

DEBRIEF OF AN AID SOCIOLOGIST

VIETNAM

1966 - 1967

No. 186710B

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Content Summary

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She attempted an experimental program whose main aim was to politicize the rural women and assist in the counter-insurgency effort. She began her program by introducing bland, noncontroversial subject matter such as baby care and improved rice. Later, she introduced the virtue of good citizenship. An attempt was made to create the kind of loyalty for the community, which the Vietnamese usually reserve exclusively for the family.

She took them on field trips to other villages, which permitted them to recognize village needs and shortcomings, which would otherwise go undetected in their own village.

She attempted to develop a positive program for good citizenship rather than an anti-VC program, because many of her students were VC or VC sympathizers. In addition, the VC officials are far more loyal and dedicated than the local government officials, so attacking the VC would only open up the government to the same kind of attack to a much greater degree.

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Because AID did not lease a house for her, thinking she would get over the idea of living out in the province, she moved in for three months with the province

chief, his wife, their seven children and nine dogs. She had four months of language training which was not enough.

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The difficulty with the American gift giving is that it is so overdone, that it loses its value.

The American "get cracking" approach is hated by the Vietnamese who prefer a long period of small talk in a relationship.

The Vietnamese desire to avoid involvement in any decisions as seen by the inability of the American to find his counterpart in times of crisis, can be exasperating for the American.

The Northerners and the Southerners have a strong dislike for each other, but both regard the Central people rather highly. The Northerners are extremely proud and frequently eat nothing but spinach so as to save money for clothes or an education. The Southerners think this is arrogance and will gladly wear patched clothes to enable him to eat a full meal. He has little ambition.

There is a large difference between the urban and rural Vietnamese. Whereas the rural people are proud, self sufficient, and would never beg, the urban people will ask you for money, clothes, or things from the PX.

Her living with the Cambodians and the Vietnamese permitted an excellent opportunity for comparison of cultures. Although she found the Cambodians to be warm, good fighters, loyal to the community, content to live simply and willing to pitch in, the Vietnamese, though superficially polite, are strained in their relations, loyal only to their family, distrustful of neighbors and unwilling to let you, as an American, ever get really close to them.

PREFACE

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1. Provide AID with management insights suggesting alterations in current policies and practices and to identify patterns, trends and problems which, when analyzed, will provide guidance for future assistance plans and programs.
2. Accumulate new or updated information for an institutional memory, for fundamental research and for application to future development assistance programs.
3. Provide material for understanding the cultural framework of a country, and the dynamics of its mode of social change. And, as a correlate, to discover customs, mores, taboos and other relevant factors which affect interpersonal relationships between Americans and members of a host community.
4. Provide material suitable for instructional purposes.
5. Obtain information which will be of value--generally and specifically--to American overseas personnel in their future assignments.

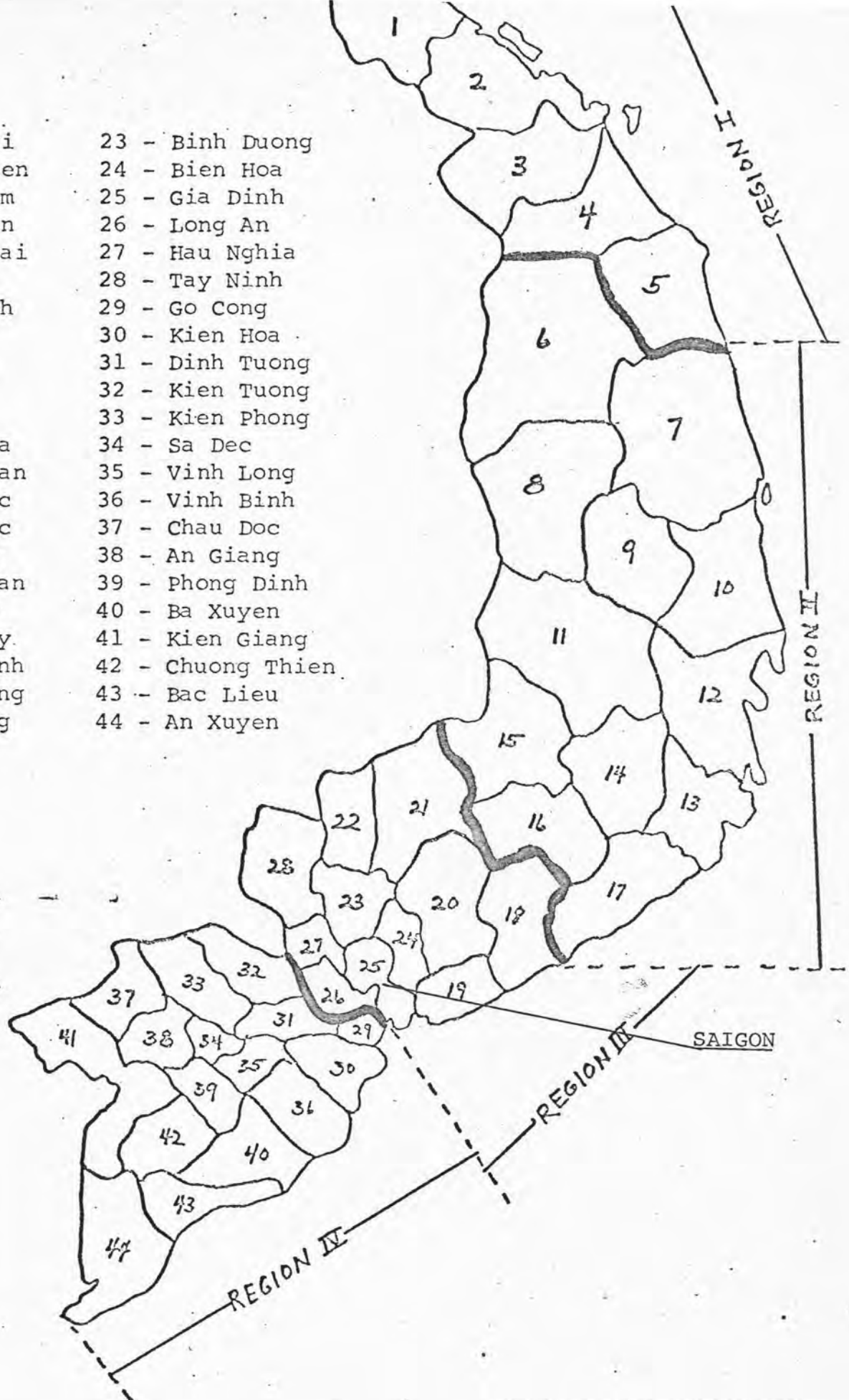
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REGIONS AND PROVINCES
OF
SOUTH VIETNAM

DEBRIEF OF AN AID SOCIOLOGIST

Vietnam

1966-1967

Role and Function of Position

In 1963 and 1964 I lived in a province in the South called Vinh Binh where I was trying to do an experimental program for rural women. The first 10 months of this was done under Madame Nhu's regime. Therefore, we worked very quietly. I found the most valuable thing to do was establish a program for a day in the town somewhere getting the Vietnamese people to contribute something, and then watch the reaction among the audience to see if this is the kind of thing they wanted. Sometimes afterwards at a tea they would say, "Oh, we wish you'd have something like this on this subject, or why not this kind of thing," etc.

I was trying to discover what would appeal to rural women; what their needs were, those that they knew they wanted. And those that we felt they perhaps could benefit from, and also for any role to be played to aid us in the counter-insurgency effort--such as calling men back from the VC, encouraging what later became Chieu Hoi idea. I was experimenting, first under Madame Nhu's reign of the soft times and then under the terrible legacy she left behind--where nobody trusted any woman's movement. So I was not able to look as though I was organizing in any way. In a way this was most beneficial because it forced me to do more than I might have normally done. Like going to the Vietnamese themselves and involving them completely. Letting the five government offices of education, health, agriculture, veterinary science, which is separate from agriculture, and NACCO (National Agriculture Credit Organization) operate on a stage that I created, with me in the wings pushing them out when they lacked the confidence to go. Technicians are generally fairly well-trained. Perhaps it's a limited training, but they know it well. When I went there, they were not performing to their fullest. They were not going out to the districts at all, and they were not using their skills. Things were at a terrific standstill.

I had a change of province chiefs when Diem's regime fell. Just previous to this, I also had a change--we had many. I got a girl, a wife of the province chief, who proved to be very helpful. She and I got together with a local school principal and several other leading influential women that I knew. We also had many, many sessions by ourselves. We drafted up what was really coming out to be the residue of these day-long sessions, tea parties and meetings with the women. I did this before I

launched the actual program itself--just feeling it out. It's slow-going, and it's hard living it out like this because your fingers get very itchy. But I just knew that it had to come from them or we would be criticized because everyone was so touchy about what Madame Nhu had done. She had a very powerful military group. All the men were afraid of this including the government and the army. I met with many men on this problem including province chiefs and the director of education in my province. I decided that with her help and others the best thing to present was something that presented the rural women's role as they saw it. Something very accepted by them--child care, washing the baby, what do you put on the baby's cuts and bruises; real simple things--improved rice, improved pigs, etc. This was so completely bland in its appearance that it was accepted by most people although it had to be sold over and over again to each individual province chief or each individual person who had to give his agreement to the authority structure. Then on a very subtle line we included a few lectures on taxation or how we support our local militia, something like this. Things that were maybe burning questions. We had a cholera epidemic that year and we had instructions on that. Carefully put in along with cutting a pattern, learning to sew on a machine, were such things as the vote and franchise, what it means, what the word citizen means. I would give one lecture the next to the last day. Training was about five days long, one hour a day. It's the only time I officially spoke to the group who were living and eating in our houses. It was generally on what USAID was there for--what the handclasp meant. I also gave the list of commodities which were not to be sold and those which could be sold on the import program. They were both sent with the handclasp and people couldn't tell the difference. They were always being accused of blackmarketing and didn't realize why. They couldn't understand why we distributed something that we were very careful about. After class hours, in bull sessions and private conversations, we began to know these women. In these follow-up sessions we pursued the counter-insurgency trend. And eventually, from a collection of provinces that I had expanded to after a number of months I formed a leadership group, picking from the province chiefs and the different areas. It was a discussion-type affair. They were delighted to learn some leadership techniques, because for the most part they didn't know how to get along with other women. They didn't know what to do about jealousy in groups, what to do about ambitious women, skilled women who weren't being used, etc.

The most important thing I think we did in this program was that as we designed it, we really lived it out. We published all the material, complete, in a packet--everything from menus, from any word anybody uttered on the stage, demonstrations, pictures went into these packets. They were

available to people who once having attended the session might want to produce their own session with or without any Americans around or any real province agents, with maybe only district agents, like the rural health district man instead of the province man. This was exceptionally good, not the way we would like to do things, but the only way they seem to feel close. Unless they had all the material right there to use, they were afraid to venture forth. I was amused that at their audiences they rarely mentioned that they did not develop it, but just proceeded to take the admiration and respect that came after the program. So this was significant. You have to start where they are. This is tradition, this is the way things have been done; we had lectures and things published on a piece of paper for people to read. We are also cutting the words down to very simple things so they could understand them. I noticed that women who would sit in on the lectures were unused to concentration or listening for more than five to ten minutes on anything other than daily routines, that they found it very hard to follow. At the rest period after lunch, the normal siesta time, everyone was reading lectures they heard that morning. This was accomplished with real uneducated rural women in Vietnam. I think it's important to use this approach because they are not able to take it all in. They haven't been to school at all in 18 years. They barely read and write. Our requirement was that you could read, but we had many that really suffered, because they couldn't read a whole lot. Very often you'd get one woman who was a bad reader and possibly two, three or four more. You didn't say anything because this is what you meet in the villages all the time. We ask these women if they can read and they say "yes." When a newspaper ventures into the village, one woman reads it and they all listen. There is about 50 per cent illiteracy among women in Vietnam. They do have literacy programs but they promised us, of course, to carry them out among themselves. It depends upon the richness of the province, how much their budget allows them to carry on these programs. The budget for literacy on the national level has been very, very low--it's been zero the last couple of years. You can check that but I think it's been very little.

I think the people want to learn to read. They do not want to admit they can't. We've learned in the literacy phase that picture methods and a lot of methods used on television with pre-school children are perfect. This didn't insult them at all. I talked to the young girls about organizing classes with the older women but they couldn't get the older women to come forth and admit that they couldn't read. A simpler way where they can almost teach themselves is through packets of literacy materials. In the local primary school a private teacher volunteered to help me with the first initial class. She did

a great deal of work. She made packets of literacy materials for these women, who were district chiefs' wives or civil service wives. They would not have made them themselves, they wouldn't bother. We would produce the program or we'd talk their husbands into giving permission to produce such a program out in the district. Eventually then we were able to take the program on trucks to the districts. And we took the pigs, the animals, the sweet potatoes, and all the beds and tables and food--everything loaded onto these enormous trucks which we commandeered from USAID. These sessions were attended by USAID as well. I think this program demonstrated a real need.

We just did a follow-up after the five-day class. We stayed up there about two weeks and visited the homes of the girls who had been in our classes. This proved to be real vital and accepted by the people. The philosophy would be then not to go to Saigon, that would be dangerous for a single girl. But to be able to go to something not very far away was a different story. Many of the men came to our sessions and stood at the back and listened to the whole thing. All the pamphlets and everything that was taken home was looked over by every man who wanted to know what his wife or his daughter was up to. It proved to be a wonderful week lacking in monotony, a chance to get away from the house and gossip, and so forth. We had cooking sessions, pattern-making sessions, and all the films produced by the education department and health department in Vietnam, which were very good. There were many simple films. We ran something like 25 to 30 after each school five-day session that we had. They've never seen so many movies in their life, they just loved it. Visual aids always are easy, and very acceptable. We even ran travel films at night; they were tired by evening but they would come to class anyway. They gained a lot of prestige, they were personally seen by the province chief, and he shook their hands, or by the doctor in the area or district, or the rural health man; they met officials who they could next week go down and meet on a real honest basis. Our school gave them a reason sometimes to pursue things they had been afraid to do before.

The men were quite wary at first, but eventually the word spread--that's all. Everything was looked over, we never mentioned the VC. The south has many a son in the VC, the local support is well known. Many girls sitting in my class were VC. We never mentioned that. We talked about citizenship, we talked about women's roles. We talked about the new Vietnam, the future Vietnam, Vietnam among other Asian nations, "Vietnam is going to come up like it has been in the past." We talked about better health, better life for our families, for our communities--all which we were pushing for the cause of democracy. The VC could find no complaints for this was what they were saying as well. We said nothing openly about

them and no lecturer who appeared on the so-called stage that was set up was permitted to mention this. I had a briefing session with all of them to explain our reason for this, that the women were too vulnerable and this is true. The VC very often visit these women. I noticed you asked me here about this, because I never remembered anything they produced in propaganda aimed at the women; but I remember that when the men were in the fields, they often visited with the women at home threatening them for rice, saying they will take their children and often did take the child. There was a lot of this, and these women were just too vulnerable. This is a whole new approach for an American to have. The agents or government were delighted because it meant that they weren't going to get any help. But I frankly think that the minute you start in on the enemy you put a whole negative approach on your course of action, and at this time it's not the answer. Because if you want to find holes, discrepancies in your enemy, your enemy can turn around and can find holes and discrepancies in your local government--in the very thing you're trying to support, which far exceeds what he has gotten into. The VC officials are loyal workers and far more dedicated than any local people. So I don't believe the situation as it exists, then or now, in Vietnam is one where you can do an anti-program. A positive program is what you need.

As long as nothing was said about the VC the neighbor who went with you to the program and who you knew very well had a brother in the VC, and therefore was on the spot as to what stand to take; you could never say that you learned something she didn't learn or that you were an agent and so forth. I was the only American in view. I wore Vietnamese clothes, I ate with the girls. By the time I gave the hour's lecture I spent four days with them, sitting and eating with them and discussing what the Vietnamese approved of. Amazingly they had ceased to pinch me and consider that I was different. I was now someone they said, "Hey, why don't you teach us how to cook something American, or can you sew clothes American style." I showed them paper patterns and this kind of thing. This disassociated me as being a wicked government advisor or a very brainwashed government advisor.

The people weren't leery towards Americans, just curious. There was very little animosity. I think the anti-Americanism that exists now was non-existent then. It never is as great in the rural section as in Saigon. But, of course, in those days there were only a few of us, a USAID man with his family, myself and this girl. Some were leery of me because I'm so different and they're not used to that. Many of them have never seen American women's clothes before. They thought my blue eyes very unusual. But the fact that I ate every day with them and obviously relished it (I got fatter and fatter) meant a great deal to these peasant people. My teachers who were from the various

government agencies or Saigon did not sit with me. Everybody took a different round table at each meal. The students immediately decide what table they should sit at and always revisited it, with their little cliques and so forth. They didn't get to meet as many students as they would have possibly liked to but they met a lot of different teachers. This is very important. I trained as part of my teaching staff, my cooks, my boy (assistant) who ran the films, the gardener, anybody who was from the place, because people who asked them questions may have had more of an open ear to hear the real reason for having a program. These people had a real understanding and were very much for it because they understood the program thoroughly. They came to staff meetings and they were part of the group. Believe me when we went out in the district they proved it to me, I know.

The time I spent establishing rapport and getting the ideas across was well spent. The servants group at my place proved to be a help in setting up a program in the field; they had an amazing ability to get the thing rolling. I just feel certain it was because they were in on everything and they felt like they were doing their job—really contributing. It allowed the rest of us to be free to do other things. They ate after we ate but very often one of us ate with them because someone was always late. The final dismantling of the school and moving on to another district always took about two days. We developed a real definite pattern for loading the trucks because we had beds and tables which we had to use, and animals that we could only put on at the last minute, a big boar, a cage of rabbits, and a case of hybrid chickens which could be bought locally from a hybrid chicken farm near us. I had a number of baby rabbits that could be given away if necessary. We had cuttings which we used to get our fresh sweet potato cuttings from for the last day. Each person went home with a cutting of a sweet potato to be planted. We worked all kinds of gimmicks like the army bringing these cuttings to us and everybody wondered how we managed to do it. NACCO gave us little bags of fertilizer for each person. They also had some vegetables to go with it by that time. There were pamphlets, books and each girl got enough material for a blouse because she had learned how to make one and made it herself. Several barrels of cloth, or big seabags of cloth, came to me by mistake. They had been off-loaded at Saigon port and given to AID and AID didn't know what to do with it. And someone said, "Well, if it's cotton material probably she will know what to do with it," and I sure did. It lasted through I don't know how many sessions. But, traditionally, if you go to a school session of this type for adults you've got to take home some rewards to show it was worth your time. The cloth was fine.

There was no charge for attending the school session. We even paid bus fare or we paid if you rented a bicycle from someone. We did not overpay, we did not give a grant of money. We figured out meticulously to the mile how far you'd come on the bus, and that's the money you got back. To make a profit you merely didn't have to pay. The province granted me this money, not USAID; I had no money from USAID at all. I had to talk the province chief into giving me so much money.

We had to start with the province officials' wives because you must work through your authorities' system and it must have their approval before anyone else will dare to attend. Our first session was aimed at the province civil servants, the province chief's wife, and the province civil servants of the high level and those people brought in from the outside, or district chiefs' wives, or mid-wives or influential women depending on the area.

The district chiefs were asked to select the women. I got many girls that weren't much use and wouldn't do anything in the future on this. But, of course, I had to accept what was chosen by the district chiefs who were all military captains and therefore hadn't had too much education. This one thing, that they were allowed to choose women from their districts to come to my original program meant a great deal when we got to the time where we wanted to ask them if we could bring them to the district program; they thought they were in on it, that they had chosen. They were invited and they came and there was a big party for them, and the province chiefs had reason to see all the district chiefs. I worked this out with them because I thought this was important.

We had to plan carefully yet the planning could only come really at the end when you had, sort of, tried to slip through what was traditional and what would be expected and what ought to be included so that people would feel at home. Then we would inject a few things like paying for the transportation--that's an American concept. The Vietnamese finally did this because they realized that other than the district chiefs' wives, the people who came to the session were real hamlet people and they didn't have the money for it and they realized that.

Our first session was held in Tra Vinh at this large house. We could bed down about 30 at a time, and we had sixty coming to our sessions. A lot of hamlets that were nearby, a half mile or so. The girls bicycled in and had a lunch with us and spent the afternoon and rode back before it got too dark. The people were from areas where they could not travel back and forth all the time; it would have been too obvious, or something, if they were allowed to spend the night. Usually, we planned on 60--30 who were sort of day students and 30 who we kept with us boarding all the time.

It was interesting in Vinh Binh because more than half of the villagers are Cambodian. And so we had a high mixture of Cambodian. When I held the first session, the district chiefs' wives session, I filled the room with women from nearby Cambodian hamlets. The next session we had to simplify the language because the Cambodian girls reported to us that although the district chiefs' wives might have understood all those words they didn't. They have never studied Vietnamese and it had to be that simple. We made a specific effort to include this minority. I got a volunteer assistant who stayed with me for a year and went out in the districts with me. She was the wife of the leading Cambodian layman, and gave great support. To this day, I have been backed solidly by the Cambodian minority.

The Vietnamese merely tolerate the Cambodian mainly because, you see, I chose the hamlet type of girl. This girl was new. Perhaps she had no education and they very smilingly looked down on her, which she expected anyhow. The only one they ever worried about was my Cambodian assistant, who was part Vietnamese, and speaks excellent Cambodian and excellent Vietnamese. Therefore, she is envied by a lot of the women. She threaded her way through some very difficult group sessions in a most diplomatic fashion. She did very, very well. She married an engineer who comes from one of the richest Cambodian families in the whole area. He doesn't have any money because he gives it all away to the Cambodians to help them improve themselves. He is a very dedicated Buddhist elder. People were amazed that she would go out and sleep on a canvas cot and stay with us in the districts, and she did it over and over again. She did it when she was very pregnant and I worried about her riding along in a jeep.

I had a Vietnamese assistant too. The original interpreter I got told us she didn't like to stay out so long, possibly because she's a Saigon girl. I recruited an assistant from the area, a teacher. She was out of a job, and this proved to be much better. Her language, her knowledge of the area, and the fact that her father was a principal of a high school, made her pretty well accepted. I found that she had little need for the niceties of Saigon. She didn't have any preconceptions of what this training should be. So I trained her and she proved to be so valuable that the next year when we spread to other provinces she would check on the sessions that were going to be held in a province. She would go to one province and I would go to another. In areas where I could speak English or I could be sure my Vietnamese could be understood by the people I would go, and she would go to the ones I felt we both should go to. She eventually got to a point where she could handle it herself.

I was at the end of my tour when the program was dissolved by the director, but I was asked to stay on to try and help clean up their urban program. As a result, I remained about seven months longer in Saigon than expected.

The program was set up to be an ongoing thing. Just before I left Saigon this time, one of my old cooks came in and said that this Cambodian assistant wanted some materials from me to remind her about what we had done and she wanted to continue this maybe in the Cambodian groups herself. In our province it went down to district level and farther on. We did a lot of follow up. We would call women in who had been our students for one day sessions from the district, have a big lunch and entertainment, and some discussion about what they were using. Now the program was based on what a woman, an individual student, could do for her community instead of just her family; what further things she could do, what she would be able to accomplish through using the men to start things, improving things, self-help projects, bettering of the school or literacy programs, etc. Mostly because this is traditional role that the woman plays--she's an iron butterfly and very quiet. Also because anything else would have been entirely unacceptable after the aggressive program of Madame Nhu. Madame Nhu's idea was to more or less throw away the traditional role, cut down the collars, and not be traditional Vietnamese. While the women are very influential on the men, the men did not buy the Vietnamese women changing her appearance role. So our philosophy was that they should remain traditional and operate accordingly--how did you get things done for your family, through your relatives, your husband or your brother or whatever, and how could you accomplish things for the community in the same way. One of the interesting experiments that eventually became a vital part of the program was a field trip, sending two or three women into the nearby villages to observe their needs. On the first trip the girls didn't see anything. By the third they had learned to come back and say, "Did you see that bridge? I think it should be replaced," or "It could be wider" or "Why do they have such a poor well system"--they began to see things. Then they saw themselves that they had learned to see and all that was wrong really was the lack of unity. They're all very aware of it but they're afraid to do anything about it because they didn't know how to see. You had to learn to see about other people first. You had to learn to be able to look outside your own area.

We had good success with our self-help projects. I think our program improved because we changed it every time; when we improved it, we learned. The end session, of course, produced the most. But one very notable example they call a bao san, a maternity clinic, which was out many kilometers from the town.

The district town was electrified but the maternity clinic, to which all the women of the town had to go to have their children, was not. The children were delivered by the aid of light from kerosene lamps. The women got an idea that they could talk their brothers into helping them erect cement poles to carry the lines down to the clinic. The district chief said if they would erect the poles he would be responsible for the funds from the electrification. A pole is a very expensive item because of the cost of cement. However, the cement was donated by USAID as long as the people would work. We built the forms and poured the cement. The young boys began to tease the girls and said, "Gee, what would you do without us, you really can't do anything." They reacted in a very western fashion which I thought was funny because instead of agreeing with the boys, which most Vietnamese women would, they said, "All right, we'll do it. If you don't want to help us, don't, but we're going to do it ourselves." And the girls carried these things on their shoulders down to the area where they had to lay them on the road, until it led to the maternity center. Then there was the problem of them being hauled and hoisted in an upright position. Because of the great bravery in shouldering these poles the older men in the area came to their defense. Then everybody got in the act and they erected these poles and cemented them in the holes and the bao san has light today. They could see the importance in the light, and they decided on this themselves. Now the midwife was very influential and very powerful--she was all they had. They all had to begin with her and she knew it. She was a very strong amazon of a woman with a weak, little funny husband--he trailed after her all the time. My assistants and I spent many sessions with her trying to win her over showing her that she should cooperate. Finally, in the last days, she gave them all a dinner at the maternity clinic, and cooked it for them--she was a very noted cook. She couldn't have done anything more for the Vietnamese. This is better than any kind of pay. They love a feast. This is how they enjoy themselves. This is the essence of pleasure in the south. They all thought she'd really done the right thing. However, this created problems later when we had another group help cement in some sidewalk area and put in a door for the women's bathroom. At that time, women had to get up out of bed after having just had a child and go outside by a circuitous route to go to the bathroom. The midwives' idea was to cut a door through so they could go directly out and to the back. She finally did this with the help of the young people, but the district chief by that time was saying to me, "Look, no more projects, I'm too involved." It was amazing what could be done. The girls recognized their power yet they did all this very ladylike.

It's interesting that they chose a maternity clinic though. In other areas we talked the men into bridges. It was very common for a father, an uncle or someone to come up to me when I was

out on a follow-up tour, and say, "My daughter says it would be possible for our area to widen that bridge. If we wanted to do it we could ask the district chief for help. Is that really so?" And I'd say, "Sure, it's so." Then I would perform the usual role of an AID person. As liaison I would drag the district chief out there the next day or drag the father into the district chief's headquarters, and provide the transportation or the courage for him to go out. However, we were willing to do this because by that time there were district teams, and each district team had available certain experts (advisors, Americans, and the district chiefs). The district team took over the project till they thought they were finished. The teamers were very welcome in the areas where this had happened. It provided a sense of accomplishment. Their sick calls were well-accepted and they were especially accepted in military areas where projects had been done. It was the team itself that was working as a counterpart to the setup of the district chief. In the area where the maternity clinic is, where we'd done the most work, they realized their greatest success. The thing is that we had a number of projects but when we moved out of the province and went along the region we were able to do less.

The age level of the women I was working with varied. The bulk may have been around a certain age, maybe in the middle 20s, unmarried and free to come. But we had many, many married women and many older women who just wanted to come, who said to the district chief, "Why not send me?" I found they all got along very well. There's not this clash in the rural area that you find in the States on thinking and so forth, not near the clash you'd expect. Not the clash of ages, they got along very well, ate and slept together, had very few problems. When the older woman had moments of experience, they'd want to share it with other people. The girls were most acceptable to this. We had age groups anywhere from 18 on up, and we did have that group because they were out of school and free. We also had a good proportion of other age groups--in the 30s and then maybe in the 50s--it's very hard to know their ages. There was a real cross section as far as ages were concerned.

I lectured one hour in the rural school we ran. It was generally on the fourth day. I only talked about the meaning of USOM and the handclasp and why Americans were in Vietnam. Then I went on to ask how about the women--what role are we going to play in society. I told a story with pictures to them about a great huge elephant. He was all tied down with many stakes and he was crying. Then a tiny little field mouse comes along and sits up on his haunches and says, "Mr Elephant, Mr. Elephant, why are you crying?" I could tell this in Vietnamese, not well, but I used to act it out and speak the voice for the mouse. The women particularly loved it. I would lumber around the stage as an elephant trying to pull myself loose. I said, "I'm tied down. Some hunters had tied me down and I was caught." The

mouse said to me, "Can I help you?" I said, "How can a small, small mouse like you help a great king of the beasts, it isn't possible." The mouse said, "I can call my relatives." All the relatives come from the village and untie the ropes. The hunters are heard returning, and see that the elephant is free. Ever after, whenever a mouse wanted to cross over to another island or wanted to go through difficult terrain, the elephant always carried him on his back. Then across the board, I had a second elephant drawn, crying on the board. We created tears, and then I said, "In this story who is the elephant?" Then I said, "Who are the mice?"

This is one of the things Madame Nhu wanted them to do, to be very aggressive, but to be very quiet and accomplish great things by learning together. So this is what I see. We went on field trips to see what could be done and on the first field trip or two we couldn't see anything. When they were starting to say, "Why don't those people fix this and why weren't they eventually able to see these needs in their own village. But somehow it was always easier to spot in another village. I used to help and my assistant used to help also. One other thing, there's always much more wrong with another village than your own. Now when they go back and are alone without me or without my assistant looking on, then they'll discuss their own problems.

We showed them how to do things very quietly through the authority system and through the men. This they liked very much. This is the way they work all the time. They just hadn't realized they could do it, or they didn't realize it was their obligation. I constantly went back to the two things I found important to them. At one of these sessions when I was telling a story I mentioned the word "citizen," saying that you have to be women citizens. Citizens that have to be acting as citizens and be supporting the community in the citizen's role, and then this little girl put her hand out, and she said, "I don't know what that word is you're using, I don't know what it means." I then found that in the corner of the room where she was there was about nine of them sitting there and none of them knew what it was, nor did a lot of people in the room. So off the top of my head as I mentioned yesterday, I said, "Oh, a citizen is five things." And out came all the notebooks and they copied down the five things a citizen is. My assistant ran to the front of the room looking at me like "What have we got here?" It was a real thrilling experience for us because it scared us to death. We had all kinds of guilt feelings.

I provided AID with some materials that show the kinds of things I was giving to them, that we need to have along with this tape transcription, and I just want to get this on the record. I wanted to show by doing this that we used subjects that were of

interest to them, that I sort of tried to learn from experience over previous days spent with them. Things like civil rights and taxation, a few of these were brought in by various ways. The bulk of the work we did for the cause of citizenship education or community organization or counter-insurgency--we did on a bull session basis. We got past the "How are you, How old are you" stage. We talked about other things. The course itself stressed more nutrition and health improvement than political education. It had to be very subtlely done because the VC sat in our audiences all the time. I had made one request of all the people that they try to be as kind to the women as in their approach to the men so that they didn't scare them off. We were trying to reach as many people as we could. These women wouldn't have been safe at all. They wouldn't have been able to operate and my program wouldn't be able to go on; there would have been no program because we would have been labeled immediately. There was this heavy home improvement, home arts, farmlife improvement subject material that pretty well covered up the subtle political approach--such things as seminar reports, discussion of issues, etc.

I think leadership training of some form for both groups, urban and rural, would be advisable. A league of women voters could play this role very well and could disseminate information on how to choose a leader, how to vote, what's the use of franchise, this kind of thing. It would be a subject to be used as a subtle way of getting a leadership quality technique over to them. Because if you just sit them down and preached then you wouldn't get very far. We had approval at one time to carry the urban women in a big private or military plane to the resort area of Vung Tau. Of course, this was prior to its occupation by the military. There the women could have three day weekends in the big villa donated by somebody. It was a real joy, a relaxing experience. We knew we were going to slip this leadership thing in very, very quietly. However, we lost approval of this project even though it was an excellent idea. It would have been great fun to go on, and a lot of them wouldn't have a chance to go to Vung Tau or on an airplane and so forth, because they're not used to accepting things. We were going to have women leaders from other countries to live with us and talk, not in my presence but in the presence of others. The idea was to get this leadership thing over very subtly as a kick-off to follow up techniques. It's all got to be like the teenager--it's got to be fun, you've got to eat, you've got to have a present to take home, or else they don't enjoy it. You've got to act as adolescents.

Personal Adjustment to Job and Living Conditions

I moved to the province two weeks after I got to Vietnam. The province chief met me at the airport and said, "You know there is no hotel that's really a good place for you to stay, so won't you come to my house?" So I moved in with the province chief and his wife and their seven children and nine dogs. I lived with this couple for three months. It was my introduction to Vietnam, and no doubt the best one could have. I learned to eat practically every food in the south, probably because the wife was very chubby and liked to eat very much. It seemed her main aim in life was to shove it into me. Our ability to communicate, hers and mine, was limited and only in Vietnamese. I would speak in English, but not in advanced English, to the province chief at night when he came home. So we contented ourselves with getting to know foods and moved on from there as my Vietnamese improved. I might say that the chief proposed to lease me a house during this period but they thought it was pretty unusual for a girl to want to live out there permanently, so they delayed leasing the house thinking I'd get over the idea. Thus the hospitality of the province chief had to be extended and this was most graciously done. They kept me for a total of three months, while originally they had only invited me for two weeks.

They lived on the second floor and I lived in sort of a guest room on the first floor right up from the main dining hall. The room had a little bathroom connected to it. I ate with the family all the time. I had living on the same floor with me a man. At the time, I didn't know who he was except that he did do a lot of things for me. I now know he was a personal body-guard; he was the province chief's and he subsequently became mine. As a result, he and I became very good friends over the years. He never passes through Saigon without stopping to see me. When I went on field trips he always went along and carried a gun. I never realized quite what his position was. I think I know now - he was in the army. He studied English, and every now and then would come up with a word, haltingly, but in reality he spoke very little.

I have had some language training through AID--four months, which isn't too much. However, it was a northern dialect, and I was deep in the heart of the south. Also, no one wanted to go out on such a permanent basis. Day field trips were the order of the day or two days at the most or maybe three, and then home again. But I was planning six weeks at a time so no girl wanted to volunteer. I finally got an interpreter, but for quite a while she was of little use because she had to live downtown and serve under the province chief's orders. Working hours were much shorter, returning long before it was dark. So I still remained alone in the house a lot during those three

months. When we moved to the village and finally got a place-- not too large a place, but a place that could be turned into a school with ease. She volunteered to go and stay with me for the first month although she had to sacrifice a lot of money to do this. She had recognized the need that here a person was pretty cut off, and that if we were going to get down to business, and not be groping along as I had been in learning, we could accomplish something. She felt she should stick with me to get things off the ground. She then moved across the street which was most valuable for me. If she lived in AID housing she would have to pay 35 percent, so she moved across the street and that helped.

Observation on Vietnamese Culture

The Vietnamese love books. There were very few and they're very expensive. They take great care of them and pass them on sister to brother and so forth. Books were one of our principal rapport builders. When you want to find out something, all you do is take a book along as a gift. Here I differ somewhat. I think a gift is not as good, but it was the policy then and I had to abide by it and it did mean a lot to the family. The difficulty with the American giving system is that it is overdone; to do this one particular time, or once in the experience with the Vietnamese would have been good. But when it proved to be a good rapport builder we became free-and-easy giving them away by tons thus decreasing their value. The Vietnamese have a proverb that says that anything given away free obviously has no value. When the rural children bring textbooks home they sit and repeat everything in the book as loud as they can, any number of times until they've learned it. And everybody listens and proudly points out to you that they are studying. So above the din we would have our conversation.

I don't feel that I know the death practices, but I observed, in a rather low economic group of mechanics, amounts of money being presented to the son at the time his mother's coffin was placed in state. A month later he had a big party with this money--feasting and drinking beer and so forth--in celebration of his mother's death. Then a year later I think something else comes. I don't know how this changes or how this differs from the other groups. This was in a sub-district in Saigon, but a quite uneducated group, boys who were doing mechanics maintenance for the USAID warehouse. Actually I wasn't invited but my boy was. I went to the party, I saw the party, but I didn't stay. It's an extremely gay and happy time because this would be like the mother would want and this is the proper way to celebrate her death. He didn't miss her at all. Americans are rarely if ever invited to participate in this kind of thing. I never have been. I have been in other countries, but I've never been in Vietnam. You'd be invited to a wedding. Also,

you may be invited to the one-month celebration and the birth of a child, but not necessarily a death.

They tend to consider Americans outsiders. They would probably figure you could come to a wedding ceremony and give a gift where you wouldn't be in a position or want to give a gift for the death because you wouldn't know the people well enough, you may not know the old people. They include you in a time that is entirely happy, entirely in harmony. They do not bother you at times of difficulty, stress, or disease. They never want dissent, they never want you to see their lives at any time except when it's strictly up and up. They keep you on a very shallow basis - their friendship is shallow. They never allow you to share real distress with them because they don't let you in that far. They have pretty shallow systems themselves and more so in regards to funeral rites. Also, fate plays such a heavy role here that they don't look at problems as we do. They tend to accept things much more readily doing nothing to try to avert them sometimes. Preventative steps are hard to sell in the rural areas to the farmer group. It's a very hard idea to get across. They sometimes wait too late because they are very ignorant, but they also follow strictly Asian habits--sometimes they do nothing and allow fate to handle the whole thing. When it's dangerous is when you do nothing about anything and finally the problem is solved through a passage of time in one way or another. Then we would suffer over the neglect we had performed, but it's entirely different in their viewpoint. You were not involved, therefore you were not to blame. If you didn't get yourself involved no blame comes to you. If you abstain from seeing the problem you couldn't say that anything could pass over to you.

This is a frequent problem Americans have when they try to find their counterparts in times of crisis. They always seem to be out of the office somehow. You see, a decision to become involved is a very hard one to make. Decisions of all kinds are hard, but the first one made is the hardest. If the American insists, then of course you will, and then you have to go on and make other decisions which is even worse. The thing is to avoid making that original one of getting involved. The going philosophy of fate supports it too. These two things are really strong.

I don't think the Vietnamese have a true sense of gratefulness. This tends to bother many Americans. For the most part I have been involved with my own immediate staff and I was much more accepted. I was allowed, somewhat, to share some problems, but picking someone up from the street and this kind of thing, I think is somewhat wrong to expect gratefulness. The attitude becomes, "Well, you stepped into this role on your own initiative, and you wanted to help me," and they will sometimes go

through a great show of a thank-you. But a real true sense of gratefulness I don't think is there. At times there is a real calloused view: "Well, okay, so you helped me, you did this on your own, I didn't ask you, I didn't beg you." The Vietnamese don't care to ask or beg. Urban people are far different--sometimes they will ask you for things from the PX, for money, or your clothes--something like this. But rural people don't ask anybody for anything. They're very proud and very self-sufficient, and he doesn't want anybody's help, he never begs. The farmer is self-sufficient too, or he tries to be. There are farmers helping each other but not as great as in other countries--but they will, in a very practical sense, share certain things or get together on some things, but in a very pragmatic sense, not a sense of obligation.

There's a strong pattern within the immediate primary family and the extended family. Then to the general horde of relatives that even goes beyond the extended family. Patterns of obligation to anybody who is related to you either by blood or marriage seem to be very strong. I think the behavior of children and of adults is governed by the web of obligations more than anything else, not by initiative, not by genuine affection or by reasoning power, but by obligation. Their children are largely raised by siblings and there's a strong pattern of benefiting those siblings in the future at any time you can because of what they did for you as a child. The pattern at all cost, any benefit is worthwhile as long as it's kept within the family and will benefit the family. If they hear of a benefit to another area they'd rather see it destroyed or not used at all if their family couldn't benefit. There's no feeling of allowing the other family to live and benefit if they're not related to you. Jealousy may be the most destructive element in their whole society.

They would never admit to family feuds. Harmony was always shown to me, but I think there is this in the Montagnard area and it may be in the southern Vietnamese also. They would rather say nothing about a person if they cannot say anything good. This is not as altruistic as it sounds, it's merely practical, because tomorrow in the unstable situation that has prevailed all these years that family may be in control over your family by some fluke. You had better have everything in fine order with them so that you can continue, if not in a close relationship, then in some sort of harmonious relationship. Proverbs and sayings of the countryside say this too. There's one that says, "Never use the kind of word that would hurt another," "Never use vocabulary that would hurt another," and also never say anything bad about anybody - just don't say anything at all. This sounds so lovely but it's very pragmatic in continuing life.

There is some obligation to the hamlet or village, it's regionalism. If you are away somewhere and you need someone from your own area, maybe there are two of you in a group of people from another area or maybe even in a foreign setting, this man has a definite stereotype of beliefs that you immediately attribute to him from living in that area, and you like being with him simply because you're sure that what he is going to say is predictable. This seems to make Laos stick with people that are from their region because they can predict their behavior. There is so much difference in the many little sub-cultures that they fear to tread very far because then they're out of their area of prediction, and they're insecure again. Over a broad sense, the southerners will stick together against the northerners or even the Central people. I think both the north and the south regard the central people rather highly and perhaps this is a good solution to some of the problem.

But the north and the south have a real strong dislike for each other. They have stereotype names and they have nicknames that aren't very lovely yet quite true--they dislike each other. My idea as a sociologist on this is supported pretty generally as well. It's a Chinese society in the north, Hanoi or even down to Hue area. The northerners now in Saigon versus, if anything, a Hindu based Buddhism, far more Hindu based than the northern part because two hundred years ago this area belonged to Cambodia, and there are large clumps or groups of Cambodians there now. The attitude in the south normally is more passive than the aggressive northerner who wants to look well, who will go without food to dress well or to get an education; the southerner, proud of the patches no matter how many there are, considers the finest thing to happen to you in life is a full stomach. They're not ambitious at all, being very caught up in fate and a caste-like code of the class system. In the south there is a lack of mobility between the classes.

Universal education wouldn't affect the caste as much as one might think. Where it hits is right beyond this when you start to choose a vocation or occupation for the child. Remember, primary schools are reading and writing, not much else. They create little conflict. Hamlet schools run three years. You can go on as far as five or six and then there is an exam. As a matter of fact there is a quite lengthy exam at six. However, few complete this in the rural areas. They would agree that most people should learn to read and write; they have come to this and have come to believe it. The northerners have this fierce saving of money. The southerner laughs at the northerner for being pale and miserly, because he will eat spinach which is two or three cents or two or three dong a kilo. It has a certain amount but not a lot of nutrition, but it is not a meat or an exciting food. He will eat this day in and day out and very little else in order to get an education; and it's

wrong because he's too proud of it. In the south it's very wrong to be so proud of yourself or to have ambition that you will come up in the world. That's not their place to say that at all, it's not their decision at all. In fact, that is a very egotistical thing to do; people look down on you if you voice ambition that you're going to become this or that. Why should you do this, why should you say things, why should you be ambitious. You won't always realize that ambition, so do you want to make yourself an unhappy man? Now, you know that things are much out of your control. Try for something that will make you happy, accept what you have and live along in harmony with it and don't fight it.

Now I recognize this from the long searchings I had with Hindus as to being born again. If you accept your class status and perform it well and not complain, obviously your reward is the fact that you're going to be born higher next time. I have never heard this voiced in my association with the people except on one occasion when my assistant said I'm a very strong producer, a very good producer. "I wonder what you were in your past life, in another life. I am sure you were an angel. The question is, which one?" Some weeks later she came out with the decision that I'd been an Indian. This was because of my great rapport and real love for Khmers. My assistant didn't realize that I'd spent years with the Indians and could read the Khmers fairly well as a result of this. The Khmers and Indians I knew could live on a terribly simple basis; they owned little and their houses were not cramped with knickknacks and stuff. I think she found me fitting into this pattern. This was the only time I ever heard of the idea of being born again. I knew that the Buddhists say this, but you don't hear it talked about like you do in Hindu society or similar societies. I think there's much more influence there.

There's a strong French influence south of Saigon in an entirely different way, and evidently this has been exerted onto the north. I can't precisely explain this influence except people don't particularly like the French and they blame a lot of their feelings and ways of character on the fact that they copy them. They are well aware that they were highly influenced, and they like to tell stories against the French. The French soldiers were so horrible, they barred the door and if you left a chair or something outside on the porch the French would come and break it. They would shoot in the air or at each other in the streets. The people went home and barred the door and stayed till the French moved on to another area.

On the other hand many rich Vietnamese in the south have French wives. Where I lived the man had a French wife, a Vietnamese wife, a lesser Vietnamese wife, and a small wife, and any number of mistresses. All of his children at times have turned up at my house and stayed with us. This man was written-off

as a man who really had a lot of women. The Vietnamese wife and the French wife lived in the same house! The house is very, very definitely about half French and half Vietnamese. Fenced in, flowers on the walls, and stucco, but with inlaid furniture. The children, the daughter of the Vietnamese wife, went on to be a doctor in France and married a French doctor, quite acceptable to the Vietnamese mother. They do like all southern peoples do--they turn right around in the next breath and say that they didn't like the French. Yet they talk about the good old days. They remembered the parties that were held and the many, many French people who attended. At that time the local government was all French. The neighbors used to tell me about how they sat and listened to the music. And this man would bring goodies and musicians down from Saigon, all that sort of thing, nothing was too great--he had a lot of money. All in all, they were fantastic times and while they weren't entirely included they benefited by them. They enjoyed telling me about those things. They were the good old days.

There were many ghosts in that house as a result of so many people living there and dying there. Many, many people would not sleep in that house. They would sleep out in the back in the servant-like quarters connected to the house but not in the house. These ghosts have been seen and heard in this house. Even though the family was Catholic I had only one member of the entire family who is a pretty great character; she was quite fearless in the VC area in the field and she was not afraid of the ghosts. When I was ill, or on various other times, she took me to the house and stayed and said, "Oh, I know there are ghosts, but I'm not afraid of them." She's the only one I know who ever said this. A lot of people were very afraid of ghosts. To open up one big room to use as a classroom we took out an altar which had closed off one door and made it inaccessible. I got permission, of course, from the owner to do this and they would be satisfied if we saved everything and transferred it to a small house on the grounds. But after that the people were more afraid of the ghosts because the altar wasn't there. There was always a perpetual light burning at the altar. It was never without that light and the ghosts would see that. "Now you've taken out the altar and now the ghosts won't see that, what are you going to do?" This was asked of me. I just said I was surprised and that in the night the ghosts were afraid of us.

There was an old French Mother in the convent who ran an orphanage and I stuck by her because she needed supplies. She was a great old girl, and she was very lonely. She spoke an amazing amount of English which she taught herself in the last few years when she was close to 80. I would go and visit her. She and I were the only two white women living in the town at that time, and I would always drop in and make a call to see

what supplies she needed. Sometimes we had milk and bulgur wheat available. She could use the cornmeal. Generally, we had a lot of trouble getting rid of cornmeal because people didn't know how to use it but she knew how. She made bread, pancakes, cookies and fritters. She has gone back to France now to die. The people realized that I was very friendly with her yet they were very surprised that a Protestant could be a close friend of a Catholic.

I also donated money of my own for causes connected with any of the religious organizations that people solicited to. If I gave money for a new temple or something, or if I gave, say, to the Buddhists, I would at the same time send over a like amount of money to the orphanage, etc.

They were very set, very narrow-minded, very self-righteous. It seemed to me they didn't like anybody. Great diverse groups were able to gather at my house, so this is a well-known fact. You see, Diem had support from the Americans, and Diem was very Catholic and used the Church and so forth. It was a generally accepted thought that the Americans must be very pro-Catholic. I suspect the French didn't go into this because they were strong Catholics. So I had good fortune in getting help from leaders on various sides. One of my best friends was an old monk; he is a very old, dear fellow, and is still a great friend of mine. He had a one-section Cambodian pagoda.

He called the civilians together at one period and said, "Whatever she has in mind for you in her visits to your villages she is trying to help us get our feet solidly planted. Even though I don't get involved in this kind of thing. I hope you will follow her." I usually tried to get the support of the religious leaders before I moved into an area. But in the case of the old monk it happened by chance. I went to meet him and we became friends. These leaders are individuals. I think it's much better if we try to find out what kind of personalities they are before you initiate some blanket plan. People read so very well, much better than you think. You have to be sincere in your approach.

When the Vietnamese saw the Cambodians were to have the same privileges as themselves they learned to play a certain role with them at my house. They found out I really meant that anybody was welcome there and this is the role they played. This way nobody got insulted. This was very helpful. There are always these little ways to insult, you see. You pass the dishes, the cookies, to somebody else first and they do this all the time; they just treat the Cambodians terrible.

I was very surprised by my friend the Cambodian monk. He was extremely devoted to his Vietnamese government and felt it would become better by this type of support. At the time when Hue was having her original problems, student and Buddhist uprisings and so forth, our province was very quiet. During the period that Diem had to contend with the uprisings in Hue, Mekong organized his monks and they marched down the main street, a long, long march, supporting the government. And I know of no other place where this has happened. The Vietnamese said, "Well, you know he's an extremely loyal old man." They respected him and especially respected this, but everyone seemed to be quite aware that he didn't support Diem, he supported his government.

This is the point that most Vietnamese aren't able to make and where Americans often get hung up. I had some lucky, lucky breaks living my first three months with the province chief and his family (the true life, you know). My next break was I had a second ethnic group there so that you could see the personality in the Vietnamese much more quickly. It happened to be an ethnic group that I was familiar with. The Cambodian people in Vietnam society sometimes seem to relate, in my mind, at least, with things I had experienced in India. They live as a group, they support each other, etc.

We were trying to work out something new in the province, converting soldiers into a kind of Civil Guard. These small groups were to be supported by individual hamlets. We couldn't get the Vietnamese hamlets to support the Civil Guard at all. We never heard anything about the Cambodian hamlets so the advisor finally went down to see if the soldiers were down there--if they were there, if they had ever appeared or were doing anything, and, of course, they were there. The people just said, "Why, it's our duty to support these boys." They slept in the temple, the temple gave them food, the people gave them food and whatever they needed--clothing, etc., and with great acceptance, great harmony. The Cambodians lived entirely in a more unified basis. They received strong guidance from the pagoda as to daily life.

Inhibitions are pretty low. They'll greet you as you come to the village by dancing, and they'll dance you in and they'll dance you out when you leave. The women were very affable--they'd throw their arms around you at any time and really affectionately welcome me or tease me, play with me, pull me and

Editor's Note: For conflicting opinion on Asian political beliefs refer to Debrief No. 9678, page 2, Asian Versus American Political Logic.

joggle me around. It was a great delight. The Vietnamese never do this at all--they are very tight.

There is a decided advantage in seeing the two cultures side by side. The Vietnamese are very easy to deal with, they're very polite, constantly seeking your approval. They are very apt to do exactly what you want them to do and go as far with you as they can until you get in areas where they feel once again you are a foreigner, like corruption, etc. But on the surface all is harmonious, and that's the way they want it to be. So unless you have another group to compare them to over the days of living, you wouldn't see the difference, you wouldn't see the strain. I had the feeling about the Vietnamese after some time in the provinces that they were under constant tension. I also feel certain the Khmers were not. They are not under some of the tensions and that's the only reason they're recognized. However, they did play a role in the army. They have a school, a school for monks, they have a lot of people. There were many Cambodian soldiers and they come with high recommendations. They will fight well. I used to say, "Give me a platoon of Cambodians and I'll go anywhere in the province at all," because they stick with you and wouldn't run. This was in the province of Vinh Binh. They had quite a good reputation in the army. Later, they had a defection of a group to the VC which is kind of a sad thing in the less spot. Cambodians are pretty self-sufficient. People will tell you they don't buy in the market, they don't use a great deal of money, they grow things, they live as a group. They were independent of the Vietnamese; they didn't have to be begging all the time or trying to work in the Vietnamese society. They could live by themselves. They bought sugar, for instance, usually only for festivities. The Vietnamese have to have sugar all the time. They have a very low requirement for necessities in contrast to the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese feel they never buy at the market, that they're so hopeless they don't even know enough to buy at the market. But actually, when you get down to this, they admire them for this because at times when the trucks from Saigon didn't get through with things, these people suffered far less than the Vietnamese. Living as a group, they'd help each other in the fields and they would lend each other buffalos, and all that.

One of the biggest problems with the Vietnamese is this aspect of cooperation. There wasn't much need to organize the Khmers into cooperatives because they were already doing it. We were there at the time when they were advising strategic hamlet construction, and so all that happened to the Cambodian villages was that they just surrounded them with barbed wire and bingo they were strategic hamlets. The Cambodians were immediately interested in defense, they immediately built a

fantastic set of booby traps. I used to go down the lanes and the people would say, now be careful, don't step there because if you do, that gives way and you fall in this big hole--or if you step there something happens over here and you get shot, etc. They were immediately for the idea. "Oh, we're to be a strategic hamlet, and we're to build this in defense of the town." Everybody worked, and everybody did by getting together and building. We never had any trouble in the areas at all. There were a lot of Cambodians very close to town but in general the minority lives near the town in the outlying areas. One whole district is Cambodian and they were next to the VC district.

They just take life with a lot more ease and a lot more willingness to pitch in; they have a strong faith so they managed well. I received permission but I never got to go. I finally received permission from the captain of internal security to go and spend a period of time within a given hamlet because he thought I'd be quite secure there. That even if the VC knew or tried to do something these people would really defend you. Remember, they lived with a far different philosophy so it's not new to them.

With the Vietnamese there was real suffering. They could not trust their neighbors. They dare not because they didn't know them well enough. They instituted a five-family system--these five families should be close together and stick together, but this didn't always work because they didn't trust each other, and they never do. They don't trust their neighbor who they lived beside for years and years and years. They never really get to know him that well. Here they were being asked to solidify themselves against an outward enemy. But in the south, unfortunately, an enemy was recruited from the local countryside, and they found this a very difficult and foreign idea. There were many other deterrents. This is just the period when Madame Nhu, I think, had a lot of weapons. She'd corral the weapons; we didn't get any weapons. They had old French guns--and the old French guns were as big as the Vietnamese soldiers--and they're so heavy. I went to many hamlets where their defense force of 11-men strong only had two guns. They would proudly bring them out and lay them down and show you the two guns they had. We know of many instances when men were killed and others took over and continued. This wasn't the case in the hamlet. All the people filed this complaint--how can they defend if they don't have a gun. They cannot make do, they don't have that flexibility. The Vietnamese rural people in this area are not flexible at all. They can be. The technicians can win them over by agricultural experiments. But living together and trusting each other and having to move from their own area to a foreign settlement is a different story.

Another pressure is in the office of Mr. Nhu. He was pressuring the province chiefs to finish a hamlet much more quickly than was possible but he met all the requirements, and so it was finish the new job. There was a great deal of padding statistics and lying by the province chiefs in order to retain their heads, and the hamlets were really neglected. I saw a great need in citizenship education on both sides but offered in an entirely different way.

Much of the humor I've heard is silly and simple. Rural humor is much more earthy and vulgar than the urban, although there is some relation. It's usually pretty shallow--a take-off on people, or a take-off on a situation. They often mimic and make fun of people. Even someone less fortunate--for example, cripples, a fat or baldheaded person. They make a great play on words, moving words from one tone to another, giving them another meaning, but it has a relation to the situation and can be extremely funny or very vulgar if you understand. Military humor all around the world is vulgar and very different from the humor of the French educated civil servants group. I don't think there was a difference in humor among the men and women. I think if the men use curse words or vulgar words I wouldn't understand them; I wouldn't know what they are and I wouldn't pick it up. I don't know whether there would be a big difference in vulgarity's use between old or adult men.

In addition to humor, there is another leveler within society--the great homage paid to small talk by everybody. To put the situation on a nice plane and get everybody straightened out you must find the topics of conversation that are going to be acceptable and also the ones that are not. There is always this feeling-out period and you have to sit through it. Technicians find it very difficult to sit through this small talk. The best thing you can do is get in it and practice your Vietnamese. This small talk will cover any and every topic--the weather, if a man's son is tall or taller than his father or shorter than his father. The smallest kind of talk, the size of a table, ad infinitum. The best thing for you to do is get in on it because it requires intense skill for you to do it; it tickles them to death that you try. It also lessens the boring period that you sit through until these people have gotten themselves on a harmonious footing and they're prepared to proceed. They're very wary of each other and find small talk the answer to the situation. The small talk is so small that it's unbelievable. You and I would have small talk on foods, something to talk about at lunch, or native clothes and this kind of thing. But we would not get to the level of communication that was babytalk like, "I have one too, you know, and mine is bigger than yours." So, if you're in a

group and you plan to introduce a subject you must be aware of this pattern of small talk. This is Vietnamese politeness or an aspect of it. Of course, the aim of it is to establish a harmonious feeling. The Vietnamese are polite. In fact, the Vietnamese are very much like the Japanese.

One of the things that Americans do is go right to the heart of the subject. This "get cracking" approach is hated by the Vietnamese. It's not the way you do it with these people at all. It's extremely impolite. They say, "Anyway, what's the rush for it, and why do you want to do that? If you had to have an answer tomorrow why didn't you call us two weeks ago or a week ago?" This is why I made efforts to operate through their culture. Their rural women are not used to coming together in groups with strange people. They generally choose the people they sit down with. If you have something to serve, even something as simple as bananas or peanuts, you can be sure that everyone will eat some of it. And the reaction would be, "Oh, I make it this way" and this type of thing is a good subject for them. When I got my teacher in this leadership program to pull the peoples' views on subjects, our reaction was "wow", "this is great", "that's right", "we must use it here and now and form a committee", "it makes sense", etc.

It's as important as leave-taking. Just going from one side of the room to discuss something with somebody else involves a leave-taking process that is considered important. It's literally dreadfully impolite if you don't make some sign of recognition by a nod of your head or a slight ducking, or even putting your hands together slightly in a clasp. In a rural section, they will call out to the people they don't see in the house or they'd run out in the back yard or the garden and say, "I'm going now." They never go without that. They find us to be too abrupt, too prone to cut things off with a mere, "Well, goodbye now, see you later." When they leave the room they stand and shift back and forth, finding this a bit difficult, so you have to help them on that. But, in general, taking leave is preparing for the next meeting to begin with that person in a nice, harmonious, friendly way. You have wound up this one in a good way and who knows what tomorrow will bring, and which member of your family may need him for something. They will acknowledge every member of the family--even an exceptional servant or an exceptional cook. I find this very unusual--that they will go as far as to take leave from a servant. You should make sure that everyone is noticed and mentioned in the leave-taking act. I haven't seen anything written on this and I'd love to know if there is something. When you are invited to a private home for a dinner, or something, and you are getting ready to leave they will come as a group out of politeness, generally speaking. The parents will summon the children and say, "Now, so-and-so is going," and they will prepare themselves for this. With the older sons you can shake hands, and with the children pat them on

the shoulder, never the head. With a woman I clasp hands. In a rural section I literally cannot reach out and shake hands with a man; in the urban section I can, but in the rural I just give them a nod of the head. When I was going through a village I would have to take leave of all the members of the elder's committee, all the council, and make sure that I did not ignore anybody. Some people can do it by just a wave or a nod. A funny thing is, as long as you recognize a person and let them know you're going to leave everything is all right. It was once said in my presence, "What's the matter with so-and-so? He just left without saying a word." In the language itself there are so many words that mean--I'm going to come right back, or I'm going to really go away, and this kind of thing. It truly means something in the society. It is a Vietnamese formalism.

There are some real formal rules or regulations in Vietnamese society that you must follow. This is very important because it reflects on your family. Children will be summoned to greet you, which was also important, but not as important as leave-taking. They'll be summoned in and maybe they want to give this little crossed-arm salute to you, and maybe they don't. If not, they don't get scolded for it, the parents just laugh. Children are considered blameless; they don't know and they don't have to be forced to do anything.

There is a funny thing in their society. When you become tall you're grown up. When you reach a certain age you're automatically mature. There is an age at which you more or less become mature. It's not necessarily determined by your growth or your emotional adjustment or your ability to take responsibility. In the south, it is not necessary for the child to have family responsibility. In the south it could be the child the family considers the most responsible, not the oldest. I think in the Hanoi area it must be the oldest as they follow Chinese tradition. In the south they show a great deal of favoritism in their children--they simply like some better than others.

Overweight is considered good. It shows you're prosperous, especially if you're married and have little children and you're not looking for a husband. They're not very aware of nutrition or their weight. Their intake of food is actually rice plus other vegetables. Fruits are not considered a main part of the diet. We try to encourage planting papaya trees; they produce in about six months and has excellent nutrient value. Betel nuts are used in the south on an everyday basis. The northern people blacken their teeth with it. The effects of betel-chewing on the teeth is not considered a detriment in the south. They do not necessarily worry about mouth beauty in the rural sections. They like very slim waists, and the word for figure in the sense of curving would be the

hourglass type. Usually these dais are worn very tight. I think they like long hair.

I would like to say something about the problem of giving gifts. In the rural section I have rarely seen them give a new thing to each other. If you give something of high value or something new you're immediately putting the receiver of the gift in a position where he must return something of similar value to you. Perhaps he's not in a position to do that at all. If you give him something used, or something of far less value, then he can repay it by a bunch of fruit from his trees that his family will not eat. But if people ask you for something you will find that they will never ask you for anything new. In the rural area, especially, they will say, "If you have a raincoat I'll patch it with scotch tape." When the PX got raincoats in and I got a new raincoat, I was asked for that old, patched scotch-taped raincoat. I said, "I don't like to give that to anybody, it's not really worth very much and it won't last very long and it's not the kind of gift I'd like to give at all. Why do you insist upon having it?" They would say, "Oh, because when I see these patches I will be reminded that it is yours, you wore it, and it served you, and now I have it and we're friends and you have given it to me." Then I'd say, "In the future when something is given back to me it need not exceed the value of the raincoat." There's a proverb which says, "Anything given free isn't worthwhile." I think perhaps unlike some people there are times and moments when you can give free things but we've run it to the ground. They don't respect what we give them or understand our reasons why nor do they believe that we could possibly have such reasons as we use today. There's nothing in our society quite like it. If a younger boy got a new shirt he wouldn't pass it on to his brother. He would give a shirt that's been used and worn. In this way the older brother is free to accept it, whereas a new shirt he couldn't possibly accept because he would have to return this in goods. There's too much obligation even in the primary family.