CONVERSATIONS WITH RURAL VIETNAMESE

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PREFACE

In November of 1969 I visited the outlying regions of four provinces -- Hau Nghia, Kien Hoa, Quang Ngai, and Quang Tin -- in order to gather information concerning that amorphous concept called pacification. My interviews with 124 Vietnamese were unstructured and open-ended. My intent was more selfish than scientific -- a desire to escape from MACV and talk to the people.

This document was submitted to MACV, along with a companion report by Bing West. Neither enhanced our official popularity in Saigon, although the observations about Quang Ngai and Quang Tin were attentively received at the headquarters for northern I Corps.
I. TRANG BANG DISTRICT, HAU NGHIA PROVINCE, NEAR CAMBODIA

I was anxious to return to Trang Bang, an area I had visited extensively during 1968 and early 1969. Bordering Cambodia near Tay Ninh Province, this district has always seen heavy VC activity. The American military presence is consequently a large one.

The drive from Saigon took less than one hour, since major portions of Route I, which connects Pnomh Penh with Saigon, had been rebuilt by RMK in the time I had been gone. Construction had also continued on a series of houses along the road on the edge of TSN airbase. Apparently most were owned by ARVN officers, for free labor was still being provided by soldier-masons, with sand and cement delivered in ARVN trucks. Perhaps one should be reassured that at least they still have enough confidence in the future to commit their funds to construction projects.

My objective that first day was simply to arrange for a two-day visit to begin the next day. Primarily I wanted to ask two Vietnamese friends to accompany us on our visits to several outlying hamlets and PF outposts. One I found working for CORDS at a neighboring district in Hau Nghia. I had no trouble borrowing him for a few days. My second friend had in the meantime been redrafted, and had been assigned to the Trang Bang district chief as a bodyguard and driver. Getting him released proved to be a little more difficult. Unable to locate the district chief that day, I left word that I would return the next day.

A Vietnamese-speaking American unknown to the Vietnamese around district headquarters apparently caused quick concern. I had just left the TOC (Tactical Operations Center) where I had joshed with a Vietnamese talking over the district radio. His language had been colorful; in fact, rather crude. I asked him only half seriously if such language was really necessary. Dressed in shorts and slippers without shirt, I had no way of knowing who he was. In any case he did not even bother to reply. A few minutes later I learned he was a captain, the assistant subsector commander. Great.

A half-hour later, after visiting with the assistant district chief with whom I had become quite friendly during my previous visits,
I observed the results of this particular encounter. At the time, I was seated outside the district compound gate talking with a few of the PF's standing guard duty. Since it was already past noon, there were several others milling around. After a few minutes of small talk our little discussion group had increased to include about 15 PF's. Suddenly the above-mentioned captain arrived, signaling one of the PF's to follow him. The PF returned shortly thereafter, addressing quietly the PF's with whom I was still talking. Our conversation, which had just begun to become interesting, died quickly thereafter. I addressed the PF whom the captain had originally signaled, asking if he had been scolded by the captain. He replied that he had not been, but offered no further explanation as to what had transpired. I queried further, finally learning that he had been told to inform the PF's not to talk to me about anything important, just the weather, etc.

A Vietnamese friend explained later the circumstances behind this cautious attitude. Apparently both the district chief and this particular captain had been reprimanded recently in connection with a CORDS construction project being built within the district compound. Materials had disappeared. After a short investigation, both men had been implicated. As a result, American visitors were suspect and warranted special handling.

I had several interesting talks with the assistant district chief. A civilian, he had graduated after college from the National Institute of Administration. Given the fact that we had often talked freely before and that we shared a close mutual friend, our discussions were both frank and uninhibited. It was sad to see him so discouraged and dissatisfied. In fact, he wanted to be replaced as soon as was possible. The principal problem seemed to be poor relations with his military superiors. He had clashed with the province chief over his political affiliations. In addition, he said he could not respect the district chief, a man he considered both illiterate and lazy. In general, he felt as a group, the military in district and provincial positions were more interested in money-making schemes than actually implementing a policy aimed at winning the support of the people. He repeatedly
stressed that there was nothing about military leaders who, albeit sometimes bravely, could lead men into battle that otherwise qualified for positions in government. He criticized this situation as crucial, for he felt that while the government's policy was in most cases a correct one, the lack of conscientious implementation under good men at province and district levels made it, in specific terms, ineffective. He repeatedly stressed how helpless he felt in this regard. He was directly under their thumbs.

In addition, we talked briefly about the current political situation. He felt that in the people's eyes the GVN was never weaker. He wanted very much to know what my opinion was and that of most Americans. We also discussed his particular political affiliation, the Progressive Party, built around the TDV (Tan Dai Viet) party organization. Not a member of the so-called government party, it came out in May 1969 in opposition. He described his personal difficulties in this regard. The province chief had undertaken to obstruct their political activities, ordering police to arrest and temporarily detain key party members. He himself had been harassed. Several times the two men who traveled with him as bodyguards were detained at police check points. His troubles finally resulted in a transfer to a less important district. Pressure from Saigon then arranged his return and even resulted in the province chief's being reprimanded for his actions. The assistant district chief described these actions as having been taken out of ignorance. Anything not clearly supporting the province chief had been regarded as a danger. The province chief had simply acted accordingly. In the assistant district chief's estimation he had shown little understanding of how a free political system was meant to operate.

The last day of our visit to Trang Bang we had an opportunity for a second short talk. I had sought him out specifically to ask his opinion on a couple of subjects. First, I was curious how much he would be willing to tell me about the large numbers of Hondas, possibly as many as 300, both new and used, that I had seen about two miles from the Cambodian border. I had often heard that Hondas stolen in Saigon were transported to this point for transshipment to Cambodia.
Of course this could only be accomplished with the acquiescence of GVN officials, in particular the police. There are at least 15 police check points between Saigon and the place where I saw the Hondas. He laughed, remarking that I was very observant. He confirmed what I had heard, offering to show me much more if I was interested. Once again he offered this type of situation as typical of why he wanted to be relieved. There was nothing he could do. He had often remarked in the past that similar schemes were taken very seriously by those profiting by their operation. To threaten their continuation would result in one's being placed in a very weak position. Much money was involved, money that could easily be translated into power if, in fact, the very perpetrators themselves were not GVN officials. He had often told me what he feared most was being put into jail because he had been so rash as to alienate an important person or someone enjoying the support of such a person. He made very good sense.

I also asked him about his opinion of the HES method of rating hamlet security. He laughed, saying that he was not pleased at the way these ratings were arrived at. He felt the adviser and the district chief, feeling similar pressures for progress, supported each other's optimistic assessments of the security situation. He personally did not feel that the general situation had appreciably improved, stating, however, that in some hamlets there had in fact been noteworthy improvement.

As to his expectations of the future, the situation that he considered optimum was a free election in which each Vietnamese had one vote. For the war to continue solved nothing and only resulted in greater problems to be solved once peace was restored. He was unclear about just how such an election could be achieved, and was quite skeptical that the VC considered such a solution as being optimum or, for them, even necessary.

Traffic along Route I was about the same as I had known it six months before, both in terms of quantity and manner. Military convoys were just as frequent, speeding just as recklessly as before. A stop by the CORDS office had produced the same long lists of traffic accidents involving both property loss and serious injury or death to
Vietnamese civilians. Claims were piling up. It appeared that claims against the U.S. Government took as long as ever to be processed. One of the problems seemed to be that the claims office in Saigon simply mailed information via Vietnamese mail to the claimants. When after an appropriate time no reply was received, the claim was accordingly canceled. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese mail service only with great difficulty ever reaches an individual at the hamlet level. Many houses are unnumbered, in which case the letter remains unclaimed at the village or hamlet office.

Traveling down Route I on my way back to Saigon after the first day’s trip, I stopped to visit three families I had once visited before. Situated right along the road, they have experienced some rough years. Their sufferings began during the war against the French and have continued throughout this one. The first family was busy harvesting their peanut crop -- father, mother, and children. Two sons were RF soldiers in a neighboring province and therefore were not present. I was amazed at how much this family had suffered over the years due to the war. I first met them when a flare had landed upon their house, burning it to the ground. Their current dwelling had once been only the kitchen. The father pointed out a second foundation closer to the road. It had been destroyed when a French convoy was ambushed by Viet Minh forces. Things had changed little.

Since night convoys had ceased along the road there had been some improvement. The people now dared to sleep in their homes. Six months previously they had not dared, for fear the VC would set up an ambush and the tanks providing security would reply in kind. Several unfortunate incidents had already occurred in this manner. Since I had last seen this family they had lost another one of their water buffalo. It had been mysteriously shot by a passing military unit. The old peasant said he was not sure if it had been done intentionally or if it had just been an accident. I wondered how he survived, for I remembered without his reminding me that he had already lost a buffalo to an ambush such as described above. As he had described it, the people had been able to save themselves only by scrambling for a bunker. For months after that night they had led the one remaining
water buffalo farther away from the road for safety where they also
found a place to sleep.

Asking him about his peanut crop this year, he scowled somewhat,
saying about one third had been ruined when an APC unit chose to drive
through his peanut patch to reach a tree-line in the background. He
mentioned that he had filed a claim for compensation but had not heard
whether it had been approved. His wife, who had had little to say up
to then, guffawed, saying even if they did ever receive compensation
the village authorities would take their share first. Since such
claims are paid directly by check I was curious as to how village
authorities could finagle a share.

I walked over to the neighboring house and began talking to its
owners. The house was under construction, the straw-mixed-with-mud
walls being made while I was watching. The owner took a break for a
few minutes, long enough for me to talk with him briefly. Although I
did not originally remember him, he remembered me from a conversation
we had had some eight months previously. At that time his house had
been farther in from the road, on the other side. He said he was now
moving back to this side for better security. Years ago he had lived
at this location, another house destroyed during the war against the
French, presumably at the same time as his neighbor's. We chatted only
briefly for he did not seem particularly talkative. On the way to the
next house I passed a new cement grave. I learned his wife had been
killed by an airstrike.

The third family received me warmly. I had spent an entire
afternoon with them about eight months previously. They asked why
I had not returned sooner. A chair was brought out, and soon I was
seated while they continued plucking peanuts from peanut plants piled
high nearby. We talked about the war, the U.S. presence, and prospects
for peace. The father, his leg in a cast, explained how he had read
in a Vietnamese newspaper that American troops were going to withdraw.
In contrast with the responses of other people with whom I have talked
in the past two weeks, I observed no remorse in the way he discussed
this prospect. By his remarks it was obvious that he associated our
presence with the continuation of the war. Once we had left, there
might be a chance for peace. His leg was about to be taken out of the cast. He asked me my opinion, for he was worried what the result would be. From a small cup he took out several bone fragments taken from his leg that was shattered one morning when a U.S. tank mysteriously opened fire some hundred yards up the road. At the time, he had been drinking his morning coffee at the village market place.

Upon returning to Trang Bang the next morning, I sought out my friend, the district chief's bodyguard. The district chief was still unavailable, but I found my friend waiting in the district compound. A colorful fellow, he represented a wealth of experience. Since Chia first picked up a rifle at aged 18 he has been a Cao Dia militiaman, Vietnamese marine, mosquito eradicator, intelligence agent, PF platoon leader, PRU, and, finally, bodyguard to two district chiefs. I sought his company on this trip both for protection as well as for advice. Familiar with, as well as sympathetic to, peasant problems, he is an expert in eliciting information. I have seen him hoe a field of potatoes for an old lady while she talked freely about her relations with the Viet Cong. Dissatisfied with his current situation, our visit provided a welcome relief. The district chief finally did consent to allow him to accompany us for a few days.

I think it important at this point to outline briefly the principal reasons for Chia's dissatisfaction. A man with a conscience, he knows the way the Viet Cong operate; in short, what has made them strong. He has long been dissatisfied with the GVN reaction to this problem, having seen at first hand the gap between what the GVN says is its policy and the way these policies are actually carried out. His current dissatisfaction reached a peak about a year ago when he observed a Buddhist monk buying mosquito-net cloth in large quantities. Since he knew the VC also used these for bandages and also knew the location of the monk's pagoda, he confronted the monk at the scene. At first denying the implication, the monk then proceeded to offer Chia money if he would release him. Believing in what he was doing, Chia persisted in turning the monk over to district authorities. His disgust was complete when, two days later after a sizable sum of money was delivered via an intermediary to the renownly corrupt S2 sergeant,
the monk was released. At the time, Chia swore that he would never again lift a hand to help the GVN. A crisis resulted two months later when he received his military induction orders. Six months ago, just before I left, he told me that he would not serve the GVN. Several friends had encouraged him to reconsider. Finally, he joined the small war of the PF's in an ex-VC village near the Cambodian border. From there he was recalled by the new district chief to serve as bodyguard. Chia confided in me that it was difficult to protect a man whom he did not respect.

A conversation between the above-mentioned assistant district chief and Chia would also appear relevant here. I played no part in this conversation and am recording only what they discussed with each other. As I approached, Chia was complaining to the assistant district chief about his current situation. He said many other PF's felt the same way. At 3500 piastres (U.S. $30) a month, how could they possibly be expected to support their families? It was curious to see the assistant district chief, himself dispirited, have to defend the existing situation. He asked Chia if the VC were not much worse off. Chia, of course, admitted that the VC were in much worse straits than even the lowly PF. The assistant district chief then pointed out that to stop fighting would mean a communist victory. Again Chia agreed. In fact, I had often heard him use the same argument in conversations with others. Chia replied that he understood very well what he was fighting against. The assistant district chief, of course, also knew his past record.

The conversation ended a few minutes later when Chia pointed out that he was not complaining solely about his own situation; he had over the years sacrificed much more. What he could no longer accept was a situation where the poor were asked to sacrifice for the rich. He stated frankly that it was really just the inequality of the situation about which he was complaining, not the actual situation. From a personal standpoint he would be willing to sacrifice anything to beat the communists; in fact, he knew that only by such public-spirited sacrifice could the war be brought to a successful conclusion. But why should he and his friends sacrifice when there were so many
who knew no sacrifice, who were, in fact, just getting richer? The government's recent austerity taxes made this inequality all the more obvious. The burden of the tax and resultant inflation fell hardest on the poor. The assistant district chief agreed, for he felt the same way.

Both Chia and the assistant district chief proceeded to explain one additional example of their dissatisfaction. Chia, along with a group of others, had sought to buy a small engine, with attachment, to mill rice. They wanted this machine both for their own use as well as to rent to others when they were not using it. The machine is readily available in Saigon. Prior to purchase, Chia requested from the assistant district chief permission to operate such a machine. His request, as well as those of many others, was turned down. The assistant district chief explained that he had received a directive from the province chief prohibiting the use of such machines. The reasoning was flimsy, something about insecurity and that it would only be rented to others. Neighboring provinces, however, had no such restriction. The assistant district chief cited this as just one more example of the government's policy being led astray for personal profit by local officials. They intimated that the owners of large rice mills had exerted pressure in order to obtain the above restriction. While the government propagated "mechanize and modernize agricultural methods," a province chief was meant to be receiving money from those who stood to lose if this policy were judiciously carried out. They were convinced that this was what was being done. I would have liked to have had an opportunity to confront personally the province chief with this situation.

During the two days in Trang Bang, I met with the MACV adviser several times. I was impressed foremost by his desire in good conscience to do a good job. He was, nevertheless, slightly defensive about the district's HES ratings. He stated that each month they are only arrived at after group discussion and analysis. We said that we would share with him our observations on any of the hamlets we visited. I asked him specifically about an area on the edge of the district town, which had been adjacent to an American fire support base along
Route I. He said the hamlet was now rated C and relatively secure. It used to be VC. While we did not have an opportunity to visit this particular hamlet, Vietnamese friends warned that daytime security was limited to the portions of the hamlet nearest the road. In addition, the area to the rear of the hamlet had been declared abandoned by the GVN. While not totally abandoned, it was true that few families dared to remain overnight for fear of artillery shells falling at random. Most of the people in this area went out during the day to work their gardens, but returned at dusk to sleep near the district capital. I had often talked with them as they passed by in their ox carts. Such migrations enable us to consider these people as being pacified. Were they resident in their hamlet, it would be difficult to consider them under GVN control. Comparing Trang Bang with Mo Cay in Kien Hoa Province, as I shall do below, makes this fact quite noteworthy.

The adviser stated further that he had absolutely no rapport with his district chief, in fact he often had difficulty in even finding him. He also did not feel satisfied that he had access to enough information about his district. As an example, upon arriving I heard of an incident a few days before right within the district town in which a group of VC had had short contact with a couple of PF's. A B-40 was fired. Both sides apparently dispersed quickly thereafter. When I heard the adviser mention that the VC rarely got together in as much as platoon size, I asked him his estimate of the group of VC involved in this incident. He replied three, at most four. The Vietnamese with whom I talked spoke of from twenty to forty VC. He was also surprised at the frequency with which the VC entered outer sections of the district town. Chia's house, for example, was located in this area. He never slept at home. The VC's last visit had been fourteen days before during which the people had been gathered together and preached to about the American withdrawal and implicit VC victory. The uninitiated might ask how Chia's wife and children could be safe in that kind of situation. Chia just laughed, for he knew where VC families lived if anything were to happen to his family. As a result, his family is quite safe.

Having heard quite a bit about him from both this civilian deputy
and his adviser, I was anxious to meet the district chief. I concluded after meeting him that their criticisms had been justified. I was finally able to locate him behind the district compound in a small rest area he had built there. Made of bamboo and thatch, it was dominated by a large bar. At the time, he was entertaining a young Vietnamese whose Renault convertible was parked outside. I racked my brain trying to figure out what sort of a deal was being arranged. The district chief's friend was wearing about as much jewelry as a man could wear.

A Marine captain, the district chief hailed from Central Vietnam. I recognized immediately that about which the assistant district chief had remarked earlier. The district chief began our talk by explaining that he had been a soldier for eleven years and had fought many brave battles against the communists. His manner of speech was slow and deliberate, certainly not the least bit erudite. The assistant district chief had said before that he was not even capable of composing a coherent letter.

I was amused at the reception this adviser received as he walked over. Greeted warmly by his counterpart, the adviser smiled accordingly. Putting his arm around him, the district chief explained how closely they worked together and how much he appreciated the adviser's help. He added that what he liked best was that this adviser did not try to tell him what to do like some other advisers he had had. After translation, the adviser no longer smiled, just scowled openly.

Our first night, at Chia's suggestion, was spent in a hamlet, which, despite its relative proximity to Route I, had less than a year ago been considered under VC control. Under the accelerated pacification program, an outpost had been built and the village, with only minor skirmishes, had passed under RVN control.

We arrived just before dusk in a downpour, thereafter spending a few minutes waiting in vain for the rains to subside. Finally, because we had such little time, we passed through the first of three adjacent hamlets, reaching the middle of the three just as the last rays of daylight were visible. By the time we had met the platoon leader and some of his PF's, darkness had already fallen. What
transpired until I finally retired around two o'clock the next morning was a most interesting experience.

Chia had joined this particular unit right after being drafted and was anxious to show us his accomplishments. It was his way of saying that pacification was possible if carried out correctly. He was warmly received by the villagers and had obviously been very effective during his time in the hamlet. He explained that his job had been as sort of a political cadre handling relations between the people and PF's. Since no such position actually exists, it was obvious that he had just decided that this was how he could be most effective. In general, the PF's exhibited excellent behavior with the villagers. Upon seeing visitors, especially one who could speak Vietnamese, we received several invitations, only a few of which we accepted. As it was, since rice wine was the standard libation, I was quite proud to have lasted as long as I did. I was at a distinct disadvantage, since my hosts, in particular the PF's, seemed as a matter of course to stay up all night, generally sleeping during the day.

We had assumed that we would spend the night in the outpost. Instead, we spent all our time walking around the hamlet talking and drinking. PF's augmented by PSDF's (People's Self-Defense Force [untrained civilians]) seemed to have the hamlet well covered, at least there were always several no matter where we went. One farmer was quite elated to have visitors, most pleased because he just happened to have a freshly slaughtered dog leg for feasting, not to mention a very special brand of sweet rice wine. He was also our host for breakfast the next morning. Our last stop was a funeral party, which was in the process of an all-night vigil. A small band -- Western guitar, Vietnamese "violins" and drums -- played while the mourners ate and drank. The deceased had been 85 years old. Many relatives and friends from nearby hamlets were present.

The peasants talked freely about their life while under VC control. Most explanations were an interesting mixture of statements, first against the VC and second against the GVN or American response, especially military, to the VC. For example, in answer to my question of what was the best thing about being pacified, some replied that now
they could sleep without being bombed. When the VC controlled their hamlets, or when the GVN district officials and the American advisers thought the VC had control, the hamlets were declared "free fire zones." This meant that any pilot flying at night could bomb or strafe any area where a light was visible.

Now, having been "pacified," the people could keep their lights on all night. In fact, each house on the outskirts of Trang Bang district town was required to keep a small oil lamp flickering on its gatepost, like the street lights in Boston in the late nineteenth century. This requirement gave rise to an unforeseen irony, as we saw one evening when we stopped for a beer on the outskirts of Trang Bang. The night seemed quiet enough, with some children playing in the street, radios blaring, and people chatting on their doorsteps. As we sat drinking, the street lamps farther down the road started winking out one after another. Chia said the VC were coming in, so we drank up and left. The people later told us that the VC did nothing, just walked up the street yelling, "Get those lights out!"

When the people lived in a free fire zone, the VC would allow them to have lights, and it was fear of the GVN that kept them in the dark. When the people lived in a pacified area, the GVN wanted them to show lights, and it was the VC who kept them in the dark.

Complaints still existed, however. Several farmers complained about being harassed by helicopters while farming their fields. One peasant described how a helicopter had ominously circled for several minutes only 10 meters over his head. He asked me what he should do in such a situation. My advice was simply to run. Another complained about having to carry his sampan into the hamlet every night. To leave it in the river or canal meant that it would be shot if observed from above. A very old peasant asked me if I had heard the artillery rounds exploding sporadically in the fields around the hamlet. I certainly had heard, for some seemed to be very close to the hamlet's edge. He estimated that each explosion destroyed about 5 gia of rice. His one hectare of rice paddy near the river had last year received four rounds, a loss approaching 20 percent of his potential harvest. His son reminded his father that at least now there were no longer
any rounds that fell within the hamlet's boundaries. The old man agreed.

Few talked about the VC in anything but critical terms. Granted that because of my presence and that of the PF's it would have been difficult to have done otherwise, I was nevertheless led to believe that this hamlet had never been pacified by the VC, simply occupied. As an aside, it should be remembered that the same description can easily be applied to some areas currently under GVN control, especially those where our presence is primarily a military one and where with our arrival death and property destruction are wrought upon civilians. Such was certainly not the case in this hamlet. Not one home had been destroyed. I was particularly impressed by the judicious behavior of the PF's with regard to the villagers -- both respectful and courteous. Perhaps this was just a function of the excellent PF platoon leader. Presumably Chia, during his time there, had also been a good influence. In any case the result was very encouraging, certainly a marked contrast with what we were to experience the next morning and afternoon.

After a short, albeit undisturbed, sleep in one of the peasant's homes, we walked back out through the hamlet to the road. I remarked to Chia my surprise that there had been so few mosquitoes the night before. He just laughed, replying that a few glasses of rice wine before retiring made one immune to mosquitoes. It seemed at the time, however, a rather high price to pay, for my head was heavy.

Returning to district headquarters we met again with the district adviser. He was awaiting a visit by the U.S. battalion commander currently working to the north of the district town. He invited us to stay and listen to the colonel's rages. The colonel had made several reports that local PF's were firing at his men from their outpost. Another incident had apparently occurred early that morning. The adviser had also heard of an incident the previous afternoon and therefore knew what to expect when the radio announced the impending visit. We declined his invitation, but said if he liked we would be willing to pay a visit to the area that afternoon. He readily agreed.

Walking out, I encountered the same assistant subsector commander
who the day before had cautioned his men not to talk freely with me. I asked him his opinion of these reported incidents. In stellar Vietnamese fashion when dealing with Americans, I was told he had scolded the PF platoon leader, warning him that if these incidents continued he would be relieved. I should have been reassured by these remarks that the situation was well in hand. Instead I became more determined to find out what was actually happening. As we were leaving the district compound a jeep sped past carrying a bristling American lieutenant colonel, no doubt the battalion commander concerned.

Later that day the adviser told us what had transpired. In addition to an incident involving a PF and American soldier, one or both of whom were drunk, a joint ambush had been conducted a few days before during which a VC had apparently walked right past several PF's and escaped. None had fired, confirming what had been suspected, that the PF's were cowards and possibly even VC sympathizers as well. The lieutenant colonel also wanted the adviser to ensure that his men would no longer be fired on by PF's as they drove past the PF outpost.

Upon arrival at the PF outpost in question I confronted the PF commander. His side of the story was slightly different. Each morning after clearing the road up from district, the Americans remained within the village area. In American eyes this was to ensure that security was maintained for convoy units passing through the area. An area previously under VC control, the PF leader stressed the people's fear and lack of understanding of these soldiers. They were particularly terrified of the Negro soldiers. Apparently the soldiers also felt it was their prerogative to search villagers' houses periodically. In addition, they liberally used the people's houses as resting places.

I asked specifically about some of the incidents that had occurred. According to the PF leader, the reason why the PF's had not fired on the VC who passed by their ambush was simply that a group of American soldiers would have been in their line of fire. The incident involving a PF and an American had occurred, but the PF hoped that the American had also been reprimanded, for they were both at fault. He stressed that the PF's were angry at the United States for the way they were acting in the village. This was the PF's village, their responsibility.
Why were his men not trusted to provide security within the village area? He also worried about the consequences of this situation, for he realized that if his outpost was to survive they would need the cooperation of these same villagers. In addition, some of his men had their families there. A few had lived there all their lives. He related several incidents that had many times caused his men to retaliate by firing over the top of U.S. vehicles as they had passed. He said, however, that he would guarantee that this type of action would not be repeated, but asked us to try and understand his situation and that of his men. Curious, I then asked what the assistant sub-sector commander had told him in regard to these incidents. He had been told simply that if they continued, to report them as soon as they happened.

We proceeded on into the village area, turning to the right off the road and driving to the edge of the village where many mud-walled houses had only recently been erected. I learned these people had just moved in from a VC area where the same U.S. battalion had built an outpost. Although some said they were fleeing VC, most replied candidly they were afraid of artillery fired in support of the base, especially at night when it fell all over the place. Some of the people were defensive, not willing to talk until assured by the platoon leader that I had come to help them, not bother them.

The platoon leader took us to the house where the worst incident had occurred. Inside were three sewing cabinets, one without the machine. Apparently on a search of the area, the Americans had discovered what they considered a surplus of sewing machines. Because there were so many machines in such a poor hamlet, they surmised the purpose was to make uniforms for the VC. The two Kit Carson scouts who accompanied them had provided little explanations as to why the two Americans carried one of the machines out of the house, filled it full of M-16 rounds and then threw it down a nearby well. It was also unclear just what role the Kit Carson scouts had had, if any. The people maintained that the Americans had done it, but that the Vietnamese had done nothing to stop them nor provided any explanation of what was happening. One of the PF's confided in me that the Kit
Carson scouts, being ex-VC, had probably urged the GI's to do this in order to give the Americans an even more unfavorable reputation among the people.

As we prepared to leave, one of the PF's was trying to convince a girl of about 25 to tell me what had happened to her. Giggling from embarrassment, she explained that that morning coming from the market she had met two GI's coming toward her. As they split to let her pass between them she said one had grabbed one of her breasts. The PF who now seemed more upset than she added that he had witnessed the incident and had yelled his displeasure in GI English after the Americans. The words he received in reply, at least the ones he understood, were curses. His pride had been hurt, but there had been nothing else he could do. He just swore back in Vietnamese. My presence and apparent interest had offered him a slightly better alternative.

As we returned to the road, I fell behind the main group talking with the platoon leader. A woman ran out of her house to meet us. Her children had said that the platoon leader had brought an American to help who could speak Vietnamese. Speaking to him, she asked if there were not some way he could keep American soldiers from searching her house. Twice they had done this, causing her the trouble of having to put things back after they had left, not to mention her fear. To me she said that everyone knew she just had a few cookies and candy for sale and had nothing that warranted her house being continually searched. The platoon leader confessed that he had no power to deter the Americans but would try again to get some help from district. He told her he thought my visit might bring some relief.

From all that he had seen, the district adviser concluded that he would try to get the U.S. battalion commander to agree to allow the PF's to be responsible for security within the village. The PF platoon leader thanked us for our visit, adding that that would be the best solution. I wonder if it was carried out?

That afternoon after lunch at the local Chinese restaurant, we returned to a series of three hamlets that I had known quite well six months before. The restaurant where we ate had been crowded both that day and the day before. The majority of customers were GVN
officials, the first day primarily police, the second, a large group of MP's. None of these people could afford what they ate and drank on their official salaries. The conclusion left to be drawn should be too obvious to need mentioning. Since it was the best restaurant in the district, a study of its customers over an extended period might well offer some interesting results. Such situations are obvious to Vietnamese and can in large part be offered as the source of some of the dissatisfaction among conscientious, low-level CVN officials. From others less conscientious one often hears the remark: "Why should we sacrifice when our superiors are just getting rich?" Then they, too, attempt to find ways to fill their pockets.

An American convoy passed by coming down the same road from which we had just returned. In the back of one of the trucks were six Vietnamese bound and blindfolded. Three were girls, two, old men, the last, a young boy. I wondered what was going through the minds of the Vietnamese who stood along the road watching. Did they not perhaps feel pity for the prisoners? There were also two GI's with weapons in hand standing over the Vietnamese. Walking back to the district compound, I talked with several people whom I had known before about what they had seen. All I did was ask about the convoy traffic and then just mention the prisoners I had seen. Their remarks were most sympathetic. One lady asked me if I thought old men needed to be blindfolded that way. Another said she had wondered what they had done to be arrested. They did not look very guilty.

A small cart pulled by an underpowered Honda provided our transportation to the three hamlets where we planned to spend the rest of our time in Trang Bang. We rode as close to the hamlets as we could and then walked the last kilometer into the first hamlet. The road had finally been destroyed by the tanks and APC's, which had provided security to the bulldozers pacifying this area. We picked our way over the crushed culverts. It was ironic for me to reflect that, at the time, the rationale had been to open this road to military traffic, thereby pacifying the hamlets. The bulldozers had thus been tasked with clearing 100 yards on both sides of the road. Otherwise, so the military explanation had gone, snipers could obstruct the traffic.
The fruit trees and occasional houses that were in the way were a small price to pay for such progress. When the operation was completed and before American troops left the area, over two thirds of the dwellings in the area had been destroyed or burned. At the time I left Vietnam six months ago, few families dared to remain overnight. Many others no longer had a place to stay anyway.

But now the irony was complete. The very road that had offered the justification for the military aspects of the operation had been destroyed by the means we had chosen to implement the operation! The road was now impassable to any kind of vehicle, military or civilian.

The hamlets themselves were now considered secure. Two RF companies were occupying the area. RD cadre were also meant to be operating there, although we did not see any during our visit. I walked along the main road looking for familiar faces. It was a ghost town in the full sense of the word. Chia learned from a couple of families located near the outpost that although we were safe along the road, we would be taking our chances if we ventured off of it. They explained that all of the rich families had left to build houses at locations nearer the district capital. Only the poor, who could not afford to do otherwise, remained. Of those who did, most still considered it advisable that the younger children go into town at night to sleep.

We had spent nearly an hour in the hamlet before I recognized a familiar face. Her house had finally been destroyed. She was busy sprinkling DDT among the remaining beams to kill termites. Thereafter, she rearranged the tin covering them so that as little water would reach them as was possible. We talked briefly about our conversations in the past, specifically the destruction that she considered had been malicious. In the end, however, it had been a mistake that her house was totally destroyed. A bulldozer had erred and ploughed under the remaining structures in the area. When it was realized that the location for the outpost was not there but somewhere else, it was already too late. One of the claims I had seen at the CORDS office had been hers. She asked me if she could expect to be reimbursed. I said I was not sure.
Nearby, a peasant invited us in for tea, providing chairs on which to sit while we chatted. Yes, he dared to stay overnight in his house. No, he did not see the VC often. The last time he had seen them was over two weeks ago when they passed by at night. The doors of his house had been shot up during the "pacification operation." He had taken them down and had not bothered to replace them. As a result, it had been possible for the VC to enter his house and quietly awaken him. They told him not to worry, that they would soon return in force. He felt they did not dare stay too long because the RF outpost was only one hundred yards away. As to how many VC there had been, he was not too sure. It had been dark without a moon. A friendly man, he seemed at ease while talking with us. Yet I wondered how he really felt. During our stay he showed us the remains of his Buddhist altar. A GI had taken a knife and slit the main picture into shreds.

We talked to only a few other people, having difficulty finding any more with whom we could talk. An old peasant living alone in a small straw hut explained he had no place to go. He could still fend for himself and didn't want to be a burden on his children. He would like to move somewhere else where it was safer but only had land here which he could farm. Elsewhere he would starve or become a burden.

Coming from the district town at about that time, a Honda approached carrying the commander of the two RF companies occupying the two outposts in this area. He had heard at district that we had come out to visit and hurried to return. On the one hand, he repeatedly emphasized the security of the area. On the other, however, whenever we motioned in a specific direction off the road he cautioned us about the possible presence of guerrillas. From his accent, I judged he was originally from the North; I learned that he and his men were actually from a neighboring province on temporary duty in the village. They were only scheduled to remain six months before returning to Tay Ninh. Any deeper questions about the local situation were answered simply. He was a military man concerned primarily with providing security. He added, quite correctly, that this was especially true given the fact that he was a stranger to the area. Regarding the GVN hamlet
representatives, he said he rarely saw them. He knew there was a village office out on the main road, but he had no direct contact with them. He invited us to stay with him that night, an invitation we reluctantly declined. We were due in Saigon by eight o'clock the next morning and realized that too many things could happen at night here to separate us from the district town and from getting an early start. I hoped we might be able to pay another visit some time soon.

As we walked back, we passed a dozen or so soldiers on their way back to their outpost after a day's R&R in the district town. I judged six of them, two of whom were officers, to be totally inebriated. I asked Chia what he thought of the situation. I asked him specifically what changes he could make if he were company commander. Chia first tried to make it very clear that he would never have a chance of becoming an officer. The most he could aspire to was a PF platoon leader. He did think, however, that two companies in this area properly led and motivated would be more than enough to secure the area. If he were ever offered the chance to command a company, he would have only one requirement -- that he be allowed to recruit his own men. What he did not want was to inherit someone else's undisciplined unit. He seemed to think that bad habits, such as the irresponsibility we had just observed, were hard to change. What he wanted most were local soldiers. For example, there were many GVN soldiers from these hamlets. Why weren't they offered the opportunity to fight for their own hamlet?

The district adviser was somewhat distressed with our observations. I stated categorically that I did not see how these hamlets could be considered pacified. He conceded that officially he may have stretched a point. On the other hand, he had seemed quite pleased with our observations of the previous day. He stressed again that no one really rates these hamlets, that they rate themselves. He referred throughout to these three hamlets as "Williamson's folly," after the CG of the U.S. 25th Division which had conducted the original operation. I would guess, in its simplest form, the problem centered around assessing relative priority. According to what I consider important, those three hamlets are at best occupied and then only
superficially. In any case, I would be surprised if anywhere near the recorded population actually is resident there. This fact, of course, would ultimately only be in the HES's favor, since very few people move from areas undergoing pacification out to VC areas. The flow is, of course, in the opposite direction, a fact that HES jubilantly records.

The paradox seemed so obvious to me as we walked back to district. A GI is not, at least by original nature, a malevolent animal. But fighting an invisible enemy who, as we say, hides behind the people, or, as they say, are of the people, the tendency is to blur the distinction between the reason for our fighting here and the object of that fight. The latter, fighting the VC, is meant to contribute to the former, protecting the Vietnamese people. In fact, however, rural Vietnamese are still more endangered and victimized by our presence, i.e., the way we fight the war than by the VC themselves. In some cases, especially in the past, this has led to the counterproductive result whereby the VC have become stronger due to the manner in which VC villages, not VC as individuals or armed military units, have borne the brunt of our military might. The moralistic question of innocent suffering need not even be broached, for it should be justification enough that the result is detrimental to our original purpose.

Often the element of time is crucial. What one MACV adviser once called the unavoidable consequences of a necessary operation is now considered by his successor to have been folly. At the time, it was a VC village. There were enemy within, and therefore it had to be pacified. When we get shot at, are we not to fire back? Tracer rounds set straw on fire. The progression of unavoidable consequences can be long. But the perspective of the current MACV adviser is different. To him, it has now become Williamson's folly. To some, even at the outset of the operation, it was regarded as misguided, short-sighted, and a mistake. Can this perspective that time itself offers be somehow shortened, hopefully to the point where a unit commander might be able to recognize in advance a military action's consequences of the reason why we came to this country in the first place?
Training combined with experience might offer possible solutions, but neither suffices. Vietnam is a special war; therefore it would be incorrect to modify existing military principles to conform to its unique situations. Finally, by the very nature of a Vietnam tour, experience is a scarce commodity. Time is short, split tours all too frequent. In a situation where the lives of American soldiers are at stake, there can be no higher precept than protecting those lives by any means available. The one easiest at hand is to substitute risking American lives by the use of overwhelming firepower. In a situation where the enemy is difficult to separate from the people, often it is a VC village that is targeted, not individual VC's. The results can be distressing to someone who holds before him the original ideal of keeping the South Vietnamese people free from communism, both for their sake and for that of our country. To use a communist term, the internal contradictions with which we are faced are never more real than when pondering these facts.
II. MO CAY DISTRICT, KIEN HOA PROVINCE, THE DELTA

Traveling to Mo Cay district, Kien Hoa Province was equally as informative in these general respects. Specifically, the contrast between ex-VC areas so often in the past considered guilty by association by both the GVN and the United States, but now undergoing pacification and considered by HES as under our control, brought into high relief these dilemmas. When under VC control, we considered, at least as evidenced by our actions, anyone resident in these areas as synonymous with the enemy. Normally, if unarmed and not trying to evade, the populace was not physically harmed, indirect fire weapons, of course, to the contrary. Material property, however, was often considered to be capable of supporting the VC and was therefore destroyed. The impact upon the civilian population so victimized must be considered as we bring nominal security to areas that have been under VC control in the past. The people still remember.

Mo Cay district was unique in many ways. Much, however, of what I experienced was quite typical of Vietnam, in particular the delta. Mo Cay has a long revolutionary history. To this day, even HES statistics record nearly 70 percent of the population as still under VC control.

We learned that at Tet, VC control had surged, that much of what was now considered under GVN control had been staked out in only the last six months. By the troop disposition it was obvious that the GVN was expanding along the main LOC's, nearly all of its forces being deployed right along the road primarily protecting bridges and the access to the district town. With the exception of a few that had built huts scattered along the road and whom I recognized as refugees, there did not appear to have been major population shifts, such as is typical in many other areas in Vietnam, Trang Bang affording a good example. There, security has not been brought to the people, but rather the people have been forced to flee to security. I wondered how long it would take a U.S. brigade with a Mo Cay as an AO to achieve a similar result.

Despite the troop deployment along the roads, several of the
villages we passed just off the road had been listed in province as VC. The Lambretta driver who picked us up at the barge after crossing the river and drove us to the district town was kind enough to point out all the places where mines had exploded, blowing up Lambrettas such as that in which we were traveling. He judiciously drove right down the middle of the road.

On our first night in Mo Cay we chose the most outlying PF outpost on the map, and late in the afternoon began to walk out toward it. PF's from the outpost nearest to it had been directed to provide security until we had linked up with PF's from our outpost for the night. Situated on a riverbank in the middle of nowhere, the outpost had presumably been built to secure a future bridge across the river. It had been blown up in 1963, and since that date the people on the other side were isolated from district, except by boat. The GVN increasingly control the roads in Mo Cay, but the VC have lost little of their control over the waterways.

The people living on the PF's side of the road were few, at most a half dozen families. The actual area of PF operation, unless reinforced from district, was likewise small. Nevertheless, the VC kept them busy, for they could harass with impunity from the other side of the river. This they did, day and night, although during the time we visited they chose only just after we had fallen asleep to fire a B-40 over the outpost. Swearing profusely because his sleep had been disturbed, a PF had a round in their homemade mortar within thirty seconds. No adjustments were necessary, for he could almost predict from where it had been fired.

The PF's seemed to be a good unit, well led and disciplined. Their platoon leader had been a PF for five years. His assistant had previously been a Vietnamese marine. All were locally recruited, two of whom were Chieu Hoi. Their complaints were typical of those of PF's everywhere. Situated at the very end of the supply line, they seemed to lack everything. Things had nevertheless improved appreciably, since all were now armed with M-16's, for which, as in Trang Bang, several had modified AK-47 cartridge clips to hold 39, instead of the standard 20, shells. For their mortar they lacked shells. The reason
was familiar: being homemade, theoretically it was not authorized
ammunition, but without it they were lost. Only with it and their
M-79 could they keep the VC at bay on the other side of the river.
M-79 rounds were just as crucial. At least now the weapon was standard
issue. Only one year ago few PF outposts had them. They also com-
plained about not having a machine gun, but smiled when I reminded
them they did at least now have individual machine guns — their M-16's.

They had communication only with district and the nearest PF out-
post. An RF company outpost was less than two kms. away, but they
had contact with them only via district. Regarding patrols, none
were sent out the night we slept there. They explained they were
hesitant to go out without the assurance that they would receive help
if they were outnumbered by the VC. In any case, since they had only
one radio, to go out meant that those who did so would have no contact
with anyone at all.

From personal standpoints their complaints were quite simple.
Three thousand, five hundred piastres per month were not enough to
support a bachelor, let alone a family. While in principle they were
supposed to be able to work during the day to supplement their salaries,
few found it possible. The platoon leader stressed that doing a good
job precluded his being away from the outpost for more than a few
hours at a time. Most said simply that they tried to live within the
3500 piastres without being too much of a burden on their wives and
children, who somehow were expected to support themselves. The recent
rise in prices had added to their troubles.

I asked Chia how he compared this outpost with ones in Hau Nghia.
He replied that if outposts in Hau Nghia were like this one, the VC
would overrun tonight. The war in the delta was obviously much
different from that in Hau Nghia. The PF leader's explanation was
quite simple: the VC, in order to take this outpost would have to
take losses, more than would be compensated for by such a meaningless
victory. He felt the VC were more interested in getting public atten-
tion by making headlines.

We talked quite a bit about the VC and the future. The PF's
were unanimous in feeling that the VC were now much weaker, even as
much as 50 percent weaker. They had attacked at Tet when the GVN was at its weakest and still they had lost. Their resultant military losses could never be replaced. In addition, they had lost much popular support as a result. Some of the PF's felt that many of the people had actually supported the VC at Tet, for they had been promised an end to the war by a quick VC victory. Because everybody wants the war to end, the PF's thought the VC had fooled many into supporting them. As a result it had been a kind of last chance. They had failed and therefore lost the people's confidence.

In this connection the VC system of high taxes was discussed. The VC had gained the support of the poor peasant by distributing land to him. In fact, however, the farmer did not understand the nature of this distribution. He thought he now owned the land. Instead it was only his to farm, in return for which he was required to pay exorbitant taxes, now much more than he had ever paid even during the days of landlords. The PF's therefore concluded that time was on their side. It was just a matter of building outposts farther out into VC areas, receiving Chieu Hoi and recruiting more soldiers from the local area. They did ask, however, why the Americans were leaving before the war had been won.

We were able to talk to only one peasant in this area. He said he had lived there all his life, never having moved to a different area to live. This meant he had lived under both the GVN and the VC and had already experienced a time when the area was being contested by both sides, as it is again being contested now. The year 1963 was meant to be the year the VC gained control, but the months after 1968 were the most critical times. At that time artillery shells were apt to fall at any time of day or night. He showed us how he had enlarged and reinforced his family bunker to accommodate these new developments. He also pointed out where an artillery round had exploded, damaging his house. He said that although he secretly sided with the GVN, it was not always possible to live that way. In practice, therefore, he supported whatever side controlled his area. Regarding VC taxes, he said he paid them as much as they ever asked for. He was not even sure how much this came to. He had no choice,
for he had always lived there. To move somewhere else would mean that he had no means of making a living to support his family.

He had been very hospitable to us. During our visit we had been served bananas and other less familiar fruit, as well as tea and coconut milk. Self-conscious at having eaten the food of such a poor family but, frankly, since we had not eaten supper, too hungry to stop, just before leaving I slipped 100 piastres into the pocket of his youngest son. We left shortly thereafter, with our stomachs full and our consciences assuaged. Upon arriving back at the outpost, we prepared for the long vigil of night in the Vietnamese countryside. Our sleep was disturbed only twice, first at midnight by the VC B-40 mentioned above, and then by a rainshower a few hours later. We then moved under the roof of the outpost where without rice wine to dull our senses we fell prey to hungry mosquitoes.

For a long time after we lay down on the ground, curled up in only a poncho, the PF's stood around talking. First they kept asking themselves why we had come to visit. They had never heard of overnight American visitors to a PF outpost before. Since they all had hammocks to recline in, they also kept remarking about how we could just lay on the ground to sleep. Presumably there had been few times in the past when they compared their situation with that of Americans and found themselves slightly better off.

The next morning as we prepared to return to district, we were fortunate to have been so well received by the PF's. Chia had observed someone high in a coconut tree on the VC side of the river taking in our situation. The mortar man quickly sent a mortar round into the area. Since just before dawn the traffic from VC areas farther down the river to the district market had been heavy, I was mortified that the round might land near the riverbank. Fortunately it did not. As we moved out, the platoon leader sent six PF's straight down the road and five more through the rice paddies to the right toward where the coconut tree spy had been. We followed a few minutes later. When we had just about successfully reached the other PF outpost, the PF's opened fire with their M-79 and M-16's. We never learned the result of this contact.
Back at district I had occasion to talk several times with the Vietnamese considered by the American advisers to be the most efficient and conscientious GVN official in the district. Young and of Chinese descent, his position was the Police Special Branch Chief. Because I have had some unfortunate experiences with the manner in which police operations, especially the Special Branch, are carried out, I entered our first conversation with a certain prejudice. After spending an afternoon with him, I had come to the conclusion that this man was a special breed, exemplary of why one often says about Vietnam that the most important aspect of a situation is how, not what is carried out. The policy is good or bad depending not on what is meant to be accomplished, but rather the manner in which it is conducted.

A local to the area, he had held his current job for nearly four years. We talked frankly about the GVN. Often he remarked that the situation was very complex. The best one could do was to try to do his best regardless of the graft and self-serving which surrounded him. Several times he somewhat less than modestly but probably quite correctly remarked that if all GVN officials had the same outlook as he, the war would have been concluded long ago. He stressed that the VC could be beaten easily, the VC, especially since Tet no longer enjoyed the people's support. All that remained now was for the GVN to gain their confidence.

As a basis for reference I asked him to give a little background about the district beginning with the Viet Minh. I had intimated that the Viet Minh were synonymous with the communists. He corrected me; in fact, I had assumed that he felt that way. He explained that the Viet Minh were both communist and nationalist, united against the French. He related an incident to prove this fact involving an important VM general who, toward the end of the war, not being a communist had been betrayed to the French by the communists and killed as a result. I added my conviction that to have been a Viet Minh is still regarded with suspicion by GVN authorities. To this day, for example, GVN police interrogation forms still question what one's political activities were during the period from 1945 to 1954. Having worked for the French during this period establishes one's reliability. To
have been a VM or even to have had close relatives who cooperated with the VM (another question), especially if they regrouped with their unit to the North, makes one's reliability suspect. Having read hundreds of such interrogation reports while on Con Son prison island has convinced me of this situation. The SB police chief would not, however, accept this conclusion. He replied this was not policy, but rather interpretation by the officials concerned. I accepted this explanation. In other words, he personally did not regard activity with the VM as being worthy of suspect. He added he felt this way even though his older brother who worked for the French also in police work had been killed by the Viet Minh.

In this connection we also discussed the Phoenix program. I mentioned some of my reservations, relating specific situations I had experienced, which had led me to conclude that given GVN venality and VC organizational methods, much of what we attempted in this regard only led to a counterproductive result. We proceeded to discuss some of the situations I had described. The SB chief stated that he followed to a letter the directives he received from Saigon. When there was doubt he followed what he called his "conscience of responsibility." As a result, therefore, he was confident that if I spent much time with him I would change some of my opinions. He said, for example, he recognized that many people were forced to support the VC due to compulsory circumstances. He stressed the importance in his work of being capable of making this distinction. He added also that if a person had ceased working for the VC for over three months, he did not regard him as having committed any crime. I told him, however, of the many people I had met on Con Son prison island who would have fallen into that category, also of many others who were there without anything in their folder but name, village, and capturing agency. Again he pointed out that he was only the SB chief in this district, in fact, not even the police chief or district chief.

I asked him about the beginnings of the VC in this area. He replied that in the early days, especially in the early 1960's, the VC, by being first to bring the peasants land reform, had easily gained the support of the vast majority of the peasant population
for the revolution. In fact, in those years the GVN response in their eyes had only been negative and repressive. I asked him about the result of indiscriminate air and artillery in these areas during that time. He replied that in this early period it had only further cemented the people to the VC. Now, however, especially since Tet, he felt the people blame the VC presence, for they no longer believe in communism. He offered as proof of this fact the absence of popular demonstrations against the GVN. In 1961-1963 women and children from VC areas frequently demonstrated against such shellings. Beginning in 1967 there have been no more.

He was quite confident about the future. In 1963 and 1964 the VC in his area had been spoiling for a fight with the GVN. GVN morale was low; they were losing. Now the opposite is true. We are searching out the VC, looking for them to attack. The turning point was Tet. It is the VC's lack of popular support that now proves their defeat. He felt, at least in his area, that there were fewer draft-dodgers, as well as fewer deserters than before. Many now volunteered for military service. He felt seven of the ten steps had already been completed. In this regard he was critical of the United States. We must be more patient. If we did pull out, however, the GVN would just have to expand the draft eligible age at both ends, mobilizing more men to fight. This, he felt could be done without great difficulty.

I invited him to accompany us that afternoon to the area where we were planning to spend the night. He seemed pleased to accept, adding there was much he could show me that he thought I would be interested in seeing. He rejected the offer of using the adviser's motorboat for transportation, preferring instead to use the standard Vietnamese covered water-taxi. This he considered much safer. I was curious that he carried no weapon, nor was he accompanied by anyone but us. This was quite strange. He said he never went armed, for he was confident that the people would look out for him. He had stressed quite frequently the importance of having good relations with the people. It was obvious that he was now anxious to show me how well he in fact got along with the people.

While in the water-taxi I had tried for pay for our fare. No one
would accept any money. Upon arrival, the SB chief asked if anyone had paid, in itself an unnatural action for a GVN official. He then proceeded to make sure both that we paid and that the owner accepted the money. When he returned later in the afternoon he made it clear that he always paid for whatever services he used. As we learned, among GVN representatives in the area he was certainly the exception.

While the SB chief was with us, we talked to many people during our visit. My general impressions based upon these discussions were that the VC had received a great deal of support from the people up to Tet 1968. The VC had controlled this area for some time. Since that time, however, there was meant to be no more confidence in the VC's ability to end the war. It was also apparent that the VC had grown considerably weaker, but still, as we learned, capable of inflicting individual defeats on GVN forces. In short, the general impression was that the people had become, for any number of reasons, disenchanted with the VC. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that few people with whom we chatted would have dared in our presence to praise the VC. In addition, none of those we met were of the poor-farmer category; in fact, most were merchants around the marketplace. Regarding the poor farmers, the question I would have liked to have had answered was the degree to which they, perhaps primarily because of VC land distribution schemes, being generally the favored group still prefer the VC, but currently simply find life in VC areas just too difficult. In short, to what degree do they perceive their current difficulties as simply being caused by GVN pressure on the VC? Is it really true that they now perceive their lot as being worse than before and therefore fault the VC? It has been said that in the eyes of many of these peasants the worst thing about the VC is the GVN's painful response to them, most often in the form of air strikes and artillery. These facts would be most difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty. The SB chief was convinced, however, that the VC were militarily much weaker and that he fully agreed with his people's support. I am sure he was convinced that I fully agreed with him.

There was certainly no question about the attitude of some of
the merchants around the marketplace. One lady was especially vehe-
ment and talked with us for over an hour. We just listened. The
conversation is worthy of being related in its entirety. She was a
middle-class Catholic merchant, owning two hectares of land. At the
time we arrived she was preparing an excellent meal for a group of
nuns, who came just as we were leaving. She criticized most severely
the attitude of the North Vietnamese soldiers and cadres with whom
she had come into contact. She considered them arrogant, often tell-
ing the people they had come all the way from the North to help
Southerners. The current VC cadres also came in for criticism. As
the revolution came of age, younger cadres had begun to replace older,
more experienced cadres. This was especially true of the level closest
to the people. The younger cadres were less educated if not even
illiterate, and much more dogmatic than the original cadres. She
maintained this change began to occur in 1966. She praised the old
cadres, whom she called old Viet Minh revolutionaries. Of model
behavior and well-educated, they had taken great pains to explain to
the people the reasons for their beliefs and the need for change. As
a result, in the early sixties the people had voluntarily supported
the revolution. It was obvious by the manner in which she spoke of
this period that she too had been a firm VC supporter at that time.

As more and more leaders emerged from poor-farmer background,
and with the old cadres gone (possibly promoted), her allegiance had
obviously changed. The rich had increasingly been criticized, the
poor, praised. With cadres whom she described as illiterate there
was no longer the easy give and take between the governed and governing.
She said the people began to feel that they were being "ruled." As
class distinctions increased, her family was singled out as undesirables.
She complained about the way the cadres referred to Catholic priests --
in very impolite terms. She said, however, that Buddhist bonzes were
always spoken of respectfully. There was no way you could argue with
such cadres. They often just replied that the revolution was infallible,
the supreme good. In this connection there was also no way one could
complain to higher authorities. The people rarely had contact with
any cadre above village level. If they ever wanted to petition such
a higher official they had no way of knowing how to reach the higher level. At least with the GVN you could find higher authorities to whom you could complain.

She described the revolution as having been comprised of three elements. First, it was against luxury-living. Second, land was distributed to the landless, and third, class distinctions were introduced involving a prejudice against the rich in favor of the poor. She described the system as being impartial but lacking human sympathy. For example, taxes that were levied were to be paid regardless of the result of the harvest. If a farmer's plot were ruined by bombs, he still had to pay his tax. She described the people as most fearful of being labeled a GVN spy. For this reason, regardless of what one really felt, one did not dare to change one's ways. For example, if one refused to feed soldiers as they passed by a cadre might ask why one now objected when one never did so in the past.

She described her family as being anti-VC. Her husband had fled to Vinh Binh Province some time back. He had gone on his own not as a refugee or Chieu Hoi, for he feared for his family. What Chieu Hoi there were rarely went to district, but for the same reason preferred to go as far away as possible. She also said many local youths, in particular those who were Catholic, had left for Vinh Binh. She also described certain acts of defiance that some people had taken. Her daughter had refused to teach in the local school because the system was so restrictive. Some children had refused to feed anyone except their father when he returned in a VC military unit. She felt many older people opposed the VC for having cost them the lives of so many of their children.

Some of her complaints were economic. One of the punishments meted out for noncompliance with certain restrictions was to refuse to allow a person's barge to leave the village. In a world of canals and rivers with few roads, this was a harsh punishment. As a merchant, she frequently ran afoul of VC economic restrictions, specifically the prohibition against bringing produce out of the VC area to sell at the GVN district market. She maintained it was sometimes possible with these new cadres to offer favors in return for permission to take
produce to market. This would have been unheard of under the old
cadres. She described bitterly how she had not been allowed to pur-
chase a second barge, and another time a second house for storage.
Chia explained that this was standard VC practice to prevent monopoly.
She certainly did not see it in these terms. Again I wondered to what
degree her feelings were different from those of the poor peasant in
this area. Presumably, for example, being ruled by a cadre from the
same social class was not objectionable, at least not for the same
reasons. What other perceptions were different?

We talked to other people in this general market area, but none
for as long or in as much depth. It did appear that most of these
merchants preferred the GVN in terms of making a living. Many had,
or at least at one time had, members of their family in VC ranks.
One 18-year old answered the SB chief's question by telling him that
her father had been captured last month and was in prison at the
province capital.

Nevertheless, regardless of the degree to which the people no
longer voluntarily support the VC, it was not clear to me that the
GVN was reaping large dividends as a result. With few exceptions, the
local GVN representatives did not exhibit the spirit of serving the
people's interests. If the GVN is to compete effectively with the VC,
it is in this sphere that the outcome will be determined. The lieu-
tenant in charge of the MAT explained that his counterparts' troops
who occupied the local outpost and were meant to provide security to
the village were undisciplined and irresponsible. They frequently
ate food in the local restaurants for which they did not pay. Worse,
whenever they went on operations into areas still considered VC, they
became regular scavengers. He also criticized them militarily. The
VC had routed them soon after building this outpost. Apparently, the
house in which they had set up their CP had buried under a tile some
3.7 million piastres of VC money. Besides just recovering the money,
the VC also received an M-60 machine gun, a radio, and several M-16's.
The RF's had bolted, leaving just a few with the American advisers.
Another VC victory of the traditional well-planned and executed, quick
ambush type had also occurred against another unit not far away. The
VC, though weaker, were obviously still capable of military victories.
We witnessed an incident ourselves while eating lunch at the marketplace. A Vietnamese dressed in black who, I learned later, was the first sergeant of the RF company had obviously, despite the hour, had more than his share of rice wine. His manner was abusive, his speech crude. Several times when his glass was not filled promptly, he swore profusely, adding that he would shoot up the restaurant if anyone dared bother him. The SB chief was obviously quite embarrassed. The drunken sergeant addressed our party several times, taking a particular interest in me since he had heard me speak Vietnamese. When I refused to enter into a conversation with him, he began spouting off about the CIA and stupid Americans, intimating, I guess, that I was both. Without acknowledging his presence, we left quietly. He swore after us that we were not even polite enough to say good-bye. His language was abusive enough personally to have perhaps warranted a confrontation, but all concerned determined it best to avoid such an incident. The SB chief reminded me how that morning he had characterized the situation in Vietnam as being very complex. This had been just one example. Assuming by the sergeant's dress that he was an RD cadre, he muttered that he would see to it that he were relieved.

Curious as to whether his bill had been paid, just before leaving the next day I approached the lady who ran the restaurant and asked her. She immediately became very embarrassed and failed to reply. An elderly man who had overheard my question urged her, if the sergeant had not paid, to tell the truth. Although joined by a second lady who worked there, she still failed to answer. Finally the second replied that he had. I asked if they were sure. Now both failed to answer. My guess would be that he had not, but that they were still mindful of his threat to shoot up the place. They knew I was about to leave; he was still going to be with them.

On the way back to the river dock we passed a very large, partially destroyed cement structure. We learned from some families who had built small grass lean-tos inside that it had been owned by a very rich landlord. None knew just how many hectares he had owned, but they did know his lands had stretched into three provinces. Built in 1922, the house had been destroyed by the French to keep it from
being used by the VM who controlled the area. The people now living there turned out to be former tenant farmers of the owner of the house. It was interesting to note that they used Viet Minh and Viet Cong interchangeably. Most rural Vietnamese, for better or worse, do the same. I learned that they used to live across the street close to the river. Almost matter of factly one of the ladies explained that on the 26th of the twelfth lunar month, 1967 (just before Tet 1968), American soldiers had come ordering the people to leave their homes. She said that they arrived in several boats and had entered the village uncontested. No one had fired at them. Without explanation their homes had been burned to the ground by GI's with flamethrowers. The rice mill was also destroyed. The Americans did not stay, but left that same day.

She had related this incident so unemotionally that I felt forced to ask her if she had not cried. She then became excited, saying that her baby was then only three days' old. As she put it, she had cried until she had no more tears.

Because of the marketplace this village was a very famous VC village. The 9th Division had run river-patrol boats up and down the canal for a time, but finally considered it just too dangerous and ceased. One of the advisers at district explained that this area had been so bad that the 9th had to "recon by fire" just to keep from getting ambushed. Presumably they had received some fire from this area or possibly just close to it as the center of the VC area. Thus VC houses, lived in by people who supported the enemy, if not the enemy themselves, had been destroyed. A VC rice mill supplying milled rice to the enemy was likewise destroyed. But these people were no longer the enemy but rather part of the 80-odd percent of Vietnam's population meant to be under GVN control, having since become positive HES statistics. From the above it should be obvious that it is a fallacy to think one can kill the enemy and then proceed to pacify the population. The two are interlinked, if not in terms of a program, one and the same. The HES computer has a short memory. It can register the population of a hamlet as VC one month and GVN the next. The people in question, due to their experiences, tend to remember much longer.
Crossing the canal we entered a second GVN beachhead within VC territory. Since we assumed the area in which we could wander about would be limited, to get a feel for the area we headed first toward the outpost built farther up the river. Along the way the shade of a large tree seemed to provide a nice place to take a short rest. Thirty yards beyond, right along the riverbank, was a peasant's home. Just beyond that was the local outpost. After a few minutes, a ten-year-old cautiously approached, obviously under parental orders. He was carrying two stools for us to sit upon. I never cease to be amazed at the hospitality of rural Vietnamese. We were far enough away to have been safely ignored, and at that just two Americans. We had not even approached or talked to them. I learned later that their home had recently burned, a casualty of PBR's on patrol, and also that their sugar cane crop had just been destroyed in order to provide the new outpost with unobstructed fields of fire.

We met with the RF sergeant in charge of the outpost shortly thereafter. His instructions were that it would be safe to walk along the trail leading from the dock for a few hundred yards, but to go beyond that would be very dangerous. We asked permission to spend the night, which he quickly granted. He warned, however, of frequent VC harassment. The night before, a rifle grenade had been shot at about 12:20. I smiled, for at just about that time the B-40 had sailed over our outpost of the night before. That night, however, turned out to be as peaceful as could be. Despite a little rain at dusk, we slept undisturbed until dawn.

The RF's were from a nearby Catholic village, which, despite VC all around them, had maintained their independence inviolate. A form of local accommodation had developed. The current presence of the soldiers outside their village area had been ordered, perhaps from as far away as Saigon. The night we stayed with them no patrol left the outpost. The reason why was easy to understand. First, why risk their lives in an area which was not theirs anyway? Also, they were only an understrength platoon. Lastly, they had not been ordered to do so. They were only there temporarily and expected to be replaced soon. They were also quite adamant about the fact that
the VC were being beaten. They added that the United States should not leave now, for they had almost won.

We had quite an interesting stroll through their small area. The platoon sergeant accompanied us part of the way. Most interesting was a VC cemetery. The sign that had hung over its entrance had been taken down. I had noticed it, however, up against the wire of the RF outpost. It had declared in bright red letters on a white background that those buried here died for freedom and independence in the war against American aggression. Chia explained this sign had been placed there to remind those who visited the cemetery why their loved ones had died — just one additional example of clever propaganda.

The first stones dated from 1948, belonging, of course, to the Viet Minh war against the French. Gradually moving row by row to the rear, the year 1968 was reached. The final row was without gravestones, and estimated by some of the people to have been as recent as two or three months ago. The lady whose house was located across the road just opposite to the entrance said that in the years prior to 1965, there had not been such a cemetery. At that time she had moved to Saigon to live, not returning until late 1967. Some time during that period the cemetery had been constructed, for it was in existence when she returned. One of three reasons may explain the discrepancy between the dates on the headstones and the lady's observations: first, either she was in error or, for some obscure reason, lying; second, the Viet Cong had been forced to relocate an entire cemetery, perhaps due to CVN pressure in another area; third, the Viet Cong had, for reasons of ideological snobbery and propaganda, set bogus headstones from past decades in order to establish an unbroken line of direct lineage between the Viet Minh, who in 1948 were the champions of the villagers, and the Viet Cong, who in 1968 did not have such impeccable credentials. Chia, on the basis of the remarkable similarity among headstones, believed the antiquity of the cemetery was bogus.

We chatted for awhile, drank some lemonade, and then prepared to move on. Just as we were about to leave, the RF sergeant pointed out a teen-age girl holding a young baby. He said her father had followed
the VC for nearly twenty years before becoming a Chieu Hoi last month. It was curious to observe so many examples of the unconscious identification between the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong -- from them a single graveyard, from us the perception of twenty years on the same side.

We wandered around for about an hour talking with people living along the trail leading from the dock. In accordance with our instructions, we only went down about two hundred yards and did not leave it to the left or right. One family consisted of two females and several small children. The children were at first terrified by our presence. Smiles did come while we stayed, but only after considerable effort. Most of my questions went unanswered by both adults and children alike. Chia, the peasant diplomat, had slightly better success. He asked which soldiers treated them better, GVN or Liberation. No answer from either. After several tries, the grandmother ventured that the GVN forces were better. Chia asked if they paid for their food. She had been making rice paper for sale when we arrived. She failed to answer. Chia counseled her that whenever GVN soldiers asked for something, she should give them a fair price and expect them to pay. If not, report them. She nodded assent.

While the daughter remained silent, the grandmother explained to Chia the reason for the large bunker with several entrances. Pointing out holes through several beams, she said that a mortar fired from an American gunboat on the river had exploded unexpectedly one afternoon. Of her eight grandchildren in the house at the time, four had been wounded, although, fortunately, apparently not too seriously. Chia consoled her, adding that she should not have to worry about that any longer.

The inhabitants next door were considerably more talkative. Of the two old ladies who lived there, one had a son who had been a GVN soldier, killed last year. The grandmother was now trying to raise her grandson, a particularly terrified eight-year-old. She explained that he had never before seen an American.

The next morning we got an early start, returning to district as we had come, by water-taxi. Entering the advisers' dwelling I overheard what I considered an interesting exchange on the radio net.
An FAC in radio jargonese was requesting permission to recon an area from which he had taken fire two days before. In fact we had observed his contact from the PF outpost where we had spent our first night in Mo Cay. Having observed five "eligibles," he had requested permission to shoot. Since it was a VC area and "free fire zone," all he really needed to check was whether "friendslies" were in the area. An eligible is a male Vietnamese of draft age. In a VC area after clearance for friendslies in the area, he thus becomes an acceptable target. In a contested area he must "evade" before he can be shot. To run or hide from a helicopter of FAC is to evade.

In the first instance, from the PF outpost we observed the FAC dive down releasing a rocket at the last moment just before pulling up. As he pulled up after the second rocket, 50-cal. machine gun fire could be heard in reply. Each time, rockets were traded for 50-cal. until the FAC had shot his load and left the scene. Artillery began impacting shortly thereafter. From the PF's I learned that the area was moderately populated, of course the very same area the PF was to fire his mortar later that night in retaliation for the B-40 rocket fired at his outpost. This particular morning the FAC had returned, and, as he put it, was "itching to do some shooting."

Within ten minutes liaison had been made with the Vietnamese and clearance given. He was told to "go ahead and shoot 'em up." He said thanks and asked if there were any more "hot targets" around in addition to where he had had some contact a few days before. None were known.

Later, I asked the very self-confident DIOCC lieutenant to give me a rough idea of the free fire zones in his district. He designated an area that encompassed everything not within two hundred meters of the LOC's that the GVN was securing. I asked him if we could assume then, roughly, that the area controlled by the VC was all a free fire zone. He said yes, adding that even though it was a free fire zone the plane still had to request permission to fire. Most of the FAC's were experienced and could distinguish, for example, between a camouflaged enemy sampan and a fisherman's sampan. In large measure, the request through district appeared to be simply a precaution that there
were no friendlies in the vicinity. In some bad areas, almost regardless of what was requested, permission to fire would be granted. He pointed out a couple of "real bad VC villages," labeling one as in fact two villages, gerrymandered by the GVN into only one VC-controlled village. I asked the lieutenant how he considered the civilians who still lived in that area. He replied they fed the VC, paid taxes to them, in short, supported them in every imaginable way. They were as much VC as those who carried weapons.

It is in this manner that VC villages, not individual, armed VC units, easily emerge from our enemy. It should also be understood that the transition from VC enemy villages to practically the entire rural population of Vietnam in general can, for the same reasons, be just as easy. There is little realization among soldiers that a peasant, regardless of his political affiliations, will remain at all costs near his ancestral home and fields. Without the latter there is no guarantee that he will be able to make a living were he to move to a different place. And yet one so often hears statements such as, "anyone still out there has got to be VC."

The MAT lieutenant we had just visited had had some harsh words for the activities of FAC in his area. He replied categorically that when asked, he never gave permission to fire in his area. He gave one example when a FAC, spotting movement in a nearby VC area had fired one of his rockets. Seventeen people had been wounded, several seriously. The people had been participating in a wedding ceremony when the FAC fired. The MAT lieutenant had only learned of this incident because his team had an excellent medic. The wounded were brought in for the medic to treat and medevac. Judging by the area of the incident and the ages of a few of the male wounded, the lieutenant acknowledged the possibility that some might have been VC. Nevertheless, in his mind that did not excuse the fact that the rest were obviously not VC, but rather women and children. He added how upset he became when over the radio he heard a request to fire, such as against "a sampan loaded with goodies." Sampans in this area are used to transport goods to market. Thus they are all filled with goodies. But all he could do was refuse permission to fire if in his area of responsibility.
Flying back to Saigon it was depressing to see thousands of hectares of abandoned farm land. The areas right along the road were green, but not far beyond them the brown set in, continuing right up to the edge of TSN airbase. In the middle of the rice season the brown of abandoned fields dominated the few strips of green.

I pondered what I had seen in the last few days. Six months had brought some changes. The GVN in the sense of daytime access had expanded its area of nominal control into areas where for years only VC had dared tread. In some of these areas certain segments of the population are certainly susceptible to GVN appeals. In these cases they have had a bitter taste of communism. They have thus experienced the VC as more than just a revolutionary movement. They have come to know it as a government as well. Just how deep was this dissatisfaction with the VC as a government? Did it include future-position society? If not, then their actual situation at the present time would be better under the VC. But the real question in my mind was whether the GVN was capable of filling this gap. It will never be possible by bombing to force all of the population in VC areas to flee to areas where the GVN is capable of maintaining security. In lieu of a more constructive means by the GVN of dealing with the population remaining in the outlying areas, the VC will always have a constituency and will remain a force that cannot be exterminated. For this to change, the GVN must go to the people. In addition, as the war drags on, more and more issues that were once regarded by the Vietnamese as black or white take on grey hues.
III. BINH SON DISTRICT, QUANG NGAI
PROVINCE, NEAR DA NANG

After a change of planes in Saigon, we had by late afternoon arrived in Da Nang. By the next morning we had reached Chu Lai, having been fortunate enough to catch a ride with a pair of Marine generals. They disappeared soon after landing in a procession of black Fords, leaving us standing on the helicopter pad. A Marine lieutenant colonel offered to give us a lift to the main gate. After a few minutes' ride he confessed that, despite the fact that he had been there for several months and on his second tour, he really did not know how to get off the base. We were of little assistance, since a year had brought many changes, mostly enlargements. We finally found our way to the gate from where we caught a Lambretta to Binh Son district headquarters. After meeting the necessary people, we hitched a ride on a helicopter to a refugee resettlement area on the coast. An awards celebration was going to be held there later in the morning.

We talked briefly with villagers in the newly established refugee resettlement area before walking along the beach to a second such area already two years old. Both seemed to suffer from the same problems. Most of the people tried to make a living as fishermen. They were not allowed, however, to fish closer to the beach than two kilometers. Specific corridors had been established for them to pass through the restricted area. The restrictions were enforced to prevent North Vietnamese supply shipments from entering South Vietnam by sea. None of the fishermen with whom I talked, however, could give a clear explanation of just why these restrictions were necessary. Several replied they only know that since the Americans had come, they were no longer allowed to fish close to shore. I was surprised that they did not have a better understanding. The fact was, however, that the restrictions are primarily enforced by U.S. Swift boats.

The people's dilemma in the area was quite simple. The area to their rear was "bad VC area." Except for these isolated resettlement areas, the hinterland was totally under VC control. The farmers thus did not dare farm farther out than 500 meters. Much of what remained
was sand. Those who chose to make a living by fishing could do so. The seas were often too rough for their small boats. Anyway, the best fishing was closer in, the reason why their boats were small in the first place. While the resettlement areas might make good sense for other reasons, economically, the future looked dim for these hardy people.

The awards ceremony took place on the beach. Although there had been some doubt at the time whether it had been a VC victory or defeat, this fact did not seem to detract from the ceremony. A Marine general gave a short speech extolling the virtues of brave men, and had pinned on most of the medals before the province chief and a Vietnamese general arrived somewhat late. The province chief then gave a short speech saying in brief that by the end of 1970 there would be no more refugees in Vietnam. At that time all would have been resettled. Hopefully, those of whom he was speaking will be resettled in a more economically viable situation than what we, at least on the surface, had seen at this location. The Marine general took us aside and asked what we were thinking. We told him we had been here last year and that the VC were not going to be run out by 1971. It was a savage internecine war, with the VC and GVN (really just CAP) hamlets preying on each other for food and material reasons, as well as for political reasons. The general asked us to have a beer with him when we got back to Da Nang.

I talked briefly with the Marine CAP sergeant at the local PF outpost. He was planning an operation for early that morning led by a recently captured VC prisoner. A man we had heard described as being both very brave and very foolhardy, he seemed pleased that we were interested in going along. The prospects of an extra gun and an interpreter were quite acceptable. He described the hinterland as full of VC hamlets. The whole area was a free fire zone. The local PF were highly regarded, although he admitted their prime motive for going into this area was to rustle "VC" cattle and sheep, i.e., any animals raised in the VC hamlets. Apparently here as elsewhere personal property in VC hamlets, or insecure hamlets, or hamlets in VC areas, was considered fair game by GVN soldiers on patrol. He asked us what it was we wanted to see. I answered really nothing special, that we
would just like to tag along for fun. He added that if it was dead VC we wanted to see he would "stack 'em up" for us. Only a directive from III MAF refusing permission for us to accompany this patrol kept us from going along.

Around noon we caught a helicopter returning to Binh Son District, which dropped us off at a village located near Route I. It had been over a year since we had visited this village. Some changes were obvious. Walking in, we passed a new Maternity Infirmary Dispensary (MID), new only in the sense that it had been built within the last year. Part of the roof was missing. The door and shutters were locked, obviously like so many others not staffed.

Soon thereafter we met up with the local PF platoon leader. He was just returning from an overnight operation in his most outlying hamlet. It was obvious from our conversation that the local situation had improved considerably in the course of the last year. An additional platoon was now tasked with security in one of the village's hamlets that had previously also been his responsibility. Of course at the time, his resources had been insufficient, and the hamlet in question had until recently been considered insecure. With his own troops now augmented by PSDF (People's Self-Defense Force) he was patrolling an enlarged area. The hamlet in which we spent the night had been considered VC a year ago. In fact at that time his men only rarely patrolled there. They had their hands full in the main village area without spreading themselves thin in outlying hamlets. During our visit a year ago he had organized a special patrol through this VC area for our benefit. Now we slept with him and his men with the fishermen in their homes.

We talked until very late that night, first with the fishermen and then with PF's. The lot of those fishermen was much the same as that of those with whom we had talked briefly earlier in the day. The best fishing was in close to shore, as the seas farther out were often too rough. One old fisherman seemed especially to enjoy talking with me. At one point he had a proposition to make. He asked me if I would be willing to stay and become their interpreter. How much easier this would make their encounters with the American Swift boats that
enforced the fishing restrictions, encounters much feared by Vietnamese fishermen. Being unable to communicate with the Americans, they live in dread of a misunderstanding. We laughingly came to terms: thirty dollars a month, room and board. Our first trip was to be the next morning beginning at 4:30. I was up by six o'clock, but they had already left without their interpreter.

The PF's were proud of their new M-16's. A year before only two in the platoon had them which they had bought at the local black market. We also talked about their perceptions of communism. Several definitions were offered, involving loss of personal freedom and communal living. They explained that those rural Vietnamese who followed the VC did so because they failed to understand these basic ideas. They had been deceived by communist propaganda to believe in a happy future of poor people for poor people.

The PF platoon leader was an old hand. He ran a well-disciplined unit and had compiled a good record against the VC. At present his platoon operates without an outpost. In this way he stressed that the VC do not know where the PF are to be found on any given night. One night they would reinforce the PSDF of one hamlet, the next, another. On the way to a second hamlet we passed the PSDF of one hamlet organizing for the evening. It was encouraging to see such youths defending their hamlet against the VC. All were armed. The only complaint was that bullets for the Thompson were hard to get. That evening, as we arrived at our hamlet for the night, I was reminded that the last time I had been there, six of us had come to ambush the VC at three in the morning after wading through the swamp on its western side. Now we were there to keep the VC out. Probably the major change was simply that the local VC guerrilla squad or platoon given SVN activity was no longer resident in the hamlet. The hamlet's population was in large part unchanged; the same fishermen worried about making a living. In this regard the platoon leader stressed that one must be ever mindful of the distinction between the VC and the people. He reminded me, obviously unnecessarily, that a year ago our host for supper was living in a VC hamlet.

The next morning on the way back to the village area we took a different path to avoid an area where the road was under water. The
platoon leader described one of his most effective sources of information about the VC. Under the GVN's draft law, healthy males are subject to the draft until the age of 38. The platoon leader said he frequently overlooked the fact that some 35-year-olds had not yet volunteered. This was his area and he felt this was within his responsibility. Similar local arrangements, some even more flagrant involving teen-age youths, are commonplace throughout Vietnam. A great deal of money stands to be made in this manner. In this particular case, given the motives of the particular platoon leader, no money was involved. Excepted individuals were expected to keep him informed of all VC activities in their area. The alternative was to be drafted. Just as we reached the outskirts of the village area a PF ran over with bad news. Twelve VC the night before had entered the area, abducting one male and destroying the GVN ID's of several others. The Platoon leader confessed that the abducted individual had been one of his draft-dodger intelligence agents. He said little about this incident, for besides being angry it was obvious he was also a bit embarrassed to have us know that while we chatted in one of his hamlets, the VC were entering unmolested a second.

By noon of that day we had arrived at Thang Binh district headquarters in Quang Tin. From there we were to fly by helicopter to the area of a joint operation being conducted out along the coast. A good friend was the adviser to one of the ARVN battalions involved. While waiting for transportation I followed three VC prisoners (suspects) who had just arrived by helicopter to the intelligence office where I was curious to see how they were treated. I was able to observe the preliminary questioning without being asked who I was. Finally a Vietnamese lieutenant asked me my mission. I avoided his question as best I could but he persisted. It was not long before the questioning had ceased. Everyone had become interested in the conversation between the lieutenant and myself. Also present in the room were two other VC's and one wounded North Vietnamese soldier.

It was obvious that the lieutenant was both proud and jealous. The combination made him very anti-American. I did not like the position that put me in. Presumably, there was much about which we were
in total agreement. When it had become obvious that a heated discussion was imminent, I mentioned that we should check first each other's basic standpoint, for I thought it quite possible that there was much we agreed upon. He was not interested. He began by saying the United States was in Vietnam for its own good, regardless of what happened to Vietnam in the process. We discussed the statement for a few minutes, a statement which, with some reservations, I accepted. I broached other subjects, but found that he disclaimed any knowledge of politics. He said that he had come up through the ranks to become an officer. I questioned whether this was the truth. He asked me what I thought of the fact that Americans used helicopters to transport ice and beer when Vietnamese were without ammunition. He asked me where I was going. I replied I was waiting for a helicopter to take me out to the coast to visit a friend. He asked me if I thought it was fair for me to use a helicopter to visit a friend when he had a wounded enemy soldier that needed to be flown to a hospital. Thoroughly embarrassed, I said I was sorry, that I had not heard any of the Americans on the advisory team say anything about needing a helicopter for such a purpose. He asked me why Vietnamese must live on so little when Americans lived so luxuriously. I played a little dirty by saying that the restaurant up the street where we had eaten lunch had been full of ARVN officers eating and drinking. My question was simple: whether their salaries were sufficient to be able to afford such meals.

The wounded NVA addressed me then calling me by the honorific title of "adviser." Trying desperately to gain points, I disclaimed the title saying to just call me "Mister." The lieutenant weakly answered my previous question by saying that perhaps I had seen them enjoying their one good meal of the month. I asked him if he did not think they would be back again the next day. Having gone onto the defensive he shifted back to the mentality of the Vietnamese enlisted man from whose ranks he claimed to have originated. He asked me simply, what about the poor soldier, was he not sacrificing? I agreed he was, but added, was it not his country? His answer was perhaps the most important thing he had had to say. He asked me why they should sacrifice when people in Saigon were living so well.
He was still speaking when I heard the helicopter circling to land. I knew I had to run to make it, but I also wanted to complete our conversation. I apologized, saying I had to leave, and adding that I would check with the advisers to see that the wounded NVA received transportation. Shaking my hand, the lieutenant smiled, saying not to worry for he actually had not yet requested one. Thinking back, I considered that short, disjointed conversation as important a one as I had had on the entire trip.

A few minutes later we had landed in the sand at the ARVN battalion's position. Two casualties were put on as we jumped off. After a ten-minute walk to the top of the neighboring hill I met my old school friend, the adviser to the ARVN major commanding the battalion. We had walked carefully, for the two ARVN dead we had just seen were mine casualties. Jack explained that the VC were holed up in the hamlet at the foot of the hill across the river. They were being engaged by a Vietnamese APC unit under the province chief and an ARVN battalion. His battalion, which was from the same regiment, blocked the VC retreat in this direction. A Korean brigade was working down toward us from farther up the coast. At least two VC companies were estimated in the hamlet below us with a second report of nearly 200 VC in a hamlet in the Korean AO along the coast. Two companies from Jack's battalion were in blocking positions on the edge of the Korean AO to prevent the VC from fleeing South. That afternoon, from their vantage point on top of the hill, Jack and his men had killed several VC trying to break out of the hamlet across the rice paddies. Air strike after air strike was being dropped into the hamlet as we watched. In all, a total of seven that afternoon. We were so close that shrapnel frequently fell in our vicinity. By nightfall there were 100 POW's and nearly 60 killed in action. But the hamlet had still not been taken completely. The APC's had been called back and another air strike called in. Dusk fell shortly thereafter.

That evening after supper I had a long talk with Jack's counterpart, the battalion commander. Jack described him as a good man but admitted they frequently had their differences over tactics. He was very conservative in his approach to the war. To Jack, the way to
take a village was to be moving in before the enemy had a chance to
look up; in other words, just as the last bomb was leaving the plane.
The major was more in favor of a cautious, but energetic siege. Com-
combined with air and artillery, the enemy could be dealt severe losses.
Jack admitted that despite his previous tour he still had a lot to learn
about the Vietnamese situation. For example, I pointed out how the
major had stressed to me the necessity of paying close attention to the
breaking point of the individual ARVN soldier. We talked, for example,
about the current economic situation and its effect on the individual
soldier. The major was adamant that the effect had been both profound
and negative. I offered as a hypothesis that, regardless of the politi-
cal or military situation, if the current economic situation continued
for another year the result might be a severe loss of will to continue
fighting the war by those very individuals called upon to fight it.
Salaries were low and stable, prices high and rising. Especially
dangerous was the prospect that while the majority suffered and was
called upon to sacrifice even more, a small minority of rich only
became richer. The major had agreed completely, but considered my
time frame too optimistic. He had estimated that if the current
situation were tolerated for four more months he would be surprised.
He considered the current situation ominous indeed.

As I related these remarks to Jack he admitted that he had recently
begun to understand better some of these elements. As a result, he was
trying hard to take some of them into consideration when he analyzed
the tactical situation and pondered a course of action. Nevertheless,
the enemy fought without concern for these SVN weaknesses and Jack was
not convinced that the conservative approach was going to be sufficient
to keep the VC from winning, not to mention beating them.

I found the major an interesting man to talk with. From Saigon,
he described his presence in Central Vietnam as due to a number of
political difficulties. He had spent the last four years in this area.
He was Cao Dai and claimed to have been Viet Minh. Questioning closer,
I learned he had joined the "nationalist" side in 1948. As a result,
I suspect that his VM comrades considered him a deserter. Jack de-
scribed him as a people's-kind of officer, as opposed to the high-class
type. The difference was obvious both by his opinions and the way he treated his men. The father of eleven children, his GVN salary is only 22,000 piastres a month. He asked me how a general with four children and only 25,000 piastres could have so much money to spend. We talked frankly about finances. When I asked, he admitted his salary was insufficient. He said quite frankly that it was necessary for him to make money on the side. Sometimes this involved his men picking up, after American units left, such items as roofing and sand bags, and selling them in town. Without specifying, he added there were other ways. But lest I jump too quickly to conclusions, he stressed that such schemes were not, as was the case with some others, his principal motivation. He first fought the war, but then economic necessities could not be overlooked. Jack confirmed these statements as a fairly close representation of his outlook. While always on the lookout for a few extra piastres, he was also quite conscientious about his responsibility to his men and his unit's mission.

Having just returned from Saigon, he had some interesting comments about the current situation. His assessment of its effect on the common soldier has been related above. He stressed, in addition, the rising degree of anti-Americanism he had experienced. It was rumored, for example, that the new taxes had been caused by American pressure on President Thieu. He had refused to comply with American wishes, and in order to achieve a more independent base was to have enacted the round of taxes, which had only increased already existing inflationary pressures. Thus, the Americans were at fault for meddling. Others had said because the United States is pulling out, the GVN must generate more money to pay its own bills, largest of which is the prosecution of the war effort. He truly feared some of the possible consequences.

Foremost on his mind was the possibility of VC using money to bribe poor soldiers to kill their officers. In line with what he had heard in Saigon, he was most critical of the U.S. failure to get aid to where it counts. Too much is wasted in the pipeline. I explained the paradox involved, for if the United States were to do it any other way, say, for example, by passing out aid directly to the people or soldiers, it would be interfering in the GVN's affairs in a way far
more grave than any Saigon critics heretofore have imagined. He was also critical of domestic U.S. politics. The United States was much too free and gave the communists too many good advantages. He considered the moratorium as a good example of this fact. The United States must be both patient and strong in dealing with communism. He felt that at the time the United States ceased bombing NVA they were on the verge of giving up.

The major made one point that I considered strangest of all. Perhaps it was only because of his outlook. His adviser had characterized him as distinctly not high class in this general social outlook. He was a bit of an outcast among some of the other officers in this regard. He had already been passed over for promotion. I had asked him about the future of the rich people living, despite the war, an easy life in Saigon. He was quite categorical in his reply. He said whether the communists won or lost, these people would one way or another have to leave the country or lose their lives. He considered the estrangement of the poor, who had suffered so much for the rich only to have them profit from the war, to be that great. No doubt his prediction of four months before, that the current situation might change this time from the bottom up, is tied in with this general prediction.

The next morning Jack discussed several plans that he had devised in line with most recent intelligence. One involved Korean acceptance of his battalion entering their AO. They refused on the grounds that the village with the 200 VC was theirs. They were going to take it. Another involved an assault by companies of his battalion. The major did not concur with this approach. Given the full moon and thus, according to him, VC inability to get out of the encirclement, he was more in favor of just sitting until they were forced to come out for fear of bombs and possibly even hunger. He had already been a soldier for 21 years and presumably expected to be one for a few more. He considered this the correct approach. An alternate plan of his had involved taking the village by one of his companies, but the Koreans had vetoed that. They wanted the booty.

By late morning still no firm decision had been made. About that time a report reached the major that the PF unit in the village had
received nine Hoi Chanh. He asked that they be brought over. Upon arrival, only seven appeared. Two had been Hoi Chanh and really were very unimportant. The seven others were POW's, not Hoi Chanh. None of the prisoners that had been captured the day before nor any of these had had weapons. Valuable points are made when weapons are captured; thus, the interest was great as to where these weapons were concealed.

The major addressed the prisoners. As soon as they were given a chance to talk, they said they had not been captured but had come as Hoi Chanh. They were immediately contradicted by the local village chief. On this subject no more was said. The major continued with a short, very sympathetic speech about war and peace, death and destruction. The only way to end this horrible war was to cooperate with each other. They could do by pointing out where their weapons were concealed. Each individually described his basic function for the VC, village and hamlet duties, with two exceptions: unimportant non-military positions. None said he knew where weapons were hidden. The major said he would give them some time to think over what they had said, and turned them back over to the village chief, in speech and manner an apparently unsavory character. I later overheard two ARVN's discussing the beating he had seen this man hand out to his prisoners when they continued to maintain they had no knowledge of weapons.

Shortly after noon Jack, disgusted at the lack of activity at the major's position, rounded up a squad and headed toward the coast to the blocking position below the village that the Koreans had said they were going to take. We moved out across the paddies and were soaked by the time we reached the sand dunes on the other side. Finally we reached our vantage point on the top of a hill. An airstrike was being prepared. Smoke was popped to signal our position, the position of a second unit at the battalion on top of a hill to our right, and a third in the valley to our left. From these positions the routes of exit from the hamlet, which was being worked over by gunships, air-strikes, and FAC, were covered. We were then about one kilometer to the south. All afternoon air firepower was directed into the hamlet. We heard no return fire, nor did the Koreans ever follow up and take
the village. At one point they began to advance, then stopped waiting for an additional airstrike. At dusk the hamlet still had not been taken. The friendly troops withdrew to ambush positions. There was talk of dropping 1000-pounders with delayed fuses to get the VC that night as they began to come out of their holes. At a little after seven that evening, an estimated VC platoon from the hamlet but now moving south down the coast was fired on by one of the ambush patrols. The VC retaliated with B-40's. As a result, both sides took casualties, the VC of course escaping. Presumably the rest made it out that night without any contact at all.

I asked Jack what he thought of the operation. He was convinced that it would be regarded as a major ARVN victory. ARVN casualties had been fairly low. Even without the weapons, there had been plenty of VC KIA, and over 100 prisoners. He expected before the operation was over these totals would be enlarged. He had already seen signs that his higher adviser to the regimental commander was preparing the ground work to get for himself a silver star for his skill in coordinating the operation. Jack felt differently. Three ARVN battalions and a Korean brigade had cornered at least several VC companies, possibly even NVA, in an area along a beach. They had had all the air support they could have asked for. And still the VC had in large part gotten away. The two hamlets in which they had taken refuge had of course been largely destroyed.

Jack blamed the conservative tactics employed as the principal problem. Artillery and air had been used in lieu of foot soldiers. On two successive afternoons in two different hamlets I had observed an enormous amount of fire power expended, dusk falling before it could be followed up. Another element was that the various units involved had operated independently and failed to link up. This offered the VC, once they had determined the gaps, opportunities to slip out. Coordination problems had also caused problems. At one point several had been caught in the open. One FAC said they were armed. A second pilot was less sure. It had taken almost thirty minutes for permission to fire. The battle had taken place right on the edge of two AO's. Another time a Korean-requested airstrike had been vetoed by the
ARVN regimental commander because it was too close to the Korean AO. Somehow Jack and his advisers had gotten into the requesting pipeline. It had been half an hour at least, with me as interpreter, before both sides understood each other. As it turned out, the regimental commander, according to his adviser, had never issued such an order. Jack added that the sum of such situations often made him quite discouraged. His battalion was the best in a good division, but he did not consider the showing it usually made adequate to cope with the VC-NVA threat.

That evening the major explained that several more prisoners had been picked up. Five were caught by the PF's in the local village, only four of whom now remained. The same village chief had shot one through the head when he had refused to disclose the location of his weapon. A single other prisoner had led to two hidden weapons. He had also said that if, on the previous day, the APC's had pushed forward 100 more yards instead of pulling back for another airstrike, they would have captured many more prisoners. All had been prepared to give up but had gotten away when dusk fell. Only he had been caught.

I asked Jack why he thought the VC were usually able to escape with at least part of their unit. He repeated some of the reasons he had already mentioned -- conservative tactics by ARVN specifically content with letting air and artillery do the job for them, and failure to link up attacking units. On the VC side they were uncanny at being able to detect the boundaries between the various AO's. Often they were obvious -- river, ridgeline, etc. What they could not guess, they could find out by a few probes. Once determined, given coordination problems it was possible to use these boundaries as avenues of egress. It was also customary that they leave behind a small portion of their unit to deter pursuit. Given the way ARVN fights, it was not uncommon for a whole company to be pinned down by one VC with a machine gun. Employment of traditional tactics could easily beat such an obstacle, but the fact remains -- pinned down.

A thoughtful individual, Jack was having problems of his own. He told me how the afternoon before when from the hill he spotted a group of VC trying to make it across the rice paddy below, he had
grabbed the M-60 machine gun and fired after them like the Marine officer he was. He had hit at least one. In other moments he pondered the futility of the war. Because he regarded the Vietnamese as people, he could not close his eyes to the suffering around him, the civilian death and destruction. He often has difficulty reconciling these two sides of himself. He likes Asia and would not mind making a living here with his family. He is also beginning to wonder whether a career in the Marine Corps is really what he wants.

The sergeant on his advisory team exhibited a somewhat different attitude. He seemed to get along well with the Vietnamese and treated them as near as I could tell with basic respect as other human beings. In other words, his feelings did not arise from a basic distaste for Vietnamese as people. Nevertheless, he was adamant in his standpoint. He said he could understand how I felt about the war. No one likes to see innocent people die. But most GI's did not ask to come over to Vietnam. As he described it, when ten GI's look at each other, there's nothing more important to them than keeping each other alive. There does not exist even one Vietnamese who is worth risking their lives. They will use everything at their disposal to fight the enemy and keep themselves alive. The death and destruction that results to "innocents," while deplorable, could not change his or any of his buddies' thinking. This was coming from an American who I saw just that morning carry a wounded civilian to a medevac chopper. His reasoning was simple, and, given his situation, quite convincing. The contradiction between the reason we originally came to Vietnam and the operational necessities of fighting the war should be obvious.

Although it may have been considered as a success by some, the operation was not without its effects on the local villagers. The village I have mentioned several times was of the resettlement type. Originally designed for 300 families, its population was estimated by the major as in excess of 8000. Roofing sheets had not been sufficient, and each family had received only four of the promised ten roofing sheets to construct a house. The prime reason for the large influx of people was that it represented an area where one could live in relative security (in this case probably more freedom for artillery shells than anything else) and still be close to one's fields of fishing
grounds. The major was worried that if the VC attacked the PF outpost and a tracer round were to set afire one of the thatched houses built in lieu of roofing sheets, the whole settlement would burn to the ground. From this he felt the VC would gain, having proven to the people that the GVN could not protect them and that they were no safer there than back in their old area. In any case, the resettlement area held at the time many more than usual, for villagers from surrounding hamlets had fled there seeking refuge from the operation. Finally they were denied access; there was no more room.

Despite the influx out of the area where the war was being conducted, I was amazed at the large number of civilians who still wandered about the area, going about business as usual. Some were in the fields ploughing; others in the woods gathering firewood. The major had said that the people in this area had seen so much war over the last few years that they no longer paid much attention to it. They would starve if they stopped work every time a rifle were fired. Even an airstrike failed to deter them. They were poor people nevertheless. Fishing restrictions such as already described above affected the fishermen. Everybody fell prey to VC taxes and contributions, as well as to ARVN forced requisitions. Times had probably never been worse. Of course worst off were the people whose homes were in the two hamlets being bombed. Returning from our walk out toward the beach on the afternoon of the second day, I saw hundreds huddled in family groups of fifteen or twenty. Homeless until the operation was over, for many presumably even then, they could do nothing but wait. They had sought refuge in the resettlement area but had been refused. They had returned to the next hamlet, obviously the scene of a previous battle. Totally deserted, not a structure remained standing. Holes fifteen yards in diameter from 1000 pound bombs dotted the area. Presumably they now had little better to return to.

Early the next morning I saw two men carrying a pole from which a hammock was slung. At first I assumed they were just transporting belongings in this manner. When I noticed an old woman in tears, I looked closer at the hammock and saw a foot protruding from one end of it. The ARVN standing nearby told me they were taking a wounded
man to the village. I said to tell them to return. We could call a
helicopter to fly the wounded man to the hospital. They did not budge
until I had spoken to their lieutenant. Soon thereafter they returned,
and within twenty minutes the wounded man was on his way to the hospital.
A crowd of people had gathered and listened as I talked to the old
lady and two bearers. The lady was the wounded man's mother. He had
been wounded early in the morning when an artillery round exploded
near the house. His wife and two children had been killed, the house
destroyed. They soon left, returning to their hamlet.

Having seen that I could arrange through Jack for a helicopter to
take people to a hospital, a farmer showed me his arm. A bullet had
hit him in the elbow, breaking the arm. The cast had just come off
but now the arm would not bend. In addition it was very painful. He
pleaded with me to call a helicopter. How could he farm his field with
an arm that would not bend. I had no answer, nor could I, of course,
solve his problem.

The people who had crowded around the wounded man in the hammock
said they had never talked with an American who could speak Vietnamese.
I asked them what they were most afraid of. The first reply was the
VC. I said nothing. Then a second lady said artillery. I asked why
they were afraid of the VC. The first lady said they taxed them and
they might die if they did not obey. I thought it was certainly a lot
easier to die by artillery. I asked if there was not something else
they feared more. After a pause in which no one answered, a bold ten-
year-old replied, the Koreans. An older girl, perhaps his sister, told
him not to say it. I asked him who were worse, the VC or the Koreans.
He would not make the distinction, just said both were bad. The ice
broken, a lady said they were baby killers and she was terrified of
them. This was not new to me. I just wondered how it could be allowed
to continue for so long.

Earlier that morning the APC unit in the valley had opened fire.
Shooting high and in our direction, the rounds started to land all over
our area. It was at least fifteen minutes before Jack could get their
adviser to compel to stop shooting in our direction. There had been
numerous close calls, but also several wounded, all of whom were civilians.
A mother had been holding her baby when a round pierced her arm and that of the baby. Most seriously wounded was a young thirteen-year-old girl. The day before she had been adopted by a particularly kind ARVN soldier. Her parents had been killed by Koreans. In accordance with Korean policy, whenever a Korean soldier is killed from a hamlet, Vietnamese found in that hamlet are killed, sometimes all including babies, sometimes just a few as a warning. Her parents had been called up out of their bunker and shot. She had been spared. The ARVN soldier who had adopted her felt quite badly. The bullet had gone through her side and appeared serious. He wanted me to find out where she had been taken, for she was alone in the world. If she died, he wanted to see that she was buried. If she lived, he wanted to bring her home for his wife to care for.

Within the course of those few hours I came across several other instances of children whose parents had recently been killed by the Koreans operating in the area. This is a VC area. These people have no representation and, the My Lai incident to the contrary, most deaths are accepted as part of war. It still is amazing that these deaths have never been publicly disclosed. They are certainly no secret to the local people or any Vietnamese who visit this area. Of course, being "VC," there is no relation to the authorities and thus no recourse. For example, I overheard an ARVN soldier talking about how his cousin, six-months pregnant at the time, had been executed by Koreans because VC had fired at them from her hamlet.
IV.

That's it. We flew back to Saigon, talked to those who would listen to us, wrote our separate but related reports, and left Vietnam. Perhaps on our next trip we will see more villages like the one in Binh Son where we spent the night.