

# CORDS

What the Americans were greeted to, once the old French indo-China was dissolved after the French Army was soundly defeated in 1954, was a quagmire. A land rapped, looted and extorted for the good of France. I witnessed only 15% of the population having electricity. I saw daily black-outs from lack of repair of electrical generating equipment. I saw leaking terra-cotta pipe leak sewer atop leaking terra cotta water pipes.

Roads had been constructed for the small French cars. The population moved from city to city by bus. The last train was blown up in 1962. Dismal were the intra-structure. The American transporting heavy tanks, Armored Personnel Carriers, and fuel trucks carrying tons of gas, diesel and aviation gas wrecked havoc on the weak road system.. Causing deep ruts, pot-holes and wavy roadways making driving hazardous

The French took native trees and plants, such as tea, coffee and rubber and enlarged these plants into a plantation. Sending these crops back to France or sale on the open market. Schools and education were for the children of the French elite. The common Vietnamese children worked the land from sunup to sundown just to grow food for the family.

The Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MAC-V) handled the 1 million combat troops and the support or administrative jobs required of all 4 branches of the military. They were the Army Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

The United States Embassy in Saigon also contained a vital share of duties. The CIA operated AIR AMERICA had a embassy office, but operated from Tan Son Nhut Air Base at Saigon and other airports around the country.

My Army Alpha MAC-V motion picture team flew in anything that was air worthy. The only Air America flight the photo team took was in a swiss built short takeoff plane, flown by an American. The payload, beside the photo team was 400 pounds of 40% Ammonia/nitrate blasting explosive for the RMK/BRJ quarry at Nuy Sap, An Gaing Province. The quarry was 100 miles southwest of Saigon.

CORDS for Civilian Office of Revolutionary Developments Supports, and embassy program with the unaimable mission of Nation Building and Pacification. The U.S. military partook in this endeavor via of MEDCAPS., where handing out a million bars of soap a month was their achievement.

However the photo team I was on was throttled with transporting a Vietnamese child back to Vietnam, after treatment at Tripler Army hospital in Hawaii.. The boy had picked up an unexploded hand grenade when it exploded. Taking off an arm and shrapnel throughout his body. By some miracle an American MED-EVAC helo was immediately available to get the boy to a U.S. hospital and urgently put on a medical flight back to Hawaii.. After half a year in Hawaii he was ready to be sent home.

He had been sling shotted centuries into his future. From no electricity to flip a switch and 24 hour light. Climate control via of air conditioning. Food from a meat bowl of rice to pizza, burgers and hot dogs, roast beef, all coming from a can, frozen bag or other contain; and a swimming pool instead of mud hole for therapy.. Our job was to transport this kid from the real world of America to his backward world of nothing. The wild tales this kid will tell his parents and friends!!@!

I had been in Vietnam well over a year before I ever heard the term CORDS. Even the introduction was an accident. As sergeant of the MAC-V Army Alpha photo team, our boss MAC-V sent my team to An Gaing Province at the end of TET. While the entire country was in a blood bath. This province had only a couple of hand grenades tossed at RUFF/PUFF sites. The equivalent of our reserves and national guard. We were sent to investigate this miraculous phenomenal event.

The Air Force still had flights into Long Xuygen (pronounce Long Swinn). At the airport only a special forces sergeant was there to get mail. The photo team was the only group to exit the plane.. We quickly learned the special forces had no mission or function. At their structure I learned the Hoa Hao Buddha sect HAD THEIR OWN MILITARY. A general and Army. The VC nor Saigon troops were not allowed in the province. Us. U.S. military it was suggested only tolerated. The VC did capture the general and killed him. That was the reason so few blood letting had gone on in An Gaing

Surprised the special forces troops didn't wear guns. We felt foolish wearing our pistols. I began to feel safer here in Long Xuygen than in Saigon, where only the M.P.s wore guns. I learned the only reason to carry a gun was if the aircraft crashed between Saigon and here. The special forces suggested C.O.R.D.S.

CORDS for Civilian Office Revolutionary Developments Supports. This was a new term a new arena. Nothing I ever heard of even with over a year in country. CORDS is run straight out of the embassy.

The CORDS mission was Nation Building and Pacification efforts. What a mouth full. Even trying to define the terminology, could mean austere or delinquent efforts. Everywhere in the country one saw the national flag flying. Both off office buildings and small hand held flags. Yet the colored cloth meant little for the illiterate farming family, with no electric, never schooled, no newspaper, and only word by mouth communication. Yet with every intercourse the meaning is altered somewhat.

In the early 1960s, nearly every week the American TV newscasts reported a coup d etat in Saigon.. In a period of 3 years nearly 2 dozen change of presidents took place, all by force.. Who cared anyway. The average Vietnamese didn't care if they lived free or under communism. The Nation Building and Pacification work was a major involvement by the U.S.

In Bam Me Thout I witness corruption first hand. The U.S. had donated cement and sand to build a school, with a 6 inch floor. The province chief (equal to state governor) stole the school supplies to build himself a larger house.

The CORDS people in Long Xuygen mentioned a plot of land where they grew other vegetables besides floating rice. I was told 2 brothers. One had a chicken farm. The other was raising hogs. What a surprise. every farmer lived in a grass hut. with a puddle for drinking water, bathes, washing clothes ducks to swim in. A few chickens and maybe a pig running free.. Then I heard of the Vietnamese military hospital, where the new commander had the patients grow their own food. I figured we hit upon the biggest

biggest story ever or the biggest crack-pot I could locate!!

On the way back to the special forces encampment, my mind was ~~swimming~~ with opportunities down here in Long Xuygen. CORDS was exactly why the 5 MAC-V photo teams were formed. When the assistance secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, got sick and tired of departing the Pentagon nightly, to go home for a hot meal and watch the nightly newscast., to see blood, guts and gore every night, when he knew the U.S. was spending millions of dollars a year on positive events. So the 5 MAC-V combat photo teams were forbidden to film war stories.

For eons, from great grandfather to grandfather, from grand father to grand son, for father to son, from son to grand son the story was preached that the only crop for the delta region was floating rice. Believing dad for the truth; and what was good for dad was good enough for me! Plus lack of money to experiment growing other crops, the time proven agriculture ideas persisted. CORDS obtained a plot of land. They had local farmer till the soil. CORDS furnished the hoes, tillers and gardening tools, but more importantly furnished the seed. CORDS showed, educated the local farmers that with adequate Ph factors, temperature and moisture anything can grow!.

For the farmer it was simply time to tend the plot of land. CORDS furnished the hoes, tillers and other garden tools, The un-educated farmer planted and was with their own eyes that tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, onions, melons, carrots and a host of other vegetables if given the chance.. The fable only floating rice was the only crop for the delta was a myth was broken!

The next morning CORDS people picked up the entire film crew. Our first stop was the plot of land as garden. To me any my crew this was no different than any garden in any town, county or state in round eye land. However to these uneducated farmers putting a seed in the ground, and the land looks just like my farm land, and out sprouts leaves that ain't rice. What a revolutionary development. Asking CORDS for some seeds I'll plant some on my own farm., and let the neighbors wonder how in the world did this miracle happen! Besides the rare times we have chicken or pig to augment the bowl of rice with vegetables might also be beneficial to our health.

We hardly shot any film here on the garden. It resemble any stateside backyard patch. The difference was mental properties. Dispelling the age old theory of only one crop could be grown. Here we all planted different things. We all watch as sprouts surfaced, not rice but vegetables. We can ask CORDS for seed and let the neighbors wonder how we got table crops to grown, beside rice!!

Then it was on to the 2 brothers and their approach to animal husbandry ~~herds~~ of chicken and pigs. The 2 brothers were truly in NO-MANS land. There was no body but the CORDS people to ask guidance. The CORDS people were the only source of information.



It might have been beneficial to both brothers if they could travel outside Vietnam to see other meat producers operations.

The U.S. poultry industry has a 62 daylife span, from hatching to slaughter house. Every hour of the hen's life is orchestrated. The sleep, water, food quantity are all controlled

With great stress on meat to bone ratio.. Another prized ratio is new breeds coming out of research labs. Here the light to dark meat ratios are important.

I don't think egg production ever entered the conversation. The question was never talked about if this brother had an rooster or not, to mate with the hens for fertile eggs. Then requiring a brooder to keep the chicks warm, until they grew feathers.

The term Rhode Island Red was tossed around. A species of hen I remember from when I was a linoleum lizard, my parents had chickens.

The other brother, raising hogs also had his pig penned in. Driving up to the fence. a group of piggies came toward the van. I suppose they thought we were some sort of food source. Off in the distance I saw a building probably for security. At nights the neighbors would steal the hogs.

The pasture was good solid ground. I saw no mud holes for the pigs to wallow in. I saw no slop pits to dump food in. All the hogs were uniform in size. I saw no big male no large sow or female swine. All the piglets appeared about the same weight. 40 to 50 pounds. Nice young hogs. When these got bigger and he sold them off; without a sow and hog where were the new generation going to come from. You can't keep buying piglets and make money!! From the hog farm the CORDS van took the photo team into the city where the Vietnamese military was located. There we filmed the patients growing their own food.

The CORDS people left us off at the military hospital. CORDS driver went into the admin office to announce that a U.S. photo team was there and could the commander meet the camera crew? When he talked, I was surprised at his command of english. He told us that he realized that 85 % of the hospital patients had been farmers before being drafted and shown how to shoot a gun. He also leaked some information, that he thought was stupid. That was "Saigon sent him money every month to buy food for the hospital, when he had at his beckon call fully qualified farmer, with the expertise and knowledge to get the job done. He stressed that only patient with the stamias and no forced patient too weak. or wounds not healed enough. Basically only those Vietnamese soldiers living in wards would be utilized.

Meanwhile the patients lounged around in the worse Vietnamese military hospital in the country. The wards were rusted dilapidated, rotten corrulated steel building, measuring 20 feet wide by 40 feet long. They at 2 doors one at each end.

The wards each had a pair of barely 25 watt refrigerator size light bulbs. It they had 4 windows. This new commander's goal was give The downfrodden, worthlessness, with any soldier with an amputation would be worthless and become a street begger. This was not in the commander's agenda.

The commander had a myraid of surprises for us. Only about 1/3 of the hospital lawn had been dug up and planted. Somee patients were busy picking ripe vegetables. Other were watering other rows of vegetables. A few were digging grass up and getting ready to plant seed.

The hospital commander pointed out a group of guys on crutches mixing cement. He told us he bought the sand and cement and had made a form for cement blocks. In a wheelbarrow one man with a water hose poured water onto the water, cement and sand mixture. Other guys with hoes mixed the concoction up to a uniform consistency. I don't recall if they used hoes, trowel to put cement into the wooden form. However after maybe 20 minutes one guy lifted the wooden form leaving a wet cement block. It dried and hardened over night. I believe the group had 3 wooden cement block forms to use. All these materials were bought out of the monthly food fund Saigon sent.

The hospital commander only said it once to be final. Only troops well enough to perform farming duties were used. Troops too weak or not healed enough were excused.

Yet the commanders was not finished with surprises for us to see. At the rear of the hospital compound was a meter and a 1/2 high wall. It ran for close to a hundred yards. Off in the distance I saw a ramp going up to 4 outhouses. The outhouses were over a fish tank.. I've ~~seen~~ the same set-up elsewhere, but for a hospital this seemed UNCOUTH!! One night decades later I woke up in the middle of the night laughing uncontrollable. I pondered if the fish perfered terds, or diahreaia//

The commandder went to a bag of CATFISH CHOW by Purina. I never heard of Catfish chow.. Taking a handful he tossed the catfish food into the tank. about 50 fish grabbed the food the instance it hit the slim of water and human waste. The commander said he bought fingerlings for about 3 cents each and 9 month later sold adult catfish for 100 cents each.

The new military commander had a wondrous toward his men. He might say , as a child you climbed trees. Now as an adult; you adapted to your enviornment, your surroundings.. You feel guilty and silly now climbing trees. As an adult, you get a ladder to achieve the same results. You adopt to change!!!

- For the men losing a arm or a leg and feeling IN-COMPLETE,  
USELESSNESS' than whole. This was certainly TRUE!! But it wasn't  
a reason ; not to adapt. Use a crutch, A wheelchair;; don't just  
lay there and cry. the blues!! Make the most out of what you  
still have. Mainly MOVATVATION; A WILLINGNESS to suceed.. Be  
victorious. Watching a amputee with one leg hop on a shovel for  
a schoop of soil. A man with a crutch mixing cement. I saw raw  
courage, a willingnessWHO WOULD HAVE THUNK IT POSSIBLE ???? A  
NO loose attitude. If I can \_do it for my fellow patients I can  
DAMN WELL do it for my family . I might be slower getting the job  
done, BUT it will be DONE!!! One leg, one arm ONE MIND DO-IT!!!  
Every man in the hospital mind was altered dramatically , just  
being in this facility!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I definately left the military hospital knowing I met a genius In all I shot 1600 feet of film. If all 4 stories were edited and used by the networks only 300 feet of film would be used. For a half hour newscast each story averages 2 minutes of air time. The editor would have a wide choise of scenes to use

About 6 months later while at the Pleiku Press camp They had Armed forces TV on. Showing was ABC's series 20/20 They had an episode on farming in AnGaing Provience. Lots of my film was used I was elated and hrumpy at the same time. Glad each segment on 20/20 lasted 17 to 20 minutes./ Giving the work of CORDS it's justice, but never did they say film from the Pentagon, nor military. I gave them the idea for the story..

I learned where the Saigon CORDS Office was and made monthly trips to visit the place for new ideas. CORDS is exactly why the MAC-V photo teams were formed.