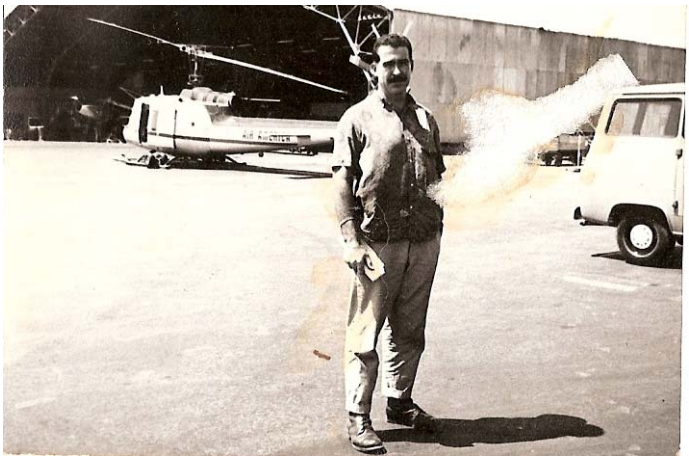
VIETNAM 1966-1968

I did my very best to prepare for Vietnam. I debriefed homecoming Special Forces veterans and visited the library. Most of the books I read were confusing, especially The Vietcong by Douglas Pike. I found nothing which described how the VC managed to spread its tentacles around nearly every village and hamlet in Vietnam. The Agency offered a brief one-day enlightenment orientation, bringing in several Vietnam experts to lecture on Vietnamese history, customs, and field operations. It was something, but not much. Although I had many questions, I was told, "Don't worry. Once in country the Station will give you an intensive indoctrination. They will cover everything you will need to know."

We were handed tickets in Miami. Our group included me, Mike Nolan, Bill Watkins, and Bob Simon. Mike was an old Southeast Asia hand. He had been recruited during the Korean War when the Agency hired all the paramilitary officers they could find. Being a former professional football player with the Los Angeles Rams, Mike met the recruiting criteria; strong, aggressive and brave. However, like all quick-start programs, most of these contract officers were axed when the Korean War ended. Mike, however, survived and was sent to Laos. Afterwards, he spent many years in hardship posts usually reserved for what insiders call "knuckle draggers." A term Agency Foreign Intelligence (FI) officers coined to advertise their intellectual superiority compared to rough and tumble paramilitary types like Mike Nolan.



MIKE NOLAN 1966

Bill Watkins came to CIA from the Marine Corps... He had been pilot and was selected for the elite spy career trainee (CT) program. Miami was his first assignment where he served as a paramilitary operations officer. Bob Simon was a former Navy underwater demolitions team (UDT) officer and a product of Massachusetts Maritime Academy. He was the one who convinced me earlier to stay aboard during the Cuban show. Although the four of us came from different backgrounds, we were now heading in the same direction.

BOB SIMON 1966

Our party would travel to Los Angeles, then board a Pan American 747 to Hawaii. From here we would transfer to another Pan Am flight to Tan Son Nhut, Saigon. Everything went as planned until heavy fog delayed our flight to Honolulu by roughly four hours. This delay caused us to miss the connect flight at Honolulu. Although we grumbled about the missed connection, things brightened when we learned Pan Am would put us up at an exclusive Waikiki Beach hotel while waiting for the next flight to Saigon. I took advantage of the free time and did what I always wanted to do, surf board and dive off this world famous beach. We lived like kings, but it ended much too quickly. Two days later we boarded Flight 002 to Vietnam.

This was a strange way to go to war, I thought. In the First World War, German soldiers relied on trains and trucks to deliver troops to battle. In WWII, our soldiers sailed across the Atlantic and Pacific in troop transports. Now our GIs were flying to war aboard commercial airliners, complete with stewardesses who served meals, snacks and soft drinks. What a change?

Our jet liner was filled with young soldiers. Like all troops heading into danger, they tried to mask their fears, emotions and anxieties through small talk, grab-assing and meaningless pranks. Most were kids barely out of high school. I had a creepy feeling they were about to be plunged into a strange, violent and unforgiving environment. If committed to combat, would they be led by an able officers looking to keep them alive? Or would they end up following the orders of some insensitive, over-zealous, star gazing, career seeker, seizing this opportunity to make his mark at the expense of bloodshed from these young lads? I wondered? How many would make it through a full tour? And how many wouldn't? In the final analysis it all depended on fate and God's will, I concluded.

I began contemplating my own situation. As a CIA paramilitary officer, I was not a member of the U.S. Armed Forces; hence, no status under the Geneva Convention. What difference would it make anyway? The VC had no rules. In fact, they were notorious murderers bent on killing anyone who stood in their way. As far as the enemy was concerned, I was big game. If captured, I would certainly be tortured to death. My name would not appear on any military war memorial or even acknowledged. It might only be recognized as a star, inscribed in marble alongside many others, on a wall inside the CIA Headquarters main entrance.

While these thoughts raced through my mind, the captain's voice bellowed over the intercom. “Fasten your seat belts. We are now in a cork screw decent over Tan San Nhut Airport and will arrive shortly. Please make sure your seats are upright and refrain from smoking. Thank you." I cranked my neck back to view the scene below through a tiny, oblong porthole. I could see camouflaged aircraft lining the runways and several others in sand bagged revetments. I had no trouble identifying Vietnamese F-5's jets, Sky raiders, C-46's, C-47's, C-123's, CH-54 and UH1H Helicopters, old C-119 Flying Boxcars, and new F-4 Phantom Jets. This commercial airport sure didn't look like one?

ARRIVAL TAN SAN NHUT

The jetliner came to stop 500 meters from a two-story, concrete control tower, damaged heavily a few days earlier by VC rockets. We exited the aircraft via a mobile stairway leading to the tarmac. We then joined the long column in the 100 degree sun leading to the equally scorching terminal building. There we stood in the civilian line waiting to clear customs, immigration, health and other desks manned by petty bureaucrats who gravitate to these positions. Before leaving the States, we were told, in fact assured, an Agency support officer would be there to greet us. We would then be escorted to our assigned living quarters. Our eyes scanned the numerous name cards held high by taxi drivers, agents, uniformed soldiers and some very slender, beautiful Vietnamese women dressed in their equally attractive and colorful ao dais. Nowhere, as promised, was there a sign of any Station officer. No big deal, we thought, currency exchanges would be happy to swap dollars for piasters. And taxi drives would fight each other for our fare. This happened. The biggest guy won. Good thing, because he had to load a ton of baggage into a very small, blue and white, air-cooled Puguet. "American Embassy." I said. A quick nod told me the driver knew what I was saying, and off we went. If you have never been in Saigon traffic, the scene was utter chaos. Masses of cars, trucks, busses, cyclos, bicycles, scooters, motor cycles and pedestrians moving every which way through thick, smoke filled, smog. Most all the drivers seemed addicted to keeping their palms glued to the horn. Every now and then we would pass a traffic cop in a white uniform standing on a pedestal, whistle in

mouth, trying desperately to control the chaos. As we turned onto Thrung Minh Giang Street, I felt a sharp pain in my right eye. Before leaving for Vietnam, I made a point of bringing a year's supply of hard contact lenses to correct my near sightedness. (I also replaced all amalgam teeth fillings with gold inlays.) Little did I know the orange/gray colored dust could work its way between the lens and the eye, grinding it like sand paper. I removed the contacts immediately, but pain and tears blinded me the rest of the trip.

The taxi came to a screeching halt outside a sand-filled barricade made from fifty-five gallon drums that surrounded the Old Embassy building. Previously, a Viet Cong sabotage team had exploded a massive bomb, causing significant structural damage and casualties. Among the injured was the Station Chief, Peer DeSilva, who lost one eye from pulverizing glass which filled the air like thin missiles. The building was under repair. Heavy, colored, Kevlar curtains hung from the windows.

OLD EMBASSY BUILDING 1966

We showed our credentials to a Marine guard, and then proceeded up the winding stairs to track down the Station support officer who was supposed to meet us. We calmed down a bit when we learned that he held a few high cards, like being responsible for assigning us our living quarters and vehicles. After making it clear "that he owed us," he came through. We ended up living in a gorgeous, two story villa on Tu Duc Street. The only thing we could say about these quarters was they far exceeded our expectations and were simply magnificent. Heck, we were prepared to live in tents.

BEAUTIFUL VILLA – SAIGON - 1966

My first meal in Saigon was at a French restaurant around the corner from our villa. I ordered steak and was expecting something like horse meat. Instead, I could cut the T-bone with a fork. Also, the baked potato must have come from Idaho. The establishment had a wonderful selection of wine, soft drinks and excellent coffee. This all came as a shock, as I had fully expected to dine on long range patrol rations. But this was Saigon, and we were destined for the field. Conditions there could be quite different.

Early the next morning we flagged a taxi and headed to the Embassy. Tom Donahue, the one responsible for Revolutionary Development, Census Grievance, and Counter-terror programs, briefed us. In the corner of his office there was a single side-band radio which he used to keep in contact with CIA field officers running Revolutionary Development Cadre Operations (RDC/O) programs. His deputy at the time was Winn Oliver whose assistant was Bill Evans, an Office of Technical Service officer. All these men were dedicated, hard-working, and experienced officers doing a great job. With the continuous build-up of U.S. forces in Vietnam, their programs would soon be under a huge microscope, eyed by officials at the highest levels of our government. "Pacification" was to be the cornerstone of US civilian efforts to defeat the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam.

Tom was a no-nonsense, yet considerate boss. I liked and trusted him instantly. He told us we would undergo a two-week orientation and gave us advanced word on our assignments. I was scheduled to replace John Scott in Bien Hoa. The Province Chief there was Col. Tran Van Hai, a Vietnamese Ranger. Since Saigon is close to Bien Hoa, he left it up to me to either drive there daily or rent a place to live in Bien Hoa. I appreciated the fact that I was treated like an adult and given full authority to function on my own with only general guidance. In this regard, it had been my experience all CIA case officers are expected to function with little to no supervision, make rational decisions, and conduct them in a trustworthy and competent manner. I know of no

other organization that gives such latitude to line officers, especially young ones. This, I believe, is a CIA trademark. Hopefully it will continue.

We spent the next three days at a nicely furnished safe house in Gia Dinh which functioned as a Census Grievance (CG) training facility. There the staff briefed us on the program. In short, CG was an intelligence gathering mechanism covered under a census umbrella. Each hamlet in South Vietnam was to have a Vietnamese CG officer trained at this facility. The CG officer was to interview every individual in the hamlet to determine where he or she lived, who he or she lived with, and if he or she had any grievances or recommendations that should be brought to the attention of the Government. In return, the individual was expected to be loyal and report any known Communist activity, sympathizers, or VC living in the area. Reports were to go directly to the local CG office, then to the Province CG officer. In addition to these reports, CG officers were instructed to draw a hamlet map, showing every road, hut, building and waterway and other special feature in the hamlet, along with color designations for inhabitants loyal to the GVN, fence sitters, and suspected Communist sympathizers. When I arrived there in early 1966, the program was in its infancy. It was our job to explain the program to our respective Province Chief and to gain his acceptance and support. In many cases it proved to be a tough sell, since the program also had the potential to uncover the corrupt scheme of any unsavory government official.

Next on the agenda was a trip to Vung Tau in Phuoc Tuy Province, located between Bien Hoa and the South China Sea. Here we would receive training on the Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC) and the Counter-terrorist (CT) programs. Being our first trip in country, we checked in at the Air America terminal at Ton Son Nhut and were escorted to a blue and white Cessna Twin Beach aircraft. After a short and relaxing trip, we landed on a small dirt strip outside RD Headquarters where we were greeted by a waiting Agency officer who drove us by jeep to Camp Ridge. Here we met camp commander, Major Le Xuan Mai, the legendary RDC founder. In his briefing, Mai explained his vision for pacification. Initially, the program started as forty-man armed People's Action Teams (PAT) which would enter a given hamlet and provide sufficient security to help the local people live in peace and improve their way of life by building wells, dams, roadways, homes, and other projects. The teams would hold entertainment shows and give instructions on how best to protect the hamlet. Subsequently, team strength was increased to 59 men, named Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC) teams. Hence, in return for such assistance, the local population was to assist self-defense projects and provide RD team’s exploitable VC intelligence. To me, the RD program resembled a tactic used by the VC to gain control over a given area, minus the enemy practice of violence and other terror tactics designed to intimidate the local population. Mai approached his job with religious zeal. Confessionals were modeled after Communist criticism, self-criticism sessions and the graduation ceremony featured a candle light ritual similar to a German SS torch light extravaganza. As Mai spoke, he reminded me of a cult leader preaching to his disciples. The whole atmosphere stuck me as somewhat bizarre, but nevertheless expected. To all of us at this time, Vietnam seemed to be a strange place, but a very dangerous strange place. Beside basic combat skills, the training taking place at Vung Tau seemed to instill a sense of pride and nationalism in the student body. With Tom Donohue's backing and the full weight of US government soon to come, the RD program was predicted to explode under the supervision and leadership of the very able and dynamic Vietnamese General, Nguyen Duc Thang.

My quick brush to describe the RD program fails to recognize the considerable efforts, imagination, and contribution of many fine CIA officers who preceded us in Vietnam. These were

"can do" officers, who overcame countless bureaucratic obstacles and were willing to take great risk in introducing new ideas to reluctant audiences. Chief of Station, Gordon (Gordy) Jorgenson, was one of them. Although I met him only briefly, his reputation and leadership drew the highest respect from the "doer" crowd. He cut enough slack to allow new ideas and concepts to flourish. Others like Stu Methven, Harry Monk, Jack Shirley, Ralph Johnson , Rip Robertson, Tucker Gougelman, had been in Vietnam long before I arrived and were still there on extended tours to help counter the roughly 3,000 VC terrorist assassinations annually which included innocent school teachers, their families, government officials, land owners, and anyone outwardly opposed to Communism. These were officers on the front lines doing everything in their power to find some way to stop VC atrocities. Ideas don't come easy. Those in Saigon looked at various models. They solicited advice from men like Edward Landsdale, architect of the successful counter-insurgency against the Huckballihuck in the Philippines; George Fenner, and Robert Thompson, whose police programs eventually defeated the Communists in Malaysia; and many others with highly impressive background. Books could be written on every one of these individuals, and some were, but many never received adequate credit for their deeds and accomplishments and still remain anonymous.

We were next exposed to the highly controversial Counter-terror Teams (CT) program. Shortly before my arrival, relatives of some Long An CT's were decapitated by the VC. In retaliation, the affected CT team took matters into their own hand. They tracked down and captured the responsible culprits. Rather than handing the captives over to the Police, they took the “eye for an eye" route and cut off their heads. To make matters worse, they placed the heads on poles in front of the hamlet where these VC once lived. It didn't take journalists long to photograph the scene for worldwide distribution. Naturally, the Agency came under intense heat. Although this action was certainly unauthorized and counter to Agency policy on prisoner treatment, CIA shouldered the blame. In response, CTs were renamed Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU's), a more politically correct and acceptable identity. In reality, PRU’s were nothing more than highly trained SWAT teams which collected intelligence primarily from family members. Their motto, "Death Before Dishonor" was displayed on their arm patch. Contrary to popular belief, given a free choice most South Vietnamese did not want to be ruled by Communists. Security in most rural hamlets was tenuous at best. The Government generally ruled by day while the VC ruled at night. For the average villager, it was suicidal to take sides. Nevertheless, to avoid the common VC practice of teen age kidnappings, families who had relatives in safe areas moved them there when possible. Many of such young men joined the CT program and kept their CT affiliation secret. To do otherwise could prove to be a death warrant for one's entire family. It was from the families of CT's that we obtained a steady flow of exploitable intelligence. Besides learning small unit tactics, weaponry, land navigation, tactics, and other paramilitary skills, CTs were given intense intelligence training in recruiting, reporting, communications, secret writing and other espionage trade craft. Having lived under Chinese, French and Japanese occupation for decades, the Vietnamese were skilled clandestine operators. And that goes for the VC and NVA as well. While I talked to several Vietnamese CT instructors at the camp, many voiced a desire to leave there and return to combat. I jotted down a few names, then checked to see if the advisor to the Center would have a nervous breakdown should I later decide to proselyte a few of his good men. I was expecting him to go ballistic. Instead he said, "Take your pick. I have plenty of good men waiting in the wings to take their place." With this I carefully evaluated every instructor and interviewed those who impressed me the most.

At the time, Vung Tau was the Coney Island of Vietnam except for the rides. The beaches are spectacular. While lazing in the sun one would never know a war was going on. It was a paradise for those assigned to this lovely place. Security was excellent. So was the food

at the many first class restaurants. Our stay in this resort atmosphere was short lived, unfortunately too short to exploit its many pleasantries. The one thing we manage to do, however, was test fire all available weaponry. The camp armory was filled with M-1 and M-2 carbines, Browning Automatic Rifles, 30 caliber and 50 caliber machine guns, 60mm and 81 mm mortars, Swedish K pistols, and a few new AR-15 rifles. We fired them all.

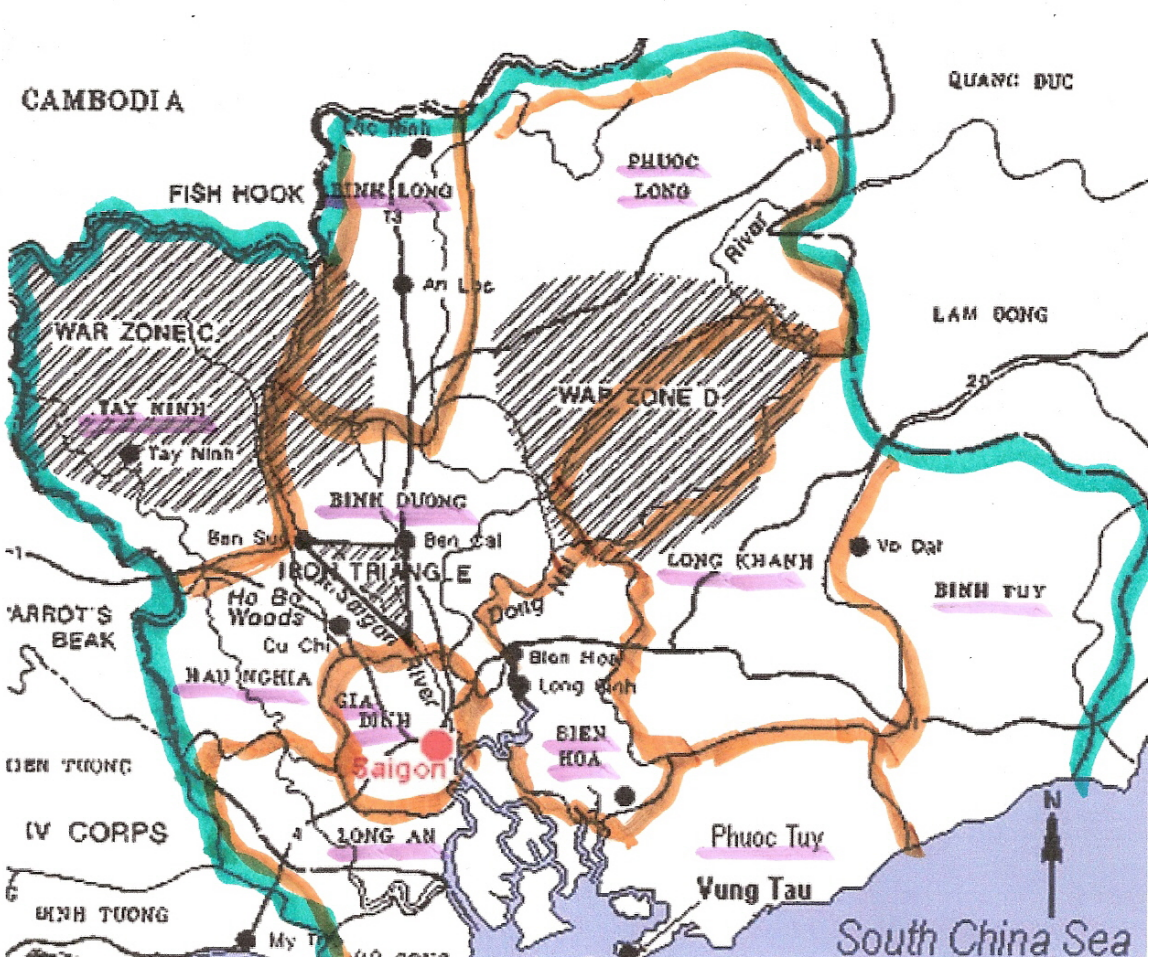
The next phase of training was back in Saigon where we were briefed on various CIA supported police programs and Station operations. Two CIA officers would be assigned to each priority province, Bien Hoa being one of them. As mention earlier, one would be the RDC/O officer and the other the RDC/P officer. I learned the P officer in Bien Hoa would be Sam Drakulich, a seasoned CIA veteran. All this was articulated by Nelson Brickham, the man responsible for CIA supported RDC/P field programs. Province advisors under Brickham's focused essentially on three major programs; advisor to the South Vietnamese Special Police (an FBI type organization); creation and support of Provincial Interrogation Centers (PIC's); and Unilateral Penetration operations (to recruit VC spies at the highest level possible). More sophisticated operations against the VC would be run by Saigon's Viet Cong Branch as well as the National Interrogation Center (NIC) where the most important VC captives were to be held. There were other intelligence components operating out of Saigon, including the Unilateral Branch and others which were on a "need to know" basis. In short, the RDC/O officer in the field was there to help counterparts become more effective and professional in intelligence matters.

We also received outstanding presentations from two US AID officers. John Paul Van and Everett Bumgartner who spoke on Civic Action programs, pacification goals, and the type of AID support available to the overall Revolutionary Development Program. (John Paul Van's exploits are well documented in Neil Sheehan's wonderful book A Bright Shining Lie.) Both these dedicated gentlemen had been in country for several years and offered us a clear, concise, and thorough understanding of GVN’s strategy. As explained, pacification would be like an oil slick. First we would pacify provinces in priority areas surrounding the major cities, bringing them under firm government control. Then we would move into contested areas and isolate the VC from the population. Finally, the VC threat would be reduced to where the people living in the South would be free. The strategy assumed, of course, that North Vietnamese army could be kept outside the major populated areas by the South Vietnamese Army, helped by ever increasing American forces.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before proceeding further, one must have a basic understanding of the country, how it was organized and what the US was trying to accomplish in the war. Without such knowledge, there is no context for the reader to understand or to relate to my experience.

In 1966, South Vietnam was divided into four Military Regions (MR I, II, III, IV), each under a Corps Commander (general officer) responsible for both military and civilian affairs. Depending on the security threat, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) line divisions was assigned to each Corps to seek and destroy large enemy concentrations in remote areas. Mobile forces, such as Vietnamese Rangers, Special Forces, Marines, and armor units were also on call to support such activity when needed. Every MR contained a different number of provinces, run by a senior military officer (usually a light colonel) who answered to the Ministry of Interior in Saigon as well as the Corps Commander. The Military Advisory Command Vietnam (MACV) assigned a sector advisor to the province chief along with other American advisors functioning as staff counterparts to the sector G-1 (Administration), G-2 (Intelligence), G-3 (Operations), G-4 (Logistics), and G-5 (Civic Action). The next level down was district, generally commanded by a Vietnamese army major or captain and advised by an American sub-sector advisor and his staff. Security forces in each province consisted of regional forces(RF), and popular forces(PF). They were essentially militia, recruited locally to serve near home. The difference being RF was more mobile, whereas PF usually defended static positions around hamlets, bridges, roads etc. On top of this, Civilian Irregular Defense Force Camps, composed mostly of Montagnards (mountain people) and advised by US Special Forces, were placed strategically near North Vietnamese infiltration routes to scout the enemy. There were other forces in country, such as Naval units, Police Field Force (combat police), secret special operations elements under Military Advisory Command, Special Operations Group (MAC/SOG) and a host of others, all with advisors.



MILITARY REGION III - 1966

It is relevant that North Vietnamese boundaries generally differed from that of the South. For example, in MR III, the VC changed regional zones frequently, eventually slicing the area into a pie with SR-6 (Saigon) its center, SR-4 NE, SR-5 E and SE, SR-1 NE, SR-3 E and SR-2 SW. You could expect finding the headquarters of units at the junction of two or three SVN districts. Going after them was similar to New York cops raiding a house in New Jersey. Moreover, a specific district like Binh Duong, for instance, could have as many as two to three different VC organizations operating inside its boundaries.

Three types of terrain are featured in Vietnam; mountains, plains and rice paddies. III Corps was a mix of all three. Yet IV Corp is dominated by heavily populated rice growing provinces throughout the Mekong Delta. Throughout I and II corps, the Annimite Mountains rises to the west from a relatively narrow and fertile coastal plain which houses the vast majority of the population. The significance of topography is that it generally determined the type war being fought in each location. Congested cities and heavily populated areas require investigative police work to find VC undercover agents, terrorists, and Communist sympathizers. On the other hand, conventional military forces were needed to root out North Vietnamese Army (NVA) divisions and other heavily armed VC main force units located in remote jungle and mountainous terrain. Security in rural areas, however, usually depended on the balance of power between the RF and PF and VC guerrillas, augmented occasionally by VC local force units. All of this could, of course, change quickly should a sizable NVA or VC main unit penetrate the outer perimeter and decide to fight amongst the population.

Most every American who served in Vietnam looked at the war through a distinct and narrow lens. A Marine in a Combined Action Team who lived and fought alongside the RF and PF in villages had a much different view than his fellow Marines trudging through the jungles or bunkered down at the Khe Son fire support base. Marine Force Reconnaissance teams lived in world of their own, scouting enemy infiltration routes and enemy base areas in dangerous terrain. Special Forces teams might only have worked with Montagnards in outposts surrounded by hostile enemy forces. On the flip side, a GI assigned to the Long Binh complex (a massive support base outside Saigon), could spend an entire tour in relative comfort without firing a shot. Yet, a soldier in the 25th Infantry Division or l73rd Airborne Brigade saw enough action in a week to last him a lifetime. I could go on and on. For this reason, I believe historians find it impossible to relate what was happening simultaneously throughout the country. And although my experiences are unique, keep in mind they reflect a snapshot when compared to the overall war effort.

BIEN HOA

January-October 1966

Logistics was good to me. As a relatively senior GS-13 officer, I was given a new jeep after indoctrination. I drove to Bien Hoa via the newly constructed Bien Hoa/Saigon highway. The road was built by Americans and looked like any asphalt four lane highway in the US. Traffic was moderate as I drove over the Gia Dinh Bridge, passed the Vietnamese equivalent of Arlington Cemetery to my left, and traveled many miles alongside the giant Long Binh complex. The whole trip took about 40 minutes when I arrived at the Province Chief's office where I met John Scott, the man I was to relieve, and his interpreter Tran Van Thanh. We had a scheduled appointment with Col Tran Van Hai, and he kept us waiting outside the office for thirty minutes. I used this time to become acquainted with Mr. Thanh, sizing him up to be very sincere, energetic and a capable asset, although his English was marginal. Scott mentioned the Colonel loved cognac and that he had given him a bottle every month as a means to stroke him. His normal working hours were 9-12 and 2-5. The mid-day two-hour recess, he added, was Vietnamese custom. I didn't say anything, but I was shocked, "Here we were in a war zone and these guys are taking a siesta every day?" Finally two doors swung outward and we entered. The office was about a thousand square feet with the Province Chief's desk facing the entry. Four wooden chairs pointed at the desk. A couch, two chairs and a circular coffee table stood off to the right. The office was orderly and I could see he was a busy man by the height of folders piled on his desk. After exchanging pleasantries, he provided a quick security assessment. He said, " Bien Hoa is under control. Only a few VC guerrillas remain and they are being pursued relentlessly by my RF battalion." As for RD, he was behind the program and happy they selected his province as a priority area. He didn't have much to say about the CG or CT programs, other than commenting he appreciated our support and would happily cooperative. Next he offered me a secure building within the compound with ample storage space for arms, supplies and equipment. He also said I was welcome to see him at any time, which was nice to hear. I left the meeting feeling positive. I heard some CIA officers had strained relationships with their counterparts, making it nearly impossible to get things done. In this brief meeting, Col. Hai had solved two of my previous concerns; genuine cooperation, and an office space to work. "Those bottles of cognac seem to be paying off," I thought.

NEW RDC/PRU OPERATIONS CENTER

I next met the CTs. There were only eleven and none spoke English. John explained these men were his first recruits, having returned from Vung Tau training the previous week. Except for a few others in training, this was it. "Not much." I thought, "But maybe a beginning?"

My predecessor then discussed the RDC teams. Six 59-man teams were in the field, two others in training. Teams would be moved to Long Thanh District shortly to pacify the villages along the Vung Tau road. Although the teams were attacked occasionally, the VC generally avoided contact. John had to leave for the States the following morning; thus, time did not allow any time together. Moreover, my visit to the province CG office was brief, as John advised against driving at night. I told my interpreter to meet me at CG office 0700 sharp the following morning and left for Saigon. I hit the fancy restaurant before going home and had another great meal.

Thanh was there before me at 0640. The RDC chief arrived shortly thereafter. I told him of my plans to visit the teams. "Beaucoup VC, too dangerous." he said in broken English. I answered, “If it's not too dangerous for the teams, it's not too dangerous for me. We go." I could see he didn't like the idea, but my interpreter seemed amused. I was carrying a Polaroid land camera, intending to take interesting countryside shots. However, I was forced to use the camera for another purpose. After winding down a dirt road for several miles, we reached a hamlet where RDC-4 was working. The team leader told me all cadres were hard at work, yet I could only spot about twenty dressed in black pajamas. I told him to muster his men so I could count heads. After an hour wait and listening to every excuse known to mankind, all he could find were thirty men. I photographed each one and told the leader that they were the only ones I would pay on payday. The others would have to come to my office and account for their absence. Before the day's end, I had the same experience with all the teams. After this shakedown, I realized true team strength was about 45 instead of 59. Some had deserted; others were ghosts to fatten the payroll. For a while I thought I was clever in bringing such corruption to an end until I discovered months later the rascals had an even more ingenious scheme. As each cadre member came to me with his ID card, which I checked against my Polaroid photo, he would then sign an original and four copies. However, the amount he signed for was not what he received. The amount of pay shown on duplicates was folded under the original, showing only the signature column. With five payroll copies pinned together, one would expect them to be the same. They were not. I discovered this accidentally. On one sheet, I couldn’t read the amount shown for an individual on the original because it was blurred. To get a better look, I unpinned the duplicates. I was shocked when I saw all the figures were different. I blew my stack and fired the guilty team leader. From then on, other than stealing a few blankets and other small items, the program was run honestly.

Once I had a handle on the RDC teams, I shifted my focus on the CTs, now called Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU.) I decided to test their performance on an upcoming operation involving the sector RF battalion. I asked the G-3 advisor to ask his counterpart if our PRU team could accompany the battalion. Major Mau proved more than happy to oblige. The advisor complained they were short of VHF radios and asked if I could help. The only radios in my inventory at the time were PRC-9s with limited range. On my next trip to Saigon, I contacted, Major Curt Terry at MAC/SOG, a classmate of mine in 1957 at the US Navy Underwater Swimmers School in Key West. When I asked for help, he magically produced six new PRC-25 radios with enough batteries to last a month. He also said his Special Forces men were available, if needed. I would later take him up on this offer.

I felt guilty hogging these precious radios for ourselves while the poor RF suffered Hence, I struck a deal with the Bien Hoa advisory staff where they would maintain the radios, provide batteries, and use them as needed with the understanding I had first priority to support my operations. It worked well for all of us.

PHUOC THO OPERATION

The RF battalion mustered at 0800 and numbered 134 men. A far cry from the 500 to 800 men I had expected. In reality, we had less than a company. No wonder the Vietnamese major was eager for our small force tag along. The plan was to move to Nhon Trach District Headquarter, stay there overnight, then proceed down a narrow road to the Vietnamese outpost at Phuoc Tho hamlet To cover the flanks, I volunteered to move my men at night and set up ambushes at trail junctions along the way. Both majors thought this was a great idea, but two of my PRU rebelled and wouldn't budge. I fired them immediately, and later asked the local district chief to keep them under wraps until we returned. We moved out at 10 pm cutting a compass course through the woods. I dropped off a five-man ambush team at the first junction, then proceeded to the next one a few miles ahead and waited. We saw nothing all night, or in the morning. The RF battalion had reached the road to our north by 10am, so we rejoined the column and continued east. At 2pm we ran into deep slit trenches cut across the dirt ROAD.

CUT ROAD

All the vehicles except a jeep had to be abandoned and we proceeded on foot, arriving at Phuoc Tho around 4pm. On the way we took a few rounds of harassing fire, but no one was hit.

PHUOC THO HAMLET-1966 S-3 ADVISOR AND ME

After spending the day patrolling the woods surrounding the village, around 5pm the G-3 advisor received an A-1 report from the Long Thanh S-2 advisor that the NVA D-800 battalion has just crossed the Phuoc Tuy road and was heading in our direction. I never heard of an A-1 report before. This designator equates to absolute certainty. Nothing is usually that sure. I asked how the Vietnamese Major planned to deploy his small company in the face of a real NVA battalion threat. The advisor replied, "He plans to move his troops into the Phuoc Tho outpost and defend from there." I paid a quick visit to the outpost and viewed it as nothing other than a death trap. Barb wire was strung on bamboo sticks. I could have knocked them over with my finger tips. Moreover, there was virtually no overhead cover against incoming mortar fire. No way was I going to stay in this potential slaughter house. Instead, I made a brief recon and located a line of newly dug graves in a cemetery. The holes made perfect trenches and the dirt piles alongside formed excellent parapets. The irregular shapes of tombstones and grave sites would mask our positions. I returned to the outpost and invited the S-3 advisor to join me rather than risk getting hammered by VC incoming mortars. He elected to stay with his counterpart, so I pointed to my map and showed him where we planned to stay. "Good luck." he said, so off we went.

My PRU's eyes widened as I told them my plan. They asked, "Why the cemetery?" I replied, "So we don't have to be moved if we get killed." They didn't appreciate my humor. We took position in a line between the trees and main road, a distance of approximately 40 yards. I placed myself within a square tomb in the middle and told my interpreter to have someone place a claymore mine string parallel to the jungle, twenty yards inside the cemetery. I felt the VC would move toward the outpost along the tree line rather than walking down the main road or crossing the rice paddies to our north.

Considering our numbers, nine PRUs plus me and Mr. Thanh, our position was quite formidable. Six of us carried Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs), we had two M-79 rifle grenade launchers, one AR-15 and two M-2 carbines fitted with rifle grenades. Each of us carried six hand grenades and I had stuffed six hand-held parachute flares in my shirt, given to me by the Major advisor before I left. I also carried a Browning 9mm pistol. My PRU PRC-25 radio operator carried the second M-79.

Like the previous night, all was quiet. I was half asleep listening to the VHF radio traffic when shots rang out to my left. This was followed by a barrage of explosions to our rear, followed by automatic firing coming from the far corner of the cemetery. My radio operator fired his M-79 and the grenade, silencing the enemy machine gun instantly. The shooting lasted for less than five minutes. I ordered Mr. Thanh to fire the claymores, but nothing happened. I then contacted Long Thanh sub sector and called for supporting 105 artillery fire, starting 500 meters to our left. The fifth round exploded at the edge of the cemetery, sending shrapnel all over the place including my position. I called for an immediate cease fire. When all was quiet, I asked Mr. Thanh for a casualty count. The answer, “All accounted for, no casualties." I couldn't believe my ears. With all that fire, I thought some of us would surely have been hit. I also asked, “Why weren't the claymores fired?" Thanh replied sheepishly, "They forgot to put them out." I felt this was my fault, because I should have checked. So I said nothing.

My men pleaded with me to pull back to the outpost. I thought this to be absurd. The outpost defenders would be edgy after hearing all the shooting and explosions. We would most likely be gunned down by friendly fire. Instead I agreed to pull back 50 yards to another line of newly dug graves. Muzzle flashes had given away our position, so it made sense to move back. I fully expected the enemy to launch a much stronger attack in the next few minutes. We retreated and I ended up in a shallow hole alongside my interpreter. By this time we were wide awake waiting for the next attack. No sooner had my heart returned to normal when Thanh poked me and said, "Mr. Rudy, they are coming." Without contacts, my night vision is horrible. I looked ahead and sure enough it looked like something ahead was moving. I pulled out a parachute flare, placed the cap on the rear, hit it, and up shot the flare exposing the whole cemetery. False alarm. Nothing was out there. Thirty minutes later Thanh said the same thing. I repeated the procedure, only this time the flare malfunctioned. It corkscrewed through the air, landing three feet from our position. My night sight was wiped out for a full thirty minutes. Before first light, however, I moved everyone across the road into a drainage ditch. It turned out to be a good decision

I believe we surprised a VC platoon moving to attack the outpost. The high number of machine guns we fired probably led the enemy to overestimate our strength. We probably inflicted enough casualties for them to scratch their planned attack. However, as the sun rose we weren't about to comb the area for a body count. Snipers were still in the tree line, shooting at anything that moved. Meanwhile, the Major Mau had enough although he wasn't really involved. He pulled his men out of the outpost and headed across the rice paddies where we linked up. We were greeted like heroes. The advisor realized the significance of our actions and thanked us. Amazingly, the VC continued to take pop shots at us most of the way home.

I learned a lot from this operation. Unlike the Province Chief's claims, Bien Hoa was, in fact, deceptively insecure. The PF battalion was greatly under strength and highly demoralized. I learned twelve RF soldiers were killed the previous week, and no replacements were expected. Major Mau, I believe, thought defensively. Initially he was against my decision to move our small PRU force into the cemetery, saying "You will all be killed." There wasn't much he could do about it. We were not under his command, so I went anyway. He changed his tune later, agreeing it

was good move. I came away with the impression, “good judgment and common sense can sometimes compensate for inexperience." My PRU performed reasonably well under fire and never complained about having practically nothing to eat. They also showed remarkable endurance when moving across rice paddies in the 110 degree sun. As for the enemy, I concluded they would prefer to fight another day rather than to deal with the unexpected. This might lead to an uncoordinated attack with unwarranted casualties which they would regret. I also felt VC actions were predictable. They functioned logically. They did exactly what we would have done if our positions were reversed. The animosity shown by The Phuoc Tho villagers was startling. In particular, they glared at me as though I was some alien monster, and that included babies as well! A big "ong my" ready to kill everyone. "We would have to go a long way to pacify this place," I thought. The overall experience led me to believe I could best contribute to the war effort in Bien Hoa by developing a PRU force strong enough to track down VC cadre and guerrillas anywhere in the province. By initiating preemptive attacks based on exploitable intelligence, it would be safer for RD teams working the contested hamlets.

CENSUS GRIEVANCE LOSS

While I was focusing on our PRU and RD programs, VC guerrillas entered a nearby hamlet at night and executed the CG officer along with his entire family. I drove to his home and blood was everywhere. It was a true massacre. Realistically, the hamlet had no security once the sun faded over the horizon. The police were behind barbed wire and the local PF were positioned in slit trenches near places they were to protect. There was nothing to stop any VC unit from entering the hamlet at will. When a poor villager was killed by the VC, all the locals could do was to mourn and burry the individual. This event served as a wake-up call to the realism of VC ruthlessness, their "ends justify the means" tactics, and why Americans like me were there to help. The whole affair only motivated me further.

RDC SECURITY

No sooner had moved the RDC teams moved into their new priority areas when Mr. Thanh came running into my office with bad news. The team in Binh Son had been overrun during the night and some team members were still fighting. I quickly gathered our small PRU force and sped to the Long Thanh sub-sector. Together with a RF detachment, we maneuvered through the Binh Son rubber plantation toward the hamlet. A lively exchange of gunfire could be heard in the distance as we ran into several RD cadres at a creek bed who joined up with us. As we reached the hamlet, the VC took us under VC fire. Unfortunately, a PRU was hit in the head and died minutes later. After thirty minutes, we were able to link up with those who stood and fought in the market place building. There were five of them, the team leader and four female nurses who sat around giggling as we approached. They were surrounded by piles of spent cartridges. The walls were pock-marked with bullet holes. Being a sort of macho-type myself and one who had been skeptical about women in combat, I realized I might have been mistaken. These girls were tough as nails, and willing to go down shooting. The least I could do was write them up for a citation and provide them a large cash bonus. .

Obviously, security had broken down. The team had simply become too complaisant, sleeping in the hamlet rather than in small ambush units as instructed. From that moment on, Mr. Phu Van Than, my English speaking RDC interpreter, would make sure each team leader was briefed daily on the exact coordinates where ambush positions were to be placed at night. I also set up an independent verification system. It worked, for none of teams were attacked again during my stay in Bien Hoa.

OTHER SMALL OPERATIONS

Census Grievance intelligence became overwhelming. A stack of reports stood on my desk every morning and I made sure to read every one of them. Most of the intelligence was perishable. Some could have been exploited had the report reach me in time. Every now and then, however, an exploitable report surfaced. Such was the case when I learned that a VC commo/liaison (communications currier) made his rounds on Tuesdays, stopping always at his girlfriend's home. A perfect capture operation, I thought. Sneak into the house at night and await his arrival. Once we had him, we could trace the mail route and arrest all those involved. The province chief signed a mission order, a requirement for all PRU operations. Three PRUs made their way into the hooch at night, undetected. Early next morning the target arrived armed with a Chicom 53, four grenades and a bag of coded messages. Instead of surrendering, he reached for a grenade. The PRUs shot and killed him instantly." A complete waste," I thought, "And nothing to show for it." However, I might have come to a different conclusion had he been able to pull the pin.

I decided to go on the next PRU operation in Di An District.

ROADSIDE PLANNING

CG intelligence pinpointed the location of a four-man agit/prop (agitation/propaganda) team which harassed the villagers nightly. Because they reportedly used only one entry and exit route, I felt we could capture them. We navigated through the jungle at night and approached the village cautiously and quietly. Nevertheless, it didn't take long for every dog in the neighborhood to start barking loudly. As I crossed a path, I heard a stampede of noises. The next thing I knew I was standing alone. Apparently a water buffalo charged the men behind me. I think I was the only one that didn't see the damn thing.

I went on another PRU operation in Thu Duc district, but this time we were dealing with a guerrilla squad. The CG report indicated the VC crossed a creek every night a small plank bridge leading to the village. An RF outpost was nearby atop a large hill overlooking the rice paddies and the distant creek. The province S-2 advisor and two non-commissioned officers from sector volunteered to go on this particular operation, so I took them along. Our plan was to move at night and set up an ambush on our side of the bridge. However, we would enter the outpost during daylight and scope out a route across the rice dikes to the ambush site. By using a series of dots and dashes representing movement forward and to the right (left wasn't necessary) I came up with a series of letters easily memorized as a guide. For example, ABC (._ _... _._.)would mean one dike forward one to the right then another to the right three forward followed by one right one forward one right and one forward. Of course, I said nothing of this to the S-2 advisor. It was pitch black when we departed. After about 25 course changes across the rice paddy, we came right out on target. They were amazed. We then set up two ambush positions and waited. I was concerned about whispering I heard from the other ambush site. My suspicions were confirmed when I heard footsteps sloshing below. I grabbed a hand grenade and motioned to the captain to do the same. We threw on the three count. Our two grenades exploded and we charged over the top and down the bank, firing our M-16s . Then all hell broke out. There were many more VC down there then we thought. We had to scramble back up the bank to take cover. Sporadic shooting lasted all night, but nobody was hit. After moving into a ravine early the next morning, we called in a spooky gunship (C-47 equipped with rapid-fire Gatling guns) which hosed the area thoroughly, thereby ending the fire fight. No one, including me, volunteered to search the area for VC bodies so we departed. Two weeks later, a CG source reported that VD losses on that day included 6 killed and 12 wounded. Apparently, we ran into a guerrilla squad reinforced by a local force platoon or roughly 50 insurgents.

One morning the province chief called me into his office and accused our PRU of killing three innocent civilians on a previous night operation. I drove to the site to take a look at the bodies. They were dressed in civilian clothing. However, something was strange. None of the clothing fit, and all were bare footed. On closer examination, I could find no bullet holes anywhere. The VC had cleverly dressed them for propaganda purposes. Col Hai later examined the bodies and shook his head, acknowledging he had been wrong.

THE CAMP

It was obvious I needed a larger PRU force. I went on a recruitment campaign, passing word at the Vung Tau training facility that our doors were wide open. Within a few weeks I signed up over fifty highly qualified CT instructors, and more were coming. There was no facility in Bien Hoa City to house these men, so I decided to build a camp. The best place to do this was on a river bank south of the Bien Hoa airbase. It was opposite a VC hotbed used as an attack staging area. Mr. Thanh and I approached the Vietnamese land owner who agreed to rent us twenty acres. The location was far removed from the city. We could build a firing range facing the river without fear of stray bullets. Moreover, it enabled me to employ new PRU recruits immediately in building the camp. My demands on the logistics officers in Saigon were staggering.

UPPER LEFT TO RIGHT – MYSELF, SINH, THE, DAI, LE DO.

LOWER LEFT- THO (ALL FORMER VUNG TAU CT INSTRUCTORS

Every submitted requisition was over ten pages long, yet every demand was met. No question about it, as CIA officers we were provided the best support in the world. I can't say enough about such capable officers, particularly Ed Mitchell and Glen Laney. They were marvelous.

I selected Le Do to head our PRU program. He was an experienced leader, well trusted and respected by the men. Furthermore, he got things done. Le Do had substantial combat experience while fighting alongside the French against the Viet Minh.. The many battle scars on his body proved the point. The camp began to take shape. Four main buildings were built in the form of a cross with zigzag trenches dug inside the barbed wire perimeter. Sleeping cots were positioned below ground near bunkers constructed to protect against enemy mortar fire. A sand-bag observation tower dominated each corner of the compound. It took less than two months to complete the project. By this time over 300 PRU was training inside the compound.

BIEN HOA PRU

We initially tested each new recruit for marksmanship. Results were horrible. We thus established proficiency standards that had to be met before leaving the range. The remainder of training covered every aspect of small unit operations including, land navigation, patrolling, tactics, night movement, ambushes, fire and maneuver, first aid, etc. We paid particular attention to detail, including where everything was to be carried, what should be taped to eliminate metallic noise, ammo loads, water purification, etc. Once past this elementary phase, I thought the PRU could best progress in the field against a real enemy. My plan was to start with the full force operating against a smaller sized enemy. In the military this is known as confidence building. As men gained experience, unit size would be reduced until they could function as independent six-man teams.

Me - 1966

The VC was not about to let us build the camp unchallenged. Accordingly, I ordered a platoon sized (36 men) security detail to remain outside the wire continuously. They took position in four-man ambush teams in a three-kilometer circle around the camp. Nevertheless, the camp came under fire one night from a banana grove parallel to the Dong Nai River. We deliberately kept our PRUs out of the area so as not to excite the land owner who owned the trees. The morning after the incident Mr. Thanh and I visited the landlord and told him to stay out of the area because it contained anti-personnel mines. He agreed. I expected the VC to follow up with a more serious attack, so we set up an explosive ambush. We tied twelve hand grenades to the trees and anchored them with wire. We then fastened a string of nine claymore mines ten meters behind on another set of trees. We tied them together with prima cord and ran the line 500 meters toward the camp. We then connected two electric blasting caps, ran a wire to camp's perimeter bunker, and attached the ends to the two poles protruding from the hand-crank blasting machine. My instructions were simple. "When you hear a grenade detonate, wait five minutes and fire."

Sure enough, two nights later there was a loud explosion, followed by another. Five minutes later the PRUs fired the claymores. I received this news early in the morning and drove to the camp immediately. When I arrived, everyone began talking at once. Apparently, one PRU tried to assess the damage. Unfortunately, he triggered one of the grenades and was killed. His body had already been recovered and laid under camouflage poncho. We could see some VC bodies at the ambush site. Some of the PRUs volunteered to check them out, but I told them to hold fast until we could render the place safe. Easier said than done. Nine grenades with wires attached were still out there. As a former Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal officer, I felt obligated to clear the area myself. It was dangerous job because the trip wires were buried under the debris field. Some grenades had their pins sheered off. Those I later blew them in place. After a few tense hours, I cut the wires from the grenades, spread the pins, and tossed them into the river. We then made it to the VC bodies. There were seven, all dressed in black pajamas with rubber sandals. We could find only one weapon, a German Mauser and there were no meaningful documents. However, many blood trails led to the river which indicated additional casualties and that the VC had time enough to police the area. We buried the dead on the river bank and placed their sandals on the grave sites. The following day we held a funeral ceremony for our fallen comrade.

PHUOC THO REVISITED

The VC had their own plan for Nhon Trach District. All source intelligence indicated the enemy was about to move a company from Ton Dinh Island to the outskirts of Phuoc Tho hamlet. Their objective was to overrun the outpost, attack the District Headquarters, blow the lone bridge, and isolate the entire district. To reach their objective, the VC had to pass through a forest at the edge of a designated area known as the Rung Sat Special Zone, adjacent the Saigon River. It appeared the best way to disrupt their plans would be to hit their staging area outside Phuoc Tho hamlet. I felt we could move our PRU by truck on a perimeter road to the south. We would be moving though hamlets dominated by Catholics who fled North Vietnam in 1954, thus the fear of ambush was minimal. We would then stage at night from the closest hamlet, roughly eight kilometers from the target.

Our six duce-and-a-half trucks came to a halt shortly after sunset. All 300 PRUs mustered at the edge of a dirt road and we set out in single column. The most experienced men were up front along with a few at the end. Night passage through the forest at night proved surprisingly easy, everyone stayed together and kept quiet. After marching about five klicks, I saw something that looked like fire flies bobbing up and down in the distance. Sure enough, a VC unit was about to cross our front. We quickly moved one company to the right and one to the left, and word was to hold fire until Le Do fired his 9mm Swedish K. The ambush was text book. The experienced PRUs raked the VC with heavy fire until the little lights no longer moved. Amazingly, within minutes, we could hear the pop of mortar fire with rounds landing behind us. I couldn't believe it. Nor could I believe half the PRUs to our left hauled ass when the mortars began exploding. It turned out these men ran in a tight semi-circle, ending up right behind our position. Fortunately, the experienced guys kept their cool and didn't shoot.

Our ambush resulted in 42 VC killed, 12 wounded, and enough captured weapons and supplies to fill an entire room. It turned out the little lights we had seen were small lanterns made out of perfume bottles. Inside, a burning wick floated on fuel giving off a small flashlight like glow. We took no casualties except one PRU suffered a slight cut from shrapnel. The captives told us they were told to establish a base area in the woods and to cache the food and ammunition for future use. We split up the load and left with everything except the bodies, including the VC wounded and all documents. It might have been possible to continue the operation, but I was deeply disappointed by the cowardly performance of those who broke and ran. Besides, had we stayed longer some of the wounded VC would have definitely died. Subsequently, they all made it to the Province hospital and survived.

I thought the operation was reasonably successful. I expected the Province Chief to be a little more enthusiastic about the results; instead his reaction was constrained, even guarded. Later photographs failed to excite him also. "Maybe he felt we were stirring up a hornet’s nest, who knows?"

DUC TU CORDON

Several intelligence reports supported the existence of a VC unit based in a narrow wooded area in Duc Tu District. An Air-American Porter flew me over the area and I took several air photos. The place seemed easy to cordon since three dirt roads surrounded the two by six kilometer rectangle with open rice field covering the open side.

We could drop small fire teams around this perimeter and have a sizable PRU unit comb for VC inside. Since we were bound to make enemy contact, I passed the word to Major Terry at MAC/SOG that his men were invited. Four volunteered. I also touched base with the Sub-Sector Advisor, an Army Captain with a strong German accent, and he was eager to go. The cordon went off beautifully. We had them trapped. All we had to do now was spread out across the

narrow top and sweep parallel to the side road. It all looked great for about 200 meters, then our comb began to separate. Instead of an echelon formation, we suddenly became a column. There was only one trail through the area and we were on it. The path led to a ravine and then to a clearing. Two highly experienced PRU acted as scouts thirty meters in front led the way. Next in line was Le Do, myself, Mr. Thanh and the lead platoon commander. As the lead men continued forward, I entered the clearing and noticed movement off my right rear quarter. There were five VC in the open and one was diving for a weapon. I spun around and opened fire. The scouts did the same. Meanwhile, the PRUs set up a Browning 1919 A1 30 cal. machine gun and began raking the woods. Mr. Thanh and I charged forward, however, I fell into a camouflaged punji pit rigged with a single stick. It hit my web belt and broke. I was lucky; the stick was dried and rotten. Meanwhile, the Sub-Sector Advisor sprinted around the right flank, followed by the second platoon. He laid down a strong cross fire and soon the return fire ceased. It's a good thing we stopped, for trip wires were everywhere. The clearing was ringed with booby traps. The only known VC dead were three of the five we shot at. Two others had managed to escape. The trail leading away from the clearing was obstructed by a fallen tree. We tied on a long line and pulled. A huge mine exploded, but everyone was safe. We finally exited the woods and had to walk through the rice paddies to the trucks. A week later, I learned the guerrilla unit attacked sustained nine killed and four wounded. Both VC at the clearing were hit, one died later from wounds.

I didn't know how to assess this operation. The SF guys were a big help and I thought the PRUs performed well. They didn't seem afraid either. Although we had no casualties, It was more a matter of luck. The only reason we never entered the mind field was because of flank support fire laid down by our German friend. Nevertheless, our men were getting experience under fire and were looking better.

If the previous operation in Nhon Trach didn't impress Col. Hai, this one certainly wouldn't either. So I never told him.

TRUCKS

Operationally, my biggest problem was troop transportation. Agency trucks had to come from the U.S. by ship. They were parceled out equally to all field officers like me. Since I already exceeded my quota, months would pass before I could expect others. The Province Chief had one single truck for all AID supported programs. Sector had a few trucks but those were in high demand, supporting RF and PF units when they weren't in for maintenance. As intelligence increased, so did the operational tempo. The only trucks I could rely on were my own. That limited me a single company size deployment, assuming the men were crammed in like sardines. One day I asked Le Do to see if he had any solution. His reply was, "I'll see what I can do." The following morning I drove into the camp and two bran new U.S. Army duce-and-a-half were parked inside. I looked for markings and there were none other than a newly painted number on the bumper. Inside, the ignition switch was hot wired. I then found Le Do and asked, "Where did these trucks come from?" "Don't ask," he replied. I never did.