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DEBRIEF OF AN  
AID REPRESENTATIVE  
VIETNAM AND LAOS  
1963 - 1967  
No. 15681

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PRECIS

## DEBRIEF OF AN AID REPRESENTATIVE

## VIETNAM AND LAOS

1963 - 1967

This AID representative served in Vietnam as a province representative for two and a half years and at the regional level for a year and a half. His last representational assignment for AID was in Laos. His attitude and approach is typical of the aggressive, action-orientated, free-wheeling, anti-bureaucratic, early Vietnamese AID group known as "The Tigers".\* He has strong views and his conversation is eclectic and racy. His "how to" advice is interesting.

He makes the following observations:

a. AID has placed pathetic reliance on the belief that good works are an end in themselves without regard to the political implications involved. We shouldn't put schools where they are shortest in schools and have the most children -- it's most likely a secure area. Schools should be built in way-out areas where tangible evidence of government presence is necessary. We must use foreign aid for political purposes.

b. There are two obstacles to learning Vietnamese in-country: you are too busy and most of the officials you deal with prefer to speak English. (He implies that language proficiency is really not very important.)

c. The Vietnamese are industrious and persistent, but not well organized. They get deeply and emotionally involved in political questions. They are not really convinced when they say they are. The women carry a great deal of weight in the financial matters of the family, and the old ladies especially exert considerable influence.

d. Any American who feels that he has to get his clothes from the U. S. and eat American food shouldn't be

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\*See Debriefs No. 6672 and 86711.

there. People who adapt best are young, single men and older men who have been married for many years. Frustration is the greatest hardship.

e. It is a delicate matter to advise Americans in AID on how to cope with newsmen. (The topic Press Relations and Publicity is better read than summarized.)

f. The Vietnamese village is a de jure structure which doesn't physically exist. The hamlet is a structure that does exist, but has no legal status. The highest level of concern to the peasant is the district.

g. We delude ourselves if we believe we can build national pride from the grass roots. We must build local and regional pride and competence. The province chiefs of today will be the ministers and premiers of tomorrow. The Vietnamese military will continue to be the major source of political candidates for some time to come.

h. The ineffectiveness of the AID bureaucracy brought about OCO and finally CORDS. (He implies that CORDS represents an advance in "revolutionary warfare" but cautious against being overwhelmed by "sheer weight of paper" and the diversion of civic action resources to military uses.)

i. Self-help is a problem because it is not well understood by Vietnamese officials. They want to tell the people what they need rather than help the people do what they want.

j. An American tendency is to become emotionally involved with his area of assignment. It's good in that it fosters team spirit. It's bad because it leads to lack of understanding of problems at other levels of operation.

k. The people of Central Vietnam tend to think and act independently of Saigon because of the lack of mobility between the two areas. Almost all intercourse must be by sea because of the lack of roads.\*

l. The farther down you go in the social strata, the better the Buddhists and Catholics get along.

m. You can't stop corruption in Vietnam, but an attempt should be made to control the amount and kind. Corrective

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\*Editor's Note: See Debrief No. 9678, pages 7 and 8.

measures must work within the Vietnamese system.

n. There was bureaucratic rivalry between AID officials in Laos and Vietnam. AID/Laos felt Vietnam got preferential treatment.

o. Christian ethics are irrelevant to the Pathet Lao and Viet Cong. Going unarmed is no protection. If it suits the convenience of the commissar to have a civilian killed, he'll do it. The fact that the civilian is unarmed only makes the job easier. Several unarmed IVS people were killed that might now be alive if they had been armed.

p. There were quite a few American "hippies" in Laos that served as a bother.

q. Laos is a little like wartime Lisbon -- you can occasionally meet the enemy face to face in a non-shooting situation.

r. Evidence of French culture is more noticeable in Laos than in Vietnam. We should not let the official coolness between the U. S. and France interfere with cooperation in Laos.

s. Catholic priests should be cultivated in Lao. Most of them have been there a long time and know their way around.

t. The Lao are easy going and really don't care much about things we think are important. It would be difficult to convert them to Communism because they don't feel anything that intensely. The Catholics have had little success in Laos for this reason. The Lao reaction to vexing problems is -- "to hell with it."

DEBRIEF OF AN AID REPRESENTATIVE

VIETNAM AND LAOS

1963 - 1967

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## PREFACE

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1. To obtain general information which will be of value to overseas trainees in their intended assignment.
2. To obtain specific information which will be of value to overseas trainees in performing in their specialties (agriculture, engineering, medicine, etc.).
3. To provide material for understanding the social and cultural framework of a country, and its particular and peculiar dynamics of social change. And, as a correlate, to discover customs, mores, taboos, and other relevant factors which affect interpersonal relationships between Americans and members of a host community.
4. To accumulate a bank of new or updated information for an institutional memory, for fundamental research and for application to future development assistance programs.
5. To record information which may not have been made a part of official reports on the functions, roles, frustrations, complaints, successes and failures of AID Field Operations Personnel.
6. To provide other information suitable for instructional purposes. For example, to identify problem situations of sufficient complexity and significance to construct case studies for use in ATC problem-solving exercises.

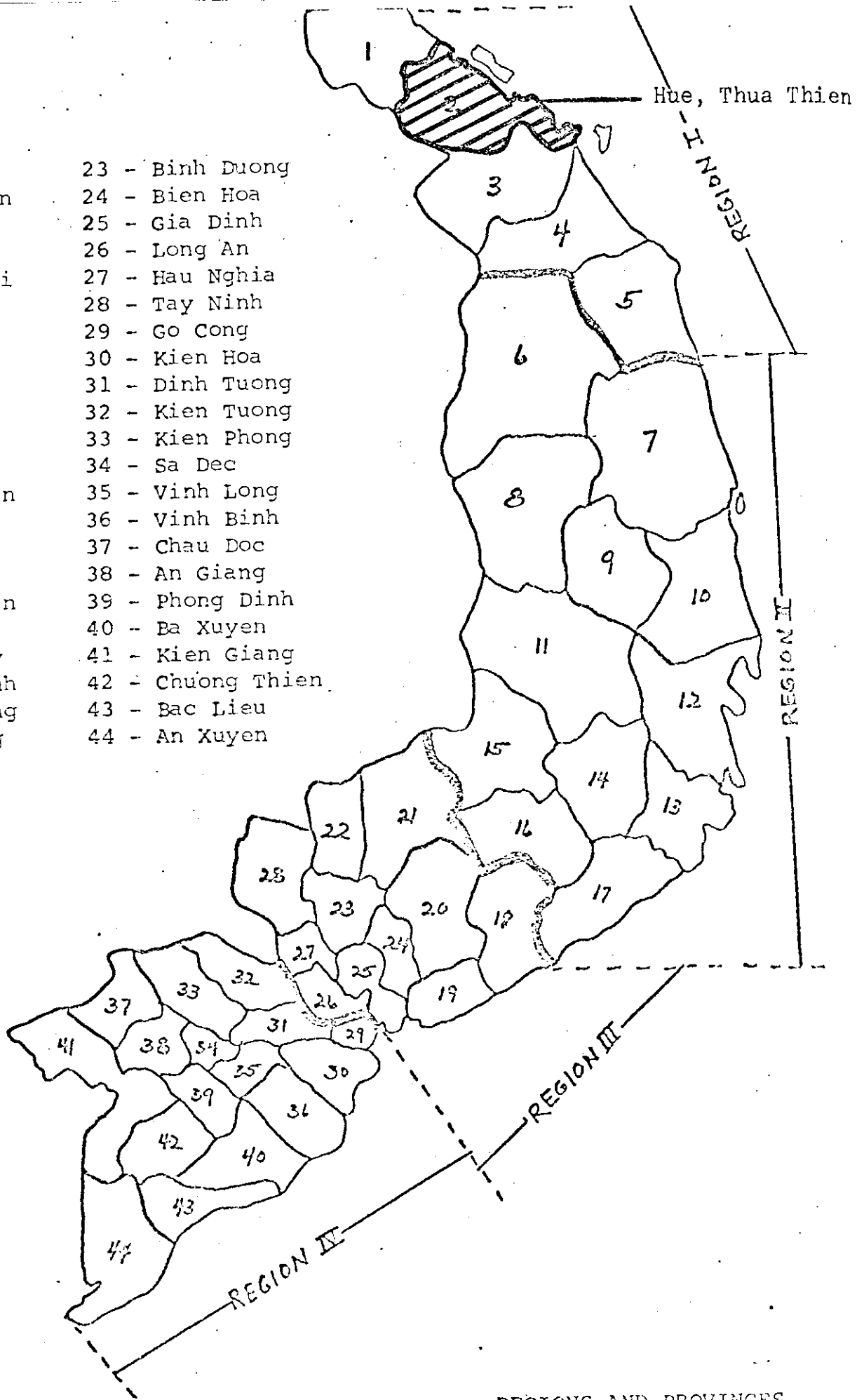
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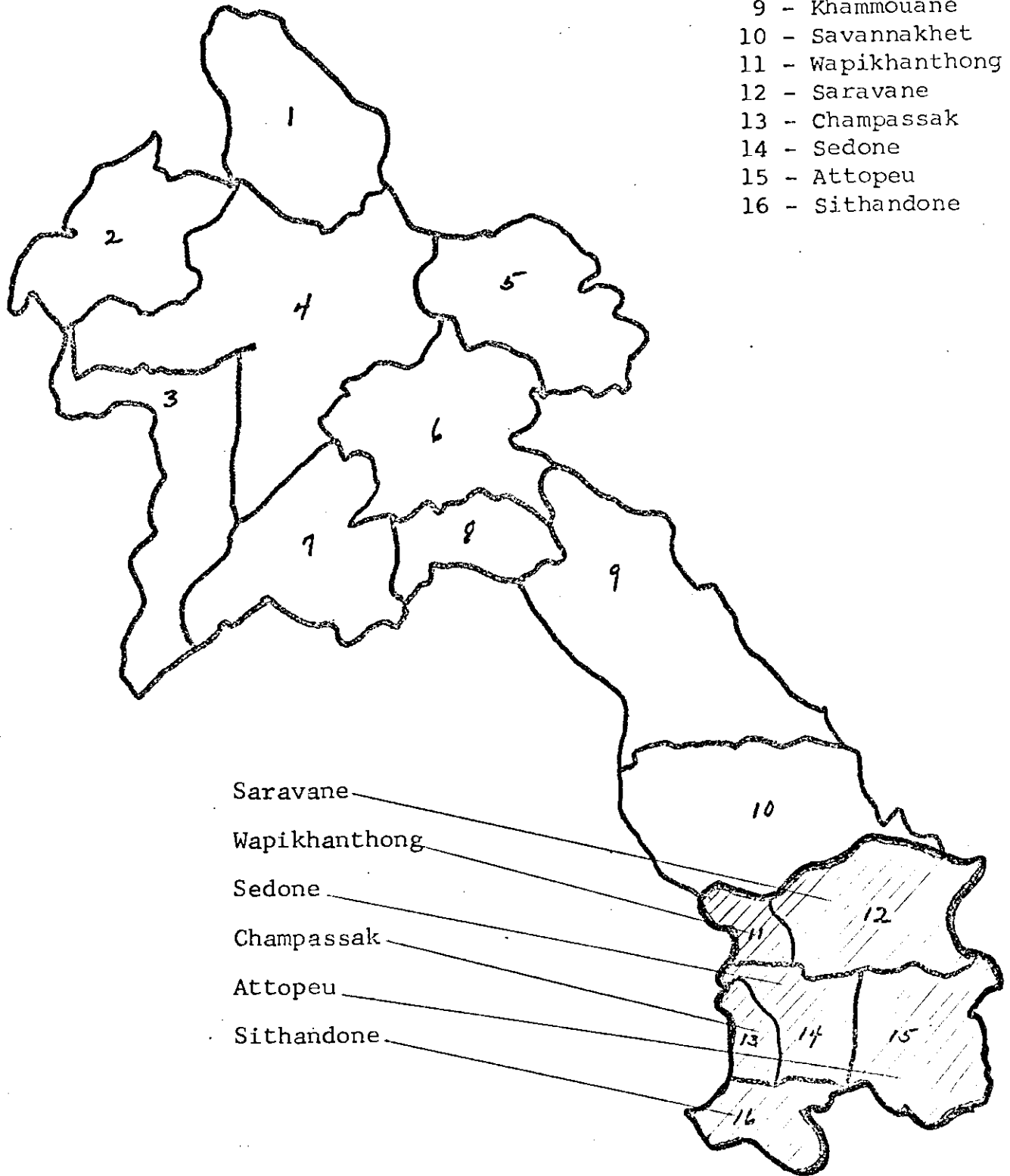
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REGIONS AND PROVINCES  
OF  
SOUTH VIETNAM

- 1 - Phong Saly
- 2 - Houa Khong
- 3 - Sayaboury
- 4 - Luang Prabang
- 5 - Houa Phan
- 6 - Xieng Khouang
- 7 - Vientiane
- 8 - Borikhane
- 9 - Khammouane
- 10 - Savannakhet
- 11 - Wapikhanthong
- 12 - Saravane
- 13 - Champassak
- 14 - Sedone
- 15 - Attopeu
- 16 - Sithandone



## DEBRIEF OF AN AID REPRESENTATIVE

### VIETNAM AND LAOS

1963 - 1967

#### Preparation and Orientation for the Position

The manner in which I was recruited for the job was that a naval officer stationed in Saigon with the advisory group told me about this. He was an old friend and we wrote letters back and forth. I was in Kwajalein atoll at the time, and he mentioned in one of his letters that USOM, which is what AID was called at the time in a few countries, needed people like me to work in the rural areas of Vietnam as provincial representatives. I had never even heard of USOM prior to this but had been vaguely aware of ECA and ICA, as AID was known previously. It sounded interesting and, frankly, I had no missionary zeal when I embarked on this sort of thing. The pay was good, and it sounded like a very interesting job, so I went out there on my own.

This was a rather freely run outfit at the time out there, and I went right to work as a provincial representative. For the first six or seven months I worked for the Office of Rural Affairs as an individual contractor to the government. It was during this interval that I was processed as a regular direct-hire employee of AID. While I didn't consider it unusual at the time (I had no basis for comparison), this method of recruitment was regarded suspiciously by the resident AID bureaucrats in Saigon, and probably in Washington. I had, after all, been invited to come out and go to work. The people who invited me worked in Rural Affairs and they more or less attempted to legalize the transaction after the fact. The bookkeepers and personnel people, however, don't work very fast, and it turned out that I was working the first month for nothing. I felt, though, that it was worth the gamble.

So, on the strength of the invitation, I quit my job in the Marshall Islands and reached Saigon on October 14, 1963. It frankly never occurred to me that I wouldn't get the job. Rather, I allowed myself seven days (the length of a visitor's visa) to look the situation over, and if I didn't like it, I had planned to continue on around the world and work in Stuttgart, where I had lined up another job as an "anchor to windward." The preparation and orientation for the job was nil from the official point of view. I feel, nevertheless, that I was excellently prepared for it and recommend it for others. Prior to my retirement from the navy in 1962, I spent three years in

CINCPAC staff as the administrative aide to Admiral H. C. Felt and I read just about every word that came through on Laos, Vietnam and the rest of the Pacific Command in the form of message traffic, OPLANS, situation reports, and staff studies. I knew the area, the issues, and the dominant trends and people. In my 24 years in the navy, both as enlisted and officer, I was a "generalist", -- a "leader of the troops", an operator, and a manager. I spent many years in the Orient and was aware of our cultural differences.

But more important than these incidental or fortuitous circumstances, I feel I was excellently prepared to be a provincial representative in Vietnam for two other reasons. First, I was totally unaware of the jackass, left-handed way ("gaucherie" in the most literal sense) that AID usually does business. By this I mean their pathetic reliance on the belief that good works like fertilizer and improved rice seed are an end in themselves without regard to the political implications these things involve. Second, I was fortunate, as were others like me at the time, in knowing people who understood the political implications and spelled them out to us. They allowed us the latitude to move freely in getting necessary things done.

At any rate, I became the ProvRep of both Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh provinces within a week of my arrival. (This wasn't unusual at the time because we were shorthanded.) These provinces were close by and I operated out of Saigon initially. For the first month or so I lived in a house in the Filipino compound down in Cholon with another American representative. We discussed things endlessly. We always discussed the same general topic: the political issues and counterinsurgency techniques. (Now it has become somewhat passé to use this negative term, "counterinsurgency", because it means just about what the speaker wants it to mean, and I myself prefer to say "revolutionary warfare" or social revolution (thanks to George Tanham and Ed Lansdale), which to me means the same thing but has a positive connotation.)

### Opinion on Language Proficiency

In my day to day operations in the field I was forced to rely on an interpreter. We called them area specialists, however, for two reasons. Their duties were much broader than those of a mere interpreter and this word "interpreter", I was told, put your interpreter on the defensive and was not liked by Vietnamese officials because the French had reputedly used interpreters as general informers or spies during their colonial occupation.

I had no formal training in the Vietnamese language, and I attempted some self-training after I got there. I found that after being on the scene awhile, the first thing I learned was reading a manifest. I began to recognize the names of commodities listed, the amounts, and the units of measurement, and then I found out how to pronounce these things by parroting my interpreter. Besides these documents, I began with my interpreter's help, to read menus (I avoided eating at the American clubs and messes), street signs, and the like. Then, of course, I learned the usual small talk ("How are you?", "Two beers please.", "I understand", "I don't understand", "I am sorry to hear that", etc.), but in speaking, I never ventured much farther than that, although I did learn to follow a simple conversation reasonably well.

When I had to communicate on my own, I found that it was a situation somewhat similar to, say, what existed here in Hawaii 20 or 25 years ago when I first came through here. There was a lot of pidgin spoken here then, although there isn't so much now, but in Vietnam I found that I could communicate pretty well with people my age and a little older with a combination of pidgin French and Vietnamese. I found it worked rather well although it must have sounded like hell to purists.

The problem to my learning the language there was that I was confronted by two obstacles. In the first place, I was simply too busy. The two hours a day that I would arbitrarily set aside for learning the language I invariably found I could better employ doing something else that at the time had a higher priority. Secondly, I found that after I was promoted to regional representative, most of the officials with whom I dealt preferred to speak English. They wanted to practice their English on me. This was true almost without exception. They took a great pride in the fact that they spoke English and they welcomed opportunities to use it. I found that I was more effective in my job if I went along with what they wanted and I did speak English with them.

### Impressions of the Vietnamese People

I had never been to Vietnam before I went there in 1963. Back in 1954 I was part of the navy task force under Admiral Sabin (and in which Tom Dooley was a navy doctor) that helped evacuate tens of thousands of predominantly Catholic refugees from North to South Vietnam. But I never went ashore in Vietnam. My contact with Vietnamese was limited to a few I met by accident at "Irene's Hungaria" restaurant in Tokyo and a Vietnamese bartender at a small cabaret on the French Riviera in Golfe Juan or Nice.

My first reaction to the Vietnamese after I arrived in country was to compare them with other oriental people with whom I had come in contact previously, and I still think that some of these comparisons are valid. I soon found that there were distinctive differences in the Vietnamese way of doing things and of looking at things and this, I think, cuts right across their various class lines. For instance, their officials, the peasants, the fishermen, their "urban proletariat" of which there aren't too many, they all have certain similarities, and if I were to compare them, for example, with the Japanese, I would say that they are as industrious, but they are certainly not as well organized. The Vietnamese, as I see them, simply don't have the Japanese talent for organization. It seems as though when you put two or three Vietnamese together in a business, for instance, they just can't make a go of it unless they are from the same family -- and the family chain of command is applied. If not, there is a lot of squabbling that eventually takes place.

I would say, and I don't want to appear biased (although I am biased, of course, in that regard), but I consider the Vietnamese far superior to the Filipinos. They struck me as being more tolerant, less opinionated, and more governed by a set of rules or ethics than the Filipinos. I must admit that there is a difference between Vietnamese, and the ones that I spent most of my time with in Central Vietnam do tend to be contentious, somewhat suspicious, and are hard bargainers or "horse traders" compared to those in the South or Delta. The Vietnamese generally, and the Central Vietnamese especially, get deeply and emotionally involved in political questions, and I would say they are far superior to Filipinos when it comes to going all out for something that they have decided irrevocably that they want. In this case, for comparison, the Filipino would quit early, the Thai would compromise somewhere along the line and at a profit, the Cambodian wouldn't understand the question, and the Lao would simply say, "Oh, to hell with it." To pursue this a little further, I think the Japanese and Korean would go as far and as hard as the Vietnamese but would depend more on dedicated leadership than the Vietnamese would. When this leadership breaks down, they are through, but the Vietnamese keeps going. He keeps going, in fact, longer after it is obvious to everyone else that the cause is lost. Parenthetically, I don't think the Chinese would embark on the project at all unless satisfied that the odds were favorable, but if an unanticipated variable is introduced into the equation which makes the odds unfavorable after he has started, he will most likely keep going, that is, throw good money after bad. The Vietnamese can be very frustrating in the way they go about things. They are not convinced when they say they are, and they only say they are to please their convincers or advisors. I

know this is true and that it is getting next to our American military there. They have on occasion accused the Vietnamese of, you might say, resting on their oars. This is true from the American point of view but the Vietnamese does not give up. He keeps at it year after year, and of course this is also equally true of the Vietnamese on the other side of the fence.

In comparing Vietnamese with what I know of the Koreans, I would say that the Koreans are a little more fierce, actually, in their determination. I would say that I find a great deal of similarity between the Koreans and the Vietnamese except that the Vietnamese are not as dour and austere as the Koreans and are a little more disposed to having a good time. They, the Vietnamese, are less inhibited but at the same time they are not as prone to commit excesses as the Koreans.

Then, compared to the Lao, one might say the Vietnamese are more austere and intense. The Lao are much more easy going, and to the extent that they don't really care about many things that I would think were important. The Lao would never be in danger of being converted to communism because they don't feel anything that intensely. The Catholics have had comparatively few converts in Laos for the same reason. It imposes a certain type of discipline that they simply won't tolerate.

I've observed the Chinese closely and worked with them in Vietnam and Laos and would certainly say they are more progressive, better organized, and easier to deal with than the Vietnamese and perhaps even the Lao. I like them but I don't trust them. They perform a necessary function in these countries, but any service they render which could be considered beneficial to either the people or the government of these countries is merely incidental to their primary purpose which is to serve their own interests. If it suits their purpose to turn communist to stay in business, they will. They are strictly percentage ball players and the overseas Chinese never loses sight of his goal -- the pursuit of a fast buck. We have the money and they love us. Of course, I'm generalizing and admit to being biased.

I lived pretty closely among the Vietnamese even during the time my family was out there. My family lived in Saigon and I would come into town from up north about once every three weeks for a weekend or a few days. The rest of the time I spent almost entirely with Vietnamese, and admittedly most of them were government officials. Many of these officials had been to the United States. After we had come to know each other quite well, they would compare notes with me and they were frankly curious as to how and why we did certain things, and occasionally they would welcome the same type of questions about their society. Some of their questions were quite trivial but interesting. For example, a question was why did we permit

teenage boys and girls to attend the same schools and same classrooms when we should know that we were inviting trouble. To this I could only answer that we lived in a coeducational society partly as a matter of economy, and we put faith and hope in what we could teach the children at home. Another was why American women were so perturbed when guests (presumably them) dropped cigaret and cigar ashes on the floor of the home or wrappings of various kinds, and to this I could merely respond that few Americans had servants and that for selfish reasons the hostess preferred they use ashtrays to save herself the trouble of having to clean it up. One final, rather ridiculous question which was asked in an embarrassed way was why Americans and certain Europeans blew their noses in handkerchiefs. To this I replied that it was done in the interests of cleanliness and hygiene -- to keep germs from floating around -- to which he asked, rather surprised, "But why save it?"

I found, too, that in all levels of Vietnamese society, the woman in the family carries a great deal of weight when it comes to handling the money, or the financial affairs of the family itself. I found in accompanying officials such as district chiefs, province chiefs and others into peasants' homes that the officials usually turned to the old ladies present when they wanted the unvarnished truth. These old women were so explicit as to what was wrong and often so contemptuous of the government effort to right things, that they embarrassed their menfolk and just about everybody else present. I remember on one occasion when I accompanied a district chief to various peasants' homes while he paid relocation money to them. This was a compensation of 3,500 piasters per family to compensate them for the forced relocation from their previous homes. The ritual would go something like this: the district chief would, with a note of apology on behalf of the government, hand the man of the family the money. The peasant's wife would be standing rather impassively or respectfully to one side or slightly behind the husband. As soon as the district chief's little speech was over or when the district chief handed over the cash, the husband would absentmindedly or perhaps matter of factly hand the money to his wife. The husband would then launch into a brief acknowledgment expressing his gratitude, and at times it was comical because the wife would remain rather flinty-eyed, and without a smile or anything, she would simply wet her thumb and start counting the money.

### Personal Adjustment

I found the matter of adjusting to my environment to be quite simple and not as difficult as I had somewhat idly imagined it might be. Life in Vietnam is just not that rough. I

missed my family a lot, and it was a year before they could join me. Then after they did, I got promoted and transferred up to Da Nang and only saw them a few days every month. I then spent a little more than a year without seeing them after dependents were evacuated in February of 1965. But what made it not only easier but enjoyable was that I felt I was doing a job that needed to be done and I immensely enjoyed doing it; I was kept so busy that I didn't have much time to think or dwell on my own problems, and my family and I were used to long separations from my years in the navy.

Another thing that helped the process of adjustment is that I like Vietnamese and French cooking. I'm not too particular and can live on fried rice for weeks. I might add that I never found it necessary to do so, however. I had my shirts, trousers, and shoes made locally and I ate "on the economy." Some people really can't do this, I know. (When I left the country in March of 1966, two American doctor friends of mine who were out there in the surgical teams gave me a homemade medal which testified that I was the only American they knew who actually suffered from constipation in Vietnam.) I think, though, that any American who feels that he has to order his clothes from Sears Roebuck and get his food from the commissary or eat at the various army messes really shouldn't be there.

So far as housing is concerned, even in the rural areas, we lived quite well when I was there; and, if anything, things have improved since then. During my two years and a half I did live for a time in a shack (in Tuy Hoa, Phu Yen) with no lights or running water (we ran back and forth to the well) but I also lived in some sumptuous French villas where really efficient servants did all the work for very reasonable pay.

It was my observation that the people who adapted best were young single men or older men who had been married for many years. It's hard to generalize, though, because Vietnam, like most underdeveloped countries, enables the average American to enjoy a higher standard of living than he probably had at home; and with everything available at such low prices, a man can go to hell in a handbasket in a hurry if he's so inclined.

I shared with many of my friends a feeling of sadness, frustration, or regret when it came time to leave because in looking back, it was obvious that I had accomplished very little. We Americans tend to be perfectionists and we're doomed to fall short of the goals we set for ourselves. Such rationalizations as "better to light a candle than to curse the darkness", or "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" don't make it any easier. I had hoped to accomplish much more than I did, and I tried hard to keep from blaming others -- the unimaginative bookkeepers in the Mission, who often controlled our

supplies and support assets, the bureaucrats who spoke in platitudes and proved their progress by various statistics, and even the Vietnamese themselves, often lethargic, inexperienced officials.

In measuring progress, I was forced to consider little things. I could go to the marketplace and see big, American-size watermelons for sale that a friend of mine from Tennessee and I had personally introduced in the area. I could sit in a local barbershop and the young fellow cutting my hair was whistling his rendition of Herb Alpert's "A Taste of Honey", and although he didn't know it and couldn't speak English, I introduced the Tijuana Brass to most of the bars in Da Nang. (Two tapes given to only one bar owner and with typical Vietnamese ingenuity and cooperation, it was copied on various Sony 500-As all over town.) These things and the friendly, unfeigned comradeship of Vietnamese from various levels of society gave me a sense of accomplishment. I realized that I had developed over a period of time something of a missionary complex myself. I was happy that I had entered rather emotionally into their lives and that they had accepted me.

Our regular or formal economic and social assistance programs in public works, agriculture, education, etc., I saw with a mixture of pride and anger. Physically and tangibly we had done quite a bit, actually, but much of it didn't have the political payoff it should have had or would have had if we had been able to exercise more local control over what was provided. And of what was provided, most of it (and I say it with a clear conscience) was accomplished despite the help, so-called, that we got from Saigon. We accomplished it by a lot of hard work and improvisation on the part of local Vietnamese and ourselves. I don't honestly think we can give our cohorts at the central government in this phase of the operation, at least, too much credit because there were too many stupid errors in planning, too much vapid theorizing and not enough action, and too many unkept promises. That all this mismanagement was done in good faith or with good intentions doesn't make the pill easier to swallow.

### Press Relations and Publicity\*

Press coverage by American newsmen of what is going on in Vietnam is a real sore point with me. For every competent

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\*Editor's Note: For other comment see Debrief No. 9678,  
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reporter who is willing to work hard, there must be 50 ham-and-egggers who wouldn't know a news item if it bit him on the leg. I realize that the shooting war and our American boys are the real news, and I accept that. Then, too, these guys have to please editors who have to please publishers who in turn are in business to sell papers. Another obstacle to good reporting is that these fellows have to get along with the PIO-type creature on the scene or be denied a lot of elbow room, sources, and the means of getting to and back from these sources.

What I object to in their efforts is purely the sloppy and shallow job they are doing on what they consider newsworthy. It is sloppy because they almost never get place names right or locations. "A district outpost 375 miles north of Saigon" is really quite puerile. It's like saying a Texaco service station was robbed 622 miles east of Denver. So what. Their work is sloppy and shallow to boot when they stress the 18- and 20-year olds who have had their eyes blinded or jaws shot off to the exclusion of some of the basic facts of why, where, and how. Youngsters have always been wounded in wars but never as gruesomely described as in this one.

It is a delicate matter to advise Americans in AID of how to cope with newsmen. One can be accused of anything from interfering with the freedom of speech to covering up the mistakes and stressing the good -- what there is of it. My procedure in dealing with them was to meet them cordially and ascertain their interest in the area. If they were of the typical sob-sister or human interest type of jerk, I would steer them immediately to the local hospital (the Da Nang Civil Hospital was a real beaut) and they could wade in blood and gristle to their heart's content. I wasted almost no time with them.

Another type of ham-and-egger is the matronly newshen who is shunted into your rural area to get her the hell out of the way somewhere else. She might, of course, also be a male, real or imagined, and her research covers topics such as, "Well, how big is I Corps compared to Texas?" or "How come these people all look so dirty?" or "If you like it so much here, why don't you join the army where you can get something done?" This type requires patience and friendliness and the best means of coping with her (or it) is to answer inane questions as clearly as possible, meanwhile attempting to get her (or it) to get drunk on her own money, after which, if you have one, turn her over to a junior assistant.

A dangerous example, however, who must be handled with extreme care, is the contentious type who feels he has been given the runaround (he probably has), thinks the administration

is bilking the American taxpayer, and hopes to get you to agree with him -- and he will probably quote or misquote you despite his protestations that "this is all off the record, of course." This type, incidentally, is always anxious to get you out of your office so "you can talk freely."

Still another type is the hard-working type who wants the dope and is willing to work for it. I always helped people like this. I accompanied them if they invited me and even provided some services such as transportation or use of an interpreter. I found interesting bits of information on these jaunts that had escaped me earlier even though it was right under my nose. (Examples are a man named Crutchfield or Critchfield from the Washington Star and Jack Foisie from a Los Angeles paper.)

I found the old pro's actually the easiest to deal with. They knew enough background to ask intelligent questions and avoid embarrassing or unanswerable ones, and they followed up on their initial inquiries to make sure they had things right. (Examples were Morgan (ABC), Collingwood (CBS), Sharkey (NBC), Hewitt of the Minneapolis Tribune, and Keyes Beech.)

In any case, I always acquainted my superiors of the general tenor and context of what was said in order that they would not be stranded out in left field with no information on the event and so that if they didn't like what I had said, they could let me know. I don't advise telling any newsman than you must defer comment until you clear it with headquarters. This is sheer ostentation since nothing we do is that fraught with danger or compromise. I feel that part of the job is knowing what to say or do ahead of time. A shortstop, for example, is paid to know what to do with the ball when it comes to him, and if he mechanically pegs it to first every time it comes to him, he's a loser because the situation or environment is constantly changing.

A sort of companion topic to this is the publicity that attends the average ProvRep's everyday activities. My own view is that I would prefer as little publicity as possible because I think it detracts from our effectiveness in more ways than one. When you discuss policies or explain procedures to a newsman who is not familiar with them, you will most likely be misquoted. We are, after all, not in show business and do not need publicity. It can do us more harm than good. In just a few cases in both Vietnam and Laos I have seen Americans, that is, official Americans, use and attempt to use newsmen as a forum to air their grievances. I'd consider this both stupid and unethical.

Another aspect of this topic is the publicity on the local scene that goes with the job and which is generated by the

Vietnamese. I could never get a reading from my superiors or from JUSPAO on what they thought was desirable here. We were not agreed in our own minds, that is, we Americans, on just how we should fit into this picture. Now I always took the view -- and later on I advised the provincial representatives who worked for me -- to shy away from too much publicity. But the Vietnamese love ceremonies, these ribbon cutting affairs complete with a band, children all lined up in ranks, recitations, and speeches. They're not only rather boring to attend, that is, I found them that way, but more important and in a political sense, I always thought that we detracted somewhat from the prestige of the government of Vietnam or from their officials by always being present at these affairs. It would have been better, and I think still that it is better if we let them take the credit and we remain inconspicuous. Incidentally, most of the people know anyway that American aid is behind most of these things, but it just sort of strikes a wrong note, I think, to have Americans too prominent in taking the credit for these things.

It appeared to me that the province chief or the corps commander felt a real obligation to invite me to these ceremonies, but that I had the same obligation to decline with thanks, and I think he appreciated it. Sometimes, of course, it is not prudent or appropriate to decline, but I felt it was necessary to explain my views to them why I did not desire to attend and they generally agreed. In fact, we usually laughed about it.

### The Province Organizational Structure

From 1963 to 1966 when I was there, and presumably yet, there was, by and large, a real dearth of capable (or not even capable) just administrators, period. It was generally true there as it is almost everywhere that organizations looked better on paper than they did in real life. At that time in Vietnam organizations that looked good on paper very often didn't exist at all. If you apply the usual yardsticks of management analysis to their structure, it's a wonder it works at all. All the common faults are there: divided responsibility, responsibility without authority, improper delegation of authority (or no provision for it), impossible spans of control, and, of course, inexperienced people.

If we begin at the provinces and the province chief, he's usually an operational commander in the rank of major or lieutenant colonel, and it's entirely possible that this is the first time he has ever had a job like this. The organizational structure is basically weak here because he has three disparate categories of subordinates of divided loyalties who report to

him to carry out the work of running that province -- all things in it. He has, first, his military component, but that is dignifying the term -- they are paramilitary, regional and popular forces. The numbers of these that he has at his disposal in operating company- or platoon-size units are determined by the criticality of the tactical situation (which is generally determined by the enemy), his ability to recruit locally, and such things as that. Then he has the administrative category of people. These generally consist of the two deputies for administration and security, his chef de finance or chief of financial services, and possibly a chef de cabinet, who is more of an executive assistant. In addition to that, in the administrative category, he has a pool of typists and clerks. Then, the third category is his technical staff. These technical chiefs of services don't owe their final allegiance to the province chief. They are simply an extension of the parent ministry in Saigon. They owe their first allegiance to the place they get their money from and that is the ministry, although on paper the province chief has the right to criticize or evaluate what they are doing and to have the last say. If, for instance, the Irrigation Chief or the Public Works Chief decided out of the clear blue sky or some previous authorization from his ministry to build an irrigation dam in an area which is obviously under the control of the Viet Cong, the province chief can veto that, but by and large he doesn't exercise too much control over them. These are weaknesses built into the system, partly a legacy of French colonial administration.

Within the province are the districts, under the district chiefs. The district chief is usually a captain, although he could be a lieutenant. In some big districts he might even be a major. The district chiefs, of course, report to the province chief. Of the military component within the province, the regional forces are usually at the province headquarters or operating out of province headquarters, while the popular forces, who actually bore the brunt of what you might call the second stage harassment by the Viet Cong, are under the district chief. Then each district chief has a civilian deputy.

The figures or percentages, as I recall them, are that about 85% of the population is rural, that is, peasants and fishermen, and for this reason, the structure of local government where the people live and come into contact with their government is very important. Below the district level of government are the villages and hamlets. The village is per se a de jure structure which does not physically exist, while the hamlet, conversely, is a de facto structure which does exist but has no legal status. A village is merely a collection of hamlets -- as few as two or as many as perhaps 16 to 20.

Now, the structure of the government remains virtually

unchanged despite the fact that the people change, the incumbents change, but so far as the individual peasant is concerned, about the highest level of government that he even feels indirectly is the district chief. He, I'm afraid, had very little use for his particular hamlet or village chief because since about 1956 until just recently, he has been an appointed official. This official was appointed either by the district chief, that is, the hamlet chief was, or in the case of the village chief, by the province chief on the recommendation of the district chief. Precisely because he was an appointee -- someone who the district chief felt he could trust -- he didn't very often really owe any responsibility to these people in the hamlet, and they knew that. The reason, of course, is that regardless of the presence or absence of the Viet Cong, there is a fundamental clash or conflict between the peasant and his government simply because this government -- what he sees of it -- is inept, stupid and usually corrupt. It keeps taking things away and has given him precious little in return. The village or hamlet chief has, therefore, been primarily an informer, a census taker, and a record keeper.

There was, however, some natural leadership in these hamlets, but they were not running things. Certain elders in the community served the purpose of natural leadership in providing advice to the younger members, but the real political fact of life, in my opinion, is that these truly representative leaders in the community possess such a narrow range of interests that they have been rejected or are mistrusted by both the government and the national liberation front. They in turn do not trust either side because their parochial views make any concerted endeavor outside their immediate environs seem like an exercise in futility. Their life is harsh enough where it is without losing sleep over what might happen 20 kilometers down the road.

I think we Americans are perhaps deluding ourselves if we feel that we must build a sense of national pride from the grass roots up in order to attain a political victory. In the first place, I think it's an impossible task at this stage of the game, and I think there is an easier way, that is, by exploiting regional pride, and by continuing surreptitiously, if necessary, to usurp the prerogatives of the central government and redistributing them locally. The framework will for some time continue to be that of a unitary form of government as opposed to a federal system, and outwardly, at least, there are no residual rights in lesser or descending political entities. The government of Vietnam, the urban elite currently in power, will understandably resist attempts to diminish its power. We are, however, obviously undermining this unitary structure from or at the province level. We do this in various ways. We have finally managed, for instance, an arrangement whereby the indi-

vidual province enjoys so much latitude now in the control of certain funds and the formulation of budgets that the province no longer has to depend upon the central government for many of the things that it formerly did. We are trying obviously -- rather than try to impose a broader type of government from the top -- to make it grow from underneath, but not from the very bottom. We've picked a place about, you might say, half way down, at the middle-management level. We've temporized at the province level.\*

I think we're building or educating a broader base of local politicians who as province chiefs today, will be ministers or premiers tomorrow. We draw them from the ranks of the Vietnamese military primarily because the security situation demands it and will for years to come and because this is about the only cohesive group that can provide them. (Perhaps physicians and surgeons would be desirable but there simply ain't enough of them.) We Americans, incidentally, tend to equate ARVN officers with, say, our own military, and I, as a retired officer myself, shudder at the prospect of arbitrarily assigning the typical lieutenant colonel or colonel in our army to positions of similar responsibility in the United States. The Vietnamese officer, from my observation, at least, in and around I Corps, sees himself first as a member of his particular family (and he takes this seriously), then as a Buddhist of various stripe or as a Catholic, then as a member of the VNQDD or Dai Viet,\*\* and only last as a military officer. You don't get many George S. Pattons from this type of guy, but you can produce Everett Dirksens easily enough.

#### The American Bureaucratic Organizational Structure (Assistance)

It's inevitable that our American organization, that is AID or USAID or USOM, OCO, CORDS, etc., has changed tremendously in the last five years or so. Bigness is not the only change. There have been changes in procedure and in emphasis, too, that make it almost impossible to recognize the present organization as being related to the earlier one. It's also inevitable that some people think our organization has gone plumb to hell and hark back to the good old days. The

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\*Editor's Note: For other comments see Debrief No. 206711 under topic heading Tax Reform -- Property and Land; and No. 126712 under topic heading An Approach to Action in Vietnam

\*\* Political Parties.

present-day operation (CORDS) is certainly not a typical AID operation and thank God for that! My point is that the Office of Rural Affairs created in 1962 was a wide departure, too, from the traditional way that AID did business, and I think it's obvious that CORDS bears little resemblance to what used to be the Office of Rural Affairs.

What this amounts to simply is that AID traditionally put in a rather small mission into an underdeveloped country. It consisted, let's say, of experts in agriculture, public works, education, public administration, etc. They all stayed pretty much in the nation's capital and concentrated their efforts and advice on the ministerial level. This is inadequate in a country like Vietnam which is beset by an insurgency controlled from outside its borders, and, frankly, I think AID's efforts were probably pretty ineffectual even in countries not faced with such an insurgency situation because in many of these "peaceful" countries our foreign aid merely strengthened the stranglehold that an urban elite had on the rest of the country.

The real purpose, in my opinion, of tacking on a group of interlopers, non-farmers, and improvisers to the traditional AID mission in Vietnam, calling them the Office of Rural Affairs, and sending them out into the countryside as ProvReps was to try to channel at least a part of the flow of goods and money into projects which had a political payoff. Now the traditional AID employee is pathetically naive -- no, ignorant -- about the political implications of his job. He thinks that good works are an end in themselves and that virtue will emerge triumphant and unaided across the threshold. This, of course, is sheer, unadulterated horse manure. What the ProvRep was supposed to do was make the existing government look effective (or let's say, more effective) to the man behind the buffalo. This involved convincing certain officials like the province chief of what he had in mind and this was always difficult. If, therefore, we managed economic and social assistance programs so that we rewarded the faithful, punished the guilty, and convinced the "fence-sitters", and at the same time denied aid and comfort to the enemy all around us, we were successfully engaged in what we then called "counterinsurgency." This term is now in disrepute and rightfully so; those of us who consider ourselves au courant prefer to say "revolutionary warfare" or "social revolution." (Counterinsurgency is like motherhood. Everybody's for it, nobody's against it, and it means something different to almost everyone; but in between the joys of conception and the pride of accomplishment, there's a hell of a lot of pain and labor.)

Well, we had a good thing going and were making a lot of admittedly hard to measure progress until the summer of 1964 when a bunch of typical AID bureaucrats shot us right out of

the saddle. We in Rural Affairs did step on some toes among the traditional technician types. We did countermand orders, rearrange projects, and made things fit the local scene, but in doing so, we certainly made some enemies. From that time on until I left the country in the spring of 1966, whatever I accomplished was done by making "end runs", pretending to do one thing and doing another, and indulging in all sorts of subterfuge and chicanery in order to fool the bookkeepers, and all this behind a smokescreen of legitimate projects. This, of course, made it interesting but it was also frustrating and tiresome.

The horrible errors in planning in Saigon and the extravagant claims and promises continued, and those of us in the field felt quite betrayed although we did still have some friends in court back in Saigon. But it was a reaction to this type of ineffectual bumbling and this abysmal, bovine stupidity which was initiated in 1964 that brought about the subsequent reorganization into OCO and CORDS. At this juncture what I call the McNamara syndrome began to enter the picture. It goes like this: "if 20 guys can do a real good job, gee willikers! just think what we can accomplish with 2,000." Overnight practically every overweight technician in insecticides became a counterinsurgency expert. Management layers between the man on the ground and the head shed multiplied. Hundreds of Americans dealt only with other Americans. What had happened is that an attempt was made to duplicate the 20 handtooled articles (of which I was one) on an assembly line and the product was simply not quite as good.

But, as the organization stands now, the situation is certainly not hopeless. The job of the typical provincial representative is essentially the same and he has more help and more supplies, vehicles, money, and everything else. He also has to make more reports and spend more time on the administrative aspects of his own operation. The key point, I think, is that if he is aware of the political implications of his job, he can be even more effective than formerly because he has more power, authority, and assets at his disposal. The danger, of course, lies in the fact he may lose sight completely of his primary responsibilities and become merely an unofficial G-4\* to a nearby U. S. military unit or he may be overwhelmed by

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\*Editor's Note: Refers to army supply officer -- in this connection see Debrief No. 166612 under topic heading KIEN HOA -- U. S. Bureaucratic Relationships, last paragraph, page 12.

the sheer weight of paper. (We Americans have no grounds for criticizing the Vietnamese for their voluminous paper work; we are the absolute champions.)

### GVN Officials and Interpersonal Relationships

I made it a point to get to know unofficial or non-government individuals and groups among the Vietnamese as soon as possible in any location I worked. I did this by patronizing local restaurants, barber shops, tailors, etc. In this way I met a lot of people and made myself available if they wanted to see me. I also checked out the local markets at least once a week and tried to keep tab on prices. Also, by patronizing local bars now and then, I met and talked with junior officers in ARVN and minor functionaries whom I would not have met otherwise or if I had, they were more relaxed and disposed to talk. My purpose in doing this was to find out as much as I could about what was going on and why. I always took an interest in local gossip. I never did much entertaining in my home, but when I did I always made it a stand-up, buffet type of dinner rather than a formal affair because this not only put people more at ease, it facilitated informal conversation (and I dodged the question of who among the guests was senior to who in the pecking order).

I kept irregular hours and operated to suit the Vietnamese with whom I worked or dealt with rather than the American system. I came to the office early and left late but in between I was out of the office most of the time. I never discussed business with a visiting Vietnamese official, businessman, priest, or monk while sitting behind my desk when they came to my office. I pointedly came out from behind it and sat with them on a sofa which was arranged with a coffee table and an easy chair facing it, where my interpreter or area specialist sat. Since I found that this was the way they preferred to do business, I never broached the reason for their visit or why they had come, until they brought it up. We would talk of other things and would drink tea or Coca-Cola. I wrote most of my reports at home in the evenings. I also did quite a bit of traveling, especially when I first arrived, but for security reasons I never advertised my times of departure or arrival. This made it hard on my office staff sometimes, but when they got the hang of how I operated, they preferred it, I think. I supervised them on the basis of what they had done rather than while they were doing it.

Vietnamese office help, or servants, too, for that matter, who take their supervision directly from Americans, pose a problem sometimes. They expect to be told what is expected of them rather explicitly, and if too many additional tasks

are assigned or there appear to be complaints or criticism over performance that was rather ill-defined to start with, they are really hurt. I observed this many times and avoided it by relaying not only instructions but general aspects of the job through my area specialist. They would then occasionally ask me directly if this or that was what I really wanted, since it was conveyed to them by Mr. Thang, my area specialist, and when I said politely but firmly that it was, I had no further problems. It saved me a lot of time since Mr. Thang also took their complaints, but as a system, it worked pretty good.

I would say that where I was most effective as a provincial representative was in the role where I was expected to suggest ideas to the province chief. Most of these ideas that I got I received from his own subordinates, especially district chiefs. I was able as the American representative in the province to act as an intermediary very often between the district chiefs and the province chief and between his chiefs of technical services and the province chief. I don't know why it was that sometimes in their cherished projects in, say, education or public works, they felt that they either hesitated to tell the province chief or they felt that if they conveyed these things through me that they would have more impact, so very often I would go around and visit these people at least once or twice a week, even when I had nothing in particular to see them about but just to ask them how they were getting along. Then when I had established very good personal relations with them, I would ask what -- for instance, you as the public works chief -- if you had one particular project that you would like to undertake, that you can undertake with resources available here in the province, and that we could handle financially in a category of the budget called provincial development -- what would you like to do? What do you think would be a good thing? And they'd come up with something. Almost invariably they'd come up with something immediately. The way we would proceed then, I would ask them to get me some plans, some cost estimates, and a bill of particulars on it. Then, when I had received these, I would present the idea to the province chief. Generally, I would see the province chief every day, but we had formal meetings once a week, and it was at these meetings that I would put forth these suggestions. We would discuss the pros and cons.

I might add that I would check these schemes or ideas out elsewhere before I broached them, and I would try to weigh the political payoff that each idea likely had in it. At these meetings there were usually only the province chief, the sector advisor, and me present. We decided things on the spot in three categories: go ahead with it, drop it, or defer it until we got more information. Very few decisions fell in the last category.

I should explain the role of the American sector advisor at that time and under those circumstances. In this case, he was a lieutenant colonel in our army whose primary job was to advise the province chief on military matters within the province or sector. As I said, I would suggest various projects and invariably the province chief would either agree or ask some questions about it. The MACV sector advisor would almost always go along with it. I might add -- and this has probably been brought out by other people -- that at this time it was more or less a matter of courtesy even to include the sector advisor in these deliberations. It was a courtesy signature that we requested from him. We could actually have gone ahead without his signature. But if he had been one of those hardnosed characters, and this never happened to me -- more luck than anything else -- but it did to some of our other people, who said, "Oh, no, I can't go along with that", then it was up to us Americans to try to resolve our differences and present a united front so that the province chief or other officials were not provided the position of using us Americans against each other. This has to be handled carefully because we do not want the province chief to get the idea that we're ganging up on him either. But if it came to that stage, we could have proceeded without his approval. Just the same, I would hate to do this because it would not only jeopardize a working relationship, but the MACV sector advisor always had certain assets at his disposal such as choppers that I could use to advantage.

In dealing with district chiefs on this same basis, there were sometimes problems because of competition among themselves. The need for things always outran the limited resources to meet the need. Individual differences being what they are, there were always some district chiefs who were more aggressive and who just seemed to get along better -- that I found easier to get along with, and we have to be fair about that -- but I could see that they were competing with each other. We can never really, or at least it's been my experience that we could never, provide everything that was needed. We were always spread rather thin.

Because there was so much to be done, and while I was there, so few people to do it, I always followed the plan -- and I later advised the guys who worked for me to follow the plan -- of concentrating on what was most effective and letting the rest go. We have different interests or aptitudes, and in my own case, I concentrated most heavily on public works projects and on education, primarily because I myself got an enormous lift and sense of accomplishment out of building something tangible or seeing that it was built. It was also something the peasants and the fishermen could see -- tangible evidence that we, that is, the GVN, were helping them. With regard to

children or education, I do feel that with the many factions that we have in Vietnam, not just the Viet Cong, the apathetic ones on the fence, and the ones on our side, but between the Buddhists and the Catholics, and among the other factions, about the only thing they have in common is a sincere concern for the welfare of their children. We can reach them very easily through their children. Our children program -- we called it the hamlet school program -- had three facets. We trained teachers, we built schoolhouses, and we distributed textbooks. Each of these was important and was related to the other, although I think if I were to choose which of these three aspects of the education program was the most effective, I would say the distribution of textbooks. Now I say that with the clear understanding that it was the most important facet not in its relation to teaching children, which, in my opinion was merely a secondary objective, but in reaching their parents, in other words, politically, as a propaganda weapon, in controlling peoples' minds.

In initiating projects within the province, say, with or through the district chiefs, I should have emphasized in the first instance that my entry as an intermediary into the Vietnamese chain of command was not official. It was purely unofficial. In other words, the district chief in a given district would say, "What I really think we ought to do, instead of allocating 2,000 bags of cement to that project, it would be much better if we did it this way." Then I would have to respect his confidence, but at the next meeting with the province chief I would make the suggestion that instead of repairing this stretch of provincial road and building these culverts, and using this cement for that, wouldn't it be better if we built some dependent housing, perhaps for some of our paramilitary in that area? It would have a better effect on morale, and it would be a better propaganda weapon. The province chief would invariably say, "I think that's a good idea, but before we proceed any further, I think I should check it with my district chief." And I'd say, "Oh, by all means." In the interval he would check it out with the district chief, who would say, "Yes, I think that would be a very good idea."

Initiating self-help projects was difficult primarily because the concept was not understood by the average Vietnamese provincial official. The peasants -- the intended beneficiaries of these projects -- understand it well enough. I almost never lost my temper in dealing with Vietnamese, but I came as close to it as I cared on this business of self-help projects. The average Vietnamese official thinks it's his job to tell the peasants what they want and what they need -- the two don't always coincide -- and disregards their choice if he doesn't think it's wise. Once you as a ProvRep can cross this hurdle, self-help projects are no problem, but I used to get blue in

the face telling some district chief that I personally didn't give a goddam how jackass the project seemed to him or to me, but that if that's what they really wanted as their first self-help project, let's get with it and quit playing God.

In getting my job done as a provincial representative, one thing I learned early was to make allowances for the differences in personality and ability among province chiefs. This is because you will almost certainly deal with more than one in the duration of a tour. Their turnover rate was rapid when I was there, and I served in more than one province myself. What I'm getting at is that it's wrong and dangerous to assume that all province chiefs think or go about things the same way. My technique was to sort of sit back in the case of a new province chief and let him make his play, and I'd take my cue from that. Once you commit yourself on something and it turns out that with the new province chief, you're 180° off course, it takes a while to get back in the formation. I think that we older men perhaps have an edge on the younger fellows in this. I've been in destroyers where the newly arrived commanding officer appeared to be so stupid that the only way he could tell the bow from the stern was that one end was pointed. This didn't mean that I had to tell him that or quit in disgust. Our first concern was to operate the ship.

I went into a new province one time -- it was really the lower Slobbovia type of place and not nearly as sophisticated or well run as the province I had just left. The province chief regarded me a little suspiciously at first, and I found that this was something I inherited from my predecessor. (They, after all, generalize just like we do.) My predecessor was the aggressive type of person who practically ran the agriculture office in the province. He was also such a freewheeling person that the province chief was genuinely concerned for his safety. Once I had allayed his fears in these two respects, we got along very well. It turned out that he really thought he was a very aggressive leader himself. Where he definitely needed my help was to use me to help unsnarl his financial procedures, that is, to get needed things done in a case where there were very few contractors and the security situation was just terrible. In order to get anything built, we had to have some sort of dispensation with regard to soliciting competitive bids on projects. I was able to do him a great deal of good in that regard, mainly because his chief of financial services was the unimaginative type of bookkeeper who could always give you nine good reasons why something couldn't be done. 15681

#### Regionalism ("In-group" Identification)

One thing that definitely comes into play when an

American is assigned out to one of the provinces is what I call regionalism. What it amounts to is that it's an emotional attachment and it's similar to two privates sitting in the rain and mud at Dak To, let's say, and arguing vehemently as to whether Texas or California is the best state. There's no logic there -- only emotion. Pretty soon after we arrive in a province, we sort of assume a proprietary air, and this is not bad; it's good if it's not overdone. What's more, pretty soon one begins to identify with the people, with their reactions to the central government, and with the feelings of the whole region generally. There exists sort of a love-hate relationship toward headquarters, wherever that might be, and Scipio Africanus had the same problem in the Punic Wars. It's the feeling that people back at headquarters just don't understand our problems. At its best, this feeling or attitude sort of forges a team spirit between the Americans and Vietnamese actually on the scene and makes them cooperate and accomplish more. At its worst, though, it produces what I call the Chicken Little effect, that is, the world is coming to an end, the sky is falling, and everything is going plumb to hell, and why -- because 500 goddam sheets of tin didn't come in last Tuesday.

Up in I Corps there was a lot of this regional feeling. In fact, they have a saying I'm told goes back for about 300 years up there. This relates to two provinces, Quang Ngai and Quang Nam. They say that if you tell the people in Quang Ngai to do something, they want to discuss it first, and if you tell the people in Quang Nam to do something, they will protest bitterly even before they can find out what it is that you want them to do. I think it's typical of those people that they react in that way.

I've observed cases where the American representative became so closely identified with the people he was helping -- and they thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread -- but somewhere along the line he ceased to be an effective agent or representative for dear old Uncle Sugar. This was T. E. Lawrence's tragedy or dilemma. Even though I've worked both sides of the street in this respect, I, too, became very emotionally involved at times in this regional loyalty bit and it colored my approach considerably. Nevertheless, where I spent most of my tour we were quite remote from Saigon. Because of this remoteness we both needed guidance and direction and we learned to improvise without it. We often found that the guidance from Saigon was quite unrealistic, not at all tailored to what actually existed. In this I know that I'm merely echoing the views of the central Vietnamese lowlands generally. This is a sort of regional antipathy toward the central government, and I can say honestly with regard to our own people in Saigon, the U. S. military there, and the GVN, that we were repeatedly put into the position where we had to solve our own difficulties

rather than expect help from the central government. This initially, I think, breeds a little resentment. It's almost inevitable that after you have done that for a year and a half, you finally come to the conclusion, "Well, who in the hell needs them."

In my capacity I found that our contact with the central government or resident U. S. agencies in Saigon was often the type that I would have preferably foregone. These were the VIP visits, and from early 1965 on it became fashionable to visit Da Nang and Hue. These took a lot of time away from other aspects of my job and it was unpleasant for me -- a sense of helpless frustration -- because I knew that our bosses in Saigon really had no alternative but to send these people up. After awhile we had a constant stream of ministers and succeeding premiers and I attended social functions in their honor. On the American side, we had cabinet members, senators, representatives, bleeding-heart liberals, magazine editors such as Norman Cousins and Otto Feurbringer, and endless reporters.

On the other hand, I occasionally was asked by my superiors in Saigon to prevail upon local officials in an attempt to relate local affairs more closely to national policy. It became apparent, for instance, that the corps commander had his own set ideas on how to deal with refugees (tactical refugees), which were in one instance absolutely at variance with what the ministry of social welfare wanted done. I was asked when this became apparent -- and it became apparent through my reports that this was how things were being done up there -- I was prevailed upon to exercise what persuasion I could on the corps commander to get him to change his mind. In this one respect I was able to do so. In other respects, however, he would thank me politely and say, "Well, that's interesting", pass it off lightly and tell me, "I know what the policy is, but I'm not going to follow it."

This, of course, was General Thi, Nguyen Chanh Thi, and I guess he exemplified the good and bad aspects of regionalism. But he was very direct and aboveboard about it -- painfully so. He sometimes palmed these things off in a rather jocular fashion and would say, "Why don't you and I and the rest of us just resign from the government." "We'll secede", he'd say.

Some people take this sort of talk quite seriously. You know, this is not as serious as it sounds. I'm afraid that to the man behind the buffalo it really doesn't mean much. All these agonizing reappraisals in Saigon mean nothing to him, that is, the average peasant and fisherman. In a long range view it might someday filter down to him so that he might feel something -- the repercussions or effects -- but

even then I doubt that. On the other hand, when they say that this northern region has in effect seceded from the rest of Vietnam, that too doesn't really make too much difference because they've been forced by circumstances to operate pretty much on their own. Let me give you an example. You know, almost everything that was needed in this corps tactical zone from outside, including food, comes in through the port of Da Nang. Almost all of the cargo that comes through this port is brought in either by American direction -- either military or civilian cargo -- or it's brought in by merchants who are dealing on a profit basis in Da Nang through their business associates in Saigon, so the government in Saigon can't really sit back and claim that they're doing very much for the central Vietnamese lowlands -- that is, not only the first region but a great deal of the second region along the coast. So, if you would say, in other words, that they say they've seceded, the fact is they seceded a long time ago. This is what makes them a little bitter sometimes. They would like nothing better than to have closer, more effective ties. (But I should honestly add that the ideal situation would include a premier from Da Nang or Hue who they could trust.) But on an economic basis, if this situation in security weren't as precarious as it is now, it would certainly be to the benefit of this entire region if they had an open rail line and open highway to the south and did not have to depend upon sea routes for resupply. The amount of stuff that can be sent by air is negligible, and is prohibitive from the point of expense, really.

### Planning Problems and Logistics

There are bound to be planning problems and logistics problems in an environment such as Vietnam. Nothing was placid or serene. Everything was in turmoil. The tactical situation in any one area generally changed constantly. Our organization was expanding rapidly. New procedures were constantly being introduced. Nevertheless, during my tenure there, our planners and programmers (most of them) maintained the fiction that planning could be done almost entirely at the central government level. But let me give you an example. One of our programmers made a special flight of almost 400 miles to Da Nang to ask me how many refugees I would have in the region for the coming year. He maintained that he had to have this figure in order to calculate our needs for cement, roofing, foodstuffs, etc. When I maintained that this figure -- the number of refugees -- was entirely up to God and the enemy, he answered prissily that unless I came up with a figure, there would be no programmed materials for refugees, and in desperation I gave him the figure of 280,000 or about 10% of the population. Thanks to a typhoon, flood, and the Viet Cong, we had 230,000 the following year.

My point is that in a situation such as this, I feel sincerely that materials should be ordered in bulk, perhaps in excess, and that flexibility be allowed on the local level to accommodate to changing and unforeseen situations. This one is probably the worst example I could cite, but it illustrates the bent of a bureaucrat's mind and we must cope with them.

Equally unrealistic as a basis for planning is the phoney statistic but these are being provided every day, not only for future planning but to justify past performance. An example of this is that I was ordered on short notice to provide the exact percentage of patients at the Da Nang Civil Hospital who were dependent women and children of Viet Cong. Patients are understandably reluctant to divulge this information even under stress. We had long since decided that it was a good psywar gesture or propaganda gambit to treat these people. In consultation with American and Vietnamese doctors, it was determined that roughly 80% might fall in this category. This figure was transmitted to Saigon and was immediately rejected as phoney. I replied by telegram that on the basis of exact counts, the figure was precisely 82.7% and this figure was accepted without question.

Aside from these rather inane examples, there are problems which are caused by a combination of poor judgment and a reluctance to delegate certain planning functions to lower echelons. In May of 1965 I was notified that I was receiving by ship 47 International, 5-ton, stake-bed trucks (which we badly needed) and that they were to be distributed to the provinces within the region on the basis of so many to this province and so many to that, on the basis of total population figures of the various provinces. The actual situation, however, was that one of the least populous provinces (Quang Tri) was most secure and could use trucks most advantageously, while the most populous province (Quang Ngai) was least secure and mobility was quite restricted. In this case I distributed them as I saw fit and kept two in Da Nang, which as an autonomous city, was obviously not a province and therefore not entitled to any trucks even though it had a population of 200,000 and almost no transportation.

On a more serious plane are planning factors that disregard such very real things as climate and weather and have long reaching effect on the local scene. For instance, the seasons in central Vietnam are reversed from those in the area just north of Saigon and to the south. In other words, in the south they're affected by a southwest monsoon, and up there we were affected by a northeast monsoon, which incidentally extends into North Vietnam. The rains up there start in September, usually around the middle of September, and they are quite intense. Then they taper off and around February or there

abouts it's over, whereas in Saigon it's pretty much the opposite. The rains very often don't start until April or May down in that area, but they stop in September or the first of October. Now this is a basic fact of life that we live with and take into account when we order materials. Nevertheless, more often than not we received construction materials that were obviously procured and distributed with seasonal climate factors in mind that existed down in Saigon. We got heavy shipments of cement just before the rainy season started and we usually couldn't build a thing with it until the following February. Cement, of course isn't perishable but it does harden in the sacks. Now this always caused me a great many problems because there we go into the logistics of not only receiving this stuff, but also getting and using warehouse space to store it, and then distributing it to people who can't use it over roads that are practically impassable. We could embark on a little vertical construction even during the rainy season when it began to taper off, say, in December, when we'd get perhaps a heavy rain only every 16 or 20 hours. Just the same, it was a headache.

I cite these examples to show what you have to contend with and how you have to lie and cheat sometimes to get around these obstacles. I would say that once you recognize the limitations or the capability of your support arm, you can allow reasonably for its inadequacy. Without belaboring the point too much, and regionalism creeps in here too because I don't give a damn about the happy Hoa Hao down in An Giang province, and I'm trying like hell to stay in business at the other end of the country, so I would use the system up to a point and then I'd go beyond the system. I'd ask a ProvRep up there, "Joe, how much cement do you plan to order for the next six months?" He'd say, "Oh, maybe 5,000 or 6,000 bags." I'd say, "Make it 25,000 bags and use these action plan numbers. When it comes in, we'll keep it here in Da Nang, and you can draw from it here, and I can shift it around as it's needed elsewhere." In effect, I established what is now called a "regional stockpile" long before this became technically correct or legal. Without this type of operation, I'd have gone out of business completely. The moral, I would say, is if the squeaking wheel gets the grease -- squeak already.

### Counterinsurgency Techniques

We simply must use foreign aid for political purposes. By that I mean that if we can make the existing government more effective by educating the officials and making them more responsive to the needs of the population, the population base will be more disposed to resist the blandishments and intimi-

dation of the enemy. I feel that only then will this population base regard their government with respect. When this government provides what the people want and need in order to survive, they will even want to become a part of their government. Our problem is that a lot of our effort is wasted. The application of Christian ethics is not enough. Shooting the overt enemy is not enough. Too much of what we do and have done in the past gives aid and comfort to the enemy. Above all, we will surely throw away the ballgame if we assume too much responsibility for setting things "right". T. E. Lawrence told his people in August of 1917 (in referring to the Arabs), "Better they do it imperfectly than you do it perfectly. It's their war and patience is the word."

The location of certain projects is terribly important. Take, for instance, a proposed elementary school. If you listen to your American education advisor or the provincial education chief, they will say it should go here because that's where most of the children are and where we're shortest of schools. But they're usually wrong and that's why the ProvRep and the district chief have a say in where it is built. Where all the children are is most likely the most secure area. Who do we convince there? They are already convinced. On the other hand, the out of the way location where people feel almost forgotten and where some tangible evidence of the government presence is necessary, that's the place. Who cares how many children are there. Educating these youngsters is only an incidental benefit which goes along with convincing their parents. The way you go about it is important, though. If the Viet Cong tears it down, rebuild it. I rebuilt some of them three times out of miscellaneous funds and by that time the VC had generated so much ill will in the neighborhood that it was cheap at the price. Of course, convincing the occasional snooper from the GAO or even your own people that this is desirable is almost impossible.

In distributing textbooks, why waste a beautiful propaganda tool by giving them to schools in secure areas? They should be air dropped in VC occupied areas, or at best distributed in daylight in marginal areas. We gain brownie points even if they (the VC) burn them and they certainly can't eat them.

The hardest thing to do, of course, is to convince your own people that we don't build X number of pit privies out of sheer altruism, that unless there's a political motive, it's useless. But success breeds success. After you've baited the trap like this a few times and had the suckers bite, it becomes enjoyable. The Viet Cong are pretty well motivated, but they are still suckers for gimmicks like this and always have been. I found, too, in I Corps that we can teach with

the stick as well as the carrot. Of course, I think these people in Central Vietnam play a more sophisticated game of ball than our friendly yokels in the Delta. Our effectiveness in economic and social development programs lay not only in what we provided conspicuously but what we did not provide, also conspicuously. We rewarded the faithful and we punished the guilty. We courted people sitting on the fence, and we failed in some respects, but we were very successful in others. When you deal with people like this, they have only contempt for you if you just give and demand nothing in return. That's why self-help can be used so profitably if it's done right. Let me give you an example. In this case I was an observer rather than an active participant (although the USAID rep and the district chief knew my views on the subject). We went to a woebegone fishing village on the sand dunes southeast of Hue in connection with a proposed self-help project. The assistant ProvRep and district chief were both present. These people were really poor, had no school, no marketplace, no pier, no nothing. Instead of wanting one of these things that they obviously needed, what they wanted was cement, reinforcing rods, and paint to build an ornate gate to their hamlet. Well, we went along with this and quite a few people participated in building this gate. They considered it a touching gift from their district chief who personified their government. This gave us a wedge or a foot in the door, and from that beginning for the next year we made real progress in this hamlet and the surrounding ones where the people were initially captivated by this marvelous gate.

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In order to be effective in a milieu like this, one has to be aware of the various factions among the population that one deals with. Sometimes the methods one employs do not appear to be ethical. What I mean is that it serves our ends to use and manipulate people. The mayor of Da Nang was really adept at this. He and I arrived there about the same time. This was in 1964 just at the time of the Buddhist-Catholic riots when the Buddhists burned about 3,000 people out of their homes, caused a lot of property damage, and killed about a dozen people. The mayor (an ARVN colonel), the MACV senior advisor, and I got together and we decided on courses of action. We sort of thrashed around with this for a week, and we decided that in a nice tactful way we would try to undermine both the Catholic and the Buddhist factions, and we would form a buffer group. This buffer group would consist of the combined Da Nang students. This included all the little ones from the very first year of school on through the secondary schools. All the schools joined except the Lycee Blaise Pascal, but we didn't press the matter much because this was a private school operated by the French. We organized monthly talent shows in the local opera house. This is supposedly what it was for at first -- recreation and entertainment.

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But we had an ulterior motive. The little youngsters put on tableaux and the older children and the teenagers would put on two types of shows. They would either have rock 'n' roll guitar playing type of things -- all patterned after the French version of rock 'n' roll, you know -- or they'd put on the traditional Vietnamese folk dramas. Sometimes, too, they'd put on their own productions that they had written themselves that exemplified the theme of the misunderstood teenager and his parents who don't understand him. It gave these kids a much needed outlet, and they were quite entertaining. The whole purpose was to get Catholic and Buddhist students to participate. When we put on a benefit every month -- sometimes they ran into every six weeks -- we knew that the parents would attend. In other words, we would bring both Buddhists and Catholics into the establishment. The mayor and I and very often the corps commander, the general, were there, and, of course, the Buddhist monks and the Catholic priests almost had to come along or else be left at the post.

Now this worked very effectively. It worked very effectively because we still had rumblings and demonstrations with students involved until as late as January of 1965 with the fall of the Huong government. But from January of 1965 until March of 1966 when they (Ky, et al) threw out the corps commander, we had no demonstrations in Da Nang from students. I attribute it to this fact -- we built them a great big student union hall, and the mayor used them to good advantage -- he used to throw these protocol functions to which officials were invited, and he went out of his way to invite at least 20 teenagers -- and balance them off, Catholics against Buddhists, to these functions. They initially were very shy, but they could be drawn out. He gave them constantly the line that he needed their help to help him ascertain what was going on in the community. I don't know whether it would be considered honest, but in effect he used them as an intelligence organization against their religious leaders, and, in some cases, against their parents. But it was enormously effective. We found, too, that in working with people like this that the Catholics and Buddhists actually got along with one another very well. The farther down you go in the social strata, the better they get along. At peasant-hamlet level they live together very happily, side by side. It's when they are, I think, driven toward each other in opposition by their leaders that you run into problems.

### Coping with Emergency Situations

One underlying characteristic of the job in Vietnam when I was there was that emergency situations were commonplace. What this meant was reevaluating priorities, improvising in the

absence of guidance or instructions, and taking a somewhat fatalistic attitude. These emergency situations were caused by natural disasters, the tactical situation, and exercise of poor judgment in planning both my me and my superiors. Sometimes I took things for granted that I should not have. One responsibility that I tended to neglect was informing or documenting my case adequately to my superiors. It was not enough simply to say that I needed 100,000 kilos of rice immediately to feed refugees from a flood. A bureaucracy just doesn't work that way. When I did this I would receive a survey party rather than the needed supplies.

I found by experience that the best way to cope with emergency situations was to line up my assets ahead of time, that is, commodities, trucks, aircraft, etc., under perhaps imaginary purposes and then divert them for the required use when the emergency arose. In this way I could react immediately and did not have to rely on the cumbersome procedure to obtain these assets after the emergency condition became apparent. It was comparatively easy to justify the diversion after the fact. What was difficult was justifying my inventory before the emergency. To do this I had to pretend to an optimism I did not really feel so far as local conditions looked. In other words, I would confidently predict that we could build 100 classrooms when I knew very well that we couldn't build 15, but I wanted the construction materials and the money on tap. I hated to do this, but I found there was really no other way. In comparing notes unofficially in Saigon with my peers or with my army (MACV) friends locally, I found that most of them were doing the same thing.

### Corruption

The types of corruption that I most often encountered in Vietnam (and Laos, too, for that matter) were extortion, misappropriation, and embezzlement. All these types had something in common in that they were accompanied by a certain amount of fancy bookkeeping which was supposed to camouflage the operation. Extortion generally takes the form of money paid to various petit fonctionnaires in order to make things move beyond their particular domain. It's the "grease" type of payoff. Some other common variations are the long overdue bill which a government agency owes a civilian concern and which is finally collected when the creditor pays a percentage fee to a government official who smoothes out the procedure and gets the creditor his money. Finally, there's the fee paid for favorable consideration of future requests that haven't even been made yet. New officials in office expect and collect this sort of fee.

Misappropriation generally takes place as a result of collusion between government officials and contractors who provide goods and services. Sometimes it's a kickback to the government official by the contractor in return for favorable consideration. Also it is collusion among contractors in rigging competitive bids, or it means a falsification of records to show that X number of units were built when actually many less were built, in which case the official and the contractor split the money. I make a distinction between this and embezzlement, which I see as the violation of a trust placed in an official who pockets certain public monies by claiming that he spent it legally when in fact he did not.

To quote George Melvin,\* "Corruption is found to flourish when all the conditions that make it possible and worthwhile are present." These conditions in Vietnam are underpaid officials who almost have to steal in order to survive, and an American attitude which is so permissive that it allows corruption to continue as a necessary evil. While I have known many officials who I consider honest, and I have met many Vietnamese who were obviously distressed at all the corruption around them, the prevailing attitude of most Vietnamese who speak out openly against individuals who are known and suspected of graft is one of envy and frustration at the cruel fate that has kept them from being able to get their "fair share". The pragmatic rather than the ethical approach in curbing or punishing a corrupt official is that he was either careless, stupid, or greedy, and because of that, he jeopardizes a good thing for the rest of them. Some of the rationalizations used by Vietnamese in defense of corruption are that since everyone else is doing it, why not join them; also that a man owes it to his family to make the most out of a situation such as this, and that it is frankly their due, or their prerogative, under the circumstances to skim something off the top.

The American attitude seems to be based on the assumption that corrupt practices are part of their way of life and must be accepted. Objections are based not upon kind but degree. A certain level is permissible, but more than that calls for corrective action. I subscribe to this view myself. I take a much more pessimistic view toward the human condition than most Americans do. We as a people are just about as corrupt as most other nations, but we feel guiltier about it. We have a tendency to admire corruption on a really grand scale, as do the Vietnamese. I doubt very much that the expatriate Vietnamese

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\*Editor's Note: A former USAID official in Vietnam and currently (January, 1968) a USAID representative, in residence, at ATC.

general tooling his Mercedes through the bois outside Paris really feels guilty. Rather, he feels that that's the way it crumbles, cookiewise, and he had the sense to grab his opportunity when it presented itself. But the American businessman or politician who fights the traffic on Wilshire Boulevard in his Lincoln Continental is often assailed by doubt and self-pity. "What has my corrupt environment driven me to?" or "Thank God my ingrate children don't have to go through what I did to make the good life possible for them."

We Americans have a tendency to go from one extreme to the other in the business of trying to stamp out corruption. We have people out there, especially the ones who are more or less unaware of our large scale corruption at home, who get quite emotional when they find a crooked Vietnamese official. They confront him with his misdeeds, humiliate him in front of his subordinates, and generally get thrown out of the province for their pains. What makes it more difficult is that the offending official, likely as not, appears to go unpunished and often does. At the other extreme is the American official who not only appears to condone corruption (maybe he's unaware of it, but to many observers among the Vietnamese he appears to condone it), but he is so naive and open-handed that he makes graft almost impossible to resist.

I would, on the basis of experience, take a middle ground. Corruption is not too difficult to discover. Other Vietnamese will delight in informing you if you give them half a chance. If, on the local scene, corruption seems to be getting out of hand, and my rule of thumb on this is 10% of budgeted monies or pilferage from warehouse stocks, and 25% of construction materials committed to a certain job, the procedure to follow is to report it to your superiors in any case (there is a machinery for handling this) and if feasible to let it be known unobtrusively that you know what is going on. There are various ways of doing this, depending on such circumstances as whether you are in the province or at the regional level and the personality of the official you are talking to. The way I used to handle it at province level was, when cement, reinforcing rods, and corrugated iron was being stolen in large lots, was simply not to order any more for awhile. When the pinch was felt and one of the province officials asked me about it, I would say that somehow it kept disappearing so fast and none of our projects seemed to get built, that I just thought I'd quit ordering it. This generally brought pilferage to a halt briefly and when it was resumed, it proceeded at a lesser scale.

At both province and regional level, in cases where the culprit was a lesser official than, say, the province chief, the most effective method I would employ is to put the province chief

or corps commander temporarily, at least, under obligation to me. He would be a guest in my home or going somewhere in my aircraft, and while he was drinking my Scotch and smoking my cigars, I would lead the conversation gradually to the point where I'd admit somewhat sorrowfully that I felt pretty inadequate about certain aspects of my job. If they didn't take the bait on this ploy, I would continue in this vein until they asked if I cared to divulge my problem, or if they could be of any help. I would then outline the problem gently -- about how some graft is always with us, etc. -- but I would stress the fact that certain attempts lately were so amateurish and clumsy that they simply could not be ignored. I would not divulge names but would throw out enough hints so that he would have enough ammo to ask embarrassing questions and start things moving. I found this to be extremely effective as a method with two province chiefs and a corps commander. It was, in fact, too effective and in two instances the culprits suffered the death penalty as a result, and it was not my intention to have them go that far at all. I cite this to make the point that Vietnamese justice can be very harsh and vindictive. The crucial point is that punishment was administered extra-legally, or perhaps downright illegally, but the man who administered the punishment was the man I talked to. I didn't shoot my mouth off to lesser lights or made this official feel that his career was affected by some scandal that forced him to act because Americans or his own superiors were leaning on him.

In one case, in Gia Dinh province, an ARVN major who bore the title "secretary-general of pacification" bilked us out of 230,000 piasters on a deal with a contractor where they claimed they had built 12 concrete reservoirs when in fact, they had built only three. The province chief in this case was quite agitated. He had this officer summarily transferred to the 52nd ARVN regiment and he was killed ten days later, because, as the deputy for security told me later, he was not supposed to live. These things are much easier to arrange than one might suppose. In the second instance, I accompanied the corps commander to a district headquarters where, in the first five minutes of our audience with the district chief, the general pulled a .38 caliber pistol and shot the district chief right between the eyes before I even realized what had happened. The general said later that the district chief had given him the wrong answer (attempted to defend his misappropriation of funds on the grounds that everyone else did it), and he also added rather off-handedly that in this case, he didn't trust the province chief concerned to take proper action, and he wanted to make an example. (He said, "Word gets around.")

Corrective measures for corruption must, I think, work within the Vietnamese system. I'm sure that it would be absolutely futile, for instance, to try to base our reasons

for opposing corruption on what we claim as being our standards of behavior, that is, the Vietnamese official will not feel a sense of guilt by misuse of money if told that he is denying the peasants in his charge their rightful belongings. He doesn't feel that responsible for those peasants. He does, however, govern his conduct by what is dictated from above rather than below.