

some 79,000 civilian amputees and paraplegics were registered with the Vietnamese government, as well as some 25,600 civilians who have become blind or deaf from war causes. In addition, the official register lists some 258,000 orphans and some 131,000 war widows.

Again, it is the children who have paid the highest price in lost arms and legs, sight and hearing. And this situation in South Vietnam has been now duplicated in Laos—where American bombing has been vastly increased since late 1968—and in Cambodia, where operations during and after the American-South Vietnamese invasion in the spring of 1970 have led to over one million refugees [two million as of 1972] out of a population of less than seven million. The burden of American fighting power on the population on Indochina shows no sign of diminishing . . .

It is another inscription I saw, that night with my children in Washington, that comes back to me more and more now, as the widow-making and orphaning goes on. From the walls of the Jefferson Memorial:

Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; and that his justice will not sleep forever . . .

VISIT TO AN INSECURE PROVINCE

What follows is Part I of an early trip report to my colleagues on the Lansdale team, most of whom had served in Vietnam before but had not been recently in the field. General Lansdale, who hoped to concentrate on encouraging political development, had been assigned by Ambassador Lodge the thankless job of coordinating U.S. civil activities directed toward "pacification." Assisting him in this role, I began to make extensive field trips; as a newcomer, I wanted to educate myself on conditions in the countryside and the nature of the counter-guerrilla war.

Within the band of "fanatics, mavericks . . . and old Vietnam hands" described in my letter quoted earlier, none had a higher reputation than John Paul Vann, who was to become my closest friend in Vietnam. (Vann is now [April, 1972] Senior Advisor in II Corps, the first civilian ever to command all the Americans, including military, in a Corps area in Vietnam.) I had heard of him even before I arrived from David Halberstam, who had written at length about Vann's honesty, nerve, and outspokenness during his 1962-63 tour—when he was an active Army officer, a lieutenant colonel—as Senior Advisor to the ARVN 7th Division (see *The Making of a Quagmire*, Chapters X and XI). That had involved responsibility covering eight Delta provinces. Now back as a civilian in AID, retired from the Army, Vann was being treated with great reserve by his new agency, whose officials had read Halberstam's account of his famous candor from a different point of view than mine. At this point he had spent ten months as an AID province representative in Hau Nghia, a small, dusty, wholly insecure province which functioned mainly as a highway for Viet Cong moving out of the adjacent plain of Reeds.

When I met Vann in Saigon, he offered to show me his province; in the course of three days' driving with him, I began to learn a good deal. In the next six weeks, we drove to every province capital in III Corps, some of which had not been visited by road for almost a year. In the following report I deliberately included the kind of concrete details I wished I had been given in my reading the year

before, in Washington; later this account circulated widely among my former colleagues and superiors in the Pentagon.

Glossary: The following terms and acronyms recur frequently in the four papers that follow in this "Background" section. "Revolutionary Development" (RD) is an American name for what the French call "pacification": coined by White House aides because it sounded less French and more competitive with the NLF. (The Saigon regime, which has a better sense than we do of who they are, declined to follow this usage, shunning the word "revolutionary"; they use the title "Rural Construction," equally misleading but less provocative.) An RD cadre team is a 59-man group—originally trained, armed, and paid by the CIA—which carries out various organizational activities in a hamlet to fulfill the six criteria (see "The Day Lộc Tiên Was Pacified") of a "pacified" or "secured" hamlet: PF are Popular Force soldiers: local, lightly trained and equipped militia, operating in squads and platoons at village level. RF are Regional Forces, better trained and equipped, commanded at province level and operating in a district, generally in companies. ARVN are the regular units of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, organized in divisions. RVNAF comprises all the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam, including PF, RF, ARVN, air force, navy etcetera. MACV is the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam; AID is the U.S. Agency for International Development. NVA is the North Vietnamese army and DRV is the government of North Vietnam.

Part III of this report—omitted here—described "Vann theses" on the problems of Vietnam and what to do about them. That section began:

When I asked Vann, Monday night, what lesson he particularly wanted me to take away from our ride through the countryside, he said immediately: "The thinness of control by either the VC or the GVN." Vann believes that control can be wrested from the VC, in many areas by rather simple changes in activity. But these "simple" changes would be revolutionary departures for ARVN and the GVN. And Vann does not think they will happen without major U.S. initiatives and interventions.

Vann and his assistant, Douglas Ramsey, believed that the major "problem" in the countryside was that "the present leaders, bureaucrats, and province and district officials do not come from, think like, know much about, or respond to the wishes of the rural majority of

the population." (An obvious solution on the first three counts would be to replace them with NLF officials; but as we saw it then—arguably—that would not surely meet the last criterion.) Many of those who stayed long in the country came to see that as the problem, all right, but remained skeptical of Vann's solution: that the U.S. Government should "accept responsibility for actual governmental performance in South Vietnam and act upon it."

I pointed out an obvious objection in my memo:

The "facade" [of Vietnamese authority, which Vann proposed to maintain] would eventually wear pretty thin, and we would lay ourselves open to charges, not only from the VC, that we had taken on a "colonialist" role. (There would be a good deal of basis for this charge; though it should be noted that, given the qualifications described above, the closest past analogy to the U.S. role would be that of a "good" colonialist power: one that was fully committed to granting full independence in the near future and that was making major, effective efforts to prepare the country for viable independence by educating the population and finding and training a spectrum of young, capable leaders and administrators. In other words, the closest colonial analogy would be British policy in Malaya under Templer, not French policy in either Indochina or Algeria.)

I shared this objection to Vann's approach, though I pointed out that it managed at least to address some important problems that were often ignored; within a year I had pinned my own hopes on another form of U.S. intervention that I had mentioned in this memo: "starting an evolutionary process in motion—perhaps by the beginnings of representative government—that will eventually transform the nature of the government, its personnel, and its élan." One more delusion; and looking back, I am more impressed by the similarities to Vann's concept of my own and others' approaches than by what we saw as differences. The actual U.S. colonial approach in Vietnam, of course, has always been essentially French, not British (with a great deal more troops and firepower than either). That, and no more than that, was what my friends and I were criticizing. "Good colonialists" was what we were all trying to be, and what Vann is. It was, and is, the wrong aspiration to have.

Late Sunday afternoon, October 17, 1965, I drove from Saigon to Bao Trai, province capital of Hau Nghia, with John Paul Vann,

the AID provincial representative. The next day we drove to each of the four districts of Hau Nghia, visiting a number of hamlets, each of the district towns and sub-sector advisor posts, and several refugee relocation centers; we traveled on every road in the province that was not physically blocked.

Yann and his assistant, Doug Ramsey, maintain a map in their office showing the latest status of the roads as "passable—not hazardous," as passable but "slightly," "moderately," "extremely hazardous," and as (physically) "impossible." Over the long stretches of "moderately hazardous" road, Yann drove fairly fast, 80 to 90 kilometers per hour. On brief stretches of "extremely hazardous" road, he drove very fast, 90 to 110 kilometers—with one hand on an AR-15 pointed out the window, extra ammo around his shoulder, and grenades in his belt.

(On the most incident-prone of these portions—18 killed a month on a two-kilometer stretch—our [110 kph] progress was halted for 45 minutes by some cars mired down where the road had been destroyed two days earlier and badly repaired. We pulled a car loose with a tow rope, got stuck ourselves and were pulled out; meanwhile, five individuals had come up separately to tell us, in various ways, to "leave quickly" because there were VC on both sides of the road. We left as quickly as we could.)

Yann drove without bravado, paying very serious attention to what he was doing and to reducing the risks, and giving me running lessons on what to watch for and what to do. ("Yann doesn't take any risks he doesn't have to," an experienced AID colleague had told me, "short of abandoning the roads to the VC.")

Yann's side comments on road security: "The roads are generally clear from mines by ten or eleven in the morning; the VC have either blown them already or RF road-clearing details have found them." (However, a mine was blown at 1500 that day—killing five RF troops in a foot column and wounding seven—on a stretch of road we had driven over at 1100.) The mines are almost all wire-controlled, and the electric circuits sometimes have delays in them; so it is hard for the controller (who may be 400 to 500 yards away) to hit a fast-moving vehicle. It is common for a mine to go off behind a vehicle moving fast; the VC prefer to wait for a convoy, so that they have the best chance

of getting one. (One informant led them to a row of twenty 105 mm. shells controlled by a single wire.) "Some day they may catch on that the way to get a single fast vehicle—like Ramsey or me—is to blow the mine just *ahead* of us."

They use enormous quantities of explosives for many of these mines—as much as 100 to 200 kilos of plastic explosive have been uncovered, though 15 to 20 kilos are more normal—so craters are typically six to seven feet deep, with one crater eleven feet deep (sandbags in the car would be of little help). In a road ambush, the local guerrillas do not usually lay an obstacle across the road, though a water buffalo may serve as a mobile barrier. The best tactic is to drive right through it; "they're very poor shots, like ARVN—the weapons are too big for them, and so is the kick—and the guerrillas are not like good regular soldiers; they'll scatter and duck if you fire back in their general direction." (Yann has now driven through three ambushes, one involving fifteen men close in on both sides of the road, and Ramsey has been through two.)

"You're safest in a single, unmarked vehicle, driving fast at irregular times, during the day." (On the way out from Saigon, Yann deliberately avoided joining the province chief's small convoy, but on the way back on Tuesday he gave in with considerable reluctance to the chief's insistence that we ride in his car. "We're so much more likely to get our ass blown off in this convoy than in my Scout," he told me.)

Water and Fish

"This is a PF outpost," says Yann; the PF's wave at us, behind their barbed wire and moat, lying on top of their concrete tower. "This one has an accommodation with the VC." How could one say that? "This post has had no contact with the VC in months; no casualties, hasn't been attacked. Now, you see this wreck next to it?" We stopped and looked at a skeleton of a building, only part of the frame and a few sheets of roofing, in the same open field as the PF outpost. It was surrounded by brand-new barbed wire; every section had been cut and trampled into the ground. "That's a PF training center we've been trying

to build. The VC have torn it down *five times*. Last time was three nights ago. They ripped the boards and the roofing off, tore up the wire. It's exactly one hundred and seventeen paces to that post. But the PF's didn't hear anything, didn't see anything—didn't do anything." Some workers were lying nearby, taking siesta. "Those are the construction workers. Some of them probably helped tear it down."

Could the "accommodation" simply be tacit: we won't bother you, so you don't bother us? "Hell no, it's not tacit. We get the information; while those VC workers are out there, tearing up the building and making a hell of a racket, they're yelling right into this post: 'We're your brothers. Why are you working for the Americans and the traitors in Saigon?' And most of the time where these little deals are made, the PF leader or hamlet chief has talked face to face with the VC commissar."

When we drove by the post two days later, on the return to Saigon, the last sheets of roofing had been removed from the training center, and the wire was further tangled.

Again and again we rode over a patch where the road had been recently trenched and then filled in, or where a dirt wall had been built across it, or a large mine hole filled; in nearly every case, there would be a PF outpost 50 to 100 meters away. This was no coincidence. The VC were deliberately cutting and mining the road—with much hand labor, pick-and-shovel work that could probably be heard for half a mile—within eyesight and earshot of GVN soldiers, PF posts, and even district towns with RF detachments. The lesson, for the villagers, was pretty plain.

It was also pretty plain that one could find VC local guerrillas when one wanted to, without going very far. The roads were being cut or mined, or ambushes laid, in exactly the same spots day after day, sometimes four or five times in a row. "If I wanted to meet some guerrillas, I'd wait in the ditch any night next to the Sui Sau bridge," the MACV S-2 advisor told me (pointing to the bridge, locally known as "Sui Cide," where we had been stopped for 45 minutes the day before).² That there is abundant

² That incident was the one time I ever saw Vann edgy. It was near that bridge three months later that his assistant, Doug Ramsey, was ambushed while driving and captured.

information on where to find guerrillas is shown by the record of the Chieu Hoi [VC defectors] platoon; out of seventeen operations in August, armed only with hand grenades, it had made contact each time, killing eleven VC. It went where the VC could be expected to be (on the basis of information and of past patterns of VC behavior).

In the same month, the 49th Regiment of the 25th Division reported conducting more than 1,400 small-unit actions, 605 of them at night. They reported contact with the VC sixteen times; no VC were killed. (Nor were any VC killed in the several large-scale operations; the 49th Regiment killed no VC in August.)

This pattern of almost no contact and few casualties inflicted or suffered on offensive operations is not peculiar to the 49th Regiment, or to John Vann's province. On my return, I began checking the countrywide figures: on October 17, 2,677 small-unit actions were reported, countrywide, with 13 contacts; on October 18th, 2,922 actions, 22 contacts; on October 22nd, 2,852 actions, 8 contacts (of these 43 contacts, 13 were at night, when the VC rules the countryside). A live VC is hard to find: for ARVN.

"The theory they give us for the outposts," the American advisor told me, "is that they serve as *bases*, from which they can do night patrolling." In reality, as he and everyone else I asked confirmed, the PF's simply do not move from these posts at night. Most of the posts in Hau Nghia are along major routes, guarding roads rather than villages; even those associated with a village are at one end, on the outskirts. The "security" they provide the villagers at night is not even problematic. And the arrogance of the VC, tearing up roads, killing hamlet officials, and abducting messengers from buses virtually at the front gate of the outposts, underlines the point.

As for the RF's and the 25th Division: (a) most of the small-unit actions reported, especially alleged night actions, are simply fictions; (b) when they do venture out, it is to go places where the VC can be expected *not* to be (intelligence is good enough for that, too); (c) large-scale operations can be expected to be compromised in advance (the American advisors told me) by VC penetrations of headquarters and supporting units and by non-

existent communications security; (d) according to the U.S. advisor to the 49th Regiment, "nearly every regimental plan is changed in many ways by 25th Division headquarters; and virtually every change is such as to reduce the chance of contact or to allow the VC an avenue of escape: changing the axis of approach, removing the block force, leaving an open flank. . . ."

The sector advisory team and the regimental advisor (I didn't talk to the divisional advisory staff) told me they urge "daily" that each one of these patterns be changed: with what they describe as *zero* success.

In the morning we arrived at Dong Hoa hamlet, part of Hiep Hoa village in Duc Hue district, just after a graduation ceremony for a PF platoon that had received motivational indoctrination training. The province chief and sector advisor and their staffs had arrived for the occasion by helicopter.

This little area illustrated many of the complexities of "security" in Han Nghia. Dong Hoa is carried on the charts as "blue" ("secured") although it is surrounded by "red." This is because it is the location of a big sugar mill (generally called the "Hiep Hoa sugar mill") which has never been attacked since it was constructed in 1923. "Notice the plate glass windows," Vann said, pointing to the housing next to the mill. The mill's sanctuary reflects the payment of what is reported to be 1,700,000 piasters a year to the VC. It is jointly owned by French and the GVN (inherited, I believe, from Madame Nhu); hearsay is that the French interest is unlikely to be expropriated, because it makes payment of the VC tax less embarrassing. The mill is unlikely to be attacked. But despite the serenity of Dong Hoa, the U.S. advisory staff to the Duc Hue sub-sector had just been removed from the hamlet "for security reasons": because of VC control of the surrounding area.

Meanwhile, Dong Hoa Bac, the hamlet just the other side of the Vaico Oriental River, was likewise carried as "GVN"—the only hamlet west of the river so listed—though it was in "deep red" country. How did its PF post survive? "By an accommodation," says Vann; the hamlet is, in fact, VC-controlled, and the fiction that it is a GVN hamlet is maintained only to permit the province to show one such hamlet west of the river. It was the

PF platoon and Dong Hoa Bac that had just received motivational indoctrination training; why the district chief had picked this particular platoon was not clear. Just two nights before, the VC had broken their truce with the hamlet by lobbing some mortar shells into the PF post—evidently to remind everyone, just before graduation, that motivational indoctrination training wasn't going to change any of the realities of the situation.

However, because of the ceremony, the province chief and the staffs accompanied the PF platoon as they returned across the river, and visited the post briefly. We went along. "This is quite an occasion," Vann told me. "This is only the second time that the province chief has ever been to this hamlet, that is, been west of the river. The previous chief never went. You'll be the first civilian—beside Ramsey and me—to be across the river in a couple of years."

While the chief was in a dugout in the post, Vann motioned me to follow him down a path between the river and a row of huts. "Watch this guard," he said. "He'll be very unhappy when we move off the tour; he probably won't let us go left here." The guard said nothing. "That's funny," Vann said, "they made a big stink when I tried to walk down here last time." (What struck me about these observations—which came early in the day—was that the province chief and his guard were only a few yards behind us, and the apparently "dangerous zone" was separated from the outpost defenses by several paces.) But after a few minutes we ran into the province chief and his guards, who had come around the back way. "Ah, that's it," Vann said. "This is on the tour today."

Close by, we gave a lift to the cadre of the motivational training course, who had flown to a neighborhood village by helicopter. They had changed into civilian clothing and left all weapons and documents identifying them as cadre behind, because they were going to ride on a public bus and didn't want to be abducted from it by VC "road agents" (as were three ARVN soldiers on leave, that afternoon).

Near Dong Hoa we entered Tan Hoa hamlet, now the seat of the village of Hiep Hoa. (Hiep Hoa hamlet had become too insecure to be the village hamlet). It is shown as "black"—"under-

going securing"—on the map and has cadre in the daytime; but all of these, including the village chief, move to Dong Hoa every night, to the security of the sugar mill. We drove slowly along a canal to a dead end, then turned back. "These people are pretty surprised to see us," Vann said. "They haven't seen anyone connected with the GVN poke down this street for a hell of a long time." They looked surprised; though when I waved, they smiled and waved back. At one point we passed a gathering of a dozen black-clad boys in their early twenties: draft-age, but not in "our" army. "There's little doubt you're looking at a VC squad," Vann said, so I took a picture. They straightened up and smiled. ("The fact is, they look too clean-cut to be GVN," Vann muttered.)

Back at the marketplace, two blocks on, I got out and took some pictures, till Vann honked the horn. "Let's move out," he said, "they're starting to move away from the car." There was now a noticeable empty space around the Scout. "We're safe for a little while, because they don't expect to see us and it takes them a few minutes to react. But eventually, one of the people back there is going to start thinking about collecting the twenty-thousand-piaster reward and the gold medal the VC gives out for a dead American." As we were leaving, the district chief arrived in a jeep, preceded by a jeepload of APA's (CIA-trained "Armed Propaganda" team). "This may be the most corrupt district chief in Vietnam," Vann said. "We're investigating him. He always uses the APAs as his bodyguard." "But I thought you said no GVN official ever came this way?" I asked. "That was behind the wire; see that wire we passed, on the other side of the market, as we started to go along that canal? The district chief isn't going to pass that wire—no GVN official will, or has."

The other side of the tracks, in short.

This was the pattern of the day: no doubt familiar to most members of the team, but an education for me. I've described it in detail to convey the impression I got of being closely surrounded in both hamlets and countryside by little signs—visible to all—saying, "To find VC, turn left—about ten feet." "This bridge closed for mining, tonight and every night." "GVN not welcome here," or "GVN traffic on this road only between 0700 and 1800, VC traffic only between 1800 and 0700" (like Washington streets

that are one-way in opposite directions during morning and evening rush hours).

(One road we did not go down. At an intersection, Vann pointed right and said, "If you want to meet VC with one hundred percent certainty, day or night, just go into that tree line, four hundred yards off. Some Polish journalists wanted to meet VC; the VC met them at the tree line, burned their jeep, and kept them for three days. They got a good story.")

Another impressive hamlet was An Hoa, a Catholic community with a churchyard and gardens as pretty as a New England village. The hamlet is very safe ("I'd sleep here any night, without a gun," Vann said)—without barbed wire. "The priest here says if any VC enters anywhere in the hamlet, he knows of it within ten minutes—and he reacts." The VC stay clear of it. The VNAF, however, tore it to pieces early in the year, by mistake, causing many casualties. Vann and the sector advisor had just gotten some compensation funds to them: the only compensation paid during the year, amounting to the first quarter's allowance for the province.

At various times during the day Vann stopped to talk business with sub-sector advisory teams, in particular suggesting a range of projects for them to spend their piaster fund on. He also had business with Captain Hiep, the district chief of Duc Hoa, whom he praised as an outstanding officer. Barry Sutherland, the Australian supervising the construction advisory crew working throughout SVN, also praised Hiep: "He's a unique Vietnamese; he gets things done. And he's honest and he cares about the people." When the district hospital was taken over by the army, Hiep had gotten another one built by the people. (Vann's comment on many of the self-help projects: "The province chief calls them 'help self.' The theory is that they're what the people want, and they'll contribute the labor. The villagers ask for schools, clinics, soccer fields; but somehow the request comes up through the village and district chiefs, and the people usually turn out to want new hamlet offices. The people aren't interested in working on that, so we end up buying labor and using a contractor anyway.")

Nearly all of the people we passed seemed very friendly, espe-

cially to Vann. "I'm usually on hand when anything gets passed out," Vann said. "They associate me with goodies." What surprised me was that the villagers seemed just as friendly in the hamlets we passed through that were controlled by the VC; although VC guerrillas slept in those huts every night and VC political cadre held meetings and discussions frequently. "They're friendly people," Vann said, when I asked whether I should take their smiles and return waves as purely hypocritical (hard to do). "They don't hate individual Americans, even in VC territory. And incidentally, they see a lot more Americans now—who are friendlier than the French were—than they ever saw. Frenchmen, out here in the provinces. On the other hand, even in the places the VC don't control, friendliness doesn't mean these people are going to involve themselves to help you out. These people smiling at us right now would smile just as warmly—and be perfectly honest about it—if they knew that in another ten yards we were going to be blown up by a mine the VC laid last night; and they wouldn't say anything."

(As Vann wrote in one of his monthly reports: "The people have come to believe in VC promises of retribution more than in GVN promises of protection and help," so they aren't inclined to volunteer information. It's true that several bystanders at the Sui San bridge did warn us to leave because there were VC in the tree-lines on both sides of the road, a few hundred yards off, but they were stuck with us in the mud and in the traffic jam, so they couldn't get out of the line of fire.)

"The children are different," Vann said. "No matter what they hear at night, they go by what they see, and if you're nice to them they trust you. I've had kids warn me along the road, a number of times, not to go into a hamlet because the VC were there; I turn right around. I give out a whole lot of gum along these roads."

That night, in a meeting with a Filipino medical team that had just arrived for a two-week stay in Hau Nghia to give standard medical aid, Vann learned that the team actually had surgical background. By the next morning—which began with a half-hour bombardment by B-52s, plainly visible over our heads, which shook the walls of the houses hard though the bombs were falling

in the neighboring province, twenty-three kilometers away—Vann was busy drawing on his brand-new contingency fund to make a temporary surgical operating room out of a large provincial meeting hall. By mid-morning, chalk-lines were laid out on the floor to mark partitions and workmen were pounding holes in the cement floor; it was ready by that evening. "Without this fund, it would have taken months to get a project like this all staffed through the ministry," Vann said. "The team would have been long gone." Since the team had brought none of their surgical instruments with them to South Vietnam, Vann was going into Saigon that night to find some and bring them back. (In the attack on Duc Lap after this was written, October 27, 1965, this team was the only surgical team in the area; it treated many casualties immediately.)

We ate our meals both days with the province chief, Lieutenant Colonel Hanh. Vann eats all his meals with Hanh (Vann supplies much of the food and all the wine and liquor). He gets on well with Hanh, they talk business together very freely, and they respect each other. But Hanh is a depressed man. (In part because of troubles with Division and Saigon; though Vann told me, "His real trouble with Division is me. Because of me, he keeps making proposals they don't like.") The only time I saw him smile, rather painfully, was when he told a joke, Tuesday night, surrounded by his wife and seven children at dinner in Saigon. "There are two hundred and twenty thousand people in Hau Nghia, and two hundred thousand of them are ruled by the VC," he said. "I am not a province chief; I am a hamlet chief."

PROBLEMS OF "REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT"

In July and August, 1966, I was a member of a Roles and Missions study group, chaired by Colonel George Jacobson, to report to the Mission Council—Ambassador Lodge, General Westmoreland, and agency heads—on "the proper role of each military and paramilitary and police and civilian force in the country."³ I was asked to frame a definition of "Revolutionary Development" (a trick name devised to avoid the French term, "pacification") and to provide a description of the process. My section began with what was often used thereafter as an official definition of RD:

Revolutionary Development consists of those military and civil efforts designed to liberate the population of South Vietnam from Communist coercion; to restore public security; to initiate economic and political development; to extend effective GVN authority throughout SVN; and to win the willing support of the people to these ends.

The ensuing description of the conceptual framework of the RD program (omitted here) is complimented by the author of the section of the McNamara Study that deals with "Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967" as "the most logical and coherent approach to returning an area to GVN control and then gaining its support that had yet been produced by a group in either the Mission or Washington" (PP, II, 584). The approach described was also largely a fantasy, in terms of actual RD practices and potential, as I knew from my own observations, having stayed in most of the forty-three provinces of South Vietnam by this time. Therefore, I decided to provide a further discussion, under the heading "Some Major Problem Areas," which began:

The RD program will fail to extend GVN authority significantly or permit it to be extended significantly unless there is radical improvement in the operation, effectiveness, and conduct of each of the major GVN/RVNAF elements.³ See PP, II, 583-86, for discussion of the group's eighty-one recommendations and the Council's response.

bearing on RD . . . even the modified (less ambitious) concept described cannot be said to be realizable with the GVN/RVNAF system as it is.

The last part of this section—which follows—deals with the "major improvements" needed in the "reciprocal attitudes, expectations, and conduct of GVN representatives—civil and military—and of the people of South Vietnam." (This and other parts of my contribution to the "Jacobson Report" were paraphrased in a memorandum to the President by Secretary McNamara of October 14, 1966. McNamara had read it—along with the preceding "Insecure Province" report and a number of my other memoranda—when I accompanied him and Under Secretary of State Katzenbach to and from Vietnam in October. (See PP, IV, 350-51.)⁴

Underlying my analysis of the problems is the viewpoint expressed by another member of the study group, Frank Scotton: to get the public cooperation needed for "Revolutionary Development," he argued, "revolution isn't essential, but radical reform is essential, and reform, unlike revolution, must start at the top." Whether "radical reform" was even remotely likely without a revolutionary change that replaced the elites we maintained in power, and whether that change was compatible with the actual interests that propelled U.S. policy, were questions we did not face realistically; we were criticizing programs whose counterrevolutionary framework we did not question or even perceive. Unwilling to see the war as a war of independence and a revolution—because we did not want to admit which side of those two struggles we were on—we did not face up to reasons more fundamental than "poor leadership" for the ARVN soldiers' unwillingness to fight or the unwillingness of the Saigon landholder-politicians or generals to reform, any more than our military acknowledged the true basis for the dedication of the Viet Cong guerrilla.

Two days before his inauguration, John F. Kennedy had talked about Laos with President Eisenhower, who "wondered aloud why, in interventions of this kind, we always seem to find that the morale of the Communist forces was better than that of the democratic

⁴ At one point, John McNaughton—who was also a passenger on the Secretary's windowless tanker, along with General Wheeler, Robert Komer, and Henry Kissinger—took me aside to relay two requests from McNamara: he would like an extra copy of my report, "Visit to an Insecure Province"; also, would I mind not showing that report to the military passengers, in the interest of not further straining civil-military relations?

forces."⁵ Or, as that "old China hand" Theodore H. White put it seven months later, in a private report to the White House: "What perplexes hell out of me is that the Commies, on their side, seem to be able to find people willing to die for their cause. . . ." ⁶

Three years later in a briefing to the highest officials in Washington General Taylor describes "two primary causes" for "the present unsatisfactory situation," which he treats as separate, independent, and equally mysterious: "[1] the continued ineffectiveness of the central government, [and 2] the increasing strength and effectiveness of the Viet Cong and their ability to replace losses." Taylor continues:

As the past history of this country shows, there seems to be a national attribute which makes for factionalism and limits the development of a truly national spirit. Whether this tendency is innate or a development growing out of the conditions of political suppression under which successive generations have lived is hard to determine. But it is an inescapable fact that there is no national tendency toward team play or mutual loyalty to be found among many of the leaders and political groups within South Vietnam. . . .

The ability of the Viet Cong continuously to rebuild their units and to make good their losses is one of the mysteries of this guerrilla war. We are aware of the recruiting methods by which local boys are induced or compelled to join the Viet Cong ranks and have some general appreciation of the amount of infiltration of personnel from the outside. Yet taking both of these sources into account, we still find no plausible explanation of the continued strength of the Viet Cong if our data on Viet Cong losses are even approximately correct. Not only do the Viet Cong units have the recuperative powers of the phoenix, but they have an amazing ability to maintain morale. Only in rare cases have we found evidences of bad morale among Viet Cong prisoners or recorded in captured Viet Cong documents. [pp, 111, 668]

Just a month after Taylor spoke, a Rand researcher, Joseph Zasloff, briefed Defense officials on the results of the first six months of Rand's project on "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale," based on long, open-ended interviews with Viet Cong prisoners and defectors. His findings confirmed and went far to explain the high "morale" that so perplexed Eisenhower, White, and Taylor. I remember his briefing my boss, John

⁵ Clark Clifford's notes on the meeting of January 19, 1961 (pp, 11, 637). (This sentence, and the rest of the paragraph—in which President Eisenhower offers his "explanation [that] the Communist philosophy appeared to produce a better sense of dedication"—has been deleted from the GPO edition by the Defense Department censors: see the blank page following Volume 10, page 1364.)
⁶ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, page 503.

McNaughton, on a late afternoon in December, 1964; when he finished, McNaughton commented: "If what you say is true, we're fighting on the wrong side." I don't recall the subject being raised again. It was a busy time for us; the sustained bombing of the North began a couple of months later, after much preparation.

Two subsequent years in Vietnam taught me much, but not—I realized later—about the Viet Cong. By the time I left I knew many Vietnamese, including former Viet Minh from the "First War," and a great deal about U.S. and GVN/ARVN operations, but—like all officials, really—I knew relatively little, other than abstractions and allegations, about the National Liberation Front. I had been shot at by Viet Cong, but had never (knowingly) met one.

Meanwhile, Rand field researchers (including Anthony Russo) had gone on to collect over one thousand interviews, some of them as long as sixty single-spaced pages, with Viet Cong and North Vietnamese prisoners. So when I returned to Rand in 1968, I was finally exposed to the detailed thoughts and feelings of "the enemy" to a degree scarcely possible for an American working in Vietnam. Though some of the Rand reports, unlike Zasloff's, were discreditable as analyses,⁷ the basic data were unprecedentedly revealing—and affecting. Just as the Pentagon Papers changed the few officials who read them, these autobiographical accounts strongly impressed most of those who worked closely with them. Some of these analysts were cynical "psy-warriors" who had been reading prisoner interrogations for over twenty years, throughout World War II and the Cold War; but never ones like these. Reading their conclusions between 1968-1970 added to my education about the war—legitimizing the cause of our opponents and further discrediting our own—in ways that were disconcerting and painful to one already disillusioned, in other respects, by services in Vietnam and by the Pentagon Papers.

But about ten years earlier, without benefit of any classified Rand reports, I. F. Stone had commented brilliantly on the bafflement of Taylor and the obtuseness of most of us who went abroad to serve on the Empire's new frontier:

⁷ A major exception is Russo's own important analysis, "Social and Economic Correlates of Government Control in South Vietnam," in Anger, *Violence, and Politics*, ed. Gurr and Fierabend (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1972). Also see Anthony Russo, "Inside the Rand Corporation and Out: My Story," *Ramparts*, X, April, 1972, pages 45-55.

In reading the military literature on guerrilla warfare now so fashionable at the Pentagon, one feels that these writers are like men watching a dance from outside through heavy plate glass windows. They see the motions but they can't hear the music. They put the mechanical gestures down on paper with pedantic fidelity. But what rarely comes through to them are the injured racial feelings, the misery, the ranking slights, the hatred, the devotion, the inspiration and the desperation. So they do not really understand what leads men to abandon wife, children, home, career, and friends; to take to the bush and live gun in hand like a hunted animal; to challenge overwhelming military odds rather than acquiesce any longer in humiliation, injustice, or poverty.⁸

Discussions of Revolutionary Development commonly emphasize that the central object of the process is to win not only the sympathy but the active commitment and support of the people to the GVN side. This is seen as primarily the mission of the RD cadre. But exactly what is desired of the people: how much and how urgently? And what can reasonably be expected of them: or of the cadre? Exponents of RD differ on the degree of public involvement that is regarded as necessary and attainable.

One influential view is that it is both feasible and essential to achieve a very high level of commitment to the GVN and total involvement in the defense against the VC, on a widespread basis, among villagers in areas currently contested or VC-controlled. This commitment would be embodied ultimately in a "people's self-defense" or hamlet militia effort in which virtually everyone in the hamlet would participate vigorously—old women and children providing early warning, men and women building defenses, and the younger men bearing arms—so as to ward off all but large-scale VC efforts to penetrate the hamlet for propaganda, tax collection, recruiting, or assassination.

In its most ambitious form, this approach foresees a landscape of hedgehog defenses shutting out the VC, who wander rootless and harassed by a hostile partisan militia, unable to get a drink

⁸ I. F. Stone, *In A Time of Torment* (New York, 1967), pages 173-74. This passage was brought to my attention by Eghal Ahmad's outstanding critique, "Winning Hearts and Minds: The Theory and Fallacies of Counterinsurgency," *The Nation*, August 2, 1971, pages 70-85.

of water or the time of day—even at gunpoint. "The people" will provide their own security, better than the PF (or implicitly, RF or ARVN) provide it today; they will themselves root out the concealed VC agents in their midst, as the police have so far neglected to do; and all this is to be brought about predominantly by the catalytic influence of the RD cadre. Thus default by the GVN military and police on their responsibilities to protect the people and defeat conspiracy will be made good by an aroused citizenry shouldering the responsibilities themselves, a "country-side at arms."

We do not think this is going to happen.

It is too late in the war. These people have seen too many government promises broken, sooner or later, over the years: promises to remain, to protect them, to bring social justice and lasting benefits. Their resistance to active, visible involvement, now, reflects skepticism and fear that is rooted deep in bitter experience. They have seen Communist guerrilla presence outlast several pacification programs, many province chiefs, and countless cadre. They are beyond the point where enthusiasm, major efforts, and truly deep commitment to a GVN are realistic mid-term demands. To ask of them at this point to take up the heavy burden of their own defense, to choose sides publicly and irrevocably, is to ask too much.

This is not to deny that hamlets and enclaves already exist where religious bonds and leadership or inspiring local officials have produced just the active self-defense that this concept demands. Cadre and officials should indeed be alert to support this spirit where it emerges spontaneously, or where it is a genuine response to GVN efforts. But it is not now something to be programmed and scheduled, or expected or aimed for on a mass basis.

In most of the area that requires RD, a genuine, intense, high-level public involvement, reflected in truly effective "partisan" defense, is simply not to be achieved in a matter of months or a year or two, if ever: not by the cadre as they are, or as they may become, or even in context of all the reforms suggested in this paper. To press for it in every case, to take it as the basic measure of cadre and RD success, is to invite distortion of effort,

counterproductive nagging and coercion by cadre, self-deception, and false reporting. It is to ensure another failure, of a sort that grows more costly for the GVN each time.

Fortunately, no such *tour de force* need really be demanded of the RD cadre. What is required in the mid-term is low-to-moderate-level public involvement on the GVN side: willing *cooperation* with government authorities, and increasing avoidance of collaboration with the VC. Under present circumstances, this is still an ambitious aim; and it is essential to thorough, lasting success in countering the guerrillas and Communist apparatus. On both counts, it would be an achievement worthy of the considerable efforts and reforms it demands from all agencies of government.

If the people in the contested areas are to cooperate with the GVN in this fashion, they must be persuaded that: (a) the risks of helping the GVN and of resisting the VC are acceptably low; (b) the GVN means to win, and (with Free World help) has the ability to win; (c) the GVN deserves their respect and support.

For most people in the rural areas, these beliefs would represent radical changes in attitude. Their present noninvolvement, passive help to both sides when pressed, or apathy toward the GVN and covert aid to VC, flow from specific attitudes like the following, which must be countered:

- (1) The VC will win in the end: after the U.S. leaves or stops fighting, when the whole effort against the VC will collapse.
- (2) The GVN will not stay in the local area, despite its promises: the VC will return (and its covert apparatus will remain throughout).
- (3) Any willing cooperation with the GVN will be noted by the local VC apparatus and eventually punished; participation as an elected or appointed GVN official is likely to mean death.
- (4) The RVNAF will not keep out the VC, will not support people's resistance against VC, and will not even reinforce friendly units under attack: RVNAF troops are a heavy burden upon the people, rather than their protectors.
- (5) GVN officials are indifferent to the welfare of the people.
- (6) The GVN at low levels is the tool of the landlords and the local rich, at all levels is a means to self-enrichment of officials.
- (7) The corruption, lack of motivation, and inefficiency of GVN officials is in dramatic contrast to the VC hierarchy, which (in the

minds of the peasants, including those who oppose the VC for their cruelty, their demands, their Communism or atheism) is incorruptible, dedicated, and efficient.

None of these attitudes can be changed by GVN/cadre words alone. Changing them is not merely a problem of communication or of "carrying the GVN message to the people." The supporting reality—the element of truth underlying each of these beliefs—must change.

Words and actions of RD cadre are scarcely the main evidence that shapes people's impressions of the nature of the GVN. When RD cadre tell the villagers about the government, they are not speaking to the credulous or ignorant. They are speaking to the people who see "the government" every day, people who are experiencing the conduct of government representatives—ARVN, RF, PF, police, district and province officials, technical cadre—even while the RD cadre talk. If that conduct confirms what VC cadre say, rather than what RD cadre say, the latter's words are wasted. Too often now that is the case. The very conception of the RD cadre as a tool to promote a favorable image of the GVN is prompted by the failure of the RVNAF and regular GVN officials to have done so by their normal behavior: indeed, from and tendency of many units and officials to blacken the name of the GVN.

The cadre example at its best will have little lasting impact on the attitudes of the villagers so long as it must compete with the more vivid impressions formed by:

- RVNAF units that fail to provide security; to operate at night or interfere with the movement of armed VC; to support hamlet cadre or outposts under attack at night; or even to protect themselves adequately against surprise.
- Rangers and other ARVN soldiers who steal chickens and pigs (under the eyes of their officers); who take meals and goods in the towns without paying; ignore police and civil authority; commit petty crimes without punishment; and terrorize the towns with drunken rampages, rape, and undisciplined shooting.
- PF or RF units whose leaders hire them out to collect rents for rich landlords.
- Village and district officials and police who set a price on every service they provide; who sell supplies provided for "self-help" prof-

ects; who not only provide for a decent living and their "old-age security," but manage to grow unjustly rich through corruption.

- ARVN and sector artillery practices that contribute to insecurity and demonstrate indifference to welfare by erratic, unobserved, indiscriminate firing.

- National Police who charge tolls at [contraband] checkpoints.
- Officials and technical cadre totally lacking in competence, training, motivation, or discipline.

- GVN neglect of the welfare even of its own representatives and its most committed supporters; e.g., the low pay, poor medical care, and lack of dependents' housing and support for RF/PF.

In securing vitally needed collaboration by the public, VC arguments and coercion are most effective in the context of real GVN failings and abuses. GVN campaigns to win support and end the collaboration cannot wholly succeed while the abuses continue. (At best, some good impressions will join the bad, so that feelings toward the GVN progress toward ambivalence.) Before a change can be expected in the people's attitude and conduct toward the government, there must be a change in the government's attitude and conduct toward the people.

Of first importance is improving the behavior of those government representatives whose misconduct the people see most widely and frequently and feel most acutely: *the soldiers*. The arrival of a Ranger battalion is generally regarded now by townspeople and peasants alike as the coming of a scourge.⁹ (One province chief recently threatened to put trucks on the runway if a certain battalion of Rangers, already en route by air to his province, was not ordered back. In two provinces, villagers reportedly asked the VC to deliver them from the Ranger battalions then afflicting them.) It is easy to believe that such troops have been worth far more to the VC than to the GVN. But this is only an extreme; most other units abuse the public less flamboyantly but more steadily, daily demonstrating in a multitude

⁹ Partly to underline the importance of ARVN conduct, one of the eighty-one recommendations of the Jacobson Roles and Mission study group was that Ranger units "because of their frequently intolerable conduct toward the populace, be disbanded with individual Rangers reassigned" (PP, II, 584). The Pentagon Papers analyst notes: "This was a recommendation which MACV particularly opposed, arguing that it 'would seriously reduce ARVN combat strength.' Westmoreland added that he could not countenance the disbanding of units which had just received a Presidential Unit Citation."

of ways their feelings of isolation from the public, their lack of responsibility to the people or respect for them. No GVN program or "psy-war" measure could have such widespread, immediate, and favorable impact as change in such attitudes and conduct by the soldiers; without that change, other efforts to improve the image of the GVN and induce more willing cooperation have scant chance of success.

The first step must be to bring about understanding in the RVN/AF—starting with the highest military commanders and working down to the junior officers and troops—of the importance of proper, disciplined conduct to Revolutionary Development and to winning the war. (ARVN battalions newly committed to support of RD, in particular, need troop reorientation training.) Effective "motivational training" aims first at just such understanding; plus understanding of the nature and aims of the war and the soldiers' role in it, to generate a sense of dignity, self-respect, and purpose—prerequisites to self-disciplined behavior. *All troops and officers* in RVN/AF need that indoctrination (as does the civil side of the GVN): backed up increasingly by the example of dedication, purposeful direction, and command discipline in their superiors. Second, the troops deserve more evidence of concern for their welfare by their government and country: above all, by pay protected from inflation and by adequate dependents' housing and other dependents' benefits (so that soldiers and their families will have less basis for the resentful belief that peasants, refugees, and Chieu Hoi rangers [VC defectors] should be doing "civic action" for them.)

These measures are just as relevant to the achievement of higher combat performance. Within this framework of better understanding and incentives, *military discipline should begin to be rigidly enforced at all levels within RVN/AF ranks*, to the ends both of adequate observance of military orders and regulations and of proper conduct toward the public. Probably no other program could so surely or with wide approval stamp a government of Vietnam as truly "revolutionary."

A comparable program of reform on the civil side of the GVN is likewise essential to the success of RD. Just as the RD cadre

need effective military performance in their area—lest inadequate security or undisciplined troop conduct *negate* their efforts—so they need good civil government over them if they are to carry out their mission.

As representatives of the national government, RD cadre are often correctly described as indispensable links between the district level, where national government has traditionally stopped, and the hamlets and villages. But bridging that gap is of conditional value to the villager. Links to an indifferent, incompetent, or corrupt level of government are not worth very much to him. Cadre can testify to the intentions of the government to serve and protect the people; they can be a channel of grievances, aspirations, and intelligence to higher authority. Yet if the government neglects to demonstrate those intentions in action—if the district and province officials and technical cadre fail to *act* upon the cadre information, to resolve grievances, satisfy reasonable aspirations, exploit intelligence—the cadre will have, in the end, little impact.

Moreover, experience already shows that the cadre teams themselves need the supervision and guidance of alert, dedicated district and province officials if they are to work effectively. The support of the district chief is most critical to their performance. Where the district chief is conscientious, sees the RD cadre as "his" workers, and understands their mission, they are showing encouraging promise. Where the district chief is apathetic toward the cadre and accepts no responsibility for them—perhaps still the majority of districts where RD cadre are deployed—they act distressingly like most other "cadre" of recent years, i.e., they are prone to do almost nothing at all. (Mechanical census-taking threatens to succeed the mechanical fence-building of yesterday.)

Ultimately, it is a delusion to imagine that RD cadre could persist as an honest, highly motivated element in what continued to be a corrupt, apathetic administrative system. Where the district/province officials are corrupt, the cadre will be forced to buy their appointments and promotions (and draft deferment) and to kickback on their salary; immersed from the start in a traditional pattern of petty corruptions, they will scarcely be

inspired to be avid reformers in the hamlets. *In the end the GVN will get the cadre it deserves: just as it now has the RVNAF and police it has deserved.*

But what is true for the cadre is true for the district chief: and on up the line. There is a deadly correlation between corruption at high levels in an administrative system and the spread throughout the system of incompetence, as higher-ups encourage and promote corrupt subordinates, protecting them from the consequences of poor performance of duty or direct disobedience of orders. Such a system demoralizes and "selects out" the able and the dedicated who do not play the game, and thwarts any attempts at reform initiated at intermediate levels. There is no escape from the requirement that reform, unlike revolution, must start at the top.

Today the government of Vietnam and its armed forces need urgent radical reforms, starting from the top, including in particular, throughout the GVN structure: (1) *marked reduction of corruption*; (2) *encouragement of leadership and initiative*; and (3) *promotion on merit*.

Such reforms must replace the current tendency to make appointments and promotions primarily on the basis of diplomacy, nepotism, political alliance, and kickbacks. The consequences of the present system are incompetence, lack of discipline, apathy, and encouragement of further corruption.

The military and administrative challenge posed by the Communist apparatus cannot be met by a government suffering these defects: they deprive the GVN of the ability to execute its programs. At the same time, the contrast (in the belief of most Vietnamese) to the Communists in these particular respects is an intolerable burden to the GVN in its political struggle with the VC for public and elite support.

The true urgency of these reforms does not emerge when one focuses upon the war against mobile, large-unit, regular Main Force and NVA forces, where Free World Military Assistance Forces have blocked military defeat and can continue to win significant successes without major help from RVNAF or the population. It is in the ultimately vital war against VC guerrillas

and apparatus for allegiance and control of the people in the countryside that GVN/RVNAF capability is and will remain crucial; and in which changes such as those discussed above mean the difference between potential success and almost certain failure. Very bluntly: present VC control in the countryside *will not be rolled back significantly or permanently by the GVN/RVNAF system as it now functions.* Nor will the political struggle in the countryside be won at all unless the GVN and RVNAF become capable of winning it.

An apparent alternative to high-level, thoroughgoing reform would be for the U.S. to substitute its own authority and capability for that of the GVN: bypassing the GVN in direct relations with province chiefs, RD cadre, and troop commanders, or relying wholly on U.S.-executed military and civil programs. Unaccompanied by an increase in GVN capability, this approach would fail in the long run. It would fail for many reasons, but one of the most fundamental is simply that the Vietnamese people do not expect the U.S. to remain in Vietnam bearing such responsibility indefinitely. Therefore, it is to the relative capabilities for struggle of the GVN and the VC apparatus that Vietnamese will look for answers to the crucial question: "Who is going to win in the end?"

Until the GVN begins to appear capable of gaining adequate popular participation and of countering a Communist resurgence on its own, after U.S. involvement has lessened, Free World Military Assistance Forces successes will appear to most Vietnamese (including the VC) as no more than holding operations postponing eventual GVN political defeat. That belief will preclude widespread Vietnamese commitment, adequate cooperation or involvement in the struggle against the VC; hence, in turn, block real progress toward GVN (and U.S.) aims.

Thus a U.S. "takeover," whether blatant or tacit and pragmatic, does not provide an adequate answer. At the same time the radical changes required *within* the GVN and RVNAF seem most unlikely to occur without the strong, focused, and coordinated exertion of U.S. influence at high levels. The goal of such private U.S. "intervention" must be a GVN capable of winning the support of its population and of winning the war. But in this

pursuit as well, the main bulk of the steady pressure and energy for reform must come eventually from Vietnamese. And in these efforts, as in the fight against the VC, there is need both for popular participation and for dedicated leadership.

Many of the young Vietnamese needed for success in a long political struggle—capable of able leadership and of tireless, selfless commitment to a cause that inspires them—are in VC cadre ranks today; and there are many more outside the VC, but fewer devoted to the GVN. To attract these young potential "activists" to the GVN effort—both from the uncommitted ranks, and eventually, from within the VC—initial steps toward reform are needed; but also more than reform: a chance to work toward meaningful public goals.

It is a striking fact that both sides, VC and GVN, proclaim publicly almost identical goals for South Vietnam (a tribute to their validity in Vietnamese terms, despite—save for unification—their "American" ring: security, freedom, independence, democracy, village reform, social justice, development and modernization, public welfare, and happiness.

On the VC side, much of this "platform" is cynical and expedient in the minds of the Communist elite, whose covert ideals call for "modernization" on a fifty-year-old blueprint of forced-draft industrialization under totalitarian controls, capitalized by exploitation of the peasants and preceded by a bloodbath to destroy or terrorize potential opposition: a vision so stark and repelling it must be kept esoteric.

There is no such ideological obstacle on the GVN side to giving unprecedented substance to the popular principles—of *government responding to and serving the welfare of the people*—it already professes. There are only obstacles of inertia, shortsightedness, and past despair.¹⁰ These can be overcome.

The war with the VC for the allegiance and the governing of the people of South Vietnam can be won: but only by RVNAF soldiers who have come to feel and act as protectors and friends

¹⁰ And of class and status interest, the history, politics, and sociology of ruling elites; their total dependence on foreign (U.S.) support, the short-term domestic political needs of the foreign rulers and the long-term economic interests of the foreign ruling groups, to name a few more obstacles I had missed—not so easily overcome.

of the people, and GVN officials who come to feel and act as servants of the people. That means today, it is in *their* hearts and minds, and conduct, that revolutionary development must first take place.

Or as General Taylor put it two years earlier in the November, 1964, briefing cited in the prefatory note (PP, III, 668):

If, as the evidence shows, we are playing a losing game in South Vietnam, it is high time we change and find a better way. To change the situation, it is quite clear that we need to do three things: first, establish an adequate government in SVN . . .

THE LOST COUNTERREVOLUTION

A review of Robert Shaplen's *The Road From War: Vietnam 1965-1970*, Harper & Row, New York, 1970, which appeared in the *Washington Post* (November 4, 1970).

Vietnam, 1965-70: the road from war? An unsettling title, for a book three-fifths of which covers the years of American buildup and escalation in Vietnam. And the irony has sharpened since the manuscript was sent to the publisher. It then consisted of twenty-two of Robert Shaplen's articles for the *New Yorker* (shortened and edited), the last of these having appeared January 31, 1970, under the regular caption, "Letter from Saigon."

Shaplen's next *New Yorker* piece, three months later, bore a new heading for the series: "Letter from Indochina." Shaplen had clearly not anticipated that the road from war in Vietnam lay, for some U.S. troops, west through Cambodia, or that what we were on was, all along, the road to the Second Indochina War.

If that last phrase would be a better title for this book, it will serve for his next, and most readers might be well advised to wait for that. But it is questionable whether Shaplen should repeat the experiment of his present format, which lays successive pieces of current reportage end to end. Shaplen's distinguished reporting—complex, reflective, and experienced—is produced in the form of long, dull essays. Hence the temptation simply to reprint them as a "journal," preserving their present tense, their burden of false starts and alarms.

But the effect is cruel to content. It calls into question the very relevance of Shaplen's chosen beat, the "political" side of the war as Shaplen defines it: primarily Saigon maneuvering and "pacification" operations in the countryside. Most of what Shaplen covers does, indeed, go unreported elsewhere; but it is hard to find that negligent when one rereads these columns in sequence.