveness.

Paradoxically, the TET and follow-on offensives both set back the growing new model pacification program and created the conditions for its later rapid upsurge in late 1968. Viet Cong TET attacks on the cities had the bonus effect of causing a precipitate drop in rural security, which led many to conclude that the latest pacification effort had also collapsed. They did knock the ambitious GVN/U.S. pacification plans for 1968 into a cocked hat. In reality the enemy did not waste much effort on the countryside; instead the loss of security came primarily from the massive withdrawal and regrouping of RVNAF and U.S. forces to defend the towns. Most pacification assets were preserved intact, which facilitated the later re-occupation of the countryside. But the May Offensive and then the last abortive VC/NVA attacks in August-September prolonged the defensive syndrome engendered by TET. Meanwhile CORDS efforts were partly diverted to
Operation Recovery -- helping meet the massive post-TET refugee and rebuilding needs of the towns.

By September 1968 most TET rural hamlet losses had been recouped. We then sold the GVN on a surge effort to capitalize on VC/NVA exhaustion -- the Accelerated Pacification Campaign. Its unprecedented success from November 1968 through January 1969 demonstrated both the relative weakness of the VC/NVA's thin hold on the countryside and the pay-off from the painful buildup during 1966-1968. Also of major 1968 pacification significance was Thieu's consolidation of his new power position as elected President, because Thieu was easily the most pacification-minded top GVN official since 1955. Whatever his other flaws, he probably did more than any other single individual to put pacification on the map. At any rate, the end of 1968 saw pacification well into the initial stages of a notable upsurge -- even though its lasting nature has yet to be put to the test.

Was there advance warning of TET?

SCOVILLE: I asked Nhat one evening to tell his history in North Vietnam, which is absolutely fascinating. And he mentioned that just before TET he had had a warning, a very specific warning . . .

KOMER: I'm familiar with this.

MONTAGUE: I'm glad you back this up, because I just told him you'd . . .

SCOVILLE: I believed Nhat from the start. Nhat gave a rather precise picture of what was going to happen . . .

MONTAGUE: It was not that precise . . .

SCOVILLE: Well, he said they were going to hit the Embassy, and there was a major attack coming on Saigon, and that he gave this to you. Could you take it from there?

KOMER: Lybrand told me that Nhat had the word, and that this was very disturbing, and apparently the intelligence people would not pay any attention to him. So I called Phil Davidson, the J-2, and said: "Some of my guys have picked this up; these guys are very competent, etc., and I'd like to have them come around and see you. I'd really like to have you look into it." I plugged them in, but Phil Davidson apparently ignored the evidence he got. Correct?

MONTAGUE: That's right. Do you remember General Xuan, the old
intelligence guy? He and his daughters ran a laundry out by the bridge to Bien Hoa on the back road, whatever the name of that bridge was; I can't think of it. And a number of the people who worked in their laundry said the VC were out across the bridge and they were going to attack there. They were really worried because they thought they were going to lose their laundry.

KOMER: But let's not overdo these little episodes. Preconceptions as to enemy capabilities and doctrine make it very hard for conventional intelligence officers to appreciate when there is a surprise coming. We just couldn't conceive that the enemy, whose Maoist doctrine was to constrict the cities by conquering the rural areas and then strangle the cities, would reverse himself and attack the cities first. We had all sorts of warning of surprise attack and everything else. What really surprised us was that it came on TET, and that they attacked the cities.

MONTAGUE: You still get almost weekly reports of VC offensives.

Could you discuss the impact of the TET Offensive on Pacification? The response of the GVN, ARVN, RF/PF, RD teams, etc. to the crisis?

KOMER: I've discussed this so often that I will only give you the highlights. The TET Offensive was not targeted on the pacification program! In fact, the enemy ignored the countryside as he went through it, so he would not compromise surprise against the cities. What happened was that the Vietnamese withdrew a large number of RVNAF units from the countryside in order to defend the towns. This was a natural reaction to the shock of the TET attacks of 30 cities, towns, etc., etc. Their withdrawal was not forced by the enemy; instead the enemy went right around them and attacked the town in the first place. But even in towns that didn't get attacked, RVNAF pulled back to defend them, because they thought they were going to be attacked next.

MONTAGUE: But the VC never followed up.

KOMER: As a result, a vacuum developed in much of the countryside from which we had evacuated loads of outposts.

MONTAGUE: We lost 377 outposts — from watchtowers on up.

KOMER: Even after the attacks on the cities, the enemy did not make a major effort to consolidate in the rural vacuum that our forces had left. But there was a major pacification setback as a result of TET. Some 27
provinces out of 44 were hit, 13 of them badly. It was shown quite clearly on the HES. We went down from about 67 percent "relatively secure" population to about 60 percent. HES enabled us to show more clearly than other measurements, the extent of setback. People who criticize the HES have to grant that it certainly showed what was going wrong as well as what was going right.

MONTAGUE: I brought the first paper where we gave an overall post-TET assessment. Everyone came and asked us around 10 February how went pacification. We said we didn't know. We had to wait until mid-March to get a full assessment in from everybody for our first public report. I also have a copy of the famous Dan Ellsberg one, as seen from Washington!

KOMER: "We're finished in Vietnam" — dated 28 February 1968. Before the TET Offensive was really over, Dan too had the Americans finished in Vietnam. The road from here on out is worse, worse, worse. He turned out absolutely wrong.

MACDONALD: It's about as good as Arthur Schlesinger's letter that we're going to lose Khe Sanh.

KOMER: Or Ward Just's famous comment . . . on 4 February, Ward wrote in The Washington Post: "Pacification is dead." I wrote him saying it is the livest corpse, quoting Mark Twain.

Another key point about the impact of the TET Offensive on pacification is that we did NOT lose many assets. Almost all of the security forces, RD teams, province warehouses, etc., etc. remained intact. Our asset losses were quite minor, which is one major reason why we were able to recover pacification momentum reasonably quickly after TET. Of course, the enemy also exhausted himself in the TET and follow-on offensives. Moreover, large rural areas were left untouched by these offensives.

We promptly began placing great emphasis on getting the RVNAF back out in the countryside. But it was difficult, because the U.S. military was almost as hypnotized as the ARVN was about defending the towns. We couldn't let it happen a second time. Moreover, CORDS was diverted by urban recovery. Of course, our 1968 pacification planning proved abortive in many respects, because TET interrupted the execution of our plans. I had a revised Project TAKEOFF for 1968 that was changed in some respects from 1967. We then made some post-TET modifications, but really it is the APC which comes along as the next major thrust in pacification.
Now, the positive side of the TET shock. I am one of those who believe that TET was one of the things that galvanized the GVN and ARVN. The crucible of TET was one of the things that proved to them that they could stand the worst the other fellow had to offer; it also made them realize they could still lose the war. It was followed of course by LBJ's partial bombing halt on 30 March 1968. The combination of TET and LBJ's actions were a traumatic shock that got the Vietnamese working more seriously than ever before. This emphatically showed in pacification. I would say the GVN really got with it on pacification as a result of the TET Offensive! And there was a strong urban reaction against the VC.

MONTAGUE: One of the big shots in the arm was the approval of the increase in RF/PF that we had suggested a long time before, but MACV and the GVN never could quite make up their minds to it. We also couldn't get support from the United States; there were economic problems. But TET came, and they saw they had to have them. And that's the best way to get pacification moving . . . to push more resources in.

KOMER: However, another consequence of TET was that we lost a lot of the ARVN battalions on RD support. They were shifted back to division. This has continued naturally with Vietnamization and has been offset by the RF/PF increases. There was an increase of about 100,000 in RF/PF in 1968 alone.

Could you discuss our efforts to persuade the GVN to increase mobilization, especially after TET?

KOMER: One of the great consequences of TET was GVN mobilization. Westy deserves great credit on this. In 1966-1967 he plugged for what he called "general mobilization" of all Vietnamese resources. The GVN would not buy. In fact, Lodge and Bunker hadn't pushed it very hard. TET really made the GVN at long last call for national mobilization. Westmoreland also deserves full credit for returning to the attack after TET. It was his educational effort that triggered Thieu, in the aftermath of TET, to realize that he'd better mobilize. I think Thieu and Ky had always understood the importance of this (as had the JCS), but they felt it was politically too painful, especially before their 1967 national elections. But TET resolved all doubts. I strongly supported mobilization. Bunker took it up after TET at Westy's urging, and it was a distinct plus in terms of Vietnamization.
MACDONALD: This ties in very definitely with things Westy told me.

KOMER: So TET made Vietnamization feasible. TET led to a much greater sense of danger on the part of the Vietnamese. Once the Vietnamese started mobilizing, they found the men were readily available. In fact experience has proved that every one of our U.S. and CVN estimates over the years on the limits of the available manpower pool undershot the mark.

What effects did this mobilization have on CORDS and CORDS-supported programs? What was done to improve the mobilization measures?

KOMER: On balance, a plus, because we got a lot more local security forces, RF/PF, etc. More plusses than minuses, but there were minuses in that we lost a lot of technicians, etc.

SCOVILLE: But do you feel that overall that mobilization hurt the administration of CORDS-supported programs?

KOMER: I'd say the benefits to pacification from mobilization greatly outweighed the losses. But losses there were and mostly in the field of mobilizing some key technicians. Yet on balance, I would rather have 100,000 more RF/PF than have saved the 5,000 key guys but not gotten 100,000 more RF/PF. Tough, but these are the facts of life.

MONTAGUE: They finally went to a program whereby the technicians come in for nine weeks, get trained, and then they go back to their old jobs and, say, join the People's Self-Defense Force.

KOMER: That was almost entirely owing to our CORDS pressure. They finally did come up with this system; I don't think it was much good. What was the use of training a guy for nine weeks, taking him out of his job, and then sending him back. He's lost continuity, because he usually leaves his job for a month before he's called up, so you lose not nine weeks, but three months. But I couldn't convince Thieu of this. This was because of General Vy, who I think was one of the more limited ministerial-level officials in Vietnam. We tried hard to improve the mobilization measures, a whole series of things -- from asking for individual deferments to proposing quota systems. But there again, we had only modest success -- much more than anybody else, I might add.

SCOVILLE: Since we're talking about mobilization, I remember a visit to Bac Lieu and our report; Dave Kenney and I complained
that they were drafting, on a widespread scale, people from programs of
CORDS interest.

Komer: I was the one who sent you guys out into the field to check
up on this. You remember I was asking for reports from all the PSAs.
The GVN were drafting the only engineers who were left, the only agricul-
tural specialists. I raised so much hell on that question in the Recovery
Committee with the GVN that I got a very polite message directly from Thieu
through General Quang. Quang cornered me and said: "The President asked
me to tell you that he would be immensely grateful if you would stop bugging
him on drafting all the wrong people in full meetings of the cabinet. He
now has it loud and clear; you have sent him 15 memos on the subject, and
have raised it orally 8 times. You are embarrassing him in front of the
cabinet. He will do something about it, but please do not raise it again
in the cabinet. If you raise it again, please do it privately." I offer
that anecdote simply to show how we zeroed in on this problem and got a
lot of changes made.

But I wasn't against mobilization. I was for it. We were trying to
save only about four or five thousand people, key people, who were the only
administrative and technical infrastructure left. And the four or five
thousand were peanuts. You didn't need them in ARVN. Instead of mobilizing
200,000 people, you could do with only 195,000 . . . so what? But their
system just wasn't flexible enough. Besides which, deferment was a politi-
cally sensitive matter. Who was to say that a merchant gets drafted but
the schoolteacher doesn't? Well, you've got to make tough decisions like
this.

Don't forget another key part of the GVN mobilization generated by
the TET shock. We finally got the GVN to move on civil defense. The
People's Self-Defense Force was created, and the GVN mobilization law
required all men from 15 to 60 not in uniform to join. Many younger and
older also volunteered, in a remarkable demonstration of the popular eager-
ness to defend themselves against the VC (see Chapter XII).

How did Operation Recovery get started? What was its impact?

Komer: I would give a lot of prominence to Operation Recovery. It
wasn't strictly pacification, but CORDS was called upon as the only U.S.
organization with the drive and know-how to honcho post-TET recovery. You would have thought that it was more logically USAID business, but Bunker and Westy both said to me, "Bob, you’re the only guy who can really make this thing go, and CORDS the only organization with the drive to boot."

Operation Recovery was one of the most successful exercises that CORDS ever ran, but a major diversion of effort from rural pacification, which postponed rural recovery. It was perfectly clear we had to do something about this great mass of TET evacuees. Then as soon as we were really getting going on the TET evacuees, we had the May Offensive evacuees. We went in for some remarkable field expedients, the famous ten/ten/five program — ten bags of cement, ten sheets of roofing, and five thousand "Ps." When you’re dealing with 700,000 people, most of whom lived in bamboo huts, what the hell are you going to do? Some of the proposals for how to deal with refugees and evacuees when we were sitting there with 750,000 new ones were ridiculous. Guys were suggesting that we rebuild Saigon like Brasilia. We said: "Don’t waste our time. Nobody is going to fund a program like that; in this country it would take four years before you got the blueprints." So we did all these quick and dirty things, and by God they worked.

One of the keys to the success of Operation Recovery was that we came out with some very simple ad hoc do-able solutions. Every refugee head of family got ten bags of cement, ten sheets of roofing, and 5000 "Ps." If he decided to roof his new house with thatch and to sell the ten sheets of roofing, that was his business. If he decided to trade the ten bags of cement for ten sheets of roofing, he had twenty sheets of roofing and could build a frame siding bamboo, without cement walls. If he needed fifteen bags of cement instead of ten, he went and bought the extra five with some of the 5000 "Ps." We really rode herd on that ten/ten/five business. We were all over the country raising hell. Some province and district chiefs wouldn’t release the stuff because the paperwork hadn’t been done. We said give it to them and do the paperwork later. If there were ever a civil defense disaster in this country, I’m sure that various local bureaucrats would be standing at the warehouse door with pistols saying you can’t have this unless you have proper identification.

Another of our devices was to get the GVN to set up a multibillion piaster special recovery fund administered right out of the PM’s office.
Our purpose was to circumvent the usual slow cumbersome release procedures, which would have paralyzed quick response. We diverted the funds from existing programs that would clearly be delayed by the TET shock.

The remarkable thing about Operation Recovery was the close working relationship that it gave us with the GVN. It so happened that Major General George Forsythe, my deputy, had been a close friend of Thieu's when he was on a tour of Vietnam duty in 1959-1960. Thieu had remembered him well and favorably, so we made George the liaison officer. We proposed, I think, on 3 February, the third day of TET...

MONTAGUE: It was Sunday afternoon when we wrote up the paper the day following TET on what we ought to do, and we cleared it with General Westmoreland. Then they set up a big meeting at the Palace; General Westmoreland, the Ambassador, Thieu, Ky, and a lot of cabinet ministers.

KEMER: Westy had the original idea that some kind of joint, top-level coordinating body was desirable to galvanize the GVN. He mentioned this; I thought it a great idea, and at his request CORDS drafted a proposal. We took it right back to him, then took it on down and sold Bunker, who went immediately to Thieu and Ky. Agreement was reached very quickly that Ky was to be chairman of the committee and I was to be, in effect, his American opposite number. We established a command post right at the Presidential Palace, and started operating on a 24-hour basis. After about ten days, Ky quit, and fortunately Thieu personally took over. Thang also quit -- in his usual fashion. He was the greatest resigner I've ever seen. How can a patriot resign every three months?

As a footnote, I got Thang rehabilitated by convincing Westy and Thieu (who wanted to relieve the IV Corps commander after the TET 1968 fiasco, General Mann) that they should send Thang down in his place. Thang performed outstandingly for three months, March-May 1968, as commander IV Corps. But after three months he quit. He said Thieu didn't trust him! We said whether he trusts you or not, he's letting you run the corps, and you're a hero. It wasn't that Thang was unpatriotic. Thang's one of the ablest men in Vietnam -- if it weren't for this death urge. At this point, Westmoreland and Abrams were so violent on the subject of Thang that even I couldn't defend him any more. I was the only senior American who would talk with him, except Ed Lansdale, who had long been his great
hand-holder. It's a pity. I used to give Thang "Dutch uncle" talks once a week or so.

One remarkable thing about the Recovery operation is that a small group of Americans in effect operated as part of the Vietnamese government. We did most of the planning and programming. They did all the execution, except for some fabulous logistic support that MACV gave the recovery effort. I sat in with Clay McManaway or George Forsythe in Vietnamese cabinet meetings, right down the table from the President. We established a rapport with the Vietnamese as a result of this exercise, which was one of the major reasons why we got pacification moving faster in 1968-1969. We ate and drank with these guys. They, of course, all came to us with requests: couldn't we have some more medicines, some more of this, that, and the other thing? We provided transport and took them all over the country to see what was going on, and to make decisions on the spot. Unfortunately, Forsythe left shortly to take over the 1st Air Cav Division, so I personally took over day-to-day liaison until I could turn it over to McManaway. Then when Prime Minister Huong was appointed in March 1968, we operated extremely closely with him and with his chief of staff, Minister Dao. This was one of the most striking features.

Another part of Operation Recovery was Operation Dong Tam. This was Westy's idea and a first-class one, but once again we supervised it. A combination of ARVN and U.S. military engineers cleared several burnt-out areas in Saigon and rebuilt about 1500 houses in two months.

MONTAGUE: Really, General Westmoreland had a lot of ideas in the pacification field, particularly in the management field, right and left.

KOMER: Westy was always very imaginative on things like that. For example, the name "CORDS" was Westmoreland's idea, and I was delighted. I also named TAKEOFF, because I knew it would please Westy. Everybody said it was corny, except Montague. He said, listen, this is the way the military work; these guys like code names. He was right.

In sum, the GVN response to TET was impressive. Given the wartime circumstances, given the heavy blow the cities had suffered, I thought that the GVN did more in four months after TET than they'd done in the two years before TET. And Operation Recovery, which took care of and helped rehouse about a million urban evacuees within a very short period, contributed a good deal to the GVN's post-TET ability to bounce back.
What was the impact of the May Offensive on pacification?

KOMER: Modest, and that's been well-reported. You could get the State weeklies, or if you could get Bunker's personal weekly reports to the President, they're even better. But the May Offensive did prolong the recovery period... no question, especially in III Corps. We had to reactivate Operation Recovery in Saigon.

Since the May Offensive hit mostly Saigon, we formed a Saigon Civil Assistance Group, with USAID support, to help cope with its special problems. It pulled together a whole range of CORDS/USAID activities in support of the new mayor, Colonel Nhieu, whom we helped bring to prominence because he was so good on the Central Recovery Committee staff.

Could you discuss the genesis and development of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign? Whose idea was it?

KOMER: I'm perhaps prouder of the APC than anything else, because I proposed it over much opposition, initially at least. It was clear to me that with the President having taken himself out of the running, with gathering dissent in the United States, we were living on borrowed time in Vietnam. This was apparent as early as March-April. Second, it was clear that the enemy was exhausting himself from the Tet and follow-on offensives, creating an exploitable opportunity. Certainly right after their May Offensive flopped, we were vigorously pushing a rapid expansion of pacification and military operations and everything else. Abrams was talking in the same vein. But the difference was that Abe said we've got to all get out there and pitch, and work harder, and take the war to the enemy.

MONTAGUE: Yes, he put out some messages to the troops that said "attack," "pile on," and all that.

KOMER: We approached the problem by structuring a detailed action program, in a sense the successor to TAKEOFF. We got our ducks in a row about early August. I remember calling in the CORDS staff and saying this is what I want. They said: "No, no, 1968's a dead year. We should start working on the 1969 program." I said, "To hell with that; we may not even be here in 1969 if we don't get the show on the road." So we took the deliberate risk of thin but rapid expansion. Initially we decided to shoot for upgrading 1500 hamlets in three months.
SCOVILLE: In view of the failure of the Strategic Hamlet Program, how did you dare?

KOMER: It was a calculated risk. Everybody pointed out, especially the CORDS guys, what the flaws were: are you repeating the mistakes of the Strategic Hamlet Program or the over-ambitious 1967 RH program? At least we took the protection to where the people were, instead of the strategic hamlet concept of reconcentrating the people in more defensible areas.

MONTAGUE: Plus APC was a once-over-lightly. It was not going to be complete pacification. The idea was to offset the VC -- to show the government's flag. In fact, in May-June or so we'd had the "show the flag" campaign which was a predecessor . . . just get the troops out marching through the hamlets. Now we were trying to do more.

KOMER: Right, we were trying to think of anything to get RVNAF out in the countryside, taking advantage of enemy exhaustion after the TET and May Offensives. And then, before we got the program into gear, we had the abortive August-September Offensive, which didn't even get off the ground but led to as great losses as the VC/NVA had in May. I took the APC paper to Abrams; we first wrote it up ourselves. The big MACCUMS staff was not very eager about it, although when I told them, they rallied and participated. But Abe and Bunker got right behind it. Bunker's immediate reaction was, okay, I'll take you over and explain this to the President. So he took Abe and myself over to the President. Early September at a meeting with Thieu in his private conference room with half a dozen of the top Vietnamese there, I laid the thing out.

Thieu was not very enthusiastic, because he thought it wasn't feasible. He too thought we should concentrate on the 1969 program. But he turned to Cao Van Vien, who didn't know anything about the Accelerated Pacification Campaign, and said: "General Vien, do you think this is militarily feasible? These guys want to get out in the countryside and take over 1000 more hamlets, etc." And Cao Van Vien said, "I defer to General Abrams because he's more familiar with this; this is a new plan that I have not yet been briefed on." A perfectly bureaucratic reply. Abe said, "Well, General Vien will know more about the feasibility, because it mostly involves Vietnamese assets, but I think it is emphatically
worth a try." Abe gave it a good endorsement. Vien then spoke up and said, "I'm inclined to agree with General Abrams, but I must first consult the four corps commanders on the military feasibility of the plan."

MONTAGUE: You had to cut it down to a thousand hamlets. We also started developing hamlet lists, so that's the time we were able to turn over to the province precise hamlet lists that they could look at.

KOMER: On the spot I decided to cut it down to a thousand because I could see that Thieu's mind just boggled at the fifteen hundred. So we one-upped the Vietnamese. Since Vien was going to call in the four corps commanders, I immediately went out with a personal message to our U.S. corps commanders saying get over and clue your counterparts that we're all for it. I then called the DEFCORDS and said get in there and pitch. We had already briefed the DEFCORDS. The four ARVN corps commanders came in and said in essence that it was feasible, largely because of being influenced by their American counterparts. Vien reported within a week to Thieu that it was militarily feasible. Thieu then said let's go. I had been hoping first for an opening date... jumpoff 1st October. Then we modified it to 15 October. Then to 20 October. We finally got going on the 1st of November. But you see this gathering push on our part to get the show on the road, based first on our appreciation of the situation in the U.S. and second on our appreciation that the countryside was ripe, because of the exhaustion of the enemy forces.

What were the essential features of the APC?

KOMER: My idea was a short-term surge effort for the three months November-January before Tet 1969 which marked the effective start of the 1969 pacification year. To concentrate effort and resources, I called for a highly simplified program -- we could fill in the chinks later.

The overall goal was to upgrade 1000 hamlets to "C" or better, essentially by (1) getting a PF platoon in each hamlet; (2) organizing an elected hamlet government; (3) setting up a hamlet PSDF unit; and (4) carrying out one self-help project. We added on some more general goals — 5000 more Hoi Chanh, an overall PSDF increase to 1,000,000 (of whom 200,000 were to be armed), and a Phung Hoang goal of 1200 VCI a month. Interior Minister Khiem raised the latter to 3000 a month, which we thought ridiculous, but I went along with it.
The APC had other important features. For example, I used the APC to finally sell Thieu on doubling the number of RD teams by the simple expedient of taking the 59-man team and converting it into two 30-man teams (see Chapter VIII). It took me two years to get that done. We also put in the APC directive the concept of having the RD team assigned semi-permanently to one village, and fanning out to the hamlets.

Do you think APC was possible pre-TET?

Komer: I think APC was possible as early as July 1968, but not possible pre-TET. This brings up the whole issue of buildup, lead time, organization, etc. It just takes a lot of lead time. You've heard Westy say how 1965-1966 was really the buildup period, and he couldn't really move out until we had stabilized the situation, built up our logistic base, cleared up the ports, established the depots, learned the drill, etc. So too in pacification. I do not believe we could have laid on a successful APC without the mid-1967 to mid-1968 work, only a year really, getting pacification set up. For example, take one of the key APC sub-programs, Phoenix. We couldn't have made Phoenix work at all if we hadn't had a year's painful experience in converting it into an at least modestly functioning program. So you needed the preparation, the working out of bugs, etc. Thus the APC would have been much more difficult earlier than July. The second major reason is that the enemy exhausted himself in the TET and follow-on offensives, thus creating a situation in which he could not, in our opinion, effectively combat an Accelerated Pacification Campaign. Incidentally, I think Abe would give me credit, as would Bunker, for the APC. Abe is a very fair-minded guy. Of course, as the titular commander he was the guy who ordered the APC. Without his acquiescence it couldn't have been launched. Once it is, the top guy naturally gets the credit.

Do you think that General Westmoreland's so-called "big unit" war in the years preceding mid-1968 was also essential in creating a climate for pacification such as you eventually had for your APC?

Komer: Yes, to a very great extent. During my White House period, for example in my final April 1967 report on "Thoughts on Future Strategy in Vietnam." I was questioning the need for more U.S. troops in lieu of pushing the RVN and ARVN to do more, and greater emphasis on pacification.
This was partly parochial, of course. But U.S. success in pushing the VC/NVA back during 1965-1967 was essential to pacifying on any large scale in 1968-1969.

If we had started pacification back in the very early 1960s, before the major NVA infiltration, and before the enemy had moved to fighting a semi-conventional war, the need for the big unit war could have been much less. But by the time of American intervention, the NVA were coming into South Vietnam in strength. The enemy had also shifted to the so-called Phase II strategy of bigger, semi-conventional war. So by the time I became involved, the big unit war had become an indispensable corollary of pacification, just as pacification was in turn indispensable in order to capitalize on success in the big unit war. Without the regular ARVN and Americans pushing back the enemy's conventional units and in effect acting as a shield for the pacifiers, the enemy's big units would have come in and messed up pacification before it could even get off the ground. In sum, you cannot talk about winning in Vietnam post-1964 by pacification alone without the big unit effort; you cannot talk about the big units winning without pacification.

MACDONALD: Then what you've been saying earlier is that we really weren't concentrating enough on pacification.

KOMER: Right. I agree we did have to stop the enemy from closing in on the cities in 1965, closing in on Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and even Saigon. But I do question the relative weight of emphasis put on the big unit war versus pacification. Instead of the resources being divided about 95/5 and then maybe 90/10, what if we had divided them much more like 75/25? Could we not have achieved much more solid results, particularly in drying up the VC?

What about Sir Robert Thompson's thesis, as expounded in NO EXIT FROM VIETNAM, that we were wrong in the big unit war, that we should have concentrated on drying up the supply contacts on the periphery of these villages and hamlets?

KOMER: Bob Thompson is very good on dealing with an incipient or small-scale insurgency. His prescriptions could have been decisive (and he was prescribing it then) from 1957 to 1963 when the insurgency was mostly Viet Cong and mostly a guerrilla and subversive operation. But Thompson continued prescribing the same Malaya technique even after a major aggression from the north. The British in Malaya never had a major external intervention, which
after all got up at one point in Vietnam to about 250,000 men a year. Bob is essentially saying use counter-insurgency techniques on the Malaya model. But after 1964 Vietnam is really quite different, because you have both an insurgency on the Malayan model and a major foreign invasion heavily supported from sanctuary. Thompson never quite granted that in Vietnam we had to cope with both a major external invasion and a conventional war on a scale utterly unlike that of Malaya, without the political and administrative structure created by the British relationship with the Malayans that had evolved over 50 years. On the other hand, CORDS carried out most of Thompson's prescriptions insofar as feasible. He lays great emphasis on police and rural constabulary. Our rural constabulary was the RP/PF; only the name is different. They were far less professional, though we finally got to work on them. So I'm very sympathetic to most Thompson prescriptions. I brought him and Desmond Palmer out again. And I brought in Sir Claude Fenner, who was the chief of the Malayan police. I always thought Bob never gave us credit for trying to do the things he proposed. He does give a few grudging words in his book.

Do you feel that APC has been the driving force behind the extremely favorable upturn in pacification in the last year?

KOMER: Unquestionably! The APC really started the rapid thrust forward that began really in October, because we started several aspects of the APC before the official kickoff date. It really started in October as you can see from the HES, which went up sharply that month. And as Montague can tell you (he was there nine months after I left), we're still pursuing the APC approach -- with certain modifications.

Why did you leave and go to Turkey?

KOMER: Turkey was the hardest job in the world to turn down for me. I already was an ambassador. But I had been a Turkophile ever since I took Ottoman History at Harvard before the war. So the President offered me the one job that gave me a real chance to indulge my interest. Second, I'd been in the Vietnam business since May 1966. I left on 5 November 1968, just as the APC was taking off.

MACDONALD: Do you feel that your change in assignments had anything to do with the election or political setup?
Komer: Not a bit. I suspect that President Johnson gave me the appointment as a reward for performance. I had been his Middle East guy and traveled to Turkey with him, and he knew my interest. So did Dean Rusk. Incidentally, when I told Ambassador Bunker I was very ambivalent about going because I also had great commitment to the pacification program, he said: "Bob, I've found out one thing in a long career, and that is not to look a gift horse in the mouth. The chance to go run your own show is too good to be turned down." I left with considerable regret.

Scoville: I remember asking when are you coming back to Washington. I meant come back and have a meal, but you took it as when am I going to leave this job. You said (this was mid-1968, when I left Saigon): "No, I've come out to do a job; I'm going to stay until it's done."

Komer: Another important managerial consideration — I had brought out my own hand-picked successor in Bill Colby. The President got him for me from CIA. He trained for almost a year as ACofS, CORDS, and I was very pleased that both Bunker and Abrams strongly approved when I urged him as my successor. I brought him out to Vietnam with this in mind, as Colby can tell you, because I told him I was grooming him for my successor. I didn't know how long I'd be there or what. In a sense I left Bill Colby in a tough spot to fill. While we built the organization up and had pacification a going concern before he took over, you can't blame him if he didn't have my prior ties to Washington and my reputation as LBJ's man. Besides which, Abrams is very different from Westmoreland. Abe regarded CORDS as sort of an odd-ball outfit alien to the Army system. Abe's a surprisingly organization man as far as administration is concerned, whereas Westy gloried in this Rube Goldberg contrivance that he and I had set up. Westy prided himself on being innovative. He's about as proud of going to the Harvard Business School as of going to West Point.

What were the results of the first APC?

Komer: Even granted the limitations of our statistical measurements, they were beyond almost everybody's wildest expectations. The initial goal of bringing 1000 contested or VC hamlets up to "C" status was revised upward several times, finally to 1335. By TET 1969 some 1089 hamlets had been upgraded (459 in IV Corps alone). MSE showed a 10 percent gain in
"relatively secure" population, rising to about 79 percent in three months. Ralliers numbered 8600, some 75 percent of them in IV Corps, owing largely to an imaginative "third party inducement" program. While we fell far short of Khien's ridiculous Phung Hoang goal of neutralizing 3000 VCI per month, the GVN did double the monthly rate from about 1100 average before the APC to around 2300 per month. The People's Self Defense objective (including at least 50 members in each target hamlet, of whom 10 must be armed) was over-fulfilled. By TET 1969 over 1.1 million were signed up countrywide and 660,000 had received some training, though only 170,000 had been armed. Above all the APC proved that the pacification program had not died in the TET offensive, but rather had substantial recuperative powers.

Why was the APC such a success?

KOMER: Partly because of all the painful 1966-1968 buildup of pacification assets that had preceded it. Partly because of good planning and clear, simplified, achievable goals on which we followed through. But also largely because of a favorable climate for exploitation, created by the VC/NVA's heavy losses in the TET and follow-on offensives and our vigorous U.S./ARVN counter-attacks. While we were reasonably quick to exploit VC/NVA exhaustion via a fairly well-designed and streamlined program, the secret of our success lies at least as much in the enemy's weakness and his slowness to react. I think he made a big mistake.

In fact, one of the surprising things about pacification 1967-1969 is that the enemy made so little systematic effort to counter it. He focused more on reacting to our anti-main force campaign and then launching his own offensives in 1968. But to a great extent, in my judgement, he discounted pacification because of its many earlier failures. His documents, directives, and speeches always paid due note to the importance of crushing the pacification effort, but he devoted relatively little effort to this during the period. Maybe history will record that we stole a march on him in 1967-1969.
VI. PACIFICATION IN THE LARGER CONTEXT

KOMER: Having finished the chronological treatment of pacification through 1968, it is useful to return to some of the larger issues. How did pacification fit into the overall GVN/U.S. direction of the war, and into the way we and the Vietnamese fought it in the field? How did the U.S. forces and RVN/AF in turn fit into pacification? How did the U.S. advisors get things across to the Vietnamese? All this raises some sensitive issues. I will speak frankly, and think I was in a rather good position from which to assess them. While in Washington, I attended many of the famous Tuesday lunches, and was a member of the so-called "non-group" of sub-Cabinet officials created to bring more Washington focus to the problems of the war. Yet I still saw only a partial picture, and that only from May 1966 to November 1968. So take what I say with the proverbial grain of salt.

One of the striking features of this highly atypical conflict was the loose, informal way it was run from the top. I suspect this was largely a device to keep the military from running away with the war -- a highly-structured war direction would almost inevitably have magnified the JCS role. Informality also fitted President Johnson's style. Moreover, it reflected the way in which an essentially small U.S. commitment in limited conflict gradually grew like Topsy into a major enterprise. Vietnam didn't start out as a major war, with mobilization, economic controls, a grand strategic plan, and the like. The unstructured way it grew, together with the effort to keep it from becoming a major drain, contributed to the informal way it was managed.

Hence, you almost have to analyze the strategic direction in terms of the roles of the chief protagonists -- the President, McNamara, Rusk, and Rostow (replacing Bundy in early 1966). Next to the President, Bob McNamara was the key decisionmaker, the one on whom the President seemed to lean most heavily during the time I was involved.

However, let me add an important caveat that Washington (including the JCS) left great discretion to the U.S. commanders in the field -- the Ambassador and COMUSMACV -- in the actual running of the war. Washington dictated resource allocation and the strategic constraints within
which this limited war would be fought. Since bombing targets in the north were central to the latter, Washington reserved decision to itself. But how the war was fought on the ground — politically as well as militarily — was mostly left to the top field commanders, who were naturally jealous of their prerogatives. It is not an unfamiliar situation in wartime. I have already recounted (see Chapters III and IV) my own problems and frustrations in attempting to manage one small portion of our Vietnam enterprise from the Washington end, and the solutions that I recommended.

To what extent was Washington (State, DOD, CIA, White House) involved in pacification planning?

**Komer:** As I pointed out, Washington mostly left such planning to the people in Vietnam. The Vietnam Coordinating Committee made various suggestions, but there wasn't much systematic planning before 1966, even in the field. Then from May 1966 through April 1967 my White House office became heavily involved in encouraging more pacification planning in the field. We used to be constantly after Porter and MACV. I sent Montague and Holbrooke out frequently to help write the plans, and tried to contribute myself. This changed again after I moved to the field. I cannot recall any major guidance on pacification planning from Washington during the entire 19 months I was there. The traffic just dropped off. After we moved our base of operation out to Vietnam, and I took some of the best people with me really (Montague and Chuck Cooper), State, DOD, and Leonhart just seemed to lay off. On the contrary, we were constantly going back to them for help and were very unhappy that we couldn't get much. The DOD left the war to Westmoreland and pacification to Komer. State confined itself mostly to giving political guidance to the Embassy.

Perhaps it was partly because many people did not focus on pacification even then; partly because they felt it would be "carrying coals to Newcastle"; partly because I may have scared off most working level people. I adopted the Westmoreland view: we're the field commanders; you give us the resources, and we'll do the job. Certainly very few specific instructions on pacification matters came through from my former outfit in the White House. Very few from Defense. State would occasionally politely say wouldn't it be a good idea to do such and such or so and so. But there was nobody in State telling us how to run pacification in the field.
We were generally far enough ahead of the people in Washington that we were telling them what they needed to do to support us, rather than vice versa. Incidentally, all the summaries, most of Bunker's traffic about pacification, was written by us, except where he made a personal comment. Except where he says "I," we wrote it.

To what extent was pacification of interest to the President, to the Secretary of State, and to the Secretary of Defense?

Komer: The President was at least as interested and inquiring about pacification as about anything else in the war. Since he had been the one to promote the "other war," he was quite frequently asking questions about it.

Scoville: Was this thought put in his head by McNamara?

Komer: Perhaps partly by McNamara, but I suspect mostly a political instinct of his own. Probably even more than McNamara he realized that this was a political war that could not be won by military means alone. Probably the President was out ahead of McNamara on this, though I don't want to say SECDEF was far behind. McNamara realized intellectually that the "other war" was critically important and that a lot needed to be done that was not being done. But McNamara disciplined himself (at least this was my strong impression from having watched him operate and dealt with him from 1961 on) to keep out of State Department or CIA or AID business. As Secretary of Defense he felt it was not his job to run their programs in Vietnam. He would give his comments, if asked, on whether their programs were doing well, or whether their policies were sound. But given McNamara's strong sense that it's poor management to muck around in the other fellow's cabbage patch, his interest in pacification stands out all the more favorably. The Secretary of State and I always had a good relationship, but I had no sense that he was terribly engaged in the pacification program. My impression of the State Department as a whole was that they were focused almost exclusively on the Saigon political calculus and the negotiating track . . . various ploys, feelers, etc. In the lower levels of State there was a great deal of interest in pacification, particularly on the part of people who had been there. But the higher levels of State, including Bill Bundy and his deputies, were not much involved with pacification.
MONTAGUE: Katzenbach got very interested when he came in and got wrapped up in the OCO decision and the decision to set up CORDS. He stirred around but didn't exert a whole lot of influence.

KOMER: True, the OCO decision went to Katzenbach, because it had to go to somebody on the Seventh Floor. In my White House days, I tried to get Katzenbach a lot more interested because he was so good. I was the initiator of the famous "non-group" of Nick as chairman, Cy Vance, Walt Rostow, and myself, a concept which I sold to the President in an attempt to get more systematic top-level Washington focus on the war. Nick also paid me the compliment of taking two people onto his staff from my old staff, Moorsteen and Holbrooke.

If McNamara was the only consistent supporter of increasing and exercising U.S. leverage with the GVN in 1965, why didn't more get done?

MACDONALD: Referring again to the 24 April 1967 memorandum, I must say you do look good, Bob.

KOMER: When we said that there is an alternative to further building up the American effort in the war, i.e. more emphasis on pacification and getting the Vietnamese to do better . . . no wonder an earlier Defense study loved it. But why didn't McNamara do more along these lines? He had a much better view of the war than he ever executed. Why didn't Bob do more of what he knew needed to be done? How much was it the President being unwilling? How much of it McNamara's deference to the professional military? How much of it deference to State? I don't know. I am a passionate admirer of his; he comes out of the 1961-1968 period as a towering man. But, somehow, even though he knew or sensed what was necessary, he didn't get it done. There must be reasons. For example, he thought the bombing wasn't so good, but somehow . . . perhaps being Secretary of Defense limited his maneuver room.

MACDONALD: This may be part of the problem.

On page three of your 27 April 1967 Memorandum to the President you advocated "putting at least ARVN under Westy and his corps commanders" as possibly being the "best short-run way to get more response out of ARVN." Could you discuss this proposal?

MONTAGUE: I'm sure McNamara never proposed a joint command.
Komer: But he told me he'd considered it earlier and was talked out of it by Westy. McNamara and Westmoreland both gave me my comeuppance on joint command.

Montague: Because I urged you to press it, and you included it in your August 1966 study (see Chapter III) and got clobbered.

MacDonald: Westmoreland was very much against it.

Komer: Very much. McNamara was convinced by Westmoreland. As Westy also told me his basic case against joint command was that in effect he already had immense influence over the ARVN through his personal relationship with Cao Van Vien and the other senior generals, and that if we got tied into a joint command, we would be committed much more than we wanted to. We would lose our freedom of action. There would also be a question, since in 1965 or so Westy had very few troops and the Vietnamese lots, as to whether Westy or a Vietnamese would be commander. He could have ended up as operations director a la Bob Thompson or something like that. But Westmoreland's chief counter to joint command is, I think, a legitimate one: "Look, I have greater indirect, informal influence over RVNAF than I might have if we formalized the arrangement." Westy told me this; McNamara gave me the same story.

Montague: General Westmoreland did go so far, based on a bunch of recommendations that we did in MACV, as to set up in early 1965 a joint planning group whereby a U.S. and a Vietnamese general would develop joint plans that would go up to each of their commanders and then go out as orders. As long as we had General Jimmy Collins, who worked with General Dzu, this was a pretty good idea. But then I left (I had been pushing this) and General Collins' job was changed. They put some clod in, and the thing didn't work. So they dropped it.

Komer: During my Washington period I kept bringing up this question of more U.S. influence over ARVN, of which joint command is just one variant. In my final April 1967 report to the President I said this was one way to get a quick fix. You remember I was making the case that what we really needed was to get the Vietnamese to do better. But McNamara as well as Westmoreland had already given me my comeuppance on this. In fact, my first serious run-in with McNamara was when, in that earlier August 1966 memo on "Thoughts on Strategy in Vietnam," I mentioned joint command. The President mentioned it to McNamara, and McNamara read me the
riot act. He said in effect: "I'm supporting you to the hilt on pacification. I'll give you anything you need. But you're getting into the military direction of the war, and I don't think that's in your charter." McNamara was very clear that I'd better keep my nose out of that one, since he'd at an earlier time considered joint command but had concluded that Westmoreland's arguments against it were right. I was greatly influenced by the fact that Bob McNamara had looked into it and decided it wouldn't work, and that I got the same reaction from Westy. But I did briefly raise it once again in my April 1967 final report. Then once I reached Vietnam and was working for Westmoreland, there was no point in raising joint command again.

MACDONALD: Did you ever run into anything on the command of the Koreans, for example?

KOMER: MACV would have preferred to have the Koreans placed under OPCON of MACV. But the ROKs wouldn't have it.

MACDONALD: Yes, I had that impression very definitely. Their face in Asia couldn't stand it.

KOMER: Yes. Incidentally, Westy made the same point on the ROKs as on ARVN, i.e. he had such great informal influence over the Korean commanders that formal joint command was unnecessary. I don't know whether he was right, but he was sufficiently convincing that I decided I didn't know enough to argue.

SCOVILLE: Certainly, not having a joint command at this point in our policy makes it a lot easier to disengage . . .

KOMER: Correct. That was one of Westmoreland's points and McNamara's. We would have lost flexibility.

MACDONALD: I think he had greater freedom of movement himself with American forces . . .

KOMER: Right, and remember that Westmoreland's concept was that to win the war in a reasonable hurry, he had to do it mostly with Americans, since it was ARVN's near collapse in 1964-1965 that had necessitated U.S. intervention in the first place, and Westy saw a long painful buildup as required before ARVN could get fully back on its feet.
When U.S. combat troop introduction was beginning in 1965, there was high-level discussion of the possibility of the encadrement of RVNAF. McGeorge Bundy (15 April 1965, Bundy to Taylor) has indicated the strong personal interest of the President in this. Were you involved? What was your position?

MONTAGUE: In March 1965 I got a call from General Westmoreland. I was sitting out at High Command, and he said he had a high-level problem for me. He said write a commander's estimate of the situation, and one of the courses of action must be the introduction of U.S. forces. So I wrote the first paper. Afterwards DePuy and I wrote the final paper that went back asking for the U.S. troops. Then we went back to Washington and briefed the study.

KOMER: But what about Bundy arguing for U.S. encadrement of RVNAF? I'm not sure what's meant. Stiffening the Vietnamese by brigading U.S. troops together with the ARVN?

MONTAGUE: I never heard of it.

SCOVILLE: I don't have the text of the message except they cite it as direct from Bundy to Taylor in which he said the President has a strong personal interest in this.

KOMER: It might have been a very good idea. I don't know why it was buried at Honolulu in 1965.

MONTAGUE: When we discussed our solution with Ambassador Taylor, he didn't even bring this up. So it's something he got and rejected on his own.

Could you discuss the reasons behind the policy not to employ U.S. forces in pacification directly? What was the CORDS position on this issue? Who was basically responsible for this policy? Why?

KOMER: In the White House, then out in Vietnam, I opposed substantial employment of U.S. forces in pacification. We couldn't afford it. General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker basically agreed with this policy.

SCOVILLE: You feel that this would override the fact that U.S. troops probably would behave better and also learn more about the area in which they had to work... you know, Dave Pabst's idea of keeping them in one area so that they pick up both knowledge and an affection for a certain area?

KOMER: Using U.S. troops on an area basis to help winkle out the
local forces is fine in appropriate cases. But to kid ourselves that U.S. troops could do a very good job of getting at the infrastructure or that we should use lots of high-cost, very expensive U.S. troops as RP/PF for territorial security was ridiculous.

MONTAGUE: It's much better to go recruit the RP/PF, train them in a training center and get them out there. Give them U.S. advisors. Give them U.S. equipment. Give them MAT teams, other help... certainly U.S. fire support. But you don't need to send U.S. forces out to hold their hands for long periods or to take their place.

KORDER: You must remember that my philosophy was to help avoid an over-commitment of U.S. troops by stressing Vietnamese, and that I laid great emphasis on cheap ways and means by which we could get more out of the Vietnamese in order to avoid having to send over a lot more American troops. At various times there were all sorts of Saigon and Washington suggestions for using U.S. forces for pacification. But none of them ever got very far, because Westmoreland and then Abrams had what they regarded as more important uses for the U.S. forces. I didn't argue with them because my position was that we did not need more U.S. troops for pacification. Why use American troops for doing a job that the Vietnamese could probably do as well?

Now, there were many times when American troops were in a reserve or static role temporarily, and might as well be used for pacification-related tasks. What to do with the U.S. forces became a problem after the last big enemy offensive subsided in the winter of 1968-1969. For example, General Barnes and the 173d Airborne up in Bong Son had run out of big units to fight. So naturally he was using his brigade in an enlightened way to support the pacification clear and hold effort. I favor that.

It's not very germane to what we're discussing here, but I might mention my early fall 1968 suggestion to Abe that the best way to buy more time for the U.S. effort in Vietnam might be to volunteer to give up, say, 50,000 U.S. troops within six months or so. The handwriting on the wall was clear, I argued, that some kind of Washington-directed troop cutback was sooner or later inevitable. My contention was that anticipating the inevitable would (1) restore MACV's credibility, which was so badly damaged by TET that people back home didn't even listen when we claimed we
were regaining the upper hand; (2) put even greater pressure on the GVN to shape up; and (3) give MACV greater control over when, how, and where to cut than if the cutback were dictated from Washington. Abe heard me out politely and then simply replied, "Bob, I don't think any general in history ever said he had too many troops." That was so conclusive an answer that I didn't even try to argue. I couldn't blame him either. I did mention the episode to Ambassador Bunker next day. He was open-minded, but saw no point in what would inevitably have turned out a split recommendation from Saigon over the objections of COMUSMACV. He was right, and I never raised the issue with Abe again.

Could you comment on the various operations or programs in which U.S. units were used in a pacification role: Operation Lamson (1966; U.S. 1st Infantry Division-ARVN 5th Infantry Division), U.S. 25th Infantry Division's program of "adopted districts," Operation Fairfax, the CAP Program of the USMC?

KOMER: I don't think Lamson was very successful, except on a modest local scale. The "adopted districts" program I am not too familiar with. Operation Fairfax under General Freund was, I thought, a rather successful example of brigading a U.S. brigade and an ARVN Ranger unit together; it proved they could operate jointly and successfully. Unfortunately, it was regarded as a successful experiment and terminated just before TET.

MACDONALD: Westmoreland has commented on this. He regretted he'd moved a little fast.

KOMER: The Marine Combined Action Platoon (CAP) Program is another fascinating experiment in the use of U.S. forces in pacification. In concept it was very good. The trouble is that the Marines themselves never carried it out on more than a limited scale. I think the maximum number of CAPs they got up to was about 114 in 1968 or later. At the same time they were touting it to me in 1966-1967 they themselves were only investing in 71 CAPs. Another problem was the Marine CAPs brigaded the Marines with the lowest-quality Vietnamese troops. We put in 12 high-quality Marines with 24 low-quality PF. Why did this happen? I asked General Krulak. He said: "We wanted to do it with ARVN, but General Thi, the I Corps Commander, refused. So then we asked him for RF; he refused. Thi was a great nationalist. The only thing Thi would let us have were the insignificant PF because he thought they weren't even worth bothering
I favor all sorts of experiments to mix U.S. and Vietnamese units together, but bear in mind that you do destroy a certain amount of unit integrity. I think we would have done better if we'd expanded CAPs, but not as much as, say, having 1000 CAPs -- one in every vulnerable hamlet in I Corps. Wasn't one Marine to two PFs a very high ratio of expensive U.S. to cheap Vietnamese manpower? Nonetheless, I liked the CAP Program, and by and large I thought it very successful. However, there were roughly 10,000 hamlets we wanted to secure in Vietnam. Take 12 Americans per PF platoon per hamlet, multiply 12 by 10,000, and you come up with 120,000 U.S. infantry. We didn't have that many infantry in Vietnam.

Westmoreland came up with an alternative to the CAP called a Mobile Advisory Team (MAT), consisting of five U.S. officers and NCOs to go out and train a much larger number of RF and PF. It grew out of an experiment that Westy had himself started with one U.S. division, probably the 1st. Why not assign a MAT team or two to each district and have them upgrade the whole RF/PF structure in the district, coincident with the issuance of new weapons and equipment? Here was an example of what I was able to do as Westy's deputy for pacification. Along came an experiment. Westy thought it was a good idea. I urged that we do it on a countrywide scale in a big way. And by God, Westy was all in favor. My big bid for MATs was one of my early successes in COMS. Westy had a meeting on American force structure, and I put in a bid for 500 MAT teams. We reached agreement on 353 MAT teams. Multiply that by five, and you see that we got the U.S. Army to put in 1800 men. We got more Army people into the program than the Marines put in CAPs, but of course the Marine force base was much smaller.

MACDONALD: The MAT team was, to my mind, one of the most successful programs I saw.

Could you discuss the issue of deploying U.S. troops to the Delta?

Kemen: I strongly favored a modest deployment of U.S. troops to the Delta. This was part of my philosophy that we should get after the VC while containing the NVA. The least energetic Vietnamese troops in ARVN tended to be in the Delta, although they were more competent than the three divisions in III Corps. I thought that getting some high-quality, mobile U.S. forces like the Riverine Force down into the Delta would energize
the Vietnamese, get the ARVN out much more along with the Americans to
defeat what I regarded as a very weak VC force in the Delta. The enemy
was weaker in the Delta than anywhere else. Just look at the order of
battle.

SCOVILLE: Well, weaker in large units, but I always thought locally
they were incredibly more powerful.

KOMER: I would disagree. The enemy up in Quang Ngai, Quang Nam,
Quang Tin were a lot more effective than the Cochinichinese VC. Anyway,
the Embassy staff said, God, the American military is tearing up the
country all over the place; they'll tear it up down in the Delta, and it
would be terrible to see another area all destroyed. My counter was
we can send them down there under rules of engagement that will sharply
limit the amount of destruction. We did get MACV agreement, perhaps oral, on
such rules. The commitment of American troops to the Delta did somewhat
increase the amount of destruction or civilian casualties, but in no
sense comparable to what the enemy did as a result of the TET Offensive.

SCOVILLE: I would disagree. I have always felt that it was not the
enemy that destroyed during TET, but that it was U.S. and ARVN reaction,
our methods of street fighting used to remove the enemy, that caused over
75 percent of the destruction. Of course, the enemy caused it all indi-
rectly. Do you agree?

KOMER: To a degree. But I feel that the extent of U.S.-caused
civilian destruction was overstated grossly by the press, etc. They
generalized from horrors like Ben Tra. I saw all these places. But I
quite agree that we overdid it, and strongly protested after the May 1968
damage to Saigon. In any case, the TET damage was a special result of
battles in the cities, and happened not just in the Delta but also in Hue,
Quang Tri, Qui Nhon, Phan Thiet, Binh Thuan, etc.

SCOVILLE: Doesn't it happen to a much greater degree when American
troops are involved? And in fact the 9th Division also did this outside
of Saigon.

KOMER: Perhaps the Americans created more damage than the Vietnamese
did, but this was largely because we were also supporting Vietnamese units
with our artillery and air. Most of the destruction in the Saigon area
was not caused in connection with American troops. It was caused in con-
nnection with American bombing and shelling in support of Vietnamese troops
and at their request. The only place American troops were really involved was down in the "z" Bridge in the 9th District, and there I think our performance was awful.

SCOVILLE: But I got the impression from talking to people, after we'd been down in My Tho, that they felt that the U.S. 9th Division was responsible and that the ARVN wouldn't have done this. I also remember large areas of destruction around Highway 4 that General Knowlton so proudly pointed out, you know, with a slight smile... you know, where a U.S. unit had over-reacted. And he would fully admit this. In fact, I don't think he realized what he was saying at the time.

KOMER: There was unquestionably some over-reaction by U.S. forces, including the 9th Division that seemed to be body-count happy. But I think the press tended to focus much more on incidents of over-reaction by U.S. than ARVN forces. We did too, because we were more interested in disciplining our own people than the Vietnamese. By and large, however, I don't think that the deployment of modest U.S. forces to the Delta caused anywhere near the amount of discomfitation that people feared. They weren't all that effective either. But the Riverine Force performed some very useful functions. And if we hadn't committed these troops down there on a couple of occasions, we would have sustained much more serious losses, for example, if we had not had them down there at TET. On balance, the temporary introduction of American infantry into the Delta was a plus. But I would agree with John Vann's judgement that by mid-1969 the time had come to pull them out. I believe that the deployment in late 1967 was sound and that withdrawal in 1969 was sound. Everything is a matching of plusses and minuses. Also note that some of our greatest 1968-1969 successes in pacification have been in the Delta, and I think that was partially a function of our attriting the VC.

Could you discuss the adaptability and benefits of having large U.S. units operating among populated areas in a counter-insurgency environment?

KOMER: There are many difficulties. The Americans tend to use firepower to save American casualties, and the American press dotes much more on U.S. casualties than on far greater Vietnamese casualties, military or civilian. This sort of double standard is inevitable. Large U.S. units
are not very adaptable to fighting in populated areas where you want to avoid large civilian destruction or alienation of the civilian population. I also happen to be one of those who favored a much more small-unit war. Americans should have operated much more in small units as a matter of course, with much less use of artillery and air strikes. The way we should have optimized our fighting style was much more the way described by Bing West and Brian Jenkins of RAND, and General Willard Pearson, who had the 101st Airborne Brigade. There were a lot of U.S. officers in Vietnam who favored much greater emphasis on Indian-fighting tactics, if you will; I certainly agree with them.

Did CORDS try to do anything about cutting down on H & I fire?

KOREN: We complained about H & I fire, but really credit on this goes to Abrams. He very discreetly started cutting down the ammo allocations to conserve ammunition, which automatically meant cutting down H & I fire. As far as I'm concerned, I think that H & I fire could have been cut by about 90 percent. One time I mentioned this and didn't get very far. But remember that H & I was NOT really what caused most civilian damage. It was not aimed primarily at populated areas but more at routes of approach. Abe cut down H & I because primarily it was expensive and wasteful, not because of damage.

Could you discuss the role of ARVN forces in pacification? Was this entirely a U.S. idea at first? When was it first confirmed officially?

KOREN: It was largely a U.S. idea at the outset. Because ARVN was pretty weak in 1966–1967 and MACV was using U.S. forces for the main offensive operations except in the Delta, MACV was open-minded about using ARVN for clear and hold. We found the Vietnamese reasonably responsive. Our first breakthrough was when we got about 51 ARVN battalions temporarily assigned to DSRD. We promoted it in 1966 and we did it by getting it in the Combined Campaign Plan for 1967 -- AB 141 I think.

Could you discuss the receptiveness of the Vietnamese and JGS to this idea? How much U.S. pressure was involved?

KOREN: The JGS was initially receptive to use of ARVN on DSRD, as
the mission seemed logical, and relatively easy. Field commanders were much less so. The division commanders in particular were constantly hauling away these battalions, and were not properly supervising their activities. Nor were a number of the U.S. tactical advisors. There were difficulties in getting the ARVN battalions assigned to the priority areas we wanted. Regimental and division commanders would not want the battalions sent off to a distant area. They wanted to keep their forces nearby, etc. We had considerable difficulty on that, but we worked out a meeting of minds. Sometimes, when we couldn't get adequate military security forces for a pacification area, we would select an alternate area where the division commander was willing to put a battalion. Naturally it had to be a compromise. The number of battalions fluctuated, and we lost control of a lot of them at TET 1968. Then, as the RF/PF began coming in, JCS and MACV began taking these battalions away — over my dead body I might add.

This only reinforced our feeling all along that RF/PF were the best territorial security forces for pacification support. They were already organized territorially, since RF was recruited in province and only served there, while PF were recruited even more locally for hamlet/village defense. They were much less likely to be pulled away for other missions, and lacked the mobility anyway. Indeed their light armament and lack of vehicles made RF/PF cheaper and better suited for local security. We felt we could get more for our money, which buttressed perhaps the most important consideration, that only the RF/PF provided enough local manpower — albeit low grade — to provide the massive, permanent local security presence in the countryside that we thought essential.

How good was RVNAF support of pacification?

Komer: It was not yet satisfactory as of the time I left. It was still spotty, but it wasn't for lack of trying. Basically, a long educational process was involved. Over time, by education, lecturing, persuasion, in some cases pressure, people like Thieu, Thang and myself developed a greater pacification consciousness on the part of ARVN and U.S. commanders. I went to every Commanders' Conference and gave a pep talk on what we wanted done in pacification. I visited the U.S. corps and divisions, but mostly I visited the Vietnamese. I also used the quarterly meetings at each ARVN
corps that Westy had wisely instituted to monitor performance under the Combined Campaign Plan to make a pacification pitch to the Vietnamese. Thieu of course did far more of this than the Americans once he was firmly in the saddle by mid-1968. It takes time to get this sort of thing across.

During 1967 there was renewed emphasis on improving the performance of RVNAF, especially with the appointment of General Abrams. Could you discuss this and the effectiveness of the result? To what degree was CORDS involved?

**Komer:** Westmoreland gave Abrams this function when Abrams reported as his deputy on 4 May 1967, the same time I did. I won't comment on improving the performance of ARVN. I think we should have focused much more directly on leadership and in general I feel we're still Americanizing ARVN too much. What we should be doing is Vietnamizing it. But the upgrading and expansion of the RF/PF was more our doing than Abe's. We did far more in CORDS (which included the RF/PF advisory staff) and my office on pressing for the expansion, re-equipping, better pay, better logistic support, etc. of RF/PF. As I recall, Abrams held one conference in October 1967 in which he called in some senior RF/PF advisors. Out of that came a number of modest recommendations, especially for MALTs. Whereas we developed an RF/PF improvement program, which we got approved by COMUSMACV, that covered a much broader span. We incorporated Abe's points from his conference in our much larger program. I think Abe would agree that the expansion and improvement of RF/PF was largely, on the American side, a CORDS effort. We were the ones who pressed for upgrading the equipment, etc. We pressed for schools. We pressed for MATs. We pressed for more officers and NCOs. We also constructed TFES -- the only RF/PF measurement system (see Chapter XII).

Did MACV properly address the most crucial problem of leadership?

**Komer:** I don't think we did enough along those lines. Westmoreland tried. From his weekly talks with Vien and his constant visits to the field, Westy had very good ideas (because we discussed them) as to who was good and who was bad on the ARVN side. And I'm sure that he expressed these views to Vien. But professional military men seem to have sort of a professional inhibition about interfering with the promotion and assignment
structure of a sister armed force. One almost gained the impression that Westy and Abe thought it unfair to press too hard for the removal of certain officers, that that was the prerogative of Cao Van Vien. They expressed their views to Cao Van Vien as to the qualities of his officers, and if he chose not to do anything about them, it wasn't their job to raise hell. As you know, on the pacification side we had a rather more activist concept of what needed to be done.

MACDONALD: MACV did do a pretty credible job of setting up these schools for them.

KOMER: The school system was pretty good. In motivation I don't think the training was so hot, but the structure was good. MACV placed great emphasis on adequate training and school structure for ARVN, and its technical aspects seemed quite good.

MACV force requests for South Vietnamese forces in 1967 showed a consistent and overwhelming emphasis on RF/PF as opposed to ARVN. Why was this so? Did you have any influence in these requests?

KOMER: This was so for two reasons. One, because we were pushing for more RF and PF. Two, because RF and PF were cheap, and MACV was operating within fiscal ceilings on dollars and piasters. To improve ARVN, you have to bring in a lot more expensive equipment -- tanks, artillery, etc. -- whereas RF/PF were very inexpensive, and Westmoreland was very responsive to proposals that we could get a lot for our money cheap by going for RF/PF.

This changed after mid-1968. It became much harder to get our share, due to the new program of general mobilization, and the rapid expansion of all elements of the RVNAF structure. There got to be much more competition between ARVN and RF/PF for spaces.

Could you discuss the quality and importance of RF/PF support to pacification, especially in the Delta?

KOMER: We could not have achieved results in pacification in the Delta or anywhere else without RF/PF. Without RF/PF you don't have security, and remember the RF/PF were way under 300,000 in 1966 and now they're up to more like half a million.
What are your feelings on the role of ARVN division commanders in the political and command structure in Vietnam in general, and the pacification effort in particular?

Komer: I emphatically believe that the ARVN division commander was given too much to do and as a result did nothing well. I do not believe the division commander should be involved in wartime pacification. His is the mobile role against the enemy main and local forces. As hostilities phase down, maybe you want to make him a military district commander and put several provinces under him, but not when you have a major war going on. We fought hard to get the ARVN divisional commander out of the pacification chain of command. Westmoreland approved in late 1967. Abrams, at the time, disagreed. I think Abe later came around to agree.

Scoville: Where was the resistance on the Vietnamese side?

Komer: The corps and division commanders, U.S. as well as ARVN, said the division has all the logistics; and the division needs to support them; and province chiefs weren't good enough. They were very hierarchical. A BG ought to command colonels. But their reasons were basically unsound in my view.

Did eliminating the U.S. division advisors from the pacification chain of command persuade the GVN to do likewise?

Komer: I sneaked elimination of U.S. division advisors through on the U.S. side as part of the initial MACV Directive 10-12 in June 1967, but we ran into a lot more flak when we tried to do it on the GVN side. Unlike the American advisory structure, the GVN province structure was logistically dependent on division. And the division commanders were all senior to the province chiefs. We ran into loads of trouble.

Montague: Taking division out of the pacification chain of command actually occurred in that RVNAF reorganization finally put in about 2 January 1968. It was a document that General Forsythe worked out with the JGS, and they had a lot of back and forth with General Abrams, because General Abrams didn't like it. But finally Forsythe convinced him and was the chairman of a little committee. But the approved directive was not fully carried out, because the corps were told to do this when the situation permitted, and so ...
KOMER: Right. This was a late 1967 effort of CORDS. After we had reorganized the U.S. advisory chain of command, we went to work on the RVNAF chain of command. We recommended this RVNAF reorganization plan that took division out of the territorial chain, assigned the ARVN RD battalions to province chiefs, assigned the RF and PF to them, etc., and was our attempt to duplicate on the Vietnamese military side the advisory chain of command we had worked out in CORDS. It gave specific roles to province, division, and corps. Forsythe carried the leading oar on this. Thang worked closely with Forsythe; it was during the Thang period in JGS, late 1967. Incidentally, George Forsythe was horrified at the idea of taking division out of the chain of command; he bucked it right up to the last minute. Montague and I would beat him over the head regularly at dinnertime — we lived together. I finally had to say, "George, dammit, we know you disagree with us, but go tell Abe and Westy what we want, not what you want!" I don't know if George ever agreed with taking division out of the chain of command.

Then I sold it to Westy. Abe did disagree, but I think later he came around. And, strangely enough, Cao Van Vien bought it, and it was presented to President Thieu and approved. I was there at the meeting in the palace in December 1967. It was promulgated in early January. And then came TET, which sort of threw everything into reverse. Also the implementing instructions were very loose . . . that the corps commanders were to have discretion as to how fast this was to happen. And of course in the middle of the TET emergency it was pretty hard to have something like that happen. I was searching for the time when we did this, because it was long before the APC. You see, we went out after these things.

MONTAGUE: Then when they came up with the new Pacification and Development Council at the central level in late 1968, they reorganized at corps and province, and we dropped out any division Pacification Development Council and allowed the division commander to come up and sit on the Corps Council. That was when we got the centralized pacification chain finally formalized.

KOMER: But Thieu had already laid down the law. I remember discussing this with Thieu, and Thieu saying publicly, on a number of occasions, that the province chief reports to corps. He'd really issued
oral instructions, "province reports to corps; corps reports to me."
At one point in early 1968 he even took corps out of the pacification chain of command. He was emulating Diem's system, where all 44 provinces reported directly to Saigon. This created great problems up and down the line. I remember Westy being unhappy because the ARVN corps commanders were complaining. Thang down in IV Corps bitched to me as well. I recall agreeing that corps should be left in the chain because Saigon's span of control couldn't cover 44 provinces. We finally got that squared away. So after 1967 the province chief was not under the ARVN chain of command. We also attempted to give more military command to the province chiefs by getting the RF and PF assigned to them, and getting them taken away from division.

Could you discuss the problems of getting Vietnamese agencies at all levels to pull their efforts together into one combined effort?

Komer: Getting GVN agencies at all levels to pull together in a combined effort was one of our great problems, but also eventually one of our big successes. They just weren't used to it. Very much a bureaucratic fragmentation of authority, etc. We really tried to focus on getting the Vietnamese organized to manage pacification. There's a big difference between having good ideas and getting them carried out. And the Vietnamese administration and military are very highly centralized. The real policy thrust always comes from the center. It's very hard to find some guy who's being flexible and innovative out in the provinces, because the system is against it. So we decided, quite logically, that the place to start working was the center. Get the center squared away and then get the policies flowing out from the center and the provinces, because that's the way the Vietnamese did things. We worked very hard on this, because we felt that unified pacification management at each level -- Saigon, corps, province, district -- was necessary.

I kept pressing on the Vietnamese that they did not have a satisfactory central pacification organization. I kept recommending revival of the old Central Pacification Committee. I recommended constantly to Thieu and to Huong, particularly after TET, that they must set up a Deputy Prime Minister for Pacification who would be my opposite number and who
would really pull together and give single management on the Vietnamese side. I think Thieu was reluctant primarily because he wanted to be the manager on the Vietnamese side. Thieu was fascinated by pacification. He is the most pacification-minded of all the Vietnamese. He had been chief of staff of Diem's pacification command and never forgot it. Thieu himself plays the major role in the buildup of pacification post-TET. Indeed, his personal role is one of the keys to the success of the "new model" pacification program. He was its patron and chief mover from the end of 1967 when he became President.

We finally at least got central organs revised and functioning. One of the good outgrowths of the TET Offensive and the APC was the rejuvenation of the Central Pacification Council in 1969, to which General Non became Chief of Staff (I had also recommended this before I left). The Secretary General was Vice Prime Minister Khiem. And the head, of course, was the President. I used to tell Thieu earlier that he ought to be head, rather than the Prime Minister, because Thieu was really interested in pacification, whereas even Prime Minister Huong (good man though he was) was not very familiar with pacification. And Thieu did a very good job. Khiem was also good, both as Minister of Interior and then as PM. I kept proposing that there should be a Deputy Prime Minister for Pacification who would have coordinating and supervising responsibility over all the ministries at the center — and be my counterpart in effect. The last time I proposed it was my November 1968 final interview with Thieu. I said: "You've got to have one guy you can turn to, Mr. President. You can be chairman of the CPDC but you've got to have one guy you can turn to to sort of manage the thing for you on a day-to-day basis." He said who and I said I thought the best man was Khiem. Three months later Khiem was appointed to the job. Why it took three more months I've never been able to understand.

SCOVILLE: But you started proposing this almost from when you came out?

KOWER: Yes. I think I first discussed it with PM Ky in May 1967. In fact, I discussed it with Ky even before, during my trips out there.
Could you discuss the general trend and responsiveness of the GVN toward pacification, especially during the period that you were there?

Komer: I've really covered that. I think the real improvement began in 1966-1967 with the RD concept and Thang and really accelerated after TET 1968 when Thieu got personally into the act. It took us a lot of time, but I would say that the Vietnamese pacification administration at the center and in the provinces was at least 100 percent better by the end of 1968 than it was by the beginning of 1967. What would you say, Bob?

Montague: Yes, that's true. They got a lot better, because the direction got focus, and the direction came from the President in a single clear document, not in a fuzzy campaign plan. The first one was the APC directive... very clear, to the point, telling them precisely what they had to do. That was followed up by the 1969 Pacification Development Plan, and they're working on a similar one for 1970 now.

How did you get these things across to the Vietnamese?

Komer: We actually served to some degree as Thieu's staff and the Prime Minister's staff and also as the ministries' staff. We wrote speeches; we even translated them into Vietnamese. We wrote directives for them. We very carefully and discreetly submitted these so they could use them as their own. We had a high batting average in getting the Vietnamese to accept U.S. staff work that was quietly and discreetly offered, partly because they could not get the same quality work out of their own people. Where they did, we of course stopped providing it. In fact, some of the real insiders say that one of our greatest successes has been the gradual shifting of full pacification management of the programs we initiated to the GVN. So, all in all, our batting average in getting the GVN to revitalize pacification management was fairly good over time.

Some U.S. advisors have criticized the way in which CORDS' independent influence declined within MACV after I left. But they also all grant that whether or not the CORDS power position has declined within the American establishment, we have successfully engineered a major transfer of responsibility to the Vietnamese. And that pacification is now moving essentially under GVN rather than U.S. steam. This is very important.
We are still very influential with the Vietnamese, I understand. Colby, McManaway, and Jacobson probably do most of their work directly with the Vietnamese.

The close relationships we developed with key Vietnamese at all levels was one of the keys to what impact we had. If pacification was essentially a Vietnamese program, we had to get close to them. Fortunately, I think the key GVN figures came to trust my advice. I not only saw them often, but developed special informal channels into the Presidency, the PM’s office, etc. We were their backstairs advisors. Now we didn’t pull any punches. My technique with an issue like local administration or mobilization was to really keep after them. Thieu used us as his eyes and ears. Thieu trusted the Americans, especially the pacifiers, to clue him more objectively on what was going on in his own country than his own people. Also we were better informed about what was going on across the length and breadth of Vietnam than his own people. Their communications were lousy too. They sent telegrams that took three weeks to get to Da Nang or to a province. They were very bureaucratic. Remember, Vietnam had a French-style bureaucracy. Whereas I could fly up in a jet to northern I Corps and come back in the same day and find out the score, which I did on many occasions. So we, in essence, were both Thieu’s second set of eyes and ears and his management consultants. We were very discreet about it, operating behind the scenes. We never publicized this. Instead, we told everybody pacification was a 100 percent Vietnamese show.

We also used the leverage provided by our major resource inputs when we felt it necessary (see Chapter XI). But it wasn’t all that necessary, at least at the top. I rarely hesitated to tell Thieu, Ky, or Huong about ministerial level or other people who I thought needed replacing or who should be kept. I kept pressing to keep Nguyen Huu Hamh on as Central Bank Governor. I plugged for Ngoc as Economics Minister and also Ho (the latter a mistake in hindsight). I raised Cain about RD Minister Lac, and earlier tried to save Thang.

Don’t let me give an impression that these close U.S./GVN relationships were mostly at my level. They went all the way down to district. Almost invariably the best ministry, province, or district advisors were those who got in bed with their counterparts rather than those who worked
at arms length. I insisted that we were there to help the Vietnamese. Particularly close ties developed between our Chieu Hoi advisors, our refugee people, the RD advisors and their respective ministries -- both in Saigon and in the field. Post-TET 1968 we converted our people on the joint Central Recovery Committee staff to a permanent little liaison team in the Prime Minister's own office headed by McManaway and then Buzz Johnson. Moreover, we concerned ourselves with helping the Vietnamese on the practical working details of making programs function. We helped write directives and implementing messages, unblock funds, find good people and finger bad ones, develop reporting systems (which we double-checked through our own reporting), etc. We functioned as troubleshooters helping the fledgling CVN bureaucracy make things work better. We didn't do half enough, but without us even less would have happened -- and certainly not as fast.

One of our problems was communicating not only with our own establishment in a new and experimental field, but communicating ideas to and through the Vietnamese. You ought to see what Colonel Lac, now General Lac, or Thang have written on pacification! Oversophisticated, and half incomprehensible to a RD team leader or a district chief. We had to clarify it, simplify it, and make sure that 44 province chiefs and province senior advisors understood it. That isn't easy. We also used to write many of Thieu's field speeches, because when Thieu went off on his own, we couldn't understand what he was talking about, and we knew damn well the Vietnamese didn't either!

MONTAGUE: His mission, when he went out to the provinces, was to motivate them. He had to motivate them by saying: "Gee, Mr. Province Chief of Binh Thuan, you are doing lousy. You've got only four hamlets in the APC. Every other province has more than you do. You'd better do better in 1969. On the other hand, you're doing pretty good in attack against the infrastructure." Say good and bad things about these fellows, and give them concrete goals to work against, and then tell them, "I'm going to come back to see how you're doing."

ROMER: Before Thieu would go to the field, which he did frequently, we wrote him one of these briefs with a little covering note on it from me: "Mr. President, let me suggest some of the things you may want to look into, and the main themes you might want to stress. As your advisors, this is what we think is important. Attached is a more detailed analysis
of what's going well, what's going poorly, what needs looking at." More often than not, Thieu would bring out every single point. He'd look these guys in the eye and say you've got four hamlets over there and you're doing a lousy job. This really makes the province chief think, my God, he's got eyes everywhere. Nobody would ever know that this was the Americans speaking through Thieu. This was the way we did business. He grew to trust us.

We had problems with our own field advisors too. For example, Suplizio in Vinh Long would answer your question on the impact of mobilization by blurtng out first off, oh God, mobilization was terrible. You'll remember he was complaining bitterly, because I was encouraging him to, and he didn't realize that he got 10,000 more troops out of mobilization over the course of a year. If I'd said whom do you want -- the 36 Vietnamese on your list of those who shouldn't be mobilized, or the 10,000 RP/PF, we would have gotten a different answer. Incidentally, he ran a damn good province team.

In the spectrum of pacification programs from 1964 on, can you think of any programs or policies that were taken, or thought up, on Vietnamese initiative and not ours?

Komer: The PAT teams were originally Vietnamese but picked up first locally and then nationally by us. We converted them into the RD cadre teams as a joint enterprise with Thang. The civil-military teams in Binh Dinh . . . Thieu added some things to the APC. Thieu wanted the RD cadre working in the villages on political action matters. Thang came up with several ideas such as his 97 points and 11 criteria. Major Be really ran Vung Tau more on his style than ours. I'm sure we could think of other examples. But on balance we were much more innovative than they.

Scoville: But gradually (say, especially this year) things have turned around the other way.

Komer: They are running the show more. They are taking the operational decisions more. I'm not sure they're innovating more. They're running existing programs and policies better. It's not that they're coming up with new programs and policies. In fact, usually the things they tended to come up with were reversions to older techniques. Thieu at one point was talking about going back to strategic hamlets, but we talked him out of that.
Do you feel that more of the key posts in Vietnamese administration (such as the province chiefs) should have been in civilian hands? Was there any U.S. pressure exerted in this matter?

Komer: We had a few civilian province chiefs when I got there. Dr. Chi up in Quang Ngai was lousy. A good researcher, but no administrator; he wasn't running anything. The rationale for using military people was very simple. First, most civilians wouldn't go out in the provinces. It was dangerous and uncomfortable. Second, the basic job of province and district chiefs, until well along in 1968, was security, and who can handle best the security aspect? In effect, the militarization of the Vietnamese civil service in the countryside was a result of the war and a vacuum being created. While I was still in Washington, I was an advocate of civilianization, as you recall from some of our papers. When I got to Vietnam, I realized that this was a longer-term goal. While we did not abandon it, we did not exert great pressure to get local officials civilianized. Among other things, we could get more control and leverage over them if they were military. But along about now, there should be greater emphasis on civilianization.

Did you have any particular problems with pacification in the areas of Allied Forces -- the Koreans, for example?

Komer: Plenty. Personally, I suspected that the much-touted achievements of the Koreans in pacification really amounted to sitting on and cowing the population. The Koreans used to make much of the fact that they were Asians dealing with Asians. I know the Vietnamese officials in the Korean area used to complain bitterly to us about the ROKs.

Scoville: No cooperation whatsoever with CORDS.

Komer: Relatively limited except locally. We had that very good Korean, Navy Captain Kim, down in ROK headquarters for a while. After Kim left, there really was not much effective liaison. But it seemed to me that I was not going to have much impact on getting the Koreans to change their ways of pacifying when Westmoreland couldn't get the Korean military to change their ways militarily.

Macdonald: Did you have your own GVN pacification structure in among them?
KOMER: Oh, yes, right in among them, in the provinces they occupied. So we got reports on what they were doing.

MONTAGUE: Yes, but the Koreans finally got to the point where they provided quite good local security. But that wasn't until this year really. They've been in very heavy concentrations; the main force enemy units have gone; and so the Koreans have broken up into smaller units, and they do provide quite good local security. As a result, in the Korean area today, pacification is fairly complete, not because of the Koreans' direct contribution . . .

KOMER: But a different security environment in which our pacification program is working . . . with American MAT teams and American province advisory teams and American district teams.

MONTAGUE: And the Koreans this year, because of the emphasis on helping AR/FID that came out of MACV, began to work with the local forces and run training schools and give them taekwondo. They did actually do as well as anyone, I think, in bringing the local forces along. But their overall contribution was . . .

SCOVILLE: They were doing that in 1968. I remember going to see the one just south of Tuy Hoa, and Colonel Donald mentions this in his long report.

KOMER: Now except for the ROKs, you didn't have much. The Australians were in Phuoc Tuy Province, and they always touted how great Phuoc Tuy was.

MONTAGUE: But they were not with the people. They were up in the jungle.

KOMER: Phuoc Tuy also fell apart after TET. I notice Phuoc Tuy is on the list of ten best provinces again. I have my reservations about Phuoc Tuy and about the Australian approach to pacification. They talked so much better, because they had been in Malaya and Borneo. PHILCAG was a showpiece operation; it was too small to have much impact. We got wildly varying reports about the Filipinos, some that they were robbing the Americans and the people blind.

MONTAGUE: It was a civic action program, and that's all it did. It built civic action projects, at very high cost.

KOMER: The Thai weren't even in the pacification business by the time I left.
VII. RURAL ECONOMIC REVIVAL AND OTHER ECONOMIC ISSUES

The history of U.S. efforts to promote rural economic and social
development as a dual weapon for nation-building and against insurgency
goes back to the early days of Diem. Once again the basic problem was
less one of failure to realize the importance of this problem area than
of inadequate resources, poor GVN management and execution, and dissipa-
tion of effort over a multiplicity of programs.

At least some of these operational problems were slowly and par-
tially overcome during 1966-1969. As part of the RD program, USAID
helped fund a New Life Development effort under MORD. Self-help was
stressed. This evolved by 1969 into the Village Development Program.
Opening roads and waterways was another major effort, stressed by CORDS.
Perhaps the largest single impact came in 1968 and after from the USAID-
sponsored "milk and rice" program, and associated fertilizer, protein
production, etc. efforts, which (along with improving rural security)
reversed the decline in agricultural output and probably income as well.

Could you discuss the CORDS effort at economic improvement?

ROMER: This was one of my favorite projects. Farmers seem to be
the same the world over. They are interested in making more money on
their crops. Farmers have a very acute ear for price changes. They
know what the crop is likely to bring, and they make rational economic
decisions. The Vietnamese farmer is no exception. He is a very smart
fellow. So I thought that while we weren't very good at plugging the
psywar theme that the government in Saigon was much better than the
government in Hanoi, we could still get at the farmer by providing him
first, security and second, a range of economic improvements -- the ones
that would affect his pocketbook. Also, if land reform wasn't going any-
where fast we could still help the farmer this way. Opening roads and
waterways also meant that commerce would move, pigs could get to Saigon,
watermelons, etc.

So one of our big pacification thrusts in 1968 was economic revival
in the countryside. With considerable support and initiative from Chuck
Cooper, the Embassy economic counselor, I think we did great things.
The other hero in that program is Jim Grant, the head of AID's Vietnam bureau who energized the AID part of this enterprise. It was a joint enterprise; we really accomplished a good deal, and I think the results are apparent.

We learned through the 1967 experience that we were going to have to devote much more effort to economic incentives to the farmer. The new miracle rice program was coming along; CORDS did a lot to help push it, based on a successful late 1967 experiment in planting IR-8 rice in the Vo Dat area where there had been a crop failure. I joined forces with Cooper to try changing the terms of trade in favor of the countryside, which meant basically the rice price. The government was subsidizing the consumers in the cities by keeping the price of rice low at the very time when it was harder and harder to grow it, and when the enemy was taking it away from the farmers. The consumers in the cities were living well on an artificial, war-induced boom, even after TET. The poor guy in the countryside was bearing the whole brunt of the war. Both sides were taking him apart. So we said let's have a high price for the producer and let the consumer pay more. We also tried hard to get the whole web of provincial economic regulations and restrictions abolished, as an impediment to commerce. I sold this to PM Huong, and he issued orders, but they were at least partially ignored. In the documents you will see a great emphasis, especially throughout 1968, on economic revival.

MONTAGUE: Fertilizer got out to the fields because we took off the price restriction. They started moving agricultural equipment out, pumps. Once we loosed the restrictions, pumps could be bought, and many got a pump with an outboard motor. There was sort of a machine revolution in the countryside. Production really began to jump up. Despite TET, the 1968 rice production was up about 10 percent from the year before. In 1969, they forecast very good results — in fact, they may even wipe out the need to import rice.

Could you discuss the New Life Development and Village Development Programs?

KOMER: As I recall, the New Life Development Program was begun in 1966 as a corollary to the RD team effort. The RD Ministry ran it with
USAID, then OCO, and then CORDS funding and help. The stress from the outset was on small local projects stimulated by the RD cadre, but with a large component of villager self-help. We built a provincial warehouse system to support it logistically; then, finding much inefficiency and corruption, we got MACV to lend us 60 U.S. Army supply sergeants to "manage" the warehouses. Frequently the RD teams in their enthusiasm would overawe the villagers, deprecating the emphasis on self-help. I was unhappy because only those hamlets undergoing RD were allowed self-help funds, so I got this changed around to allocate funds to all interested hamlets. We had an NLD Division in CORDS to help the MORD run this program.

An old midwestern farmer, Ben Ferguson, who had introduced a promising low-cost village self-help program in East Pakistan, was brought out by Don MacDonald to see if we could do the same in Vietnam. His ideas looked good, but we insisted he try them out in a few pilot areas first to see if they would take, while he was constantly preaching that we should start the program "de novo" on a grand scale. His ideas may have contributed to the 1969 Village Development Program, which I think the best thing we've done yet. But the chief designer was chief CORDS planner Clay McManaway. It was then sold by Bill Coleby to Thieu as a combined rural development and political action effort. Bill and Clay deserve great credit for making it a real self-help effort. The effort was facilitated by the GVN decrees of December 1966 and April 1969 restoring village autonomy (see Chapter XI). It was also tied into a major program for training local officials at Vung Tau (see Chapter VIII). In 1969 two billion piasters were allocated to MORD for direct allocation to 1681 villages to be spent on projects chosen by the people. Those villages with elected councils got a million piasters, while others got only 400,000. Funds were also provided for larger projects to be handled by the Provincial RD Council.

Didn't you also lay great stress on opening roads and waterways?

**Komer:** And how we did! From May 1967 on (see Chapter IV) opening the roads and waterways played a major role in economic revival, and we emphasized it even more after TET 1968 than before. At my urging, MACV took over from AID in 1968 (I negotiated this) complete responsibility
for the roads and waterways program. We brought the highway people from AID over into MACV and set up a combined organization and got the funding out of DOD. It was another important innovation. Field responsibility for the whole highway rehabilitation program and for relations with the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Works was brought under MACV with certain people being detailed from USAID to help do it.

MONTAGUE: I remember how we worked it out. They went under Clark in the Highway Division of MACDIC; it was named the National Highway Program.

KOMER: And remember how we kept trying to get more Navy SEABEE (Construction Battalion) teams assigned to rural works projects, including roads and bridges. I forget how many teams we had at peak, but they made a distinct contribution. The wise province advisory teams were always screaming for more.

We got into the rock problem too. We wanted to rebuild all the roads in the Delta, which were gradually subsiding into the mud. You needed a lot of rock. The rock was all being produced up north, and our civil road problems were down south. So we pushed the famous Delta Rock Program, especially the project to open a quarry in An Giang. I took that personally under my wing. There was no rock in the Delta except in this little pimple at Nui Sap. We spent $20 million or something to get rock, and now we've got rock coming out of our ears as long as the military don't steal it all. I used to fly down to Nui Sap. In fact, they had an attack on the Nui Sap Quarry the day after I got there. But we finally got that thing going. You know, there's nothing like calling the boys in every week and saying now what's up on my project. It does sort of motivate the troops.

MONTAGUE: But we had continuous problems in getting rock allocated to pacification projects. We built hardstands for helicopters. We built new U.S. bases. We did everything except channel rock into pacification, and it hasn't been until very recently . . . just before General Lac left the RD Ministry . . . that he finally authorized the provinces to spend money to send their own trucks to pick up rock at Nui Sap. The Delta Rock Plan started to provide rock for everybody but the pacification people. I found this out, but couldn't do anything about it. You would
have told the J-4 to cut down the amount of rock to U.S. forces down there and put it on the roads, because there's no use having U.S. forces unless the roads are there for the rural population to use. You'd have called in Colonel Clark first, and then the MACDC, and you'd have gone to see COMUSMACV, after you got all the facts.

**MACDONALD:** Just what role could you play in opening roads and canals, other than trying to get your rock and this sort of thing, because it really was a military job to keep the roads open?

**KOMER:** Opening the roads was not just for military purposes -- it was also for civilian mobility and economic revival. So I made it my business, and as a deputy to COMUSMACV I was entitled to do so. I had as much right to call in the Director of Construction or the J-4 as anybody else did. The engineers will tell you that we really were after them. I would say that Colonel Bob Clark, chief of the MACDC Highway Division, spent more time in my office than he did in Westy's or Abe's.

**MONTAGUE:** And he really like it. The troops even liked to get out and open up the roads and to see people start using them. We pressed such things as having military convoys going at night to help keep the roads open.

**MACDONALD:** Now your primary assets for that -- were there any ARVN engineer battalions that you used?

**KOMER:** The primary resources were the American engineers. They were just much more efficient than the ARVN. But we used them all. As a matter of fact, we got a lot of roads open that were of primary use for pacification on the grounds that they were also for military operations. The legal place you got that appropriation was from MILCON, Military Construction money. But we got a lot of military construction money that I went for. At Westy's okay, we put in a big bid to Washington, which we got approved on military grounds but which actually was mainly for pacification purposes. Here was a case where the two went quite well together.

Don't forget my notorious effort to secure and open the key Mang Thit-Nicolai Canal, the main water artery between the Bassac and Mekong. Someone is writing a book about that. And there was the Cho Gau, the other key Delta Canal below My Tho.

**SCOVILLE:** There were an awful lot of troops around the Mang Thit-Nicolai Canal for no good reason -- at least for no good effect, because . . .
ROMER: Look at the transportation pattern in the Delta; the Mang Thit-Nicolai Canal used to carry all the commerce from the lower Delta, so it did not have to go all the way up the Bassac to the Cambodian frontier and come all the way down the Mekong before going through the Cho Gao Canal to Saigon. I saw a French study that indicated that two-thirds of the rice and other traffic from the lower Delta went through the Mang Thit, at a great saving in transportation costs. We were trying to get down the costs of food to the consumer and increase the price to the producer. The Mang Thit looked like an important economic artery. It was easier to secure in the sense that it was much shorter than the Bassac though not as broad. So I named this one of the priority targets for pacification. Pacify a place that obviously would contribute to economic revival. Westmoreland agreed. The Vietnamese agreed. But we ran into a lot more trouble than we thought we would, because it turned out to be fairly heavily VC-infested and accessible to two VC base areas, one to the south along the Vinh Binh-Vinh Long border -- the other to the north in the Sa Dec triangle. So we kept working on it . . . it takes time. It was not successful in 1967; we did somewhat better in 1968. I used to fly down there all the time.

MONTAGUE: Traffic went through it in most of 1968. It was starting through before TET. TET set it back for five or six months, and by the end of 1968, traffic was flowing through it again.

SCOVILLE: Not when I saw it . . . absolutely closed. I was down there for a whole week in June with Lt. Col. Devereaux.

ROMER: That was just after the May Offensive, when everyone was scared again. Also you may have just missed the convoy. What they did was to make up weekly or biweekly convoys. We had to regularize their running. They would assemble the convoy, but not until the Vietnamese Navy showed up with those bloody rag boats would this crew of big sampans from Ba Kuyen start up the canal. They were not going to go through the Mang Thit Canal without convoys. If it happened we were running an amphibious operation, the convoy could just sit there. What did the Vietnamese Navy care about convoys when it had a chance to go off and have itself a nice shooting party?

MONTAGUE: We went down with Ky to open the Mang Thit in late 1967.
We had an official opening, and by that time the traffic had built up quite significantly; the Vietnamese Navy was running regular patrols through it. The American Navy threw some people in from time to time to beef up.

Komer: Tom, in June you still had the TET psychosis...

Montague: In fact, around My Tho and Ben Tre those were threatened areas. Even the Cho Gao Canal was way down.

Scoville: They had no lack of resources, and one of the recommendations of our thing was that they had so many that since nothing was getting down, send them elsewhere.

Montague: Colonel Nghia, the PC in Vinh Long, has the canal opened. He was in Washington recently very proudly proclaiming that it was in good shape now.

Could you discuss CORDS efforts to improve GVN resources control?

Komer: Here was another case where we learned a lesson. Montague and Holbrooke told me right off the bat "resource control is no good." My initial instinct was to say it is no good because it is incompetently handled, so double and triple it; deny resources to the VC. I rapidly discovered that I was on the wrong track. By the time I got out to Vietnam I had been brainwashed to realize resource control was counterproductive in practice. My CORDS effort was to try to abolish most resource control as causing more trouble than it was worth. By this time the VC were re-equipped with a whole new generation of Chinese weapons and weren't even using our ammunition. The NVA coming down had their completely different supplies. Our mortar shells didn't fit their mortars and vice versa. It was clear to me that resource control was an excuse for wastefully deploying a lot of people. More important, it was an excuse for a mass of restrictions impeding the flow of commerce and encouraging petty corruption. Since I was in charge of resource control policy and programs on the American side, I set out to abolish most resource control, and we had some success. Improving security also permitted us to argue that in many cases the checkpoints, etc., were not necessary.

We had difficulty convincing the GVN. We had also had a generation of Americans in Vietnam touting resource control. We had to change that
around. We favored a much more sophisticated form of resource control in which all you're doing is looking for weapons and explosives and chemicals and a few things like that ... that are basically more effectively controlled near the source. I thought the checkpoints set up all over the country after Tet to stop traffic coming into the cities were ridiculous. So I discovered we were using a long electric prod to poke down into the rice loads on sampans, and it gave a flash if you detected metal, i.e., weapons. I got a hundred of them to use for inspecting cargoes in trucks. It was pointed out to me that trucks have metal parts in them. I said: "Forget about it. The psychological impact of a guy using this strange electronic device is going to scare the VC plenty, before they find out that it doesn't do any good."

What was the innovation Bob Crownover had plugged for so long and that we also got moving -- the unified logistics program? Remember how I picked that from the dustbin and sold it to Thieu?

MONTAGUE: The Central Logistic Agency; it got approved by the President, and the decrees were written up before I left. But they were still in the organizational process, so I don't know where it has gotten as of now. It took over from the Central Procurement and Supply Agency, and the Central Logistic Agency was to absorb CPSA functions, plus a lot more -- provide transportation for all ministries, not just the Ministry of Revolutionary Development. And it had to procure for other ministries beyond the ones that CPSA took care of, like Refugees, RD, Chieu Hoi ... it went on to include everything but the Ministry of Defense.

KOMAR: Another major thing I promoted was a GVN Joint Medical Program, which was finally put into effect in 1969. Vietnam didn't have enough medical facilities to go around. The ARVN military medical program was just going great guns, and as casualties went down, they had hospitals that were only half full. But GVN civilian medical facilities were in terrible shape, yet ARVN was drafting all the doctors. There weren't many civilian doctors left. Moreover, duplicate hospital facilities were being built. This was ridiculous. I talked to the MACV surgeon who was also chief medical advisor to RVNAF, and found he quite agreed with my suggestion we propose integration. So we sold the ARVN Chief Surgeon and Minister of Health on a program to integrate military and civilian hospital facilities to create a single medical program in Vietnam.
MONTAGUE: That even included the MACV hospitals, and of course they're the ones that took the most civilian load. It was the military hospitals that took the most Vietnamese civilians, because the ARVN hospitals somehow didn't really get with the program, but they are beginning to now that they see MACV leading the way. You go to a MACV hospital and you can see a little kid or a lady or an old man right beside an American casualty, and they're right in the same wards. Great.

MACDONALD: Westy had quite a little discussion of that in his medical annex.

KOMER: Westy loved these managerial innovations. On these we could always get Westy's support. I just took it to him. I first discussed these ideas with Westy, got a meeting of minds, and then we staffed them out.

MACDONALD: Bob, can I write this history without real access to AID?

KOMER: Certainly. The Economic Stabilization Program is very well documented. By the way, an amazingly successful program. In my view, AID's macro-economic performance in Vietnam was excellent, and one of the most successful things we ever did was the Economic Stabilization Program. I helped along a phase of it from Washington in 1966-1967. It was going pretty well... the CIP was invented before I ever showed up.

What about the USAID role?

KOMER: Before we finish with economic revival, let me add that responsibility for it, where CORDS leaves off and USAID takes on, is vague. USAID provided the bulk of the civilian advisors in CORDS, and staffed whole divisions for us -- Refugees, Public Safety, NLD, Chieu Hoi, etc. CORDS also had operational control over all advisors outside of Saigon, including all sorts of USAID technical assistance people -- the agricultural advisors, education advisors, medical advisors, etc. But on these technical programs, USAID provided the technical advice. The analogy is to the role of the Chief of Engineers. He provides the technical guidance to all the U.S. Army Engineers, but in wartime the engineers are under the OPCON of the commanders. In point of fact, we did a lot more than USAID to really jazz things up in the countryside.

MONTAGUE: That's not true anymore. It's gone back over to USAID.
We've allowed them to withdraw most of their field advisors, and so their staff is really Saigon heavy now. You remember our big push to get "ag" advisors out to the provinces where they grew rice; they're almost all gone now.

KOMER: It bothers me that we do not still fight these battles. They are very important. When I was there, USAID was one of the more harassed outfits in Saigon, because if we had an idea that was good, we didn't want to wait for it to be staffed five times, but to move on it. Apparently there has been a considerable degree of backsliding. Probably Abrams is not inclined to fight a lot of these battles as Westy does -- they are civilian-type battles; they are not military business. Also I suspect I was much closer to Bunker and MacDonald than Colby is. After all, MacDonald was my nomination to go to Vietnam. But this may be just sour grapes on my part, because guys keep coming back and telling me how things aren't being managed as when I was there.

Our relations with AID had their ups and downs, because we were constantly interfering in MacDonald's business. Since AID was one of the main providers of funds and people, we were constantly telling them how to run their business. We kept them so busy defending themselves that they didn't have time to tell us how to run ours.

But the direct contributions of USAID to rural improvement should not be slighted, though I won't go into them in detail. They deserve much credit, though CORDS helped in many cases. I've already mentioned agriculture. Especially notable here are the accelerated rice production, feed grain, and protein production programs. AID helped promote the flourishing Agricultural Development Bank. USAID help in expanding rural public health programs and improving provincial and district facilities should be mentioned. Rural water and electrification got attention. Next to agriculture, perhaps the biggest effort went into hamlet schools beginning in 1963. Through the RD Ministry some 18,178 low-cost classrooms have been built; over 20,000 teachers trained and 1.25 million rural children enrolled. We ran into plenty of problems in these programs, but given the extent of wartime disruption, it's surprising they could do as much as they did.

After all, AID is a peacetime economic development agency; it was never set up to conduct emergency wartime programs, which require a flexibility,
adaptability, and tolerance of waste not acceptable from peacetime bureaucracies. Given this handicap, I think AID in Vietnam (at least 1966 to the present) has been unduly criticized.
VIII. THE REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Often confused with pacification as a whole, the 1966-1967 RD program under Thang was the high point of U.S. civilian efforts to try to accomplish something without much U.S. or ARVN military support. Begun in 1965 in Bình Định Province, the 59-man RD teams became the cutting edge of the new U.S.-supported Ministry of Revolutionary Development, created in 1965. MORD's other big program, local self-help, became known as the New Life Development Program (see Chapter VII).

An important conceptual shift from the earlier Agroville and Strategic Hamlet Programs was abandonment of their earlier emphasis on settling the population into more easily defensible locales in favor of seeking to protect and help the villager in the hamlet where he lived. This important RD feature later became a hallmark of the "new model" pacification program. Instead of resettlement closer to protection, we sought to bring the protection to the rural population — largely because the arrival in strength of U.S. forces plus the growth of pacification resources permitted seizing the initiative from the VC and beginning to expand the area of GVN/U.S. control.

During 1966 the RD program was still almost entirely separate from the GVN/U.S. military effort. But in late 1966, when Ky offered half the ARVN infantry battalions to provide RD security support, a major effort was begun to tie RD (and other pacification-related programs) into the military planning cycle for 1967. As a result, the Combined Campaign Plan for 1967 (AB 142) for the first time included a major pacification component — an important stage in the transition toward the "new model" pacification program.

Though not large enough by itself to have a massive impact in the countryside, or permit a permanent presence at hamlet level, the RD team effort grew to over 350 teams in 1966, about 550 in 1967, and a peak of around 750 (plus 100-odd Montagnard teams) in 1968. Almost all were trained at Vung Tau. Toward end-1968 the rapid growth in territorial security forces, VC/NVA weakness, and Washington limitations on funding as it was shifted from CIA to DOD led to a decision to level off RD cadre strength, divide each RD team into two 30-man teams and shift to a concept
whereby each team would be semi-permanently assigned to one village
and concentrate mostly on self-help and political action. All in all,
the RD program — despite many weaknesses — was one of the more effective

Could you describe the origins and development of the RD cadre program?
Who were the key personnel involved, U.S. and GVN? What were the U.S.
and GVN attitudes toward this program over time?

KOMER: It was a fascinating experiment which came to make a very
useful contribution. The 59-man teams in black pajamas and the MORD New
Life Development Program were quite well run. This was largely owing to
some very talented Vietnamese, especially MG Nguyen Duc Thang, who took
over as RD Minister in early 1966 after the first RD Minister was killed
in a plane crash only a short time after the ministry was created. Now
in 1969 they again have a very talented general, Phong, the former Chief
of Staff JGS, running it.

We really promoted the new RD Ministry (MORD). In 1966 and early
1967, one of the best jobs that Porter and the OSA people did was to
organize our relations with the cadre programs and MORD very effectively.
They did an excellent job of revising the MORD logistic procedures, for
example. MORD was the most efficient and streamlined GVN ministry as a
result. It actually worked out in the field, unlike other GVN ministries
at that time, which had lost much of their field personnel.

MONTAGUE: It had special funding procedures that now have been
gradually adopted by many other ministries as the only funding arrange-
ment that really worked.

KOMER: During 1966, Bill Porter and I really thought the RD cadre
were the greatest thing since ice cream. But we had less than 10,000
of them. So Porter concocted a mid-1966 plan for vast expansion of the
RD cadre program based on opening a second school at Lung Hai near Vung
Tau. This was because we were back in the period where we could use
only civilian assets. We saw that if pacification was going to get going,
we somehow had to get more of our own GVN people to function in the country-
side. Therefore, in our honeymoon period, we were strong backers of the
RD cadre as the key to pacification. However, it soon became apparent
to me that RD by itself was not going to suffice, except perhaps over a
very long time span. We could not expand the RD teams fast enough and still maintain enough quality to get the impact we needed. Moreover, the 59-man teams by themselves could not provide either adequate security or stay long enough in the hamlet before moving on. So by August 1966 I was beginning to focus on the RF/PF. We had to build on an existing large-scale organization, if we wanted reasonably early results without the delay involved in building up a whole new organization — the inescapable problem of lead time.

We had made one abortive try already -- the June 1966 Ky proposal to take RF/PF out from under the JGS and put it under the RD Ministry, thus putting Thang in charge of both the RF/PF and the RD cadre. I strongly supported this, because it would have put us on the map in an optimum way (see Chapter VI). Porter also supported this, but not as strongly as I. Somewhere in the GVN, this plan, which was laid on by Ky at Thang's request (I understand from Dan Ellsberg that Lansdale very wisely sold it to Thang), got lost. I've never really found out the score. That was the end of our first attempt to really get hold of the RF and PF, and to put it under control of the pacifiers. After I got out there in 1967, we made a second proposal, but this time we reversed the order.

It was reported that on 15 May 1967 you met with Vice President Ky, who indicated that he had rejected a suggestion from General Thang to bring GVN RD efforts under JGS. Why did Ky reject this plan? Were you responsible for Thang's suggestion? How much U.S. pressure was there to make the GVN pacification organization conform approximately to our reorganized setup?

SCOVILLE: This source may not be accurate.

KOMEN: I don't think it's accurate. I think we are talking about the proposal to send Thang over to JGS as Vice Chief and to take the RD program with him. And I don't recall Ky rejecting it. Ky may have stalled, but he later joined Thieu in implementing it. Ky may have raised this with me as early as 15 May; I'd only been in country for a week and a half. At any rate, I did keep pushing this idea as a very strong U.S. initiative. I then worked it out with Thang as part of our RVNAF reorganization scheme.

SCOVILLE: In other words, to make the GVN side of pacification roughly parallel to ours.
Komer: Precisely. The simple device that we hit on was to propose moving the key RD guy, Thang, over to work as number two man in JGS. Then Thang would be my opposite number. Our proposal was that General Thang should become Vice Chief of Staff for Pacification and RF/PF, and have under him the RF/PF plus the RD cadre. This plan was largely accepted. Thang went briefly over the JGS as Vice Chief with direct responsibility for RF/PF. He brought the RD cadre with him. The question of whether he would have command over the RD Ministry simultaneously was left open, but Thang so dominated the RD Ministry that he could run it even though it was not under him. Our scheme misfired when Thang, for the umpteenth time, resigned his job. He apparently, being a man of great dynamism, was elbowing aside his good friend Cao Van Vien, the Chief of Staff. They had a spat. As soon as Thang resigned, Colonel Lac got the RD cadre right back over into the RD Ministry. Incidentally, a great buddy of Thang's, Major General Nguyen Bao Tri, had taken over as RD Minister. Tri was not as bad as many thought he was, in my judgement. At any rate, we worked very closely with him during the brief period that he was RD Minister. He was so much under Thang's thumb that, as long as we had understandings with Thang, Tri would go along. He was a key man who got lost in the shuffle after Thieu clamped down on the Ky clique. Then BC Lac, who had been in pacification and RD for years, took over. He was a great disappointment, despite his long RD experience.

In sum, this part of our effort to get the GVN organization to conform to ours eventually proved partially successful. The principle behind it was to bring key military and civilian elements of the GVN pacification program together.

What about the confusion between pacification and RD?

Komer: It is frequently thought, especially by the press, that RD and the RD cadre program were the sum total of pacification. This was something I sought vigorously to combat, because if you added up the whole RD program, it was only maybe 5-10 percent of the total pacification resources that we deployed. What I'm really saying is don't overestimate the importance of the RD cadre and the RD Ministry, bright spots as they were in the total pacification picture.
SCOVILLE: I think part of the problem, rather than being the fault of reporters, is that after 1965 or 1966 the U.S. started to call pacification "revolutionary development." I feel that was a big mistake, because I feel that it's pacification; "revolutionary development" should not be the title of the book .

MONTAGUE: Pacification is not one and the same.

SCOVILLE: No, but many people have taken it to be though.

MONTAGUE: Right, because Ambassador Lodge wanted to call it that and the Vietnamese said call it what you want, but we'll call it "rural reconstruction."

KOMER: There's no term in Vietnamese for revolutionary development. At any rate, I felt that pacification was the single term which covered all aspects. So my rule of thumb dictum to all concerned was that the overall program was pacification; RD was a significant component of it. Of course, the RD Ministry never ran pacification as a whole. And Thieu finally changed the terminology back to "pacification" in October 1968 when he ruled that the 1969 program would be called "Pacification and Development." The Central RD Council was then renamed the Central Pacification and Development Council. Thieu like myself favored the old, more easily understandable term.

By the way, pacification does have unfortunate imagery connotations, and I feel that this was one of the decisions that I made too quickly. But I was interested in using the lingua franca that everyone understood, rather than using fancy terms like RD which would not get everybody in focus. The first thing I kept telling our advisors was: "Your job is not just running RD teams or RD New Life Development programs. Your job is also to advise on RF/FF, Phoenix, the police program, the refugee program, the agricultural program -- the works. You're not just in the RD business." This was essential to clarify matters, even though it caused some difficulty.

In addition, the CIA were the best publicists in Vietnam. The black pajama teams were sexy, Vung Tau was sexy, and all the press got down to Vung Tau and wrote about the black pajama teams. It over-influenced me in the early period too. I'm not denigrating the RD program. But the RD program by itself was neither in scale nor in concept sufficient to do the job of pacification.
Could you discuss the working arrangements of CORDS with OSA regarding the RD cadre program and the Training Center at Vung Tau? In late 1967 the funding for the RD cadre program was put under the Department of Defense. Why was this done?

Komer: From February 1966 on, Porter had OPCON over the RD program though it was still run by OSA. This was later reinforced when the cadre part of OSA was brought into OCO. It was further reinforced when the cadre division of OCO was just transferred bodily into CORDS. We had policy and program control. We laid down the guidelines; we told them what we wanted done and they did it. We did not interfere too much in the actual management of Vung Tau or the day-to-day management of the RD cadre program, even though it was a division in CORDS staffed mostly by OSA people, because it was being run well. When you've got one of the few things that is running reasonably effectively in the U.S. advisory structure, why the hell tell them how to suck eggs? But we laid down the policy on such issues as cutting the 97 points down to 27, and on the size of the teams and the funding. In fact, the Agency was happy, because it was trying to disengage by 1967-1968. CIA tried to get out of the cadre program, and the military were thinking of taking it over. I was strenuously opposed, on the grounds that OSA had demonstrated an outstanding managerial capability. The 1968 compromise was to put funding for this program under DOD, simply because CIA was running out of money; it was just too big an overt program to be funded covertly for long. But as a result of my direct intercession with Washington, the agreement was that management of the funds would be left with OSA. In other words, OSA would run the program; DOD would pay for it. I thought it imperative not to have a change in management just at the time when we were getting moving, and when I thought OSA management was probably a great deal better than we could get from DOD.

Montague: The strength of the OSA system was the logistic and administrative channels they set up. They could keep each RD team very well supplied. They could pay people on time. That was one of the big problems with turning RD cadre over to military funding. The Pentagon said you can't pay them that way; they had to be paid centrally and then down through the Vietnamese. In 1969 we said it won't work. The MACV comptroller didn't want to change; nobody wanted to change. So I finally
beat them over the head and wrote the messages to Washington myself saying that we were going to continue paying them the same way, so to find some procedures under which we could do this.

SCOVILLE: The management has now been shifted also?
MONTAGUE: Yes.
SCOVILLE: Has that been for the good?
MONTAGUE: It hasn't hurt anything, once we got them to agree to go along with the same procedures.

Who formulated the 11 RD criteria and 97 points?

MONTAGUE: General Thang, helped by Colonel Be.
KOMER: He wrote them in late 1966 as detailed guidelines for what each RD team should do in 1967. We thought they were far too sophisticated, far too complicated for simple village kids in black pajamas to ever execute. It was a great example of an intellectual over-structuring of what these poor kids are supposed to do. I tried during my entire time there with Thang and his successors and we finally got Thieu to order they be cut down to 27 points and 5 criteria. One of the better things I did was to get that cut down.

What has been the position and influence of MORD versus other agencies of the Vietnamese government? Has MORD gotten the necessary support? What work did your office do towards getting the GVN behind the program? On 12 July 1966, General Thang was elevated from Minister of Revolutionary Development to Minister General. Was it successful?

KOMER: Theoretically, MORD was senior to all of the other agencies, and was to coordinate their activities in the provinces. When Thang was there, it ran over all of them. But very few of them cooperated much with it. The old line ministries just sat back and let MORD run the whole RD program, especially New Life Development (see Chapter VII), the village/hamlet self-help program that largely took over the old ministries' functions in the countryside. MORD got outstanding American support; it also got better support from Thieu and Ky than most other ministries did. So in a Vietnamese context, MORD really did better. It was known as the "American Ministry." We in CORDS and OCO before us were the great protagonists of the RD Ministry with the GVN. So my answer
to what work did our office do towards getting the GVN behind the program is "plenty." The Thang promotion was just part of a cabinet shift. That was just protocol. Thang was a very energetic, able, dynamic guy; even when he was a BG, there was no doubt that he was running things.

How would you describe our advice, liaison, and influence with MORD at the national level?

**Komer:** We did have great influence behind the scenes. We had a special liaison officer there, Mark Huss, who had been there ten years and spoke fluent Vietnamese. Was just very good. He had a group of people working right in the Ministry . . . extremely close liaison at all levels, including mine with Thang, Tri, and Lac.

**Montague:** Then we ran into the period of trouble with General Lac when he started sending out memos without us seeing them and issuing orders to move teams around and change logistic supply levels. We finally had to get rid of him.

**Komer:** Yes, in late 1968. I went to the mat with General Lac, and then bitched to Thieu. Thieu kept telling Lac "you'd better do it the American way," because after all, we were providing all the money and logistic support. Finally Lac was relieved. Where is he now?

**Montague:** He went to the training center at Vung Tau. He took General Tho's place when Tho went to 18th Division.

In November 1967 the GVN established a Central RD Council with sub-councils at corps and province. Could you discuss this plan and the reported reluctance and lack of response on the part of the GVN regarding these councils?

**Komer:** This was our initiative, another attempt to establish some kind of central directing mechanism for pacification. It was accepted by Ky and Thieu. The new Prime Minister (Loc) wasn't appointed until December. Regrettably, they just never followed through or met very often. As far as I'm concerned, the Central RD Council was more or less of a dead letter until it became the Central Recovery Council after TET. Then we got more meetings and more movement. But not until 1969 when Thieu named Xhien Deputy PM for pacification and gave a staff to the renamed Central Pacification and Development Council did this central body really begin to function.
MONTAGUE: That's true. Thang just didn't like to stand up in front of a lot of other ministries and push them around. You know, he preferred not to exercise his powers. For example, he didn't control the ministries he had under him -- Public Works, Agriculture. He just didn't want to push them. However, he certainly pushed guys who were directly under his control in the areas that he knew about.

Could you discuss the training center at Vung Tau? Who were the key people and which agency was responsible for it? Was there OSA pressure to remove Major Sauvageot and Mr. Richard Kriegel (AID)?

KOMER: The RD school at Vung Tau was an excellent innovation. All RD teams were put through a 13-week course. Later we stressed refresher training. It has since been largely changed in function, as the original role of the RD cadre has been modified, to the place where they train hamlet chiefs, village chiefs, officials, self-defense force people, etc.

MONTAGUE: It's still probably the best school in all of Vietnam. This is largely due to Colonel Be. He's just a sensational motivator, and a darn good administrator. He administers the school exceptionally well.

KOMER: OSA was responsible for U.S. support of the school. AID had some people down there too. I'm unaware of any OSA pressure to remove Sauvageot and Kriegel.

SCOVILLE: Apparently, according to an earlier DOD study, they succeeded in removing Kriegel and tried to remove Sauvageot.

MONTAGUE: No. Kriegel went home, and then he came back, and they sent him up to II Corps.

SCOVILLE: Yes. Well, he went home, and he thought he was coming back to this job, and he found out he had been reassigned.

KOMER: But I think Wade Lathram did that in OCO days, because we desperately needed a key liaison guy up there in II corps. Headquarters for II Corps was at Pleiku, and I Field Force Headquarters was at Nha Trang. OCO decided that they needed a key liaison officer who was really knowledgeable up at Pleiku there, and Kriegel, as a Marine, they thought would work very well. I didn't think Kriegel was all that good.
A CORDS evaluation of 10 May 1968 echoed an often-heard complaint that the "training at Vung Tau failed to prepare RD cadre psychologically or technically for operations in exposed or insecure areas in the field." Was their training perhaps too idealistic?

**SCOVILLE:** Here's that old thing about Major Be filling them so full of idealism, and then they got out and found the horrible realities in the hamlets . . .

**KOMER:** Who wrote this evaluation? I recall asking for it because I was worried about high RD cadre attrition, and constantly pressing the MACCORDS Cadre Division about it.

**SCOVILLE:** I think Jim Culpepper and John Lybrand. It was called "RD Cadre Attrition." They spent quite a bit of time on it. I heard this going around . . .

**KOMER:** We heard it many times. I think it partly valid. But I don't see what training at Vung Tau could really prepare you -- this was a problem.

Could you discuss any problems in RD cadre leadership and efforts that were undertaken to improve it?

**KOMER:** RD cadre leadership was inadequate. It was one of the great problems, as reflected in the high resignation and other attrition. Leadership at the team level was very spotty, and the provincial RD cadre chiefs were, by and large, pretty poor. It was the fact that OSA had shadow leadership through the cadre advisors that really made the program work as well as it did.

**MONTAGUE:** But they subsequently stressed leadership schools, people coming back to additional courses at Vung Tau. Now they've gradually built up the leadership in the RD cadre, because RD cadre assignments have been relatively stable.

What steps were taken to reduce RD cadre absenteeism and desertions?

**MONTAGUE:** We ran a study and found out all of the things that we could do, and then started a program. We got reports province by province, and then you beat them up. The teams that had high rates of desertions, you know what we did with them? Wiped them out. In Bình Thuan they had lousy records; we told our people to stop supporting them.
KOMER: Did we ever get the high 1968 attrition rates down?

MONTAGUE: Yes, not way down but down to something now very much akin to ARVN. Attrition rates are now at 15, 16, 17 . . . something like that, per thousand per month.

Do you think it was a mistake to have the RD cadre advisor in the province responsible for both cadre and PRU activities?

MONTAGUE: In most cases that's not true, because you had both cadre and PRU advisors. The senior guy had actual control of both.

KOMER: In many cases it was not true because there were separate advisors. However, the criticism is more theoretical than real, because we just didn't have enough advisors to go around. We were constantly pressing OSA to bring more advisors in, because their guys were generally pretty good. It was a simple shortage of advisors that forced us into that, even though we and OSA recognized that it was not desirable.

In your letter to John McAlister, you mentioned the redirection of efforts of the RD cadre away from local defense and physical construction tasks toward political education and mobilization as part of the village government. Could you discuss this?

KOMER: In 1966-1967, because neither the Vietnamese nor American military were paying much attention to security for the village or protecting the RD teams, we had to provide our own self-defense elements, and this mission tended to dominate the concerns of the RD team, particularly in an exposed hamlet. As long as the teams really had to protect themselves, they rarely got too far beyond local defense. This changed as a result of the enemy's exhaustion from the TET and follow-on offensives, and as a result of the substantial increase in RVNAF and U.S. shielding and the substantial increase in troops assigned to territorial security -- RF/PF plus the 50-odd ARVN battalions. Therefore, I felt that we could shift the RD teams away from the defense mission and much more into the village development and political action missions. Thieu was strong for this.

My other idées fixes was to get those damn 59-man RD teams cut in half. The structure of the 59-man team was a defense platoon of 34 men, and the rest of them in little civic action teams. The reason we initially
had to have the defense platoon was because the cadre team had to provide its own security plus that for the hamlet. Once we were defeating the enemy, once we had integrated pacification so the RF/PP were part of the pacification team and we had these ARVN battalions, the whole rationale for having the defense platoon disappeared. It was only sensible back when the civilians had to provide their own protection for their own pacification program. So I said to abolish the defense platoon and create two teams for the price of one. We finally got around to this. It was accepted by Thieu in the APC, over the dead bodies of OSA and General Lac.

In other words, there was a shift in RD team employment in late 1968?

KOMER: Yes, carried out partly in the first APC, but mostly in the 1969 pacification program. For the reasons given above -- improved local security, increased territorial security forces -- plus Washington pressure to reduce RD cadre funding, I decided we'd better restructure the RD team approach. We peaked out the growth of RD cadre at about 56,000 or so as I recall (plus some 6000 Montagnard cadre), and shifted instead to the smaller 30-man teams. To meet the repeated criticism that we never left a permanent presence to protect the hamlets (largely owing to previous lack of resources), we decided to assign the new RD teams semi-permanently to a village (along with PF and PSDF). This was a clear change in the RD approach, and I'm happy it seemed to work out.

MONTAGUE: It's even more clear in 1969, when you have the RD cadre team permanently assigned to a village, because each hamlet in the village also has a popular force squad or platoon plus PSDF. So there's no more need to provide hamlet security by sending in a whole 59-man cadre team. The cadre team works out of the village, in all its hamlets -- maybe eight guys in this one, three in that one, maybe twenty down in this hamlet for two weeks. They move around doing the jobs required in the hamlets. And we've told them to work not the "V" hamlets but the "D" or "E" hamlets to bring them up to "C." In fact, some now are serving temporarily as government officials. They were permitted to run in the village hamlet elections. If they won, they dropped out of the RD cadre and took up their new duties.

SCOVILLE: Were they successful?

MONTAGUE: A fair number. Several hundred ran, and more than a hundred actually won office this year.
What about Census Grievance?

Komer: This little program, begun I believe as an independent exercise with OSA backing in 1965 or so, was very promising. You should look into its origins and output. At any rate we later brought it into the RD Ministry. The idea was to recruit a few mature citizens in each hamlet to take census data and also record grievances. One OSA purpose was to get dope on who the VC sympathizers were, but another use was to find out what was bothering the people. Many very interesting grass roots insights were gained. As I recall, the total number of CG cadre never exceeded 6000 or so, but I regard this program as one with which we should have done more.

Was there a separate Montagnard Cadre Program?

Komer: Yes. The CIA started separately from RD cadre a more simplified Montagnard program, called Truong Son Cadre (later Son Thong). It reached about five to six thousand men in 108 teams. While it was kept separate for political reasons, the program was modified to conform to the RD cadre system.
IX. THE USE OF LEVERAGE

This has become one of the fashionable questions among those involved in Vietnam. Did we press the Vietnamese hard enough and effectively enough to do what needed to be done? Did we use the power our indispensable contributions gave us sufficiently to this end? That's what leverage is all about. In the light of what actually happened since 1955, who can deny that we should have pushed the Vietnamese harder and gotten them to do more? I was a prime exponent of this line of criticism, and felt entitled to levy it because I think CORDS proved how much could be accomplished along those lines in 1966-1968.

But having said this, let me temper it with a pragmatic reminder that there are some things that just could not realistically be done, especially in the wartime chaos that reigned. Some things were simply not administratively, logistically, or politically feasible in the circumstances of the time. Much of the art of applying leverage is not to waste it on impracticable goals. Moreover, in retrospect, the sheer fact that the U.S. was directly or indirectly providing most of the financial and resource inputs probably did more to generate Vietnamese responsiveness than the active use of leverage. Indeed, in the last analysis, the rapport we developed with the Vietnamese as the usefulness of our advice became apparent to them probably helped more than any direct or indirect use of leverage in our effort to build pacification into a major Vietnamese program.

In the summer of 1967 there was increasing discussion of improving our leverage. On 12 July, Colonel V. Warner wrote a draft NSAM on increasing leverage as regards the RD program. Was this approved?

ROMER: No, and I would have raised the roof if it had been. In general, we in CORDS were precisely the people who were applying leverage on a consistent, sustained basis in Vietnam. I feel very strongly on this. The State Department was always writing silly papers on leverage. We actually applied leverage. The examples are legion. But I don't want to overstate the case. Given persistence plus access, you can get the Vietnamese to do things by the proper combination of cajolery and persuasion without resort to threat or sanction. We actually withdrew support on
numerous occasions from PPF companies, from province establishments, from RD teams, etc. But we got a lot more done by less arduous methods, especially in the case of getting key GVN personnel saved or replaced. Getting the right people is the key. Some critics have erected leverage sort of into an absolute. I always felt Volney Warner’s criticisms were excessive, though he was on the right track.

MONTAGUE: Yes, it’s like the joint sign-off. Was that really important or was it really not? Most of the time our advisors just signed; they didn’t know what they were signing. You need joint sign-off on plans, not joint sign-off on individual transactions.

KOMER: But basically my feeling, expressed time and time again, as you see in my reports to the President and in my reports out in Vietnam, was that we should apply more leverage to the Vietnamese, beginning back around year one; that it should have been a more consistent element of U.S. policy, especially on the military side. We didn’t have to stand for so much RVNAR inefficiency when we were footing the bills. Bob Shaplen in his Lost Revolution in effect takes the same viewpoint on a much broader political/military basis. I think he is essentially correct, and I buttress my case for more use of leverage by saying that in pacification, we did it. Of course, it didn’t always work, at least immediately.

What was your position on the decision to abolish the Joint Sign-Off that was made by Mr. Killen in December 1964?

KOMER: It happened before my time.

MONTAGUE: I was against it. Do you know why Killen wanted to abolish the joint sign-off? He was afraid that his guys weren’t really applying themselves, and that he was going to get hooked by a GAO-type investigation.

SCOVILLE: You mean because they were signing things they didn’t know about?

MONTAGUE: Yes. He didn’t want to be on the hook. Well, MACV was against him, but this was determined to be primarily USAID business if they wanted to abolish it.
In October 1965 the State Department killed the Mission Council effort to reestablish it. Do you know Ambassador Taylor's position?

Komer: I wasn't involved yet in Vietnam. Did Killen influence State, because he happened to be back in Washington? State didn't listen much to AID people. Frankly, this wasn't all that important an issue.

An earlier DOD study makes the statement that the "only consistent supporter of increasing and exercising U.S. leverage with the GVN during 1965 was McNamara" (Joint Command, encadrement). Do you agree?

Komer: I don't know about 1965. But in 1966-1968 we pacifiers were the ones who used leverage perhaps more than anyone else. We were able to succeed at least partially because we worked more closely with the Vietnamese than almost anybody else. Second, we took a very activist conception of our role as advisors working hand in hand with our counterparts. This went right on up to me. I imagine that I dealt with more Vietnamese officially and unofficially while I was there (from the President on down) than any other senior American in Vietnam (of course, Ed Lansdale saw even more of them socially). My practice was always to visit them. They were in charge. We were the advisors. So I would go see the Minister of Refugees or Defense, the RD Minister, Interior Minister, Prime Minister, the President, the Minister to the Prime Minister (who was a key man). I regularly visited the head of the National Police. We set up a weekly conference at JGS with our RE/PP counterpart, General La. I think intimacy of association led to a situation where they were more willing to take our advice and where our threats were more credible too. Leverage is not just threat (if you don't do something, some sanction will be imposed); leverage is also implied. "If this program doesn't work, I don't see how I'm going to be able to fund it next year." We used every device we could think of. Maybe we weren't imaginative enough, but we were more imaginative than the rest of the Americans in Vietnam, with the possible exception of CIA -- maybe they used girls or bribes or things like that! But we used all legitimate forms of leverage.

Now, some cases in point. The classic example is how we went after ARVN leadership in pacification. We grabbed a major role in the appointment and shifting of people in pacification right up to ministers and general officers. We really zeroed in on the key people, including
ministers and agency heads as well as province and district chiefs. Pacification almost by definition focuses on the province, district, and village war. And after we'd settled the provinces and districts, we were planning to move in on the villages.

**SCOVILLE:** What about General Vinh Loc? Were you responsible for . . .

**KOMER:** In part, perhaps, but that was larger than pacification. Our complaints contributed to the relief of Vinh Loc at II Corps after TET and earlier Dang Van Quang at IV Corps in late 1967. We kept needling Westy, Bunker, Ky, Thieu, etc.

**MONTAGUE:** Yes . . . Quang and Defense Minister Co in late 1967, then Vinh Loc after TET. We didn't so much go after Quang as that he got tied up with General Co. And that wasn't the U.S. so much.

**KOMER:** Yes. It was also Quang's wife -- alleged corruption. Incidentally, General Dang Van Quang looks much better afterward. His senior advisor, General Desobry, insisted that Quang was much better than his successor, General Manh. I would agree. We also urged dismissal of Manh after TET, because of his dismal performance. I proposed Thang as his successor. Westy ran with that ball beautifully.

**MONTAGUE:** Quang was ten times better; he was a sensational division commander.

**KOMER:** Another form of leverage was the A1K fund! The Americans were largely financing and totally equipping ARVN. Meanwhile the U.S. forces incurred a lot of piaster costs for all sorts of local labor, local construction materials, this, that, and the other thing. So the Ministry of Defense gave us, from its budget, a negotiated lump sum each year to be used by us for these and other broadly specified purposes in the interest of the war effort. This reverse lend-lease arrangement was called "Assistance in Kind." The A1K piaster fund varied between a billion and three billion "Ps." As soon as I arrived I said why shouldn't CORDS get a lot of these funds for pacification? After all, pacification is now part of the American military establishment that receives the A1K fund. This thought was unheard of in MACV but I got it approved. We got 1.5 billion out of the 3 billion A1K.

We wanted this for a number of purposes. After all, it extended our reach. It gave us considerable leverage because we now disposed of more resources that we could withhold or disburse. There had been
constant pleas by advisors, and complaints that for the want of a nail the horseshoe was being lost. For example, say we had contracted with a local contractor for a school. After nine months of complicated French-style bidding, it is agreed that the school would be built for 40,000 piasters. Then it turns out that 40,000 piasters can only go so far. The contractor says I've spent all the money; I'm broke. The school doesn't get finished. Two thousand piasters still to go. The province advisor says isn't there some way I can provide the extra 2000 piasters. Or we want to repair a local bridge. The province treasury has in it only 35,000 piasters to replace this bridge. The cost is going to be 40,000. "If I can contribute 5000 piasters, the province chief says he'll put in 35,000." Things like that. Frequently because of the inefficiency of the GVN administration, people weren't getting paid. In an emergency when a guy's paycheck was late, we'd tide him over rather than have him quit. All sorts of little emergency projects that in wartime were important but somehow, because of bureaucratic procedures (Vietnamese and even American), just couldn't get moving. So I decided to give each province senior advisor a special fund from AIR. He would be required to account for this, and we would have ex post facto audits. We put out a directive telling the advisors what we wanted them to do with it, that in any case of doubt to check with us. We gave each province originally a million piasters a month. That sounds like a lot, but remember the piaster was at 118 to the dollar. Actually, we scaled it. The biggest provinces got three million. Then the next got two million, and the smallest got one million. This was probably the most popular thing I did for our advisors in Vietnam, because it gave them a flexible tool under their own control -- to help cut here and there and keep things moving. They usually used it in direct association with their Vietnamese counterparts. But it did give them a quick-reaction capability without having to go through channels all the time.

We then immediately put in a review procedure. I wanted to know, month by month, what AIR was being spent on, who was spending and who wasn't, because this was one indicator of which province temas were on the ball and which weren't. We found provinces where for over six months not a piaster of AIR was spent, and other provinces where those guys could show all the things they were doing spending to the limit. We sent people
down to find out why. It turned out that in some cases it was inertia. In other cases, guys were afraid to spend.

MONTAGUE: Afraid to spend -- somebody would criticize them if they spent it on the wrong thing.

KOMER: So we pressed them on this. We also analyzed the types of things they were spending on, and found that a lot of it was going for refugees, which we felt legitimate; a lot for hamlet school programs -- legitimate; not enough going to support the Phoenix program. So we said: "We get complaints through Phoenix channels that we can't build the DIOCCs. You guys have all these plasters that you're not spending. Now that's what we gave them for. Phoenix is a priority expenditure of the AIK Special Fund." That helped unblock a lot of things. Frequently, the way the American would get the DIOCC set up was to contribute a typewriter. That was the catalyst. Want to know how he did it? He bought a Japanese typewriter with AIK in many cases.

MONTAGUE: If a province didn't spend, then someone asked why not. Everybody said that's no way to do things. But it was necessary. Now in 1969 everybody has backed off, saying don't spend AIK.

KOMER: Isn't it crazy? We were trying to pump resources into pacification, trying to build up impact and momentum. All the AIK put together was a piddling amount, but looked big in plasters. Because of this flexible technique, it gave us leverage and influence far beyond its monetary significance. When you're fighting a 30 billion dollar war and less than 2 percent of that is going into pacification (which can make a much greater contribution per dollar of resources spent than dropping bombs), we were eager to build this up. And I think it netted out overwhelmingly successful. It's this little sort of add-on that we were ingenious enough to develop. I did cut province AIK funds when a province wasn't spending them. I established a special AIK fund for the rebuilding of Hue. We just kept very flexible. Since our billion and a half plaster AIK was much greater than the province advisor's fund, we allocated a very substantial amount to refugees. We gave a lot to Phoenix, principally to build DIOCCs. We used it to fund the province advisor's school. We did some financing of the RD Ministry too.

The things that gave us leverage were our troop and financial
commitments; the real threat was to turn off the supplies. Several times we looked into the question of turning off supplies when there were cor-
rupt or incompetent district or province chiefs. But mostly we decided that all we had to do was to cut off support and these guys would be tar-
geted by the VC. Let me give you an example. The chief support we give in the security sense is artillery fire, air support, etc. If an RF pla-
tion or a district town is in trouble, who provides the support? Cut that off, and it'll take the VC just two or three days to find out that the artillery isn't firing anymore, or that the helicopters aren't coming anymore. The word is out that the Americans are out to get Major so—and—so. Then the VC will target him. So, you took a considerable risk of throwing out the baby with the bath. This was our feeling on absolute withdrawal of support.

But there were forms of support we could withdraw. Several times I directed, to the great pain of our RD Cadre Division, that we hold up support to the RD Ministry. I refused to disburse the money or to sign off on certain procedures they wanted until they came around to our way of thinking.

We also did this frequently with the police. In the case of Police Field Force companies, I was getting so little result that I finally decided to use the PFF as an example. When a PFF company was consistently maldeployed or misused, we would simply cut off its equipment support -- which was practically 100 percent from U.S. sources (we gave them every-
thing but their pay). This was done in a half dozen cases, and if I'm not mistaken, in every case where we withdrew support from a PFF company, they were brought around within a month or two. Frequently using leverage like this, telling the province senior advisor to withdraw support, had repercussions all the way up and down the line because the Vietnamese police would complain through their own channels up to the Director of National Police. So National Police Headquarters would come around and ask please will you restore support. And we'd say no, because you guys agreed with us nine months ago that the 201st company was going to be redeployed, and you never did it. Frequently it turns out that an order has just been held up in the works. Or it was simple inertia. I won't say we won on every case where we employed pressure, but our batting average was on the order of 700, which isn't bad.
In the philosophical discussions about leverage, there was great stress by State and AID people on avoiding the "empty threat." If you make threats, and don't go through on them, people will know you're a paper tiger. Therefore, don't start threatening, because you know damn well that you can't withdraw support. Nonsense! Since in some cases we withdrew support, I doubt they considered us as using empty threats. Besides which, I philosophically disagree with "never bluff, because you might get called." No poker player won money doing that, and no general ever got a reputation always playing it safe. But that's the way bureaucrats do business.

Did leverage difficulties increase as a result of the September 1967 elections?

Komer: I would say no. When Ky was Prime Minister, he was more approachable than Thieu. But Thieu was far more interested in pacification than Ky. Once Thieu began to take an activist role in the pacification program, we began to get a lot more movement than previously at top levels. So in that sense, the September 1967 election, by bringing Thieu to the fore as head of government as well as head of state, was a big plus.

Scoville: But didn't he gain any strength from the mere fact that they became sort of a legitimate government? They didn't use this as a lever on us?

Komer: No, they didn't say to us now we're a legitimate popularly-elected government, so don't go twisting our arm the way you used to.

The Project TAKEOFF Study contained a substantive proposal on leverage, recommending the "oriental" approach but leaving open the possibility of choosing a more open exercise of U.S. power, including U.S. control of resources. Did you approve of this recommendation?

Scoville: This may be that Project TAKEOFF Study that you couldn't remember. Did you farm out a study to be done by the regular CORDS organization? I wonder where that earlier DOD study could have gotten the idea. This is a study done by CORDS out there after you had arrived, roughly May 1967.

Komer: Montague and I wrote the basic TAKEOFF directives, but we did say to CORDS, staff out these guidelines and come up with action
recommendations on how we give life to them. We had Ogden Williams do
a Chieu Hoi paper, etc.

MONTAGUE: We had to have a sensible management scheme, so we made
Wade Lathram the overall TAKEOFF manager, and we had monthly reports,
and all that sort of stuff.

KOMER: So CORDS did flesh out action programs at my request; it
may be that they put them all together, as staffs will, in a nice fancy
notebook and sent it up to me. It's quite possible that there is a leverage
chapter of that sort.

Could you comment on the influence of the Haymann-Warner study on leverage
(August 1967)? What was your reply?

KOMER: Its influence? None. Our reply? That we were already
doing it.

SCOVILLE: Did Warner come brief you on leverage in July 1967?

KOMER: We invited him out. We put him to work. Volney sent the
study out in advance. We read it, and we marked it up with all sorts
of nasty comments. It was sort of an academic exercise. But Volney
Warner was a very good Army colonel on the White House staff with Leonhart,
and now a brigade commander in Vietnam. I don't mean to denigrate the
study. I do mean to denigrate the utility of the exercise in an action
process where we were already moving along these lines.

MONTAGUE: Studies just don't have much influence unless they offer
something new. If they just reinforce what you're doing, they might as
well not have been done.

SCOVILLE: Didn't Frank Scotten and Colonel Gibney write a reply to
the Warner thing to you?

KOMER: I don't recall. Many of our people were quite opposed to
the use of leverage. You can have academic discussions of leverage in
the Mission Council, stuff like that. But until you practice it, you
just aren't in the ball game.

MONTAGUE: The perfect example is the advisor's fund. I had the idea
for the fund initially back in 1964 and got General Westmoreland to back
it, even though the staff said no. The district advisors thought it was
the greatest thing since ice cream. Once I left, the opposition started
springing up over in AID and the Embassy. They said: "We question this form of leverage. It might get us into trouble. All the advisors won't apply it in the same way. We ought to stop it." And they did. It took Ambassador Komer to come back and jam it through again, against considerable opposition. This 1964 advisor's fund was a precedent, used much the same as our later AIX fund.

At the various conferences (i.e., Honolulu, Manila, Guam), were we prepared to compromise on how much we wanted out of the GVN in pacification?

KOMER: We didn't present a list of demands at these conferences. We went there so the President could talk to Thieu and Ky and say, for Pete's sake, try to move faster on land reform; or, push the election along. We had our lists of what we were going to ask them to do, with fall-backs in some cases. And they had what they were going to ask us for. But these issues usually ended up by one side saying I'll have to study that and come back at you later.

The issue of corruption has been hotly debated and many people feel it to be of critical importance. What was your attitude towards this problem? What was the degree of GVN response to our efforts?

KOMER: There is lots of corruption in Vietnam. There is in most Asian countries. I doubt that you could say that Vietnamese society is significantly more corrupt than Philippine or Indonesian society. In fact, most who have been in the Philippines I've argued otherwise. No doubt also the chaos of wartime, the breakdown of administration -- deliberately induced in many cases by the VC -- did breed a sort of sauvé qui peut attitude on the part of many. War profiteering was substantial. There also was a great deal of war profiteering in the United States in World War I and II, you know. Moreover, squeeze or baksheesh is a way of doing business in most parts of Asia. So a lot of what we Americans call corruption is part of the cost of doing business in Asia. If you want to get your passport validated in a hurry, you pass a few hundred piasters to the underpaid clerk in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I suspect it is even done in Japan. I know damn well it is done in the parts of Asia that I am familiar with.
Another factor to be taken into account is that GVN civil servants and military were ridiculously underpaid. We had sharp inflation in Vietnam, even though it was kept under far better control than in the Korean War for example. Nonetheless prices were advancing on the average 25 to 30 percent a year. Wages did not keep up. And it was the people on fixed incomes who were fighting the war — the military, the civil servants, etc. Not only were these people on fixed incomes underpaid in the first place, but their incomes were being steadily eaten away. Under these circumstances, the temptation to take a little bribe in order to perform service more rapidly could become almost overwhelming. In fact, the surprising thing in Vietnam is not the extent of corruption, but how relatively modest corruption probably was overall. Those who argue that corruption is eating away at the vitals of Vietnamese society and makes it impossible to have an effective government and achieve our aims in Vietnam are advancing totally unsupported propositions.

MONTAGUR: There was never really a major corruption scandal involving a high government official that was proved, or a whole ministry . . . General Co and General Quang, but that was allegation and not anything really substantial at that.

KOMER: The secondary sources are poor. You will find people writing impressionistic accounts, based on rumors they hear in Saigon, about the level of corruption in Vietnamese society. Or they'll cite the money changers. There's a money black market in most countries in peacetime and wartime, with respect to foreign currencies. So to cite the Hindu money changers in downtown Saigon as an example of corruption in Vietnam is perfectly ridiculous. You can find the same money changers functioning in Bangkok, Rangoon, Calcutta, Hong Kong, Djakarta, Cebu City, or Manila. I don't mean to understate corruption. I think corruption eats away at the respectability, at the efficiency of operations over time.

SCOVILLE: This is the point. One can always say that it exists, and it's almost a normal part of the society. But to what degree do you feel that it was damaging to pacification and to our whole effort in Vietnam? You know, if refugees didn't get . . .

KOMER: I would guess it led to a siphoning off of up to 5 percent or so of the total resources, which is very small wastage. Granted that this is sheer guesswork on my part. I discovered that the U.S. military
plan for a wartime noncombat wastage rate of 8 percent before resources ever get to the battlefield. But I do not think that corruption by itself was a critical impediment. Montague and I are in a better position to evaluate the impact of corruption of program effectiveness than most people, because we were involved with program effectiveness. The press didn't have a clue as to the impact of corruption. They just had a lot of rumors and impressions, which they blew up as usual.

Even so, while we tried to see corruption in perspective, we went out harder against it than anybody else. We really pushed the anti-corruption program; we collected evidence on corrupt province and district chiefs and other officials involved in pacification. When we had allegations that satisfied us (and we frequently sent people up to check up on them), we brought the allegations directly to the attention of high Vietnamese officials. I would say we sent as many allegations of corruption to the GVN directly as all other American organizations in Vietnam put together. I want to emphasize that we actually did something. We sent all sorts of dossiers, papers, memoranda, excerpts right to the key people in the GVN, because we were trying to get rid of these guys.

MONTAGUE: For example, when the RTTs would report corruption in Tay Ninh City, we would excise that portion out of the RTT report and send it right on down to the palace. John Vann used to get very upset, because then they'd come back down from the palace. He said we should protect our sources better. But we said no, the name of the game is to stop corruption, not to protect sources.

SCOVILLE: How do incompetents stay in government? Because of close tie-ins, both family and payoffs . . . directly taking money? It results in a system where the best guy often stays at the bottom . . . do you feel that has an effect?

KOMER: It has. For example, this is one of the reasons why we were trying to get the corps and division commanders taken out of the pacification chain of command, because of the allegations that province chiefs were paying off corps and division commanders. Thieu enforced that all province chiefs would be appointed by Saigon. I know for a fact that he rejected most of the recommendations of the corps and division commanders. So that was one way of getting at corruption. Second, when Thieu established
this school for province and district chiefs, he ordered that they would get their assignments on the basis of class rank. First in the class got to pick from the entire list of assignments the one he wanted most, and so on down the line. It's pretty good.

MONTAGUE: Province chiefs and district chiefs who apparently were corrupt went immediately on our list of ones to be removed, and the reason we gave President Thieu was "suspected of corruption."

KOMER: We tried to be careful about the rules of evidence. Where it was allegation, we said so. Where we thought we had proof, we provided it. This was practically unheard of in the U.S. establishment.

SCOVILLE: I remember an example of this. You sent Jerry Dodson to look in on General Lu Lam on the "Cam Ranh Bay land grab."

KOMER: That's right. We sent our evaluators out frequently. The CVN was fairly responsive. Among other things, when you attack corruption, you're largely trying to do it by example. You may not be able to find all the cases, but if you can just get it around that the Americans are looking for corruption, it has an impact . . . because the Americans are around a lot of places; the Americans are involved in a lot of resource allocations. And when investigators come down and say that Ambassador Komer has told the President's office that district chief so-and-so is a crook, and we're down here to investigate it, that has an impact.

Our first great case was Colonel Vuong, the province chief of Binh Dinh. Vuong was the brother-in-law of Vinh Loc, the II Corps commander. I had received certain credible allegations. We were having dinner one evening with Ky and got onto the subject of corruption. Ky said to me, "You just tell me anybody who is corrupt and I'll have him out just like that!" So I said: "Let me tell you about the province chief of Binh Dinh. We think he is as crooked as a corkscrew." Ky was taken aback, because he thought he had made a big grandstand play and that I wouldn't be able to cite a case. By God, they sent up an investigator who proved that Vuong was on the take, and Ky removed him in November or December 1967 or so.

SCOVILLE: But often it seemed that you'd get a corrupt guy out of one place and he'd be reassigned to another corps.

MONTAGUE: Look at the jobs they were assigned. They weren't assigned as province chief.
KOMER: Then he's got to build up his corruption network all over again. Doesn't he get scared by this? Is he as likely to be as openly corrupt the second time? All I know is we kept working on it.
X. PHUNG HOANG: THE ATTACK ON THE
VIET CONG INFRASTRUCTURE

Few pacification sub-programs have become more controversial than
the U.S.-supported GVN effort to do something at long last about neu-
tralizing the clandestine VC political and administrative structure
that was one of the secrets of VC success. It directed the village and
terror war; logistically supported it, and gave it political direction,
conscripting or proselyting recruits, enforcing VC taxation; made anti-
GVN propaganda, and the like. If Vietnam was a "people's war" as Hanoi
called it, a political and revolutionary as much as a military conflict,
then rooting out this network of perhaps 100,000 to 150,000 hard core
cadre at its peak was one of the most critical tasks we faced. Without
it, no matter what our purely military achievements, their lasting impact
would be in doubt.

It is a sad commentary on the overly conventional nature of the U.S./
GVN approach to insurgency war that not until mid-1967 did we even begin
to mount a major concerted attack on the VC clandestine political structure --
its shadow government at all levels down to hamlet. Our failure was not
because we didn't recognize the problem -- you can find studies going all
the way back to the mid-fifties that correctly identified the key VCI
role. It was largely because nobody tackled it as an operational and
management problem -- it was everybody's business and nobody's. It fell
between the cracks. The reason I began zeroing in on it in late 1966 was
because I saw that winning over the farmers would require not just providing
territorial security against the enemy main and local forces but also
rooting out the clandestine political and terror apparatus. So I made
it an integral part of pacification.

The GVN at all levels grasped its importance from the outset, but
for various reasons it was slow to get off the ground and even today suf-
fers from numerous weaknesses that impair its effectiveness. Ideally it
should be a professionally executed police-type program, conducted accord-
ing to well-known legal procedures, backed by an effective system of trial
courts, and ending with imprisonment in adequate facilities for political
rehabilitation. All this was done in Malaya. But in Vietnam by 1967-1968
these institutions had largely to be rebuilt from scratch. Some have criticized Phung Hoang for being a counter-terror program, which it wasn't; others have claimed it has been used for other political purposes than rooting out the VCI, which I doubt. Indeed, the greatest criticism of Phoenix has been its sloppy and feeble GVN execution, despite U.S. advisory help. So many thousands of arrested VCI have been let go again promptly as to raise questions as to why they were apprehended in the first place or whether they bribed their way out.

Yet even if the claims of 12,000 VCI neutralized in 1968 and 19,500 in 1969 are quite exaggerated and included mostly low-level VCI, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we are putting a serious dent in the VC cadre structure. Ambassador Colby claims that it is down to around 75,000 in all at end-1969. Moreover, the simple fact that they know the GVN is after them in a big way probably has a destabilizing and deterrent impact on VCI ability to do their jobs. Hopefully, Phung Hoang will yet get the priority and resources it deserves. It could be worth more than three ARVN divisions.

Were there any significant anti-infrastructure programs before the ICEX/Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program?

MONTAGUE: There weren't any significant integrated programs as such, because it was fragmented to everyone. In other words, the police had an anti-infrastructure program; presumably ARVN did; the PRUs were involved. But there was no collation of the intelligence or any centralized operational direction.

SCOVILLE: Was there any pressing for this before 1966 or 1967?

MONTAGUE: Not really. In 1964 we had made attack against the VC infrastructure one of the key elements of pacification. We turned the function over to the province and district chiefs and expected them to coordinate the activity. We had of course briefed our advisors on how important it was. But we had never formed a national structure. So you didn't get things like detention facilities. You didn't get things like SOPs. You didn't get things like definition of who was a Class A VCI or Class B or Class C. Once we got the Komer operation back in Washington, we got into a position where we could start to think in terms of pulling together the Vietnamese effort. I did have Burnham and Holbrooke
look at the VCI in Binh Chanh District in late 1966. I was temporarily Director of Plans, Operations, Reports, and Evaluations of OCO, on detached duty from my White House job. I sent Burnham and Holbrooke out to Binh Chanh and they came back with a documented case of the great number of different intelligence organizations and the lack of interest in the Binh Chanh administration in using the product of any of these. We sent that report back to Mr. Komer in the White House. I gather that he sort of used the Holbrooke-Burnham Binh Chanh Study as a starter to get the CIA working on the integrated attack against the infrastructure. It was a horror story. At the same time, we had had the experience of the Marine DIOCC (the Marines introduced it, in conjunction with the CIA -- a sort of a combined thing) in the Dien Ban District of Quang Nam in early 1967. Those two things combined indicated that we ought to take corrective action.

SCOVILLE: Can you tell me about the CIA study?

KOMER: CIA worked closely with us in the White House. They were very cooperative. The head FR man was Colby. At my request, Bill produced a couple of studies in early 1967. I was not satisfied because they were much too generalized. What we wanted was an action program! Everyone agreed that we had to go after the infrastructure. Everybody agreed that it had to be done by police-type techniques. But how do you set it up? How do you make it work in Vietnam? We really had to put in the action components.

MONTAGUE: I recall that you had me put the final proposal together in Saigon. I took parts of the CIA study -- for example on how a DIOCC operated -- and put that in an appendix to the study that we sent to General Westmoreland on 14 June 1967. Whole pieces of the CIA study were useful, but we made the action plans and developed the actual organization of the study that we did out in Saigon in May.

KOMER: I discussed it with Westmoreland, who thought ICEX was a great idea (see Chapter IV). But the MACV staff was very much opposed to a joint/CIA/military operation structured the way I wanted it. They wanted to make it a routine military intelligence operation. My basic point was that the military intelligence network was primarily concerned with OB and where the enemy units were. We had to have somebody else whose main
mission was where are the infrastructure, and how can we get at them. You've got to create special-purpose institutions to do special-purpose jobs. Give a secondary mission to an already existing outfit, and that secondary mission will be neglected. If you want to get real focus on a problem, set up a group that will have this problem as its primary focus, nothing else. I think this was one of the secrets of our success in pacification. We were great ones for action programs. Theory was not much good if it could not be implemented.

MONTAGUE: We then used "attack on the VCI" as one of the key action programs of Project TAKEOFF (see Chapter IV).

What were your reasons for pushing the Phoenix Program? Multiplicity of allied intelligence organizations, lack of coordination?

KOMER: The main reason was that this key target, the enemy's clandestine political infrastructure, was not being adequately addressed. Second, this was part of my philosophy that we should concentrate on the weak sisters in the enemy lineup, to wit the VC. Get after the VC guerrillas, destroy the VC's political structure, and the NVA are in a considerably weakened position, even though Hanoi can continue sending them down from the north. Westmoreland completely agreed.

This business of the multiplicity of allied intelligence organizations has been overdone. I notice that Bob Thompson repeats the old canard that there were 17 different outfits, none of them talking to each other. That's just baloney. There were five or six, but this was just in Saigon where various people had little outfits of their own -- they probably included Lansdale's group.

SCOVILLE: Except that Frank Wisner brought up that there were plus ten in Tuyen Duc alone, and he fully agrees with the Thompson thesis . . . people blowing each other's agents . . .

MONTAGUE: Yes, but Thompson's just not right that they never talked to each other. They don't work under one boss, but . . .

KOMER: In any case we agreed that there was considerable lack of coordination. Therefore, my concept was not to create yet another intelligence outfit, which would compete with all the others, but to bring all their anti-VCI efforts together under a single management umbrella,
with common direction, doctrine, measurement and reporting systems. It had to be a GVW operation, but the first step was to organize the U.S. advisory side. Our trick was to make ICEX, the progenitor of Phoenix, a joint CIA/military advisory operation. This was over the strenuous objections of J-2. My reason was that CIA people had the only available American expertise in going after the political substructure. I wanted to marry this with the military's assets, because CIA could only produce a few dozen advisors for this program. If we were going to set up DIOCCs in most districts, we had to have a few hundred people, and those could only be provided by the military. The military staffed most of the DIOCCs. Also, I did not want this program to be under a J-2 section that bore the imprint of General McChristian. In candor, they were just not up to it. General Davidson was infinitely better than McChristian, but he was properly focused on the main force war. We wanted the direction of the program to be under guys who were focused on the infrastructure.

We got as head of the ICEX Directorate an able CIA officer named Ev Parker, who was brought out specifically for the job. We put a full colonel, whom I personally recruited from the Pentagon, as his deputy -- Colonel William Greenwalt. Both did a swell job.

Could you discuss the importance of McNamara's July 1967 visit to the program?

**Komer:** I don't recall any specific impact! McNamara always kept saying we've got to get after the infrastructure. He had been asking the same question since 1964. This time we told him we had a program, and I think he was pleased though skeptical.

Why was ICEX originally directly under you and not ACoFS/CORDS?

**Komer:** The reason I put ICEX under me, as in effect Chairman of the Board of Directors, was because we had both CIA and J-2 involved. They were very sensitive organizations, and I thought that to put this program down at MACCORDS level would multiply the difficulties, as neither CIA nor J-2 would work well with MACCORDS on this new, sensitive program. My other thought was that if this program was to get off the ground, I'd better honcho it personally. I really kept on their tails. It also made them happier.
MONTAGUE: That proved to be very smart, because now it's under ACoF S CORDS and not getting enough emphasis or attention. Most of the time they're answering the Chief of Staff on routine staff actions, instead of getting on with the job. It's much more important for staffs to meet suspense dates than to get VCI.

KOMER: We designed the Phoenix Program as much more than just intelligence on who the VCI were. We tried to make Phoenix a complete program. We insisted that a program that identifies the enemy but doesn't do anything about him is not much of a program. Therefore, Phoenix was both identification and capture or other neutralization, sentencing -- we went for an additional four military field courts, and interrogation and incarceration. We got an experienced attorney out to research Vietnamese law and tell us what could be done legally. We had a prison program to expand the number of cells. We got a former Marine colonel, Randolph Berkeley, and put him in charge of advising on the prison program. We tried to approach all aspects of the problem, but some moved faster than others.

What was the Vietnamese reaction to the Phoenix Program? What was Brigadier General Loan's reaction?

KOMER: The big problem with Phoenix was less getting the GVN sold on it in principle than getting them actually to set up a program. Phoenix had to be Vietnamese! We could provide advice and support, but basically getting after the VCI had to be a GVN job. Getting PM Loc's initial approval was relatively easy. We wanted the police to take a primary role. General Loan, Director General of Police, agreed, but he didn't move very fast to get the thing set up. His being wounded at TET solved that problem. His successor, Colonel Hai, was very much in favor, and then General Khiem came along as Interior Minister in March 1968 and really pushed it.

I met with General Loan frequently. He was favorable in principle but slow in moving. However, he finally gave the job to a very bright young Special Branch major, and I felt that Phung Hoang was finally beginning to go when TET came along.
Were you satisfied with the methods of elimination employed against the infrastructure and also the GVN's disposition of apprehended infrastructure persons?

KOMER: No. We placed great emphasis on capture rather than kill. Obviously we wanted to interrogate these guys and find out more. This is standard. As a matter of fact, in every stage of the program there have been far more captures than kills. Increasingly it's been rallying. But we were not satisfied. I got CIA to put the FRUs in support of Phoenix. They were very effective, but sometimes they were more inclined to knock these guys off than to bother to bring them in. By and large, statistics show that the emphasis was on capture and interrogation.

There were many problems and flaws in the Phoenix Program, mostly problems of execution -- inertia, slowness -- rather than problems of concept. For example, we did not accept the inflated Vietnamese figures as to the infrastructure they brought in. The Phoenix record and reporting systems that we developed and sold to the GVN finally, were the first large-scale professional attempt at this. We plugged blacklists and lists of "most wanted." We set up our own evaluation staff to screen every one of these cases by name, and we generally accepted only about two-thirds of the names the Vietnamese brought in. So we worked hard on measurement programs, etc. OSA cooperated extremely well. This was the sort of thing they understood, and Phoenix could not have really gotten moving without CIA participation and support. The disposition of captured VCL was a constant thorn. In the first place, the procedures for handling were not very good. A lot of them were let go. We were constantly working on this.

It has often been said that the main problem of the Phoenix Program in its first year was that there were no parallel orders, guidance, or operating instructions coming down through the Vietnamese side. Who was responsible for this delay? Why?

KOMER: Agreed this was the main problem. The delay was that it took a lot of time selling this to the Vietnamese. The first Phoenix directive was put out by PM Loc in December 1967, so it really began before July 1968. But we found that this directive, which was necessarily fairly general, was not enough. So we decided we'd spell out SOPs, and that's what you described in the report of July 1968.
On my visits to the field (late 1967, early 1968) it appeared that the program was a spotty effort at best, largely dependent on the local initiative of a particular district chief. Could you discuss this?

Komer: I agree that the early program was a spotty effort at best, largely dependent on local initiative. Part of the problem was the lack of command emphasis on Phoenix down the GVN chain of command. We worked on this by getting Thieu to raise hell. Thieu in his trips out to the field would say to the province chief: "What are you doing on Phoenix? The reports we have are that you're not really backing the Phoenix Program. Now get with it." That had some impact. Then we put it in as a key part of the APC. We kept constantly pressing the priority status to be given to Phoenix, and the Vietnamese gradually began getting with it. So I would say that by late 1968, as of the time I left, we had the program going. But you've got to bear in mind the lead time required to get something going in Vietnam with Vietnamese. These were novel concepts. We sold them easily at the high level, but field implementation (when you get down to 250 districts) takes more time. We had to build from the ground up.

Montague: You have to build the DIOCCs. You have to send the guys to school. You have to earmark the key people. It's a big administrative job.

Komer: We deliberately centered Phoenix at the district level. We could have argued "do it at village," but we didn't have anything down there very much except a PF platoon. District seemed to be the lowest level at which we could still get management influence on the program. The idea was to extend it later to the village.

Montague: A key objective of Phoenix was to eliminate "Dragnet" type operations and go to the rifle shot approach.

Komer: Exactly! We stressed the rifle shot! Target on the individual. Identify him through careful police work. Then go out and pick up that guy. Don't surround a hamlet and herd together 5000 people and then go through them. You can't do a good job that way. The 1st Air Cav up in Binh Dinh Province was running these "Dragnet" operations and claiming a thousand VCI a month. Their figures were ridiculous. What they were bringing in was everybody — farmers, cooks, bakers, candlestick makers, etc. — and calling them VCI. We were sure that this was not sensible. I am not an admirer of "County Fair" and "Dragnet" type
operations. They generally were very loose sieves. They garnered up hundreds of people. They did not have an effective mechanism for screening. They didn’t know whom they were looking for.

MACDONALD: In April 1969 I found in IV Corps, for example, they were doing a lot of searching the village and bringing everybody into the square. At least that gave them an opportunity to fingerprint everybody, and they turned up a lot of deserters and draft dodgers and this sort of thing over and above the VCI. This was the "Dragnet" concept, I think.

KOMER: Only partly. This was also the National ID Card Program conceived by CORDS Public Safety Division. The old GVN ID cards were sloppy and could be easily forged. The U.S. sold the GVN on a program to issue revised, tamperproof identification cards to every Vietnamese man and woman over the age of 15. This key program had been moving very slowly under USAID, and when CORDS took it over I regarded it as crucial to population control in a counter-insurgency war. It was potentially invaluable to identification and tracking of VCI, catching draft dodgers, and the like. I took it personally under my wing, and made several major changes, but it still moved all too slowly, even though I kept pushing it personally.

MONTAGUE: It is another example of a program that takes literally years to get started. USAID initiated the idea back in 1966, but it wasn’t until mid-1968 that it really got started. It is still going at much too slow a rate, because you don’t have enough guys out there making out the forms.

KOMER: AID got good FBI experts to design the system. We set up a great big national fingerprint center in the police compound in downtown Saigon. We trained hundreds of little Vietnamese girls at the technique of collating and filing fingerprints, and we worked out every detail of the program so that we could, over a period of three years, give a new ID card and fingerprint everybody in the country. I kept emphasizing: "Let’s fingerprint the VCI. We’ve got to have a central file. We capture a guy in Vinh Dinh. We interrogate him; we identify him; we fingerprint him; and then some guy releases him. He may show up the next time down in Lam Dong. How can you trace him?"

MONTAGUE: The concept is that everybody, VC and friends, gets an ID card. But the Vietnamese want to give ID cards only to good guys.
So how do they separate the good guys from the bad guys to give them their ID cards? They require all sorts of background information, identification, statements that this guy is okay, and as a result they get bogged down.

KOMER: Very frustrating. To sum up, ICEX/Phoenix/Phung Hoang was one of those relatively low efficiency GVN programs that take a long time to get up steam. It was very hard to raise to real efficiency. What the British did in Malaya was to develop this sort of thing over a period of 25 years. We started really in June 1967. The fact that by the end of 1968 it was going somewhere, because again it was a Vietnamese program, is impressive. Eighteen months was pretty fast in one sense, and Phung Hoang was outstandingly cost-effective from the standpoint of very modest resources invested. Cumulative results were beginning to show at the end of 1968. The results have been much more impressive throughout 1969. However inefficient Phung Hoang is, I believe that it is cumulatively eroding the VCI, which is critically important.
XI. POLICE, CHIEU HOI, REFUGEE, LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, AND PEOPLE'S SELF-DEFENSE PROGRAMS

KOMER: The "new model" pacification program was much more than generating territorial security and getting after the VCI. While we concentrated first on security, we recognized from the outset it was not enough. The constructive side consisted of a series of interlocking programs, all of admittedly low to modest efficiency, designed to generate both positive rural support of the GVN and antipathy toward the VC. Our still largely abortive land reform efforts are covered in Chapter IV; attempts at rural economic revival, opening roads and waterways, and USAID programs in Chapter VII; the RD program in Chapter VIII. This chapter briefly covers the police program, Chieu Hoi, refugee help, CORDS efforts to improve local administration and autonomy, and the People's Self-Defense Forces.

What is your opinion of the role and importance of police forces in a counter-insurgency war?

KOMER: The role of police is invariably important and under certain circumstances could be decisive, especially in the incipient stages of an insurgency. Much depends on how large-scale the insurgency is. By 1961 in Vietnam, the VC threat had reached the point militarily where it was far beyond the capability of the police to handle. But at all stages police play a key role in coping with any clandestine political structure like the VCI. We Americans did help support the National Police in SVN from about 1955 on, but I don't think we ever did as much as we should have. And it would have been a lot cheaper than our support to ARVN.

Could you discuss the U.S. advisory program to the National Police, especially its personnel? It has often been remarked that it was a mistake to send ex-traffic policemen from Los Angeles out to advise in a situation for which they were inexperienced.

KOMER: The GVN National Police were inadequately professional and had very few long-service personnel. We should have placed even greater emphasis than we did on improving the quality of the police.

SCOVILLE: Badly shaken up after Diem, and disreputable.

KOMER: That was a serious problem; it is really not understood ...
the extent to which the Diem coup destroyed the National Police. They had to be practically rebuilt.

In my view, the U.S. advisory program was too much oriented toward quantitative increases and logistic support, partly because the only public safety advisors we could lay our hands on were people from metropolitan U.S. police forces or state police forces. They just were not trained in what we would call loosely "colonial police" techniques — constabulary techniques. So we had to really learn on the job. I do not think that the quality of the advisors was as low as frequently indicated. But they certainly were inexperienced. We tried to beat that problem by recruiting ex-U.S. Special Forces officers. The senior American advisor of the PFP Training School at Dalat, for example, was an ex-Green Beret colonel.

By and large, I was dissatisfied with the American police advisory effort and I tried to do about as much as I could. Among other things, we had brought in about six British police advisors, a few very good. Unfortunately, the Americans were reluctant to bring in as many experienced British colonial police officers as I wanted. I then found that the British Foreign Office was extremely touchy on this score, and very reluctant to send as many as we wanted. For policy reasons, they did not want a British stake in Vietnam.

I also brought in Sir Claude Penner, the former head of the Malayan Police. I brought Bob Thompson and Desmond Palmer back. Our relations with the Vietnamese on police matters at a higher level were excellent. I tried personally to honcho the programs and to give full support to my chief police advisor. You know my feeling that I should function as a trouble shooter. Wherever a particular problem was proving difficult, if I raised it to my level and went down and saw these guys, I could generally get farther than the chief police advisor (John Manopoli — an excellent man) could.

The 1966 ROLES AND MISSIONS STUDY recommended that RF and PF be formed into a constabulary and put under MORD. Did you ever favor this?

Komer: I originally favored (back in the White House) this plan to build a constabulary. As a step toward it, we tried in 1966 to get the
RF and PF transferred out of RVNAF into the MORD. Then I changed my view because of the long lead time required and the fact that we couldn't compete successfully with RVNAF for good manpower. The term "constabulary" has an important qualitative implication. Most constabulary are relatively high-trained, professional forces. Neither the National Police nor the RF/PF were up to that professional standard, but in wartime you have to make do with what you have rather than what is theoretically best. So I decided we had to postpone creating a really professional constabulary until the post-war consolidation period.

In early 1967 there was discussion over a proposal of an inter-agency study group that a civilian national constabulary be developed based upon the nucleus of the existing NPFF to provide security for pacified villages. What was the CORDS position on this issue?

KOMER: There was no CORDS then. The early 1967 proposal was another civilian attempt to create our own pacification security force -- an impractical idea that never really got off the ground, because this is just the sort of thing you can't afford to do in a war. Building a civilian national constabulary is a long-term job.

To prove my point, look how we were never able to get enough men for the Police Field Force -- the so-called constabulary nucleus -- and how poor the PFF was despite all our efforts. The PFF probably still aren't much more than 11,000 men. You can't build a nationwide program on 11,000 men, particularly when they aren't any good. I regret that I did not carry through my 1968 threat to abolish the PFF and pull them all back into the regular police, because I don't think the PFF served much useful purpose. The genesis of the PFF was very sound. But then when we set up CORDS and got our hooks on the RF/PF, the PFF became a very small thing. Given the competition for manpower, there was no chance of making it much bigger.

So I wanted to make it a higher-quality thing. That did not pan out. So in fall 1968 I proposed that CIA take over the training of the PFF and sort of integrate them in with the PRU, because I was so dissatisfied with the performance of the PFF. We tried to make them the main operating arm of Phoenix, to go out and capture the VCI. I insisted they be redeployed in platoons rather than companies for this purpose, one at each key district. But their performance, by anybody's standards, was very poor in that role. When the only attempt at creating the nucleus of a
constabulary turned out so lousy, why do the critics argue that we should have gone for a much bigger constabulary that would probably have turned out even worse?

An earlier DOD study cites the above case as an example of the power of MACV in all areas where it sought to assert itself. Would you agree?

Komer: I disagree with the early DOD study's citation as an example of the power of MACV. In hindsight MACV was quite right in opposing a national constabulary, because it would have caused major discombobulation for an extended period, before we ended up with something which probably wouldn't have been any better.

Bear in mind that we did use the RF and PF as sort of a rural constabulary, an inefficient one. But you work with what you have, and those 300,000 guys were the only large group we could get our hands on. The contingency plan that I got MACV to adopt in late 1967 with Westmoreland's approval was that once the war phased down, we would gradually put the RF under the National Police and convert them into a constabulary. But we did not want to do a lot of radical reorganizing until after the fighting had really phased down, because it would take a long time to build up a professional constabulary force. You can't rework elaborate programs easily in the middle of a war. You've got to take a very pragmatic approach to using what you've got optimally, and not make changes that will result in a sharp loss of effectiveness for at least a year or two while you build up something new.

In sum, the role and importance of police forces in counter-insurgency is critical. I entirely agree with the Thompson thesis that police forces have been underemphasized in Vietnam. However, I would also argue that we did just about as much as could reasonably be done under 1967-1968 circumstances.

We did several excellent contingency plans for shifting over to a constabulary as the war wound down and we could do post-hostilities programming. I will gladly shoulder the blame for any criticism that CORDS thought too much of the short-term here... In the light of what's happened, since, weren't we smart to think of the short term? If we had put more effort into the long term, it would have been at the expense of even doing
as much as we've been able to accomplish already. That's the difference between practical executives and irresponsible critics.

Rather than waste a lot of time plugging a constabulary once we got the RF/PF in our hands, I kept stressing the importance of the police role in Phoenix, especially that of Special Branch. Special Branch should have been given much greater emphasis than it was. This was a CIA advisory responsibility. By mid-1968, CIA was beginning to focus harder on this problem, and I pushed them. We should have put a much bigger effort into Special Branch and a much smaller effort into the lousy Police Field Forces.

Another important CORDS public safety effort was the National ID Card Program, potentially very promising but very slow-moving (see Chapter X).

What are the origins of the Chieu Hoi Program? What efforts did your office undertake to give the program added impetus?

**Komer**: The Chieu Hoi Program began in 1963. Even if half the Hoi Chanh who came in were really low level part-time porters, minor members of front organizations or plain farmers, it was still one of the most successful little programs in Vietnam. We knocked ourselves out in 1966-1968 to give this little program more emphasis. It was ridiculously inexpensive and thus highly cost-effective. Maybe we had 50 U.S. advisors and 60 Filipinos at the peak. We got the Chieu Hoi Ministry going. We had an outstanding senior advisor to the Ministry in Ogden Williams, who really is the father of the advanced program. The biggest payoff came in 1969 when about 47,000 ralliers came in, raising the total since 1963 to a cool 140,000.

Did you push the "National Reconciliation Program" that occupied U.S. policy in late 1966 and early 1967?

**Komer**: Yes indeed, I joined in pushing it. But we found the Vietnamese a pillow on it. They accepted it in principle. Ky and Thieu said a few of the right words. But they never executed it in practice. The rationale was to try to offer something more than just amnesty for ralliers. We were trying to get some of the bigwig politicians on the other side if there were any. The reaction of the GVN was tepid. The results were almost nil. Here was an example of our pushing a program that the GVN just did not want, indeed most of the nationalist Vietnamese,
not just the government itself. The politicians in parliament were even more vigorously opposed.

Were you satisfied with the GVN's follow-through in handling Hoi Chanh?

**Komer**: It was better than the follow-through on Phoenix, and remember we just kept them for three months, tried to retrain them, offered them a resettlement allowance. But I was not satisfied. Once again, we could have pushed for more elaborate schemes, but it was probably administratively infeasible to do a lot more. Remember, in all of these cases we had to ask ourselves what the traffic would bear. There's not a program in Vietnam that could not have been carried out much better if we had had the time, the money, the right kind of GVN leadership. And I might add, the right kind of advisors. So if you want to criticize pacification, you can criticize every single thing we did. There's no question about it. I myself was the severest critic of how we were doing. But you've got to measure results and performance against inputs, environment, and lead time. Rome isn't built in a day.

Three small programs for utilizing Hoi Chanh were very effective. One was to use them in RD teams; we got up to 1100 in 1967. Another was the development of 25-man Armed Propaganda Teams (APT), which would go out and get more VC to defect. They were so effective that we set a target of 5000 men in APTs. I believe we met it. One of the big problems was getting these teams armed because many local GVN officials feared arming ex-VC. The other program, which was started by one or two U.S. advisors, but which was such a natural that I picked it up and sold it to Westy as a nationwide program, was the Kit Carson Scouts. U.S. units used knowledgeable Hoi Chanh as scouts, guides, interpreters and the like. We set up a target of I think 250 Kit Carson Scouts for each U.S. division. In most cases the Hoi Chanh proved invaluable, though there were some cases of treason.

Could you discuss CORDS efforts to alleviate the refugee problem and to provide better surroundings and opportunities for refugees?

**Komer**: CORDS really put the Refugee Program on the map after we took it over from AID. We tried hard. Great credit belongs to refugee
chief advisor John Thomas, in particular. I think Jim Grant got him for us. The Vietnamese just didn't have any conception of a welfare and refugee ministry. We practically had to set one up. We did, in early 1967. Dr. Que was in charge. I think he did an outstanding job in a very new and untried situation. He was a tough-minded little guy. His successor, Luy, was an even tougher-minded little guy. He was at the same time Minister of Health. I think that Luy is one of the Vietnamese heroes . . . and his assistant, Dr. Phieu, who has now taken over as Luy's successor.

We also used the three U.S. Army civil affairs companies very extensively in refugee work -- broke them up into platoons, squads. They really did a great job. Moreover, U.S. voluntary agencies such as Catholic Relief Service were of immense help.

SCOVILLE: Did this have to do with that change in policies toward refugees? Did that come about at the same time?

KOMER: I won't say change of policy. I would say rather it was as big a whacking up of the refugee effort, Vietnamese and American, as we could possibly stimulate. Unfortunately, it took a lot of lead time.

SCOVILLE: We'll get on to this later. It's the question of making U.S. units responsible for the refugees they generate, at least the big . . .

KOMER: Yes, that was one of the techniques we had in mind.

In your August 1966 Memorandum to the President you advocated stepping up "refugee programs deliberately aimed at depriving the VC of a recruiting base." What did you mean by that phrase? Did your position change over time on this point?

KOMER: You caught me out on that one. I had forgotten about my August 1966 refugee generation thinking. But nobody ever did anything about that. It was a dead letter. I switched my thinking. That refugee suggestion was written in August 1966 [Draft 3, 7 August 1966, "Giving a New Thrust to Pacification"]. By April 1967 in "Future Strategy in Vietnam" I skipped it completely. So it was an early thought. Incidentally, my staff was horrified.

SCOVILLE: I wasn't thinking I was catching you. I thought I was catching MACV on that one.

KOMER: Let me explain what I had in mind. If we treated the
refugees better, and if we encouraged them to come in from the VC areas, we could deprive the enemy of a population base. Dick Moorsteen feels very strongly that is the correct policy even today. I abandoned the idea, I might say, largely on grounds of impracticality. It was never policy.

SCOVILLE: Yes, that was my great quarrel with the "safe-haven" hamlets -- great in concept, but look what happened -- it was never done.

In summer 1967, Jerry Dodson did a series of evaluations on refugees (Edap Enang, Cam Lo, Quang Ngai, Lai Thieu) that were highly critical of U.S. and GVN efforts to care for refugees and that questioned the then current "policy" of deliberately creating refugees in order to deprive the enemy of a population base and support. On 23 September 1967, General Westmoreland sent a letter to his corps commanders asking that they reexamine this policy. Could you discuss this question?

KOMER: I think the evaluations were made at my request. Frequently the evaluators did not know that I had requested them, because the request came down through Colby. But I do not think it was "then current policy" to deliberately create refugees in order to deprive the enemy of manpower. That was a II Corps policy with certain Montagueards in border areas. The second time it came up in the spring of 1968 I strenuously opposed it. This was Ray Peers trying to move Edap Enang, but Westy convinced me that this was a sound exception to policy on military grounds. He showed me the documentation, and I think it's true. The fact that it was not country-wide policy or practice is obscured by the fact that there were several well-publicized incidents of U.S. commanders actually moving people -- the classic case being Ben Suc, right in the middle of the Iron Triangle. I think that probably Ben Suc was sound in concept. It was certainly very poorly carried out. The U.S. 1st Division moved them, and poor John Vann had to take care of them from then on. It had not been well thought through, but sometimes you've got to do that. The enemy were using the 7000 people in Ben Suc as porters and scouts and everything else.

SCOVILLE: Also, and this I know you will leap upon, the policy of deliberately making it hard militarily on the people in the countryside so as to drive them into the cities and away from where they could provide the VC both population and support. Do you feel that this was if not a written policy, then an unwritten one?
KOMER: No, I don't think it was even an unwritten policy. Here again I would suggest that you may be over-influenced by the situation in southern I Corps. Quang Ngai, Quang Nam, Quang Tin — they were really tough VC-infested provinces. Here again I think you're greatly overstating the case. By late 1967 I was arguing against generation of refugees, largely on grounds we couldn't handle them and were inviting disaffection.

Somehow, many critics seem to be arguing that we created most of the refugees, either consciously or by what we did unconsciously. I think this is wrong because most refugees fled the VC, not our destructiveness. True, there was some forced or encouraged population movement -- especially in I Corps.

The Westmoreland letter of September 1967 was our initiative. I think we wrote it, and proposed it to Westy. It laid down a policy requiring prior permission to move refugees, but I'll grant that local commanders didn't always do so. Gradually, as I found out about this sort of stuff, I opposed it. I was in favor of moving pacification out to protect the farmers rather than bringing all the farmers in, because this just made more sense. I think there's an important distinction between what some people did on local initiative and what the overall policy was. Westy could not know of every local case. Nor could I. In hindsight, we should have monitored this more vigorously. Perhaps Westy was too permissive on a lot of this, and Abe later. I too should have been much more rigorous in raising hell on questions of refugees. Indeed, we did on a number of occasions. Every time we heard of a refugee settlement getting hit by the VC, we used to burn up the wires asking who in hell is supposed to protect these guys.

MONTAGUE: We were the guys who wrote the messages "don't create refugees." And we'd send them up, and they'd sit around for a while, and finally you'd go and spring them loose. There was always an out . . . the commander could create them if it was militarily necessary. But we stuck in there prior approval . . . and take care of them.

KOMER: First, he had to take care of them and, second, prior approval was required from at least corps level. We had to stick in things like that because I couldn't tell the military not to do things if Westy
would not approve too tight a restriction of the flexibility allowed local commanders.

SCOVILLE: Do you think that the 23 September letter really had results -- that little pressure?

KOMER: Yes, I think it had positive results. Whether it had enough is moot. Generally I find that when you want to put in a new and somewhat unpopular policy, you have to keep after it. So we followed up on this. I think we sent messages out after TET. We kept reminding people of this policy. The question really is how effectively could we, whatever our good intentions, police the whole U.S. and ARVN establishment. We did pretty well, but I don't think we did enough. Do you disagree?

MONTAGUE: That's right. You just positively couldn't!

In December 1967, Colonel Serong made four proposals in an evaluation titled "The Refugee Operation: National Overview." They were: (a) that the military scrutinize closely plans for operations with a refugee-generating potential to ensure that the refugee product can be handled; (b) that the military take over much more of the initial handling of refugees than is now done; (c) that SCR concentrate its major effort on resettlement, as distinct from temporary assistance; and (d) that there be a major inter-regional transfer of refugees from I CTZ for resettlement in III CTZ east of Saigon. Could you comment? Was anything done to implement these proposals?

KOMER: Serong's evaluation did not have much impact. Our refugee people said the good things he proposed were already being done and were pretty obvious. His third proposal, the only new thing, was absolutely wrong. Here is Serong making proposals that simply could not be carried out. We had a million and a half refugees on our hands, and he was proposing that SCR concentrate on resettlement. If SCR concentrated its whole effort on resettlement, it could resettle maybe a thousand people a month, and that's a pretty small chunk of a million and a half. It rose to two million after TET.

The Refugee Ministry had about a thousand people spread all over the length and breadth of Vietnam. We had 60 refugee advisors and were screaming for more. We had these three civil affairs companies. Major inter-regional transfer of refugees was a longer-term project. We promoted it; we put it into the 1968 planning, but of course in 1968 resettlement was just thrown completely off by TET.
MACDONALD: What was the point of this? To get them away from the DMZ area?

KOMER: Yes, the DMZ area and also Quang Ngai, Quang Tin. There were a lot of refugees from the north who had come down to I Corps, and there was great pressure on land. The amount of arable land in I Corps was extremely small. The only place in Vietnam where you had a really serious over-population problem was in I Corps, not because the total population was so big, but because the amount of arable land was so small and so vulnerable. We just wanted to relieve the pressure on the land. And there were large areas in Phuoc Tuy, Lam Dong, Binh Thuan where it was feasible. The land was national domain. So nothing was wrong with the concept, but look at the trouble we had even taking care of refugees there in little camps in Quang Ngai. Can you imagine moving 100,000 people...

SCOVILLE: Oh, I disagree with the whole proposal anyway.

MONTAGUE: They just haven't done any of it, even in 1969. It's open in case someone really wants to try. We'll help. But the people don't want to leave. That's the big thing.

KOMER: Some do, some don't. The idea was to fly down the hamlet chief and a few of the elders, show them the new land, let them spend a day or two looking around, show them what the options were. Then fly them back, and they could decide. If they could convince their people to move, then we would organize it. We decided we would give them the same as we had given the TET evacuees: ten bags of cement, ten sheets of roofing, and 5000 piasters as a resettlement allowance. We borrowed this idea from the Operation Recovery concept. If you're dealing with millions of people, you've got to have some pretty simple solutions. But, to sum up on refugees, we apparently got the problem under much better control in 1969 as a result of the buildup of our effort and as the war's intensity declined. Reportedly over 400,000 people were returned to their original homes and many more resettled, so that the number of known refugees declined from around 1.5 million in February 1969 to around 300,000 at the end of the year. These figures may not be wholly accurate, but we devoted a lot of effort simply to getting better refugee reporting, so we could know where and what the problem was.
What efforts did CORDS take to improve lower-level (below Saigon) administration?

Komer: As you know, we placed great emphasis on removing corrupt and incompetent officials. That was a regular program. We systematized it by telling province and district senior advisors to send us regularly the people who they thought should be put on the list. When enough didn't come in, I went out and asked the advisors. We even sent out special messages. In other words, we tried to do a systematic job of identifying and then getting rid of the corrupt and inefficient at all levels, naturally starting at the top. Our technique was discreetly to pass the word to the Prime Minister's office, the Presidential Palace, General La (the head of RF/PH) . . . the appropriate place given the people involved. We frequently put together lists. We focused initially at the key province and district levels. I would send a list of bad province or district chiefs down to the palace. Then a month later we would check over the list and see that only five or six had gotten fired; meanwhile our people had reported that there were two or three more they wanted to get rid of. We would revise the list and send it down to remind them. This was the technique of follow-through.

With our help, the GVN did quite a job of purging province and district chiefs. They removed 25 province and 162 district chiefs in 1968 and another 23 province and 110 district chiefs in 1969 (excluding shifts). Colby says this has resulted in improvement in most cases.

Montague: On improving pay and allowances, we tried very hard -- though with only modest success. They came through this year with an entirely new pay bill.

Komer: Now, with the RF and PH we achieved some improvement of pay and allowances. We got special allowances for the RD cadre, because we controlled that; we paid the bills. But we did not do as well with one of my pet projects -- pay increases as an incentive and anti-corruption measure. I proposed an executive pay raise at the time the new National Assembly was setting its own salaries. We never got this through. As I pointed out, the incentive to corruption was so substantial because these guys were all so ridiculously underpaid, and an honest man couldn't really maintain himself. We did a lot, but I feel that we did not get as far with improving pay and allowances as we should have.
MONTAGUE: We did get a big thing through this year in 1969 -- upped the pay of the village chief to greater than anyone else in the village. Same with the hamlet chief. They at least surpassed the RD cadre group leader. Their pay was more than doubled, which is very good. Then you also set up that school for them at Vung Tau, and a rather large number of them have gone through the school already. The goal is to get every local official through the National Training Center at Vung Tau, and the President goes down to each graduating class and talks to them. Sensational!

KOMER: Part of the effort must be to get the good guys promoted as an incentive. We were only modestly successful on this score too, but we tried. We used to make direct recommendations to the President, Prime Minister, or Chief JCS on promotion of guys we thought were unusually good. We succeeded in enough cases that we were pleased with ourselves, but not enough. This is one of the great weaknesses of the Vietnamese system of doing things -- seniority and background count for more than demonstrated competence. They'll never get really good leadership across the board until they go for battle field promotions, meritorious promotions, things like that. And the only way to get this is to assign quotas, and have the President say "I want each division commander to deliver to me the dossiers of five officers who he thinks are outstandingly qualified; and if he delivers bad officers, I'm going to raise holy hell."

Could you discuss the redirection of the GVN towards restoring village and hamlet self-government in 1968 and 1969?

SCOVILLE: I'll give you examples, many of which you already mentioned: abolition of rural taxes paid to the central government, placing of RF and PF in villages under village control, allocation of RD funds directly to the village -- I guess this may have all been under something called the Village Development Program. Did all this come out of CORDS?

KOMER: Yes. The latter examples are from the 1969 program (see Chapter VII). But as far back as I can remember, restoring effective and autonomous village/hamlet government was a growing feature of our pacification program. Diem in 1956 had centralized all power in the GVN and abolished traditional village autonomy. Our concept was to restore much of this as central to competing with the VC. Restoring a functioning
hamlet government was one of the 11 criteria and 97 tasks for the RD teams laid down by Thang in 1966. Then you will notice it in my initial directive on Project TAKEOFF in May 1967; we gave priority status to village and hamlet elections, restoring local administration. We got collection and use of land taxes (which were piddling from an economic viewpoint) returned to village control by Decree 041/67 of 18 October 1967. But all this had to be on a curve. The first priority was to restore adequate security. Second priority was to capitalize on adequate security to get the enemy's clandestine political infrastructure. You are then in a position to start reviving more or less normal administration in the countryside. Before that, nobody will come out of his hole and do anything. Critics have pointed out that many village chiefs and hamlet chiefs had to be appointed, that frequently very few candidates ran. Of course, one of the reasons why they won't come out is because the place is so insecure.

MACDONALD: I find it incredible that any of them would run.

KOMER: The VC terror was such in times past that it took a very brave man to come out. But we gathered momentum after security was restored, and we made local administration one of our strongest pressure spots.

SCOVILLE: And you would term that point as being somewhere near the beginning of the APC?

KOMER: Oh, no. We were starting in 1967, depending on which areas were more secure. In An Giang for example we got a lot further along these lines, because it was pacified by late 1966. You'll find we had a lot of local elections in 1967, under a December 1966 GVN decree giving the people back the right to elect their own village and hamlet officials. True, they were on less than a national scale, because we only controlled about half of the rural countryside then. We felt this was an indispensable element of a rounded pacification program. Another key feature was the GVN decrees of December 1966 and April 1969 restoring village autonomy by granting the village council increased authority over budgets, taxes, land transfers, public service and internal legal matters. The 1969 decree gave the village council authority over the PF platoon and RD team, another major step.
Why was there not more CORDS emphasis on improving Vietnamese administration for the future... the Thompson solution?

Komer: Most of Thompson's solutions were much more suited to a long, slow-fused incipient insurgency. He is absolutely right that over time one of the ways to deal with a potential insurgency is to develop a strong, effective administration. When I got there, we already had a pretty intensive war on, and we had only been there seven months when they attacked Saigon. You have heard me already on solving the short-term problems in order to buy time to turn to the long-term problems. On police, I feel that Bob Thompson is absolutely right. I tried very hard to do something about the police administration. It was lousy. But it was very hard. I tried to get some British advisors in to help us. But to convert a French-type administrative system to a British-type administrative system in the middle of a war is a little difficult. Therefore, I think that Bob Thompson overstates the case. I grant that we could have done more on improving the administration just as we could have done more on about everything, but I do not regard this a critical omission. Moreover, AID had already done a good job at developing longer-term administrative solutions, the training of people again in the National Institute for Administration, in particular. That's a first-class outfit.

Montague: Yes. It's a training program almost to excess.

Komer: It turned junior-grade French inspecteur de finances and we couldn't get these young guys out into the countryside. Normally most of the class had gone out and served as assistant district chiefs, but in wartime it was pretty hard to get them out, because of the environment out in the countryside. We devoted a lot of attention to improving Vietnamese administration in practical ways. I mentioned the Central Logistic Agency. I mentioned the training school for province and district chiefs, the new RD Ministry logistic procedures, all the directives and the on-the-job training that we gave at the hamlet chief's school, self-defense school, and the RD cadre school at Vung Tau. Vung Tau became a National Training Center where by the end of 1969 over 30,000 local government workers have received a special five-week course, including 1862 village chiefs and 8532 hamlet chiefs.
The last of your points in the 27 April 1967 Memorandum was to "use our influence discreetly to maximize chances of smooth transition to an effective, popularly-based GVN." How was our influence used? What priority did this goal have in our pacification efforts?

KOMER: The Americans did use U.S. influence discreetly to maximize the chances of a smooth transition to an effective, popularly-based GVN. U.S. influence was used in terms of persuasion and cajolery to get national elections, to get a constitution. The story is rather well-known. But there is some question as to how much we were trying to impose American forms on a Vietnamese society not terribly used to them, and also a very real question as to whether we weren't pressing the GVN more in order to impress the American audience back home than to have a positive impact in Vietnam.

Of course, pacification as a rural program did not deal with the national-level political scene. Our task was to get political process going again in the villages and hamlets. Our concept was that restoration of village autonomy, giving the people some kind of a stake in their own community, bringing them back into the process of governing themselves, could not help but be a useful counter to the VC and a means of beginning to generate some kind of commitment. This was in our original concept paper for the TAKEOFF program. We stressed it all the way through. We pressed the GVN constantly to have more local elections, to use the RD cadre to organize and support them. So it was a consistently high priority goal — even in the APC, where we really slimmed down the priorities.

MONTAGUE: In 1968 and 1969 we concentrated on village and hamlet elections. Just as soon as they were on the track in 1969, we started pressing for elections of provincial and municipal councils. I notice that these are going to take place now in early 1970.

KOMER: Colby has pointed out how in 1969, with radically improved security, much greater emphasis on regenerating local self-government was possible. During 1969 elections were held in 961 villages and 5344 hamlets, bringing the total of elected local governments to 2048 out of 2151 villages and 9849 out of 10,496 hamlets.
Were the elections undertaken as a pacification approach or to appease world opinion?

KOMER: The local elections were much more a pacification approach. I think the local elections were a plus. Once again, their impact was largely intangible, so it's very hard to say. On the national elections, we did feel that giving the government legitimacy would help. Hanoi propaganda was constantly attacking Ky as not representative, nothing but a military clique. I think the national elections were also a plus, but largely in terms of their impact outside Vietnam. The National Assembly, which we looked to as a constructive check and balance on Ky/Thieu, has been a disappointment.

To what extent were the Americans involved in the initial stages of the idea of the People's Self-Defense Force?

KOMER: It was our idea -- an example of CORDS reviving an old concept in an effort to get the farmers committed by giving them a means of self-defense. There had been civil defense forces in Vietnam before. Generally the controversy over whether to issue them arms had killed them, particularly in the later days of Diem. Diem was unwilling to issue arms to the people as he realized he was more and more unpopular. Throughout the 1964-1966 period they were very reluctant. We had pressed arming villagers in 1966-1967 as part of the RD program, but never got very far. Then we dusted this idea off again as a result of TET, and added an urban civil defense component to take advantage of aroused popular consciousness and to facilitate releasing troops to get back out in the countryside. This time we went to Thieu, who was finally willing to bite the bullet and order that arms be distributed as part of the PSDL Program. So the idea of reviving the self-defense forces on a grand scale -- and organizing them better -- was ours, but the basic climate and motivation were created by TET. The TET Offensive was really what put People's Self-Defense on the map. We provided ideas, a few advisors, and some funds.

MONTAGUE: It wasn't until August that we were able to get "Self-Defense Month," which was really the kickoff for the Self-Defense Program.

KOMER: We first invented the idea of "Self-Defense Month," an
American Madison Avenue idea. We sent out quotas. The President said, "Everybody is supposed to recruit for PSDF during the month of August, and I want reports on how various provinces, cities, districts have done." We naturally did these up and gave them to him, and pointed out the guys who had goofed off and the guys who had done a good job. Then organizing a PSDF unit in every hamlet and town was picked up by us and made a part of the first APC -- one of the six priority tasks. We then kept hammering on province chiefs, etc. to issue old arms to the new units. Many were quite reluctant. All in all, this inexpensive program has made remarkable strides since 1968. I gather there are well over two million part-timers in it now, of whom over 400,000 are armed. The goal for 1970 is to increase PSDF to three million, but to split it in half into the main group that would be armed and a support group. The former would be armed on a 1 in 3 ratio -- since they are part-timers they can share the weapons.

What about propaganda, psywar, and information activities?

KOMER: Despite an imaginative U.S. advisory effort led most of the time I was involved by the talented and aggressive Barry Zorthian, GVN performance in this field was generally weak -- especially compared to the VC. No matter how hard we tried and how many resources we contributed, the GVN organizations -- ARVN Polwar, the Vietnamese Information Service (VIS), the Information Ministry -- somehow didn't seem to click. They had some good people here and there (Ton That Thien was an excellent spokesman as Info Minister in the Huong cabinet, though an indifferent manager), but were mostly a sorry lot. The VIS cadre in the field were usually regarded as the poorest cadre of all. In sum, I had a grim feeling that we were not doing the job we should have in communicating the pacification rationale and effort to the farmer in the terms he would best understand.

Interestingly, CORDS was not the first unified U.S. civil-military operation in Vietnam. Zorthian early sold Westy on unified Saigon-level psywar management. JUSPAO (Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office) was set up in May 1965 with a large military component. JUSPAO did joint policy, planning, and programming. But unification did not extend down into the
field organizations. MACV still ran its own huge psywar effort, and ARVN copied it with a huge and even more ineffective replica. Their accomplishments were mostly quantitative -- immense numbers of leaflets dropped or distributed over enemy areas but rarely a clue as to whether they had much impact.

When CORDS was created, we absorbed JUSPAO's field psyops people (mostly civilian) into a CORDS psyops division, but JUSPAO continued to give it policy guidance. In late 1968 Zorthian and I agreed that the CORDS division could be cut back to a few liaison people, partly because it wasn't accomplishing much and partly because of USIA pressures to recall personnel.

One good job done was getting our side's news out, however. Gradually we helped build up a network of provincial newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and later TV sets in a lot of village marketplaces that met the local thirst for news and tended to blanket the weaker VC network. The number of small radio sets went up immensely in Vietnam. You could find them almost everywhere way out in the boondocks. But the quality of GVN propaganda was spotty, often poor.

Another good job was propaganda support of the Chieu Hoi program. JUSPAO and the Chieu Hoi people designed some rather good mass propaganda campaigns to bring in ralliers, usually keyed to a suitable occasion like TET. The TET 1966 campaign was especially good. Millions of leaflets and safe conduct passes were dropped, etc. The JUSPAO-promoted drama teams also were a useful low-cost means of popular communication. All in all, it's difficult to evaluate how much impact the major U.S. and GVN info and propaganda effort had.
XII. CORDS MANAGEMENT, REPORTING, PERSONNEL, AND ADVISOR SELECTION

It is increasingly clear in retrospect that the unique civil-military hybrid called MACCords was one of the managerial keys to the upsurge in pacification since mid-1967. It was a field expedient designed to bring together under unified management for maximum impact all U.S. pacification advisory and support resources. As described in Chapter IV, the predominance of military assets and the militarized environment that had developed on both the U.S. and SVN sides by 1967 almost dictated that CORDS had to be put under the military. Paradoxically, however, this device in fact permitted essentially civilian management of mainly military resources. The Deputy to COMUSMACV for CORDS, the Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS, and the four corps DEPCORDS were all civilians, and still are at this writing. CORDS provided the managerial instrument through which the U.S. at long last put pacification on the map, by providing massive resource inputs and exerting unified influence on the Vietnamese.

How did CORDS function? This story has already been told in large part in previous chapters. Chapter VI, for example, described the techniques of dealing with key GVN officialdom, while Chapter IX discussed CORDS use of leverage. This chapter discusses what might be termed internal CORDS management--our management methods, reporting systems, measurement techniques (HES and TFES), advisor selection and quality, advisor training, and logistic support.

CORDS has been criticized for having too many U.S. advisors, for over-Americanizing pacification. But this argument falls of its own weight when one looks at the facts. By the time I left Vietnam, CORDS had grown to about 5500 advisors, but it was assisting and supporting roughly 550,000 Vietnamese--a 100 to 1 ratio. By 1970 CORDS had reached about 7200, but Vietnamese inputs had also grown accordingly. A 100 to 1 ratio hardly seems excessive when one considers the number of sub-programs the U.S. is supporting, and the fact that countrywide pacification means operating in 4 regions, 44 provinces, 250-odd districts, and over 2000 villages in South Vietnam. Moreover, over half the U.S.
advisors were either junior officers and NCOs working with RF/RF or administrative/logistics people taking care of internal U.S. housekeeping in the field. All in all, CORDS appears as a quite lean operation both in comparison with the U.S. military establishment in Vietnam and in terms of the results it achieved. By any standard of cost-effectiveness, the American advisory investment looks rather good indeed.

What was your management philosophy in setting up CORDS? How did you make the advisory system work?

Komer: My key staff and I were essentially pragmatists. We all strongly believed that there had to be greater emphasis on the village war, on clear and hold plus generating rural political commitment in competition with the VC. But within this context we didn’t spend much time on theory. We tried to practice hearts and minds but we didn’t preach it. Moreover, a lot of water had gone over the dam before I came along. There were plenty of prior studies and numerous experiments from which I benefitted (largely by gathering around me the brightest and most experienced younger people I could find). It seemed to me that, while there was no lack of perceptive thinking on what needed to be done, it was not being done yet on a big enough scale or consistent enough basis to have an impact commensurate with the need.

So by the time I got involved, I felt compelled to fill this gap, to grapple with the practical problems of organization, management, and resources. Perhaps instinctively, I focused from the outset (even in Washington) on the pragmatic questions of how to organize and motivate the U.S. advisors, and through them the Vietnamese, to do the possible — which in Vietnam in 1966-1968 wasn’t a great deal. Many of our field expedients doubtless seem less than optimal, but we tried to avoid designing programs or seeking results that, at least in the short run, looked like more than the traffic would bear. But we were eager to experiment. If it worked, we built on it.

My Saigon management approach was dictated by the situation as I found it — a multiplicity of diffuse and often competing programs, essentially Vietnamese but supported by a series of separate U.S. advisory structures, operating without much central direction or top level
supervision on either the U.S. or GVN sides. To pull all this together, I went for highly centralized policy guidance and supervision, but highly decentralized execution in the field. The latter in turn was dictated by the fragmented nature of the village or territorial war taking place in 44 different provinces, some 250 districts, 2000 plus villages, and a cool 10,000 or so hamlets. Down there was where the action was taking place, so the real field managers had to be the province and district chiefs and their advisors. We couldn't control their day-to-day actions from Saigon.

To help generate consistent forward movement by such widely dispersed Vietnamese assets, we stressed a well-known management technique that has often been criticized — setting concrete performance goals and time-phased quotas. Generalized exhortation and policy guidance only takes you so far. It has to be supplemented by real targets to shoot at, progress toward which can be measured and monitored over time. Thus we were constantly after the GVN to set simple, attainable performance goals and quotas for province, district, and down the line — hamlets to be secured, RF/PP and PSCPF recruited, VCI captured, DIOCCs created, equipment issued, schools built, teachers trained, refugees resettled, Hoi Chanh rallied, and the like. For incentive purposes, we sought to strike a balance between goals high enough to require stretching and realistic enough to be attainable. We made lots of mistakes, but overall it was indispensable. True, this sort of thing creates pressures toward fudging, which we sought to monitor against via the U.S. advisors and GVN inspectors. True, it also creates a bias toward quantitative "statistical" progress that can be misleading unless management keeps its head. But the critics ignore the managerial facts of life. A countrywide program like pacification simply could not be managed effectively without such performance and measurement-oriented techniques.

Another understandable criticism of my approach might be that I overmanaged. This was deliberate. It was my way of overcoming previous weaknesses, and getting everybody pulling on the same team in the same direction, according to the same sense of priorities. I insisted on stricter conformance from the field than seemed to be normal military practice at any rate. But I felt that with a new and really unique operation this was
essential at the outset to get the show on the road. Later, as the operation shook down and I identified the stronger and weaker managers, we could ease up.

MACDONALD: Listening through the day, I get a sense of inaction in MACV, other than in CORDS. Rightly or wrongly, you get this impression. Do you think this is because of an over-population of MACV?

MONTAGUE: I wouldn't say "inaction." I would say that their action was similar to that which goes on in the Pentagon. They were very active, but just didn't get much done.

MACDONALD: They were staffing papers all over the place?

KOMER: It was bureaucracy, the system, that made MACV musclebound in many cases. Where we saw a problem, we stepped in and tried to do something about it. We structured it, we acted on it, we followed through; and when we got reports in which weren't satisfactory, we raised hell. Also most of the areas where we took action involved the Vietnamese. We were advising on and managing behind the scenes Vietnamese problems. For example, we took the desertion rate in the RD cadre much more seriously than MACV took the desertion rate in RVNAF. And we went to work on the desertion rate in RF/PF, which fortunately was much lower than ARVN, because they were serving in their own home areas. We don't want to toot our own horns, but it's hard to get away from an impression that we were one of the few go-go operations in the country. Westy was go-go; Abe was go-go; but all too often the staff was just generals and colonels filling slots. The influence of the top generals was further seriously diluted by the system, as it travelled down the various layers of command. According to Army doctrine, they tried not to interfere too much with their subordinate commanders. Heading up a new and frankly experimental program, I erred on the other side from the outset.

What is the difference between DEPCORDS and MAACORDS?

KOMER: I was not part of MAACORDS. It was a MACV general staff section, headed first by Wade Latham with BG Bill Knowlton as his deputy; and then by Colby with BG Earl Cole as his deputy. It had numerous divisions -- about a dozen -- that provided staff support to the pacification program. I was part of the MACV command echelon as Westy's Deputy
for CORDS. DEPCORDS consisted of myself; General Forsythe, my deputy; two light colonels and a few sergeants and secretaries. It was a very lean operation. But we managed to get a lot done. For example, soon after I arrived came the McNamara visit of July 1967. Contrary to previous MACV practice, I decided to personally brief McNamara. We discussed the whole range of pacification problems. Montague then briefed him on TAKEOFF, and had an argument with him on Phoenix.

SCOVILLE: I think I've got that briefing. There are words like "previous efforts in pacification have been both underfunded and under-protected."

KORET: Up to when I arrived, the MACV briefing schedule for a VIP visitor like McNamara was all canned. They had a standard format: J-1, J-2, J-3, J-4, then the special staff sections, all done by regular briefing officers. At the dry run I said, "Westy, instead we ought to really focus this briefing on what we want from McNamara and what we think McNamara wants from us; we should have a beginning and an end, main themes, recommendations." Westy thought that was great. He rejigged the whole approach. Westy also said of course we'll want to have a pacification briefing. I interjected: "CORDS is a new thing. You and I have really just set it up and McNamara is very interested in it, because he was the chief Washington backer of this reorganization. Maybe I'd better brief personally. There is nobody in MACCORS who is as familiar with what's been done. If we want to tell McNamara where we're going, the guy who's going to do it ought to tell him." It was unheard of for a briefing to be given by one of the principals. But Westy then ordered every head of staff section to give his own briefing. There would be no briefing officers. The poor J-3 himself had to get up there. Westy ended up doing most of the talking himself. It was the most successful of these sessions I have attended -- I was present at three of them from my Washington days when I went out on trips with McNamara, and several during my time in Vietnam -- in great contrast to the previous one in October 1966. McNamara himself said it was the best yet. From then on, whenever any top dog came out, I gave an informal talk rather than the canned briefing.
Could you discuss your working and personal relationships with General Westmoreland, General Abrams, and Ambassador Bunker?

KOHN: With Westy, very close. Whatever the critics say of Westmoreland's general conduct of the war or MACV's comparative neglect of pacification before 1967, I can attest that his role was central in pushing the 'new model' pacification program. He was also keen on innovative ideas. His backing me except when he thought I was getting out of bounds was a major contribution to whatever success I had. We had our arguments, mainly over allocations of forces and resources in which I was competing with the big unit war. But that's to be expected.

Abe and I had a friendly relationship, but I did not have the same sense of personal rapport that I did with Westy -- partly I suspect because if you're close to one commander, it's sort of hard to transfer that to another.

With Bunker, I would say extremely intimate but less constant relations than with Westy. I saw more of Westy than Bunker because I moved my office out to MACV. I figured that the best thing was to be right out there with Westy. Bunker was very interested in pacification, always insistent that it be taken into account in any policy decisions, always unsparing in his backing of any proposition I put up to him. He felt, like Westy, that if you've got confidence in the fellow who's running it, don't harass him.

The only problems I really had were with the deputy ambassadors; once I came along and took over pacification, they didn't have all that much of a role. You would think they would have spent their time managing the AID program or the political side, but invariably they began to dabble in my program. There were two of them, Gene Locke and then Sam Berger, and we had to clarify that pacification was my responsibility working for Westy. Bunker invariably ruled in our favor. By the way, Westy and I were very sensitive to anybody but THE Ambassador getting into our affairs. I was probably more edgy than I needed to be, but I've always found it pays to keep other guys off your back if you're going to get something done.
General Knowlton has remarked that "probably the greatest gain in the first year of the CORDS effort was the ability to plan centrally." Could you comment on this?

MONTAGUE: It's not a bad comment.

KOMER: Bill's a pretty savvy guy. I agree that CORDS facilitated our ability to pull together and plan centrally on the U.S. side all facets of pacification, and equally important, to tie them into the military planning at all levels, but especially Saigon and corps. We also got much better planners into CORDS. But even more important were the joint planning with the Vietnamese, which we did very seriously because pacification was an all-GVN program, and getting a management system that permitted us to execute decentrally.

MONTAGUE: CORDS caused the Vietnamese to plan centrally with a simple plan that went out to everybody.

Could you describe the planning process from district, to province, to corps, to Saigon, and the degree of joint U.S./GVN participation involved at each level?

KOMER: We saw joint planning as one of the keys to effective countrywide pacification. Bear in mind that all pacification programs were carried out by the Vietnamese. Bear in mind also the decentralized nature of the problem. Pacification had to be gotten moving on some kind of systematic basis and according to some set of common priorities and criteria in 44 provinces, 244 districts, 2000-odd villages, and up to 8-10,000 hamlets. So genuine joint planning was imperative.

In general, I would say that the U.S. input tended to predominate, during 1966-1968 at least, at Saigon and perhaps corps level, while the GVN input was clearly predominant at province and district level. Moreover, so long as there were no effective GVN central pacification organs, we tied pacification into the military Combined Campaign Plans -- beginning really with AB-142 for 1967. We also made a major input into AB-143 for 1968. But we discovered that these generalized overall directives didn't have much impact. Thieu had the same view, and wanted to put his own imprint on the planning. So we switched to a separate Pacification and Development Plan for 1969. As the GVN central planning capability grew, especially after revitalization (and renaming) of the CPDC in March 1969
with its own staff, Vietnamese planners gradually assumed predominance. Our chief CORDS planner during this whole period, Clay McManaway, says that the 1970 Central Pacification and Development Plan is mostly a GVN product.

But in the atomistic village war called pacification, province was the key planning level. We didn't do detailed planning for them in Saigon but rather laid down guidelines and called for detailed province plans that the Saigon level then reviewed and modified, often in a set of meetings at corps or even province. In this process, CORDS expected every district and province advisor to get his licks in with his counterpart, and we usually sent down separate U.S. guidance on what we wanted the U.S. advisors to get into the GVN plans. Frequently, it didn't turn out too well, however.

MONTAGUE: And we couldn't get our advisors interested in planning. Often the province chief developed the plan, sent it in, and then the province advisor went over and found that he had done this and looked it over and said we ought to change it. But the province chief said "too late."

KOMBR: So we got the province advisor to send his amendments on up to the higher echelons. If we thought he had a case, we changed it. If we thought he didn't have a case, we ignored him. I'm told that by now the revived Regional and Provincial Pacification Councils are doing a better planning job.

Could you discuss U.S. reporting from district and province to Saigon, region to Saigon, Saigon to Washington, CORDS to State, CORDS to DOD, reporting of other agencies to Washington; did CORDS have access to these?

KOMBR: My chief comment on all the regular reporting channels is that we made an all-out effort to stress accurate reporting. We made it a fetish, and I personally did this. I kept saying to all advisors in all my meetings: "What I want to hear from you is what's going wrong rather than what's going right. If it's going right, we can be happy and don't have to do much about it. If it's going wrong, that's where we want to apply the muscle. So I don't want anybody to cook figures; nobody's efficiency rating is going to be based on what he's reporting about GVN performance. You're not evaluating your own performance;
you're evaluating the Vietnamese." We had an elaborate system of field visits. I wish I could have gone out even more, but I must say I could get more done in Saigon in terms of payoff than I could get done in the field.

Could you discuss reporting from Saigon to Washington?

KOMER: We probably did more formal and informal reporting to Washington than any other component in Vietnam, because we wanted to keep them clued. We had a more systematic, evocative reporting system back to Washington than anybody else. We reported to everybody. And we did it all through channels. We kept the White House, State, DOD, CIA -- we kept everybody really quite well informed on what we were doing. This was partly because I wanted to forestall the kind of uninformed criticism that I and others had made from Washington, because we just didn't know what the hell the score was out there. So we thought it would serve a useful purpose in keeping Washington off our backs if we reported on the pluses and minuses.

MONTAGUE: For a while Washington was complaining that they weren't getting enough, so we stepped up the reporting. We wrote a report on Phoenix every month and on Chieu Hoi and when the HES came in. We reported the results from major meetings with Thieu or Thang. We just tried a lot more.

KOMER: The guys in the field were complaining about too many reports (especially John Vann) and the guys in Washington were complaining about too few reports. So we cut down the reports from the field and increased the reports to Washington, but you can't satisfy everybody.

SCOVILLE: Did they complain about the quality?

MONTAGUE: No, we never had any quality complaints. We sent back, for example, the raw HES data to DOD and CIA. We sent the HES tapes before we even processed them ourselves. We sent all the province reports back, and when MACV learned about this after you left, the roof came down.

Did CORDS have access to reporting of other agencies to Washington?

KOMER: Yes. I saw everybody's reporting, except some from my superior officers. Westy naturally had his own messages; Bunker had his.
I was not necessarily privy, though both showed me some of them. On the other hand, I saw some reports to Washington that they generally didn't bother with. My relations with the CIA were close, because we were working on all these joint programs, and they generally showed me their analytical reporting as a matter of course.

I made a point of insisting that relevant things going to Westy (unless they were very sensitive; we had to have a rule of reason) come to me as well. Anything on pacification that went direct to Westmoreland without going through the Deputy for Pacification, the Chief of Staff heard about that! It happened four or five times, and the roof went off the building for effect. I saw the way Abrams put on tantrums. They were very effective. Abe was the greatest contrived tantrum guy in the business, especially when he wanted me to fire John Vann. It was a great performance. Again a press guy, an old friend of John's, Peter Arnett, almost blew John out of the water by having a very liquid dinner with John, staying overnight, and then writing a story in which he directly quoted Vann, not about pacification, but about the way Abrams was fighting the war.

MONTAGUE: And in which John Vann recommended immediate withdrawal of 250,000 troops that were being totally wasted in base defense.

KOMER: Somebody told me on what he said was absolutely unimpeachable authority that Arnett said later that he deliberately mouse trapped John Vann. Arnett proudly told other press people he'd deliberately blown John Vann because he thought the story too important to hold.

Could you discuss your personal back-channel private reporting to the White House and the President?

KOMER: As a matter of policy, I did NOT do any personal, back-channel, private reporting to the White House and the President. I'm not fobbing you off; it just does not exist. We occasionally would send a back-channel to Washington, sometimes to Leonhart in the White House, more often to people in Defense or State, sensitive personnel or administrative matter, but there was no personal back-channel reporting.

SCOVILLE: This is a misconception that is very good to clear up, because most people, talking loosely about pacification, feel that you
had a private, close relationship with the President. One gets the impression, from not knowing anything, that this continued after you went to Saigon on a sort of working basis. It's interesting to know that this is not true.

Komer: Correct. It was operationally useful to have that impression abroad on the part of everybody but my immediate bosses. I was very careful to let Westy and Bunker know that I was not reporting behind their backs to Washington. Of course, Presidential advisors or SECDEF came out and asked what do you really think about problem X? And I sure was going to tell them. Moreover, I went back to Washington fairly frequently, because it seemed important to keep them clued, and I knew the President didn't read a lot of my traffic. But I did not do any back-channel, private reporting.

Could you discuss any reporting channels that you used that did not involve information coming up through many levels of command?

Komer: Our out-of-channel reporting was largely via the Evaluation Branch, the telephone, and field visits. I did use back channels down the line to the corps commanders or to the DEPCORDS, simply because there were frequently things you'd want to tell them informally. This was an approved military technique. You frequently clue somebody back-channel that something is coming front-channel, so that he understands it, because obviously you don't want to have to clear the real reasons, and you just clear the final instruction. But that's SOP. Field visits were really the main form of reporting channels. We went ourselves. Because we encouraged it by an open door policy, we had a constant flow of people coming in. I would see on the average a half dozen people a day. Montague would see two dozen people a day. My best back-channel reporting was Montague's visitors.

What was the value and influence of the Evaluations Branch?

Komer: As I recall, this was one of our innovations too when we set up CORDS. I wanted to have my own eyes and ears on what was really going on out in the field. We staffed it with some of our brightest young men with high intellectual curiosity. As you know, I personally read most of
the reports and found them quite valuable, though spotty. I also got
the evaluators in trouble by insisting on recommendations as well as
analysis.

Could you discuss the Hamlet Evaluation System and other forms of auto-
mated reporting? General Knowlton remarked that Colonel Brigham and J-33
had already begun work on such a system before the visit of Mr. Allen,
and he alluded to a military-civilian conflict over this at the time.

Komer: I should start by saying that the whole question of how to
find out and measure what was actually going on was one of the trickiest
and most painful in this highly atypical war. How well were we doing?
How measure performance? Traditional methods like territory gained or
lost just weren't very meaningful. The military fell back on comparative
casualty ratios or weapons captured vs. weapons lost, but these had serious
built-in limitations. Our measurement problem in pacification was at least
as difficult, particularly as we were seeking to measure Vietnamese per-
f ormance of a highly fragmented nature (e.g. several hundred RD teams,
RF companies, and police units, and several thousand PF platoons), and
also the real situation in 2000 villages and 10-12,000 hamlets. Then
add the constant pressures from a frustrated Washington, and above all
a frustrated U.S. press, for us to tell them how we were really doing.
Since subjective judgements had already proven so far off base, the
pressure was for solid, quantifiable, analyzable data. I'm under few
illusions as to how well we divined the undivinable, but I'll argue
that we pacifiers were more innovative than most.

Now as to our most imaginative and most notorious effort, the HES.
It originated in a request from McNamara before I got into business.
McNamara said to CIA, "Design me something that will tell us the status
of our control in the countryside." George Carver came to see me, and
I heartily concurred. When they had the scheme worked out, they briefed
me. I said it was fine except that it was weighted too much in favor of
development rather than security. Since security preceded development,
it would give a distorted impression of the realities if we gave develop-
ment factors that degree of prominence. They disagreed; my staff didn't
agree with me either, except for Montague. The rest of them thought that
I was downgrading the civilian side of pacification, which I wasn't at all.
MONTAGUE: George Allen and Colonel Clark visited Porter's office in Saigon in October 1966. Then Colonel Clark and I drew up the HES form one night. George Allen had the matrix idea, and Clark and I put in the 18 items. We picked items that we could stretch out into five different grading categories. Things that were "either/or" we threw out, because we were looking for something you could grade from A to E. We turned it over to two of Brigham's PTAI people. They worked up the sheets on which you ask the questions of the district advisors and then use the computer to score. So the CIA proposal was significantly modified in the field. We didn't have any civil-military conflict.

KOMER: Colonel Brigham was an outstanding head of our Research and Analysis Division, but his role in setting up HES was less than his role in making HES actually function in the field. He did a very good job. Also Major Dworsksh of the Air Force was very good.

This form of reporting, especially the HES, has been loudly criticized both within and without the government. Do you feel that the criticism was justified?

KOMER: It was grossly overstated. HES is generally criticized for being what it wasn't, by people who were not familiar with it. It was a crude measurement of several physically measurable security and development factors that American advisors could reasonably expect to validate.

MONTAGUE: We tried to get physical things that were measurable. We're not asking the district advisor to tell us whether the people in the hamlet support the government or not. Rather, is there a school? Do more than 90 percent of the eligible children go to that school? If it's more than 90 percent, that's an "A" for "School." Very simple. We picked simple things so that our people could measure them. Now the R-HES, which people seem to like, I think is full of questions that the guy can't answer. That was one of my criticisms.

KOMER: HES had to be on a consistent basis, because we were interested in a comparative picture in 10,000 hamlets. You have to accept some fairly rigid quantitative criteria if you want comparability.

Remember that we devised HES as a U.S. measurement system to overcome precisely the optimistic bias that the more subjective GVN reporting
systems had developed. HES was consistently lower than comparable GVN measurements. The GVN was doing a lot of reporting from the hamlet on up. American advisors were unanimous that these reports were much too subjective and self-seeking. So we had to evolve a scheme that could be scored by American advisors in the field. This was feasible because by this time we were pushing U.S. advisory teams down into the districts. We wanted to get the evaluation done at the lowest feasible level, by the people who spent the most time in the hamlets. I think it was sound to switch from a GVN to an American measurement system, because our purpose was to evaluate their performance. Then we could advise them how to improve it. The greatest tribute to the HES is that the GVN gradually abandoned its system and used ours. Thieu did that. Thieu insisted that the American system sounded more accurate and was invariably less optimistic. And so often, few of the people who critiqued the HES spent enough time around it to find out what it was all about? But that's par for the course in Vietnam.

MONTAGUE: Bing West was worried today that there were certain hamlets in Quang Nam through which the enemy passed often in coming in to the "rocket belt." They looked at the HES, and these were "C" hamlets. How could that be true? But the presence of infrastructure is only 3 of 18 factors.

KOMER: Moreover, a hamlet can be relatively secure and decide that when the enemy comes through in strength, it's better to lie low than to risk retaliation. It won't be the first time that's happened.

MONTAGUE: That's right. Even knowledgeable people question the HES wrongly. They ought to see that the fact that a hamlet has an operating hamlet school, that it has a functioning government, that it has this, that, and the other thing outweighs an occasional entry by the enemy.

KOMER: Some of the criticisms almost seem to imply that unless your system is well-nigh perfect, it isn't any good. HES was full of weaknesses. We wish we had better measurement techniques. But given the situation at the time, could we have done better with the resources at hand? I don't think so. Moreover, has anybody else come up with anything anywhere near as good in the entire history of the Vietnam War?
Reminds me of Barry Zorthian's famous remark that the press always looked at the bottle as half empty, and the establishment always looked at it as half full. My retort was, "And more important, it's whether the bottle is filling up or whether it's emptying." It's the direction in which the flow is going that is most important. HES was most useful in identifying trends.

Also the HES as a negative indicator has been ignored by the critics. HES showed the very sharp drop after TET; going down from 67 percent to 59 percent may seem like an only 8-point drop, but it's about 12 or 15 percent loss in security. Read the Southeast Asia Analysis Reports; OSD/SA used the HES data to find all sorts of things going wrong in Vietnam, or being done poorly. That's one reason why I respect the Southeast Asia Analysis Reports, because they found that our quantitative data could be used to make all sorts of interesting inferences. Some were wrong, but more often right. We made several efforts to refine and improve the HES. We had a Simulmatics group out there in 1967; they did a validity study that showed that by and large we were doing pretty well, they gave us a pretty good report card, but pointed out some weaknesses. Then PTAI came out and designed a revision of the HES to meet several weaknesses that we saw. The revision just didn't pan out for technical reasons. It had nothing to do with our reluctance . . . they had worked out an involved mathematical scheme, and we finally worked it through and decided it just didn't scan. Then PTAI designed a second revision. Did that ever go into effect?

MONTAGUE: They haven't switched over yet. They're carrying the new R/HES scoring through parallel, and then they're going to switch in 1970. We ran the first test of it I guess in February 1969.

KOMER: There was no need to weight the HES factors more heavily in favor of security, because the HES was so designed that you could take out the 9 security factors and get HES ratings on that basis alone. I generally tended to look at the security factors separately, and that was easy. John Tunney made this criticism and, frankly, I think he got it from me. We had him to dinner, and I mentioned this as a weakness of the HES.

I personally used the HES figures extensively. After all, this was our best reporting from the field on a systematic basis. The trends and changes were what were interesting. I always assumed that HES data
might be off by as much as plus or minus 10 percent, but, as you know, there's a statistical principle that if your universe is big enough, the overs will tend to balance out the unders. If you have reporting from 10,000 villages, 18 factors per village, the number of guys who overestimate will tend to be cancelled out by the number of guys who underestimate. Therefore your total will be reasonably valid even though individual inputs may vary much more widely. Somehow people never could understand that if they went down to a "C" hamlet and they thought it was much worse than HES showed, this didn't mean the whole HES was no good. Some other guy might still be rating a hamlet "C" that really ought to be an "A" and statistically those two would cancel each other out.

Were you responsible for the development of the TFES and other systems that followed HES, such as the terrorist incident reporting system? Do you feel that perhaps these systems were stronger as they dealt more in quantifiable data?

KOMER: I directed that TFES be developed, as a means of getting a better handle on the RF/FF. When I first arrived as DEPCORDS, I kept asking where all the RF companies and PF Platoons were located, what they were actually being used for, their state of leadership, equipment, and morale? Neither MACV nor JGS could answer these questions, so I instructed Colonel Brigham in mid-1967 to design a simple measurement system. Remember we had to keep tabs on several thousand PF Platoons and literally hundreds of RF companies. I personally reviewed their proposals, and had them revamped by the end of 1967. TFES turned out to be invaluable in the RF/FF expansion and upgrading process. We found all sorts of things wrong out at the cutting edge, because again we designed TFES like HES to be done out at the cutting edge, by the junior U.S. advisors actually working with RF/FF in the field. True, TFES was more reliable than HES because it dealt mostly with easily quantifiable phenomena, e.g. how many rifles or working radios per unit, how many officers and NCOs. TFES also asked for performance evaluations but these were relatively straightforward. I regard TFES as a very useful management reporting and control system, another CORDS innovation.

You must recognize that we regarded HES, TFES, the Phung Hoang reporting system and the others as more than progress reporting systems.
Their chief purpose was to help us in managing and controlling the vast, inchoate, fragmented enterprise called pacification. For this reason alone, we were more interested in what was going wrong rather than right. The former was what needed attention and corrective action. Of course, press and other critics never understood this aspect of HES, etc. They thought we invented them as means of showing paper progress.

Substantial criticism was leveled at you personally for optimistic reporting at a time when many felt that there was no such progress. Could you discuss this?

KOMER: The simple answer is they don't know the score. For example, I would give a long press conference and discuss all the pros and cons. Yet what would come out was a little story that just gave the overall, plus the improved HES score. So we'd knock ourselves out talking for two hours to the press, explaining all the qualifiers, all the problems, and everything else, and then what would we get out of it? "HES says 68.2 percent of population secure." Not relatively secure "C" hamlets, as we said. This is one of the things that I think threw Congressman Tunney. It was done even more in Washington. The higher the level, the higher the degree of abstraction.

The press may legitimately complain that they were not really kept clued on what the military side of the Vietnam War was all about. But they cannot make the same complaint about us pacifiers. We tried our damnedest to get the press interested in our part of the war, to bring the press in, to clue them, to make material available to them, to answer their questions, etc. Yet I feel there was very poor understanding on the part of the press of what our programs were all about and what was happening. Except for the 59-man RD teams, pacification didn't seem sexy enough. Therefore, I discount much of their criticism, of pacification at any rate.

MONTAGUE: Rather than telling people that this was the way it was, you'd call them in and show them the report we just sent.

KOMER: Or the field report we'd just gotten. It was more credible to them if we let them read the actual official report we were sending, criticism and all. We let out classified information right and left.
Quite naturally, I'm sensitive to the accusation that I was over-optimistic. What really started me down the slippery slope, although it was going to happen anyway to anyone involved in Vietnam, was my report to the President on 13 September 1966. At the Honolulu Conference in February 1966, the President laid great emphasis on the "other war." Once we'd been in business long enough, I thought we ought to tell him how the "other war" was going -- a progress report on Honolulu six months later. Since I was put in business to get the "other war" on the road, I thought we'd better let him know that we were going somewhere; indeed a lot of these things had been going on for years, not just six months. So we sent to the field for detailed reports. We never put a damn thing in that hand't been sent us from the field, though we took out a lot of crap that had been sent us from the field. I wrote a preface saying that "this report naturally accentuates the positive rather than the negative. There are a lot of things still going wrong in Vietnam. We're not claiming that we're winning the war, etc." But the thrust was that we're getting somewhere in the "other war." We're building so many schools; we're distributing so much food; we're taking care of so many refugees; we're reopening so many roads. I sent it to the President; he said, "This is good stuff; release it." We released it at the same time I sent it out to Saigon, so nobody in Saigon had seen the so-called "Komer Report." Certainly no press people because even officialdom didn't have it yet. It was a 36-page document, and we had spent all our time cleaning it up and getting it out in mimeographed form. The stories from Washington, where I held a press conference, were straightforward. They reported what we said, and what was in the report. But the very next day we got replays from Saigon ... the Saigon press corps takes on Komer and the "other war" report; it is grossly overstated; this is wrong; that's wrong ... mostly highly impressionistic comments. What did they have to go on? They didn't have the report. They didn't have anything except the Washington press stories which naturally were highly-compressed versions. They didn't know anything about the demurrers. They didn't know, among other things, that the most cautious chapter in the whole report was on RD, where I did not think we were making any great strides yet. We were very careful to point out that the RD Cadre Program was just beginning and had a long way to go. Well, the Saigon press corps decided right then that Komer was one of these overoptimistic guys like Westmoreland and Lodge. I never really recovered from that.
That is an example of the way these things happen. I asked those press guys when I got out to Saigon on my next visit, "Did you even read my report?" "No, no. Didn't even have it; just had the press accounts."

I speak more in sorrow than in anger; I'm not the first guy who's gotten knocked that way, especially on Vietnam.

Second, when the press was devoting itself, emulating David Halberstam because he got a Pulitzer Prize, to proving how things were going wrong in Vietnam, what was the establishment expected to do? Say they agree with Halberstam or say: "Look, there are some things that are going right in Vietnam. We really think we're doing much better than this." To ask the establishment to criticize itself the same way that the press does, is tantamount to asking the establishment to commit suicide. Perhaps some of the press would have been happier if Komer burned himself in front of Independence Palace. Perhaps inevitably, the press reporting was too impressionistic. They couldn't do the work in depth that we were doing. In you guys in Evaluations Branch I had a dozen people who were much more knowledgeable than the whole press corps put together. Moreover, I'd argue that the results, which became so apparent in late 1968 and from then on, fully justify in hindsight the contentions I was making earlier. By and large I'd stack my evaluations against those of the press any time.

Was your "optimistic" reporting due to pressure for "results" from Washington, to a desire to keep up CORDS and GVN morale, for public consumption?

KOMER: I was never under pressure for results from Washington.

SCOVILLE: I'll be perfectly frank. For some reason we always had the impression somebody was saying we have to have these kinds of results in order to present them to the American public. And sometimes we thought you don't really believe them, but somebody's telling you to.

KOMER: I was never told at any time to produce results for public consumption. Now we were part of the team. Sure we were trying to get results. What the hell were we in Vietnam for? Sure it was a good thing to let the American people know that we were doing rather better than the press was saying we were. Sure it was useful, when some Vietnamese salon politician gets a three-column headline by saying the situation down
in the Delta stinks, to background the press that this guy hasn't even
been down in the Delta since 1965. Actually, despite the usual credibility
gap, I would say my reputation for accuracy and honesty with the press
was better than most. For candor, was probably much higher than most.
But when the guys write their stories, they're in business too. If they
don't send back negative results, if their editors want to print negative
results, then they're not doing their job.

MONTAGUE: A lot of them from Saigon were complaining that their
stuff was severely edited. It wasn't changed, but the positives were
removed, and the negatives highlighted. We spent a lot of time with the
press. We met them at night, went over plans with them, tried to describe
what pacification was, gave them our impressions and evaluations, and tried
to give them a broad background with which to operate.

SCOVILLE: I can remember one time around May 1968 the Evaluation
Branch got an order for everybody to find something good about pacification
in Vietnam. I don't know what this was for. You may remember this. It
just came down once, and I remember people scurrying around in an absolute
fury because we were being asked to do this. This had a distinctly bad
odor to it.

MONTAGUE: I don't remember that. But we did ask you for ten places
where pacification was going well and ten places going badly.

KOMER: Didn't you know that famous list? This was very early . . .
Let me tell you what happened. Some bird would come out from Washington
and go down to some hamlet, particularly one where he was told it was a
pretty hot area. He'd come back and write a report saying pacification
stinks in Vietnam, based on his afternoon in one hamlet. This used to
really frost me, because after all, we were talking about 10,000 hamlets.
In fact I wrote a letter to one guy saying, "You have based your indict-
ment of pacification on 1/10,000th of the available evidence; do you
think that's a sufficient sample?" Well, after a week or so of stewing
about this, a thought struck me. I asked for a list of ten places where
pacification was doing poorest, and ten places where pacification was do-
ing best -- some definable area that we can send somebody to. Time and
time again, I'd have a press guy in the office. He'd say: "I want to
go out and actually see this stuff. What shall I do?" I'd say: "That's
easy. You can prove anything by going out in the field. Here is my list of the ten places where pacification is going best in Vietnam, like Ba Tri District. All you've got to do is to go to one of these ten places, and I assure you you will come back writing 'we've already won.' If that's the kind of story you want to write, fine. On the other hand, here is my list of the ten places where we are really doing worst. So if you want to write a story proving that pacification is no good, just go down to any of these ten places. You cannot lose.

MONTAGUE: Lousy district chief, you know, poorly organized district administration, poor RF/PF, VC gaining control rapidly, and that would be one little descriptor.

KOMER: I asked periodically for updates of this list as I didn't want to pull out a list dated August 1967 when it was already January 1968. So that's where the updating request came from. We always asked for two lists — worst and the best.

What about the contention that our reporting system, indeed much of the whole approach to pacification, emphasized the maximization of statistical goals and progress at the expense of the more difficult, and more intangible, goals that cannot be quantified?

KOMER: Silly! Those who contend this simply confuse the program itself with the measurement systems. Quite naturally we tried to stay away from the earlier highly subjective reporting. As a result, our new measurement system emphasized what we could measure. They didn't emphasize what we couldn't measure. We always pointed that out, but the qualifiers perhaps understandably got lost. We were not trying to measure people's popular attitudes, popular commitment, because we couldn't. But this didn't mean that our actual programs were not designed to influence popular attitudes in the rural areas. That was what we were in business for.

MONTAGUE: The monthly narrative reports from the provinces and the districts (you only asked for a little report from each district advisor each month) were impressionistic. How do you put those together in a single report to Washington? We just sent them the whole set.

KOMER: One advisor says, "I have the feeling the people are coming to support the government." Another advisor says, "I have the feeling the people are pretty unhappy with the lack of GVN support; I think they're
beginning to lean back toward the VC." How do you measure these two things? Were they using comparable criteria? Here was a question of judgement. Is one a new advisor, the other an old experienced hand? Inevitably, our reporting necessarily stressed the things that were measurable. There's no doubt about it. We were trying desperately to find countrywide indicators, and naturally the only indicators we could use were those that were statistically comparable and measurable. We were running a hamlet war in 10,000 hamlets. We recognized the limitations of our data. It was the press that didn't recognize the limitations. It was the press that overstated the HES as "a computerized formula" for determining the security and allegiance of a village! We used the computer for exactly one thing — to add up the data from 10,000 odd hamlets. You could have used a Chinese abacus just as well, except that you would have to have a thousand clerks. Instead, we put it in a machine and ran it in one night. We borrowed the computer; we didn't own one of our own. As usual, this was blown up out of all proportion, and then we began to be criticized as sheep rather than goats.

CORDS activities were more unified in the field, especially at province, than in Saigon, for example, fisheries and agriculture. Could you discuss your efforts to bring all in-country, pacification-type activities under CORDS?

**Komer:** We insisted at the outset that all in-country field activities.. everyone in the field be under CORDS OPCON, because we were the only people who could administer them in the field. But their parent Saigon agencies gave them technical guidance. This was a legitimate division of responsibility, and didn't cause too many problems, partly because their top echelon and I worked closely together.

**Montague:** We told them where to put their agricultural advisors. We didn't tell them which ones. We'd just tell them we wanted two agricultural advisors in Bac Lieu and none in Quang Duc. Now we've lost that again.

Could you discuss the question of various agencies (JUSPAO, AID, OSA) being involved in pacification but who were accountable to separate parent agencies in Washington?

**Komer:** This presented surprisingly few problems. Perhaps it was
my power position as it had evolved in Washington, but I genuinely think that the year in Washington where I was supervising the parent agencies developed a set of relationships and a degree of understanding that helped when we got out into the field. I knew all the agency heads and deputies. Moreover, I had close, though often stormy, relations with the key agency field people like John Hart and Lew Lapham, or Barry Zorthian, or Don MacDonald; so we presented a united front to Washington usually. In general, Washington gave us very few problems. They generally provided most of the things that we needed, so I don't have a big squawk about Washington.

What is your feeling on the size of CORDS staffs? Were they overstaffed?

Komer: This was quite a controversial subject. I don't agree with those who say we would have done a better job with fewer people. People didn't realize how small the U.S. pacification advisory organization really was! In a 550,000-man U.S. establishment, there were only about 5-6000 pacification advisors. Remember that this included over 1800 MAT team members and perhaps another 1000 or so working mostly with RF/PF. Then we had to do a lot of our own administrative and logistic support. So the real advisory cutting edge, including 88 PSAs and DPSAs and 250-odd district senior advisors, was not much more than 1000 — a very small effort compared to what we were able to achieve. Even counting all 5-6000 advisors, we still had about a 100 to 1 Vietnamese to advisor ratio!

Many CORDS people in the field felt that there were too many advisors. But they didn't understand the management problem of fighting the hamlet war in 10,000 hamlets, 2000 villages, 250 districts, and 44 provinces, with two dozen sub-programs and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese. We didn't have enough advisors to really push all the priority programs that we wanted. In no case could I say I was 100 percent satisfied with the performance of any district or province team. I think those who argued that we had too many Americans in the field were really echoing the argument that there were too many American troops. If you've got a 70-man team but 20 of them are sort of second rate, theoretically you can do almost as well by getting down to 50 and getting rid of the 20 second-raters. But how do you cut the right 20? I did not regard the criticisms that we had too
many American pacification advisors as valid until the advisory team could prove to me that it really was doing all of its jobs. For example, if the Phoenix Program wasn't working well yet and the PSA said I've got too many people, my answer was take five guys out of another activity and put them into Phoenix. There is one exception. I thought that the regional staffs were inflated. I do not believe that the big regional staffs did earn their way.

SCOVILLE: Especially IV Corps?

MONTAGUE: III Corps was worse.

KOMER: Proportionately, the biggest empire was Vann's in III Corps. But I never told John he had too many people because John really used them. Everybody on the regional staff in III Corps always kept busy. IV Corps I don't cavil at, because we deliberately built up IV Corps. Remember IV Corps had 16 provinces; I Corps had 5. The pacification program was many times bigger than in I Corps, where it was largely a military-type war. We were fighting a different type war in I Corps.

MACDONALD: The contrast in visiting IV Corps in early 1967 and in early 1969 with the number of people they had was fantastic. They were simply hurting there in early 1967.

KOMER: Yes, they were very lean, so we gave IV Corps highest priority largely to rectify that imbalance. But the regional staffs in general were largely duplicating work that could have been done at province or in Saigon. So I put them on notice in the course of a fall 1968 planning meeting that I intended to slash regional staffs in 1969.

MONTAGUE: When Frank Wisner left, he suggested a drastic reduction in advisors in Tuyen Duc. We went out and proposed to the corps commanders that there be a test. I know in II and IV Corps we proposed a test case, and both of the corps commanders came back saying "no." They claimed they needed all the people they had.

Were there any morale problems among U.S. civilians in Vietnam due to placing pacification under MACV?

KOMER: This was a most pleasant surprise. We were really on the lookout for this, because this concerned me, and I was really surprised that it was utterly insignificant. The press had made something of how
there would be lots of civilian complaints, particularly as Komer, who would be a pigeon among the cats, got gradually swallowed by the military colossus. But we only had two or three cases of even a grumble. There was one guy who said he was going to resign. Did he?

MONTAGUE: You had Sidney Roche.

SCOVILLE: He was later on. Apparently, there was one guy who had planned to go back to Harvard.

Could you discuss your choice of key CORDS personnel; were there any problems in getting those you wanted to serve?

KOMER: Yes, but one of our secrets in making CORDS a going concern was that we really tried hard on personnel. I think I spent at least 10 percent of my total time on personnel problems of one kind or another, largely getting the right man for the right job. I had a very extensive correspondence with Washington. We earmarked key military officers as well as civilians. We got Bill Greenwalt to help run Phoenix that way. I got my deputy, MG Forsythe, by going to the Army Chief of Staff. I got Major Dworshak by going back-channel to the Chief of the Air Staff. Here was where people like Montague, Volney Warner, George Forsythe, and Earl Cole were invaluable. They knew all the people in the military establishment. I insisted that we should clear all senior personnel appointments. I blocked a lot of routine appointments and brought in people whom we favored. As I went out into the field, wherever I found a good guy, we tried to get him. In fact, many volunteered; there was a lot of red tape, but if they were good guys, we'd take them. One of my failures was Jack Cushman, who was Bob's old boss down as 21st Division senior advisor. Cushman was an outstanding soldier whom I'd known in Washington. He agreed to come be our chief RF/FP advisor in CORDS. Unfortunately his wife became very ill; he had to get compassionate leave and they changed his assignment in Washington. To succeed Greenwalt in Phoenix, I put the arm on another very bright colonel, Bob Gard, who had worked out of SecDef's office, but we lost him after I left.

SCOVILLE: What about your four DEPCORDS?

KOMER: They were all hand picked by me. Bob Matteson was my personal choice, over the objections of some others. Unquestionably John Vann was the outstanding DEPCORDS, far ahead of the rest on the basis
of experience, leadership, drive. I recommended to Abe that John be first choice for replacing Colby as ACS/CORBS when I recommended Colby be moved up to take my job. He was unacceptable to COMUSMACV, so they picked my third suggestion, George Jacobson (my second had been Jim Grant).

Were the higher-level personnel good managers? Did they understand the type of program they were supposed to be managing?

Komer: Some were good managers, some not so good. Chuck Cross up in I Corps (an FSO-1) turned out to be an unusually good manager. I did not think that Cottrell down in IV Corps (another FSO-1) was a very good manager, but Cottrell had other leadership qualities. By and large, our people were not as good managers as I wanted. But most of the higher-level personnel understood what pacification was all about, and what our role in it was. If they didn't, it wasn't for want of telling them, arguing with them, reminding them, etc. We did much more communicating of what we were after, what the programs were, what the performance was we were looking for, than most. I would say we ran a much more open and much more feedback type of organization than MACV or USAID or the Embassy — certainly than the SVN. True it was easier; we were a much smaller advisory group. And remember that out of 5-6000 U.S. advisors, the number of really key guys (including 44 province advisors and all the district senior advisors) was less than 400. It was easier to make sure that 400 key Americans and say, 2000 key Vietnamese had the word, than it was to run a much larger military machine. Also, since pacification is sort of a unique kind of thing — it had never been done on the post-1966 scale before — we wanted to be damn sure everyone had the word.

In 1967, did you have problems getting the actual number of military and civilian advisors that were authorized under the new cords organization?

Komer: Plenty. In the military system, it's one thing to get spaces, another thing to get bodies, as I used to have to keep getting educated on. You get spaces, and then a year later the bodies may begin to trickle in. So it took about a year to build up to the 353 MAT teams, for example.

Montague: That's right. Of course, the difference between space and bodies was always greater on the civilian side. You always had at least a 20 percent lag.
KOMER: We got AID to finance the sending of FSOs. This was a very good thing, and they're still doing it.

Could you discuss the quality of the military personnel that were assigned to you, especially at Saigon and province? Did you have any choice in their assignment or were you able only to reject them if unsuitable?

KOMER: We didn't accept them unless we vetted them. I had a choice frequently, in the assignment, and always a veto.

MONTAGUE: This just applied to top people. The overall quality wasn't as good as went to U.S. units.

KOMER: That's right, but many guys who were lousy we got bounced. We got several transferred back. When we weren't satisfied with people we were getting, we did something about it, but not across the board. You could spend all your time saying people weren't good enough. How do you run a program? Frequently, the second or even the third best who is available is better than a really good guy whom you can't get for a year. And then it will take him six months more to learn the drill. So I also tried very hard to get good people to extend. I got McManaway to stay and Maynard to come back out by promoting them. I wired State that I was involuntarily extending Paul Hare and making him PSA in Ninh Hoa. Paul said that he didn't think it proper for him to volunteer but that if ordered to stay, he would. I got Wianer to extend by giving him Tuyen Duc Province. I got Burnham to extend by giving him Kien Hoa Province. Several excellent military voluntarily extended.

We promoted a system, with the support of the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Army, for sending province senior advisors out on two-year assignments with directed MOS. It was to be the equivalent of command duty, and they would get to bring their dependents to a safe haven after six months.

SCOVILLE: Did this idea start with you or with MACV?

MONTAGUE: It started right in our office. We got in great trouble over that, because I sent the cable off through State channels.

KOMER: After all, we were representing State, AID, CIA, and everybody else, so we used everyone's communications channels. If we wanted to make sure that the Pentagon sat up and took notice, we sent a cable through State, because the Pentagon reads State cables much more carefully
than its own. The State cables are put together in nice little books, and sent around to all the top brass. We did run into a few little problems on this. Someone pointed out to me, I think it was Abrams, that I was in a military command. I said: "Abe, I am also an ambassador, and I'm responsible for these things. I'm not sending any cables that haven't been authorized. But civilian channels are also legitimate because pacification is a CIVIL-military enterprise." As soon as I left, I suspect that changed!

MONTAGUE: It sure did.

Could you discuss the quality of civilian personnel assigned to CORDS?

ROMER: By and large, I think most observers would agree that the quality of civilian personnel assigned to CORDS was unusually high compared to the overall level of civilian personnel in Vietnam, partly because we paid more attention to it. Perhaps the best as a group were the young FSOs (100-150 per year) who were brought in through the regular FSO entry process but funded by AID money. They were then sent to the VNMC and on out to Vietnam for their first tours. So they were a select group indeed, and performed very well on the whole.

We were not afraid to bitch if we thought we weren't getting the right kind of people. Now the quality was not uniform. I can't say all the people we had were good. If a guy wasn't particularly good, we'd send him home at the end of his tour. If he was really good, we'd make an all-out effort to keep him, including promotion and better job. This was our best way of keeping experienced hands. I know the reenlistment rate of people we went out to get to stay was very high. This even got to the point that when I was out in the field, some PSA would sidle up to me and say, for example, "Hank Gallagher is great, but he is going to be leaving us." Hank can personally testify that I put the arm on him up in II Corps.

Do you feel that there was proper balance between military and civilian advisors in the key posts of PSA and DSA?

ROMER: Westy and I made a bargain early about a roughly 50/50 division of PSA slots. Remember that out in the field the military population outweighed the civilian by about 4 to 1. To have pushed for more than
50 percent civilian senior advisors in the provinces would have been very difficult. Every civilian advisor managed more soldiers than he did other civilians. So the treaty worked out with Westy was very farsighted on his part.

SCOVILLE: What about the fact that district advisors were 99 percent military.

KOMER: More like 90 percent now. One of our early problems was getting enough civilians. When you've got good civilians, why not use some instead in special programs like Phoenix? Or in an emergency to jack up the refugee advisory effort. But there were some outstanding civilians working at district. Terry Lambacher in Hau Nghia was a hot shot! We tried to get more civilians for district advisors, and I hear we have 24 or 25 now.

MONTAGUE: Of course, you left that decision up to the corps DEPCORDS, and they could have pushed that harder if they'd wanted to, but they had to evaluate the capabilities of the people they had.

SCOVILLE: Also the average major probably would have had more experience than an FSO-7 or 8.

MONTAGUE: Of course that number has been brought up considerably during the last year or so as we've gotten these trainees out of Vietnam Training Center with the extensive pacification and language training. Then the civilians can be more than a match to the military who haven't had similar training. It's only recently that the military district advisors were put into that school.

Weren't there difficulties getting adequate logistic support for advisors?

KOMER: This was a big problem. So we developed a major reorganization of logistic support for our advisors in the field to cope with it. There was a major effort to improve advisor performance by improving the supply system. We found that in actuality these advisors were being supported by the ARVN! We got responsibility shifted to the Americans. As I recall, this is the way we divided up the pie: in I Corps the U.S. Navy Support Facility was tasked with providing all the support across the board; in II Corps it was AID; in III Corps it was AID, wasn't it; and in IV Corps it was the Army. And we went to a system of common-user items.
We found that civilians couldn't go to military depots and draw supplies. Sometimes the civilians had to run a hundred miles on the road to get their supplies. So we said they're all part of the same advisory system and it's a MACV responsibility to support them; let's work out a practical solution. I cannot answer as to how effectively that solution worked, but I had the impression . . .

MONTAGUE: It wasn't too effective up until the time that we really had excess helicopters and could use them to fly district advisors. We did this by giving the helicopter to the province advisor, so he could push the supplies out to the district advisors and MAT teams. When we added the MAT teams, we added a real burden. The thought was that the MAT teams would go down there and live off the land; in other words, with equipment and a stove and this, that, and the other thing, they ought to be able to buy rice, local meat, ducks, chickens, and what have you. But most of them still wanted rations through the U.S. system, and that made it very difficult, because we weren't about to supply them other than commissary-type items that could come out of corps and province. We weren't going to have a daily run of fresh milk to them. In fact, when we first came up with the district advisor idea in 1964, I decided that we weren't going to logistically support the district advisors, because we didn't have a system to do so. So we never put a district advisor out unless we went and talked to the district chief and said, "Will you give him a place to live?" Almost invariably they said, "Please send the fellow out, and I've got a place right here in my house for him." That was great. Later on, somebody made a program out of it, and sent huge packages down to the district advisors, including a house (which is bad). Then there developed a district advisor's compound separate from the district chief's. I thought that was wrong, but people feel that we ought to support advisors just like we support every American troop. So we went along and tried to get the system set up to do so.

KOMER: We did our best. The problem was considerably diminished by late 1968. At least we were getting fewer complaints along these lines, whereas in 1967 we were getting plenty, especially from the military. Civilians were much better off, because AID had developed a bigger logistic system for dealing with a much smaller number of civilians in the field.
However it was the poor military advisors who formed the bulk of our pacification teams who were getting it in the neck. Our answer generally was "let's cut the civilians back to the level of the military." Incidentally, we had some very good administrative people.

I also recall how the CORDS field teams were always clamoring for helicopters to extend their advisory and logistic reach. John Vann and our people in II Corps (by far the largest corps area) were the most persistent. We tried hard on this, but helicopters were just about the scarcest major item in Vietnam, and MACV wasn't about to take even a few away from U.S. tactical units. I should have pushed harder on this. However, CORDS did get a lot of support from Air America. I guess we were the largest users of their planes and choppers, larger even than CIA.

What were your impressions on schooling and competence of the average military officer assigned to pacification?

**SCOVILLE:** This is an idea that a military officer suggested to me as perhaps of interest. It wasn't meant in criticism.

**MONTAGUE:** The Army recognized that the training is inadequate, and they've just set up a special MAO program, to make up for some of the deficiencies. We limped along in Vietnam with the MATA course which was a general course for all advisors, whether going to an ARVN unit or a province or a district — it didn't meet the needs of any of them precisely.

**KORNER:** I felt that pacification was seriously shortchanged by the military education system. We did try to have a substantial feedback to Bragg, to the MATA course, to Camp Gordon. But the schooling of the advisors we received (both civilian and military) was quite inadequate and seldom very relevant to pacification. So we set up our own Vietnam Training Center in the U.S. (see Chapter III) at State's Foreign Service Institute. Len Maynard, an old Saigon hand, became its first head. I think they've had 22 thirteen-week classes there now. Since one of the problems was getting advisors who could speak Vietnamese, those students who showed facility were kept a full 42 weeks for intensive language training. They started coming out in mid-1968 and were great.

We also set up our own CORDS training courses for advisors when they got to Vietnam. But my general feeling was that we shouldn't keep them
in Saigon for three months training when they were only out there on one-year tours — rather send them out and then bring them back after they'd been out for a while and give them only a week's pumping up. We ran our own school right there in Saigon once a month for about 100 people. I made it standard practice to go myself and talk to each session of that school; if I couldn't go, Forsythe or Wetherill would.

MONTAGUE: Moreover, the MAT teams we had to train all in-country, because they came thoroughly untrained.

KOMBR: Ah -- very important. MACV set up its own MAT Training School in the old 1st Division base camp at Di An. Who was that outstanding commandant we got promoted?

MONTAGUE: Lieutenant Colonel . . . it started with an S . . . really a good guy. He'd been a district advisor for a year and agreed to stay on. He just left quite recently.

KOMBR: I was proud of him. I went down and talked to his class. Then I made it policy that either General Cole or General Wetherill or myself would talk to each graduating class at the MATS School, so they could see who the chief pacification guys were and we could give them a pep talk.

Now, on competence . . . most were average American military and, I thought, quite flexible, quite adaptable. I was pleased with the general caliber of the advisory material we got. Now, we got some dumb clucks. You couldn't ask for only top guys, but wherever we found a guy in another part of the business who we thought would be good for pacification, we tried to recruit him. This was a problem, but after all we were learning by doing, so how could the Army have a good education system on pacification when the Army had never had much experience in it before, even in Vietnam?
XIII. GROWTH OF PACIFICATION RESOURCES

One important index of the growing importance of the "new model" pacification effort 1968-1970 has been the steady increase in personnel and financial resources allocated, in comparison with earlier programs. On the other hand, the still slender proportion of total U.S. personnel and resources (measured in dollar terms) going into pacification as compared to other aspects of the U.S. war effort is revealing too.

In analyzing these resource inputs one must bear in mind several factors. First, to conduct countrywide pacification operations and then provide a semi-permanent security presence required large numbers of personnel. In a real sense the SVN pacification apparatus was not only the local security apparatus in thousands of hamlets and villages, 250 odd districts, and 44 provinces, but provided the local government and administrative services as well. Since a permanent presence was required in most cases -- and also because the bulk of pacification forces were recruited locally for service only in their home village district and province -- these assets were largely immobile. They could not be shifted easily from place to place. Indeed, one of the weaknesses of early pacification programs was that relative lack of resources led both to too thin a presence on the ground and to shifting pacification forces out of areas before they were thoroughly pacified (which in some cases meant that they had to be pacified over and over again).

Fortunately the resources needed for pacification were relatively inexpensive. Since the personnel were almost all Vietnamese, their pay and allowances were far less than if Americans had been used. Moreover, pacification did not require high mobility, great ordnance expenditure, massive air support or the other things that caused U.S. and even ARVN operations and back-up to be so costly. For this reason, despite the complexity and geographic extent of pacification programs, plus the large numbers of personnel involved, total program cost has been quite low in comparison with other major U.S.-supported programs -- making pacification appear to be quite cost effective.
GROWTH IN PERSONNEL

A look at the limited manpower allocated to pacification-type missions in mid-1966 will illustrate the point about growth. The RF/PP numbered under 300,000. Moreover, even this figure (as MACV discovered) included several tens of thousands of "ghost soldiers" who could be padded into payrolls because of exceedingly primitive strength accounting procedures. RD cadre numbered only 35,000 by mid-1966. National Police numbered only 60,000, of whom only about 20,000 were in the provinces. Even including those civil servants who were left in the provinces following the quasi-collapse of GVN administration in most rural areas during 1962-1965, the total number of GVN personnel in pacification-related activities at end-1966 was probably not over 400,000.

By end-1969, following the big post-TET 1968 upsurge generated by GVN mobilization and tapping of new manpower resources, the manpower allotted mostly to pacification probably had about doubled -- to 470,000 RF/PP; 58,000 RD and Montagnard Cadre; 82,500 National Police. PSDK personnel are not included. The above estimates also do not include U.S. and ARVN troops who engaged at one time or another in pacification-related activities -- for example, the 50 or so ARVN battalions assigned to RD support in 1967.

GROWTH OF FINANCIAL INPUTS

The increase in pacification funding is even more striking. According to figures submitted by CORDS to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at its February 1970 hearings, U.S. and GVN dollar and piaster allocations combined rose from $582 million dollar equivalent in 1966 to $789 million in 1967; $1,068 million in 1968; then $1,337 million in 1969; and $1,519 million projected for 1970 -- an almost threefold increase over five years.

In one respect these figures considerably overstate real pacification expenditures. For example, over $1 billion worth of dollars and piasters (the latter at the overvalued 118 conversion rate) in FY 1970 go for equipping and paying the RF/PP. But an estimated 25 percent of the RF/PP are still deployed on non-pacification tasks -- base and headquarters
protection and the like. Thus one could argue that some $250 million should not be allocated to pacification costs. Similarly, the National Police, which account for the equivalent of $129.5 million in FY 1970 pacification funding, the second largest chunk, have important urban and other non-pacification functions which account for perhaps half their annual outlays. All in all, I would suspect that between $400-500 million in dollars and piasters should be deducted from the figures given the Fulbright Committee. On the other hand, significant numbers of ARVN and U.S. troops have at one time or another, particularly since 1967, been assigned temporarily to pacification-related territorial security tasks. There is probably no way of quantifying their costs.

**SHIFT IN FUNDING SOURCES**

There has also been a significant 1966-1970 shift in the sources of pacification funding from U.S. civilian agencies to DOD, and more gradually from the U.S. to the GVN. In 1967 (the yearCORDS was created) some 71 percent of U.S. pacification support funds came from DOD, 17 percent from AID, and the remainder were RD Cadre outlays. By 1970, DOD had assumed RD Cadre funding and its share of total U.S. dollar inputs had risen to 84 percent, while AID's had declined to 16 percent (even though in dollar terms AID's contribution had about doubled). Of course, as indicated above, these figures lump all RF/PF and public safety outlays under pacification.

Analysis of the relative shares of pacification funding borne by the U.S. and GVN is complicated by the issue of how to treat U.S.-generated counterpart piasters. They account for 16 percent of total pacification piaster outlays in 1970, for example. If they are treated as part of the U.S. share, then in 1967 the U.S. was funding over 61 percent of pacification outlays, while the GVN share was just about 39 percent. By 1970, out of much higher total funding (over $1.5 billion as compared to under $790 million in 1967), the GVN share rose to over 42 percent.

However, this method seriously understates the GVN contribution. Counterpart piasters are not an added charge on the U.S. taxpayer. In terms of economic impact they are spent in the Vietnamese economy, and are a drain on Vietnamese rather than U.S. resources. Thus they should
be more properly charged to the GVN side of the ledger. Valuing counterpart plasters at 118 to $1 (itself unfortunately an overstatement of the plaster's value), the 1970 GVN contribution rises to almost 49.5 percent. Thus the GVN is now contributing about half of pacification costs. Moreover, since the U.S. share goes so largely for equipping the RF/PP, RD Cadre, and police, this should decline sharply as the equipment process is completed. By 1971 the GVN will probably be funding well over half of total pacification costs. Put another way, GVN regular budget support of pacification increased over 100 percent (from $307 million dollar equivalent to $628 million) between 1967 and 1970. By and large, GVN funds and counterpart go primarily for personnel costs, while the U.S. funds equipment and resources not available locally.

WHERE DO PACIFICATION FUNDS GO?

By far the largest manpower and financial inputs to pacification have gone into territorial security. They account for well over half the people and money allocated to pacification every year 1966-1970. For example, in FY 1970 the 500,000 RF/PP are budgeted for U.S. dollar support of $518 million, some 67 percent of the total U.S. dollar support of pacification.

A breakdown of the $1,519 million allocated to pacification in 1970 (assuming that all the RF/PP funds go for pacification) shows that over two-thirds go for territorial security via the substantial buildup and re-equipping of RF/PP. The second largest chunk (almost $130 million) goes for the National Police. The third largest is $118.5 million for RD Cadre and RD support in the villages. See Figs. 1 and 2 for a fuller breakdown of U.S. and GVN 1970 funding.

HAS PACIFICATION BEEN COST-EFFECTIVE FROM THE U.S. VIEWPOINT?

Refined answers to this question are impossible as yet, when we don't even know what lasting impact pacification has had or how to quantify it. Nor do we know what proportion of improved local security, etc. is attributable to pacification and what to other factors such as U.S. or ARVN anti-main force or area security operations, bombing, naval blockade, shift in enemy strategy/tactics/capabilities, etc. Indeed,
Fig. 1 -- Components of US support to pacification, FY 1970 total $777.4 million
Fig. 2 -- Components of GVN support to pacification, CY 1970 total US $741.7 million (US $1 to VN $11.8)
it is doubtful that we can ever get a definitive answer to these questions.

Yet it is clear that even the "new model" pacification program of 1967-1970 has taken only a very modest fraction of total U.S. outlays on the war. In a peak U.S. spending year -- 1969 -- dollar outlays on pacification are estimated at some $677 million out of total U.S. outlays of perhaps $23-28 billion. Thus at most they were only 2-3 percent of the total. Of course, pacification outlays have risen since, while overall U.S. Vietnam costs have fallen, so the 1970 share might be more like 4-5 percent. Given this quite modest U.S. investment, it is hard to escape the conclusion that pacification, whatever its many weaknesses and indeterminate results, has been quite cost-effective from the U.S. viewpoint. Add in that it has been a primarily Vietnamese program from the outset, involving far fewer U.S. personnel than financial investment, and one could argue that it has been the most cost-effective major U.S.-sponsored program in the Vietnam war.
XIV. SUMMING UP -- AND A STAB AT LESSONS LEARNED

This concluding attempt to distil at least some tentative lessons from our Vietnam pacification experience is done with benefit of at least partial hindsight but also in full recognition of the handicaps involved. Even a provisional assessment of pacification is risky indeed when all the returns are not yet in. Not only does the war continue, but its pacification aspect is by its nature a gradual long-term process. If the end objective is popular support and commitment, this may not be ultimately tested for many years. In fact, our means of measuring its impact suffer from serious limitations. It is also difficult to sort out the relative impact of the pacification program from that of many other factors, e.g. the big-unit war or enemy losses. Besides, exogenous factors may so cloud the ultimate outcome in Vietnam as to make it impossible in the end to sort out what impact pacification had.

Second, I write as not only an analyst but a participant. It is doubly difficult for a participant to be objective about what is partly his own performance. Whatever his claimed objectivity, he can hardly escape a somewhat parochial view. On the other hand, the participant brings some special insights to bear on the problem. He looks at it with a different eye than the outside critic.

Moreover, there is a crying need for balanced if not definitive appraisals. It is fashionable these days to be highly critical about the U.S. role in Vietnam. Coming when it did, involving such great sacrifice to so little apparent end, indeed being apparently so unsuccessful (perhaps the cardinal sin), the Vietnam War has inflicted deep scars on the American psyche. One consequence is that much of what has been written to date is so impressionistic and so often ill-informed or marred by impassioned dissent, as to make even a partial professional evaluation useful at this point. And in the case of pacification, it is hard to point to any systematic analysis -- whether critical or uncritical -- of this neglected aspect of the Vietnam conflict.

This critique is only a partial one. It does not deal with most larger issues surrounding the Vietnam War, such as why we intervened, the influence of limited war constraints in a nuclear age, the larger
political picture, the bombing of the north, or the big-unit war. Its
focus is rather on the practical problems of coping with a highly atypical
conflict, especially in the pacification field. My intent is not to
criticize but to explain. Many critics of the war will find my comments
insufficiently critical, whereas many of my former colleagues will doubt-
less find them unduly so. I labor under few illusions as to the many
flaws of policy and execution which marred U.S. involvement in Vietnam.
Almost all senior U.S. officials, myself included, bear some measure of
responsibility for them at various times. If anything, the mistakes were
even greater on the GVN side, not to mention all the other indigenous
factors -- inefficiency, corruption, political fractionalization -- that
made translation of policy into practice so difficult in Vietnam. But
experience helps one to see more clearly (though perhaps to attach undue
weight to) the actual bureaucratic and operational difficulties in framing
and executing policies and programs. One is more aware of the constraints
imposed by real life.

Hence this critique will focus less on the theoretical than on the
practical -- not because the theory of revolutionary war and how to cope
with it are unimportant, but rather because this already has been the sub-
ject of much scholarly treatment. What most needs to be added is how
real life -- the limitations on available resources, the flawed nature
of those which were available, bureaucratic constraints, institutional
inhibitions, and the sheer practical problems of coping with the unfamiliar
environment within which we had to operate -- so largely determined what we
could and could not realistically accomplish in Vietnam. This added per-
spective is essential to understanding what was done and why it succeeded
or failed. It is a perspective often missing from critical analyses of

VIETNAM WAS DIFFERENT

For Vietnam was different -- unlike anything in previous experience.
Each war is different from the last, but most will concede that Vietnam
was much more different from Korea than, say, Korea was from World War II.
By almost any standard, Vietnam presented a highly unconventional situation.
The very fact that it was so different did much to make our largely
conventional and only slowly evolving approaches to coping with it so ineffective for so long.

First among these atypical circumstances that made our task so difficult was the sharp contrast between the adversary we confronted and the ally we were supporting — a tightly-controlled, ideologically highly-disciplined regime in Hanoi and revolutionary Viet Cong apparatus versus a relatively traditionalist weak regime and half-formed nation in the south. Few would deny that the north and the Viet Cong were more highly motivated and disciplined, more willing to use all means including terror than their nationalist compatriots.

Another unusual difficulty is inherent in the very nature of a largely political insurgency conflict. While the advantage may have lain with the GVN in the incipient stages, by the time 1965 had arrived the advantage lay with the VC attacker seeking to uproot and destabilize, using a rural strategy and hit-and-run plus terror tactics; the defender had to deploy far greater assets to be strong everywhere, and to defend while attempting to build a viable state (leaving aside ideological issues, our strategy in Vietnam was defensive, designed to prevent a takeover, even though some of the means employed were offensive in nature). These special circumstances confronted the GVN and U.S. with a series of painful counter-insurgency dilemmas, as aptly pointed out by Tanham and Duncanson.*

Nor should one neglect the particularly adverse impact from the demise of the Diem regime and the constant political turmoil and coups during 1963-1965. Not until the end of the Buddhist affair in I Corps in May 1966 did even relative GVN stability return. This turmoil undermined the capability of the GVN and ARVN to combat the VC, and thus to a considerable extent forced the U.S. to choose between intervening (and Americanizing the war) or seeing SVN go down the drain. It also largely explains the hiatus in pacification efforts between the 1963 demise of the Strategic Hamlet Program and the advent of RD in 1966.

But even these special circumstances that made Vietnam so different do not sufficiently explain why we did so poorly there. In my view they

---

alone did not make the war "unwinnable," though they certainly raised the cost and lengthened the time span required. Even more controversial will be my assertion that to a considerable extent we realized Vietnam was different, and that our failure was less one of perception than one of giving far too little weight in our programs and policies to the special circumstances that we broadly recognized, and consequently of reluctance or inability to adapt quickly enough.

We may have looked at Vietnam too much as an exercise in containing global communist expansionism, but there was no lack of high-level analysis or realistic grasp of the real nature of the problem in Vietnam itself. After all, we had plenty of time to learn — from 1945 on. As far back as the French days, many were pointing out the essentially political nature of what began as an anti-colonial struggle, became a revolutionary war, and has since evolved into more an external aggression as the revolution failed. Even in the early Fifties when the U.S. was pressing France, consistent U.S. policy emphasis was placed on the need to build a legitimized forward-looking indigenous government as the key to viability of a non-communist Vietnam. United States stress on building such a government in Saigon from 1955 on is another case in point. So is our stress on land reform and on "classic" economic development.

Nor was there any dearth of advice on how to fight insurgency via rural programs, police techniques and resettlement, as in Malaya, or other unconventional means. The record is full of perceptive insights, not just from advisors or academics but from the chief actors, South Vietnamese and American. Lyndon Johnson with his "other war," Robert McNamara in his trip reports, and many others sought broader focus. Ambassadors Taylor, Cabot Lodge, and Bunker were all strong advocates of pacification, of strengthening GVN administration, of getting after the Viet Cong political infrastructure. I recall Ambassador Lodge calling the latter the "heart of the matter." Many imaginative programs were proposed, and several promising ones actually undertaken, though none of a scale sufficient for major impact.

Or take the criticism that the U.S. jumped in and over-Americanized and overmilitarized the war. This was not an early choice but a late, desperate rescue effort. For 18 years it was U.S. policy not to intervene
in Vietnam, but rather to place main reliance on building a viable South Vietnam able to defend itself. So we tried "Vietnamization" under Diem and his successors for a decade. Intervention came only as a last resort when this effort seemed on the brink of collapse, and when the NVA was infiltrating to help give the coup de grace. By this time we had little other choice except not to go in at all.

Yet I would not carry too far this assertion about our broad perceptions. Certainly some were far more perceptive than others, civilians more so than soldiers by and large. But most important, while many perceived the essentially political and revolutionary nature of the Vietnam conflict, we grossly miscalculated its full implications and what coping with it required. We consistently underestimated both the strengths of the enemy and the weaknesses of our side. Politically, we failed to give due weight to the revolutionary dynamics of the situation, the popular appeal of the VC, the declining viability of the Diem regime (which was never strong). Militarily, we underestimated the enemy's guerrilla and terror potential, Hanoi's capacity to escalate, and VC/NVA ability to frustrate a much larger and better-equipped force by hit-and-run tactics stressing economy of force and evasion. One of our greatest military frustrations in Vietnam was the difficulty of pinning down an elusive enemy. However well we perceived the key role of the VC political infrastructure, our tactical intelligence on it was exceedingly poor. Or take the persistent inability of U.S. advisors to understand what was really going on in Vietnamese minds and to operate effectively on it. The list of what we didn't know well enough -- and still don't in some cases -- is almost endless.

WHY WE DID SO POORLY

Yet if we at least broadly perceived the unconventional nature of the Vietnam problem, why were we so slow to give adequate weight to it, to enrich our operational understanding, and to translate this into effective programs of a type and on a scale commensurate with the need? What went wrong? Why was our performance so poor in practice?

To me, the chief reasons for this lie in the various policy and institutional constraints that made our approaches so conventional and
ill-suited to the needs, while inhibiting innovation and adaptation. These constraints rendered the GVN/U.S. response to an unconventional insurgency/guerrilla war situation unduly conventional, expensive, and slow to adapt.

To take up first the policy constraints, these mostly affected the way in which we opted to fight the Vietnam War. A case in point is our conscious acceptance of limwar constraints that allowed the enemy the great advantage of external sanctuaries, because of our quite understandable reluctance to risk widening the war. My intent here is not to criticize but to explain. Indeed, I would agree with this particular constraint. But the availability of sanctuaries across the Seventeenth Parallel, in Laos, and later in Cambodia did critically impede GVN/U.S. military efforts to grind down the enemy in South Vietnam, even after our naval blockade closed off Hanoi's best supply line to the south along SVN's well indented coast.

A second major policy constraint was our stress on gradualism or incrementalism, which appears so costly only in retrospect. This constraint interacted with — and was influenced by — all the others. It sprang from the best of motives — a USG reluctantly driven to direct intervention only after all else had failed, a President seeking manfully to balance the domestic demands of a Great Society against the indeterminate requirements of what first appeared, a Secretary of Defense probably determined to fight a cost-effective war and concerned (as were the JCS) by the distortions of our global strategic posture forced by a growing conflict in SEA, principals and advisors at all levels implicitly convinced that yet another tranche of U.S. forces or step-up in the bombing could not help but turn the tide.

In a sense this last reflected a form of arrogance of power — a conviction, born of our limited understanding of the realities in Vietnam, that throwing so much U.S. weight into the balance could not help but make the difference. Historians and participants will long debate the role of gradualism. The critics will contend that quicker escalation would have availed us nothing. Many soldiers will counter that had we done more sooner (and called up the reserves as the JCS repeatedly suggested) we would have broken the enemy's back. For my purpose, it suffices
to point out that gradualism was a major constraint affecting the slowness of the ARVN buildup till Tet shook the GVN and ourselves, the snail’s pace of land reform, the failure to move faster on pacification, failure to push an anti-VCI program, etc.

Some have pointed to the lack of any coherent overall strategy for coping with the atypical problems we found in Vietnam. Whether or not this was a policy constraint, it is explicable largely by the unconventional nature of the Vietnam War. It was also a consequence of gradualism. The problem did not appear until late to be of such overwhelming proportions as to require unusual efforts to pull it together managerially or conceptually. We fought the war with largely a peacetime management structure. This created an institutional constraint, the lack of adequate machinery -- in Washington or Saigon -- to pull together the complex interlocking strands of an effective overall strategy and to see that it was followed through.

Turning to such institutional constraints on our ability to adapt to the special circumstances of Vietnam, these are nowhere more evident than in our approach to the military conflict. Overinfluenced by the Korean War (and neglecting the French experience in Indochina), we put the bulk of our military aid into building up a conventional ARVN ill-suited to the challenge it faced. Then, when it buckled, we Americanized the war by intervening with U.S. conventional forces and repeating many of the same mistakes. But this is understandable, if not wholly laudable. Institutional constraints -- doctrine, tactics, training, equipment -- made it difficult to do anything else. When we intervened, we did so with a military machine designed, equipped, and trained for a quite different purpose -- intensive conflict in the highly sophisticated environment of Central Europe. It was developed (and rightly so) to meet a quite different enemy, and it is unsurprising that the American style of warfare was so ill-adapted to Vietnam.

Of course, the overmilitarization and over-Americanization of the war -- especially after U.S. intervention -- were also partly inherent in the fact that the situation had deteriorated so far as to require a major U.S. military response. Once this occurred, the U.S. military largely took over the reins of power in Vietnam (as had the Vietnamese
military earlier) and military considerations became predominant. The fact that our intervention was largely precipitated by Hanoi's increasing clandestine invasion of South Vietnam with regular units also helped determine the nature of our military response. Armies like to fight other armies. It is what they are trained and equipped to do. So MACV and ARVN naturally focused first on the big-unit war to the neglect of territorial security.

On the civilian side, the picture is one of GVN and U.S. civilian agencies (though naturally more perceptive of the political nature of the conflict) essentially failing to adapt to the exigencies of a wartime situation. Unsurprisingly, just as the U.S. military did their thing, the State Department focused on political development, AID stressed economic growth and then wartime stabilization. The State Department in Washington and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon for the most part continued to operate as if they were dealing with not only a sovereign but also an effective government, i.e. one that could carry out what it agreed should be done. Similarly, AID kept pressing conventional nation-building programs long after the GVN machinery to execute them had largely atrophied.

But who was responsible for conflict management of counter-insurgency, or of its leading edge -- pacification? The bureaucratic fact is that everybody and nobody was responsible for coping with it in the round. Neither the USG nor the GVN set up any specialized planning or operating agencies for counter-insurgency, except on lower levels. Both were organized conventionally, with little room for activities that cut across agency lines. Counter-insurgency fell between stools, which accounted largely for the prolonged failure to push it on a large scale even though many correctly analyzed the need.

Finally, the U.S. was seriously constrained -- partly for policy and partly for institutional reasons -- in the extent to which it pressed the GVN to deal with the situation along lines it saw as desirable. Somehow U.S. bureaucracies -- civil or military -- are notably reluctant to impose their views on other bureaucracies, especially those of allied nations. This is a complex subject, and the debate over how hard the U.S. should have pressed its Vietnamese ally will long continue. But few would deny in retrospect that we did not press home our own ideas
hard enough on the Vietnamese. We didn't use optimally the power over the GVN that our major contributions gave us. We were their prisoners rather than they ours. This was the case both with respect to ARVN and the GVN. We gave them massive resources, without tying these sufficiently to internal reforms to optimize their effective use. True, one soon runs into the dilemma of promoting stability versus change. The destabilizing consequences of our acquiescence in Diem's fall, for example, influenced our subsequent policy -- as did the importance of a stable political environment as the U.S. troop commitment grew.

In sum, in an atypical situation that cried out for adaptation and innovation, our side was instead highly conventional in its responses. As Herman Kahn has aptly pointed out, there was far too much a "business as usual" approach. A combination of policy and bureaucratic constraints inhibited both the U.S. and GVN from translating effectively into practice their perceptions as to the optimum way to fight what Mao terms a "people's war." The very way the USG (in Washington and Saigon) and GVN were structured diluted managerial focus on this problem area and limited the degree of innovative adaptability needed to meet the special circumstances found in Vietnam. In true bureaucratic fashion each U.S. and GVN agency did what it was used to doing, and there was little overall machinery to assess these problems and force adaptation. Perhaps this proposition is best demonstrated by the fact that in the few instances where innovative organizational and managerial solutions were adopted they usually proved to be substantial improvements (whether sufficiently so is another matter).

WHERE DID PACIFICATION FIT INTO THIS PICTURE?

Pacification 1966-1970 was one of those instances. But the GVN/U.S. approach to pacification also suffered (and to some extent still does) from the same problems that afflicted the overall U.S. approach to Vietnam -- greater perception than generally realized of its importance in coping with a largely political insurgency conflict, but delayed and inadequate execution in practice owing mostly to the bureaucratic constraints on developing unconventional approaches to a difficult, atypical problem area.

Both the Diem regime and U.S. experts saw pacification-type programs
as desirable, even essential, to meeting the VC threat. It has even
been alleged that MAAG Chief LTG "Hanging Sam" Williams urged such pro-
grams in the late 1950s, though he regarded them as not being MAAG busi-
ness. At any rate, the Agroville program beginning in 1959, the Strategic
Hamlet program of 1961, Diem's Civil Guard and other initiatives can be
regarded as efforts in this direction. Diem himself was very alert to
the need for control and support of the rural population, though the
techniques he favored had serious flaws.

But whatever the perceived need, neither the GVN nor U.S. invested
much in it, in great contrast to the essentially rural-based VC. In
part, this was because of the general deterioration of the increasingly
repressive Diem administrative apparatus as it gradually lost control of
the countryside. In part, it was because Diem and his U.S. advisors
turned increasingly to conventional military means to combat the growing
insurgency. This trend was powerfully reinforced after VC insurgency
was supplemented by NVA invasion in 1965.

It was also reinforced by the advent of government by the military
after the fall of Diem and the increasing militarization of GVN local
administration as civilian bureaucrats fled the countryside. A similar
trend took place on the U.S. side, when the more the U.S. turned to
military solutions the less the emphasis on politico-military pacifica-
tion measures. True, by this time thwarting the VC/NVA main forces had
become indispensable to creating a climate in which pacification could
get started once again. Only by 1967, as the enemy's big unit effort
was increasingly stymied, did we turn again seriously toward pacification.
This again is understandable and I have already commented (see Chapter IV)
on how after 1965 it was essential to fight both the main force and village
war. There was a symbiotic relationship, even though the balance of our
effort should have been tilted more toward pacifying and clear and hold.

Another important institutional constraint on pacification was the
lack, until very late, of any management structure for it. Neither in
Vietnam nor in Washington -- neither in the GVN nor U.S. establishments --
was there any agency charged with managing anything so atypical as a
pacification program. However important, this aspect of counter-insur-
gency war had no bureaucratic vested interest speaking for it. Not until
this was created did pacification begin to acquire shape and substance.

Unsurprisingly, the first innovative pacification approaches after U.S. intervention were sponsored by that most flexible and least bureaucratic of U.S. agencies, the CIA. It picked up the PAT team experiment and played the main role in initiating and funding the RD program, which led to creation of the RD Ministry and the deployment of the first 59-man RD teams. AID participated in the corollary New Life Development Program under the RD Ministry. But these efforts suffered from two major weaknesses--insufficient scale in relation to the countrywide need—and the lack of a territorial security environment within which they could thrive.

The solution to both problems was to require the U.S. and ARVN military, who by this time controlled most of the available resources, to take on the pacification job. Related focus on these problems led on the U.S. side to a series of management changes designed to pull together U.S. pacification support, culminating in placing it under the military in May 1967. This led in turn to the "new model" pacification program of 1967-1970, which, despite its weaknesses, stands out as the first major pacification effort attempted on a scale commensurate with the need. Creating an adequate management structure on the GVN side was more difficult, since what needed to be pulled together and expanded was not just a modest advisory and support structure, but major operating programs. Eventually this too was done, culminating in the revival of a Central Pacification Council under President Thieu's personal chairmanship.

Whatever one's view of pacification's impact, compared to other U.S./GVN programs it was quite flexible and innovative. Why was this? In large measure I think it was precisely because the pacification program was something new and different, hence not bound by the same bureaucratic constraints (existing doctrine, techniques, etc.) as other agencies or programs. We were able to write the bible as we went along. The same thing happened on the GVN side.

Nor should the leadership factor be neglected. Another reason for the comparative flexibility and managerial effectiveness of the "new model" pacification program was that to a surprising extent it attracted an unusually able and imaginative group of Americans and Vietnamese, who
were excited and engaged by the challenge it posed. These people were interspersed at all levels; in practical terms they made a whale of a difference. On the GVN side one must recognize the key role played by President Thieu himself, who from 1968 on was chief pacifier in fact as well as in name. Generals Thang, Khien, Phong, and HN were outstanding among the ARVN senior officer corps. Among the top leaders on the U.S. side, Ambassadors Porter and Colby stand out, as do General Forsythe and the incomparable John Vann, the sparkplug of the pacification of the Delta. There were many others at MACV level and in the field, in part because CORDS stressed attracting and keeping the best people. The stimulus provided by interaction between military and civilians working together within a unique single management structure also played a role.

The shifting emphases of the new model pacification program after the creation of CORDS are suggestive of its adaptiveness. In general, the initial emphasis was on buildup of territorial security forces and clarification of their role. Then, as the enemy's Tet and May 1968 Offensives petered out, emphasis shifted to rapid if thin expansion of the area being pacified in the first and second APOs. In July 1969 Thieu shifted pacification priorities again, from expansion to consolida
dation. Instead of the APC emphasis on upgrading contested hamlets to a "C" rating, he ordered stress on upgrading "C" hamlets to "A" or "B" status. This, along with the 1969 Village Development program and local elections, reflected the gradual shift from stress on the security aspects of pacification toward stress on its political and developmental aspects. This stress is even more marked in the GVN 1970 Pacification and Development Plan.

What was your philosophical approach to pacification?

Komer: Above all, remember that we were pragmatists. We all strongly believed that somehow there had to be far greater emphasis on the village war, on sustained clear and hold, on generating rural political commitment in competition with the VC. We kept emphasizing that a rural program like pacification was essential to counter the enemy's rural-based strategy. The bulk of the people lived in the countryside, and we had both to deny the enemy this rural base and regain it for the government.
But within this context our approach evolved rather naturally and pragmatically.

One key element arose from our realization that sustained local security in the countryside was the first essential step -- almost the *sine qua non* -- of pacification. I started out in Washington pressing a host of grandiose "other war" schemes until it dawned on me that unless we regained dominant control of the countryside and provided credible protection on a permanent basis to the farmers, it wouldn't even be feasible to provide them aid, restore self-government, open schools, revive commerce, reform land tenure, and the like. People still criticize us pacifiers for not doing things that, until security was restored, simply could not be done. Until then the farmers are not going to risk their lives and livelihoods to cooperate, the pacifiers cannot do much more than defend themselves (as happened with many RD teams), supplies pile up in depots because they can't be distributed, schools or bridges built are soon blown up, etc. Many civilians involved in pacification just didn't realize that massive improvement in security was an indispensable prerequisite to other programs.*

So in the spirit of stressing first things first, we saw the need to grab hold of substantial military and para-military forces, which in turn showed the logic of putting pacification under the military if this were to be accomplished. We put initial stress on territorial security measures, using primarily the RF/FF but also ARVN, police, RD teams and everything else we could grab. Then we added Phung Hoang and the PSDF to round out the security picture.

But we were also well aware that security alone is not enough -- that a positive side was essential to help engage popular support. Some critics ignore all the constructive programs we carried out as local security improved -- restoration of local administration and autonomy, rural economic revival, refugee care and resettlement, hamlet education, and so on.

---

restoring roads and waterways, massive health and medical efforts, etc. Here too our approach was pragmatic. We stressed first what was immediately feasible in a Vietnamese wartime context, to lay a base for the longer term. Proposals like broadening the GVN's popular base, radical land reform, national reconciliation look great in principle but try to carry them out reasonably quickly in the middle of a mixed up war. Yet note the gradual evolution of the pacification program from primary stress on expanding territorial security to greater emphasis on political action as the conditions precedent were created.

Next, we recognized early that there was no one pacification technique that of and by itself could be decisive if we just put all our resources behind it. So as a practical matter we pulled together in a patchwork quilt all the various ongoing programs that looked as if they could make a contribution, and unified their GVN direction and U.S. support under one central management. To utilize all available resources, we pushed multiple programs simultaneously, rather than concentrating on one or two at a time. Their resources were not very fungible, at least in the sense that we could shift Vietnamese around very quickly.

At the same time, we enforced a rather clear set of priorities. We tried not to fritter away our effort in a lot of pinprick programs such as characterized much of the earlier ATD field effort -- a little rural electrification here, a few well-digging rigs there, a host of modest technical assistance efforts that had little cumulative impact.

Lastly, I sought to give much more direct personal leadership to the program than it had had in the past. Call it my managerial style if you wish. I tried (not always successfully) to leave the essential routine of administration to the ACS/CORDS and his staff and to concentrate on policy, programs, and the essential high-level liaison with Bunker, Westy, Abe, and the GVN. But I believed in intervening from the top to solve quickly certain specific problems that otherwise would be massaged by the bureaucracy for months on end. I did this partly to create a sense of program dynamism; if you act decisively on one given problem, it has repercussions all up and down the line. Even so, I've pled guilty to "over-managing," and have explained (Chapter XII) why I felt this imperative. I also sought to keep in close touch with the field by
frequent visits and to be available to the people I felt I could learn from (such as our CORDS evaluators and the constant stream of PSAs, etc. coming through Saigon). We probably had more open debate in CORDS about what should and shouldn't be done than in the whole rest of the U.S. establishment in Vietnam. We encouraged it. Guys who had an axe to grind often came to us, even the military, because that's the kind of shop we ran. I wanted everything open. A lot of them also freely disagreed with things I did. Montague was one of my severest critics, and he has been at pacification much longer than I. When did you first go out, Bob?

MONTAGUE: In mid-1963. I had done some studies in the office of the Army Chief of Staff on counter-insurgency and what we were doing in Vietnam prior to going out. I was down in the 21st ARVN Division first, and because I started pacification down there as we now know it... with a multiplicity of programs (pacification was the glue that held them together), General Westmoreland asked me to stay an extra year as his special assistant for pacification. He was interested in getting things started elsewhere in the country. We had difficulties because the enemy got stronger, and we couldn't do quite as much as we had anticipated.

KOMER: What about Wisner's comment that you wrote the first real pacification directives, in 1965?

MONTAGUE: That was when you sent me out in late 1966 to help Porter with 1967 planning. I wrote up instructions to the field on what pacification was and that one had to pull all the programs together, security first. Then I wrote what the RD cadre should be doing, how to use local forces like the RF/PF, how ARVN ought to fit into pacification. I even wrote how U.S. forces ought to be used. These were just guidance from the chief pacifier in Vietnam, Ambassador Porter. They weren't sensational. They were largely writing down what we had been thinking about in Washington. Simple concepts designed to tie programs together, nothing fancy.

KOMER: That was our philosophy of pacification. Nothing fancy, just something simple that will work. One thing that bothered me as a practical man was that guys came up with all sorts of proposals that
were sound over a long term -- if you had five peacetime years to develop
them into real programs -- and then proposed that they be carried out
in the middle of a war! Moreover, a war in which it was perfectly clear
that we were operating on a fairly short time frame. It didn't take TET
1968 to make us realize that the chorus of dissent on Vietnam was rising
in the United States. TET simply catalyzed it, made it more powerful.
But the idea that I should back five or ten-year programs as opposed to
quicker fixes just didn't make sense to me.

*SCOVILLE:* That's a very important point. I've heard other people
criticize you for that reason. When we just didn't back certain things
that would seem desirable, they said there was no desire in CORDS to do
anything long range. You give a very good answer.

*KOMER:* Managerially, it was a matter of priorities -- putting
first things first. We weren't going to get anywhere with the other
aspects of pacification until we first reestablished security. Then
we could get after the VCI, and start work on the short-term civil aspects.
And then when we were getting the situation under control, we could work
on the longer term aspects. True, we did start the post-hostilities
planning program with the Thuc-Lillianthal Group when I was in Washing-
ton -- but this was a special type of long lead time exercise that didn't
get in the way of the war.

Was your approach to pacification more numbers and mass than seeking
high quality?

*KOMER:* This question of quantity versus quality is important, so
let me philosophize about it for a moment. We went for quality wherever
we could get it, particularly with respect to advisors and Vietnamese
officials in key spots. But essentially I will argue that massive quan-
titative approaches were the optimal solution, given the nature of the
problem, the low quality of the resources available, and the need for
quick impact.

This sort of approach was almost dictated by the fact that from the
outset pacification was Vietnamese-run, even though largely inspired,
funded, and advised by Americans. This entailed a lot of built-in
constraints; I quickly acquired a realistic grasp of the frailty of the
material with which we were working -- the slender resources, the hangups of the Vietnamese, and the incapacity of the Americans in many cases. Remember that we pacifiers, coming along relatively late in the day, had to make do with the assets that were left, that no one else was really using. We got the ragtag and bobtail. We didn't get the ARVN, except temporarily 50 battalions or so; we didn't get the bulk of the resources on the American side; we didn't get the big American battalions. We got what was left such as the neglected RF/FF and police. Considering what we had to work with, what alternative was there? So we tried not to overload the Vietnamese circuit at any given time, though we pushed them as hard as seemed productive.

Second, we needed a massive across-the-board effort on a countrywide basis if we were to achieve the necessary impact in the village war, even though this necessarily meant some degradation of quality. A 10 percent improvement in 44 provinces was much more meaningful overall than a 60 percent improvement in three or four provinces. Moreover, some administrative structure and resources were available in all provinces. Therefore, why confine ourselves to a few? The enemy didn't. Granted that this approach led to widely varying results -- some areas and programs did much better than others -- but in a conflict like that in Vietnam it is cumulative results that count.

A third reason for stressing quantitative mass approaches by 1967 was the urgent need for gaining across-the-board momentum quickly by this late in the day. If we had started way back in the late Fifties or even the early Sixties, we could have had a much more careful buildup; we could have used much more sophisticated techniques; could have had much more time to learn and improve. By 1967 we didn't have time for a lot of fine-tuned adjustments, or to really work on it village by village. There are 2000 villages in Vietnam, and it'd be 1984 before we even got a quarter of them garrisoned, much less pacified. Some said you must do it with the RD cadre, and the RD cadre must stay permanently in the village, one team per village. I said: "Gentlemen, it's a matter of simple arithmetic. Vung Tau can turn out only 10,000 of these guys a year. That's the maximum, before we begin to lose all quality. At this rate of increase, offset by attrition of RD cadre each year, it will be 1995 before
we have enough R&D cadre to cover Vietnam." So the short lead time that was all I thought we could afford forced us into quick quantitative fixes.

Fourth, remember that many aspects of any countrywide pacification process, especially sustained territorial security, necessarily were manpower extensive in nature. We were vividly aware of a major weakness of previous pacification efforts, in which the securing troops stayed only a brief period and then moved on, letting the situation deteriorate again. To provide some permanent in-depth security presence took a lot of people. We had to provide continuous local security for thousands of hamlets, not just for a few. We were dealing with 10,000 hamlets, 2000 villages, 250 districts, 44 provinces. This almost dictated simple mass approaches, especially given the nature of our resources.

The same rationale applies to our measurement systems, which have been so criticized. True, they were very gross and oversimplified. But gross quantitative measurements were much better than the previous subjective evaluations or impressionistic reporting. A correspondent would visit one hamlet for an afternoon, see how pacification didn't seem to be going well in hamlet "X" and then proceed to generalize that to cover all of Vietnam! I kept trying to explain that it was a matter of 10,000 hamlets. It might be going bad in "X," it might even be going bad in hundreds of other hamlets, but if it was going better in some 7000, then we were in pretty good shape. Being responsible for the whole program, we had to focus on what was going on in 10,000 hamlets. If you weren't, you weren't dealing with what was really going on in Vietnam. It would be perfectly easy to focus all our resources on one province and really clean it up... put three U.S. divisions or ARVN divisions in there, absolutely saturate the place, give every family 40 acres and a mule...

MACDONALD: And then they'd accuse you of taking them and showing them your showpiece.

Komer: They did. An Giang was our showpiece province, and Ba Tri was our showpiece district.

In sum, given the real life circumstances we confronted, we had to accept our inability to get sophisticated high-efficiency programs. We didn't have the time; we didn't have the material. Therefore, making quantity substitute for quality, running very simplified (indeed frequently
oversimplified) programs was almost the only effective way to do business. In essence, we designed pacification realistically as a concerted series of relatively inefficient, low-confidence programs carried out country-wide in an effort to saturate the enemy and build faster than he could destroy. Indeed, I recall no really efficient program in Vietnam — no single effort, military or civilian, run by Americans of Vietnamese, that you would call highly efficient by American standards. The circumstances of the time, the material you were dealing with, the chaotic impact of war on a society that was still far from being well formed, much less modernized, meant that everything was going to be rather inefficient.

Takashi Ota of the CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR cites three basic pacification defects as he saw them in April 1967: (1) pacification was an American program rather than a Vietnamese one; (2) pacification was an administrative program, in both the civilian and military spheres, rather than a political program; and (3) by neither the Americans nor the Vietnamese had it been treated as the core of the entire war effort, not just an adjunct to the military campaign. Were these valid comments as of early 1967?

Komer: True, the "new model" pacification program was largely an American concept, but the actual programs, even in 1967, were all Vietnamese. In fact in April 1967 there wasn't much of a pacification program. The only thing we were really doing was the RD Cadre Program and that was much more Americanized than most. But one of our successes was to sell pacification to the Vietnamese; I think we've successfully done that, and I give chief credit to people like Thieu, Khiem, Thang, and a few others.

When Ota said pacification was an administrative rather than a political program, I'm not sure what he meant. If he meant making political support the primary goal before you achieve security, restore local administration, and revive the economy, then he is asking too much of the Americans and the GVN. It's much easier to destroy than build up. It's much easier to proclaim a national revolution than it is to try to save the people from being terrorized, etc. I believe that by 1967 the VC were no longer achieving mass results with their propaganda. If the VC were popular before then, I think it's largely because for a
long time they were more adept than the government in proclaiming themselves true nationalists. Equally important, it looked as though they were winning the war. I am one of those hard-nosed fellows who says that Vietnamese popular commitment sides mostly with the people they think are going to win. So the fact that by 1969 we seemed to be winning in the countryside created a snowball effect that further influenced pacification progress. So in saying in April 1967 that pacification wasn't a political program, Ota was being rather premature.

Moreover, as pacification got under way in 1967-1969, note our stress on engaging the people in their own self-defense, the hamlet elections, emphasizing village autonomy, reviving the economy, etc. Don't all these things have political impact? I think they do. I can't measure it; I can't prove it, but when the situation improves, the farmers are getting richer, terrorist activity is going down, the VC hold on the people is being broken and VC taxes are no longer being collected, and the VC are not drafting all the kids as well as the GVN -- doesn't all this have an impact?

If Ota meant by saying pacification was an "administrative" rather than a "political" program that the Americans really concentrated more on management and organization, I think he's right. I defy anyone to have any program -- political, military, or anything else -- without management. The most bureaucratic, the most detailed administrative management was that exercised by the VC. I realize now why the VC could only attack around once every couple of months -- because they spent the rest of their time writing reports or organizing, as well as running around to avoid the bombs and artillery.

I sympathize with Ota's third point that pacification should have been more central. But it depends on what time frame you are talking about. Pacification as the primary tool might have sufficed in the late Fifties, but by 1963 you couldn't win in Vietnam by pacification without a major military effort as well.

How would one sum up the chief accomplishments of the "new model" pacification program? What were its strong points?

KOMER: In a sense this is like asking a football coach in the third
quarter what the final score will be. The game is far from over yet. Hence, in keeping with the organizational and managerial focus of this study, I will confine myself mostly to the U.S. and GVN accomplishments in setting up and carrying out a program that was at least better attuned to the atypical nature of people's war in South Vietnam than most other aspects of the GVN/Allied effort.

(1) In general, I'd say that these accomplishments were more managerial and organizational than conceptual. We didn't invent pacification, but we did put it on the map at long last on a major scale as an indispensable part of counter-insurgency strategy. U.S. and GVN efforts in 1966-1970 converted a lot of perceptive thinking and some innovative but small-scale experiments into a coherent, integrated program on a big enough and consistent enough scale to gradually achieve significant impact.

(2) The severalfold buildup of pacification assets was a major accomplishment (see Chapter XIII).

(3) The "new model" pacification program was pulled together, and built up into a major effort in remarkably short lead time. While some things were done before mid-1967 when CORDS was created, essentially the two years between mid-1967 and mid-1969 were the period of major reorganization, buildup, and territorial expansion via the two APCs.

(4) The organizational key to U.S. ability to stimulate this development was the creation of CORDS within MACV. It was the device that gave unified civil-military management to most U.S. advisory and support resources and which provided high-level impetus to getting the GVN to move in the same direction. Its efforts led, partly by example and partly by influence, to a reorganization of the GVN pacification structure at all levels, culminating in the revival of a ministerial level central pacification council, the creation of a Deputy P.M. for Pacification in March 1969, and Thieu's own assumption of chairmanship in July 1969. Thus in three years pacification rose to a status where its top policymaker on a regular basis was the President himself.

(5) CORDS, personifying a vested interest in pacification, forced greater operational focus on political and counter-insurgency aspects of the U.S./GVN effort. Pulling together civilian and military efforts
on both U.S. and GVN sides led to greater recognition that the war was as much political as military and that adequate interface was essential. CORDS helped make the U.S. and ARVN military more pacification conscious, and was better able to do this because it operated as part of the U.S. military command -- part of the team, as it were. This would have been much harder to do from the outside.

(6) While pacification was from the outset an essentially Vietnamese effort, CORDS managed through a combination of factors to have considerable impact on it. The Interface was, all things considered, quite effective. Most important, while much of the program was U.S.-designed and sponsored, it was effectively sold to the GVN. At this point, the GVN is doing the bulk of the planning and almost half of the financing too.

(7) The "new model" pacification program was notable for centralized systematic planning and follow-through, plus decentralized execution.

(8) The GVN and U.S. pacifiers, as chief advocates of territorial security, were the chief architects of making it a major military program, building mostly on the neglected RF/PF. The pacifiers promoted a reorganization creating a separate territorial security chain of command, so that the territorial forces would concentrate on this task, while the U.S. forces and ARVN focused on the big-unit war.

(9) The pacifiers built on improving territorial security with a wide range of essentially civil programs, though largely military-administered. These programs -- reopening of roads and waterways, refugee care, economic revival, local self-help -- became recognized as an integral part of a civil-military pacification effort. Of these civil programs, restoration of semi-autonomous village and hamlet administration may be potentially the most important.

(10) Also central to insurgency war, the pacifiers designed and generated growing GVN effort, though still with many weaknesses, against the political core of the insurgency -- the VC infrastructure.

(11) Creation of the PSDF was a major step forward in stiffening local security and, perhaps more important, in engaging the people in their own defense. Its growth to over three million enrolled is impressive, even though effectiveness may be low.
(12) Pacification management on both the U.S. and SVN sides was
(at least compared to many other aspects of the U.S./GVN effort) unusually
flexible and adaptable. Pacification programs were realistically based
on the nature of the resources available. They were pragmatically built
on these. Quantity was used as a substitute for quality, since high
quality programs were beyond reach. But the level of innovation was
comparatively high, both civilian and military, in the "new model"
pacification program. Among the many examples might be: (a) CORDS
itself -- a unique civil/military enterprise; (b) the Phung Hoang pro-
gram; (c) Operation Recovery; (d) APCs; (e) new measurement systems --
the HES, Revised HES, TFES, etc.; (f) the RD program, including the
59-man teams; (g) the Vietnam Training Center; (h) the National Training
Center at Vung Tau; (i) the CORDS Evaluation Branch. The Army MAT pro-
gram to train RF/PP and the Marine CAP program were both successful
innovations.

(13) That CORDS played an effective advisory role, at least com-
pared to other U.S. advisory efforts, reflected in large measure its
unusual emphasis on advisor selection, training, and retention. This
seemed essential in view of the fact that pacification was an essentially
Vietnamese program. CORDS got longer military advisor tours with special
incentives (civilians stayed 18-24 months), had a high advisor extension
rate, set up its own U.S. training center with special emphasis on language,
etc.

(14) Lastly, even taking a relatively pessimistic view of what has
been accomplished, the "new model" pacification program seems impressively
cost-effective. One must look at inputs as well as outputs. It utilized
99 percent Vietnamese personnel and mostly locally-generated resources.
At peak it has absorbed only 2-5 percent of the total U.S./GVN outlays
in Vietnam.

In sum, I'd essay the speculative judgement that given the environ-
mental circumstances, the time available, the limitations of materiel,
resources, manpower, etc., it has turned out the most cost-effective
major program in Vietnam, and one that is apparently having a significant
though indeterminate impact. The 1969-1970 results are a direct conse-
quence of all the buildup work put in during 1967-1968, despite TET.
If TET 1968 hadn't come along, I think these results would have shown considerably earlier; on the other hand, if the enemy hadn't exhausted himself in the TET and later offensives, it probably would have been a much more gradual upturn.

But how much has all this effort really accomplished in the countryside? This is the ultimate payoff.

KOMER: Agreed that it is too early to tell how deep or lasting an impact has occurred. It may prove transitory. It is also difficult to say how much the apparent improvement is attributable to the pacification program as opposed to other factors. Yet, despite all the flaws in the picture (some of which will be described in the next section), the upsurge in local security and development in the rural areas, the roads opened, refugees resettled, etc., seem impressive. Among other things, there appears to be a substantial increase in popular acceptance if not support of the GVN.

SCOVILLE: Has there been an increase in the people cooperating now?

MONTAGUE: Well, take a look at the People's Self-Defense Force. When 2,000,000 plus people join, there's a good deal of cooperation.

KOMER: And it's largely voluntary. There are undoubtedly some instances of coercion, where you're made to understand that it's the thing to do to join. But essentially the improvement in the GVN/Allied military position before TET, then the shock of TET, and the sharp improvement since have made the people much more favorably disposed toward participating. Of course, the fact that the GVN seems to be winning may have a lot to do with this. Beyond this, although you can't base it on evidence, is it conceivable that all the things we've done for the Vietnamese farmers — providing greater security, winking out the VC infrastructure, providing the economy, opening the roads; giving them better rice strains and fertilizer; making available the things they're buying like outboard motors, pumps, bicycles, etc.; the hamlet school program; the medical programs — have had no impact on Vietnamese popular attitudes? Haven't they at least made the farmer and his family feel that the GVN and the Americans are doing better by him than the VC? Counterpoint to this the increasing use of terror, forced taxation, forced draft
at gunpoint, etc., that has had to characterize the VC response. As
the VC got into more and more trouble, they really had to bear down on
the people. So it may well turn out that what the VC did to the people
turned the people against them more than what we did for the people
turned the people for us. How you balance these things out, I don't
know.

MONTAGUE: Look at VC recruitment. If people are all for the VC,
why don't they join them? Particularly when the VC are out to recruit
everybody they can. Recruitment is down probably less than 1000 a month
now, countrywide. It's very low. Why?

KOMER: Surely Hanoi didn't want to send in the NVA unless it was
necessary. There were two reasons why Hanoi sent the NVA south. First,
because they needed the NVA to finish off the job, and later (and this
became more and more important), because they were running out of VC to
match our buildup. At the least, the pacification buildup and expansion
has helped swell the CVN manpower reservoir while critically restricting
that of the VC. It has helped damp down the insurgency in the South,
whatever the continuing capability of the NVA.

I also grant that one of the reasons why pacification went well in
1969 was because the enemy hasn't done much to oppose it. Perhaps his
exhaustion in the 1968 TET and follow-up offensives forestalled this.
He didn't put much effort into combatting the pacifiers. He decided
other things were more important, such as attacking the cities at TET
and repeating the performance two more times.

MONTAGUE: But then he switched back. In the last year he's been
saying that you've got to attack pacification.

KOMER: True, but you will recall that he's been saying this all
along. His bureaucracy always has to put in that we've got to attack
the pacification program. But he hasn't done much. It may be that he
lacks the capability; it may be that he is targeted on other things
he regards as more important. It is probably a combination of both.
Anyway, there's no doubt that the relative weakness of the enemy response
to pacification has helped give us an entrée. Now maybe he'll change
his mind. I notice Colby's people picked up a document the other day
in which the enemy says he's going to concentrate on the hamlets. Of
course, I've seen those things enough times before that I'll believe them when it happens. On the other hand, I do not believe that pacification is as fragile as all the critics say it is. I think it would now take a major enemy effort targeted on the pacification program to seriously discombobulate it. He might be able to slow it up; he might even be able to halt the continued improvement, but to cause a major pacification setback would take one hell of an enemy effort.

MONTAGUE: What Bing West brought up ... that perhaps pacification will be meaningless in the future because everything will depend on how ARVN stands up against the main forces -- doesn't seem to me true. Through pacification you've made it very difficult for the enemy ever again to operate as effectively. Now they can't recruit madly, can't gather great stocks of food and other supplies, and have a harder time causing the people to switch their allegiance. They just may be deterred from coming back, because the chances will be lower.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES AND MISTAKES IN PACIFICATION PROGRAM

In keeping with the focus of this paper, I'll confine myself mostly to operational and management problems. Of course it is much easier to be critical afterward than to have been prescient at the time. In hindsight the number of things that the ARVN and U.S. could have done better or sooner, or just did wrong is legion. While the 1966-1970 pacification effort was a major if belated step in the right direction and is making a significant if indeterminate contribution, I readily grant that it has been cumbersome, wasteful, and only moderately effective to date. In analyzing its shortcomings, I only ask that one realistically accept certain limits on what was feasible in a Vietnamese context. Since pacification was essentially a Vietnamese effort, this posed a whole series of real-life constraints. By the same token, the criticisms that follow attempt to be practical and realistic. My test is whether they could -- or can -- be carried out in real life.

(1) First I'd argue that the greatest mistake in pacification is that we didn't do more of it earlier. Whatever its weaknesses, some form of major pacification effort was indispensable to coping with a politico-military conflict like Vietnam. Optimally, certain aspects
of it (perhaps on the Malayan model) should have been instituted in the late Fifties on a large scale. As the conflict grew in intensity, pacification by itself became a less sufficient answer, but it should never have been allowed to collapse in 1963-1965. Then in 1965-1970 we Americans should have pressed it harder and supported it more, at the cost of only a modest additional diversion of resources from the anti-main force war.

(2) Our pacification advisory efforts suffered, like most other U.S. efforts in Vietnam, from inadequate appreciation of the realities of Vietnamese social structure, behavior patterns, and motivations. It also took us far too long to grasp the nature and techniques of revolutionary war as practiced by the VC and North Vietnam, at least in terms of operational insights to which our strategy and tactics should have been adapted.

(3) Largely as a consequence, I'd lay great stress on the massive intelligence failure to get the right kind of information on what the enemy was really up to in the countryside, as opposed to O-8 on his main force units. Particularly notable was the lack of political intelligence on the VCI. We were partly flying blind.

(4) I cannot yet understand why we delayed for so long an effective attack on the key VC politico-military infrastructure -- the VCI. This should have been designated a primary task way back in 1955 and the necessary professional police apparatus built. When we finally did get around to it, GVN performance was delayed and feeble at best in many critical respects. It still is. This has been one of the great pacification failures in Vietnam.

(5) Related to it is GVN/U.S. failure to build up early an adequate professional police and judicial establishment, again a sine qua non of effective counter-insurgency. Our public safety program was more one of logistic support and management than one addressed to building the kind of professional capability needed for counter-insurgency war.

(6) If sustained territorial security is the essential first step to effective pacification, this was not recognized or at least acted upon sufficiently until very late in the day. The Vietnam experience
is replete with examples of areas being "pacified" but then the security forces moving on and the area regressing. Optimally the RVNAF should have developed in the late Fifties a territorial security structure, with a separate chain of command from ARVN divisions and not let it deteriorate so in 1962-1966. A strong RF/PF type command under a senior ARVN general should have been created much earlier than 1968 and much more adequately staffed.

(7) Those who like Sir Robert Thompson deplore the lack of focus on effective administration are absolutely right. We should have done a lot more earlier in pressing for improvement (or re-establishment) of effective, responsive, reasonably non-corrupt GVN administration in the provinces and below. The GVN allowed corruption to get out of hand, and we Americans did all too little to bring it under control. Similarly, there was lack of sufficient emphasis on creating an adequate judicial system in the provinces.

(8) There was wholly inadequate attention to the counter-productive ways in which the U.S. and ARVN military were fighting a counter-insurgency war. If a prime objective was to protect and gain support from the people, our overly military approach failed to take adequately into account how much we might be alienating the very population whose support we were seeking. Not enough emphasis was put on indoctrinating both ARVN and U.S. forces to this end. However, I think the overall extent to which the rural population was alienated has been overdone by some critics.

(9) In general, the catalogue of GVN administrative weaknesses that inhibited pacification effectiveness would be a long one, however explicable. One of the most serious was insufficient high-quality leadership at every level, and lack of adequate GVN or U.S. focus on measures to remedy it. Far greater attention should have been paid to selecting and training properly province and district chiefs, for example, and removing them where necessary.

(10) Another serious weakness was the feebleness of the GVN information and propaganda effort — a critical need in counter-insurgency war.

(11) Given the problems faced by the GVN in strengthening itself, the U.S. did not exert itself sufficiently to influence GVN performance
on this score. This is easier said than done, but the strides CORDS did make suggest that even more would have been possible.

(12) Turning to organizational weaknesses, neither the GVN nor the U.S. organized optimally to meet the special requirements of the atypical Vietnam War. Both should have developed sooner and more effectively a top management structure for pacification. The lack of any such vested bureaucratic interest is one key reason why it was so long in getting off the ground.

(13) If pacification basically entails both civil and military aspects, then we delayed too long bringing the civilian and military strands together in an effective manner. This was essential both for proper ordering of priorities and for a balanced effort. On the GVN side it is a shame that a strong Central Pacification Council with an adequate staff didn't really operate full time until 1969. Of course Diem and Nhu had given strong central management earlier but had subverted its purposes. On the U.S. side, a vigorous case can be made for a stronger "other" war supervisory mechanism at White House level, as was finally done, and for establishing something like CORDS in 1965 rather than 1967.

(14) While it entailed many problems as well as benefits, on balance we probably should have gone for greater integration of U.S. and GVN management structures. I for one would lean in retrospect toward a joint command as providing much better leverage on RVNAF improvement. General Ridgway's impressions of the effectiveness of U.S. command over the ROK forces during the Korean War is instructive on this score.*

But there are many devices short of this which would have contributed a good deal -- e.g. a combined operations center issuing unified directives on the Malayan model, a Joint Economic Board, a Joint Promotion and Assignment Board to jack up RVNAF leadership. I would not denigrate the considerable influence the U.S. had over RVNAF, but feel that it should have gone much further. The cry of over-Americanization was feared unduly in my opinion.

(15) Pacification plans up through 1967 were overambitious in

---

relation to capabilities. We tried to walk before we could crawl, and paid inadequate attention to the need for a semi-permanent security presence at the hamlet/village level, and to the logistic and administrative facts of life.

(16) Despite all efforts, pacification suffered from inadequate GVN and even U.S. follow-through. Plans and programs laid down are not plans and programs executed. Constant monitoring and inspection are indispensable but were often lacking.

(17) Nor were adequate measurement systems developed, however hard we tried -- and we were more imaginative than most. Even the Revised H2S still focuses mostly on the quantifiable. Nor did we do a good enough job of analyzing the data we did collect. In retrospect we should have set up at the outset well-staffed analysis groups in both Washington and Saigon, reporting directly to top management. Operations research was also weak, and what little existed was insufficiently absorbed.

(18) While the U.S. advisory structure gradually improved, it still left a lot to be desired. We should have fought harder for top talent -- civilian and military -- and been more ruthless in pruning out the deadwood. Those who point to our lack of institutional memory have a valid point. Advisors should have received special training and career incentives and have been required to stay for two or three years. Greater and earlier emphasis on Vietnamese language and social patterns would have helped.

WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN?

If my previous analysis is correct, then some general "lessons" flow rather obviously from it. But first two equally obvious caveats. Let me reiterate that so long as the fog of war continues, definitive conclusions are difficult to draw. Next, the unique features of the Vietnam situation are unlikely to be duplicated, nor may any lessons learned be equally applicable in a different situation. Indeed, as in the case of what we learned in Korea, the experience may lead to misperceptions about how to deal with what turn out to be quite different problems.
On the other hand, one consequence of apparent failure to win out in Vietnam may be the conviction that the U.S. cannot successfully cope with Vietnam-type insurrections. This would be a dangerous misreading of the lessons from that tragic conflict. For many -- though by no means all -- of the professionals actually involved believe that a modified counter-insurgency strategy, one more attuned to the political realities of that atypical conflict, could have led to a more satisfactory outcome -- at far less cost in blood and treasure. The case for this belief rests partly on a web of controversial evidence about experiments that succeeded but were never widely adopted, but also on the degree of success -- even if transitory -- achieved by the "new model" pacification program of 1965-1969.

(1) Perhaps the key operational lesson from our Vietnam experience, which though it seems self-evident was learned the hard way, is that atypical problems require unconventional solutions. This sounds almost banal, but as Vietnam illustrates it is not all that simple. Involved are not only a realistic appreciation of the nature and dimensions of the problem, but balanced programs designed specifically to meet them, and flexible machinery to carry them out effectively. From this basic design flow all the rest.

(2) The sooner we correctly diagnose a major insurgency problem and decide whether or not and how to deal with it, the cheaper and more effective the resulting effort is likely to be. Preventive medicine in the incipient stages -- political, police-type, or whatever -- is the best answer, provided the right dosage is given early enough. If this, like most of the other lessons cited here, is simply restating the obvious, look at what usually has happened.

(3) The normal analytic and decision processes of government tend to be slow to appreciate the full dimensions of atypical problems and to generate adequate responses.

(4) Once active insurgency reaches the point where it dominates much of a nation's territory or population, some form of massive pacification effort is needed to suppress its popular base and rebuild that of the government. This might be feasible by pacification-type means alone before the insurgency acquires major military strength.
After that stage is reached or external military intervention occurs, combined pacification and major military operations are required, pacification becomes a corollary to the latter but if neglected, as in Vietnam, becomes a far more costly and iffy proposition later.

(5) If insurgency (with or without major outside help) becomes broadly and deeply rooted, pacification must be undertaken as a massive time-consuming gradual process, continuing long after the insurgency seems militarily defeated but shifting emphasis from population protection to police-type action and constructive politico-economic programs as security is restored.

(6) Coping with an insurgency stimulated and managed by an elaborate clandestine apparatus like the VCI makes not just territorial security but a major police-type anti-infrastructure effort indispensable.

(7) In assisting less developed countries to meet the special problems of insurgency war, we must recognize the practical limits of the possible where the local government's capabilities are involved. Programs must be realistically tailored to the realities. Relatively inefficient, oversimplified quantitative measures may prove optimum. Special emphasis must be placed on strengthening local administration and increasing its effectiveness and fairness.

(8) It almost goes without saying that in coping with revolutionary or "people's war" measures that alienate the population are counterproductive and those that generate popular support should by definition be stressed. The trick is to identify them, and to promote them adequately.

(9) Turning to organizational and managerial lessons learned, the essential one is the serious weakness of conventional government machinery in this case both U.S. and Vietnamese -- for coping with the unconventional problems we confronted in Vietnam. In dealing with such major active insurgencies, we cannot separate out the political, military, and economic aspects and deal with them quasi-independently either at high policy level or in the field. A unified approach is essential, lest the individual bureaucracies march to their own tunes, as happened so often in Vietnam. Special measures are required to pull them all together.

(10) In effect this means much more integrated policy direction, as well as specially designed machinery to execute unconventional programs
effectively and adaptively. Somehow, a deliberate effort is required to forestall the inevitable bureaucratic tendency to deal conventionally with problems by institutionalizing more flexible adaptive management, with a premium on innovation and experiment rather than the reverse.

(11) If the U.S. desires to maintain an adequate capability to support counter-insurgency capabilities of friendly governments in cases where this seems appropriate, present machinery and programs seem inadequate and ill adapted to the need. The adequacy of unconventional warfare and police-type programs is highly questionable, as demonstrated in Vietnam. Adequate planning and policy coordination mechanisms hardly exist.

(12) If, as, and when major support to a counter-insurgency effort is required, special ad hoc U.S. machinery should be set up early and at a suitably high level. Similarly, unified management of any U.S. support effort in the field is essential.

(13) By the same token, any U.S.-supported government engaged in a major counter-insurgency effort must be pressed to create special ad hoc machinery to deal with it.

(14) Where, as in Vietnam, the local government is so weak and ineffective that the U.S. decides on major intervention, some kind of combined management is essential, as is greater use of the leverage that the U.S. input gives.

(15) The range of special measures required for optimum effect points to the need for a much more professionalized U.S. advisory effort on both the military and civilian sides. Almost invariably the best advisors in Vietnam were the most imaginative and least conventional or bureaucratized.

To end as I began, the above practical operational lessons will seem to many beside the point. To them, the chief lessons of Vietnam are that the war is unwinnable and that we shouldn't have intervened in the first place in an immoral colonial war where vital U.S. interests are not involved. I will not debate these points, though they often smack of post facto rationalization. It was the fact that we apparently failed or at best seemed to get stalemate and endless war that led many
to shift their views. However, our experience with pacification does suggest that we can adapt to need, however late and however inefficiently; we can be flexible and innovative; and that if we had done much of what we see more clearly now earlier and better, war might not have been so seemingly unwinnable. But I'll leave this to historians to sort out.