INTERVIEW III

DATE: August 14, 1985

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INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Colonel Sauvageot's office, Arlington, Virginia

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G: --the Tet Offensive and its effect on pacification.

S: All right. When the Tet Offensive actually occurred, I was actually in the National Training Center at Vung Tau for the training of RD [Revolutionary Development] cadre, and actually that was probably the safest place you could be in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive, as it turned out, because the training center itself, Vung Tau, [was] not targeted, at least not in the short run, by the communist offensive. Of course, I'm sure the reasons for that were primarily geographic. As you know, it was out there on that peninsula, and it just would have been a difficult target had the Communists been more successful than they were in their assault on Phuoc Tuy province, and they did assault Phuoc Tuy during the initial stages of the Tet Offensive but were ultimately repulsed. Had they been more successful, then, I think, yes, they would have come on down the peninsula towards Vung Tau. But they did not because they were stopped.

Now, when the Tet Offensive started, it was a massive multi-faceted assault all over South Vietnam. Of course, the news traveled very fast and was shocking to

everybody, including all the student cadre and the faculty people at the National Training Center for the training of the RD cadre. Of course, nobody knew at that time but what the assault wouldn't come down to the training center, so there were--the first thing, of course, was that very hasty defensive preparations were made in each of the three camps that comprised the National Training Center: Chi Lang being the main camp, and then Lam Son, and a third camp--I don't remember the name right now. But, anyway, there was a lot of running around getting the people that had arms and ammunition up to a sort of a--on the perimeter of the camps and being sure that there was a maximum state of alertness; people were staying up through the night and just taking all the precautions that we could.

As soon as it became apparent that the communist offensive was not--had been stopped short of the National Training Center, [and that] they were not coming beyond the province capital of Phuoc Tuy, then the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, as it was called in Saigon, and the National Training Center, which was under the authority of the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, were able to turn their attention towards how the National Training Center could contribute to the reconstruction or repair of the damage inflicted by the Tet Offensive, what kind of a role the students and the faculty could play in this reconstruction, because it didn't seem to make a whole lot of sense just to try to go back to the normal training schedule for these cadre when there was this tremendous threat throughout Vietnam and the necessity of rebuilding the morale and the confidence of the people in the government of South Vietnam. So rather than go back to business as usual, the thought was how to employ the cadre in a meaningful role. In

order to--I went up to Saigon as soon as it was feasible with the commandant of the National Training Center, Colonel Nguyen Be, and we met with the--my memory is getting fuzzy at the exact title, but it was General Nguyen Duc Thang, the Minister of Revolutionary Development--I think they called him the minister. Anyway, we met with Thang, and he and Be discussed bringing most of the cadre students and a number of their faculty instructors up to Saigon from Vung Tau, moving them, as I recall, by boat, and having them participate in relief activities in Saigon, helping people who had been displaced, restoring confidence in the population, and generally helping to rebuild in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive on Saigon, on the--Cholon, on the urban areas there. And so they worked out the schedule and we brought the cadre up, and I came up, relocated myself to work very closely with Colonel Be and his cadre, faculty and students. It was also decided to give the student cadre constructive credits toward graduation from the course, so that the time that they were actually doing civic actions and relief work in Saigon, they would actually be moving toward graduation in the normal time span.

G: That's real on-the-job training, isn't it?

S: It was a real on-the-job training. We slept out in the--oh, just on whatever empty buildings or space was available. They'd just spread out and sleep on the floor with mats. Most restaurants, of course, were closed in Saigon, but there were some that opened very quickly, and even if they didn't have rice and regular--all the courses available, most of them had the well-known North Vietnamese breakfast soup, you know, the *pho*, with beef and noodles, as people describe it. And for days that's about all we had, but I can eat that and never get tired of it. And it was for breakfast, lunch, supper. We certainly

weren't hungry, but we had to improvise quite a lot, be flexible. The streets in Saigon at that time were virtually empty. There was a curfew, of course, and there was very little traffic except the cars that we had to run around in. You could--Saigon was usually crowded and difficult to drive in. You could just race through the streets very easily, but, of course, you could get beyond a certain point where there was still a problem with security, military security, because there were still some communist snipers and a few communist elements on the outskirts of the city. In fact, I remember in some of the work we did in the evenings out toward the Cholon area, seeing jet strikes not too far from where we were, air strikes on communist positions, right in the edges of the city.

We had some casualties; not too many. I vividly remember just this one cadre student, who was shot and taken to the--one of the hospitals in Saigon, I thought I'd never forget the name but I just don't remember, but they did a good job on him as far as I could tell. They had to operate for several hours. They had surgery a couple of times. They did save his life. He had a long recuperation period. We visited him at the hospital. I did myself to see how he was getting along. Colonel Be, the commandant, visited him, and his very close associate, in fact, relative, who worked as a member of the staff at the National Training Center, Nguyen Xuyen Thieu [?]. Thieu and I worked very closely together in this relief effort. I can't remember exactly how long it lasted, but it seems that we were there, as I recall, for, oh, several weeks and then redeployed back to the National Training Center. So far all I've talked about are the effect on the Tet Offensive at the National Training Center itself, what happened to the students who were being trained there, and how they were employed to assist in the recovery effort in Saigon.

Another facet of that, of course, is how the RD cadre fared out in the provinces. I have less detailed memory of that since I was involved directly in the effort in Saigon with the faculty and students of the National Training Center. However, I do know--but, again, in less specific terms--that the initial impact of the Tet Offensive was to greatly reduce the effectiveness of the RD program throughout the countryside, because many cadre teams were either attacked or intimidated into running back to the district capital or the province capital. And in some cases it was quite a long time before they were redeployed out in the field. However, they were eventually in most cases redeployed out in the field as a part of the accelerated pacification campaign that the Saigon government undertook to redress the damage inflicted by the Tet Offensive.

G: How long did this take before the accelerated program got under way?

S: Well, it was certainly some appreciable time span because--I really would have to be able to go back over notes or something, but I--the reason I believe--I associate in my mind [the] accelerated pacification campaign after I was reassigned to Saigon, working in the Prime Minister's office with the Ministry of the Interior. Colby pulled me up to Saigon. And I remember our efforts on the accelerated pacification campaign at that time, and, of course, when the Tet Offensive occurred I was still up in the National Training Center at Vung Tau. But I went up to Saigon in 1969.

G: Okay. So that's a year in any case. That would have to be at least a year, I guess.

S: Well, I don't know. It depends on what time of the year, and I just--and that's what I can't--

G: Oh, okay.

S: --sort out without some notes.

G: There were a lot of reports at the time that the countryside was, in effect, lost to us, that pacification was set back a year, that the VC were actively recruiting in the countryside, very gloomy sorts of stuff. Do you have any comment on that? Were you able to observe for yourself what the true situation in the various parts of the country were?

S: Well, I can't quarrel with the basic outline that you've just made. I mean I could not--while I can't quarrel with it, it certainly was true. There were two things, both true, that different people emphasized more or less, depending on their perspective, and [one] is that the Vietnamese Communists lost a tremendous number of their cadre in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive because they surfaced and were no longer any good, or they couldn't be used, or they were killed. Many of them were killed in the fighting and in the ultimate military defeat throughout South Vietnam. So the Vietnamese Communists lost many of their best cadre in South Vietnam with some, from their perspective, some very bad effects in the years following the Tet Offensive.

On the other hand, it's also true though, as we said before, that the South Vietnamese government lost a lot of good cadre, lost the presence in the countryside in many places. And both those things are true, but sometimes you hear one--you know, some people emphasize only one or the other, and actually both are true. I think that after the Tet Offensive probably--well, at the--during the years after the Tet Offensive, I remained personally quite saturnine about the outcome of the war, how things would turn out then. But, in retrospect, I guess since things turned out that way, I would have to say

that unfortunately maybe my perceptions were basically correct on balance, but, on the other hand, maybe things could have turned out better. The jury was still out.

There were--you know, the government's "Land to the Tillers" program really did start to have a favorable impact in South Vietnam, more, I think, than it's given credit for. There had been so-called land reform programs before in the history of South Vietnam and, I think, during Ngo Dinh Diem's time, the First Republic, and maybe to some extent during the Second Republic, the first stage of the Second Republic, but they were never really effective. But President [Nguyen Van] Thieu's Land to the Tillers program was implemented in a very serious manner. It really did result in getting land out to the tiller. So they called it the Land to the Tiller program. Nguoi Cay Co Ruond; Land to the Tillers.

G: I'm going to have to get you to spell that for us before we get away--

S: All right.

G: --or we can look it up.

S: No. N-G-U-O-I: Nguoi. Cay: C-A-Y. Co: C-O. Ruond: R-U-O-N-D. Nguoi Cay Co Ruond; Land to the Tillers. And the--I really think it did have an effect, and the bitter irony is that the good effect came too late in terms of the American military withdrawal, and the conspicuous diminution of United States support for South Vietnam came in about the time frame that the Land to the Tillers program was actually having a beneficial effect. Now I can give you an example of this from a sort of a [inaudible] of Long An province, L-O-N--

G: Oh, yes. I--

S: You know that [inaudible].

G: Just south of Saigon, right?

S: Right, just south of Saigon. Have I ever talked about Long An province in our interviews?

G: I think it's come up but not in detail.

S: Well, in February 1970, when I was assigned to the Prime Minister's office--that is, I was the liaison and coordination officer for MACV, duty station at the Prime Minister's office, and also working closely with the Ministry of Interior, Mr. Lai Kum Chuh [?], and, of course, working with Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem, but not on a daily or weekly basis with the Prime Minister himself, more routinely with General Kao Hao Hun [?], who was Khiem's general officer responsible for the Central Pacification and Development Council, as I think it was called. He was the one that actually oversaw the pacification and development programs throughout the Republic of Vietnam and worked closely with MACV in developing the annual pacification and development plans.

Anyway, in February 1970, Elliot Richardson, who was then at the State Department, responsible for East Asia--I don't remember whether he was called an assistant secretary--an under secretary of state. Now, of course, they have an assistant secretary of state for East Asia, but I think he might have been an under secretary. But, anyway, he was very--I mean, he followed the events in Vietnam and took a large personal interest and responsibility for them. Elliot Richardson sent a team of people out to Vietnam to look at the status of pacification and development as it existed in February 1970. Different members of his team went to different provinces to look at the status of

it. One of the people that came out was a special assistant to Elliot Richardson named Charles Cook, who had been--I think had a long-term association with Elliot Richardson, worked for him at HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] after he left the State Department. Charlie Cook asked me to go with him to Long An province because he assigned himself to Long An province, and other people went to different provinces. And, of course, he asked Colby if it would be okay for me to go down to spend about ten days with him for an intensive look at Long An province. And Colby said, "Fine." So I left the office for about ten days and thoroughly enjoyed working with Charlie Cook, a very good observer of the Far East and of Vietnam in particular. We had a third member of the team. Charlie Cook added a marine lieutenant colonel who he knew very well and could give us a military perspective of certain things that might elude either Charlie or myself, even though I was an army officer, but still I had been pretty far removed from the normal army troop duty for some time.

So we got an old civilian vehicle of some kind. I, of course, wore either just ordinary civilian clothes or--I think that is what I did wear most of the time, just ordinary civilian clothes or sometimes black pajamas, but always, you know, rubber sandals, Ho Chi Minh sandals. And we drove throughout Long--to each of the seven districts in Long An province and interviewed people. That was what we were doing, but I was doing the interviewing because of course I could speak Vietnamese. In most cases, I was the one that was doing the interviewing. And we set up a method of operation, and just kind of worked it out on the spot whereby I could interview a number of ordinary rice farmers about their political attitudes in a way that they would, one, tell me, and, two, that I could

then report back to Charlie Cook. The way we did that is that, as far as getting the rice farmers--you know, it's a very difficult thing to get accurate information out of Vietnamese peasants. You have to become a non-threatening figure to them, something that ironically it was easier for me to do as a foreigner than it would be for a Vietnamese, who would probably be known to them to be either on the government side or on the communist side and, therefore, require structuring their responses in a certain way. But in South Vietnam, of course, it was very difficult generally to get a chance to talk to ordinary farmers without having government--South Vietnamese personnel with you, but we worked out a way we were able to do it, and it was just as simple as it could be. All we did was, for example--of course, naturally, we were going to talk to all the government officials, all the district chiefs, the province chief himself, people on the district staff. Those were official appointments, worked out ahead of schedule, and, of course, we all participated in those. If the district chief could speak English, Charlie Cook could talk to him directly. If he couldn't speak English, I could interpret, but we would all be there in the room together in any event.

Well, the way we were able to talk to the farmers is that if we were staying overnight in one district capital, we could make an appointment with the district chief and the district adviser, of course, in another district capital, say, for eleven o'clock in the morning the next day. But we could start out at any time with no controls over us. So we would start out early in the morning, right after breakfast, and spend three hours just driving to the next district capital, which meant that I could go along ten miles an hour, and as soon as we would see some Vietnamese farmers threshing rice--it was during

the--it was February 1970; in February, they were threshing rice--and I could just stop and talk to them. Now, of course, to--in order not to get them tense or suspicious, I had to have some reason to approach them, but the reason was very easy. All I had to do was ask directions. And in order to encourage this naturalness and set the stage for an effective interview, Charlie Cook and the marine officer were intelligent enough not to follow me out to where the farmers were threshing rice, because if they followed me people would know intuitively. There's no reason for a couple of Caucasians to get out of the car and come with the driver to ask directions. It's more natural for the driver to go out and ask directions and for them to sit, presumably impatiently, in the vehicle, waiting to get on down the road. And I used them as props in that way. And so I would ask directions, and then they would tell me. I would tell them I was lost, and "What's the way to get to the district capital?" Then they would tell me, and if that's all they did, we wouldn't get very much out of the conversation because we really knew where we were going. But more often than not, the Vietnamese, because of their own personality, their spontaneity, the traits they have, were very easy to engage in conversation because they would first of all be curious about why I could speak such good Vietnamese. It was a natural rapport. So then they would ask me questions about "What did I do?" and everything. And I would tell them that I was a driver and an interpreter. That was always my occupation. I said that I lived in Saigon and that I made good money because I had a driver's license, and I knew French and English and some foreign languages, but particularly French and English, and could--of course, I really didn't know French, but it was just to convey this image--and then often they would say, "Well, you must be

French." And I would say, "Well, you're very smart," you know. "How could you ascertain that I'm French since I don't have a sign on me that says my nationality?" And they would say, "Well, we just can tell that you were born here and have lived here all your life." And I'd say, "Well, of course, that's true, but, you know, I really don't like it out here in the country because I have always lived in Saigon, which is very nice because they have a lot of bars, and it's a very nice place at night. You know, if you make some money off these foreigners, you know, driving some Americans around and interpret for them or something, that's really great because then you can hit the bars, and there's lots of beer and some nice girls and everything, and it's really a nice way to live. But it must be terrible out here, you know, because it's very dull, and I don't see any bars, and I'm lost, and it's kind of scary and all." So about the time you go on like this, then they figure, "Well, there's no harm in talking to somebody like this." I mean, "The guy is apolitical, knows nothing," you know, so they would talk. They would just talk. And I never used any term for the Vietnamese Communists until they used one first. Then, if I wanted to ask about the Vietnamese Communists or refer to them in any way, I would use the same term they used. So if they called them, for example, *may ong giai-thong*--that's spelled--do you want me to spell that?--

G: We'll come back to it.

S: M-A-Y first word; second word O-N-G, and then the third word is G-I-A-I, a compound word and the second part of the word being T-H-O-N-G, and it's kind of hard to translate into English, but it's--a rough translation would be "the liberation men" or the "liberation gentlemen" or something like that. *Giai-thong* is "liberation," and, of course, it's obvious

that that's a rather honorific term, not even a neutral term. Sometimes they'd call them just *may ong*, "those men," sort of take it however you want to. Very few called them Viet Cong or the Vietnamese Communists.

But anyway, I would use whatever term they used, and I might say that in February 1970, the scars of the war, the aftermath of the Tet Offensive and the effort to push the Vietnamese Communists out, were still very visible. You saw damage, you know, houses bombed out and things of that sort. People pointed this out to me very often. A disturbing, very disturbing, disquieting thing was that throughout all seven districts of Long An province, among the rice farmers, the people threshing rice, the men and women threshing rice, there was a pronounced sympathy for the National Liberation Front, for the Vietnamese Communists, and there was quite a lot of hostility towards the Saigon government. Long An province is not all of South Vietnam, and I know that if this--the picture was not, in political terms, as bleak in many places as it was in Long An. Long An has a--had a unique history just in terms of that province. There were other--maybe I shouldn't have said unique. Its history, as the history of some other parts of South Vietnam, was such that there were many people predisposed to favor the Communists. That was not true in other significant areas. You know, it depends upon where you are. So I don't want to overdraw this thing. But the fact is that in an important province directly south of Saigon, in February 1970, through this interview technique that I just gave you, Charlie Cook and I found a disquieting preponderance of sympathy for the aims and objectives of the National Liberation Front of the Vietnamese Communists as the--among the rice farmers. And I might say that as soon as I would get back in the

car and start driving, then I would talk into Charlie Cook's tape recorder. He had a tape recorder right there, and I would immediately talk so that everything was very fresh in my mind, blow by blow. And then, of course, I couldn't stop again until we were out of sight of the first group that we had [interviewed], but as soon as we were out of sight, either around the bend of a road or with sufficient distance, then I would stop again, and again let them lead, and--you know, it's necessary to do all kinds of little things to keep that nuance of "no threat to them," to include not really going in too long a conversation without--without looking back at the car and saying something like, "Oh, I can't stay too long because they'll get upset. They'll wonder why I'm taking so long just to ask directions, and some of these foreigners get very impatient."

(Laughter)

Things like that, you know. I even showed people my driver's license and sometimes even went so far as to ask questions that were not relevant to what we were interested in, like, "How do you thresh rice? It looks difficult. How do you do it?" and take lessons in it on the spot just to--so they wouldn't think that I was focusing on anything political. And some of them would explain to me how the Liberation Front was trying to build a school and education system and doing things for the people, but there had been so much military action, and people were killed. They'd point to houses that had been bombed out, and, of course, I would be hoping that they would blame the VC for that, but all too often they didn't. They'd say, "Oh, that was American planes, or South Vietnamese planes that were supported by the American money." This was really a communist propaganda line also. You know, "The American money supported them, but some day

the Americans would leave, and when they did, the South Vietnamese government would collapse, and the Liberation people would be able to do wonderful things for the people, and there wouldn't be any more fighting," and all of that sort of thing. So we heard that, you know, many times again through these--

(Interruption)

Now, of course, talking to the district chiefs and everything, you got a different picture, but, of course, one of the disquieting facts that emerged from this whole process was the gulf between what the rice farmers were telling me they perceived and not only what the district chiefs perceived but what the district chiefs believed the people perceived.

I remember in a discussion up in a--some official meetings up in Washington, and I was on temporary duty back to Washington to participate in these meetings. I relayed some of the dynamics of this experience in Long An province for an inter-agency group that was chaired by--this was the summer of 1970, this was about August 1970--that was chaired by then-Director of United States Information Agency Frank Shakespeare. And Shakespeare didn't like to hear what I was saying, of course, and wanted to challenge it and, I think, discredit it if possible. And he said, you know, "Well, how can this be? How can you claim to have a better insight into what Vietnamese rice farmers are thinking than a district chief who administers the area, who is, after all, Vietnamese?" And I said, "Well, frankly, I don't think it's too difficult, because the key to getting inside those people's minds in a conversation--there are a couple of keys at least. One of them is to be a non-threatening figure. These are people who are in a sense the pawns in a great power struggle between two forces, neither of which they can control, the

Communists and the government who is opposed to the Communists. So their lives and welfare are at stake when they are relating to either of these two groups. So they have to be very careful and take refuge generally in feigned ignorance and non-opinions about everything that has any political correlation. And they're very good at doing that as a matter of survival for them. So if you're going to get through that barrier you have to be perceived as neutral, apolitical, and non-threatening, something that a Vietnamese district chief could, by definition, hardly be. That's one thing. Another thing though is--another key is that you have to be--you have to listen. There's a lot of Vietnamese officials--and I wouldn't limit it to Vietnamese. There's a lot of officials in any government bureaucracy who are not predisposed to listen to people; they do a lot of talking, but they don't do a whole lot of real listening. Also, right in the United States"--I'm telling you what I told Frank Shakespeare. I told him, "Right in the United States there's many areas in which an observant foreigner can come in and observe more accurately some of the relationships among various American ethnic groups than many of the local people would be able to do, because many people are prisoners of their own perceptions. In many areas of the United States, as an example, if you had, for example, an elected Caucasian mayor of a town with a large black minority, you might find a different perspective between the mayor and the black minority on how they saw things. Or, more specifically, if you asked the mayor for his ideas on how the blacks felt about their community, his perception of--what he would tell you about how the blacks felt about the community might be different from what the blacks would tell you themselves." So you can find that

all over the world and the United States, and I told him that you can find it in Vietnam, and I told him that I had quite a bit of confidence in our report, in the accuracy of it.

G: Did you see the reports from other provinces as well?

S: I did not because when I went back to my office, you know, I just went back to my office. But, of course, Charlie Cook assembled all of these things, and Elliot Richardson. I, also, you know--things just often, you know, if you get [to] what people are thinking, what they're really thinking is sometimes quite different from what you would think they were thinking based on external appearances. For example, in our running around this way, I'll never forget one interview that was, in a sense, very different from interviewing the uneducated rice farmers, but, in an unfortunate sense of the perspective of the person being interviewed, was very similar. In one of these little villages, a hamlet, we ran into a young Vietnamese student--he was going to high school, high school level--who was standing by his motorcycle. He had a nice motorcycle. He was a very clean-cut, nice-looking young guy of maybe, I don't know, sixteen, seventeen, something like that, and his father owned a rice mill or had owned a rice mill in the province, and he had--he and his family had been relocated to Saigon for their safety during the peak of this military action to drive the Vietnamese Communists out after the Tet Offensive. Now, outward appearances--the fact that he was going to school, was doing well under the South Vietnamese government, his father had some--was a small capitalist, so to speak, with a rice mill, the fact that he had that shiny Honda that he could drive back and forth to school, all these things would predispose you to think that he would probably be different from the rice farmers in that he would support the South Vietnamese

government. He did not. The only difference--the difference between talking to him and talking to the rice farmers was that he used political language, politicized language, and he was very direct and bold about talking about his opinions.

Also, in the conversation, he revealed that he had an older brother who was a major in the Vietnamese Ranger unit. So, again, you would think that with those family ties and his brother in an elite South Vietnamese unit that he would be very strong on the Saigon side, but, in fact, he was a very ardent supporter of the Hanoi Communists, and I mean the Hanoi Communists. With many of the peasants you were not so sure if they really would support the North Vietnamese as opposed to the southern Communists who were working hand-and-glove with the North Vietnamese. In some cases, I never knew. The interview would never go far enough to ascertain it. In some cases I did. But with this guy, there was no doubt because he laid it right on the line. He said, "Of course the North Vietnamese support the National Liberation Front, as they should, and the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union support Hanoi in its efforts to unify the country, as they should, and"--like the peasants told me that "some day the Americans will go, and when they go, the North will take over, and that will be good for everybody." And I said, "Yes, but I don't see how"--but since he was being so direct and all, I felt I could be just as direct. I didn't have to drop a lot of this cuteness. And I asked him--I said, "Well, look, I hear--I understand what you're saying but, you know, I'm pretty ignorant about military things and political things." I said, "You know, it seems to me that there's no reason to assume that the Communists can take over even if the Americans leave because you have a good army of your own, and how about your brother--he's in one of the

toughest outfits. What are those Rangers going to do? What are the paratroopers going to do? What are the South Vietnamese Marines going to do? They're going to have something to say about who takes over this country."

And he said, "Oh," he said, "It'll drag out for a while, but you take away the American support, they'll give up gradually. You know, they won't be able to stay the course. The Soviet Union and China can keep up their support for North Vietnam as long as it takes." Which, I might add parenthetically, was something that the Communists had been--many Communists that I had knowledge of had been led to believe that to be the case, and actually it was not an inaccurate assessment.

Well, anyway, this was sort of the picture in February 1970 of Long An province. Now, I haven't forgotten where we started. I remember I had said earlier in the conversation that the Land to the Tiller program had quite a good effect but too late. I'm getting to that.

So this was February 1970. I had an occasion to return to Long An province in January 1975. We're talking about five years later. Now I did not get to stay in the province and go into the depth that I did before, but nevertheless, I touched it, talked to some people along the roadsides, and everything. And remember, in January 1975 was just--what, four months before the takeover of South Vietnam. And I was out there on temporary duty in South Vietnam with a general from the Defense Intelligence Agency. We were working together to make a report back to Washington on the status of everything in South Vietnam. And at the time, I was teaching out at the Command General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, but I was just put on temporary duty

to go out there, immediately after Christmas of 1974 into January 1975. And sometimes the general and I would work together and sometimes we would split and then make our separate reports, and I would give him my report.

Well, anyway, I went alone down into the Delta, through Long An province, Dinh Tuong province, My Tho, talked at length to the division commander of the Seventh ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] Division, General San Van Huy [?].

Well, anyway, to make a long story--

G: You were driving?

S: --short--I drove, right.

G: Alone?

S: Actually, when I drove from Saigon down to Long An and Dinh Tuong, I had a couple of Vietnamese with me. One was from General Hun's office that he sent to help me, and also, I think, to watch me, both, because I had to get rid of him to have a dinner alone with General Huy. We had to get rid of him so that General Huy could talk candidly to me. And then, also, I had, on one occasion, just met out in one of the provinces one of my old Vietnamese acquaintances, who went with me to certain places that he thought I ought to go to, like down in one of the little villages in [inaudible] district that had--where the village chief had had half of his Popular Force and Regional Force desert because of the increasing threat to them by the North Vietnamese, by the Vietnamese Communists, the increasing threat, and the lack of support from the South Vietnamese government, that is, oh, things like not being willing to issue them sufficient hand grenades and ammunition because they were storing it up at district [province?] level.

Things like that. And I went out there. I thought it was dangerous to go out there, and I was very reluctant to do it, but this Vietnamese guy said, well, I really wasn't doing my job if I didn't go out there, and everything. He just egged me on until I felt I had to do it, and I did, but what--it was a--we didn't get out of there until after three in the afternoon, and that was the time that I'd already been told that sometimes Communist units came out on the road and blocked it and stuff like that. So it was not a very pleasant thing, I mean, just coming out from Kansas so late in the game and not really wanting to get scarfed up at that particular time, with a wife and daughter already in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. But it was quite an experience going out there and talking to that village chief and seeing that everything I'd heard was true, that he really was in a bad position.

Well, anyway, talking to some of the people in Long An province and Binh Duong, some of the rice farmers and all, I got a picture of people whose sentiments had changed considerably from when we went through in February 1970. They had shifted. Here's the irony. Here's the bitter irony. There had been a very perceptible shift in sentiment away from the Communists and to the South Vietnamese government. After all, at this time it was the Communist units that were down there mucking around militarily. It was the Saigon government who was the initiator and implementer of the Land to the Tillers program, which was going well, and the Americans were gone, and the scars, the memories, of the fighting in which the Americans had participated had receded into time, and, if you put all these things together, there was a real shift, but the--of course, I thought it was a bitter irony. The bitter part is, though, that this shift in sentiment was not exploitable by the Saigon government because the shift in sentiment

was accompanied by a perception that the Communists were stronger militarily, and that it would not be smart to stick one's neck out to support the Saigon government at a time that their prospects for survival were diminishing, and [that] one would have to, regardless of one's personal feelings, have to adjust to the new reality, and that if the North Vietnamese were going to be the wave of the future, then one would have to arrange one's lifestyle accordingly.

So there's kind of what I was trying to explain to you.

G: That is a bitter irony, and I think I've used my allotted time for this morning.

S: Well, that's all right, Ted. I've--

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III

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