

of coordination at the Saigon level. He wonders why the people who are responsible for teacher training and those for building schools don't get together so that when schools are built the teachers will be there. I get this kind of thing all the time.

A. In the days of the Trueheart committee, the whole American counter-insurgency effort in the provinces consisted of not more than 100 people. Today I would guess that there are probably 10,000. There are endless coordinating techniques used today-- committee meetings, staff coordination, etc. Our sophistication is much greater than it was in the days of Trueheart. In the days of Trueheart, there weren't many more than ten Americans in the country who had spent any time outside of Saigon, with the exception of military advisors advising military units. That was another era and coordination was relatively simple. In some ways it was better than it is today because it was so small and we had a few people who knew what they were trying to do, but from the standpoint of institutions, our institutions are much more sophisticated now and better than they were in those days. The only real answer to this question is as I said, that it's too new a field without sufficient institutional training, even though our institutions are much better now, to expect that it will be the same type of efficient system that you have in any well-run institution, whether it be government or non-government, in which the individual--at whatever echelon he is--feels that he's part of something that he knows about and that is proceeding toward a certain goal and he is fully satisfied because he's a part of this. But too many things are going on, it's too new, it's too big, it's trying to do too much too fast under rather unusual circumstances.

Q. Yes, I understand what you say, but it seems to me that when you do have these problems you're still always trying to move forward. You're trying to, even though you know you've got the problems and you're always going to have them, solve them. I'd like your reactions to proposals, solutions, what do you think about it?

A. For every legitimate complaint or feeling something ought to be done better, I'd say a number of plans have already been considered in Saigon; some of them have been implemented successfully and some have been tried and did not work. For example, in keeping a person informed there are inter-agency briefing teams that are supposed to brief people on what everybody else is doing. I don't know how this system works but I would suspect that it wouldn't be too satisfactory because there aren't that many people who really know what everybody else is doing.

Q. I'll ask you if you can tell me something about leadership qualities found in Father Hoa, how you came to be associated with him, some of the story of how you helped his organization. I understand that it also fell apart.

A. It's still going. Let's start with a brief history of Father Hoa's operation and the U. S. relationship to it. Father Hoa is a Chinese Catholic priest who came to South Vietnam about 1957 or 1958. He worked his way from South China, where he had been a parish priest and also a local military leader in efforts against Chinese Communists. When the Communists took over completely he managed to escape and worked his way to North Vietnam, then over to Cambodia. While he was in North Vietnam he managed to get some of his people out of the parish in China. Eventually, he came to South Vietnam and was able to convince President Diem, who was also

a Catholic, to give him and his small band of followers, most of whom were from his original parish in South China, a piece of land which no one else wanted near the southernmost tip of South Vietnam, which is called the Ca Mau peninsula. It's very close to the bottom point of South Vietnam as you look at the map. He started a sort of resettlement project there--resettlement in the sense of building homes, reclaiming land, developing rice fields, fishing, etc. This was originally a middle-sized village--I would guess around 1,000 people. As this effort took root, concurrently Communists were beginning to re-emerge in a major effort to take over the south--this was in 1958, 1959 and 1961. In his area, as he was building his own structure and settlement operations, the Communists were also reactivating their structure, which had always been strong in this area--a traditional Communist stronghold for many years. So eventually the two sides started fighting. It started out on a very small scale on both sides with just a few weapons, and progressively got larger and larger until Father Hoa's resettlement village eventually turned into sort of a military operation. He was able to convince President Diem to give him the initial weapons. Later he got some American assistance in terms of weapons and some other military equipment. At the time I first knew him, in late 1962, he had something like 1,000 men under arms and had expanded his area to about five outposts, all of which radiated out from his initial settlement, primarily along canals since canals are the main route of travel in the area. All during this period he had the personal support of President Diem and it was this support which enabled him to survive and operate, since he's Chinese (most people who are interested in Vietnam are aware there's a long-standing antipathy between

the Vietnamese and the Chinese).

Q. When he had these 1,000 men under arms, did this include Vietnamese soldiers as well as...

A. Yes, I should point out that his operation expanded and during the period of 1959, 1962 and 1963 he assimilated a number of local Vietnamese in the area. These Vietnamese got along quite well with him. The trouble with the Vietnamese was really with the Vietnamese officials between his area and Saigon. One of the things they always objected to was the alleged favoritism which he received because he did have the support of President Diem. Actually this was always grossly exaggerated--these special favors he received. It was a very useful technique for the Vietnamese officials who did not like him to use to cut him down. They were able to convince many Americans that Father Hoa was a special case and received many things which other people didn't which actually wasn't true. He did get a few special things, but he always made very excellent use of what he got. He also got some publicity and publicity for a person like himself whose only real source of support was the president, was dangerous. This tends to make you a target for jealousy. Eventually he became a target of dislike not only of the Vietnamese bureaucracy, but of many Americans at the province, Corps and division levels. But his relations with local Vietnamese in his own area were quite good and his best military unit was made up primarily of Vietnamese, although for every five Vietnamese there was one Chinese cadre. Most of these Vietnamese were local boys, many of them former Viet Cong who were captured, reindoctrinated and put back into this special unit, which was an intelligence, psy ops, commando type unit which was quite good.



One of my jobs some time ago was to pick up American assistance to Father Hoa because the former type of American assistance had ended and his troops were being transferred to the Regional Forces. For a period of about a year and a half to two years I provided financial and logistical support to his operation on the civil side. For example, one of the major problems was that his area was isolated and surrounded by Communist controlled areas so that it was very difficult to get supplies to him. So we established our own sea supply route which meant renting barges, sea-going junks, warehouse space, etc. We also financed enlarging of a very small airfield he had there--the cost was for the workers' food. It wasn't a major construction effort, just a handbuilt, small airfield. We financed moving some people who wanted to come out of Communist areas; we got some other types of supplies--such as radios, etc. We also built a typical AID dispensary following the standard plans.

About this time President Diem was killed and all of the antipathy which had been growing over the last three or four years against Father Hoa by the Vietnamese bureaucracy came out into the open and he was in real trouble, and has been ever since. His operation is still going. He doesn't have control of it because they gradually stripped him of control, but he still has a great deal of influence because a lot of the people are still his own people. It's not as healthy as it was by any means. A lot of its spirit has gone out of the place because his control has been taken away and there's also been a steady attrition of good leaders down there--company leaders, platoon leaders, etc. They eventually were wounded or killed.

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As far as leadership goes, he's a superb leader in the sense of taking care of his own people. He's a very inspirational leader to those of his own clan and his own clan does not just include the Chinese but also local Vietnamese from his area. It takes a long time for him to really trust anyone or for anyone to be assimilated into his clan. But once they are, then he will help them one way or the other for the rest of their lives. His way of being inspirational is in low rather than high key. He jokes a lot and yet is a very tough person. He's fair and strict; he knows all the families and spends a lot of time with them. He's just a delightful person. He's a good leader and knows what he's doing; he's very warm and has a good sense of humor. It's this kind of inspiration. This and the fact that most of the people, not all but most, are Catholic so they want somebody who has this leadership capability to help them stick together, and keep the Communists off their backs. He's also a very good showman and is particularly good at this with Americans. I say this not as a criticism at all because he's had to do this in order to be able to provide for his people and do what he thinks needs to be done--including fighting the enemy. He doesn't have any real resources of his own; he's had to get assistance to do everything he's done. One of his ways of getting assistance is to strike the right note with the Americans. I could go into his techniques for running the place.

Q. I would like for you to go into some of the techniques. For example, I'm curious to know if he operated in the old Mandarin style where he tells the people what's good for them or does he go to the people and find out what they want and then get it for them--or is it a combination?

I've never really taken the time to analyze that to my own satisfaction. First of all, as I said, he's very strict and very suspicious. Yet he doesn't ignore the wishes of his people and he doesn't ignore their participation in what he's doing. For example, in expanding the airfield he explained very carefully why this was necessary--not just getting up on a platform and making a speech, but in talking with his own subordinates, the people in the village, with leaders of a couple nearby hamlets. He explained what this would do for the area. The decision, however, to expand the airfield was completely his. There was never any sort of council where his chief lieutenants would say what they thought should be done on a matter of this type. This kind of decision sharing did not take place--he decided what to do. I wouldn't disagree with him at all for the situation he was in. His whole operation was completely personal. This is both the strength and the weakness of this kind of system because if you take away him you really don't have the spark. It was his charisma, his personality which made the thing possible in the first place and which kept it going. I think it's surviving now because it's been going long enough and there are enough resources, military resources--they get fire support and have a much larger airfield--so it's not profitable for the Communists to attack.

Q. Is the ARVN controlling these places now?

A. Yes. I would say the main weakness of this system is that there's no real way of developing other leaders. He didn't really spend any time on this--he did to the extent of short-range needs. He

very carefully worked with a couple of local Vietnamese down there and they became good local leaders, both military and civil; he worked with some of his own people and they became reasonably good leaders. But none with the stature to replace him; nothing working toward this, or working toward a situation in which a group could collectively take over. Perhaps that's asking a little too much--as I said, it's always been very personalized. The best tag to put on his operation would be paternalistic--a father looking after his flock.

Q. In your relationship with him did he accept advice from you, did he ask advice?

A. No. He rarely accepts advice from anyone--he never accepted advice from any of us, except to the point he had to to get what he felt he needed. I can't criticize him for this because usually his judgment was better than ours.

He was quite good in psychological warfare. I remember one operation--a large two company size operation--into a Communist base area just south of Father Hoa's area in the forest. The first morning of the operation--he wasn't on the operation because of his age, although he went on many operations in his younger days--the force suffered four or five killed crossing a river in a sampan. We couldn't recover the bodies because the current was too strong and the water too deep. Later the bodies were recovered by the Communists and sent back and they had bullet holes in them. When the casualties occurred Father Hoa had taken the line that the Communists opened fire, the boat had tipped over and the men had fallen into the water and had drowned. When the Communists returned the bodies he told his troops that the Communists had fired into the bodies after recovering them from the river. Then he sent a message back to the Communists thanking them for returning the bodies



but shaming the Communists for desecrating the dead by firing into the bodies. He did a good job of shaming them. As you know, in Asia, the recovery of the bodies for proper burial is quite an important thing. The point I'm trying to make is that he was sharp with his psychology and sharp in reacting immediately. He got a message back to the Communists very fast. Instead of letting them shame his operation by recovering the bodies and sending them back he was right on top of them. Also at the end of the operation we had a memorial ceremony for those who were killed. Then we had a large feast. All the soldiers were there and everybody got half smashed. At this kind of party all of the soldiers came around to his table and toasted him and he toasted them. It was a communal affair--discipline didn't break down, he was still the leader--but it was sort of a family get-together. The reason, of course, he did this was to offset feelings of remorse over the casualties.

Q. One of the things about this was there's this Father Hoa and then farther north there's this Vietnamese Father Dzu who were successful in establishing a system and counteracting the Viet Cong apparatus and substituting their own. I believe, I think, the figures say that about 800,000 Catholic refugees came down from the north, many of them of the intelligentsia. Why is it that there's been so little of this self-protection, self-help, self-organization as in the cases of Father Hoa and Father Dzu?

Q. You mean among the rest of the Catholics?

A. Right. There has been. The Catholic communities are still the best organized and best defended and most effective communities as a whole in the country. The other notable example would be the Hoa Hao. Anytime you have a strong local political organization (which you almost always have when you have a Catholic community) then you have