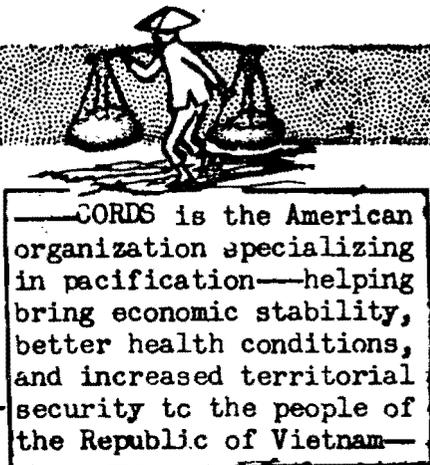


# News Release



Information Office  
Military Assistance Command, Vietnam  
CIVIL OPERATIONS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT  
II Corps Tactical Zone  
APO San Francisco 96240

—CORDS is the American organization specializing in pacification—helping bring economic stability, better health conditions, and increased territorial security to the people of the Republic of Vietnam—

STUG: Hoi Chanh vs VC  
BY: SGM Harold Efron  
RELEASE: 218

BINH DINH PROVINCE, Vietnam -- Le Tao was the Communist finance chief in My Binh hamlet, Tam Quan district. In late February he made a momentous decision; he decided to rally to the government of Vietnam. This was to set into motion an adventure that was little dreamed of as Le Tao returned to his wife and four children after his stay at the Binh Dinh province Chieu Hoi ("Open Arms") Center.

For the next month he was just another ordinary citizen in his native hamlet. He diligently worked his fields, enjoyed his family, and for the first time knew the taste of true freedom under the government of Vietnam.

The peace and quiet he had hoped for when he gave up his life as a Viet Cong was suddenly and dramatically destroyed. On the night of May 5, the VC struck the peaceful hamlet of My Binh. Le Tao and three

Taking them to their camp in the mountains, the VC released the other three prisoners but not Tao. They considered him no ordinary villager. Without benefit of counsel, or any due process of law, Tao was hauled before a Kangaroo Court. The verdict was a foregone conclusion. The penalty for choosing freedom as a Hoi Chanh (rallier to the government) was death. There was no appeal. The sentence would be carried out at sunrise.

Three armed guards held him in a tunnel. Despite the fact that Tao had been only a simple farmer and never a soldier, they were taking no chances. He was bound hand and foot. The two North Vietnamese Army guards were armed with AK-47 rifles while the remaining guard, a VC, held an M-16 rifle.

It was a long night, and time passed slowly. As the hours slipped away, Tao thought desperately of a plan--any plan that would let him escape death with the coming of dawn. Finally, well after midnight, he pleaded with the guards to be untied so that he could go outside and relieve himself. They reluctantly agreed, keeping him under their

guns every moment.

When he returned to the tunnel, he sat down next to the guards. His dejection, his seemingly utter surrender to his fate apparently lulled them into a sense of security, and, they did not bother to retie him. After all, they were three to one, and the guards held all the weapons.

Tao sat quietly and finally pretended to fall asleep. Not moving, not daring to disturb the guards who were gradually nodding, he lay still. Time passed. At last, the final guard's head fell to his chest and all three were dosing. This was his moment of decision. He might have minutes, or only seconds, in which to act while his guards were inattentive.

Tao had never held or fired a weapon in his life. The AK-47's and the M-16 were as strange to him as the controls of an airplane.

Dawn was less than a scant hour away. It was now or never.

Desperately, he snatched an AK-47 from a guard. Before the others could bring their guns to bear, Tao cut down all three men with a deadly burst.

It was dawn when Tao returned to the nearest Allied outpost. He told his story, and agreed to lead a patrol back to the scene of the grim drama.

It was as he had excitedly gasped out the details. The total: three enemy dead, 2 AK-47's, an M-16, several Chicom grenades and more than a pound of documents for intelligence to scan over. All this from a scared, simple rice farmer, who only hours before had been bound hand and foot with three armed and well-trained enemy troops waiting to carry out his death sentence.

Tao received a monetary award for his efforts. The government of Vietnam gave him 25 thousand piasters. But the real reward--one that could not be measured in dollars--was that Tao had earned the right for himself and his family to live in peace under the government of their choice. He had earned this right because he was willing to fight, and even risk dying, against seemingly insurmountable odds. However, as Tao proved, men who wish to be free have never counted the odds against them.