

*written about
40 years after*

THE GREATEST YEARS OF THE PIG: 1962--1964 IN THE RURAL AREAS OF SOUTH VIET NAM

Harvey Neese

It was the year 1962 and Bert Fraleigh, Deputy Director of the Office of Rural Affairs in USOM in concert with Rufe Phillips, Director of the Office of Rural Affairs, decided to implement a Pig Corn Program in South Viet Nam. This program would consist of selling on credit three improved Yorkshire pigs to the poorest farmers in many of the provinces north of Saigon.

Improved Yorkshire pigs were one of the most coveted desires of any small farmer in South Viet Nam. USOM (later USAID) Agricultural Division fought Bert at every opportunity, apparently trying to cause the program to fail. But Bert being a transplanted war horse (or was it a dragon?) from Shanghai, China prevailed. The program went forward and two young people just out of college were put in charge of supervising the program in the provinces, Ong Dinh a Ling (a.k.a. Nguyen Qui Dinh, a recent University of Arkansas Razorback (a pig mascot of all things!) and yours truly Ong Harvey Neese, a University of Idaho transplant a.k.a. Ong Heo or Mr. Pig—I should confess that it was never revealed if the name “Mr. Pig” was attached to me because of similarities in appearance, similarities in voice or it referred to my work with the Pig Corn Program.

My first work on the Pig Corn Program came close to the end of Ong Heo. I went to Tuy Hoa in Phu Yen Province to observe the first batch of about 600 pigs that had arrived in that province in 1962, many of which had died from some unknown cause. Bob Burns, the Rural Affairs Provincial Rep. in Phu Yen and I decided to visit one of the villages that had received pigs very early one Sunday morning in his open top jeep. As we came into the village proper, we didn't see any villagers moving around which we thought was kind of odd as Vietnamese farm families are usually up working quite early each morning in the fields or moving about on the paths between rice fields. So Bob stopped in front of one village thatch home and asked me to knock on the thatch door and ask them where were all the people at and inform them that we had come to see the new pigs. A Vietnamese came to the door and looked very surprised at seeing me, an obvious Gringo. I asked him in Vietnamese where all the villagers were as we had not seen any coming into the village. He then excitedly told us the story.

The Viet Cong had come into the night and attacked a group of Vietnamese home guards and some Vietnamese military personnel who were camped on a hill beside the village and killed all of them. The Viet Cong, according to the villager, thought the military in the camp had contacted their headquarters to tell them of the attack. The Viet Cong then lay in ambush alongside the dirt road that Burns and I rode into the village on, hoping to attack any military personnel who came to rescue the encampment. The villager told us that the Viet Cong had just left the village a short time before we arrived. So, Burns and I missed the Viet Cong ambush by only a half hour to an hour or so. We were the first to alert the closest Vietnamese military encampment of killing of all in the hilltop camp.

Dinh and I would travel in the provinces where pigs were to be delivered continuously to inspect the construction of pig sties and we visited all the provinces after pigs had been delivered to farmers a number of times. Some rather strange happenings came about as we drove our old WWII jeep with a license plate “3535” all over South Viet Nam (I might add that the numbers 3535 have special meaning to Vietnamese which is related to specialized hormones of the body).

We found that none of the villagers in some areas wanted to raise boars for breeding of other sows other than their own. They acquainted “custom” breeding of sows with being an

undertaker. We had a difficult time convincing some of the villagers receiving pigs in each village to keep some males for breeding of other sows to improve the sizes and marketing opportunities when the villagers marketed their hogs.

Another oddity we found was that villagers in Central Viet Nam, along the shores of the South China Sea, always built their pig sties facing the east and not any other direction. From the east is where the cold winds and rains came from during the typhoon season. We found this a cause for pigs dying in Central Viet Nam and diagnosed the malady as pneumonia. The villagers, with their superstitions, claimed their daughters would never be married if their pig sties faced the west. So we managed to redesign the pig sty front a bit so there was a thatch grass overhang to keep much of the cold wind and rains from drenching the young pigs.

Usually, when we visited a village, a large group of villagers would follow us around. In Tuy Hoa Province, when I visited villages there, Bob Burns would encourage a chant with the young school children following us around the villages that went like this: "Harvey Neese, Harvey Neese, Har-vey Neese" and repeated many times. It was a bit embarrassing but once you got to know Bob Burns, it was not surprising.

Once I visited one village in Quang Tri Province and talked with an elderly farmer who had acquired three pigs under in the Pig Corn Program. The pig sty was filthy and wet and I chewed him out in a nice sort of way. He kind of smiled but promised to do a better job by my next visit. We shook hands and smiled at each other, he with few teeth in his gums. On my next visit to the village, the old farmer smiled as he invited me to see his pig sty. We reached his place and his pig sty was extra clean and I complemented him on his feat. He then directed me to a shy younger woman nearby and the elderly farmer said he had taken this woman as his second wife and her job was to tend to the improved Yorkshire pigs and pig sty.

Dinh and I visited Phu Yen Province one time and when we were leaving, we decided to visit a village near the grass covered runway where the Air Viet Nam's DC-3 would land to pick us up. One farmer told us his pigs were sick so we went to look at them. Dinh decided to give one pig a shot of antibiotics. So I grabbed and held the pig while the farmer watched. The Air Viet Nam plane then circled the little air strip and Dinh said we needed to hurry or we would miss our flight. Air Viet Nam came to Phu Yen only a couple of times a week. Dinh grabbed the large hypodermic syringe to give the pig the shot. I told Dinh maybe we better use the smaller hypodermic syringe but in our hurry, Dinh just vaccinated the little pig. And then.....the pig dropped his head and died on the spot. Here we were, supposedly bac si's or doctors and one of the prized possessions of this farmer died in my arms. The farmer was almost shedding tears and we were so embarrassed, the only thing we could do was to promise the pig farmer another pig with the next shipment to Phu Yen and we grabbed our bags and ran to the air strip where the Air Viet Nam plane coasted in and we were very humble as we boarded the plane.

Dinh decided to ride with a two tiered truck load of pigs to determine why so many pigs were dying after they reached Central Viet Nam. Dinh found that ever so often, the truck driver would find a water hose and wash down all the pigs with cold water. Since this was the typhoon rainy season, the temperatures were quite cool. We finally figured out that the pigs had died from pneumonia after being drenched many times with cold water the two to three day trip to Central Viet Nam from the Mekong Delta south of Saigon.

One time I visited Quang Tri Province that bordered North Viet Nam. A North Vietnamese soldier patrolled the bridge crossing the Ben Hai River. I walked out on the bridge and began conversing with him as he suspiciously eyed me up. He asked me what nationality I was and I

told him German as I thought he probably wouldn't converse with me if he knew I was American. Then he asked me what I was doing in Quang Tri Province and I told him I was working on the Pig Corn Program. He kind of looked up and told me that the North Vietnamese had a pig program in provinces on the north side of the Ben Hai River. I don't remember if he told me of a pamphlet that was passed to farmers giving instructions on pig raising or Dinh received the pamphlet from the local Animal Husbandry Office of the national Directory of Animal Husbandry. Any way, we obtained a copy and it was exactly like a pamphlet that Dinh and I had prepared using Walt Disney animal characters conversing to give information on what to do and what not to do in raising improved pigs. So the North Vietnamese liked at least one program that was from the south.

Dinh and I were called to a meeting by Dr. Vu Thien Thai, Director of the National Directorate of Animal Husbandry. When we came to his office we saw several Americans there in military uniform. We were a little confused as to what the meeting was about. Dr. Thai introduced the Americans as veterinarians who were in South Viet Nam to inspect meat supplies for the US military personnel. One of the officers spoke up and informed us that they had been studying the Pig Corn Program and had visited various villages and gone to the Mekong Delta to observe the large quarantine operations for the pigs that were purchased from larger pig raisers, quarantined and vaccinated them and then shipped them to many villages all over South Viet Nam under the Pig Corn Program. Then what the officer said almost caused me to fall off my chair. He said if they hadn't seen the operations themselves, they wouldn't have believed we could have implemented such a program with the long distances shipping pigs over several climatic changes with such a small loss of pigs. He was very complimentary which was not at all what we received from the USOM Agricultural Division. The Ag Division never helped with the program and even tried to hinder it.

Meanwhile back to more normal times, I was asked to come to a meeting in Bert Fraleigh's office. As I waited outside of Bert's office, a person working in the financial office of USOM sat down beside me. I thought this a bit strange as I had rode to work in a USOM transportation car with him and he had some unkind words to say about Rural Affairs, and especially the director and deputy director of the Office of Rural Affairs. Then the real ugly side of USOM/USAID would begin to surface.

Well, Co Nga invited us into Bert's office and after introductions, the USOM financial officer came out with something very strange. He said he would not repeat what he had to say if asked but he wanted to tell us that "somebody was out to get Harvey". The information he provided did indicate that someone in USOM was trying to destroy the Pig Corn Program. Then he related some strange accusations which he had investigated. One I remember was that someone had accused me of going to the Catholic Relief organization and demanded powdered milk to feed the hundreds of pigs in quarantine in the Delta. He said he had visited the Priest at Catholic Relief and the Priest said he had never met me and he didn't know who I was. Also I was supposed to have personally authorized the transfer of Section 202 corn to 201—one Section could be used for animal feed, the other was for human food although they were both the same corn in the same bags except one was Section 201 and the other 202.

I was quite disturbed by this accusation of the USOM Controllers Office and paid a visit to the Controllers Office. I asked the very round, over weight USOM official if I could see the document that stated I had authorized the transfer of U.S. PL480 corn from one section to the other. The person reluctantly went into his office and pulled out the minutes of a meeting in Vietnamese that I had attended and with some suspicion passed it to me. I could read the Vietnamese which said "Ong Neese se hoi (will ask) Ong Fraleigh ...on the transfer of corn from

one section to the other". I asked the Controller person to bring in his best Vietnamese translator to translate this sentence. The translator read it the same as I, that I "would ask" Mr. Fraleigh if the corn could be transferred as he had the authority to do it but not me.

I learned that the Controller's Office never did correct the mistake they either made on purpose or by accident. Since the new USOM Director, James Killen had rumbled into Saigon to the applause of the USOM Ag Division, these type false accusations cropped up regularly.

Apparently there was under the table sabotage of the Office of Rural Affairs that was going on by Killen and his decrepit followers; the Pig Corn Program was overseen by Bert Fraleigh who they also were after although the program was considered successful. Successful programs were hit on regularly; this was America's foreign aid program in action in a country that was about to go communist!

Well, despite all of this skullduggery, the Pig Program went on to sell through loans some 60,000 pigs to the poorest farmers in South Viet Nam despite the Killen Administration's dirty tactics to destroy Rural Affairs. There were other blatant charges made against Rural Affairs personnel which were all ridiculous, I can laugh at them now. One was against a well driller who put a considerable amount of his own money into his drilling program because USOM did not or would not reimburse him. He had left Saigon for another country. He demanded to come back to Saigon to defend these charges. USOM ended up reimbursing much more money to the well driller than they accused him of mishandling. And the most ridiculous of all was the accusation of me charging \$9 more on a day of per diem (yes, nine whole dollars and one day of per diem) than I could justify after averaging 20-25 days in the field each month of my first 18 months on the Pig Corn Program or approximately 360 days in the field. On my airline ticket, the day Air Viet Nam departed from Ban Me Thout was unreadable. Because the Killen Creeps couldn't read the exact day I left Ban Me Thout, they "assumed" I left a day early and did not warrant the \$9 per diem I was asking for the last night I spent in Ban Me Thuot.

During this time, some very nice things did happen to me. Bert called me in and told me that I was to attend a FAO Conference in Singapore with Dinh and another Vietnamese official. One of his reasons was that I was traveling around in the provinces so much, I might be picked up or put out of commission permanently by the Viet Cong; Bert thought I needed a rest. I went to Singapore reluctantly but while there I would meet my future wife and this year, 2007, will be our 40th wedding anniversary.

After the turmoil in Saigon, I vowed I would never work for USAID again. Although I was offered several positions by USAID when I returned to Washington to resign from USAID, I refused and never was directly employed by this incompetent organization again.

USAID would continue to do the unimaginable in supposedly assisting Third World countries. This organization would eliminate most of the agricultural technical people in USAID although the biggest problem in developing countries is lack of food, improper food storage, inadequate packaging and handling, etc. In 2006, there are few, if any, agricultural personnel in USAID in the field or in the Washington, DC lair. Unbelievable but true.

Below are the words to two songs I wrote about the Viet Nam fiasco. It is still hard to believe the US Government went along with sending an unstable individual to South Viet Nam to undermine the counterinsurgency program in the midst of a war. The Viet Cong leadership must have been ecstatic with joy.

The Legend of James D. Killen (words to a song)

1965 - Washington, D.C.

Words by Harvey C. Neese

Music by Burr Frutche and Freddie Armbruster

1

Well, his name was Mr. Killen,
he was one of Taylor's lads.

He was faithfully promoted
by those statey petatey cats--

Statey petatey cats,
Statey petatey cats.

And he was faithfully promoted
by those statey petatey cats.

2

Mr. Killen went to Saigon,
he reached the gates of ease.

He said we'll have to cut back
I need an air conditioner please--
I need an air conditioner please,
I need an air conditioner please
He said we'll have to cut back,
I need an air conditioner please.

3

I don't like pigs or windmills,
once more I don't like corn
And anyone working on these two
I'm gonna trim his horns--
I'm gonna trim his horns
I'm gonna trim his horns
Anyone working on these two,
I'm gonna trim his horns.

4

We've been winning this cold war
too damn quick for me,
I'm gonna cut more projects off,
now you just wait and see--
Now you just wait and see
Now you just wait and see.
I'm gonna cut more projects off,
now you just wait and see.

5

He said to Luce and Fraleigh,
it's time for you to go,
You've just done too damn much here
to suit my big ego--
To suit my big ego
To suit my big ego.
You've just done too damn much here,
to suit my big ego.

6

I don't like organization
nor fast efficiency.
There's too many guys out in the field
we need more bureaucracy--
We need more bureaucracy
We need more bureaucracy
There's too many guys out in the field,
we need more bureaucracy.

7

He said to Green and Leaty
I'm gonna make you reps.
Well now....you've been working with
Montagnard,.. pigs..and fertilizer and everything--
And you've got too much pep
And you've got too much pep.
You've been working too damn hard,
and you've got too much pep.

8

The apple of my eye
is aggie A—I—D.
I like to see them jump real high
and kiss my ass for me--
And kiss my ass for me
And kiss my ass for me.
I like to see them jump real high
and kiss my ass for me.

9

The moral of this story
is plain with A—I—D.
You don't work for the people,
you work for bureaucracy--
You work for bureaucracy
You work for bureaucracy
You don't work for the people,
you work for bureaucracy.

ANNAM (words to a song)
1963 - Saigon
Words by Harvey C. Neese
Music by Burr Fruthey and Kirk Dimmitt

Chorus

Am, Am, Am Di Am
Once it was A-Na-Nam
Nam, Nam, Nam Di Nam
Now it's called Viet, Viet-Nam

1

Here is our land, long and lean
nestled by a deep, blue sea,
Our people have for many a year
Fought to be free, free...

Peasants wish only to live
as Buddha asked them to
But first came the foreigners...
And then Diem and Nhu, Nhu,
And then Diem and Nhu.

Chorus

2

The peaceful Perfume River flows
where lotus blossoms bloom
And Kings do silently sleep
inside their dark tombs, tombs...

Now we wish such quaint peace
would take o'er the land,
From Ben Hai to Ca Mau
And to the oceans' sand, sand,
And to the oceans' sand.

Chorus

3

Ancestors who we worship
must pity us down here.
We pray they plead with Buddha
to save us these tears, tears...

Our daughters fall in love with
men who must die
And children without fathers
Never know why, why.
Never know why.

Chorus

4

Some mothers, they must sing,
a sad, sad song.
Misled sons have run away
and joined the Viet-Viet-Cong...

They live a lonely, lonely life
and die a lonely, lonely death.
And in unmarked graves they die,
And laid to final rest, rest
And laid to final rest.

Chorus

5

Palm trees along the shore
and the Mighty Me Kong's flow
Soon will see a peaceful dove
to chase away our woes, woes...

We will chant with happy hearts
of Buddha's gracious hand,
From Ben Hai to Ca Mau
And to the oceans' sand, sand
And to the oceans' sand.

Chorus