

TRANSCRIPT OF LECTURE
FETC/AID - UH
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(Reel 5, Side 2)

Bohannan:

Gentlemen, this is a most un-nerving group to talk to, most difficult one to figure out what to say to. Partly, because of your divergent backgrounds, partly because in so many of the sessions there are so few here, partly because the field is so damn broad. Yesterday morning I figured out, more or less, what I thought I was going to try to say in each of the remaining sessions. I haven't succeeded yet, for various reasons, including my own ineptitude, and my desire to try to get what might be the most important points into sessions which were fairly fully attended. Last night, or this morning, going home after our soiree last night, I got to thinking about a suggestion of Brother Runyon's here, and decided that I was going to tear up the script and start all over again this morning. Came out and looked over your background data again, got to wondering whether I should or not, what I should talk about. I think I will try a slightly different angle on this this morning. I hope that you will bear with me. It is based on the feeling, that, despite the experience which many of you have had, it may be that courses of instruction, such as you are going through, these long area-country familiarization courses, may possibly do more harm than good. Now this sounds like a rather ridiculous statement -- maybe it is -- I don't know.

To give you a better background on which to judge my competence to make such a statement, let me say this: First of all, appearances to the contrary, I do not think I am necessarily anti-intellectual. As a matter of fact I am the first one in about five generations of my family not to have at least one doctorate -- I was saved from one by WW II. I grew up as an anthropologist -- I say I grew up as one because I started studying it at a pretty short size. At the same time, in my boyhood, I spent a very great

many nights out on the high desert, listening to the tales of men who had fought, as guerrilla or as regulars in wars ranging from our Indian Wars on the High Plains -- both sides, men from both sides --- to men who rode with Pancho Villa in Mexico. During a part of this time I was with a revolutionary force in Mexico. Since then I have listened to the tales of people, sometimes for many days and nights on end, ranging from the rather epic march of a couple of Czech battalions clear across Russia during WW I -- deserting from the German Army but refusing to be incorporated into the Russian forces, perhaps hating the Russians a little more than they did the Germans. I spent three nights in a cave on the Alaskan tundra, listening to a man who made that march. In addition to what I have heard from these gentlemen over the years, I have had a fair amount of experience myself. I have been shot at, and shot back at, black, white, yellow, and red, and brown. I served with I don't know, five or six different guerrilla forces, as well as counter-guerrilla forces, and the thing that has come across as perhaps the most important thing to try to say to a group like this, about this is that: People are mostly people.

I am afraid that in our courses of instruction, area familiarization, country familiarization, we tend to emphasize the differences too much. We tend to make it appear that because each country, each people, are to some extent unique, they are totally unique -- that they must be approached with awe and trepidation, shall we say, because one knows so little about them, no matter how much one has studied. I don't think this is true. I don't think that this is the way that it should be. When I think back over my own experiences, the tales I have heard, the books I have read, for that matter, there is so much more in common than there is different. People are people. They have little differences, just as there are differences in individuals from the same town, differences between two brothers. Now the further you spread out, perhaps, probably, perhaps, the more differences you will find, the more noticeable, the more obvious certain differences will become, but basically we

have a great deal more in common than they do separately. I see that I am boring some of you. OK, I am sorry, but this is I think important.

Dr. Fall, the other evening, spoke of the non-applicability of Malaya, and of the non-applicability of Philippine experience in counter-insurgency. Well, my immediate reaction, when he speaks of the non-applicability of Malaya, is to agree with him, much as I dislike to agree with him on any point. But, if you really stop to look at it, it ain't so. The approaches taken to the problem, there, were approaches which could not possibly be applied in Vietnam by reasonable men. There have been little, few attempts by reasonable men, or unreasonable men, really to apply the approaches taken in Malaya to the contemporary war or counter-insurgency. And yet, despite that, there is a great deal of similarity.

One patch of mangrove swamp, or saksak swamp, is very much like another. Sleeping in one mud puddle in the tropics is much more like sleeping in another mud puddle in the tropics than it is like sleeping in a feather bed back in Minnesota. But they are both sleeping, in more or less a horizontal position, it is the same function, but there are minor differences. Remember Brother Mauldin, years ago, got a great deal of publicity, a great deal of exposure for a statement that he made to somebody who had been saying that soldiers have an easy life really in the field: "Yeah, its an easy life. You just go out and try carrying two suitcases loaded with rocks 15 miles through a rainstorm, and then sleep in a mud puddle, and you will find out how damn easy it is." Well, that was thought to be really telling the guy off, really intended to be. But when you come right down to the nuts and bolts of the matter it isn't particularly bad. Once you find out that you can do it, it needn't bother you very much. I know a lot of you guys have done things comparable, and you know it for yourselves. I mention it merely as an illustration.

Jungle patrols in Malaya, jungle patrols in Vietnam, or in the Philippines are very very much alike. The techniques that will keep you alive in one, will keep you alive in the other. So will luck. The non-applicability theory applies more, I think, to theory than to practice; more to basic principles than it does to field techniques. I saw a question back there just a moment ago.

Question: "Colonel, this is the contest (unintelligible) I don't know if it is true or not, I would like your opinion on it, but you probably know more about insurgency and this type of thing than anybody who has spoken to us before, but it seems, it seems from the people we have talked with before this, that if you took all the insurgency that you (unintelligible) basic career. . . . and put a plus or minus after it in trying to denote the reactions say of the American people; if you do that there would have been one time when there was an awful lot of plusses, because it was a very favorable thing, we thought it was a very favorable thing; but more and more, it, probably as we come closer to today you would find more and more minuses. It seems as if we, something has happened to us or something has happened to the world, something has happened somewhere that the people, I think that people haven't changed that much, something has happened so that we as Americans have a more negative reaction towards something like this today. It seems rather disturbing, I don't know why, but you know, you look back at the old traditions you would say: "Well, Gee, maybe we could explain, of course this is a kind of nebulous conflict we are having." I don't think it would hurt any of us think about these things."

Answer: "Well, I must compliment you on feeling uneasy about these things. I do too, I do too. We are really getting, for me to try to answer that question is really getting into deep water, in terms of, as far as US official policy and thinking and so on, but I can pretty much fight like hell. So, the answer to your question is: Yes. There is a very strong, there seems to be a

very strong rejection of participation in revolutions among the American people, one which has grown steadily and observably within my life time. This is, I think, because the counter-revolutionaries have so largely taken over in our intellectual life. By the counter revolutionaries I mean those who want to control people; those who want to make people be good, so that they will be happy; those who want to make them "socially adjusted" so that everybody gets along with everybody else; those who want to make laws so that you can't - Harrumph - without getting a license from city hall.

Gentlemen, we were a revolutionary people. We came into existence through rebellion and revolution. We came into existence as a nation - the ones who started that nation were rebels of all different descriptions. Some of them you could regard as counter-revolutionary rebels - our New England forefathers, some of them, were almost as strong as regulating the lives of the individual as Franklin Delano Roosevelt or any of his successors. And the difference between them is hard to see at times if you really look at it from this point of view.

We have gotten away from revolution. We want security, we want security, we want order, we want sweet reasonableness. It is indeed discouraging. Speaking for myself, for thirty years I grew more and more and more disgusted with developments in the United States, with thinking the trend of popular thinking, especially in matters of government, of war and peace, of the rights of the individual. I could look back, at the way we used to be, the way many of the elder citizens that I knew well as a boy, as a young man, were, and I saw no encouragement at all. Quite the contrary.

One thing that I learned a good deal about in the last 20 years was the most amazing experience in, shall we say "inter-cultural relations" of Americans and Filipinos in the last two years of the last century, and the first four or five years of this century. That seemed to be the apogee of American experience, of American success in dealing with quite alien peoples and cultures.

It was not something entirely without precedent, there have been small-scale examples of that clear back through our history; one of the more interesting ones being the Marine Corps's real claim to the shores of Tripoli, William B. Eaton's experience as an advisor in an insurgency in Tripoli a hundred-odd years ago. A hundred and thirty five years ago now, isn't it, wasn't Eaton 1831? But, from the first years of this century, down to the present, our ability to be effective in dealing with alien peoples seemed to be, and I think was, steadily decreasing, despite our increasing academic knowledge concerning them and in the so-called social sciences.

As you know, I had some time with Filipino guerrillas in WW II, three different groups of them, culturally at least as different as French, Spanish, and Italians, or perhaps as French, Spanish, and Finns. I personally saw, and heard a great deal, about the experience of other Americans who served with guerrilla units in the Philippines, and elsewhere, throughout the war. Much more experience than I had. Some of them did quite well, outstandingly well, but most, perhaps the best you could say for them was mediocre; quite a few were anywhere from lousy to stinking awful, but overall it was not encouraging.

I didn't really see anything very encouraging in our ability to deal with other people, other people much less ourselves, until about 4 years ago, when I first went up into the hills of Vietnam, and visited small Special Forces detachments up there, working among the Montagnards, a completely alien environment, with people whose culture, I think, could safely be described as quite primitive, handicapped by the presence of individuals from still another culture, Vietnamese Special Forces officers whose special job and real assignment was to keep these Americans from becoming effective in dealing with the Montagnards. Their assignment was to prevent the development of American influence among the Montagnards, period. It was as flat as that.

Now, these gentlemen were doing a magnificent job, these young lieutenants, mostly young lieutenants and old sergeants, and some young enlisted men, were doing a magnificent job at getting across to these Montagnards, at giving them leadership which they would, they gladly accepted, winning their loyalty, and giving their own loyalty back to these Montagnards. I've heard some awfully romantic and incredible stories, some of which are true, unquestionably, about the relationships developed between Filipino soldiers and American officers of the old Philippine Scouts and the old Philippine Constabulary, fifty-five years ago. I didn't think we had it in us to do it again, on such a scale. But we have. These guys, these Special Forces people, contrary to doctrine and propaganda, were not intensively trained on the Montagnards; they weren't even intensively trained on cross-cultural relationships. They had, yes some training on that, in practical terms by and large. I think we have got, right here in this room, a former member of the Special Forces in Vietnam. How about you? How much training did you have before going to Vietnam? (Answer): "About nine months of basic and demolition training and about three months of other." OK, there you are, very fast. It is different today (incidentally, let me say parenthetically, that, in the last couple of years, Special Forces has kind of gone to hell. Drafting people into it. - Instead of on volunteers virtually, oh, they are volunteers all right, but they are of the handcuff variety. They are giving them a lot more training, but they are not like they used to be. Of course, that is the old story. Always in the Army we say that there are only two good assignments, your last one and your next one.)

To get back to your question. Have we lost our interest in revolution? I am afraid we have, to a great extent, and yet there are hopeful signs that while you might say that group opinion appears to be opposed to revolution, counter-revolutionary, for more security and less change, more regimentation and less freedom,

nevertheless people keep popping up who see it differently. And one of the things that helps is our experience overseas, whether it is in combat or not, whether it is military or civilian, this helps to, I think, to reseed the spirit of independence among our people. Does that answer your question?

Question: "When you say that you think that courses like what we are going through might be counter-productive, I wonder if what you are saying is that commitment to the whole thing is more important than your nuts and bolts training and a course like this tends to cause dis-orientation in people and the kind of run out of commitment somewhere along the way. We have seen that happen.

Answer: "Yes, that does happen at times, but that is not what I was driving at. In fact, while I am a firm believer in commitment to something or other, commitment alone won't do it. Some of the worst flops that I have seen, in almost any field, were people who were totally committed to doing right in that field, but they lacked common sense, or they lacked the knowledge, the basic knowledge of what they were trying to do. Some place they just weren't hadn't gotten it, or didn't have it, not quite the same thing although grammatically it is. No, what I am saying is, that such courses as this, may so focus on the differences between your culture and the one that you are going into, that you may lose sight of the similarities which are so much greater, the fact that these are human beings, like yourself. Their basic motivation is much the same as yours and mine. They want to eat, drink, sleep make love, have children, not work any more than they have to except when they want to and so on and so forth. They are no more anxious to go out and die in a rice paddy than you or I -- but not necessarily any more reluctant to, either, if the right motivation is touched on. Human experience is human experience, wherever you find it, and human experience in one place, to a very large extent is applicable in another. Where you go wrong is when you fail to realize the great number of similarities just as much as when you fail to realize important although minor differences. In some places in the world you can make a friend of a man, at least establish cordial relationships with him, by slapping him on the back. In Vietnam you are

like to establish unpleasant relations with him by slapping him on the back, and yet there are Vietnamese who have become so Americanized that they feel you are cold and strange if you don't slap him on the back, whichever their habit is. But it is much more important that you get it across to them that you are trying to help, and that you can be useful. You really want to be useful, you want to do something something that you think is right and proper, and will help in their problems. Yes sir?"

Question: "(unintelligible) trying to help. . . such a glib fashion, telling them that we are trying to help . . . a difficult thing to do?"

Answer: "I am not quite sure that I understand the point of your comment."

Question: "All right, you can't tell somebody, just tell somebody that you want to help them there, there are singposts to people, you spoke of the similarities of people, you can't prove that you are trying to help just by being aware of the differences, your differences and . . . it seems like that would be a very potent thing to . . . I don't know, it was just that when you said that, it just kind of stuck out, and it is an important thing and a difficult thing to really make yourself a part of it. I don't know how to express it . . . "

Answer: "Well, you may have something there, I am not quite sure, still. Let me put it this way. I didn't say telling them, is trying to help them, of course, I did say showing them that you are trying to help. This does include telling them, you tell them and you demonstrate. Actually, we are going there, you are going there, for one of two really valid reasons: Either, you are going there to serve the United States, and you really don't much care what you do or where you do it, so long as it is the ~~most~~ useful thing you can do for Uncle Sam; or else you are going there to try to help the Vietnamese, either as people, or as a nation, in a time of real trial. Whichever of those reasons you may be going there for,

your job, essentially, is identical, it is trying to help the Vietnamese, which in turn, will help Uncle Sam. I don't know whether that is a fair answer to your comment or not. Yes sir?"

Question: "Colonel, about this development of leaders. What book would you suggest that I read, or is it that guerrilla leaders are born?"

Answer: "Hmmmm. I would suggest that you read, first of all, an article in Army Magazine about five years ago, entitled, "Both Sides of the Guerrilla Hill" by Brigadier Miers, British Army, who was probably their top practical expert on counter-insurgency; - His last assignment was as Adjutant General of the British Occupation Forces in Germany, and he got so damn bored with life there that he shot himself about three years ago. But I would start off with that. And then the next one I would read, is one that I wish you would all re-read - I trust that many of you have read it, "Kim" by Kipling. I suppose that if there were one book that I could ask all of you to read, it might very well be "Kim". I would have to really scratch to try to make up a selected reading list on that. I'd say that that the best thing to do, and this is not meant as a crack, the best thing to do would be to go out and start one, or start something comparable."

Question: "(unintelligible) How much can I appreciate the other man's attitude by putting myself in their position, and knowing as much about their problems and their situation?"

Answer: "I suppose the best way to do is to go out and live with them and "inter-relate", in the jargon of the day. Techniques, there is loads of books on it, but, so many of the best leaders, of alien forces, had no training, no preparation. They just got pitchforked into it, they kind - they had a hell of a desire to make good for one reason or other, perhaps no more than just to stay alive. They turned out to be pretty good, most of them, at communicating, and "relating" and they did damn well. There were a few that I know, one of the two fathers of US Army Special Forces,

was about the lousiest communicator with other people, especially the people whom he formed a guerrilla organization, that I have ever run into. Why that bastard managed to live through WW II and come out smelling like a rose, with about 30,000 men under his command; roughly twenty-nine thousand nine hundred and eighty of them Filipinos; roughly 9,980 of them bastards who had been collaborating with the Japanese for all they were worth until just a few months before; when the handwriting was so plain on the wall that as one Filipino put it: "They succeeded in turning their coats, while carrying a bucket of water on each shoulder, without spilling a drop."

But, generally speaking, the people who have been successful, have not had too much experience, too much preparation. Those who have had experience and preparation perhaps have had a higher percentage of success than those who have not.-- What I am trying to say is this: There may be a thousand people who have tried out on this job. Out of that thousand, 950 had no adequate preparation or experience. Of that 950 perhaps 150 were successful. The other fifty in that thousand were prepared, and maybe 25 of them were successful -- a higher percentage yes, but not a higher total number. Yes sir?"

Question: "Could you say something about this (unintelligible) there was a little something about focussing in on the lives of persons, You don't have to be, you don't have to have training or anything else, it maybe is just an attitude or something that, if you do have this thing, you can certainly be that much better at it, but before you can you are looking at a person face to face and trying to figure out what his life means. This is something you have got to work, and want to work on, and I think that is what Frank said, and that this is something it is very hard to grapple with . . ."

Answer: "Yes, that is another way of putting it, that you have got to be interested in working with people, or at least realize that you must act like you are interested in working with them, and work hard at trying to work with them, if you are going to succeed,

whether as a guerrilla leader, or as a civilian advisor to a district chief. You have got to establish more than mere formal verbal communications.

In this connection I would like to go back to a book that many of you no undoubtedly have read, called "The Ugly American". You may recall that one of the points in "The Ugly American" was picked up, and has been run with like hell ever since, was this business of knowing the language of the people that you are working with. Why according to "The Ugly American" you have got to know the language, otherwise they are fooling you all the damn time. Well, very interestingly, that has been accepted almost as the Gospel. Now, so far as there was any outstanding hero in that book, it was probably Colonel Hillandale, the guy who won the war against the Huk in the Philippines, it says here, and -- to a large extent he was.

I have worked off and on for 20 years with the prototype of Colonel Hillandale. I have very high admiration and respect for him. He is a phenomenally effective man at intercommunication, at inter-relating, with any kind of people. When he first went to Vietnam, to work, I was with him. I had been there, (I was batting back and forth between the Philippines and Vietnam,) on this particular occasion he had been there perhaps three months. I had been there perhaps two weeks, that stretch. The Binh Xuyen attacked the palace, came within an ace of overthrowing the government. We had a conference with a Vietnamese guerrilla general, General Trinh Minh The, leader of a dissident group of Cao Dai. This was a first session with him. He spoke no English, he spoke no French, he spoke only Vietnamese. He did have with him an interpreter who spoke a reasonable amount of French. Colonel Hillandale does not speak more than ten words of any other language than English, he seems to have almost a mental block against learning languages, reinforced by his firm conviction that you don't need a language, a knowledge of the other guys language. Well, I speak maybe 30, maybe

thirty-five words of very bad French, horribbe. It started off as Parisian argot with a strong Spanish accent, got modified by a year's association with French Canadians, and then finally came to full bloom dealing with White Russian emigres whose French is also peculiar -- but anyhow, we had, despite my almost total limitation, we had a very deep skull session between Colonel Hillandale and General Trinh Minh The, in which I tried to go from English to French, and then this other lad went from French to Vietnamese, and then the answer would come back the same way, the same route. I tell you the verbal communication was practically nil -- but Colonel Hillandale and General Trinh Minh The understood each other perfectly. Those two characters as one feller said, communicated emotionally. I don't know how the devil they did it. Obviously, they couldn't say things like "I will meet you on the street corner opposite La Pagode at 4:75 this afternoon, provided there isn't a man with a blue car in sight." They couldn't get that kind of idea across at all, but the general ideas, of much greater importance, of what one should do when his country was attacked; of whether one should support the administration in power; why should one do it, that sort of thing those two gentlemen got across to each other a damn sight better than they did to either one of us two insensitive apes who were doing the translating for them.

There just don't seem to be any rules on this sort of thing. People who can really communicate seem not to need words. One of our more highly educated and sophisticated Filipinos, a graduate in para-psychology or something from a Stateside school and so forth, oh JC he was an over educated custard, was appointment secretary to Mr. Magsaysay when Mr. Magsaysay was president. He just couldn't get over this character Magsaysay. He said that the only way he could explain this man was to say that this man communicated emotionally. He could gather a crowd from the Tondo slums (lets say from Harlem,) and give them a lecture on differential calculus in Sanskrit. They would laugh when he wanted them to laugh, and cry

when they wanted them to cry. And, they would go away sure that they understood every damn word that he said. Gentlemen, this is hyperbole, but it comes a lot closer to being true than any cold factual statement that I can find words to express. Some people can communicate, some people can make other people feel that they understand and share their problems; some people can't do it. Lets take a very quick break and get back and wind this thing up.

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