INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JEAN ANDRE SAUVAGEOT

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Colonel Sauvageot's office, Arlington, Virginia

Tape 1 of 1

G: Colonel Sauvageot, when did you first become involved in Southeast Asia?

S: Right out of the career course at Fort Benning, Georgia, in August 1964. I was assigned to Vietnam because I had volunteered to go there from the career course at Fort Benning, Georgia, the infantry career course. So it started in Vietnam, I was assigned as a district adviser in Ben Tranh [?] District in Dinh Tuong Province.

G: What part of Vietnam is that, for those who are not familiar with the geography?

S: That is in the Upper Delta, south of Saigon, on National Route 4, about sixty kilometers from Saigon.

G: Below Long An Province?

S: Yes, you have to go through Long An before you get to Tunh Hit [?] village, which is the district capital of Ben Tranh.

G: Did you have any special qualifications for this mission? Did you just consider yourself another infantry officer?

S: Just another infantry officer. My army career up to that time, both enlisted and commissioned, had been strictly TO & E [Table of Organization and Equipment] type jobs. That is, as an enlisted soldier in the 82nd Airborne Division performing regular peacetime tactical training-type field exercises and later as an officer either training trainees or serving in an infantry rifle company, either as one of the company officers or as a company commander. So, yes, I was very much strictly an infantry officer, as a captain at that time.

G: Your name suggests you might be fluent in French. Is that correct?

S: It is not. All I did is take a couple of years of French in high school and college and then let it atrophy. After being assigned to Vietnam, I made a very basic decision to let the French go and start Vietnamese from scratch. I had not had any Vietnamese language training before going. I had wanted to, had asked the army for it, and they wouldn't send me. At the same time they made some other officers go to Monterey [Institute of International Studies] for language training who didn't want to go.

But in either event when I got there, there were no American tactical units in Vietnam yet. That predated the assignment of American tactical units. So the only thing that was open were advisory jobs. I had recently completed Ranger school before going over there after the career course, and my desire was to advise a Vietnamese ranger battalion. But that didn't happen, because when I got down to the province capital, My Tho, they said they already had advisers with--I think it was the 44th Ranger Battalion, Vietnamese Ranger Battalion. So the senior adviser, a full colonel, army colonel, gave me a choice between advising a regular Vietnamese infantry battalion or a district or sub-

sector, as they called them. I elected to advise the district, because he explained I would be the first adviser being assigned to that district. This was shortly after the decision had been made to assign Americans down to the district level. Before that, they had only been assigned down to the province level.

So I thought it would be maybe more exciting and more interesting to go down to a small, sort of county-sized administrative unit, headed by a Vietnamese army captain, and be involved in the whole range of military operations, especially the regional force and popular force operations. That's at the company-sized units and platoon-sized units. And all the civic action aspects. In other words, a whole range of both military and civil operations in Vietnam. So I elected that, and sort of ironically a couple of weeks after that, after I was assigned down to the district, the 44th Ranger Battalion that I wanted to advise got ambushed and every adviser was killed and half the battalion was decimated. So sometimes we're protected from getting what we want.

G: I remember that fight. How do you go about learning Vietnamese? It seems to me that you were really starting from scratch, in a totally alien sort of language, a tonal language. Do you have any background for that?

S: No, I didn't have any background at all. I got over there, I didn't know any Vietnamese at all, but I had a very strong desire to learn it. And the way I started--well, first of all, when I got down to the district at first I didn't at that time have a district house set up or anything. Later on the district chief did give us some quarters, but I started out without a full district team, just initially by myself, although soon after that I got a senior NCO [non-commissioned officer]. But I didn't have an interpreter at first and didn't have a

driver at first, because it was just the beginning of assigning people and they didn't have all the sub-sector kits, both from personnel standpoint and equipment standpoint, the stoves and things that Americans later on got. So we were starting out sort of on a shoestring. The district chief spoke French and hardly any English at all, but just really French and Vietnamese, and I did communicate with him some in my nearly lost French, but it was useful for some very basic things.

But basically I made a very strong case with the province senior adviser--a major at that time, come to think of it--that I really needed to have an interpreter, a Vietnamese interpreter, and a driver to maintain the Jeep, the vehicle. I mean, I could drive my own Jeep, but I could hardly maintain it. And I needed particularly an interpreter to do business well. And they agreed and did assign a Vietnamese army sergeant, one of the so-called assimilated sergeants that did interpreter duty. They assigned a sergeant to me and a driver. And I liked both of the men. The driver was a regional force soldier whose family was very nice to me, and we got to be very close. I even took him to the United States one summer just for fun for a vacation. And the interpreter also was very helpful to me, a very smart man.

Well, the way I started to learn Vietnamese was, first of all, by just learning words from my driver and my interpreter. But of course the interpreter speaking English was in a better position to really get me started. And the way we started, I asked the interpreter to give me lessons. I told him I want to learn this language and I want to have a basis to start. So he began by teaching me the Vietnamese alphabet, which is romanized. So he taught me the ABCs in Vietnamese and the diacritical marks that

indicate the tones and how to put these together. That gave me the building blocks to purchase Vietnamese newspapers and develop vocabulary, both by reading and by using the language orally as much as possible. And that's the way I started. And just through the eight years I was there, kept building on it by putting as many demands on the language, my language capability, and of course the more capability I got, the more jobs I tended to get that were based at least in part on language capability. That led to some very interesting assignments and led to a better Vietnamese language capability, which I have maintained so far throughout my life.

G: How long did you stay in that position as a sub-sector adviser?

S: I stayed in the position of sub-sector adviser actually not too long, come to think of it, because--remember, I was just a junior captain when they put me in as the adviser, and they really wanted majors in those jobs. So it wasn't long after that that they moved a major into my district, so he became the adviser and I then became his second-in-command, whatever they were called and I think it was deputy, but whatever it was anyway I was his second-in-command. The major they assigned there didn't last too long; he was reassigned some place else, and another major came in. But in any event I was a district adviser for probably just about a month before they moved a major in and the rest of my time in Ben Tranh District was as a second-in-command. Actually that suited me fine in a lot of ways, because I got to continue to work on all the things I was interested in. I had a major to run interference between me and the province senior adviser, which--I sometimes needed that; it was helpful. And I was in the district for nine months. I think until, well, from August 1964 until about May 1965.

G: Would you spell the name of the district for the transcriber, who may have a little difficulty with it?

S: Ben Tranh, yes. That is a compound word. The first is capital B as in bravo, E-N as in November, then the second word starts with a capital T and then it's R-A-N-H. Ben Tranh.

G: Good. So you were in the district for nine months. How would you describe conditions in the district at the end of that period? Better or worse than when you arrived?

S: I think very much the same, not much different. In fact, when I think back on the situation in that district and the situation in some of the surrounding districts--but let's talk about just that district, or at least the districts in that province, in Dinh Tuong. By virtue of having been in that district nine months, and because I stayed constantly in country for seven years before coming back to the United States, and then going back to Vietnam after another nine months--but because I stayed there so long, I had opportunities to go in and out of the district from time to time and observe it from kind of the perspective of somebody who had been there, goes away, comes back, goes away, comes back over a long period of time.

One of the things that I recall thinking about is that the situation on the ground really didn't change as quickly in either direction, for good or for bad, as reports made by people like myself would tend to indicate. And I think that's a very natural phenomenon, and it's a natural result of having people--that is, district advisers--assigned there in the district for relatively short periods of time and under pressure to show progress. Therefore, there's a very natural tendency for somebody coming in fresh to see what in

their opinion is not as good as it could be; secondly, to go to work on making it better; third, to report the progress. I should put progress in quotes, maybe. Or it might really be progress in the things they're reporting about. But the problem is, is the progress that we're reporting, that we district advisers were reporting, really relevant to the basic balance of power on the ground between the Communists and the Republic of Vietnam forces?

I remember one time when I was back visiting the province capital, that is, in My Tho, just for fun I pulled out some of my old reports, some of the reports from the majors who were over me before, and then a number of their successors. That is, these are the weekly reports on activities, what was being accomplished and all of this. And I scanned through the reports over a number of years, not only in my district, the district I've been in, but some of the others. And it seemed that there was really a pattern of peaks and valleys, of people coming in and finding things not so great, making steady progress throughout their tour, only to be reassigned, having somebody else come in and find things awry, and--the same thing over and over. Where in fact from the perspective of somebody who was kind of geographically removed and looking at it over time, the situation really wasn't changing that much. Or if it was changing, it was changing less dramatically over time.

G: That's interesting. How did you come to get involved--I hate to use the word pacification, but it seems to be the standard, the one that everybody eventually comes back to--in what became known as the pacification movement, program, or whatever?

S: Well, I think that the assignment to the district was the beginning of involvement with pacification. Had I chosen, when given a choice, to advise a Vietnamese infantry battalion, I probably would have been somewhat less likely to have gotten a long-term involvement in pacification, although I guess it could have worked out that way anyway. But, in any event, in my case the assignment to the district is in fact an assignment whether it was called that then or not. It was in fact an assignment in the range of activities that later became known as pacification and development, because you're doing civic action, you're trying to build--I say advise directly, but you're trying to support the Vietnamese district chief in his activities aimed at building village and hamlet political structures and institutions which would result in keeping the communist influence at bay and developing a prosperous society from the grass-roots up, so to speak.

That was the beginning of my assignment to pacification and development. And, remember, the tour in Vietnam was only one year, so when I first started out there, I thought that I would just be there one year, and that was what I was counting on. One year out and get back like everybody else. I didn't originally intend to stay. What led to me staying so long was the number of interesting assignments that I wanted to stay on to complete or to get further involved in. So I just kept extending. And of course extensions in Vietnam were voluntary. You were not forced to stay if you didn't want to. Now, there were cases of people wanting to extend who were not permitted to extend. Usually, they would permit one extension, but often they turned down people on multiple extensions. So to be fortunate enough to have a lot of extensions like I did, you had to be filling some requirement that, in my case, the Military Assistance Command Vietnam,

MACV, felt was sufficiently in their interest that they would keep you on as kind of an exception to the rule. So I was fortunate in that respect.

Even though I had elected to be assigned to a district instead of a battalion, I still had the desire to advise a Vietnamese infantry battalion or a Vietnamese ranger battalion, either one, before leaving Vietnam. So when I was coming up close to about nine months in Vietnam as a district adviser or a second-in-command of a district, I submitted an extension--I think only for six months, which would take me up to a year and a half--with the stated purpose of the extension to be assigned as an adviser to a Vietnamese infantry battalion. Having submitted the extension and waiting for the assignment to the battalion, I was given another assignment that I didn't want, but later ended up extending again to complete because I liked it so much. That assignment was as an adviser to a small group, I think a five- or six-Vietnamese rural political cadre who were trained by USIA [United States Information Agency] and MACV to conduct political, attitudinal surveys. That is--well, actually they were trained to train other Vietnamese cadre to conduct these surveys in their own districts.

By that time, by the nine months that I was in country then I had already acquired an appreciable language capability, and one of the requirements for the officer to be assigned there was the language capability. And that's why I was assigned there. As I say, I was given no choice. I was taken out of the district very quickly, assigned on this project very fast. They knew I had the language capability; they had an urgent requirement because the position had been filled by another army captain but he was taken out of that job and, as a matter of fact, put in my job in the district. And I was

moved to this project very summarily against my wishes. And also they knew I had more than another six months to go in country, because I'd just extended. Well, once I got up there and started working with this team, it was fascinating, so I extended again, for this time a whole other year, so that I could hopefully complete that project. But the project was disestablished before I could complete the project, although we did train people in quite a few districts.

G: Why was it done away with?

S: It was done away with to make way for a larger, more comprehensive cadre training program. That is, the establishment of the so-called revolutionary development cadre, to be trained up in Vung Tau. And I was assigned to that project. I say so-called revolutionary [development cadre], because that was not what they were called in Vietnamese; that was strictly an English-language term. In Vietnamese, a translation from the Vietnamese would have been "rural political cadre," not "revolutionary development cadre." So there were simply two different terms.

G: What was the philosophy behind this effort, this project? What were they going to accomplish and how?

S: Well, this was building blocks of pacification and development. The idea was to have these cadre--they were originally, I think, teams of fifty-nine men--go into a village and live with the people there twenty-four hours a day, night and day, and undertake the whole range of so-called nation-building tasks at that level, and organize; if they needed to have elections, to implement that process; to help them with advice on development, agriculture, security, organizing self-defense forces and not to have to depend so much

on the external assistance, but to be able to help themselves, to give the people a high stake in their own community and then give them the means with which to defend that stake.

By "the means," I'm not talking about putting guns and ammunition in their hands so much as I am talking about the kind of teamwork that would be necessary to secure the hamlet and village against communist infiltration. It's kind of two things. First, they have to have a desire to prevent communist infiltration and see the Communists as a threat to a way of life which in fact is valuable to them, no small trick in some areas. And, once those basic desires are there, then to give them the institutional, and organizational, and, to some extent, the physical means to resist encroachment by a group, that is, the Communists, who, if things are done properly, are in fact regarded as a threat and in which the people have a stake in preventing the infiltration and the influence by those people.

G: What were your duties when you first went to Vung Tau?

S: Well, at first of course I was called a political officer. When I first went up there, the senior adviser was a CIA person and in fact actually had more authority than the Vietnamese commandant initially.

G: Do you remember who that was?

S: Let's see. I guess--I`m just trying to think if there's any--I guess there wouldn't be any harm if they--you know how those people were assigned. Some--obviously this was an overt assignment, it wasn't a covert assignment, and I guess they wouldn't put a person in

an overt assignment if they were later going to use him in covert missions. In other words, I do remember who it is, but I'm just trying to think if it's all right to say.

G: I understand.

S: Obviously it would be available from when the first adviser, when the mission started up.

G: Well, we can come back to that.

S: Well, let's come back to that. Let me think about that. I'm not used to giving the names of people that I know are in the agency and yet I have a feeling that when they assign people overtly like that it really doesn't matter anymore.

G: You replaced this CIA--?

S: No, no, I just went to work for him.

G: I see.

S: He brought me up there at the recommendation of John Vann and Ev [Everet] Bumgardner. They recommended that they bring me up to the training center, so I went up there from the old job. And when I got up there, I asked the senior adviser, the CIA man, if I could put on their payroll the trainer cadre, that is, the rural political cadre that I had been working with in the hamlet political attitudinal surveys. And they agreed. So I brought them up, put them on the agency's payroll, and they helped me write lesson plans for the instruction of the new RD cadre.

Of course, we weren't the only ones doing lesson plans. There were other people doing lesson plans. In fact, the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, as it was known in English, sent an army lieutenant colonel named Tran Ngoc Chau up to the training center with a team of his from the Ministry of Revolutionary Development to write

lesson plans. And it made a rather difficult situation for me, because my senior adviser who in fact had more authority than the Vietnamese commandant--the Vietnamese commandant was Le Xuyen [Xuan?] Mai, major at that time, Major Le Xuyen Mai, nominally the commandant but in fact under the CIA. But he was very popular in his own right, very popular and [a] very able commandant, very good person that they selected.

But, anyway, I was in a rather ticklish situation because my boss--although the CIA never paid me, I was on loan from the army; the army kept paying me--but nevertheless he had told me to write up some lesson plans on some of the subjects, write them up in Vietnamese for Vietnamese instructors to use, which led to my request to bring my cadre team, my old cadre team that I had down in My Tho, or some might have come back up to Saigon. I had to go and round them up, get them on the payroll, brought them up, got them quarters and everything right there on the camp, and had them start to work on writing up these lesson plans. They were very helpful.

But then into this situation came Lieutenant Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau with his team with a charter from the Minister of Revolutionary Development to write lesson plans. So I established a good relationship with Colonel Chau and offered the services of myself and my team, short of placing them at his disposal, in order to be of assistance. In some ways initially the senior advisers, the CIA senior adviser, thought that maybe that, you know, that that was unnecessary, that we could just work independently and have a tug of war about whose were the best. But I persuaded him that that wasn't the best way to do business in this situation, so to his credit he let me go ahead and work between

Colonel Chau's people and my own people, and in the end we came up with lesson plans that were mutually agreeable to all parties.

I might add, too, just for your information that later the Ministry of Revolutionary Development decided that they wanted to assume real command at the training center, not just nominal command of it. So they decided to assign this same lieutenant colonel, Tran Ngoc Chau, as the commandant of the National Training Center, instead of Major Le Xuyen Mai who was the agency's man in the National Training Center. So many of the cadre who worked for Major Le Xuyen Mai opposed this decision very strongly, because, as I told you, Le Xuyen Mai was in fact very popular and very competent. So they formed a struggle committee to oppose this, and it led to a very complicated situation but in the end was resolved to the satisfaction of the Vietnamese government. That is, the U.S. Government yielded and let them assign Colonel Chau, Tran Ngoc Chau, but at the same time we had a real problem in getting the struggle committee that was formed in its own right--certainly not at the behest of the U.S. Government, but simply in support of Le Xuyen Mai on their own.

So there was a problem in defusing that. I played a role in that. It was again a rather ticklish role, but it was useful being up there and I had an advantage because I was living right in one of the camps. I didn't go into Vung Tau at night. I stayed out with the cadre all the time, slept with them, ate with them, everything, stayed with them all the time. I much preferred operating that way; it's a more effective way to operate, in my view, or at least it is if you know the language and you're used to the conditions there and

that sort of thing. But, anyway, that's a story in itself in how we got that movement defused.

G: I was going to say that struggle committee has a little ominous sound to it, if you--

S: Well, what happened was--do you want to know what happened?

G: I mean, is this the struggle at Dau Tranh?

S: Dau Tranh. You're thinking of the Vietnamese word. "Dau Tranh" is "struggle committee."

G: But the implication of "struggle" in Vietnamese is a much more strenuous sort of concept than it is in English, isn't it?

S: Well, let me tell you. After the Vietnamese government announced it was going to assign--or I should say, well, it was the Vietnamese government, but specifically the Minister of Revolutionary Development announced that he was going to assign Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau as the commandant of the National Training Center, the National Cadre Training Center for Revolutionary Development Cadre. He was supposed to be out there, as I recall it was a Thursday morning, he was supposed to come out to make his opening remarks to some of the faculty, some of the cadre trainers. And I was--well, let me back up by saying, you know there were three separate camps to this training center. There was Che [Tre?] Ling Camp, was the main one with the commandant's headquarters--that was really later that they had the commandant's headquarters out there. That was under Nguyen Be, who put his quarters out there. In fact, when I first got out there, it wasn't called Che Ling, it was called Ridge Camp; it had an American name. That was another

one of those things that Be changed later on, I think for the better. But, anyway, it was called Ridge.

Then they had another camp, but the camp that I stayed in was called Lam Son, L-A-M S-O-N, Lam Son Camp. I stayed there. Well, anyway, Colonel Chau was supposed to make his opening remarks at nine o'clock in the morning, and I took my seat in the auditorium waiting for him with all the other Vietnamese. There were no Americans except for myself there. And of course the senior adviser, that is, the CIA man--in fact this was the second senior adviser by this time. The first one had gone on reassignment. There was another CIA man in for this, a very good, capable officer, and he knew that I would report back to him on how the meeting with Colonel Chau went.

So nine o'clock came and Colonel Chau didn't show up. Nine-fifteen, still didn't show up. People--a little bit of restlessness, so I was surprised that some people got up, some of the Vietnamese started getting up on the stage and making speeches about how unfair it was for the Ministry of Rural Development to arbitrarily assign one of its own officers to the National Training Center when Le Xuyen Mai was doing such a wonderful job, and this was not an appropriate reward for him and it wasn't good for the training center. So they proceeded to form on the stage a struggle committee to oppose the decision.

And they established three phases of the struggle. The first was to petition the American Embassy to not permit this to happen, [and] weigh in with the Vietnamese government and dissuade them from this capricious and unwise action. The second phase, if the first phase didn't succeed, was to go to the foreign press and complain

through the media and make their case in the newspapers, foreign newspapers particularly. The third phase was armed struggle to oppose the takeover by the Ministry of Revolutionary Development. I keep wanting to say Rural Development because that's what it was in Vietnamese, but I remember in English it was not. And of course they had ammunition and weapons, small arms, which they had to have for security, and these they decided would be turned against the Ministry of Rural Development if they tried to take over.

And it turned out, too, later on that the reason that Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau didn't show up is because he had received a threat telling him that he would be in danger if he--they would kill him or something if he showed up. So he didn't show up.

So in the next part of their program they said that nobody would be permitted to leave Lam Son Camp because they were going to keep it bottled up from the outside world until this thing was resolved. And during these speeches and everything Le Xuyen Mai, the commandant, came in and sat down and watched this struggle committee being formed to keep him in place. Then one of the speakers on the stage noticed that I was sitting there and everything and asked me to come up and lend support to this struggle.

G: This put you in a rather delicate political situation.

S: It put me in a terrible position. So I got up on the--but with the mood in the auditorium and all, I couldn't just refuse to get up. I mean, they were very tense and uptight and everything. So I got up on the stage and took the microphone and told them that this matter that they were involved in was strictly an internal affair inside the Republic of Vietnam, and that, as an American army officer or American official of any kind, I could

not get involved on one side or the other, that the only role that I had in Vietnam was the generalized role of assisting the Vietnamese government, that is, the Republic of Vietnam, in the common struggle against the common enemy, the Communists. That was the U.S. national interest and that was the common interest of those Vietnamese who were anti-communist. And that to get involved in an internal struggle on one side or the other would get me a ride home to the United States on the next airplane and would therefore take me out of the involvement against the Communists, which I would not want. Therefore, I would appreciate it if they would just let me sit down and stay out of it, which they did. They were not pleased, but they were not hostile. They just figured that was that. So I made no comment about the struggle at all. After the committee had been formed and everything, they did make an exception to the general rule of not letting people out of Lam Son Camp and let me out with my Jeep, so that I could go back and report to the senior adviser, which I'm sure they knew I would do, but probably that fit their interest anyway. And I did.

Later they flew me up to Saigon to consult with the mission in Saigon about the situation there, and I was able to tell them within another twenty-four hours or something that the situation was defused enough that Colonel Chau could come into Lam Son, talk to the cadre, make a speech--that he should go in personally with me and that with my relationship with the Vietnamese there and everything, with some of the talking I had been doing with the people in Lam Son, different small groups or individuals, telling them that this course of action had no chance of success, that the Vietnamese government was a sovereign government, it wasn't a colonial situation, and if they [the Government

of Vietnam] were resolved to take over the training center, that's the way it would have to be, and they should facilitate this process, not obstruct it, for all the reasons that I could think of to give them.

And in fact over time, not too much time, that emotions cooled, and it was my assessment that Colonel Chau could take over if he came in right about the time that I recommended, not waiting too long for things to get started again. And he did, and things went well and he did become the commandant. But he did not last a long time. For some reason the ministry reassigned him back to Saigon and later he ran for the National Assembly and was a well-known national assemblyman, who President [Nguyen Van] Thieu arrested, but that's another story. But he was imprisoned by both the Thieu regime and by the Communists later and he got out long after the war was over. He's in California now.

But, anyway, for some reason the Ministry of Revolutionary Development took Tran Ngoc Chau out of the training center and assigned a Vietnamese army major from Binh Dinh Province named Nguyen Be, and that was the beginning of my very long professional and personal association with Nguyen Be, right up to September 1982 in the United States when he died of cancer. Of course, later he was promoted to lieutenant colonel and then to full colonel as the commandant of the National Training Center, and he made tremendous changes for the better in the training center. In fact, we looked at him after a while as a genuine training genius, and the way he motivated those cadre and trained them was as different from what had gone on before as day is from night.

G: Let me ask you a couple of questions about the training of these fifty-nine-man teams. Forgive me if they're very basic and simplistic, because I don't know very much about them, but I can see the problems that might--for example, how do you pick your people? Upon what basis do you select the fifty-nine men?

S: Well, the training center, as I recall, could not do the choosing. The choosing had to be done down there in the provinces and districts that were sending them for training, because they were only going to be trained up there to be returned to the province from which they were sent, in order that the province chief could employ them to work inside of whatever districts and villages and hamlets that he felt they were most needed.

G: So the province chief would pick the people?

S: That's right.

G: You would train them and send them back to him, so they would be working at least in their native province, and not as strangers?

S: That's correct.

G: What about--?

S: But let me tell you something about Be's takeover, because it's so important to understand the difference. It's not enough for me just to assert it was different. I have to tell you how it was different. Before Nguyen Be took over the National Training Center, the training cadre slept in barracks, concrete or stone structures that were clean and neat, airy, nice enough structures, with beds, double-tiered bunks. And I think it cost about two hundred and seventy thousand dollars just to build those up in Che Ling Camp, as I recall that figure anyway. But, anyway, it was up.

The point is that these Vietnamese cadre coming in from all over South Vietnam were being put into a very westernized milieu in which to train to go back to rural hamlets and villages and operate effectively there against the Communists, who, you know, were not being trained for their jobs in a similarly westernized milieu. Another part of this same picture is that the security at night against communist attack was provided by Nung guards, N-U-N-G, Nung guards that the CIA had hired to provide security. In other words, the Vietnamese did not provide their own security, but the Vietnamese faculty members, that is, the trainer cadre, and their students slept in western-type barracks, trained on fields or ranges that are also reminiscent of western military training and then went back after training to sleep in these barracks with the security provided by a different ethnic group. Nguyen Be changed that very quickly. He fired all the Nung guards.

Oh, and I might tell you a little story before Nguyen Be got there. I was just driving my Jeep one night very slowly, lights blacked out down the main road, one of the main roads there in Che Ling Camp towards the barracks. And suddenly shots were fired and you'd hear the crack of bullets going over near the Jeep. I stopped the Jeep, got out, got behind a bulldozer that was there, handily. And there were a number of cadre students who were just milling around without weapons; they hadn't been issued weapons yet. And what had happened is a VC [Viet Cong] squad had come in, thrown a couple of homemade hand grenades into the barracks and put some small arms fire on them, and then withdrew. But they were able to get in through the Nung guards.

Now, when Nguyen Be took over, Major Nguyen Be took over the command, he saw this situation I just described and was extremely dissatisfied with it, thought it was most inappropriate. And he'd come in from Binh Dinh Province where he had been very innovative in establishing some of the security procedures in Binh Dinh. But, anyway, Nguyen Be kicked the Vietnamese faculty and students out of the barracks and sent them out into the woods, and he got rid of all the Nung guards and said, "The Vietnamese will provide their security for themselves, and they will go forth into the woods and, using the materials that are available naturally"--that is, the wood from the cut trees or whatever and the material for the thatch--they would build their own houses, but they would build them not like westerners' barracks or something, but they would build them configured as hamlets and villages, but particularly hamlets.

The basic unit then became not a barracks unit or something, it became a hamlet with a name, and the hamlets looked like just any other hamlet in rural Vietnam. Thatched houses, a village headquarters, a place for the hamlet chief, and--it was just organized that way. And of course they had to provide their own security.

Nguyen Be decided that he would build the commandant's house at a point in Che Ling fairly close to the ocean, to the South China Sea, that was in fact much further out, that is, out away from what had formerly been the security perimeter at night. He built it out further than the security perimeter, that is, way further out than the point to which this VC squad had come up to on--I think it was 12 March 1967, I believe. Or maybe it was 1966. But, anyway, people thought when he said he was going to build his house out there--some of the Vietnamese that were still thinking back in the old days, they thought,

"Oh, that's very risky." Let me tell you, he put his house out there, had it built out there, beautiful commandant's headquarters, and there was never one VC incident, ever again, ever. How could they get in? These Vietnamese were scattered throughout the forest in the villages and hamlets that they built for themselves, and then they began training for their mission in the rural hamlet in a Vietnamese milieu. And not to mention the extra morale and pride provided in going out there and doing it yourself and providing your own security and not looking to others for this sort of thing, inculcating the self-reliance and everything. But I thought you'd be interested in just knowing--

G: That is interesting.

S: --what a dynamic figure this Nguyen Be was and the difference he made.

G: How do you guard against penetration by enemy agents in a situation like this?

S: Oh, again, that was a province responsibility.

G: Any evidence that they fulfilled--?

S: Oh, I'm sure some VC cadre must have gotten in there. I don't know how much damage it would do, probably not too much.

G: Would you call your people cadres using the same term that the Viet Cong--?

S: Yes, it was the same word in Vietnamese. *Can bo.*

G: *Can bo*.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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