

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR PETER TOMSEN

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
Initial interview date: April 20, 2016
Copyright 2022 ADST

INTERVIEW PART I

Q: Today is April 20th (2016) and we are beginning our interview with Ambassador Peter Tomsen. We always begin with, in this case, providing Ambassador Tomsen with a small token of our esteem, the mug with our brand on it, "Cool Franklin," and begin with the first question - where was he born and raised?

TOMSEN: Thank you very much Mark and thanks for this gift. Ben Franklin is one of the most popular Founding Fathers!

I was born on November 19, 1940 in Cleveland and raised in small towns in Ohio.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your forbearers, where they originated as you recall them.

TOMSEN: My father had a very difficult childhood -he was an orphan. He was born in Oakland, California. His mother was from a farm family near Navarre in eastern Ohio. She married someone from central Ohio whose name was Tomsen. They went out to California in the first decade of the 20th century. Unfortunately, my grandfather abandoned my grandmother in the San Francisco/Oakland area after Dad had been born. My great-grandmother came out from the farm in eastern Ohio to help her, but my grandmother passed away from a disease in 1911, probably typhoid. So Dad was basically orphaned at two.

Dad's grandmother arranged for him to move in with relatives farming in Wisconsin. They shortly thereafter placed him in an orphanage. His grandmother talked one of Dad's uncles on the Navarre farm into taking Dad in by providing the uncle with more land to add to his farm.

Dad was very miserable there. His older cousins gave him a rough time. His aunt rejected the school's request to buy him glasses. The school's threat to get a court order forced the purchase. That only toughened his predicament at home. As soon as he was eighteen, he walked away with a bag of clothes, determined to find his own way and to go to college. He graduated from Case Western Reserve. He met my mother who was teaching at an elementary school in Wooster near Cleveland. They settled in Cleveland near Lake Erie

where I and my two older brothers, Jim and Jon, and a younger brother, Tim, were born. Another younger brother, Mike, and sister, Margot, were born later.

My family line on my mother's side --her maiden name was Yates-- is a more interesting story. Two cousins, very interested in our Yates' family genealogy, have traced our Yates forbearers going back to the late 1600s when they settled in present-day Culpeper County, St. Mark's Parish. Their farms were a few miles away from the county seat of Culpeper County, also named Culpeper.

The Yates were of English origin --hard-working farmers intent on expanding their land holdings in Virginia, later in Ohio. A good illustration: my great grandfather, Civil War veteran Daniel Yates, wrote down his profession as "dirt farmer" in his 1861 regimental mustering-in document.

The earliest Yates we have been able to specifically identify was Thomas Yates, born in the late 1600s or early 1700s. His father, also Thomas Yates, arrived in America at the village of York (now Yorktown), a port on the Virginia coast about 1670. We believe he was from southern England and sailed to America from Bristol in southwest England.

The elder Thomas Yates, like thousands of other young, landless farmers, came to America as an indentured servant employee of the Virginia Company. In that era, the Virginia Company, like the Massachusetts Bay and the East India Companies, was a joint stock venture chartered by the English government to colonize vast tracts of the empire overseas. The Virginia Company loaded up their ships with indentured servants contracted to work for 3 or 4 years. At the end of the contract they were granted freedom and usually a plot of land.

The first name "Thomas" continued as the name of the oldest Yates sons for four generations of our family in Virginia and Ohio. The earliest courthouse recorded land deed purchase my cousins traced was in 1728 in Culpepper, Virginia --up the Rappahannock River from York. They estimated that this Thomas Yates, probably the oldest son of the emigrant, was born before 1707 when he had to be at least 21 to have the land deed recorded at the Culpeper courthouse.

Thomas Yates married Sarah Morgan in Culpepper. Their eldest son, another Thomas, of course, was born in 1740. He married Elizabeth Ziegler. Her parents, Zieglers and Zimmermans, arrived in Culpepper from Germany in the late 1600s and early 1700s respectively. They, too, were farmers.

Thomas Jr. and Elizabeth's youngest son, Abner Yates, also our direct ancestor, was born in about 1773. He married Clara Smith in Culpepper. They moved to Virginia's far western, Shenandoah Valley (present day) Rockingham County, Linville Village, to farm and raise a family in the 1790s. County land tax records from the period locate their farm 8 miles north of Harrisonburg, the county seat, near a major Indian trail cutting through the Appalachian Mountains to Ohio and Kentucky.

Interestingly, Abner Yates, along with John Lincoln, President Abraham Lincoln's great-uncle, and Daniel Boone's wife's parents, were active members of the same church --the Linville Creek Baptist Church. President Lincoln's great-grandfather (another Abraham) and John Lincoln were early members of the church. The younger (President) Abraham's father had moved his family to Kentucky in 1782.

The church also adjoined the Indian trail. The minutes of the church committee's meetings have survived to this day. They recount how Abner Yates, John Lincoln and Daniel Boone's in-laws, the Bryans, managed church activities. Fascinating reading! The Yates' homestead and the church have long since disappeared. But the still privately-owned Lincoln family home and cemetery stand nearby today on Route 42, about one hundred yards away. It is fronted by one of those white and black historical signs, "Lincoln's Virginia Ancestors."

Following the leap-frog pattern west of many thousands of land-hungry pioneers, Abner and his family, including his only son and my direct ancestor born in 1799, another Thomas Yates (!), emigrated over the Appalachian Mountains to Ohio.

The Ohio Genealogical Society records state that, during the 1820s, Abner and Thomas Yates were among the earliest pioneers to settle in north central Ohio's (present day) Wyandot County. They became firm Methodists and abolitionists in Ohio. Some members of the family moved to Kansas to influence that territory's entrance into the Union as an anti-slave state.

The pattern of mixed, northern European marriages, English, Scotch-Irish, Irish, German, Dutch, Swiss, Scandinavian marriages in Virginia continued on the Ohio Frontier. Thomas Yates married into a local Dutch family, the Crauns. They had eleven children. The third son, Civil War veteran Daniel Yates, my great-grandfather, was born in 1839. He died in 1931, nine years before I was born.

May I briefly add here that the Northwest Ordinance, the last Act passed by the Continental Congress, called for the surveying and dissecting of all land in the then Northwest Territory --covering the 5 later states Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin-- won from Britain in the 1763 Treaty of Paris. In Ohio, the very unequal 1817 Treaty of Maumee (Ohio) following the Indian wars forced about eight Indian tribes to surrender some four million acres of lands to settlers. They received broken promises of reservation lands and stipends for tribal chiefs.

Congressional legislation sub-divided the rich Northwest Ordinance farm lands, top down, into counties. The counties were divided into townships, the townships into one-mile by one-mile squares, or sections, containing 360 acres each. The squares today are still called sections. In each township a portion of one section was set aside for schools. Some have been preserved and can be seen along country roads down to today.

Abner Yates took advantage of Congress' liberal 1820 Land Act charging only \$120 an acre. He bought most of Section 10 in Sycamore Township in the northeastern part of Wyandot County. Wyandot County land records record he sold 40 acres to his son Thomas for only \$50 an acre to get him started after his marriage to Elizabeth Craun in 1833.

Q: The only thing I would add here is that the original Yates who settled in Ohio benefitted from two main issues in U.S. history -the Northwest Ordinance- the one thing the Continental Congress did right, and the creation of the Erie Canal. That was one of the ways they would get goods to market, up to the lakes and to the ports.

TOMSEN: You are so right. And the Northwest Ordinance prohibited slavery in those 5 states.

The advent of the railroad in the 1830s also made transportation of farm produce and livestock to markets more efficient.

After Abner Yates' passing in 1847, Thomas moved his growing family north to adjoining Wood County. He bought 160 acres outside rural West Millgrove village, ten miles east of the town of Fostoria. The farm was adjacent to two other local farm families --the Kellys and the Kigers. The Yates, Kigers and Kellys intermarried, enlarged their land holdings, built comfortable houses and bigger barns, constructed winter houses in West Millgrove and buried their dead in West Millgrove cemetery adjoining Yates Road.

My great-grandfather Daniel Yates' mother was a Kelly. His wife was a Kiger. His aunt, Fanny Kelly, and her husband Josiah, were emigrating West when their wagon train was attacked by an Oglala Sioux war party after leaving Fort Laramie. You can find her fascinating memoir, "*Narrative of My Captivity Among the Sioux Indians,*" *Classic Reprint Series*, on Amazon today. We have personal family letters —not in the book— from Fanny and Josiah Kelly to relatives back in West Millgrove recounting her ordeal after the wagon train massacre.

Daniel Yates and his older brothers, John and William, signed up to join the 49th Ohio Volunteer Regiment when President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers after the April 1861 firing on Fort Sumter. Once on leave from a post abroad, I went to the National Archives building first floor and asked for my great-grandfather's war record. A clerk disappeared into the Civil War archive, returned, and handed me a thick file wrapped around by a red ribbon!

Kim and I, at times myself, have visited most of the major battlefields where the 49th fought in the West during the Civil War --Shiloh, Stones Mountain, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Pickett's Mill, Atlanta and Nashville. Daniel's older brother John, a First Sergeant, was killed by his side at the Battle of Nashville. During one of those suicidal Civil War charges, in this case attacking up a ravine slope towards entrenched Texas and

Arkansas regiments at Pickett's Mill near Atlanta, Georgia, Daniel was shot in the head but survived. He finished the war as a sergeant during the occupation of Texas.

My grandfather, Dwight Yates, followed in his father Daniel's footsteps and volunteered (upping his age, 17, by one year) at the onset of the Spanish-American War, serving in the U.S. Army's 5th Regiment. He returned to West Millgrove after the war and married Mabel Slosser. Her mother ran a boarding house for workers on leafy West Fremont Street in nearby Fostoria. Most of them were immigrants from Ireland. Grandma's mother was a single Mom, having kicked her hard-drinking husband out of the house. Mabel, a high school graduate which Grandpa was not, following the gender strictures of the time, had to resign from her elementary school teaching position in Fostoria when they married. She did not appreciate farm life in the Yates household on rural Yates Road in West Millgrove. After her mutiny, they moved into the West Fremont Street home. They later inherited that house where my siblings and I and cousins spent many happy days growing up.

Q: A very quick question: Is that the Fostoria where the glass company has its operation?

TOMSEN: Yes, it is. The Irish tenets in the house worked there.

Q: I've heard a great deal about the products of that company and how it's quite old and has been producing all kinds of glass from regular things we use in the kitchen to more art-oriented glass.

TOMSEN: Yes. The older pieces are quite famous. Especially the beautifully colored ornate lamps. Numerous family living rooms in Fostoria facing the streets still arrange for those lovely, upside down quarter moon, bright and richly colored Fostoria Glass lamps to be admired by passers-by on an evening walk. Later on, in about the 1920s, the gas gave out and the factory was moved to Wheeling, West Virginia. There's a Fostoria Glass Museum nearby Wheeling.

I vividly remember spending summers in the West Fremont Street house, sitting around the large dining room table at Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners with numerous relatives, listening to Grandpa's long prayers, eyeing serving dishes heaped with food and always a deep bowl of thick brown gravy, ladle at the ready. In many ways, Fostoria was a hometown we could always go back to since we moved so much. My father worked for the Fuller Brush Company when door to door sales professions were at their height in the '40s and '50s. We moved around a lot. He was transferred altogether eight times by the time I was 16. But we would always be going back to Fostoria to the home there that's been in our family since the late 19th century.

With our cousins we had a great time. We read comic books, swam in Fostoria's public pool, rode our bicycles around town. I was very close to my grandfather, even though he never let me win at checkers. One memory: I was not much more than a toddler when he took me to an ice house. We went down into the dark basement area where there were

massive cuts of ice covered with straw. Grandpa brought along a gigantic tong. He grabbed a chunk of ice, took it upstairs, paid, and we drove home. Using the tong, he placed the huge chunk of ice in the (aptly named) ice box --in more modern times, a refrigerator.

It was said that Grandpa's service in the military gave him credit for passing the Post Office test. He became a rural mailman.

Q: Of course, even then there were veterans'...

TOMSEN: Yes. I used to go along on his route and helped him by putting the mail in the mail boxes from the passenger's side. They didn't have those special, narrower vehicles they do today. We would stop at Yates' relatives in the countryside for lunch. I was very excited by that experience, not the least because I and my brothers got to sleep in Grandpa's bed with him overnight, and got up before sun-up to begin the mail route. Anyway, lots of memories like that from Fostoria. When my grandparents passed away, Kim and I purchased the house. We still own it today.

My grandfather's having that full-time government job during the depression in the 1930s, was fortuitous. My mother, Margaret Yates, and her three siblings were, for the first time in our family, able to go to college.

Q: The times -this is basically from 1940 to 1950 or so, your childhood. Was there telephone service to your home at that point?

TOMSEN: Yes, there was.

Q: But there was running water, there was electricity?

TOMSEN: Yes. There was still a hand pump in the back of the house in Fostoria where we could also draw water. The old, unused outhouse stood against the fence in the backyard next to the lane until the 1970s. One of those rectangular, brown Roosevelt-era radios provided news and Sunday night entertainment --*The Shadow*, *The Long Ranger*, music and other shows, but no TV for us until the late 50s.

Q: Regular small-town life at that time. Because you moved around a lot, your early schooling - what was that like?

TOMSEN: It was difficult in some ways because we moved so often. I was 16 when the moving finally terminated at a Cincinnati suburb in a small town called Blue Ash --it's much larger today. The high school was Sycamore High School. We lived all over the state during those moves. The downside was that, each time you had to pick up and leave behind friends, teachers, neighbors, schools and go to the next location, and do the same all over again. For a child growing up, that was obviously a downside. But the upside was

that you really had to learn to be flexible and adaptive. It sharpened your interpersonal skills because you had to make new friends, get adjusted to a new environment.

My brothers, sister and myself, we always studied hard. At home there was a lot of help for our homework. My second older brother died in a tragic automobile accident. He was the driver. My oldest brother was in the back seat and was miraculously thrown out of the vehicle and survived. I was a Freshman in college at the time.

My brothers and I graduated from Ohio colleges. My sister, Margot, received her Ph.D. from Indiana University in English literature. She taught for twenty-five years at Hanover College in Indiana before retiring.

We all participated in extracurricular activities including sports. Socially, it was the *American Graffiti* decade, lots of fun, no sign yet of the drug culture in our between-the-mountains small town setting. We had outstanding teachers. One was my World History teacher. He took an interest in me and gave me extra assignments on the side.

Q: In the absence of an advanced placement regime in the school, it was your teacher's own initiative - saw your skills and decided to develop them beyond the average that was expected in class.

TOMSEN: I was lucky. My World History teacher, Mr. Lucius, taught for only two years at Sycamore. He then obtained a master's degree at the University of Cincinnati and went into the Foreign Service. His first tour was Hamburg, the second, Karachi. I took his class in his first year at Sycamore. I was a sophomore and eagerly fulfilled his out-of-class assignments. The first was a paper on Alexander the Great. He gave me outside reading assignments as well. What he taught me, and others too, gave a window on the unfolding of history. He and his wife, Mary, retired two miles from us in McLean. We maintained our friendship. In 1995, we invited him to my ambassadorial swearing-in at the State Department. During the ceremony, I happily called attention to his kind mentoring, long ago, of a frog-in-the well Ohio teenager.

Q: That's a remarkable lifetime relationship.

TOMSEN: Yes, I was very fortunate!

Q: Here you are, you're in high school. You've done some of these extracurricular activities and have the benefit of actually being able to have some contact with someone already in the Foreign Service. What are you now thinking about in terms of college?

TOMSEN: Looking forward towards college plus afterwards, I had a very notional two-path career scenario in mind centered on my interest in history and international affairs. One was teaching at the high school or college level. That would ideally call for a graduate degree. The other was following Mr. Lucius into the Foreign Service. I assumed

that the Foreign Service would be an uphill challenge, one that I would not be able to overcome. In those days, only a very small percentage passed the written Foreign Service exam. Less than one percent passed the written and oral out of some 20,000 or so who took the test. Mr. Lucius advised me in letters from his overseas posts to read The Economist, the Sunday New York Times, and The American Heritage to prepare for the test. I did that.

Q: The interesting thing is we periodically give talks to students now and they ask, "What should I do to prepare for the test?" and I tell them the very same thing - New York Times, Economist, and any other thing you want to read. American Heritage is now I think a bit more of a specialty magazine than maybe it was when you were reading it. But if they are reading the Times and The Economist, they're going to be very well prepared at least for the international level.

TOMSEN: Yes. The old written test had much more American History in it than today. So, today I give this same advice you do on those two basics, New York Times and Economist. On essays, I advise to prepare for at least one United Nations topic on the list of essay choices on the written exam.

Q: In high school you mentioned all of the extracurricular activities. As you were thinking of college, which ones did you apply to, which was the college you had your eye on?

TOMSEN: I didn't really cast a wide net like we did with our daughters when they approached college age in the 1980s. The less than half of Sycamore graduates who went on to higher education selected local colleges. I applied to only one college, Wittenberg, where a friend of mine had gone. It had an excellent academic reputation, was affordable, and was a two-hour drive north, in Springfield, Ohio. I did not visit it beforehand, just mailed away for the application form, filled it out, sent it off, and I was accepted. Tuition was about \$350 a semester. I received a small grant from the college for the first year.

Q: You apply to Wittenberg, and you were accepted. You start college in which year?

TOMSEN: That was 1958. I graduated from Sycamore in the spring of '58, then entered Wittenberg in the fall of '58.

Q: You were a freshman arriving there, what were your impressions? It may have been a relatively small college but it's going to be quite different from your experience at home and from high school; what did you become involved in?

TOMSEN: College was different in terms of demanding more study discipline, productive concentration, and many more hours devoted to homework. You had to take good notes during the lecture and master them as well as the reading assignments. In English, I initially struggled to create a logical sequence for essay writing ending with a conclusion!

I adjusted to the higher academic standards in college and came to enjoy all my classes. Wittenberg was a liberal arts college. That unveiled new gems in life. I had never bothered to listen to classical music. Our Music Appreciation professor had a remarkable ability to motivate and render beautiful --to our minds as well as to our ears-- the works of the great composers --Mozart, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff and so on. The Art professor was just as encouraging, as was the Earth Science professor on environmental issues. Philosophy was another course I'd never taken in high school. The professor was a great scholar from Spain. I loved his class.

On the social side, I'd say about 70% of the campus went into fraternities or sororities. It was almost expected that an entering Freshman would be swept up in one of them during their first weeks on campus. So, I chose a fraternity, went through the initiation process, pledged my loyalty, and got paddled in a cellar. Then I became disillusioned with fraternities and their exclusionary charters. I pulled out and moved into an apartment with a friend for the last three years of college. I'm glad I did. During the '60s, there was a backlash against these charters and their exclusionary practices.

Overall, college was a memorable and enjoyable experience. However, what I remember most outside the classroom was that I had to work part-time during the school year and full-time during the summers to pay for college. I mentioned that my second older brother died in an automobile accident; that occurred during my first year at Wittenberg. It was a great blow to our family. Also, at that time, in the late '50s and '60s, the door to door sales professions began to go downhill rapidly. Perhaps because of growing security concerns in communities. Or, for other reasons I can't recall.

Q: Or maybe the development of bigger department stores and the malls?

TOMSEN: Yes. Department stores like Lord & Taylor at malls started to pop up, and small town Main Streets began to fold up around the country. To keep his door-to-door sales business going, Dad mistakenly invested, in effect sacrificed, his retirement pension to reverse the downward slide. Hard times for our family began about the time I was going to college. My parents financed most of my freshman year, but after that I was pretty much on my own.

So, I worked part-time when at college. During the summers I worked full-time. There were a lot of manufacturing jobs available then because factories had not yet gone overseas. I joined unions and made really good money. I also experienced from the inside the perspectives and life tempo of blue-collar workers. One summer I worked in a canning factory. There was always about 10% of the union's membership calling for a strike at union meetings. I worked two summers in the local Inland Steel factory. The second year, I headed up a steel drilling team of three. Another summer I worked in a box factory, a swing-shift type of job. When it came our group's turn to take the night shift, everybody including the foreman slept most of the night. We started out the next day, work-free, fresh and energetic.

During the school year, I worked first as a waiter. Fortune smiled when a friend of mine who was graduating passed on to me his part-time job --that of a federal grain sampler working for a federal grain inspector. When I finished classes for the day, I drove into the countryside to small town railway yards bordered by tall grain silos. My job was to break the metal seal on the boxcar doors, climb up and onto the pile of grain in the boxcar, and bag grain samples. My boss, a nice, elderly federal grain inspector, examined and graded the quality of the grain samples I gathered.

On a normal day, I would visit three small town railroad yards, take samples from some twenty boxcars, and deliver the samples to the inspector. He and other grain inspectors were very busy in rural areas during the Indian famines of that period.

When I was working in factories, I had the opportunity to interact with and befriend blue-collar workers because I was a factory laborer myself. As an itinerant grain sampler, I saw a lot of the countryside and met farmers in that capacity. I could not have spent my time better with different parts of American society even if I wasn't making money to get through college!

Q: That is also not very different from the kinds of background plenty of politicians have, having grown up in various parts of the state and seen all different kinds of commercial activity, educational activity, begin to have an ambition to represent them perhaps in Congress. Did that ever occur to you?

TOMSEN: No. Way later when I was DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) in China, a visiting aide to the Ohio Governor asked me if I would be interested in running for Congress. I responded "No." That's just not me.

Q: It's a very different path for sure. But these jobs helped you get through college essentially without debt.

TOMSEN: Yes, except for the last trimester of graduate school when my one-year Heinz fellowship ran out. I could not cover about \$500 in the final months of the last trimester, and took out a loan. I paid it off quickly after entering the Foreign Service.

Q: We're still in college from '58 to '62? A lot of other things are going on from '58 to '62. Desegregation, the election of President Kennedy and everything that developed from that. How did that affect you?

TOMSEN: That affected me, as it did many in my generation, quite profoundly. Kennedy and Nixon, as you know, were running for president in 1960. They both came through Springfield, Ohio, campaigning. In those days as in previous decades, many of the candidates for president travelled in trains with dining and sleeping facilities. They delivered speeches from the rear of the train to gatherings at pre-scheduled stops. Nixon came through and I went to his rally at a railway station in town.

I dimly recall that Kennedy travelled by air and vehicle during his Midwest swing. He delivered campaign speeches at colleges and universities. Launching of a Peace Corps was one of his topics. He first raised the Peace Corps at the University of Michigan. The enthusiastic reception of his call to American youth to join the Peace Corps prompted him to make it a major issue in the 1960 campaign.

Our Wittenberg Campus was Kennedy's next campaign stop after the University of Michigan. I'll never forget sitting on bleachers in the football stadium with friends listening to his inspirational speech about how the country needed to move into a new stage led by a new generation. He asked how many of us were willing to learn Urdu and serve in the Peace Corps as teachers in a Third World country. After his visit, all of us in that group decided to organize a Peace Corps committee on campus. We wrote to members of Congress urging them to support legislation for the Peace Corps. I decided that somehow, some day, I would volunteer for the Peace Corps.

Q: That's pretty remarkable - one speech had that much of an effect.

TOMSEN: Yes. Very moving. His presidential inauguration speech, as you know, was also inspiring for our generation.

Q: All right. With the end of college, what sort of ideas did you have as you now approached the end of either graduate work or actually going to work? What was the immediate trajectory from college for you?

TOMSEN: About my junior year, I began to consider seriously next steps. My two career aspirations remained:

-- The practical which was eventually to go into teaching. In my family, there was a tradition of teaching. I had in mind obtaining at least a master's degree and maybe later on a Ph.D.

-- I also retained a glimmer of hope about the Foreign Service. I still considered this aspiration a very long shot. I did take the Foreign Service written test after graduating from Wittenberg. I must say I didn't do very well! Indeed, I was stunned by the difficulty of the test!

One priority I set for myself was completing the master's degree quickly. I had seen students, for financial or whatever reasons, truncating their graduate studies into two or three phases, delaying completion until their late 20s. I was 21 when I graduated from Wittenberg and wished to finish the master's requirements in two years' time. That would provide plenty of time to settle into a career path. This strategy conflicted with my idealism which was quite strong --applying for the Peace Corps, also participating in the desegregation movement you mentioned. I did participate in the Martin Luther King's 1963 March on Washington. I stood right under the iconic Lincoln Memorial, south side, with over 100,000 people of all races standing around me, on both sides of the reflecting

pool back to the Washington Monument. I looked up utterly transfixed as Martin Luther King gave his historic "I Have a Dream" speech. To this day, that has remained one of the most memorable and impressionistic moments of my life.

In my senior year at Wittenberg, I applied to several graduate schools, requesting financial aid. Two offered financial assistance, which was a necessary condition in my case --The Kent State (northern Ohio near Cleveland) Political Science Department and the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA). I chose GSPIA. Its Heinz fellowship applied only to the first year of GSPIA's one-and-a third year graduate program. But it fully covered tuition that first year.

GSPIA's program had a greater academic appeal. It covered Political Science, International Relations, and Public Administration, had a diverse international student body, and the opportunity to take courses in the University of Pittsburgh's Political Science and Economics graduate departments. My personal interview with my future advisor at GSPIA, Dr. Daniel Cheever, went well. Dr. Cheever had taught at Harvard for many years. He had a national reputation and was the author of the highly regarded *Swords into Plowshares* textbook on international peacekeeping operations.

Q: The tuition was covered but you still needed to find funds for room and board, miscellaneous things.

TOMSEN: Right. Graduate school academic pressures ruled out part-time work. Classes continued through nearly all the summer months. I was always short of money and had to share an apartment with two other graduate students. What really saved me, though, was volunteering for an experiment on cholesterol at the University of Pittsburgh's medical college. I and two others --they were both in dentistry-- became guinea pigs. We were required to stick to what was on the daily menu and not consume any food item outside the medical experiment's menu. We had a blood test every day.

The medical college provided breakfast, lunch and dinner --we had to be there at a certain time for each one of those meals. The menus were managed in such a way as to send our cholesterol levels way up and then bring them way down. To this day, I have a cholesterol problem! (Laughter) But I didn't care. In those days, I was getting free meals. Making ends meet every day remained a problem in graduate school, especially during the last few months at GSPIA after the one-year Heinz fellowship expired.

Q: In graduate school, what did you focus on?

TOMSEN: I focused on political science, international affairs and government management. One useful course I still remember was built around foreign policy making, using the interagency process.

Q: Is the year you graduate, 1963?

TOMSEN: I did finish my course work at the end of 1963. Unfortunately, I missed my graduation ceremony in early 1964.

As I approached the end of graduate school, I applied to the Peace Corps. As a backup, and aware that my draft board deferment would not last long after graduate school, I also visited the Marine Corps recruitment center in downtown Pittsburgh to see if I could qualify as a Marine Corps officer. The recruiter, I remember, was a tall, ramrod straight, clean-cut individual, absolutely crisp uniform --right out of Marine Corps central casting. I took their physical and filled out paperwork. I had still not heard from the Peace Corps when, about a month later, he phoned and invited me to come back downtown to see him. When I arrived, he gave me a letter of acceptance, stating that a slot had been reserved for me in the next Officer Candidate School (OCS) class at Quantico, Virginia.

The following week, the other corps, the Peace Corps, sent an invitation to go to Nepal! I chose the Peace Corps and Nepal. The Peace Corps had been a preference since Kennedy announced it. Also, the Marine Corps acceptance letter and accompanying instructions made it clear that I would be making a commitment for four years. The Peace Corps commitment was for two years. That gave me more time to begin a career in my mid-, rather than my late-20s.

Now, going back to missing my GSPIA graduation, I did so because the three-month Peace Corp/Nepal training program at George Washington University started in January, 1964, directly after I completed my last class at GSPIA in December. So, I could not attend it. But a half century later, I did catch up to the GSPIA graduating ceremony when I was able to joke --in the first line of my commencement speech to the 2014 GSPIA graduating class-- that "I'm delighted to be here today because I was unable to be present at my graduation ceremony in 1964 since I already was in Peace Corps training and preparing to go to Nepal!"

At any rate, I went to Washington for the beginning of the Peace Corps training period, which was three months of intensive (Nepali) language and (South Asia) Area Studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The follow-up physical training was on Hawaii's main island, where we trekked through mountains, generally roughed it, and did practice teaching in Hilo.

Q: We're back here with you now at the orientation for going to Nepal with the Peace Corps.

TOMSEN: All of us showed up on a bright day in February 1964 at the Allen Lee Hotel not far from the Potomac River and the National Mall and two blocks from the State Department. Today, the pre-WWII building is a dormitory on George Washington University's ever-expanding campus. Our Nepal III Group was scheduled to replace Nepal I that arrived in Nepal in 1962, just after the Peace Corps got off the ground. We numbered 37 and were divided into two groups. The largest group were teachers of English as a second language, the main preference put forward by the Nepali

Government. The other, smaller, group were foresters. The Nepali government wanted our forestry group to help train their new Forest Service; also to assist in mapping the forests in Nepal, including via helicopters.

During our training, there was always a psychiatrist or two hovering over us. They gave us disagreeable "peer evaluation" forms to fill out "evaluating" our fellow Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) trainees. Questions like "Who would you like to room with? Who would you not like to room with?" and lots of other leading questions designed to let them determine --and they really had no ability to determine this-- whether any of us could survive in Nepal. Their mandate was to predict who was too unstable and wouldn't be able to work in Nepal, I suppose.

We resented the periodic sit-down interviews with the psychiatrists that smacked of interrogations, trying to judge our lives. One by one during training, the lead psychiatrist told about nine members of our group, basically, "You're out of here." They did it very efficiently --an isolated meeting with a trainee who would be told he or she had been "selected out," then they'd be gone. We weren't even able to say goodbye.

Q: Out of curiosity, in your opinion from the little you knew of this group, had you identified people that you thought, "It's very nice that they want to serve in Nepal but they don't seem like they'd be ready for the rigors of it?"

TOMSEN: It's a fair question. But we did not believe that the psychiatrists had the competence to make that imperious decision. There was one in our group who went through training and walked to his village in Nepal. He took a quick look, walked back to Kathmandu and flew back to the States, not at Peace Corps expense. Another candidate who was selected out went to Nepal on her own. So, the psychiatrists' many tests failed in those cases. No doubt, there were many other failed cases.

The last day of training in Hawaii, I and the other trainees were sent to one of those banks of little mailboxes at the entrance of our building. My mailbox and mailboxes of other trainees were next to each other. For example, Ralph's (a pseudonym) mailbox was next to mine. The psychiatrists set it up so that every mailbox contained a slip of paper with a room number to go to. There were three rooms: one was for the group that would go to Nepal, one was to receive those who were selected out, and one was for those who needed extra medical attention before they went.

So, Ralph and I were next to each other and we both took out our little pieces of paper. We had different room numbers. I said to Ralph, "It looks like I've been selected out." He said, "No, I think I am selected out." We couldn't do anything but go to the assigned rooms. Mine turned out to be the one for those going to Nepal. We never saw Ralph again. He and some others were selected out and were sent back to the Mainland.

Years later, the Peace Corps dropped the psychiatrists from training programs. It created a very sensible system whereby volunteers would be trained in-country and leave voluntarily if they did not want to continue through the full two-year tour.

Q: In Armenia many years later, when you were ambassador -

TOMSEN: Yes. In 1964, the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal Henry Stebbins swore in our group, Nepal III. At the embassy in Armenia during the late 1990s, I swore in two Peace Corps groups. I congratulated them, talked about Armenia and, recalling my own 2 years in the Peace Corps in Nepal, offered a few predictions of some things they might not expect to happen! One Armenia PCV sent me a letter afterward --“Thank you very much for being part of our swearing-in ceremony for Armenia. We loved your talk with us about both your Peace Corps experience and what it has meant to you over the years. We wish you well and I hope we may meet again. I enclosed the words to the poem which I took from a Joan Baez album.”

The poem is gushy. But it reflected the idealism and optimism of Peace Corps volunteers:

“May the Lord bless and keep you
always. May your wishes always
come true. May you always do for
others and let others do for you.
May you build a ladder to the stars
and climb on every rung. May your
heart stay forever young. May you
grow up to be righteous, may you
grow up to be true. May you always
know the truth and see the light
in front of you. May you always
be courageous, stand upright and be
strong. May your spirit stay forever young.
May you have a firm foundation when the
winds of change shift. May your
heart always be joyful, may your
song always be sung.”

Q: Very nice.

TOMSEN: Speaking about folk songs and Joan Baez, one relief during language training and area studies -

Q: This is back when you were a Peace Corps volunteer?

TOMSEN: Yes, when we were in language and area studies training at George Washington for three months. We would, after hours, sit on balconies at the Allen Lee

Hotel. Two of us had guitars. We would sing the folk songs from that era, mainly from Joan Baez' and Judy Collins' collections. There was also a lot of classroom pressure. We buckled down to learn the Nepali language. Our Nepali language teachers were as enthusiastic as we were.

Q: Pause just a moment. Nepali is related to Hindi?

TOMSEN: Yes.

Q: So it is a syllabic alphabet?

TOMSEN: Yes, that's called the Devanāgarī script. A lot of written Nepali is actually Hindi or pure Sanskrit. I learned Hindi later in the Foreign Service. The tribes in the mountainous central Nepal Mahabharata Range speak a Tibetan-related language from the Tibetan-Burmese branch of languages, as well as Nepali. The British recruited most of their Gurkha regiments from these tribes. They are of Mongol stock, from mountainside subsistence agricultural communities, very hardy and tough --Gurungs, Magars, Rai, Limbus.

Q: And they were descendants of the original Mongol invasion through that area long ago, or had they just migrated?

TOMSEN: Anthropologist lecturers in our area studies' classes thought they had migrated into the Himalayas from present-day Mongolia through Tibet, pushed there by billiard-ball type migrations of other tribes behind them millennia ago.

In our area study classes, we also learned Nepali history. The Nepali royal dynasty had been founded by a Rajput family from India in the 18th century. Many Nepalis still revered the king as a deity. During our two years in Nepal, King Mahendra's proper name plus honorific religious and royal titles added up to 7 words: Sri Panch Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. We noticed that he seemed to change cabinets every six or eight months. He counted on the ministers of the moment to leave satisfied that they had collected enough corrupt patronage while in office to secure their future loyalty even as the next group of ministers was replacing them.

Religion was an important subject in area studies. Hinduism predominates in Nepal. Consequently, much of Nepali society is overladen with the caste system, particularly in the more heavily populated valleys. The Gurkha communities in the mountains that arrived from the Tibetan plateau practice a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Tibetan-speaking population (the Sherpas are one example) living along the high Himalaya range practices Tibet's version of Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) Buddhism. These Tibetan ethnic groups have a flexible community hierarchy that does not emulate the rigidity of the Hindu caste system.

There are Brahmins and Untouchables and numerous castes in between among the majority Hindus in Nepal's population. The royal family and most senior officials are high caste Hindus. Of course, Buddhism started from Lumbini where Buddha was born in southern Nepal. Buddhism spread from there into India. Later there was a Hindu counter-reformation and Muslim invasions that virtually wiped Buddhism out in India. Today, numerous Buddhist monasteries, stupas, prayer walls still abound in Nepal's mountains, along with several important Hindu pilgrimage sites. Two very large and ancient stupas are in Kathmandu, Bodhnath and Swayambhunath.

During training at GW (George Washington University) an early PCV returnee from Nepal gave us an eye-opener presentation. He described the friendly and open environment of Nepali villages where we would live. We would be an object of curiosity. Nepalis will want to freely engage us in conversation inside or outside our home. In fact, wherever we went. When teaching, he said, don't be upset if students get up and walk out of your class. They do not have to ask permission. Same applies if they do not show up for a week or so.

He mentioned the 98% illiteracy rate; talked about the one road in the country --the *Rajpath*, or "King's Path." The Rajpath was built by India. It extends upward from the Indian plains to the capital Kathmandu. Outside of Kathmandu there was no electricity or running water that we could expect. There were no cars, of course, because there were no roads. Poverty was extreme where we would be assigned.

Cows are holy in Hinduism. In Kathmandu, also in towns and villages, they wandered around, laid around, and relieved themselves everywhere. Nobody accosted them. They ate anything they could get hold of. There were large numbers of dogs in the bazaars that ran wild, reproduced and killed each other over territory. Owners rarely kept their livestock fenced in --cows, goats, pigs and chickens, too, wandered through bazaars. They were shooed away, but snuck back again looking for food.

During the physical phase of our training in mid-1964, we climbed mountains on Hawaii's main island and did some practice teaching in Hilo. Except for a few in our group, we, including myself, had never experienced long-distance air travel.

Flying across the States from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco and then on to Hawaii was a new adventure in itself. Still etched in my mind are the amazing views looking down from the airplane window on a clear day as we flew across the rugged Appalachians, the vast Plains states, then over the white topped peaks of the Rockies. More splendid scenery awaited us as we took off for Nepal from Hawaii. There were brief refueling stops in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Rangoon, and Calcutta. The temperature and humidity were progressively higher at each stop --highest in Calcutta when we sat sweating in the transit lounge in the wee hours waiting for the sun to come up to enjoy the last leg of the flight to Kathmandu. That morning we were greeted by the panorama of the stunningly beautiful, brightly white, outer Himalayan range as we

approached Kathmandu --8 of the 10 highest mountains in the world stood at eye level right before us!

When we landed, the Kathmandu Peace Corps office literally “turned us over” to the Nepali government for several days of in-country training at an abandoned palace. The Nepali officials who spoke to us were excellent --we learned a lot more about Nepal. Unfortunately, the old, somewhat dilapidated, empty, musty, long ago unused palace they housed and taught us in was a very unhealthy environment. To put it mildly, hygiene, drinking water and clean utensils and plates were Nepali standard that we were not yet prepared for. Within a day or two, everybody got fierce stomach pains. My future housemate, Ed Burgess, told me that he escaped one day, walked to the embassy snack bar and was able to buy sugar-coated raised doughnuts.

A Nepali doctor at the palace sent me to another doctor in the Kathmandu bazaar to get a shot. So, I went to his shop and he pulled out his syringe. It was about a sixteenth-of-an-inch in diameter, a thick needle with a pipe-like, worn down handle. I guessed it dated from the 1930s or so. At the end, the steel needle narrowed only somewhat, swerving down to a steel point with a hole. The Nepali doctor administered the shot and I walked back through Kathmandu’s crowded streets to the palace. The wound quickly healed.

After the Nepali Government training, the great majority of Nepal III PCVs were sent out in groups of two and three to isolated villages. We didn't see much of each other until the end of our two-year assignments because we were so scattered in remote mountain communities.

The awesome beauty of Himalayan Nepal, the valleys and the mountains, and the wonderful friendships that you made with Nepalis more than made up for the separation from each other. The warm personal relations we established with Nepalis and the wholly different culture we would learn about balanced off any downsides. Nepalis frequently invited us into their homes. You could drop in at any teashop and sit down with Nepali strangers at a table drinking tea and join them in conversation.

I discovered that the Nepali speaker who talked to our training group was right about expecting student absenteeism. You never knew when a student would drop by our place without knocking for a chat, or a cup of tea, or a game of chess. After all, there were no phones. Things were casual, open door. It did not matter if a Nepali didn't show up for dinner when invited. When the Nepali host and guest met the next day, neither raised the subject but just carried on as usual.

And there were other unpredictables. I remember one day the principal had organized a faculty meeting outside under the sun. We were sitting on straight-back chairs in a circle under the mountains, all the professors. I was the only foreign faculty member. The principal finished what he had to say, and then he just abruptly announced, “And now

Professor Tomsen will speak.” That was kind of helpful training because later on in the Foreign Service, you would never know when you'd be called on to speak. (Laughter)

Q: Absolutely right. Many occasions of my own, I had the same story.

TOMSEN: You can't prepare. You just have to not be surprised when, out of the blue, this happens!

Q: In Nepal, the famous mountain of garbage -was that there when you were there?

TOMSEN: There were always numerous scattered things left on the ground from all the discarded stuff --poop, broken items after the various animals, the Untouchables, and the very poor finished scavenging. But there really was not much left after that. The mountains of garbage became a term used by the media to describe the high piles of clothing, equipment and food left behind by Everest mountain expeditions in the Everest area.

In the Peace Corps, we were told to take the initiative ourselves, to live with the people, and work things out. We got \$40 a month in Nepali rupees for food. Meat or eggs were often not available; vegetables and rice were. That \$40 usually went for your food and clothing. The Nepali Ministry of Education paid for our housing. Our twice a day fare was routinely Nepali dal, bhat, tarkari (lentils, rice, vegetables), topped off by, if you could get it, chicken, goat or buffalo meat. Never beef. Once we slaughtered a black pig an Untouchable family sold us. We all got horribly, horribly sick for days after gorging on bacon and pork. We did not repeat that disaster. Nepali meal times were mid-morning and evening: dal, bhat, tarkari. In between we snacked on milky tea cum sugar and sometimes biscuits. For some reason, most of the female PCVs gained weight in Nepal. Nearly all the males suffered a precipitous drop in weight, down to a wiry frame.

The Peace Corp's Kathmandu office assigned Ed Burgess (Pennsylvania), Pat Reinhardt (Missouri) and I to Pokhara, in the lovely Pokhara Valley under the High Himalayas in Western Nepal. Pat taught shop at the multi-purpose high school near our house. Ed taught English. Later we were joined by Jim Dooley (Michigan), a forester assigned to the Pokhara forestry office. We became lifelong friends. In our late 70s, we still hold periodic reunions with our wives. Ed's thorough grasp of Nepali language and his able management of our Frontier-like kitchen were critical to our health and survival during our years in Pokhara.

The Peace Corps provided us a cardboard book-locker filled with books. It was invaluable. We also each received shoulders to below hip, sturdy Khelti backpacks for mountain trekking. Our household kits further included a sleeping bag, a canteen, an indispensable pressure cooker, and a small medicine chest. It contained bandages, syringes, tetracycline, extremely bitter malaria tablets, lomotil for stomach issues, and halazone water purifying tablets. All else we acquired locally. We built a marvelous charpi (latrine) to handle those frequent, round the clock visits (stays too) to the facilities.

On mountain treks, we rolled out our sleeping bags at *bhattis* --those were private Nepali mountain homes of families that took in passing travelers for a very small fee. *Bhatti* dinners were the usual dal, bhat, takari. We then rolled out our sleeping bags and slept on the mud floor next to the mud baked chulo (stove).

Q: The books were for students? Or for you?

TOMSEN: For Peace Corps volunteers. The book-locker, contained fiction and non-fiction paperbacks well-chosen by the Washington Peace Corps office. It was a godsend. One memorable book was *Thunder Out of China*, written by Theodore Lincoln White. We had candlelight or kerosene lanterns to read by at night. Nepalis usually turned in at sundown. We usually went to bed an hour or two after dark, reading or chatting, and woke up at sunrise with the rest of the bazaar.

We periodically received a Peace Corps newsletter, entitled *Volunteer*, sent to all PCV locations abroad. It took a while to get to us --there was a high casualty rate in our mail, about 50% got through, we estimated. I received the ballot for the '64 election that Lyndon Johnson won against Barry Goldwater. I was going to vote for Johnson but my absentee ballot arrived months after the election! Once a Peace Corps volunteer got a box of cookies from his mother. Probably in Calcutta or Kathmandu where the package transited, somebody had punched a hole in the box, reached through, and pulled out a few of the cookies; but the rest of the cookies in the broken box eventually got to him in his village.

The Peace Corps newsletter most helpfully listed job opportunities for post-PCV service in the U.S. It included articles about on-the-ground PCV daily life somewhere in the world. Once, we're sitting way up in the mountains of Nepal, 12th century AD, and here's a photo on the front page of a PCV serving in Lagos, Nigeria in a white suit, nice shirt and tie --handsome guy-- reading from a document during a television news broadcast in Nigeria. Sure he did a great job. But it was a sharp contrast with Nepal!

I would say that health issues were the main problems we faced in Nepal. We took all the precautions we could, like boiling our water and cleaning utensils. But we could expect to get knocked down at least once during our assignment. That proved true with me. I got a severe case of Hepatitis B. The Peace Corps doctor kindly put me up in his Kathmandu home's guest room and provided medication and care. I recovered and returned to Pokhara. Today, Hepatitis B is still a part of me!

Safety was also an issue in mountainous Nepal. When we trekked to different areas it was usually along a 2–4 foot wide trail along mountain ridges or (more often) directly up and down for thousands of feet. No joke. At times, the trails simply disappeared. Bridges were sometimes unreliable --particularly over large creeks and rivers. Swiss assistance in Nepal constructed high cable chain bridges over gorges. Like much in Nepal, they were not properly maintained. The wooden flat boards forming the floor of these sagging chain bridge disintegrated. The Nepalis tossed bamboo poles onto the sagging cables of the

bridge to replace the wood. The poles rolled when you walked on top of them. Once a Nepali stepped on the back of one that I was about to step off of and onto the end of the next pole. It suddenly turned and I rolled off! I was just able to grab one of the side vertical cables in time (!) and rescue myself from a twenty story or more fall into the raging water far below.

A treasured PCV forester in our group, Bruce, was less fortunate. He and another Nepal III forester, Andy, were trekking along a ridge as night was falling, less than an hour from the village where they planned to overnight. Bruce noiselessly slipped off the trail, fell about thirty feet, hit a rock, and died instantly of a head injury. This tragedy floored us all. I wrote a somber poem remembering Bruce after we learned of his death in Pokhara.

I taught “Politics” (Political Science in the U.S., Politics in the U.K.), Civics and Comparative Governments at Prithvi Narayan College located a hundred yards across a field from our house in Pokhara. The college was named after the 18th century founder of the Nepali royal dynasty. I also taught English in two other schools, part-time. One, a “Normal School,” was a teacher training institution. The other was a night school. The college hours were from 6:30 to 9:30 in the morning because many of the 80 students attending were teachers at high schools and elementary schools in the Pokhara Valley that started at 10:00 a.m.

Every morning walking to class I looked up at the middle section of the High Himalayan range only about thirty-five miles away as the magpie flies. It contains 3 of the most well-known mountains in the world --Annapurna, Dhaulagiri, and Machapuchare-- all white-capped, absolutely beautiful, all year round. Mountain climbing was forbidden on Machapuchare. The local Gurung tribes considered Machapuchare holy.

The college was constructed of mud, bamboo and straw. One day before I arrived, a ferocious gale had come down the valley and literally blew the college away. The teachers and students together rebuilt it. The first graduating class (it was a four-year college) of seniors numbered about fifteen, far smaller than the large, more prestigious universities in Kathmandu. When the national “BA” examination took place, the seniors scored the highest marks in the country as a class. The King rewarded the college with a large grant to modernize and expand. While I have not seen the most recent statistics, 10 years ago it had grown to about 6,000 students. Known now as Prithvi Narayan “Campus,” it serves all of western Nepal, offering MAs, Ph.Ds., medical as well as undergraduate degrees.

Years later when I was Director of India, Nepal, Sri Lankan Affairs in the State Department’s Near East and South Asia Bureau (NEA/INS), the Nepali Chargé called. He invited me to meet the Nepali UN (United Nations) delegation of mixed government and non-government representatives going up to New York to attend the annual UN General Assembly (UNGA) session. I went to his evening reception and happily met a former student of mine in that senior class, a member of the Nepal UN delegation! He was as

thrilled as I was! I probably more so on hearing that he was now the “Chief of Campus” of Prithvi Narayan Campus.

Q: Let me just ask: You’ve also been an English teacher. Was it successful? Did people actually learn English?

TOMSEN: The thirst for learning English was ubiquitous, especially among the young. There were English classes in universities and high schools, and also in private schools, government recognized or not. Because the country was 98% illiterate, it was not surprising that Nepali teachers of English weren't always that fluent in the language, to put it mildly. Peace Corps English teachers were in demand because we spoke native, conversational English.

To give you an example of the demand for English teachers: My friend, Mahendra Singh Thapa, the PN College History teacher, spoke fluent English. From the Magar Tribe, his father had been a Gurkha soldier so he attended English-medium schools run by the British army for the children of Gurkhas. He earned extra income by teaching English in a private night school. Mahendra asked me to join him to teach in the same night school. PCVs, of course, never charged. We were freebies!

So, we took our flashlights (called “torches”) and walked together for two hours to teach at the night school, returning in the dark about 10:00 p.m. --through wind and rain, on rice paddy dykes and across fields. I was able to help my friend and take advantage of another opportunity to teach. A downside: I gradually learned that a lot of students were leaving other tuition-paying private night schools to study at ours, partly because a native-speaking American taught there. As always, I enjoyed the teaching, but felt uncomfortable about contributing to this comparative disadvantage.

A word about the poverty we saw in Nepal. Unlike in India, almost all Nepalis had enough to eat and a roof over their heads. Even in Kathmandu, a single beggar was a very rare sight. Yet poverty was endemic. In rural areas, men and women did backbreaking labor on terraced mountainsides. They raised and harvested rice, corn and millet, pounding the rice inside their huts at night. Sometimes they banged pots and pans together all night in the fields to drive away monkeys, bears and deer from their ripening crops.

There was very little relief from the Nepali government or foreign NGOs when natural disasters periodically struck isolated communities in the mountains --usually flash floods, landslides or earthquakes. There were no roads to transport food and medicine, no communication lines to announce emergencies. Government corruption sopped up international and government relief resources if and when they materialized in Kathmandu.

The survivors had no choice but to pick themselves up, bury their dead and reconstruct their lives. Reading newspapers accounts about the huge 2015 Nepal earthquake

aftermath nothing much has changed. Kim and I made a cash contribution –but expected that relatively few resources would reach the survivors of that disaster that killed over 9,000. The attitude of too many Nepali officials was and is, “Grab as much as you can while the taking is good,” and put your relatives in position to do the same.

Ed Burgess, my Pokhara housemate, later a Peace Corp staffer in Kathmandu, once accompanied an American United Nations doctor on a helicopter to a remote western Himalayan village where people and livestock were dying of some disease. Ed was the interpreter and advisor. Nepali medical assistants also were on board. When they and their American pilot viewed the village scene of scores of human and animal bodies scattered on the ground, the pilot reached under his seat, pulled out a bottle of whisky and began chugging it down.

So they put on masks and investigated. They discovered that a teenage girl, a shepherd, had slept in a small, wooden shack, a *goth*, on a mountainside summer pasture above the tree line. Tragically, she was struck down by the bubonic plague inflicted by biting fleas attached to rats inside the goth.

Q: All the way up in that very remote and cold and forbidding terrain?

TOMSEN: Yes. The shepherd and goth were at about 12,000 feet. Remember, the Himalayas are much closer to the equator than the Rockies. It is actually hot during the daytime in the summer. Above the treeline and below the snowline, we would trek at that level in light clothing. The temperature drops at night. So they flew up medicine to inoculate the living in the village. Luckily, the plaque did not spread further because of the isolation of the village.

Q: The disease never got out of the village, and at least those still living could be inoculated?

TOMSEN: Yes. I heard that also happens in Africa, where deep inside the jungle, say 20-30 years ago. There would be an epidemic and it wouldn't spread because it was so isolated. People just passed away –as had at least half of this village in northwestern Nepal. Life continues as before among the village survivors.

That was tragic. But nearly all of the unpredictable thing we encountered in Nepal were positive, sometimes delightful. Many learning experiences for us. We were in a different culture with a different concept of time and space and many other things as well. We spoke Nepali pretty well. Very few Nepalis spoke English, especially on the trail. Most Nepalis assumed the world was flat so we did not get into that topic. You'd meet Nepalis who had taken off their shoes to walk barefoot because they wanted to preserve their shoes in good shape to show off when they reached their destination. Or they'd put the top of a pen in their pocket; they didn't need the bottom as the top was sufficient to indicate they were literate.

You're walking in the mountains. You'd pass stone *chauteras* built by travelers or people seeking *karma* through good works. They were located near passes or along a straight stretch of the trail—usually built on top of 3 to 5 tiers of rock that included a ledge to sit on—and capped by two trees. You could sit down, rest, and converse with Nepalis pausing for a break.

The conversations always started with “Where are you coming from and where are you going.” Then descriptions of each other's family. You might offer him some of your water, he'd give you something, the most amazing out of my personal world (and his too!) conversations occurred. It was not unusual for a Nepali to look out towards the mountains and burst into a folk song. We could, if we felt like it, respond, having memorized a few stanzas from Nepali songs.

I recall that one morning the lady in a shop across the street began screaming. We went over to ask if we could help. What had happened was somebody had broken into her storeroom armed with a key to open the padlock. The problem was that both key and padlock had been mass produced in India to exactly similar specifications. So, any key among the countless thousands of similar keys produced could open any of the corresponding thousands of padlocks produced at the same factory. A number of shopkeepers in the Pokhara bazaar used the same cheap Indian key-padlock sets to lock the shop doors up at night. Both thieves and shopkeepers bought their keys in the bazaar at the same store!

Nonetheless, the robbery was very unusual in Pokhara. Crime was not a major problem. I can't remember what happened in this case but the police were pretty effective in an isolated community where most everybody knew everybody else. They were also feared for their tendency to close the door and harshly beat suspects and witnesses.

Our posting to Pokhara opened up splendid vistas for Himalayan trekking. But it also inhibited our ability to get to countries outside of Nepal for our one long vacation allowed by the Peace Corps. At the same time, the frequent Hindu holidays in Nepal gave us many near and far trekking opportunities. We took up to a month off during the Fall school break. During shorter vacations, we visited PCVs in other villages a two- to three-day trek away. I took two long treks while I was in Nepal, both about three weeks. One was with 2 other volunteers around the Annapurna chain, up to the Tibetan Plateau part of Nepal, on the other side of the Annapurna massive near Tibet and then back to Pokhara. We crossed a 19,000-foot pass to get to the Tibetan side.

Q: That's considered a religious route, the pilgrimage?

TOMSEN: Yes. Muktinath, a venerated Hindu --also Buddhist-- pilgrimage site, lies at 13,000 feet. It's on the way up to the 19,000-foot Muktinath Pass over the Annapurna range. The other long trek that I took was towards Everest base camp in the Sherpa area. I went with a Sherpa friend. We visited famous Tengboche monastery and stayed in his Sherpa village. Potatoes, were the staple of the Sherpa diet, prepared for lunch and dinner

in a variety of ways, mixed with all kinds of herbs, chilies and peppers. A storm stopped us a half day's walk from Everest base camp. Both treks were fantastic experiences!

Twice I tried to get out of the country, like most volunteers did for the long vacation. All of us wanted to see other countries before returning to the U.S. The main destinations were Afghanistan, India and Thailand. My trip to Afghanistan fell through in 1965 when the Indo-Pakistani war broke out that year. In 1966, I tried again but could not succeed. Every day I walked the four miles to the airport to wait in a teashop, sip tea and watch the monsoon clouds ringing the mountains, then returned home. The airport was a field. When the stray cows were driven off and the clouds cleared, one of Nepal's WWII-era DC-3 could land. The clouds were the main problem because the Royal Nepal Airplanes did not have radar. They flew by sight. The monsoon clouds persisted for a week. I gave up and walked home.

Q: Let's pick up, you were talking about your vacations and the difficulties of actually being able to take one because of the airport and the uncertainty of flying.

TOMSEN: Yes. After we arrived in Pokhara we passed many days at tea houses on the airport road gazing at the mountains waiting for the daily flight. I was on one flight when, approaching Kathmandu, the Nepali pilot invited an attractive British young lady in a flimsy outfit to join him in the cockpit and to help him land. The plane landed on the tarmac, then jumped hundreds of feet into the air, and came down with a thud, pouncing to the end of the runway.

One of the teahouses near the Pokhara Airport, the Annapurna, was run by Tibetan refugee women. They were dressed in Tibetan bright color blouses and dark aprons, the traditional attire of Tibetan women. Once, I share a cup of tea with Peter Aufschneider, the Austrian mountain climber of *Seven Years in Tibet* fame. He had escaped from a British POW camp in India with Heinrich Harrer, another Austrian POW. They fled over the Himalayas to Tibet's Lhasa where Harrer electrified the Dalai Lama's Potala and waited out the end of WWII.

Q: These were Tibetan refugees in Nepal?

TOMSEN: Yes, they had fled Tibet to Nepal after the 1959 Tibet Uprising against the Chinese who had occupied Tibet in 1950. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama led the exodus of over 300,000 refugees that followed their holy leader over the passes into India and Nepal. The Dalai Lama established his Government-in-Exile in Dharamsala, in the northern Indian Himalayan foothills at Dharamsala (religious shelter). The Swiss Government assumed the responsibility for setting up camps for the refugees arriving in Nepal. We sent PL-480 wheat shipments to help with the food requirements of the camps.

The Swiss and the Nepali Governments chose an elevated mesa north of Pokhara surrounded by a steep river gorge and ridgelines to build the Hyangja Tibetan refugee camp. It was located next to the Nepali Hyangja village, an hour and a half walk north

and uphill from Pokhara. The approach from Pokhara featured a final one hundred yard or so climb up a ridgeline situated a thousand feet or so above the Seti Gandaki River.

The camp housed some 900 refugees from the northern Drukpa nomadic tribes. They were sheep and yak herders from the vast Changtang Plateau on the Tibet side of the Himalayas. Between 10,000 and 20,000 feet high and the size of Texas, the plateau ranges north into Xinjiang, west into Ladakh and Nepal, and east to Chinese settled areas. The Drukpa tribes living there were still in, say, an 8th Century B.C. pre-cultivation, pastoral stage of livelihood. The severe climate and poor soil on the plateau were not amenable to farming. Few Drukpas in the camp had seen, much less met, Nepalis, Chinese or Indians, much less Americans and Europeans.

Tribal chiefs led the clans in the Tibetan camp. They were very religious. Scores of Tibetan prayer flags flew above the camp on poles. Their first priority at the camp was to build a *gompa*, or Buddhist monastery. They adhered to the oldest Tibetan Buddhist sect, the Red Shirt branch --the Dalai Lama is of the Yellow Shirt branch. Their religious practices stressed groups praying or chanting aloud in unison --with a heavy dosage of tantrism and shamanism mixed in.

Q: Lots of sympathetic magic, lots of shamanism.

TOMSEN: Yes. The Tibetan culture is quite different from the Nepali culture. The languages are also different. I won't go into the details. Illiteracy in the camp was near complete except for the Buddhist lamas who read aloud Tibetan mantras and chanted sanskritic Tibetan prayers. The Tibetans are bigger in stature than the Nepalis, especially taller, and they wear different clothes. But they're just as friendly as the Nepalis.

While I was teaching in the initial months in Pokhara, the Swiss director of the Tibetan refugee camp, Hans Schnurrenberger, invited me to his Swiss style chalet in the camp for lunch. He introduced me to the Drukpa chiefs and showed me around the camp. Families lived in hastily constructed, small, ramshackle homes built from local materials of stone, wood and bamboo. We passed the time talking about Nepal, Tibet, and other topics. He was very engaging, sometimes jovial. He had a free-wielding. German sense of humor. At the end of the lunch, he asked if I would teach English on the weekends in the camp's open-air bamboo school of about 70 students, aged about 7-14. I agreed.

I enjoyed my days plopped down inside Tibetan society. When free on weekends, I trekked up to the camp and taught at the school. Every student, from kindergarten to middle school age, was beginning from scratch, had never seen a book, pen or even paper when in Tibet. The students sat on the ground. There were no chairs. Only a blackboard.

The headmaster was a young Tibetan. He had learned some English. He taught English. A Tibetan lama taught Tibetan. A Nepali taught Nepali. There wasn't room or expertise for anything else in the morning curriculum! I taught beginning English -the alphabet and

so on. Given the long walk back and forth to Pokhara, I occasionally overnighted in the camp and came to know Tibetans better.

I recall one night being invited to a small thatch and bamboo house where a Tibetan elder was very sick and laid out in a bed under a huge dark Tibetan cloak. A Tibetan witch doctor dressed in black wearing a high, oblique hat, also black, danced around the bed, chanting for hours, shaking a *dorje* (lightning symbol) and ringing a Tibetan bell to drive the evil spirit out of the patient.

You see this scene at times in movies. The witch doctor is armed with his various amulets and magic paraphernalia, attempting to expunge a disease from a person's body. This was the real thing! When I sat there in the darkness inside that one room hut watching him dance, chant and shake his instruments, I really did feel like I was in a different millennium. I had the same feeling when I joined in with the communal, nighttime Drukpa dances. Men, women, and children in a very large circle cheerfully swayed next to one another around a fire, singing Tibetan songs and laughing loudly under a full moon.

Mr. Schnurrenberger --we did not address each other by our first names-- stayed aloof from the dancing but not from the Tibetans in the camp. He had close personal relations with the Chiefs and other camp residents. A former Swiss Paratrooper, well over 6 feet tall, he was a very hardy individual like the Tibetans refugees themselves.

His avocation was collecting snakes. That might have drawn him to Nepal, home to over seventy species of snakes, including cobras, coral snakes and kraits. He'd collected snakes in different parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. He was a published herpetologist on Libyan snakes.

He'd been bitten many times. His arms had many snakebite scars. He always had a bag with him when on the trail. Walking next to him, he would quickly reach down, grab a snake which no one had noticed, stuff it into the bag, and take it home. There were live snakes in glass containers inside his chalet, dead ones too --and water snakes in a small enclosed pond outside. A huge snake encyclopedia stood on a pedestal in his living room, available to research his latest catch. He told me that a spitting cobra in Egypt had once released its venom towards his face but missed his eye.

While on my October 1964 long trek around Annapurna, Schnurrenberger died from a snake bite in his chalet. Camp Tibetans told me when I returned that, at mid-day, he had been playing with a thin one-foot-long snake in his chalet when it nicked him. He put it back in a jar and laid down for his afternoon nap. When he awoke, he saw the venom in the vein of his arm advancing upwards. He opened his snake encyclopedia, identified the snake, closed it, laid back down, and announced to the gathering Tibetan crowd inside his chalet that he was going to die.

Sonam was the Swiss-trained head of the small camp dispensary. He panicked. He ran out of the camp, down the steep mountain path bordering the precipice above the Seti Gandaki, and continued running on the 4-mile hilly trail to the European missionary hospital on the outskirts of Pokhara. He waylaid a European doctor and hurried back to the camp. They were too late. Schnurrenberger had died --only six hours after the small coral snake had bitten him. The coral snake, similar to the asp that killed Cleopatra, had small fangs that envenoms with little pain. The victim may be tempted to downplay the bite, but the venom is deadly and speedy.

The Tibetans told me that they had angrily thrown all the snakes Schnurrenberger had collected over the precipice, a thousand feet down into the Seti Gandaki River.

Schnurrenberger was replaced by another unforgettable character who also gravitated towards Nepal during that period. His name was Fred Barker.

Q: But Swiss as well?

TOMSEN: No, he was a Peruvian Englishman. His father was English and his mother was Peruvian. He'd grown up in Peru and then went to boarding school in England. He was a wandering spirit, like many young folks of that era --probably late '20s, a bit older than us. He went out to India and studied at an ashram for a couple of years, did pilgrimages, dived deeply into the Hindu meditation culture. He arrived in Nepal at the same time the Swiss were advertising for Schnurrenberger's replacement. Fred applied and was accepted.

The first Nepal PCV sighting of Fred Barker was by Gene Sentz. Gene was a forester in our group. He was at a teashop cum village truck stop near the Indian border waiting to hop on top of the cargo load of a truck for a few rupees ride up to Kathmandu on the Raj Path, still in 1960s the only motorable highway in Nepal at the time. The Sikhs were normally the ones driving the multi-colored lorries that, as Indians said in 1930s English, "plied" the roads of the Subcontinent. Fred Barker was sitting on the top of the cab --a perch that allowed him to enjoy the panorama of the Himalayas at a higher cost in rupees. He was dressed in a simple white dhoti and sported a huge beard. He looked like a sadhu, a Hindu ascetic so to speak. Gene briefly conversed with Fred at the teashop, then climbed onto the cheaper, rear cargo pile in the truck. Fred returned to his aerie atop the cab for the winding ascent to Kathmandu.

Fred probably discarded his dhoti and beard for the interview with the Swiss Embassy. He was dressed in western clothes when we met him in Pokhara after becoming director of the camp. Pretty soon he switched accoutrements. He adopted Tibetan clothing --a small, conical Tibetan woolen hat, a plain cotton shirt covered by a dark, knee-level Tibetan robe and Tibetan boots--a big jump from the Sadhu Gene met on the Raj Path. Fred's beard was still bushy but shorter than the ashram one. He told us he loved to ride horses in Peru.

From the windows of our house on the outskirts of Pokhara, we could look out on the trail winding up to the Tibetan camp several miles away. Sometimes we'd catch sight of Fred galloping down that road towards us, his belted Tibetan sword flapping behind him, his long wild hair flying in the wind. Once we saw him lower his sword, thrusting the point past the nose of the horse, like in the Valley of Death charge by the British cavalry at Balaclavad. He would dismount outside our house, pass his reins to the Tibetan riding with him, and come inside for tea and conversation.

Fred asked me to come back to teach at the camp. I agreed. When I had time on weekends and could spend an overnight, Fred was always very hospitable. We'd hold philosophical conversations late into the night. Fred started a donkey-yak transportation cooperative in the camp. It carried goods back and forth from Mustang on the Tibet border --previously one of the CIA mini-bases that Tibetan guerillas used to conduct raids against Chinese military convoys in Tibet.

In late 1965, as our Nepal III group was finishing up its service in Nepal, the Swiss government asked the Peace Corps for a PCV to create a vocational training school in the camp with a new and larger budget. Fred requested that I become the school's headmaster. The Peace Corps and I agreed. So I extended in the Peace Corps for eight months --moved from Pokhara to the camp. The Tibetan chiefs assigned some laborers. I labored too to build my one-room hut out of mud, stone, and bamboo, with a thatched roof. I settled in with a few belongings. Fred and I designed a larger school --a bamboo-thatch structure capable of holding about 120 students. We bought tables, chairs and some desks for teachers.

I raised the salaries of the current teachers and hired new ones, including a Nepali math and science teacher. To jump-start vocational training, I traveled down to India to buy tools --we had various vocations, carpentry being one of them, gardening, boot-making, handicrafts including weaving-- the Swiss had already started a weaving program producing Tibetan rugs in the camp. The carpentry, gardening and other tools I bought in New Delhi bazaars and took back to Nepal in a trunk were low quality. The saws had printed on them, "Made as in Western Germany," obviously suspicious. But they were the best I could find. The hammers also fell apart within months. Gardening tools survived longer. My parents mailed vegetable and sweet corn seeds from the U.S.

Going and coming to Delhi, I traveled by third-class train, the cheapest. They've since abolished third-class trains in India. Third class usually didn't have any seats. You were lucky if you found space on the floor. When you were at a train station in India and the train stopped and people got out, the best way to get in was to throw your stuff through the window and dive after it.

With the help of Fred, the Chiefs and parents, the school developed well. I returned two years later to witness gardens around every home in the camp --beans, squash, corn, cucumbers and more. The school was even bigger.

During the Peace Corps extension in the Tibetan camp, I was busy during school hours but missed my Peace Corps housemates, Ed, Pat and Jim. I spent a lot of time listening to BBC and studying Tibetan with a tutor in the camp. When the Peace Corps Country Director, George Zeidenstein, came out on a visit, I showed him around and interpreted for him during his meetings with the Tibetan chiefs and among ordinary Tibetans at the camp. All the while the camp was growing, new houses were going up --the Chiefs built a new, magnificent Gompa.

Before the Peace Corps extension in the Tibetan camp, I began to chart next steps in my life. I still saw two broad options. One was teaching, the other passing the Foreign Service exam. I took the Foreign Service test in the American Embassy on May 1, 1965. It was one of the few times I made it to Kathmandu, another being when I caught hepatitis. Two other Nepal III PCVs signed up for the test. Future Foreign Service colleague, Oregonian, and another lifelong friend, Victor Tomseth, took the exam with me. The night before, the three of us that had signed up for the test reunited over a bottle of gut-wrenching Kukri Rum. Victor and I were the only ones able to show up for the exam the following morning. I found the exam once again extremely difficult. I assumed I had failed again.

About 3 months later, I was at the Tibetan camp on a weekend when my roommate, Ed Burgess, trekked out from Pokhara to pass on an envelope from the State Department. He was holding the envelope high as he climbed up the hill to the camp. "It's your exam results from the State Department," he yelled. I shouted back asking that he throw the envelope over the ridge into the river. I was certain I had failed. Ed continued to the top and handed me the envelope. I opened it and was pleasantly shocked to see that I had passed! I asked Ed why he had not thrown the envelope over the cliff. He answered with a smile that he had opened it in Pokhara and saw that I had passed!

That was great news. The State Department letter listed the next steps in the process --oral exam, medical exam, and a security clearance.

Q: I'm sorry, this is now 1965 when you get the results?

TOMSEN: Yes, about late August 1965. The envelope was dated June 14, 1965. Over the next 7 months or so into my extension, I had an unstable correspondence with the Board of Examiners to set the date for my oral exam. The extension in the Tibetan Camp dictated a delay in taking the oral in Washington when I returned to the U.S. They never received the initial response I mailed to them choosing one of the options offered, probably another casualty of the Nepali mail system. We eventually agreed on September 12, 1966 in Washington, after my extension ended the previous month.

Meanwhile, as a fallback, I had responded to a college teaching position announcement in one of the (Peace Corps) *Volunteer* newsletters. It called for applications for the position of an Instructor in the Social Science Department at St. Cloud State College in Minnesota. So I applied and was accepted.

Q: Without a Ph.D. but with a Master's?

TOMSEN: Yes. In the mid-1960s there was not then a surplus of new Ph.Ds looking for college level teaching positions. Especially in many of the smaller colleges in the U.S., a master's degree earned you the right to be an Instructor. The University's Social Science faculty booklet placed me lowest ranked on the list of the faculty in that department. I still have the booklet today.

Q: I'm sorry, it was 1965 when you got the results?

TOMSEN: Yes. But my first letter back to them on a date for the oral got lost in the mail. After another exchange and six months later, my oral exam was set for September 12, 1965. Classes at St. Cloud College would begin soon after. I determined that, if I passed the oral, I must still keep my commitment to teach a semester at St. Cloud. That would give enough time for the college to find a replacement at my Instructor level before the next semester. I hoped the Department would allow me to enter the first introductory State Department A-100 course in 1967.

May I add here a lookback at the Peace Corps?

I cannot overstate the many benefits my two plus years in Nepal gave to me at an impressionable phase of my life. In countless ways, living and working in the very different Nepali and Tibetan cultures changed my outlook on life, matured me, widened my knowledge horizons, and enriched my values.

I flew to Thailand on August 31. I didn't have much money, nor presentable clothes for international travel. I felt healthy and strong although down to a skinny 125 pounds. During an overnight in Bangkok, I went to a Thai boxing match, you know, where they kick and elbow. I was in the stands, surrounded by howling Thai, when I noticed that the young man quietly sitting next to me looked like a Nepali. I greeted him in vernacular Nepali. He happily responded likewise! My Nepal experience was extended to one more enjoyable evening in Bangkok.

There was a Chinese restaurant next to the Peace Corps hostel in Katmandu. The owner, Mr. Wong, named it the Peace Restaurant, no doubt to attract Peace Corps volunteers. And it did. The sweet-and-sour pork was great and it wasn't that expensive. When I told Mr. Wong I was going to transit Hong Kong, he gave me an envelope and asked me to drop it off at his relative's apartment in Hong Kong. After arrival, I found myself wandering through different levels, nooks and crannies of these huge crowded tenement buildings that we built in the '50s for refugees coming out of Communist China. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese families lived there. I finally found Mr. Wong's relative's tiny apartment, delivered the envelope, used sign language over a cup of tea and walked back to my hotel.

I did have the sense to open the envelope in Kathmandu in Mr. Wong's presence, knowing of Malaysia's tough treatment of drug smugglers --it contained a thick wad of Indian rupees. When I arrived at the Kuala Lumpur airport transit lounge from Bangkok, I looked very Peace Corpsish --rugged, worn jeans and a faded short sleeve shirt. Probably for that reason, I was taken out-of-line by a British official who may have been a leftover from the British colonial bureaucracy. I was taken to a room in the airport and completely stripped. My simple carry-on bag with the letter was taken into another room and searched.

Q: Even with your U.S. passport and telling them you're part of the Peace Corps?

TOMSEN: I told them that. They still strip-searched me, examined everything in my possession. Fortunately, my bag including the envelope didn't contain opium so I was not hanged. (Laughter) They gave me back my bag and released me. I ran to the airplane gate, got there just in time, and flew to Tokyo following the day in Hong Kong.

I stayed in a cheap, quintessentially Japanese hotel in Tokyo. I tried out the tiny hotel bar where about three people could sit on stools. I was the only patron. The Japanese bartender spoke English and recommended a sake brand that he poured into a little cup. When our conversation got to Korea, he declared that the Japanese hate the Koreans and the Koreans hate the Japanese and that will never change. That uncompromising observation has stuck with me to the present! The next day I took a train to Yokohama to see the Kamakura Buddha.

Q: Is that the Amida Buddha, the huge one?

TOMSEN: Yes, that's the Sanskrit title of the name. I stayed at a small hotel there and got to talking with the desk manager-owner. He invited me to dinner at his home.

Q: That's surprising.

TOMSEN: Yes, I did not expect the invitation and spent a pleasant evening with a Japanese family. After a Japanese dinner, he took me back to his hotel. The next day I flew back to Washington where I was to take the Foreign Service oral exam in the next few days. I stayed with Victor in his one-room efficiency in the city. Victor had already entered the Foreign Service and was in a six-month Thai language course at the Foreign Service Institute across the Potomac in Roslyn, Virginia. Three girls from our Nepal III Peace Corps group were in the same apartment building. Two had lived in a mountain village where they taught English; the third taught in Katmandu. Victor slept Peace Corps style on a thin floormat. I did as well.

I suffered from culture shock while walking around in busy, congested downtown Washington. I bought some presentable clothes, a jacket, dress shirt, and tie, tried to look my best, got a haircut, and walked to the Civil Service Building. It was two blocks from the State Department. The exam was conducted on the seventh floor. I heard a rumor,

probably apocryphal, that an examinee was so nervous he tipped over a glass of water onto the floor where it broke into pieces.

The culture shock --a feeling of numbness-- helped to stave off nervousness when I entered the exam room. An Ambassador flanked by two senior Foreign Service officers warmly introduced themselves. They took their seats behind a long table on an elevated platform. They looked down at the examinee of the moment seated on one of those elementary school-like small table-chair combinations. A glass of water and ash tray were placed on the little space available on the table.

The exam lasted over two hours. All three asked tough, wide ranging questions. They seemed calculated to see if the examinee could think and speak clearly under pressure. The first question was, "Marx, Smith and Keynes, which has been the most vindicated by history, and why?" I gave a typical Foreign Service answer: "Each was a product of his time and wrote about the economic system of his time." Other questions I recall: "You have a map of the United States on the wall in back of you. Trace the western movement of the United States from the Treaty of 1783." "You're at a cocktail party with a Soviet diplomat. He says his system is more democratic than yours; what do you answer?" "What books are you reading now? In your opinion, which orchestra conductor in the U.S. is the most accomplished?"

At the end of the examination, the ambassador asked me to wait outside. They deliberated for about fifteen minutes. The ambassador joined me in the corridor and informed me that I had passed the exam. He gave me a formal letter from the Board of Examiners dated that same day, September 12, confirming that. It further listed other medical and security clearance steps required before entering the Foreign Service.

The ambassador stated that, as a returned Peace Corps volunteer, I could join the next A-100 Foreign Service Entry class scheduled for November. I asked for a three-month deferment to allow me to honor my teaching commitment at St. Cloud college. He readily agreed and enrolled me in the next A-100 class in January, 1967.

Q: This is probably a good place to break.

Q: This is April 28, 2017, and we are resuming with Ambassador Peter Tomsen on the period when he is approaching entry into the Foreign Service.

TOMSEN: So in mid-September, within a week of taking the oral exam, I drove to St. Cloud College near Minneapolis. I very much enjoyed that semester of teaching in and getting to know the Upper Mid-West.

St. Cloud was a mid-sized city at the time, situated along the Mississippi River near the Twin Cities, St. Paul and Minneapolis. There were probably about 5,000 students. Today it's grown quite large, to well over 14,000 students. When I arrived, I immediately

searched for housing. I had only a few days before classes started. I rented a one room apartment in a low-income part of St. Cloud near the college.

The Social Science department that I taught in highly emphasized, and I thought correctly so, integration of political science, economics, and sociology. There was an additional accent on cross-cultural aspects of other societies. I thought that this may have contributed to the department's decision to hire a freshly returned PCV from Asia!

By the mid-1960s, many liberal arts colleges were moving in this interdisciplinary direction. The department's introductory Social Science textbook I used was excellent.

My classes were large, consisting of 50 or more, mostly Freshman students in a class. Because they were so large, I had to develop what I thought was a fair and objective grading system. Each student had to take three written examinations. The third, the final, had a greater impact on the student's grade for the course. I recall when grading one final exam, the student on the last page wrote in big black letters "HELP!"

It's well known to anybody who's taught in college ranks that preparation of the original lectures is very time-demanding. I had arrived just two days before the beginning of classes, so I spent many nights -not to mention weekends- trying to make sure that every class would be a fulfilling one for the students. I made friends among the faculty. I really didn't have much time to make friends outside the campus.

Q: Let me ask you a question here. You prepared all of these lectures, this was an introductory course for the students so they're going to learn methodology and so on. But what was the general direction that you were taking then, based both on your education and your experience in the Peace Corps -not to go too much into detail, but it's sort of a good moment I think to look back and think about what you understood about the world and how you described it to students back then in 1967.

TOMSEN: This was the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement was still going full-blast. The anti-Vietnam war movement, the tumultuous 1967 election campaign and the election itself, were catching popular attention, including on campuses. Socio-economic mega trends were also underway, for example the gradual shift of population from the rust belt in the north to the southwest. All grist for the Social Science lecturers' notes.

So, I was able as well to draw from my Peace Corps experiences to relate stories and anecdotes galore to depict for the students how different societies with different social values, religions and general outlooks carry on everyday life. How they looked on the world. To give one limited example, I contrasted music appreciation traditions by playing recorded excerpts of Western classical music followed by recorded excerpts of Indian, Nepali and Tibetan music.

My three-and-a-half months at St. Cloud were pretty much tied up with students and teaching. I was able to break away at times and drive around the countryside. I found it

delightful to stop at restaurants in this Scandinavian-heritage part of the country to indulge in smorgasbord and listen to the lively pianist/singer at the piano bar. I did this alone. I didn't have time to develop deep friendships.

During this period there was a depressing degree of political polarization like there is today in American society. I heard from other faculty members I knew that there were white supremacists in our classes. One was among my better students --he usually had a defensive look I recall.

There were also some faculty I came to know who told me they were members of the Communist Party. In our conversations, they would use the acronym "CP" in discussing their party activities. During my last week at the college, finals were over and parents were arriving to pick up their children and to meet their teachers. I was at a table in the Student Union with a couple of students and their parents having lunch. We could clearly hear a somewhat loud conversation at an adjacent table. Two faculty members who were members of the Communist Party were utilizing the not-well-coded "CP" formulation. I'll never forget the troubled look of the parents at our table as they silently listened --one of the fathers exuded an especially stern, disapproving expression as he looked straight ahead, ignoring our table's conversation.

I returned to Ohio for Christmas, purchased an old, cheap Buick, drove to Rosslyn in January, 1967 and joined the A-100 course at FSI that same month. My wealth had not grown much at St. Cloud. The salary in those days for entering Foreign Service junior officers was somewhat above \$3,000 a year. I rented another small one-room apartment two blocks away from FSI.

There were about 30 Junior Foreign Service Officers in the January, 1967 A-100 Entry Class. Some 20 were State Foreign Service diplomatic officers and about 10 USIA (United States Information Agency) officers, all enthusiastically embarking on Foreign Service careers. The USIA officers' principle focus would be on public affairs areas --cultural relations, cultural exchanges, for example, plus the very important media area. In embassies and consulates overseas we both reported on host country media activities. The USIS embassy press attaché's office would usually be situated near the ambassador's office to allow for quick consultation during the day. The press attaché handled the ambassador's press conferences.

As you know, when USIA officers were overseas, they became United States Information Service officers, or USIS officers. When I was Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the East Asia/Pacific bureau many years later, the management side of the State Department asked bureaus not to assign USIA FSOs to head bureau press and culture directorates. M (Management) did not wish to continue paying salaries of USIA officers working at State.

Q: This is while the two agencies were separate?

TOMSEN: Yes. I rejected that suggestion. In my experience, the USIS press attaches overseas were consummate professionals. I retained the veteran USIA officer who was then the Director of the EAP Bureau's Press and Cultural Directorate. We chose an experienced USIA officer as her replacement when that officer's assignment ended.

On the first day of training in January, 1967, reality dawned on me that I had become a Foreign Service officer -albeit a junior officer on probation for a year! I had a good shot at a long career in front of me. For me, the traditions of the State Department were every bit as storied as in the U.S. military. We stood on the shoulders of the first Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, later on such Foreign Service luminaries as George Kennan. Kennan was in the second A-100 class, which was conducted in the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House. He took the Foreign Service examination in 1925, following the passage of the 1924 Rogers Act by Congress. He was a member of the 1926 A-100 class.

The A-100 course itself was created in an executive order issued by President Calvin Coolidge in 1924. The number 100 connotes the room number in the Old Executive Office building where it convened. The State Department and the pre-DOD War Department were in the Old Executive Office Building then. President Lincoln used to walk the few steps from the White House to review messages coming in from Civil War battlefields. During the Second World War, the State Department moved to its present location near the Lincoln Memorial; the War Department moved across the Potomac to the Pentagon.

The 1924 Rogers Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Coolidge to escape the then Spoils System practice whereby mostly wealthy individuals with political connections filled State Department positions at home and abroad. Prospects for corrupt activities offered payback opportunities. The Executive Order attendant to the legislation mandated selection on the basis of merit through examination --leading to a professional, non-political Foreign Service.

Unfortunately, the Spoils System that the Rogers Act sought to prevent has crept back into the State Department in recent decades under administrations of both political parties. The sale of ambassadorial positions to political appointees, mostly manipulative campaign donors, is discouraged by law. But, both the Congress and Presidents have ignored the restrictions. The exam process has been watered down. Administrative measures have opened up lateral avenues into the Foreign Service outside the exam process. Between the Clinton and Obama Administrations, to include the George W. Administrations, numerous defeated congressmen, party loyalists, a flood of partisan congressional staff, and donors from both political parties have been inserted at senior- and mid-levels inside the State Department.

The Foreign Service as an institution was already on the ropes when the Trump Administration delivered the coup of grace. The main casualty, of course, has been U.S. national security. Hopefully, someday, another President will emulate the Rogers Act,

abolish the Spoils System in State, and re-establish an American diplomatic corps based on merit and professionalism.

Fortunately for me, the 32-year arc of my career did not overlap with the vigorous return of the Spoils System until the last few years. By the late 1990s, George Kennan was stating in interviews that Foreign Service aspirants should not expect to influence policy-making during their careers.

Kennan made major contributions to U.S. foreign policy interests during his career. He also endured some major hits. But a sentiment he wrote later in his diary can attract nods from many, including myself, who chose a Foreign Service career.

If I may quote, he wrote:

“Of course this is not the only life
one can lead. There are other things
you can do even in the wake of a Foreign Service career,
but an organizational framework which has held you for so
many years of your life and particularly in your youth never fully loses its
claim on your feelings. I must say that I love the Foreign Service and
the life that it gave me.”

My Foreign Service career started in 1967 in Alex Davitt’s A-100 class. Ambassador Davitt was an ideal mentor for our entering class. He explained how the State Department and posts abroad function and how to interface with other foreign policy-making institutions in the U.S. Government. He spelled out the new “cone” personnel system –we would be “coned” as political, economic, political-military, administrative, consular or what have you specialists. I was placed in the political cone.

Flamboyant, witty, urbane and wise, in splendid attire every day, Ambassador Davitt was a model diplomat -someone just arriving at a reception in a Western Europe chancery. His sunny disposition greeted us every morning and remained throughout the day. He took us to various national security agencies and departments around Washington. We met with the Secretaries of Agriculture and Commerce and subcabinet level officials at other departments. I’m afraid that exaggerated impressions of our new status led us to be sometimes overbearing in our questioning.

Senior Foreign Service officers invited to speak to us at FSI regaled us with their experiences, their negotiations with the Soviets, with the Chinese, their handling of angry mobs at the embassy gate. We were briefed on the importance of dissent in the State Department when officers differed with policy --I did avail myself of the dissent channel once in India. You always received a response even if in most cases policy did not change.

Q: Here let me just ask a question. When you sent a dissent channel message at that time, did they tell you where it went? It would never go directly to the secretary, it would go to somewhere on the seventh floor; in my time it would go to the head of the policy planning staff and then be staffed for wherever else it might go beyond that. In your time did they tell you who would actually look at it initially?

TOMSEN: In the one case where I sent in a dissent channel message on visa policy, the answer that came back indicated it hadn't really been considered outside the consular bureau in the State Department. The author of the response politely cited reasons why my proposal to change U.S. visa laws was not realistic. I had pointed out that many Indians I had given non-immigrant visas for a temporary visit to the U.S. --had gone to the States and fraudulently applied not long after their arrival for an immigrant visa. The INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) would send a blue slip to the consular officer abroad --seemingly scolding the officer for being tricked into giving the non-immigrant visa!

Q: The very famous blue sheet that consular officers dreaded continued well beyond your tenure in India, it certainly went into the '80s. I imagine by now it's no longer a sheet, but it was a famous and painful thing to get back.

TOMSEN: Agree!

Q: But it is interesting that you sent a dissent early in your career, still while you were a junior officer, so you were obviously thinking about the effects of policy very early.

TOMSEN: Yes, it was still early.

Q: I went to Jamaica for my first tour as a consular officer, it was famous for its huge visa operation.

TOMSEN: It's a good approach, because consular work is extremely important in the Foreign Service. As you go up the ladder you have to have had that visa-issuing and American citizens services experience. In my case, it was postponed. I eventually caught up with consular work in New Delhi.

Towards the end of the A-100 class, Alex Davitt stood up to read out the list of where each of us was going for our first assignment. To my surprise, I was the only one who was given a department posting. I was assigned to be assistant economic officer on the Thai desk in the East Asia and Pacific Bureau (EAP) of the State Department. Every other State member of the class went to visa assignments in consular sections around the world for their first tour.

My assignment to the Thai Desk was the first of 3 Asia/Pacific Bureau I would receive inside the State Department Washington bureau during my career. I was a junior officer in a nine-person office. The Thailand Directorate had asked for an assistant economic

officer because economic issues were becoming more important. The lead economic officer, Wever Gim, needed an assistant. I also performed *ad hoc* tasks for the Country Director, Larry Pickering, and the Deputy Country Director and Political Officer, John Sylvester.

Dean Rusk was the Secretary of State at the time. Lyndon Johnson was President. Rusk had risen to become Secretary of State from Foreign Service ranks during the Kennedy Administration. He established the Country Director system in the department. He wanted to be able to rapidly reach out at any time, to make a phone call, or invite a Country Director to his office for a briefing on an important issue requiring deep country expertise. The Country Director positions, per Rusk's instructions, were to be filled by Foreign Service officers who knew their country intimately. They spoke the language. They had had assignments there. They personally knew or were very knowledgeable about the leadership of the country they were dealing with. President Kennedy also on occasion directly phoned country directors from the White House.

In 1983, for example, when I was Country Director of India, Nepal, Sri Lankan Affairs, I was called to Secretary of State Shultz' office on the seventh floor to brief him on Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination that had just occurred. With five years of experience in India and language capability under my belt, I was able to answer his questions and to give my views on how the U.S. could capitalize on the coming change of leadership in India.

Country Director Larry Pickering spoke fluent Thai and had served in Bangkok before his appointment as Thailand Country Director.

One morning Larry called me to his office. King Bhumipol, Thailand's constitutional monarch, was coming to Washington for a high-level visit. He would meet the president and the Secretary of State, and travel around the country. Larry planned to have a photographic display of Thailand placed in the elegant Diplomatic Entrance on the first floor of the State Department when the King and his delegation arrived for the meeting with Secretary Rusk. A military officer in the Pentagon had invited Larry to send one of his staff to the Pentagon to select photos from the trove of pictures the military had taken in Thailand to put in the display. Larry told me to go over to the Pentagon, look at their photos and choose appropriate ones for the Thailand exhibit.

I was greeted at the Pentagon by a colonel. He was considerably older and far above my rank. I thought that my dark suit and tie may compensate somewhat for the difference. Richard Armitage, a career military, DOD official, later a Deputy Secretary of State, is reputed to have once said: "If you don't wear a dark suit in the State Department, you're accused of streaking." (Laughter) So I had the right costume on.

The colonel escorted me to a very modern media room. I was seated at the head of the table in a large chair. Colonels, lower level officers, and next to me a general sat around the table. The general took command of the meeting.

Q: So you're sitting at the head of this table at the Pentagon...

TOMSEN: Yes. The general introduced the slide show. The other officers at the table more or less sat at attention. There were various screens on the wall in the room where they displayed their photos for me to consider. It turned out that the great majority of the photos had been taken by U.S. military officers in civilian clothes who traveled around Thailand to map the geographic terrain of the country --presumably in the event the Vietnam war then raging would spread into Thailand. The scores of slides I was shown displayed many trees, mountains, valleys roads and highways, villages and town scenes. It was difficult to choose ones that the Thai King would find reflective of the beauty of his lovely country. I spent a painful hour-and-a-half looking at the slides, and chose perhaps 10. I thanked the general. The colonel escorted me out of the Pentagon. I returned to the State Department, candidly briefed Larry about what I'd seen and gave him the slides. I don't remember how many, if any of them, ended up in the exhibition.

The high point of my time on the desk was filling in for Wever when he was unable to attend the weekly EAP economic meeting hosted by the Assistant Secretary of State, William Bundy. William Bundy was the brother of McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Advisor under Kennedy and later Lyndon Johnson. I would join EAP economic officers from the China, Japan, Australia and other EAP desks. We each presented a 5-6 minute briefing on the latest economic developments in the countries we covered. I worked hard to make my presentations concise and informative but could not tell if I succeeded. The assistant secretary was always very polite while listening to me.

In June, 1967, after two months on the Thai Desk, the U.S. ambassador in Thailand, Graham Martin, requested that an officer be sent to Bangkok on temporary duty, or TDY, to serve as a note-taker during negotiations the Thai Foreign Ministry had requested. The ministry wished to conclude a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) in order to give Thailand jurisdiction over American soldiers who had broken Thai law, especially when off duty. The ministry argued that the current immunity of U.S. troops from the Thai legal system violated Thai sovereignty.

An exchange of diplomatic letters between the Thai and American governments in the 1950s gave U.S. troops complete immunity from Thai jurisdiction. Thais like to say their foreign policy is like "bamboo blowing with the wind." They had sided with Japan then switched to the U.S. side at the end of the war. Perhaps they believed that the granting of immunity to U.S. military personnel at the time helped smooth their way into the ranks of the victorious powers.

During the 1960s, our military presence in Thailand was growing exponentially as the Vietnamese war continued on the upswing. The number of GI's detained for murder and other serious crimes was likewise growing. They were quickly bundled onto U.S. military aircraft and flown back to the U.S. for trial in U.S. military courts.

The Thai military in 1967 did not give much importance to the Thai foreign ministry's desire for a formal SOFA. As after 2014 until today, the Thai military dominated the Thai government. It stood aside and allowed the SOFA negotiations to run for about four months, then intervened and halted them.

My Bangkok TDY lasted six months. I honored the genteel protocolary tradition of dropping my Third Secretary calling card into a silver tray just inside the DCM's residence after arrival.

The classified SOFA negotiations provided my first exposure to diplomacy at ground level. My only role, played out many times over by FSOs during their career, was to furiously write down what was said by both sides, put the near verbatim exchanges into a cable, get necessary clearances, and deposit the cable at the embassy's communications' section for transmittal to Washington. I witnessed negotiating tactics pursued by both sides over the negotiating table. The Thai deputy foreign minister headed the Thai side. Our DCM, Mark Hannah, headed the American side. I came to know my Thai counterpart notetaker well. He would later become Thai ambassador to Washington when I was EAP PDAS in the early 1990s.

I did many nighttime shifts in the windowless communications section of the embassy, monitoring the U.S. Air Force's Rolling Thunder bombing runs over Cambodia. Myself and other Embassy officers on these night shifts were exercising the embassy's authority to approve or deny them. There had been bureaucratic turf friction between the Departments of Defense and State in Washington. The State Department insisted on approving the military decisions regarding where bombs would be dropped in Cambodia—on North Vietnamese targets, not on Cambodian civilians. So, I pored over Cambodian terrain maps, studied coordinates and the location of population clusters, and submitted my approval or denial recommendations to the Pol-Mil Action officer.

May I recall an unusual incident that once took place when I was at my desk in the political-military section? A classified telegram distributed by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) was copied to our office. It reported that a PX (military Post Exchange) truck, driven by a Thai driver, was carrying an expensive cargo of electronic goods had gone missing. The truck picked up its load at Bangkok harbor for delivery to the PX store for sale there. Army investigators never found the truck or its driver. The final line of the intelligence report stated that the truck was last seen disappearing into Bangkok's teeming Chinatown!

Q: It's April 28th and we're with Ambassador Peter Tomsen and we're going to pick up where we left off on his temporary duty to Thailand and complete that portion.

TOMSEN: Towards the end of my six-month TDY in Bangkok, Dwight Kramer, a Thai specialist and EAP Personnel officer, visited me in the embassy Pol-Mil section. He invited me to begin long-term Thai language training at FSI and return to Bangkok as a

political officer. I had to cordially decline the offer. By that time, I had already decided to volunteer for Vietnam via Vietnamese language training.

My six-month TDY in Bangkok ended in January 1968. The week before I began Vietnamese language training, General Abrams, the future Commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam replacing General William Westmoreland, bounced into our office. I was at the door about to exit. With a smile on his face, he stuck out his hand and belted out, “Abrams!” I shook his hand. He disappeared into Country Director Pickering’s office for his briefing on Thailand. Continuing into the corridor in pursuit of the task of the moment, I greeted his highly decorated *aide de camp* standing in the hall outside.

Given my extremely low-rank, I never saw General Abrams again in Washington or in Vietnam.

I knew that once in South Vietnam I would be assigned either to the Saigon embassy political section or to my preferred destination, CORDS. That’s the acronym for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. In 1970, “Rural” replaced “Revolutionary” to read “Civil Operations and Rural Development Support.”

CORDS had been launched in May of 1967 to support the South Vietnamese Government’s (GVN) flagging pacification campaign in rural areas where the vast majority of the country’s population resided. CORDS’ mission was to strengthen, not displace, the GVN pacification campaign in the countryside—the new pacification approach was seeking to adopt the VC’s “People’s War” strategy and draw the allegiance of the rural population to the government’s side. A civilian-military mix characterized the CORDS hierarchy. Mr. Brown worked for Colonel Jones; Colonel Jones worked for Mr. Smith and so on up and down the unified CORDS chain of command.

CORDS marked the first occasion in history, before and since, when civilians were inserted directly into the military chain of command. Unfortunately, the CORDS’ unified, results-based structure in Vietnam would not be repeated later in Afghanistan and Iraq. The CORDS civilian-military hierarchy in South Vietnam extended from Saigon down to Regional, Province and District levels. I would be working at the lowest, district level, closest to the action. I assumed that the Vietnam assignment carried with it some risks. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and VC guerillas influenced or controlled most rural areas where CORDS was deployed. I would be leaving the protective shield provided by the State Department at overseas posts. But I had missed service in the U.S. military. The integrated civilian-military CORDS chain of command operating in a wartime context would be the closest I could come to military service. It was a risk I wanted to take. My village-level Peace Corps experience might prove useful. The State Department quickly approved my request and assigned me to FSI’s (Foreign Service Institute) Vietnam Training Center, known by its acronym, VTC.

The one-year training program for incoming CORDS personnel started with a CORDS familiarization program. That initial training introduced the CORDS practice of melding

the majority military and minority civilian personnel in CORDS together. We got to know each other well, sitting side-by-side in lecture halls and in language classes, also in the cafeteria, and wondering around in Washington on weekends. State FSOs were relatively few. The “we’re in this together” civilian-military CORDS training spirit continued in the field –in my case on 2 different CORDS district teams during my 18-month tour in the Mekong Delta.

Q: VC was Viet Cong?

TOMSEN: Yes.

My Vietnamese language training program began in February 1968 and continued to January 1969. Most of the students at the VTC in Rosslyn were mid-level active duty military or older, already retired military officers working as civilians in CORDS. The rest of us were relatively young civilians.

Q: Let me just ask you a quick question here about Foreign Service officers in Vietnam. The recollection I have was that there was a time in the Foreign Service where it was almost expected that every Foreign Service officer would serve a tour in Vietnam in order for them to expect to be able to move up in the ranks. Was that ever a sense that you had or was that an actual policy?

TOMSEN: After 9/11, I heard that the Department twisted arms to pressure employees to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan during those wars. Employees were told that agreeing to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan would advance, in some cases save, their careers. During my last months in Vietnam in mid-1970, I heard that the Department was sending out notifications in advance to entering A-100 classes that they could be sent to Vietnam on their first assignment.

Before volunteering and while in Vietnam, I personally assumed that the CORDS assignment would actually delay my advancement up the ranks because CORDS did not involve traditional diplomatic work. It would not be conducive to competition with others in my political cone. After I returned to Washington for Hindi language, I was assigned to an FSO-6 visa-issuing vice-consul slot in New Delhi even though I was an FSO-5. So I went backward in rank!

The great majority of AID jobs in CORDS were filled by AID regular and contract employees. The about five FSOs in my CORDS 8 language studies class at VTC in Rosslyn, like myself, were detailed to AID for their CORDS assignment. I recall that, also like me, they all volunteered.

It’s worth mentioning that in the 1960s, as opposed to after 9/11, AID had many hundreds of personnel in the field doing development work around the world. By 9/11, distressingly, AID had shifted to become a huge contracting agency with relatively few direct-hire or contractor field personnel. The high number of AID field personnel available during the Vietnam War in the 1960s made it less necessary to pressure FSOs to do AID work in Vietnam.

The stream of “Area Studies” lecturers during our year of training at the VTC overlapped with momentous military and political developments in Vietnam during 1968. The huge North Vietnamese (NV) Tet Offensive in 1968 belied General Westmoreland’s public claims that his strategy of “Big Unit” U.S. military sweep- and-destroy operations and lopsided body-count measurements was succeeding. Under this misleading impression of impending victory, the Johnson Administration planned to begin U.S. troop withdrawals in 1969. The Tet Offensive shock compelled President Johnson to pull out of the Democratic primaries leading up to the November 1968 presidential elections. Johnson and his advisors concluded, in effect, that Westmoreland’s strategy was not working. In May, 1968, he opened a diplomatic channel and began talks with North Vietnam in Paris. He shifted from a U.S. military victory in Vietnam to a 2-pronged strategy: Vietnamization of the war coupled with a U.S. withdrawal.

Vietnamization involved a long term multi-billion dollar Vietnamization effort to upgrade South Vietnam’s army, ARVN, whose World War II era M-1 semi-automatic rifles and M-2 automatic carbines were inferior to the AK-47s carried by the NVA (North Vietnamese Army). The joint U.S. CORDS-Government of Vietnam (GVN) rural pacification campaign was the other pillar of Vietnamization.

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a 100 battles,” wrote Chinese war strategist, Sun Tzu, in 500 B.C. Unfortunately, VTC lecturers from the intelligence community were unable to provide useful information on the North Vietnamese politburo, its strategy in the war, even which members were in charge. Today, 45 years later, we know that politburo debates generally used Mao Tze-Tung’s 3 phase frame of reference to discuss strategy.

- Phase I: Defensive stress on guerrilla war supported by political and propaganda programs;
- Phase II: Conventional war targeting cities and towns and continuing guerrilla warfare;
- Phase III: Large scale military offensives coupled with a popular national uprising to overthrow the enemy’s government.

In 1960, hardline Politburo member Le Duan became Party First Secretary and undisputed leader of the Politburo. He argued that Ho Chi Minh and Minister of Defense Vo Nguyen Giap had erred in agreeing to partitioning Vietnam into North and South Vietnam at the 1954 Geneva Conference. They had buckled under international political pressure. The Vietnamese communist party should have fought on to unify the country. Le Duan’s politburo majority rejected Ho and Giap’s post-war advocacy of Mao’s Phase I guerrilla warfare that had continued after the 1954 Geneva Conference.

Le Duan mixed Mao’s Phase II and Phase III strategies up to the final massive North Vietnamese April 1975 general offensive/uprising and the Fall of Saigon.

He timed periodic North Vietnamese conventional attacks on cities to generate uprisings and also to encourage domestic U.S. political pressure against the war—a tactic that had helped convince the French to leave. Two large-scale North Vietnamese conventional offensives were launched during U.S. presidential years, 1968 and 1972.

In 1967, when I was still in our Bangkok embassy, I read a Pentagon intelligence report describing the Hanoi Politburo's mass mobilization of North Vietnamese troops to pursue Le Duan's permanent and aggressive warfare in the South. The report's implications were ominous.

It documented that every year 250,000 young North Vietnamese out of the 23 million living in the North were coming of military age. North Vietnam was a rigidly controlled police state mobilized for continuous war. The annual supply of military manpower was indoctrinated, armed with Soviet and Chinese supplied weaponry and sent South.

From dozens of NVA sanctuaries along South Vietnam's borders with Laos and Cambodia, NVA units crossed into South Vietnam to confront the American military juggernaut. A morbid Vietnamese adage went: "Born in the North to Die in the South." American casualties also rose with the American buildup in the mid-60s to over 58,000 killed by 1973 when the last U.S. military departed.

A pattern of escalation and counter-escalation began after John F. Kennedy won the November 1960 election --only two months after Le Duan won his intra-party power struggle over Ho and Giap. There were 685 U.S. military advisors in South Vietnam when Kennedy took office in January 1961. That number rose to 16,000 by the advent of the Johnson Administration in 1963. Thereafter, the number of advisors and combat troops steadily rose to 549,000 in 1968.

The 1968 Tet Offensive's first wave of attacks began in February when I was at the VTC. It continued for 2 months. A second mini-Tet took place in May. A third flareup occurred in November 1968 as I was completing area and language training at VTC.

The 1968 year-long "general offensive/uprising" manifested Le Duan's shift to Mao's Phase III. Hanoi announced the establishment of a North Vietnamese puppet communist front in the South, the PRG (People's Revolutionary Government) soon after the 1968 Tet Offensive began. PRG propaganda organs called on the population to rise up and overthrow the GVN. The offensive's country-wide offensive attacked Saigon itself, 37 of 44 provincial capitals and 70 of the 250 district capitals.

VC regiments and guerrillas left their rural bases and threw themselves against fortified cities and towns. They suffered horrific casualties. A company of VC sappers assaulting the U.S. embassy were gunned down outside the embassy walls and inside on the lawn before they could detonate their charges.

U.S. military briefings declared the Tet Offensive a tactical success. By the end of 1968, U.S. and ARVN forces had retaken all of the urban areas overrun during the communist offensive. The U.S. military estimated communist losses at above 100,000 during the course of the year. VC losses made up the greater portion of communist casualties. Over 4,000 U.S. soldiers and some 7,000 ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) were killed during the offensive.

In the U.S., the shock of the 1968 Tet Offensive, while Westmoreland was declaring the war nearly won, emboldened those in the Johnson Administration urging de-escalation. Johnson granted Westmoreland only 29,000 more troops instead of the 206,000 he requested after the offensive. And he stuck to his prior intention to begin withdrawing forces from Vietnam in late 1969.

Richard Nixon won the 1968 presidential election. He continued Johnson's de-escalation, fight and talk Vietnamization strategy. Le Duan remained supreme in the Hanoi Politburo, notwithstanding the failure of his general uprising and heavy communist, mostly VC, casualties.

During 1968, we language students at the VTC closely followed the news coming from Vietnam. We all struggled to master the difficult Vietnamese tones. The language training involved a guillotine over your neck. If you didn't show progress in weekly quizzes, you were sent out early to Vietnam, short of achieving a S-3, R-3 (S for Speaking, R for Reading). 3/3 is functional fluency in speaking and reading. Reaching the 3/3 level meant you could talk to ordinary Vietnamese on the street or Vietnamese officials. You could read the newspapers. That was important to me. While living in Nepal, it was essential to know Nepali to converse day to day with Nepalis, to make that cross-cultural jump into their culture. The same was true in Vietnam. Language competence guaranteed a much more enjoyable and productive tour of duty.

Q: So that I understand – people who were not keeping up with the language training at some point would be removed from training and put in a job that didn't require as much conversational contact with the Vietnamese or that would require an interpreter? That was the one thing I wasn't sure I understood.

TOMSEN: Yes. Instead of serving in a remote district where most of the rural population did not speak English, you were assigned to a position on a large CORDS province or district level staff where knowing Vietnamese was not that important.

Most of those who were sent out early left VTC disappointed. They also missed the rest of the valuable Area Studies portion of training at the VTC.

During the Area Studies training, I read as much as I could about Vietnam. I plowed through Joseph Buttinger's excellent two-volume history of Vietnam published in 1967. Titled *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, it comprised 1,070 pages of text and another 200 or so pages of notes! Other books that I read focused on the failed French attempt to hold on

to their Indo-China colony and the beginning of the American phase of the long Vietnam War.

So, Vietnam Area Studies was an important part of the VTC curriculum. But, the great majority of our time at the VTC was devoted to intensive language training to stay on top of the weekly quizzes and complete the year of language training.

Q: We were speaking about assigning people who didn't keep up with language training to positions where it was not as essential.

TOMSEN: Yes. Fluency in Vietnamese was very important at the district level. There were plenty of CORDS staff positions in Vietnam that did not require Vietnamese language officers. CORDS personnel not proficient in Vietnamese had to rely on Vietnamese interpreters who were sometimes erratic or deficient in English.

I was lucky to survive the year of language training and go out to Vietnam with a 3/3.

Our VTC Area Studies' reading and discussions described the communists' bloody purges of the Viet Minh coalition's 2 nationalist Vietnamese political parties—the VNQDD and the Dao Viet-- after the French defeat. The U.S. was still implementing its Cold War containment strategy at the time. No Administration wanted to see a country “lost to Communism.” Indo-China's loss would provoke dominos to fall in Thailand, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries, one after another.

The only card the French could really play in Geneva was the threat of U.S. intervention. They had been soundly defeated at Dien Bien Phu and the Viet Minh were holding back French POWs. After the Geneva agreement and Le Duan's rise to politburo leadership, 200,000 communist cadre and guerrillas in the South were brought to the North. One million Northerners, mostly very anti-communist Catholics, migrated to South Vietnam.

The French failure to subdue the Viet Minh insurgency should have given us more pause before we ourselves plunged into Vietnam in 1961. Some on the Kennedy and Johnson National Security teams did speak out. They were overpowered by conservative and military voices.

Q: Especially because this was recent memory for the Vietnamese who were now fighting the Americans in Vietnam; this was only 10 years earlier and they remembered very well what it was like to have a different colonial power trying to control them.

TOMSEN: Yes. While the VC began expanding into South Vietnam's rural areas in 1962-63, the authoritarian rule of South Vietnamese catholic President Ngo Dinh Diem was alienating the country's majority Buddhist population and other religious groups, such as the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. Diem's assassination in late 1963, a few weeks before President Kennedy's assassination, heightened instability in South Vietnam. Three

destabilizing military coups by generals vying for power against each other occurred during the following 3 years.

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson futilely sought advice on how to reverse the deteriorating trends in Vietnam. Kennedy sent a two-man team to assess conditions in Vietnam. One was a Marine general; the other was a senior State Department Foreign Service officer. They spent a month in South Vietnam, returned and met Kennedy in the White House. The Marine described how well the war was going. The State Department officer told Kennedy that the war was not going well. The South Vietnamese population disliked Diem more than the Viet Cong. At which point Kennedy asked, “You two DID visit the same country, didn’t you?”

Q: Since you’re talking about review and an accounting – were there OIG (Office of the Inspector General, at State) inspections of any kind, either by the State Department or GAO (then the General Accounting Office, now the Government Accountability Office) while you were there or that you knew of that also addressed these larger issues?

TOMSEN: There were inspections and reviews and debates at the National Security Council level and below. The debates uniformly reflected the same two opposing “hawk and dove” positions. I don’t recall any GAO or OIG reports.

The hawks and doves continued to battle each other in Washington into the last year of the Johnson Administration. Under Secretary of State George Ball, the number 2 in the State Department then, was the main dove. He was also odd man out at White House meetings chaired by President Johnson that included Robert McNamara, the influential Secretary of Defense. Dean Rusk, the conservative Secretary of State, was a hawk.

But Ball fought on. He presciently warned against attempting to militarily “win” U.S. wars against Third World insurgencies underway in societies we did not understand --nor could we change to fit the American democratic model.

Ball sent a prophetic 1965 memo to President Johnson. The first paragraph began with the three words, “A losing war.” It continued, “The South Vietnamese are losing the war to the Viet Cong. No one can assure you that we can beat the Viet Cong... or even force them to the conference table on our terms. No matter how many hundreds of thousands of white foreign U.S. troops we deploy, if we do not now ‘limit our liabilities’ and get out, the alternative will be a protracted war involving an open-ended commitment of U.S. forces, mounting U.S. casualties, and once we deploy substantial numbers of U.S. troops in combat, it will become a war between the U.S. and a large part of the population of South Vietnam, backed by the resources of Moscow and Peiping (Beijing).”

Anti-war demonstrations and growing anti-war sentiment in Congress in an election year left Vietnamization of the war the only viable option. These same pressures –unrealizable military goals and domestic political pressures— would, decades later, compel the

Obama Administration to shift to Afghanization of the Afghan War coupled with U.S. troop withdrawals.

Johnson embraced the creation of CORDS to support the GVN pacification campaign into rural areas where most of South Vietnam's population resided. CORDS began operations in 1967. In 1968, President Thieu re-organized his pacification bureaucracy to align with CORDS from Saigon down to the district level. Fully backed by Johnson and later Nixon, the pacification drive to take the countryside back from the VC moved into high gear in 1969, the year I arrived in South Vietnam.

Q: It's May 31st, 2016. We are resuming with Ambassador Tomsen, who is in Vietnamese language training.

TOMSEN: Many of our VTC lectures, not surprisingly, addressed the background of CORDS and what CORDS was supposed to accomplish. President Johnson considered the CORDS rural pacification program a key part of his adjusted Vietnam policy after the 1968 Tet Offensive.

So, Vietnamization of the war mounted 2 prongs. One prong was upgrading ARVN to fight the conventional war against the North Vietnamese and VC Main Force regiments. The second prong was the long-neglected pacification effort to attract the allegiance of the 75% of South Vietnam's population living in rural villages and hamlets. According to U.S. statistics, after the 1968 Tet Offensive less than 40% of the rural population could be considered living in GVN-controlled or -influenced areas.

The Communists from 1962 up to the 1968 Tet general offensive and attempted uprising practiced guerrilla warfare, propaganda, outright terror and land reform to gain the upper hand in the countryside. VC influence or control in rural area steadily expanded. GVN counter-insurgency endeavors, like Diem's 1961-63 Strategic Hamlet Program, fell apart due to recurring military coups and political infighting in Saigon.

The VC suffered no such divisions. Le Duan's Politburo maintained tight control of COSVN (Central Office of South Vietnam), the Politburo's southern headquarters secreted in Cambodia. Although from Central Vietnam, Le Duan had led the southern communist front during the last years of the French War. He was thoroughly familiar with the southern battleground. His deputy in COSVN, Le Duc Tho, was a Northerner. Tho would later be the politburo's representative chosen by Le Duan to negotiate with Kissinger during the secret Paris Talks.

In the South, V.C. village and hamlet "Liberation Committees" conducted a Mao Tze-tung political "People's War." It capitalized on the GVN's unpopularity and lack of security forces to protect the population. Even in supposed government-controlled areas, it took only a squad of VC armed cadre to enter undefended hamlets to tax, hold propaganda meetings, recruit fighters and assassinate government sympathizers.

President Johnson was a master politician and knew how to use power. But getting interagency buy-in to Vietnamization and CORDS was a challenge. Robert Komer, his Special Assistant for Pacification in the White House, had to use every ounce of presidential authority to bludgeon the bureaucracy to accept the CORDS unitary civilian-military chain of command.

The tenacity of USG bureaucratic resistance to change explains why CORDS was not successfully revived later during the Afghan and Iraq wars. Too many bureaucratic bowls and independent fiefdoms would be broken. The military freely executed its unproductive military strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq. Civilian development agencies separately executed their strategies. Each agency managed its separate budget. There was no CORDS-like unified chain of command and single integrated policy. Counting the CIA's (jealously) separate covert operations, there were at least 4 separate U.S. policies in Afghanistan. Example: an Afghan governor's schedule during a typical day would include separate meetings with the local U.S. military commander, a CIA officer, the USAID representative, and perhaps the head of a major American NGO working on a large project in the province.

Komer was called the "Blowtorch." Johnson was a much bigger blowtorch. The AID Administrator in Washington was the first to push back against CORDS. Johnson's phone call quickly brought him in line. General Westmoreland, MAC/V Commander, initially resisted mixing civilians into his military chain of command. Johnson ended all bureaucratic waywardness by issuing a presidential order written by Komer. It mandated the single unified military-civilian CORDS chain of command inside the CORDS pyramid.

The tip was in Saigon. Budgetary requirements and the overwhelming military staffing of CORDS dictated that the MAC/V commander would be at the top. Komer became Westmoreland's Deputy Chief of Staff for pacification, or DEPCORDS. Komer became Abrams' DEPCORDS when Abrams succeeded Westmoreland in June, 1968.

Per the presidential order, Abrams supported Komer's lead role on pacification. Komer's MAC/V DEPCORDS rank carried the authority of a three-star lieutenant general supervising all military as well as civilian personnel inside the CORDS pyramid. The four civilian DEPCORDS in each of the four regions – Vann was one of them— reported to Komer, the senior-most DEPCORDS in Saigon. The U.S. major generals already in place in the 4 regional capital deferred to the regional DEPCORDS on pacification matters. They focused on the conventional Big Unit war in their regions.

An alphabet soup array of civilian U.S. agencies was inserted into the CORDS hierarchy. AID implemented CORDS development and governance projects. USIS officers advised their Vietnamese counterparts in media, information and public relations areas. USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) personnel assisted GVN agricultural development, introduction of IR-8 "miracle" rice, and land reform. CIA officers ran the Phuong Hoang "Phoenix" program targeting the VCI (Viet Cong local political-military

infrastructure). Thousands of U.S. military officers and enlisted manpower comprised more than 80% of CORDS field personnel in South Vietnam. DOD provided the logistical support critical to operating CORDS teams at the regional, province and district levels.

Most of us who completed the training at VTC served as DDSAs, deputies to U.S. military DSAs (District Senior Advisors). The DSAs were generally U.S. army majors on one-year tours. Single FSOs were on 18-month State Department tours.

The DSAs' Vietnamese counterparts were the district chiefs, ARVN majors or lieutenant colonels. The DDSAs' counterparts were civilian deputy district chiefs for administration. The deputy district chiefs supervised the non-military offices in the district government. The American DSAs reported upwards to the U.S. CORDS Province Senior Advisor (PSA) in the provincial capital, and their deputies --or Deputy PSAs. Nearly all PSAs were Colonels or retired Colonels. Their DPSAs were usually civilians or, if the PSA was a civilian, a Lt. Colonel.

In late 1968, President Thieu established the GVN pyramidal structure mirroring that of CORDS. He created a Saigon-level Central Pacification and Development Council (CPDC) bringing together all government military and civilian ministries. Thieu placed the 44 Vietnamese Province Chiefs, and beneath them all district chiefs and their staffs, in the CPDC's chain of command. They and the civilian Interior Minister would now appoint, transfer and dismiss province and district chiefs.

Thieu's reorganization emulated the American CORDS structure. The ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) commanding generals in the 4 Regions would no longer appoint and supervise ARVN military province and district chiefs or choose civilian village chiefs. Like their 4 MAC/V American military counterparts in the regional CORPS headquarters, they would now focus on the conventional Big Unit war.

The elections of new village councils had begun in some parts of the country after the 1967 adoption of a new constitution. The election reforms were designed to create GVN (Government of Vietnam) local governments to counter the communist People's War in the countryside with its own People's War. The constitution and presidential decrees called for elected village councils to select their village chiefs. Elected village and hamlet local governments would play a major role in military and developmental pacification programs. The villages and hamlets would become the main arena of the political-military pacification war heating up in the countryside.

In Vietnam, villages are like small U.S. counties. The village market town is the village center. The village *dinh*, a sort of temple, is located there. Religious and cultural events occur at the dinh. The dinh houses the village charter. Outlying rural village hamlets, numbering between 10 and 30, surround the village center. Most of the village population lives in the hamlets, usually rice farming communities.

Q: What were the criteria for success that a provincial or district level CORDS would report; what was expected of them?

TOMSEN: During our VTC training, we were told that we would be evaluated on our performance as a district-level advisor. Like FSO EER preparations everywhere, we submitted a list of accomplishments (in the district) during the rating period to our raters in the CORDS hierarchy. The raters varied. They could be military officers, AID, or FSOs.

The CORDS system was structured to show Vietnamese ownership. All pacification directives were written by Vietnamese in Vietnamese, then translated into English for (American) CORDS consumption, and distributed downwards through the parallel GVN pacification and CORDS hierarchies. GVN officials took the lead during pacification conferences and meetings from Saigon down to the hamlet levels. American advisors stayed in the background. All knew that the American military was withdrawing.

Our speakers at VTC alerted us that CORDS advisors' decisions in compiling the monthly Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) report on hamlet security was one area where we would encounter differences with our Vietnamese counterparts. They were under pressure to inflate the HES grades.

Our lecturers acknowledged up-front that the monthly HES was flawed; but they claimed there was no better alternative –certainly not the discredited body count. It contained more than 20 indices requesting information on enemy activity in each hamlet. For instance: number of VC propaganda meetings, taxation or terror attacks; the state of the hamlets self-defense force; did the hamlet chief sleep overnight in the hamlet? Other indices dealt with land reform; evidence of corruption; did children have access to a school; and so on.

The highest rating was A, a pacified hamlet; B was nearly pacified; C was contested; E was leaning VC; and V was VC controlled.

While many answers were subjective or too positive or based on guesses rather than facts, the idea was that the aggregate conclusion and resulting letter grade was roughly indicative of the hamlets' pacification situation. Tracking the same hamlet month after month, along with the tens of other nearby hamlets in a village could provide a rough estimate of the progress or retrogression of pacification in the village.

Komer designed a three-month experimental Accelerated Pacification Campaign, or APC, to be launched on November 1, 1968, and end on January 31, 1969. The HES would be used to test the effectiveness of the GVN and U.S. CORDS pacification institutions to shift contested C hamlets to A and B categories. If successful, the APC would establish momentum to build on during the 2 half-year 1969 pacification pushes into the countryside.

The last 2 months of our VTC training program coincided with the first 2 months of the APC. On November 6, 1969 Colby replaced Komer as Abram's CORDS DEPCORDS. Too far down in the 8,000 strong CORDS melting pot, I never saw, much less met, DEPCORDS Colby during my Vietnam assignment.

The APC concentrated on improving security, governing and development conditions in 1,200 C (contested) hamlets, most in the populous Upper Mekong Delta. The campaign increased the number of full-time paid village Popular Force (PF) platoons recruited from their villages, and armed People's Self Defense Force (PSDF). The PSDF were part-time, unpaid militia trained to guard their hamlets. During the 3-month campaign, young men and women in Revolutionary Development (RD) cadre teams clad in VC-like black pajamas moved from hamlet to hamlet advising village and hamlet governments and training PSDF hamlet militia.

Due to heavy VC losses in the 1968 Tet offensives, the APC encountered relatively little resistance. The increased numbers of armed and trained GVN local militia forces defending their villages and hamlets produced a shift in the military balance in the limited areas the APC targeted.

Elections were held in over 700 villages and hamlets during the 3-month campaign. The newly elected village and hamlet members were sent to the Vung Tau Training Center near Saigon for 6 weeks of training in management, local security, administering the village's Village Self-Development (VSD) budget, and land reform. President Thieu presided over the graduation ceremonies.

In the APC's focus area, the GVN gained the initiative. GVN and CORDS planners in Saigon drew on the lessons learned to plan the 2 countrywide pacification drives during each half of 1969.

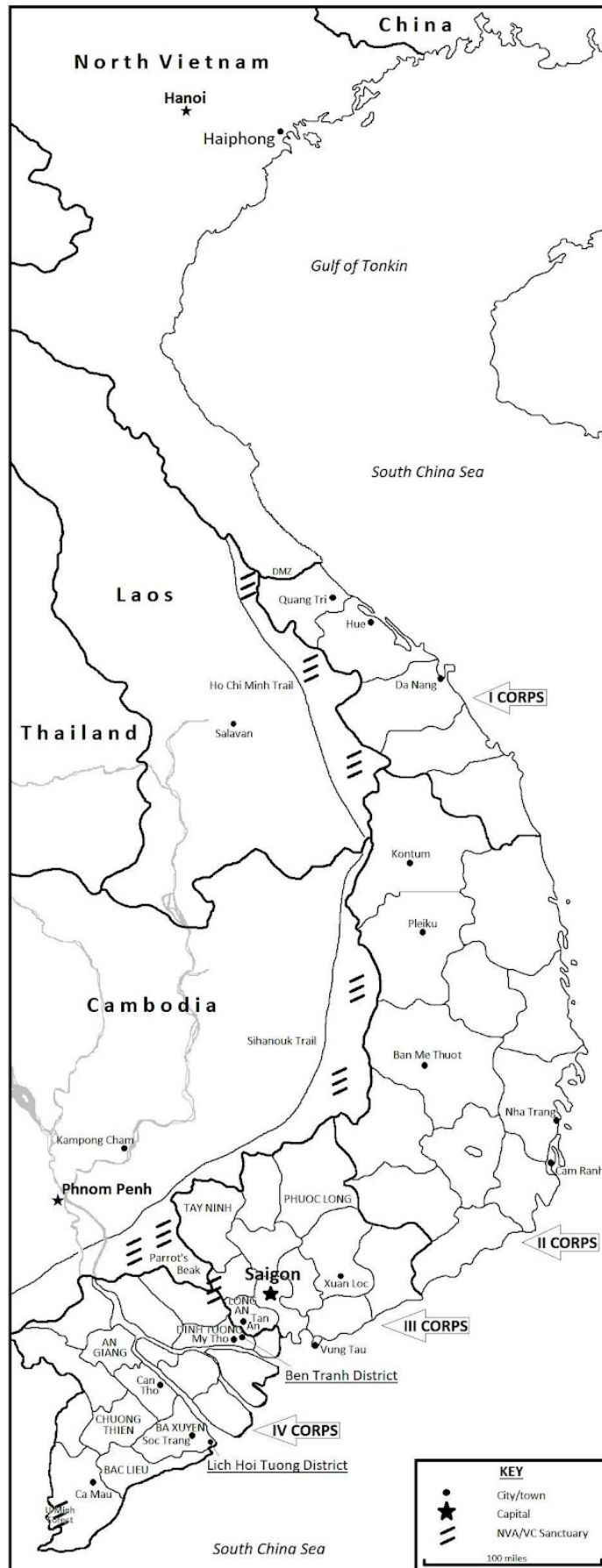
Our last few CORDS lectures at the VTC mixed the sour with the sweet. One speaker, an AID advisor, was consistently negative. John Paul Vann, the DEPCORDS in Region 3 moving to Region 4, waxed positive and negative.

The AID advisor spent his tour in III CORPS, the region surrounding Saigon. I CORPS and II CORPS were to the North, covering most of Central Vietnam. Prominent leaders in North and South Vietnam came from Central Vietnam. To name just a few: President Thieu, Communist Party Leader Le Duan, Dien Bien Phu victor, General Vo Nguyen Giap, and President Ngo Dinh Diem.

Hue, the former imperial capital of Vietnam, was the capital of I CORPS. South Vietnam's second largest city, Danang, population 500,000, lay south of Hue. Per square mile, I CORPS was the most militarized corps –North Vietnamese regiments were stacked up above the DMZ. They crowded the Laotian side of the tri-border (South Vietnam, Laos, North Vietnam) juncture, only 35 miles away to the west from Hue. GVN military deployments in I CORPS were also heavy –the elite 1st Division commanded by

the respected ARVN general, General Ngo Quang Truong, the Marine and Paratroop Divisions, two more regular divisions, and several Ranger Groups.

The AID Advisor spent most of his two-hour presentation criticizing GVN corruption and bureaucratic incompetence. John Paul Vann kept us spellbound during his two-hour presentation. Vann was one of the few heroes of the Vietnam War. I would come to know him in the Mekong Delta where I would be assigned. IV CORPS was the most populated region of Vietnam: IV CORPS districts numbered 92, fully one third of districts in South Vietnam. Region IV was also the rice basket of the country.



Vann's knowledge of Vietnam was encyclopedic. He'd served there as a military officer, a lieutenant colonel. He was a dissident. He spoke of the need to put the Vietnamese out front to defend their country. Vietnam was a war that could not be won with just military power. The political side was more important. He stated that the great bulk of the Vietnamese in South Vietnam opposed the Communist North.

Vann declared that the South Vietnamese would never learn to defend themselves if we attempted to do the fighting for them. Airpower could not win the war. He said we shouldn't attack the sanctuaries in Laos, Cambodia, or North Vietnam. If we overran one or two of them, the North Vietnamese would just create more. As long as the North retained the ability to keep the war going until we tired of it, they saw victory in sight. The only way we could succeed was to help the South Vietnamese government win. The U.S. role is now and should be assisting the GVN to carry out the military and economic programs in the GVN pacification campaign.

Q: In essence, he was arguing that South Vietnam as a nation would need to change from the way it did business in order to be able to have a reliable government that had the confidence of the people, so they would fight for it.

TOMSEN: His emphasis was supporting the GVN to fight the war. It was a People's War. Only the GVN could win it.

Q: He was aware of the problems and challenges the U.S. faced in doing this?

TOMSEN: Yes.

Q: On a village by village basis where that really had not been the way they had done business.

TOMSEN: Yes. Vann understood the enemy and he understood the South Vietnamese government's shortcomings. He also knew the U.S. military well. He'd been an infantry officer in the Korean War. In Vietnam he was an advisor to the 7th ARVN Division in Region 4's Dinh Tuong Province where I would first be assigned.

During one operation, the VC had moved into Ap Bac hamlet in the far northern part of Dinh Tuong Province and occupied it. His Vietnamese counterpart's inept tactics led to unnecessary casualties. The VC drew the ARVN troops into ambushes and boobytrapped kill zones, inflicted casualties, then withdrew. They'd accomplished what they wanted. They'd bloodied the nose of the 7th Division and taken few losses. The 7th Division returned to base. The population in Ap Bac knew that the VC could come back at any time.

The U.S. military command in Saigon declared the battle a great ARVN victory. Vann correctly believed it to be a VC victory. A reporter for the *New York Times*, David Halberstam, drove down Highway 4 from Saigon to interview Vann. Vann bluntly gave

his eye-witness interpretation. It was published in the New York Times. Vann was reprimanded. After rotating back to the U.S., he retired. He returned as a civilian working for AID. Komer made him the DEPCORDS in III CORPS. Colby transferred him to IV CORPS. Vann continued to convey his non-conformist views to the media. He'd get calls from Saigon, threatening removal if he did that again. And he would do it again. In the end, they still needed him because he knew so much.

Young CORDS personnel in the Delta like myself looked up to Vann. He was an inspiring leader. He was brave. He sometimes flew his own small helicopter to move around Region 4. He would jump into a Jeep or onto a motorcycle and drive solo to a remote Popular Forces OB (Operating Base) and remain overnight there.

Q: In concluding a bit about Vann's success, he must have been able to speak Vietnamese very fluently if he was able literally on a moment's notice to go anywhere and get ground truth.

TOMSEN: He was not fluent but could get his meaning across. He would visit a district senior advisor and grill the advisor on conditions in the district. He expected the DSA to be on top of economic as well as military issues. For example: What proportion of the district's cultivated land was planted with IR-8 rice? What was the price of rice in the district's market?

Vann did not differentiate between CORDS civilian and military advisors. He promoted civilians to fill district senior advisor positions in the field normally held by U.S. Army majors. One of his directives mandated that civilian as well as military DSAs were required to accompany their Vietnamese counterparts on military operations in the field.

CORDS training at the VTC included visits to military bases to familiarize us with the U.S. military's operations, structure, and way of doing things. We were trained to fire sidearms at a Washington, D.C. firearms range. We travelled to Fort Bragg for military briefings and to observe Special Forces field exercises. We were at Fort Bragg on April 4, the day Martin Luther King was tragically assassinated. I wrote in my diary that night: "As a spiritual leader, he has no equal. He is one of the greatest men of our time." The nighttime sky over Washington was lit up on the flight back to Washington from Fort Bragg. It seemed like daytime. Demonstrators set fires and looted shops. Huge flames leaped high into the air illuminating large parts of the city. I'll never forget that distressing sight as we circled to land –right out of a horror movie. Later that night, several battalions of the 82nd Airborne Division in battle gear from Fort Bragg, where we had just been for 4 days, began patrolling the streets in Washington in jeeps and walking patrols.

One extremely positive development for me in 1968 was that I met my wife, Kim Dung Nguyen. Kim had come to the United States as an American Field Service exchange student. She attended French elementary and high schools -run by the French government- in Saigon. She spoke fluent French. The French high school's stress on

math, science, and the French language prepared her well for her AFS-sponsored senior high school year in Ashland, Oregon. And later at Hiram College in Northeast Ohio. At both locations, she lived with American families that we're still in touch with today. After college, she taught Vietnamese at the VTC, where we first met in the classroom!

Kim had grown up in Saigon speaking the southern dialect outside her home and the northern dialect at home. Her family had emigrated to the South in the early 1940s from North Vietnam. The family's northern origin rankled the other language teachers. They were all from the South. They protested to the American linguist that teaching the northern dialect would confuse the students assigned to serve in South Vietnam! Their protest convinced the linguist to let Kim go, even though she spoke both dialects equally well. She shifted to a nearby DOD language school that taught northern and southern dialects. By that time, February 1969, we were already engaged and I had arrived in Vietnam.

Five months later we got married in Hawaii. I took the first of two R&R breaks from my CORDS tour to fly to Honolulu. Most Vietnam R&R flights went to Bangkok where U.S. military personnel spent their R&R having a good time in bars and night clubs. Others chose Australia, where they stayed with Aussie families, well-known for their warm hospitality for American troops in Vietnam. About 90% of our R&R planeload of military were officers and enlisted soldiers. Many of us had plans for marriage followed by a honeymoon in Hawaii. Hotels and resorts offered deep discounts on rooms for American personnel on R&R from Vietnam.

After quick reunions with dozens of soon-to-be-brides at the airport terminal, the marriage process was mechanical. Priests, ministers, and rabbis were on hand or waiting at their nearby places of worship to whisk us through the marriage ceremony after we deplaned. Kim and I were married by a protestant minister (I forgot the denomination). At the end of the ceremony, he kindly rejected my offer of payment for the marriage service.

Q: Was she Christian?

TOMSEN: No. Kim's a Buddhist. A few friends of friends of Kim living in Hawaii attended our marriage at a church in downtown Honolulu. The ceremony was traditional, except for the omission of "obeying!"

I met my Best Man for the first time at the wedding. After Kim and I took our vows, he turned to me and said with a pleasant smile: "Congratulation Mr. Thomas!" (Laughter). Then we flew to the beautiful island of Kauai and enjoyed a glorious honeymoon at a resort there. The state of Hawaii and indeed everyone we met in Hawaii were immensely friendly.

After the honeymoon, I returned to Saigon. Kim stayed in Honolulu until she received her American citizenship. She then went to Bangkok where we rented an apartment for the

duration of my Vietnam tour. Those of us in CORDS whose spouses resided in Bangkok were allowed two one-week visitations in Thailand.

Kim became one of the “Vietnam wives” living temporarily in Bangkok. Foreign Service friend (and former Peace Corps Nepal colleague), Victor Tomseth, was stationed at the Bangkok Embassy. So, Kim and I, during my visits, hung out with Vic and his wife, Wallapa. Kim was back in Saigon and I was down in the Mekong Delta when our oldest daughter, Kim-Anh (Golden Intelligence), was born on June 6, 1970 at the U.S. Army Third Field Hospital in Saigon.

Shifting back to my arrival in Saigon after the VTC language training program:

I departed Washington and arrived in Saigon in February, 1969. My first objective was to meet Kim’s parents and her family. They lived at 210 Gia Long Street in a narrow four-story house. The house had been struck by a VC rocket during the 1968 Communist mini-May Tet Offensive and was still being repaired.

Looking upwards from the front door, I could see the gaping hole the rocket had left through the ceilings all the way up to the roof. The early morning explosion killed Kim’s two teen-age younger sisters, Mai and Tam. It severely wounded her mother’s right arm. Her youngest brother was saved after over 10 hours of surgery by a dedicated Vietnamese doctor. Earlier, Kim’s older sister, Hanh, had tragically died when a Vietnamese army truck plowed into the rickshaw (a 3-wheel bicycle taxi) she was in while going to work in Saigon.

The busy reconstruction work underway at 210 Gia Long Street did not reduce the warm reception Kim’s parents gave me during my periodic visits from the Delta. Kim’s older brother Dat, an ARVN Captain, was stationed near the Cambodian border in the South. He led long-range infantry patrols (LRPPs) into remote border areas. Another brother, Nam, was an ARVN PsyOps officer stationed in Saigon. Kim’s 2 oldest brothers had a decade earlier studied in France, then emigrated to Canada. Her 12 year-old youngest brother, Cuong, a student, was still at home in Saigon.

Happily, my 3/3 in Vietnamese was sufficient for routine day-to-day conversations with family members.

Q: You were confident the 3/3 could get you around?

TOMSEN: Yes. In CORDS I probably spent over half of my time in rural villages and hamlets where only Vietnamese was spoken.

Saigon was a bustling city of 2 million when I arrived in February, 1969. The city’s economy hummed, partly due to U.S. money and resources pumped into the country --mostly because of the native entrepreneurial spirit of the Vietnamese and also the Chinese-Vietnamese commercial class living in the Cho Lon (Big Market) quarter of

Saigon. Young students, girls in neat white or multi-colored “ao dai” on bicycles wound their way through the noisy Saigon streets on their way to school.

The famous Vietnamese dish of “Pho” was available at makeshift kiosks, mobile street food vendors and storefront cafe during daylight hours. Huge vats of fragrant beef broth on sidewalks began percolating at 4:30 am or so. Little tables and stools were set up nearby. Vietnamese of all ages would stop by for a bowl of pho, either on the way to school or to work. A typical early morning greeting in Vietnamese was to ask whether you have had a bowl of pho! In Nepal, Nepalis asked if you have had your dal-bhat (lentils and rice).

Q: What was typically in “pho” in South Vietnam?

TOMSEN: “Pho Bo” typically is a clear beef broth soup with rice noodles, topped with thin raw slices of beef. The broth was simmered-cooked for at least 5 hours, with spices (like cinnamon, star anise, cumin, coriander stems), char-grilled shallots, white onion, carrots, and lots of beef bones. It is a tedious way of cooking, but the end results are heaven! The boiling broth is poured over the raw thinly-sliced beef and fresh rice noodles. The final touch is a topping of sliced spring onion, paper-thin sliced white onion and a clump of coriander leaves. Fish sauce --concentrated *nuoc mam* (in lieu of salt)-- can be added to the soup at the table, depending on how salty one prefers it. Then of course, fresh black pepper and fresh hot chilies can be added last.

Besides beef, one can have chicken for the meat ingredient. So, the broth is made with either chicken or beef bones. The beef version is typical Northern style. The Southern style of noodle soup is called “*Hu Tieu*” which is actually Chinese. It mixes “noodles” with pork meat and broth is made from pork bones. Hu Tieu can be found in Thailand, the Caribbean, and (thanks to Vietnamese refugees) in the U.S. The Cambodian Hu Tieu is a favorite of Vietnamese living in San Jose, California. Pho eateries have sprung up in many American cities and towns. It is another option to McDonald’s when in a hurry and can be eaten any time!

After visiting Kim’s family, I checked into the mysteriously named Oscar Hotel. The following morning, I went to the embassy to track down my trunk sent as surface freight from the U.S. I filled out forms in the B&F (Budget and Fiscal) Office and met the CORDS Greeter. His job was to meet CORDS personnel arriving in Vietnam and to assign them to one of the 4 CORDS regional headquarters in South Vietnam.

The CORDS Greeter was a hassled middle-aged AID bureaucrat. Our meeting was hurried. He continued to leaf through piles of papers on his desk searching for references to me. He glared at me. Asked who I was, why had I come to his office? He had no information on me. I answered that I was a Foreign Service officer detailed to AID to work in CORDS and that I had just completed a year of language training at the VTC. I was sure he’d met others like me. His frustration obviously rising, he blurted out, “You

will go to IV CORPS. Here's the ticket for your Air America flight to Can Tho. Your flight leaves tomorrow morning."

An equally inauspicious moment awaited me that night in my small room at the Oscar Hotel on Nguyen Hue Avenue, downtown Saigon. A VC rocket salvo struck nearby. One exploded on the street outside next to the hotel entrance, just under my room. I was thrown into the air and landed with a thud on the floor.

At daylight the next morning, through my room's window, I saw a huge jagged black hole in the roof of the larger Rex Hotel down the street. Below my window, a deep crater about 15 feet in diameter had obliterated the pavement near the hotel entrance.

Kim's father invited me to dinner that evening before my morning flight to Can Tho. We had a pleasant meal at a Vietnamese seafood restaurant –a barge on the Saigon River. The week before the VC had floated a mine downriver aimed at the barge. The barge took a hit but the restaurant itself was only partially destroyed.

I boarded the Air America flight to Can Tho the next morning. Air America was operated by the CIA. Scores of Air America small passenger aircraft crisscrossed South Vietnam every day shuttling CORDS and other U.S. personnel from one province or regional capital to another. The pilots were young and helpful. Their airline was efficient and invariably on time! I grabbed a taxi at the Can Tho airport, arrived at the IV CORPS CORDS compound at 8:00 am, and checked into the CORDS hotel there. The compound was a well-guarded mixture of nondescript 3-4 story office and residential buildings. It included a large swimming pool surrounded by attractive outdoor furniture, also a changing room and a snack bar.

John Paul Vann, the next IV CORPS DEPCORDS, had not yet arrived from III CORPS. His number 2, a retired U.S. Army Colonel, "Coal Bin" Wilbur "Willie" Wilson, was acting DEPCORDS. His nickname, rumor had it, could be traced back to his requirement that the coal bins at the 82nd Airborne base at Fort Bragg be painted white.

My one and only office appointment at the Can Tho CORDS headquarters was with a senior CORDS personnel officer. He was also a middle-aged AID bureaucrat. Part of his job was to assign incoming CORDS personnel to a district somewhere in IV CORPS -sometimes rendered IV CTZ (CORPS Tactical Zone) or Region 4.

Q: So anyone's assignment in your position would always be a location and then a series of duties. So the location was part of the assignment?

TOMSEN: Yes. Like a posting to an embassy in some country -the location, then your duties to perform. I would be a DDSA doing AID development work in a district in Region 4.

My meeting with the Can Tho personnel officer was again an in-and-out affair. He asked me where in IV CORPS I wished to be assigned. I responded that, while in the Peace Corps in Nepal, I had spoken the language and learned how to work well in a remote area with little outside support. I was prepared to work in a remote area. I added that I preferred not to be assigned to a district where U.S. army units operated. That last comment initiated an awkward pause in our conversation.

I made that request because I had heard that district advisors near American military bases periodically found themselves dealing with gruesome situations involving civilian casualties caused by irresponsible use of American firepower.

I could see immediately that the PER officer did not appreciate my answer to his question. He announced that I would be assigned to be the DDSA to a U.S. Army Major, the DSA of Ben Tranh District in Dinh Tuong Province in the northern Delta. Later, I discovered that the personnel officer was a retired army lieutenant colonel. He had purposely placed me in the middle of the AO (Area of Operation) of the 3rd Brigade of the 9th U.S. Infantry Division. The 3rd Brigade of the 9th Division was based less than 10 miles north of Ben Tranh District in Long An Province. Long An, a Region 3 province, bordered Dinh Tuong Province. It lay only 12 miles south of Saigon. The 9th Division had a bad reputation for unnecessarily causing civilian casualties.

During my nine months in Ben Tranh District, as feared, too often, I found myself driving to hamlets to investigate and provide compensation to peasant families who had suffered civilian property damage and lives lost as a result of errant 9th Division firepower.

Later that afternoon, with nothing to do, I sat in on a CORDS political meeting that was advertised on a bulletin board. The meeting was chaired by the acting DEPCORDS, Colonel Wilson. Arriving late, I settled into a seat in the back of the room, in time for the Q and A session after the presentation. I was able to catch Colonel Wilson's conclusion in an answer to a question: "We all know how the Oriental mind works."

That observation did not encourage confidence that Can Tho regional headquarters at the time was overloaded with political understanding of Vietnam. Colonel Wilson's strength obviously lay in military matters. I thought that his personal ties to John Vann, probably went way back.

Q: This is June 8th, we're resuming with Ambassador Peter Tomsen in his tour in Vietnam.

TOMSEN: I arrived in Vietnam in February 1969, at the end of the Johnson Administration and the beginning of the Nixon Administration. The Nixon Administration took office in late January 1969. In his presidential campaign, Nixon -like Eisenhower in his 1952 campaign during the Korean War- proclaimed that he had a plan to end the Vietnam War. In Eisenhower's case, to end the unpopular Korean War. In Nixon's case, to end the unpopular Vietnam War. Nixon stated that his withdrawal

strategy would bring “peace with honor. We will not sacrifice our honor but will withdraw.”

In practice, the Vietnam strategy Nixon followed after taking office in late January 1969 was essentially the same one Johnson’s administration had put together after the 1968 Tet Offensive. U.S. domestic political pressures were increasing. The U.S. military’s giant sweep and destroy strategy to win the war had failed. The best (actually the only) way forward was Vietnamization while U.S. troops withdrew.

Q: Let me ask a more general question. At this point, as we are now beginning the slow military withdrawal and the addition of the CORDS attempt to win the support and loyalty of the average people when the Viet Cong were trying to also tell them “you’ll be better off without these foreigners or the current government, the way the current government is treating you.” Were the average Vietnamese that you encountered happier with the idea of whatever the communists were promising –land reform, elimination of certain local organizations that were oppressive– or was it more that they didn’t really care and just wanted the war to be over and whoever was the stronger power, fine, as long as you leave us alone?

TOMSEN: Good question. Based on my experience, after 30 years of war, most of the rural population did want the war to end. But most opposed a communist takeover of the South. If given a choice, they preferred a return to traditional normalcy, traditional institutions and ways. The lowest social rungs of the peasantry did benefit from the VC’s land reform during the VC high water ride in the countryside from about 1962 to 1968. The GVN land reform program began later in 1970. It transferred land to a much larger group. It also allowed the beneficiaries of VC land reform to retain possession of their land. But the government’s land reform did not take off until 1970 and 1971.

By 1969, when I arrived, much of the rural population had come to fear the V.C. They resented the GVN government, its representatives’ abuse of power and the corruption practiced by government military and civilian officials at the expense of ordinary Vietnamese. On the other hand, VC assassination squads systematically killed village leaders, hamlet chiefs and school teachers. The VC intimidated the population generally. Their message was, if you cooperate with the government you and your family are going to suffer and you may be killed.

The key to long-term GVN pacification success was to provide districts, villages and hamlet with the resources to defend themselves against the VC –also resources for self-help development to parallel the self-defense of hamlets and villages. There were 3 levels of self-defense local forces: The RF (Regional Force) companies were armed with small arms, mortars and heavy machine guns. The RF companies could unite into battalions to take on larger VC or NVA formations. The PF (Popular Forces) platoons were lightly armed. They focused on village and hamlet security. The PF were paid a low salary. At the hamlet level, the PSDF were part-time, unpaid hamlet militia. They carried

WWII era M-1s, M-2s and Thompson sub-machine guns discarded by the ARVN, RF and PF when they switched to M-16s.

U.S. MATs (Military Advisory Teams) led by a First Lieutenant commanding 5 NCOs and enlisted men circulated in each district, training the PF and PSDF. When present, they coordinated with GVN RD (Revolutionary Development) cadre teams to train and advise on local defense and development projects.

President Nixon continued the deadlocked negotiations in Paris that Johnson had begun in mid-1968. Kissinger's attempt to make headway in secret peace talks similarly stalled. North Vietnamese negotiators rejected the U.S. demand that Hanoi withdraw its forces from South Vietnam. Kissinger rejected the North Vietnamese demands that the U.S. replace the Thieu regime and provide a time-bound date-certain for complete U.S. withdrawal.

The Nixon Administration implemented Johnson's plans to begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam in the fall of 1969. 25,000 U.S. troops departed Vietnam that year. U.S. troops in-country fell to 139,000 by the end of 1971. All U.S. combat troops had departed by the end of 1972.

One key Nixon modification on Johnson's Vietnam policy: Nixon was much more inclined to use U.S. airpower against military targets in North Vietnam and to attack North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos.

Q: In the withdrawal, was there a strategy of leaving troops in a certain area? Or was it simply all four of the corps had equal reductions?

TOMSEN: They looked at which parts of the country were least vulnerable to the NVA and the VC. Also, which parts of the country witnessed momentum on the side of the South against the NVA and the Viet Cong. The first division to be withdrawn in late 1969 was the 9th Division in Dinh Tuong and Long An Provinces, IV CORPS, where I was posted.

As the U.S. military was leaving, the NVA and the Viet Cong had to contend with their own problems. Their '68 Tet offensives had failed to hold on to any provincial or district capital. The offensives had severely depleted main force VC battalions and the ranks of local VC guerrillas. That left the countryside vulnerable to the GVN pacification push. As U.S. divisions left, they were replaced by upgraded ARVN divisions. Also, the South's air force received more combat and transport aircraft and better equipment. The Navy was provided modern ships and riverine patrol boats.

The pacification campaign's emphasis on arming rural communities to defend themselves and to provide resources for community self-development was especially successful in areas where the VC had alienated minority religious groups. Each of them was already anti-communist -the Hoa Hao in the central Mekong Delta; the Cambodians in the Lower

Delta provinces of Ba Xuyen, An Giang, and Kien Giang; and Cao Dai communities in Regions 3 and 4. Catholic villages and hamlets everywhere were intensely anti-communist.

Q: These smaller sects were Buddhist? Or more Confucianist and animist? How would you describe them?

TOMSEN: The Hoa Hao minority sect was founded in 1939 by Huynh Phu So. It was a version of Buddhism, but very hierarchical and disciplined. The French captured Huynh. It was said that he converted a French psychiatrist who interrogated him in prison! The Cao Dai religion honored Vietnamese and many international religious and secular leaders like Abraham Lincoln and Victor Hugo –those considered to be of high moral standing, an important Confucian tenet. Their faces appear in Cao Dai temples. Early on, VC tactics of assassination, coercion and threats alienated the sects. VC assassins, for example, killed Hao Hao leader Huynh. Pacification programs gave substantial resources to the sects to defend themselves and to develop their communities. That strengthened GVN control in their areas.

In mid-February, 1969 I took an Air America flight from Can Tho to My Tho on my way to my assignment location, Ben Tranh District in Dinh Tuong Province. My Tho is 45 miles south of Saigon on Highway 4. It was the largest city in the Upper Delta, the capital of Dinh Tuong Province, and the hometown of President Thieu's wife. I consulted with the CORDS staff at CORDS province headquarters in My Tho for a day before driving to Ben Tranh.

My briefings in My Tho provincial CORDS headquarters began in Colonel Harry Amos' office. Amos was the Province Senior Advisor. He said he was glad to see more Vietnamese-speaking CORDS officers out in the province's 7 districts. He reviewed the APC campaign's positive contributions to province security. He was realistic about GVN prospects. The APC ending the previous month, January, had reclaimed some areas from VC control. But lethargy and incompetence in the GVN's military and civilian bureaucracies would be the main obstacles to pacification progress in the first half (February to July) of the 1969 Pacification campaign beginning that month.

Amos said the VC human-wave assaults on My Tho during the Tet offensive had been decimated by artillery and air power. As a result, the VC main force regiments in Dinh Tuong were undersize. But NVA troops were infiltrating the province from Cambodia in greater numbers than before. They were reinforcing VC units and preparing for the next North Vietnamese general offensive in a few years' time. Although reduced in numbers, the VC remaining in Dinh Tuong were hardened guerrillas in their third generation. They had fought first the French, then the South Vietnamese and now the American and the South Vietnamese.

The colonel spoke at length on the vulnerability of Dinh Tuong and other provinces to communist bases less than 50 miles away in Cambodia. Soviet ships unloaded NVA

military supplies at the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville. The supplies were trucked north on the Sihanouk Trail to NVA bases along the 350-mile Cambodian-South Vietnamese border.

A Cambodian territorial enclave jutting into South Vietnam near Dinh Tuong, the Parrot's Beak, was the main North Vietnamese jumping off point to infiltrate Dinh Tuong and the Upper Delta. It was only 32 miles from My Tho and 24 miles from Ben Tranh where I would be stationed. The infiltration route wound through the inhospitable Plain of Reeds of riverlets, swamps and thick underbrush over the northern edge of Ben Tranh, south into the Delta and north through Long An and around Saigon.

Amos stated that the U.S. 9th Division's principal mission was to block enemy infiltration into the Upper Delta from the Parrots Beak. The 9th headquarters were at Dong Tam in northwestern Dinh Tuong near the infiltration routes from Cambodia. The 3rd Brigade of the 9th at Tan An performed the same blocking mission south of Saigon.

I next met Colonel Amos' civilian deputy, the DPSA (Deputy Province Senior Advisor) Herb Gross and Bill Weingartner, the province team's head of the CORDS development and governance programs. Both were FSOs. They supervised the DDSAs working in Dinh Tuong districts. Herb and Bill echoed Amos' compliments for the GVN performance during the APC in Dinh Tuong. They described their senior-level Vietnamese civilian counterparts as dedicated and effective. But lethargy, laziness and incompetence abounded at lower-levels. They told me I would be lucky to get a counterpart in Ben Tranh who was able and committed.

That day of briefing at CORDS My Tho provincial headquarters generally coincided with what we had heard during our VTC training. I would experience much of the same during my CORDS assignment. After arriving in Ben Tranh, my low rank in the CORDS hierarchy and distance from My Tho ruled out any further meeting with PSA Amos. I never encountered his counterpart, Province Chief, Colonel Le Minh Dao, who would later gain fame on the battlefield. My principal interlocutors in My Tho were DPA Herb Gross and Bill Weingarten. Both were very helpful. They met all of my requests for support during my 9 months in Ben Tranh District.

Q: It's June 10th and we are continuing with Ambassador Tomsen in his tour in Vietnam.

TOMSEN: Following the day of consultations with the province's senior CORDS staff in My Tho, the motor pool issued me a used International Harvester Scout suitable for rough terrain. I set out for the Ben Tranh District capital, Tan Hiep, 10 miles north of My Tho on Highway 4.

Highway 4 was a well-maintained, paved two-lane road built to American standards. It was the most important road artery in the Delta. It started in Saigon, transited Tan An, Long An's capital, and continued south through Tan Hiep, Ben Tranh's district capital and My Tho, then onwards to the southern tip of South Vietnam. Outside My Tho I drove

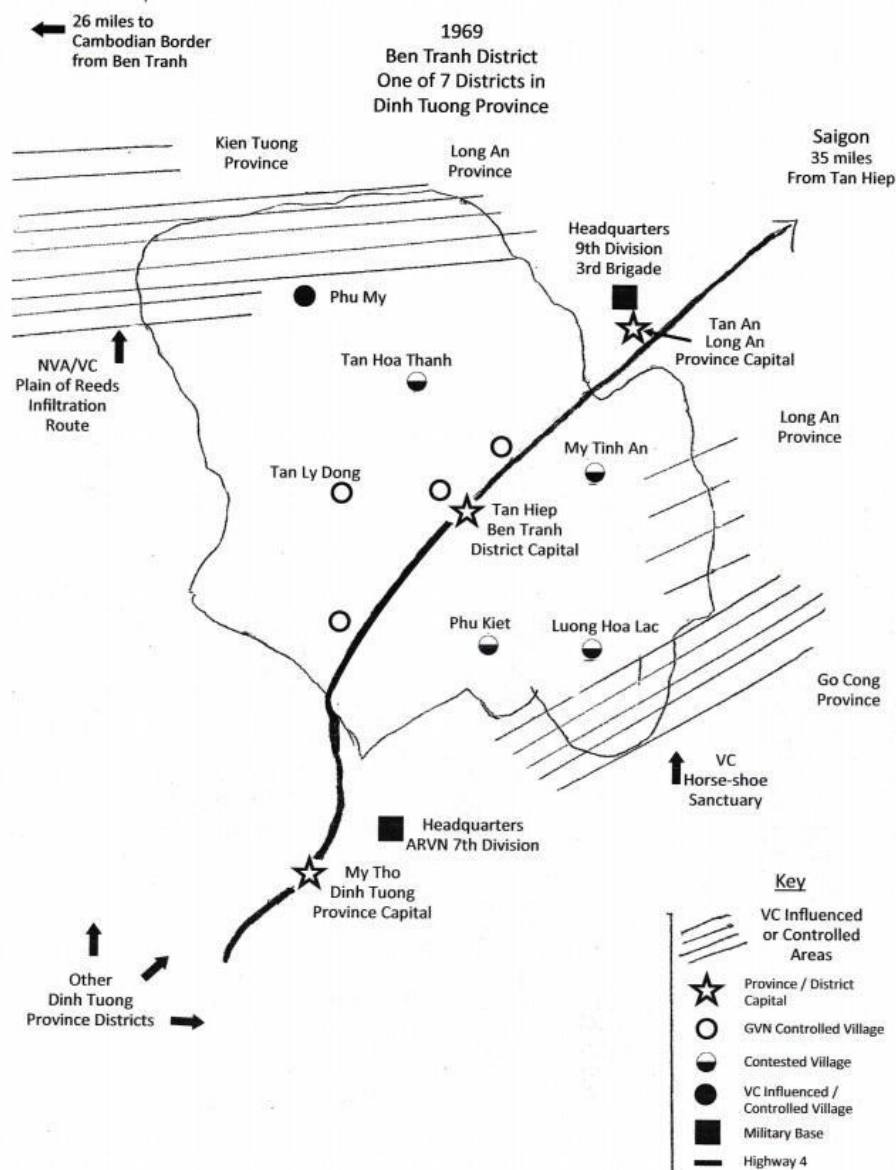
past the “seminary” where a catholic seminary had once existed. Now it was the headquarters of the American advisors to the ARVN 7th Division where Vann was previously stationed.

Thieu, like Diem before him, made sure that one of his most trusted generals was commanding the 7th Division in Dinh Tuong. The 7th commander’s military capabilities were secondary to personal loyalty to the President in Saigon. If there was a coup or an uprising in Saigon, 7th Division tanks and APC (Armored Personnel Carriers) could roar up Highway 4 to Saigon and save him. At the time of Diem’s overthrow, the anti-Diem military junta had secretly arranged for the commander of the 7th to be visiting III Corps when they triggered their coup.

The drive was scenic. Vietnam is a very beautiful country. The forested Central Highlands in I and II CORPS slope down to the coast. Populated III CORPS envelopes Saigon. IV CORPS’ flat, well-irrigated Mekong Delta is one of the world’s most productive rice-growing regions. The dry season was already 2 months old. The rains would begin in June. An endless sweep of green rice paddies would appear, glistening in the sun. Now, the landscape was a dull brown crisscrossed by land dykes demarcating rice fields. Pre-teen Vietnamese barefoot boys in faded white shirts and dark shorts could be seen lazily perched high on the backs of buffalos –or walking on the ground holding a tiny stick while herding hundreds of noisy ducks wondering through the fields scooping up rice shoots leftover from the harvest.

I drove into the district center of Tan Hiep, a bustling town straddling Highway 4. Tan Hiep is best known as the birthplace of the popular Vietnamese dish “Thit Bo Bay Mon” (or Beef in Seven Varieties). The streets were crowded with scooters, taxis, trucks, cars and motorized cyclos. The cyclos were operated mostly by middle-aged men transporting people or goods, sometimes both. One- and two- story shops and residences ran together on irregular lines along Highway 4 and the side roads of Tan Hiep. Colorful roadside signs in Vietnamese advertised merchandise for sale. Children played in the streets. Women wearing “non la” (the conical wide-rimmed Vietnamese hats worn in the rice paddies) and light-colored blouses over black pantaloons sold vegetables from store fronts. They gathered at water spigots to wash clothes and fill their water buckets. Older school-uniformed children, PF and RF in camouflage clothing and women in traditional Vietnamese ao dais mixed in with the crowds.

The volume of barbed wire fencing increased exponentially as I drove up a slight hill to the sprawled-out district government center. The district chief’s headquarters and district government offices stretched in a line of fortified, dun-colored buildings. The CORDS team compound was next door to the district chief’s headquarters.



Ben Tranh District was oblong in shape, slightly angling upwards in its far northwest corner towards the Parrot's Beak NVA Cambodian sanctuary to the west. Highway 4 traversed the center of the district on a north-south axis. Altogether, there were 10 villages in Ben Tranh. The most secure ones, including the Tan Hiep District capital, were graded A and B in the HES. They were strung out along the highway 4 North-South corridor. District contested C and E hamlets in 4 villages were situated outside the corridor, further out to the east and west of Highway 4. Those hamlets were the main focus of the 1969 pacification campaign. The least secure V hamlets in the district were the farthest from Highway 4, beyond the contested zones. NVA infiltration routes and VC guerrilla bases were located in these wild, lightly populated or deserted E and V hamlets of the district.

The “Horseshoe,” was an overgrown, booby-trapped VC base area in the far southeast near the southern-most hamlets of Luong Hoa Lac village. It extended into neighboring Go Cong Province. District PF and RF militia occasionally patrolled the outskirts of the Horseshoe. The chore of deeply penetrating the Horseshoe was left to 7th Division main force battalions.

The largely deserted V hamlets of Phu My village were located in the districts far northwest. They lay inside the inhospitable Plain of Reeds NVA infiltration route entering northern Dinh Tuong and Long An Province from the Parrot’s Beak Cambodian enclave less than 30 miles away.

I parked outside the Ben Tranh Advisory Team compound, entered and met Major Thoms, the DSA and his deputy for military affairs, the S-3 advisor, First Lieutenant McDaniels. They introduced me to the first lieutenant advising the district’s S-2 Intelligence major.

Thoms’ counterpart was District Chief Hop, a paunchy, middle-aged, friendly lieutenant colonel. He commanded some 900 PF and RF militia in Ben Tranh. McDaniels’ counterpart was the S-3 head of district military operations. Three sergeants and a corporal rounded out our Ben Tranh CORDS team. Sergeant Pocket managed the hooch –the team house. It was the one-story wood structure where we lived. He was very heavy, certainly over 250 pounds, and beyond his prime. Aside from supervising household cooking and cleaning, he performed the important function of scrounging for food from the 9th Division.

Q: Let’s be clear – hooch was the little compound in which you lived. It wasn’t an illegal distillery where you were making bathtub gin.

TOMSEN: (Laughter) Yes. It was our one- story team house --rather plain barracks-like and located inside the large government compound where we lived. We drank tons of Budweiser beer. I never saw either hard liquor or wine. Beer sustained the team.

Q: Did the Vietnamese themselves have a locally-produced distilled spirit?

TOMSEN: Yes. It was called Ba Si De, rice wine. Ba Si De was horrible. Our Vietnamese counterparts avoided it. Two beers dating from the French colonial era were available in the market –“La Rue” and “33.”

Colonel Hop, the District Chief, and his staff periodically invited us to dinner parties at district headquarters. They quickly evolved into drinking parties. Over and over, Vietnamese military officers would challenge all or one of us to chug down a glass of French Hennessy Cognac –Hennessy was considered the top-quality alcohol money could buy. We were outnumbered, so drank the largest quantity of Hennessy into the night. Sergeant Pocket was a world class scrounger when it came to raiding 9th Division warehouses for food and beer. We set aside “war trophies” scooped up during military

operations -SKS carbines, pistols, VC hats, flags and other paraphernalia, items in much demand at the 9th Division. Sergeant Pocket's NCO contacts at the 9th Division were feeding over 10,000. He would return in the team Jeep. The jeep pulled the team wagon loaded with beef, chicken, vegetables and cases of Budweiser. Our CORDS team never paid a cent for food and housing during our Ben Tranh postings.

Our team medic, a First Sergeant, attended to the team's medical needs. He worked with district military medical personnel to organize MEDCAPS in hamlets. Doctors from the Tan Hiep District Center hospital usually participated as well.

Q: They're still very popular. Occasionally the U.S. hospital ship –it was the Mercy but it's been renamed- or there's a second ship. We had a ship visit in Costa Rica of this ship where for a week or two they provided simple surgeries like cataract surgery, dental care, all sorts of things. The lines, people waited all day. These were free services and amazingly popular things for public diplomacy even today. I imagine the same was true in Vietnam.

TOMSEN: Very much so. The hamlet would also be crowded with people coming to the MEDCAP from other hamlets. Hundreds of people lined up to receive medical treatment. The MEDCAPS were also successful public relations events.

Sergeant Brooks was the team's S-5 civic action specialist. Together, Sergeant Brooks and I supported Vietnamese counterparts to carry out economic development and road maintenance projects. He was amazing. Once he drove a huge grader into our compound. He had somehow scrounged it from one of the military depots. We used the grader to upgrade roads in the district.

DSA Major Thoms supervised the 6-man U.S. MATS team circulating among Ben Tranh hamlets to train new PF platoons and hamlet PSDF militia. The team was led by a Lieutenant, whose name I forget. It co-located with PF platoons inside their Operating Bases (OBs).

The thousands of PF and RF Operating Bases (OBs) throughout South Vietnam were based on one model. The OB was triangular, shaped to open up fields of fire against an attacking enemy. Its thick sunbaked mud walls easily withstood small arms fire. Defenders mounted elevated ramparts to fire back at attackers with small arms and grenades. Some OBs were issued smaller M-60 mortars.

When under attack, the OB commander could radio district headquarters and our CORDS team to request helicopter gunship fire support --or a (helicopter) Medevac (medical evacuation) to transport wounded soldiers to a hospital. The OBs contained spartan barracks and eating facilities. PF families living in nearby villages or hamlets would provide food to their RF and PF relatives. A perimeter of barbed wire and concertina surrounded the OBs. U.S. claymore land mines were hung in the wire –also empty cans that sounded an alarm if shaken by intruders cutting through the wire.

Properly defended, a platoon-size PF OB adjoining a village or hamlet could hold off a company-size or more VC attack until a gunship arrived to light up the night with flares and turn their M-60 or -50 caliber machine guns against the attackers. During my Vietnam tour, successful VC attacks on OBs were rare in the 2 districts where I served. When that did occur, it was usually the result of an insider working with the VC who opened the OB gate –or he duped the PF commander and his men into drinking too much Ba Si De.

As the one civilian on our district team, by necessity, I quickly learned the catch-all of military terminology and the military alphabet from alpha to zulu. I became familiar with one-time pads to encode messages. I did my shifts on radio duty, calling in air support or medevacs.

Later, in 1970 in another district bordering the South China Sea, a U.S. Navy destroyer responded to my radio request to help defend a PF OB under attack. It worked its computers to lay down accurate fire around the outpost. The VC fled.

Q: Even back then computers were already integrated into ships.

TOMSEN: Yes. My first night in Ben Tranh, like my second night in Saigon, was eventful. We got mortared. This happened periodically, every couple of weeks. The same VC squad would set up its Chinese 82-mm mortar during nighttime to the west of the district to shell the district compound. They would drop 3 to 4 mortar rounds into their mortar tube. The shells would soar high into the air –giving the VC time to pick up the mortar and run. They would already be on their line of withdrawal when the first round fell into the district headquarters area where we were located.

Instantaneously, when the first round impacted, we and the Vietnamese living on the district compound would dash to nearby bunkers, hopefully before the next round impacted. Once our team's intelligence lieutenant was sleeping when the first round hit nearby. He took a little piece of shrapnel in the butt, jumped out of bed and ran into the bunker also inside our team house. Later he received a Purple Heart for the wound.

The district chief arranged for a veteran Vietnamese sergeant –one thoroughly knowledgeable about his U.S. 81 mm mortar- to counter the VC's incoming fire. He slept outside next to his mortar every night. His job was to return fire as soon as the first round struck the compound. During daytime hours, the sergeant walked the locality where the VC mortar team set up. He measured distances to district headquarters from likely launching sites. He also interviewed local hamlet dwellers. He got pretty good at estimating the VC's movements.

One night, he scored a direct hit on the retreating VC squad, killing them all. Their bodies, with their mortar on the ground wrapped in a water-resistant tarp, were found the next morning next to a canal. Further investigation revealed that an underwater hole on

the canal's opposite bank was the VC escape route. After passing through the underwater tunnel leading from the hole, they crawled above the waterline surface into an underground cavern with air holes above. They probably hid there for a day or so before withdrawing by night to the district's northwest communist infiltration route in the Plain of Reeds.

Region 4 DEPCORDS Vann stressed that each military and civil pacification program was important in its own way. But the military-security programs occupied the first 10% zone. Timothy Knight, a highly regarded AID field manager, added that the military progress would not stick without implementation of the civil programs. Both were right.

When I arrived in Ben Tranh, 52% of the district hamlets were rated E or VC. The priority in the early stages of pacification focused mostly on contested (C) and also on some VC-influenced (E) areas. In Ben Tranh, Major Thoms and District Chief Hop devoted most hours of their days to extending the district's security presence outwards from Highway 4 into those C and E villages of the district –building new OBs; deploying newly formed and trained PF platoons and RF companies to man the OBs; arming and training part-time PSDF to protect their hamlets; and providing a radio net to link the OBs and hamlet PSDF commanders to district headquarters. The military buildup and attendant development resources dedicated to the district's contested hinterland created the conditions for refugees to return to their homes in villages and hamlets, and to resume farming when the early rains came in June.

When I arrived in Ben Tranh, the GVN's APC drive had already begun to threaten NVA infiltration routes entering the district's northwest Phu My area from North Vietnam's Cambodian sanctuaries. VC guerrillas would guide lines of NVA across Highway 4 and transit the districts' northern border overlapping with Long An Province districts. Some NVA infiltration groups swung northward into III CORPS provinces near Saigon. Others would loop southeast into the VC Horseshoe sanctuary bordering Go Cong Province, then continue south further into the Delta.

S-3 Lieutenant McWilliams and the district team's NCOs accompanied Colonel Hop's S-3 military officers during daily district sweep operations into contested and VC influenced areas of the district. Gradually during 1969, district daytime patrolling penetrated into the outskirts of the Horseshoe and the Plain of Reeds. Four of Phu My villages hamlets were considered VC or VC influenced, two more were contested.

Relatively few development and governing resources could be invested in the remote VC or VC influenced hamlets of Luong Hoa Loc Village near the Horseshoe. During 1969, the ARVN 7th Division based near My Tho plunged deeper into the Horseshoe on operations. I don't remember any occasion when they stayed overnight. They always suffered casualties from boobytraps and firefights.

So, the GVN pacification spearhead was construction of new OBs and daily RF-PF patrolling outward from the Highway 4 corridor into the contested areas. Civil

pacification programs accompanied that security spearhead. My DDSA responsibilities concentrated on advising and assisting the district government to implement the civil pacification programs in Ben Tranh District.

My counterpart was Ben Tranh Deputy District Chief for Administration Phu, an elderly administrator whose experience stretched back to the French colonial period. Phu infrequently traveled from district headquarters in Tan Hiep. He delegated field activity to his subordinates dealing with non-military pacification programs.

I adhered to the CORDS mantra that CORDS advisors assisted their GVN counterparts. Our biggest sin was to grab the steering wheel and assume leadership. On most days, I tried to visit at least one village or hamlet, always with an official from Phu or Colonel Hop's staff, never on my own. Sometimes, district officials invited me to accompany them on visits to the field. At times, I would invite them to join me, always deferring to them during the day's activities.

Sergeant Brooks or the team medic would often accompany me, depending on whether or not their specific expertise would be helpful. The District Chief, Colonel Hop, periodically asked me to join him to inspect civilian pacification projects, to sit in on his meetings with village councils, to monitor elections or to attend a ceremony celebrating the completion of some village self-help project. He proved a cheerful, and I thought, competent partner during our visits to villages.

I drove my scout and, depending on the terrain, sometimes the team jeep to destinations around the district. Local PF and PSDF provided force protection.

I became close friends with Phu's young deputy, Viet, during our many hours working together. Viet's main job was to train recently elected village councils, village chiefs, hamlet council members and hamlet chiefs about administrative procedures required to execute the range of civil pacification programs. I heard that Viet was an unannounced member of the Vietnamese democratic-minded political party --the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD). The VNQDD, like the other major Western-influenced political party, the Dai Viet, were moderate nationalists. They opposed dictatorships, be they communist or military. The VNQDD and Dai Viet were part of the communist-led anti-French Viet Minh coalition. As the French approached defeat, the Vietnamese communists annihilated their leaders. GVN military autocrats alternatively suppressed or tolerated them.

I never discussed Viet's political leanings with him. But I admired his commitment to the good governance pacification programs --village and hamlet council elections, mobilization of community members to choose and implement Village Self-Development (VSD) projects. Viet was a spirited lecturer to village and hamlet groups. He was in his element articulating the self-help administrative steps which local officials needed to take to implement civil pacification programs.

In the case of VSD projects, the village councils were required to provide 1/3 of the total costs in money, labor or materials and to account for village expenditures. The village council's financial clerk maintained a checkbook and a paper trail for each project. That entailed a large amount of paperwork to cover the U.S. \$400,000 (in Vietnamese piasters) granted to each village for VSD projects during the first half of 1969. The GVN provided a second tranche of U.S. \$600,000 for VSD projects during the second half of 1969.

I came to know and work with other district officials. The VIS (Vietnamese Information Service) cadre disseminated propaganda and TVs. They sometimes deployed drama teams and armed propaganda squads to proselytize in villages and hamlets. On occasion, they showed movies.

VIS cadre never came close to their VC competitors in effectiveness. Once I accompanied another DDSA on a VIS operation in a contested hamlet in neighboring Long Dinh District bordering Ben Tranh. The VIS cadre set up loud speakers pointed at two homes at the edge of the hamlet believed to be owned by VC sympathizers. The homes looked unoccupied that day. A horde of local children and older peasant men and women watched as the VIS team blared out messages on one loud speaker towards the empty houses. The team handed out GVN leaflets to the curious onlookers. Less than an hour later, the VIS team members, mission not accomplished, gathered up their equipment, climbed to the roof of a bus filled with people, chickens, ducks, squealing pigs, and vegetables. They smiled and waved to us from the top of the bus as it roared away in a cloud of dust back towards the district center.

Trips around Ben Tranh with GVN district officials dealing with agriculture, refugee return to pacified areas, education and road construction demonstrated that the pacification progress started during the APC campaign was continuing to make progress in 1969. An estimated 50% of district farmers were using "miracle" IR-8 rice by mid-1969. Province and district officials distributed building material, IR-8 seeds, fertilizer and cash to support the return of thousands of refugees to their homes in time to prepare their fields for planting before the rainy season began. Hundreds of families turned out for Medcaps conducted by Vietnamese doctors and our team medic in C and E hamlets.

I found the district chief and deputy district chief much more enthusiastic about pacification programs they thought were worthwhile. The Phuong Hoang intelligence and VIS programs did not fall into that category. The VIS' distribution to villages of televisions that carried GVN political messaging from Saigon and popular Chinese opera performances was a PR success. But Phu and the district chief gave only polite responses to our recommendations that district military psyops cadre and VIS civilian officials be from the local areas where they proselytized –not marooned back at district headquarters in secure Tan Hiep Village on Highway 4.

Foot-dragging by the Vietnamese leadership and legislative assembly in Saigon delayed the takeoff of the important land reform program. At the local level, land reform

threatened the landowners. About 70% of the farmers in the district did not own their land; they usually had to provide over 60% of their harvest to the landlord. That was the main reason historians concluded that Chiang Kai-shek lost the Chinese Mainland to the Chinese communists. Rural Chinese society, as in Vietnam, reflected a medieval feudal agricultural structure where the peasants worked the land and the landed aristocracy got the benefits. Many of the Ben Tranh landlords had left for My Tho or Saigon during the 1962-68 VC expansion into the countryside. They would attempt to reclaim their land in the wake of pacification.

One of the first things Chiang Kai-shek did, with U.S. assistance after he evacuated to Taiwan, was to force landowners to sell their land to the government in exchange for bonds. The bonds were paid off over a 10-year period. The land was redistributed to landless farmers. That has reinforced political stability and development of a rural middle class in Taiwan up till today.

Encouraged by the Americans, President Thieu finally forced the “Land to the Tiller” law through the National Assembly and signed it into law in March, 1970. Thieu told DEPCORDS Colby that passage of the act was the “happiest day of my life.” The implementation phase followed the Taiwan pattern. Over a million tenant and landless farmers gained ownership of their land they farmed. Farmers given land by the VC were granted GVN title to it. The GVN bonds provided to landowners to buy their land were guaranteed by the U.S. government. By 1973, rice production had increased by 30% and VC recruitment in the Delta slumped.

Sharing the dangers of operating in a war environment with our Vietnamese counterparts was always with us. Nearly every day we witnessed depressing violence, death and destruction resulting from the long-running Vietnam War. Destroyed hamlets, empty fields that hadn’t been cultivated for years, overgrown woods, booby-trapped areas the VC had evacuated. Mines, mortars, small arms fire from both sides caused military casualties but mostly killed innocent civilians. I carried an M-1 and a radio. I wore a flak jacket whenever I traveled to villages and hamlets in the district. I did regular radio checks with the team back at our team compound to tell them where I was and how things were going.

Q: This is interesting because you had been given arms training with the M-1?

TOMSEN: Yes, on rifles and pistols generally.

Q: That is a difference between how the State Department interacted in Vietnam, and in Afghanistan and Iraq. To my knowledge, State people are never trained in weapons except to the extent they might learn it in the field. They’re given either U.S. military or contractor security people to accompany them.

TOMSEN: Yes. In my personal experience in Afghanistan, force protection was more difficult there because of the atomistic tribal nature of the society and the ever-present

danger posed by Pakistan-sponsored terrorist groups. During a 2002 one-week private visit to Afghanistan, I was hosted and given protection by Afghans in Kabul, Kandahar and the Panshir Valley. In Kabul, the embassy sent an armored vehicle and American guards to pick me up for a meeting with the ambassador at the embassy.

Our force protection in Vietnam was village and hamlet officials we knew, and local PF, RF and PSDF from communities we and our Vietnamese counterparts were visiting. Also, American CORDS district team members protected each other in Vietnam. When DSA Thoms was gone, I assumed charge of our district team. Vann's CORDS Directives insisted on such interchangeability.

All district CORDS teams administered a separate budget –about \$70,000 a year— to fund “Assistance in Kind,” (AIK), self-help development projects. Our CORDS Ben Tranh team invested most of our AIK money in C-contested hamlet development projects. The AIK budgets managed by all CORDS district teams drew funds from the excess piastres gathered from the embassy's program to stabilize Vietnam's economy through commodity imports. We coordinated with Colonel Hop and Mr. Phu to select the projects –for instance road construction and repair of destroyed schools or village dinhs –none already financed by village VSD self-help projects.

Q: The labor would typically come only in the dry season, because they would need all hands for harvesting the rice in the rainy season?

TOMSEN: Yes. Rice sowing was in high gear beginning in June after the dry season ended. The rice harvest took place during November and December following the rains. Most men and women living in rural areas would be working long hours in the field.

I became well-acquainted with our team's Vietnamese neighbors in Tan Hiep, the district capital. Not a few tapped into our generator cables and helped themselves to free electricity! During informal chats with Tan Hiep's elected village council members, I suggested that they consider creating a town electric cooperative. I tracked down some literature in Vietnamese explaining how to develop and manage a cooperative. Their interest grew after, together, we visited a village near My Tho that already had an electric cooperative up and running.

It took about four months for the Tan Hiep Council to write the necessary charter, elect a cooperative board, and set aside VSD self-help funds to start the electric generation project. The next step was to acquire the big-ticket items. That included a large generator and important accessories.

After consulting with AID officials in Saigon, I and three members of the cooperative's executive committee drove in my Scout, followed by a village commercial truck, to the enormous U.S. Army logistics base at Long Binh, north of Saigon. After processing through the base security perimeter and the base administration office, we drove to the area that contained discarded appliances.

It was a sight to behold! A forest of high piles of jumbled appliances. Actually, they were appliance mountains. They towered up to about 10 stories. Each mountain specialized in a different appliance. The refrigerator mountain was the highest. Three of the mountains –the refrigerator, washer, and dryer mountains— were white. The generator mountain was black. The air conditioner mountain was multi-colored. It was the lowest mountain. Probably due to Vietnam’s hot, tropical climate. Air conditioners were always in demand.

We climbed the generator mountain and pulled out a large generator that appeared in good condition. We loaded it into our truck bed. We also loaded up the truck with transmission equipment, various cables, wire, meters and wood telephone poles.

The Tan Hiep electric cooperative project developed surely but very slowly. The inauguration ceremony took place after my transfer to another district in the Lower Delta in November, 1969. There, I encouraged 2 other village councils to establish electric cooperatives.

Not long after I arrived in Ben Tranh, Vann ordered that each district team, military and civilian, be “represented” in nighttime operations near one of the numerous PF and RF OBs in their districts once a week. He knew that the VC owned the night in many areas of IV CORPS. His intention was to force both the Vietnamese and their American CORDS advisors out on nighttime operations.

Q: Now these night-time patrols were the most dangerous of all?

TOMSEN: Yes, because the VC operated mostly at night. They were especially active during the darkest nights.

Q: No moon and no ambient light from anywhere else?

TOMSEN: Exactly. When sensing danger, OBs could request the district or province to fire illuminating rounds --flares-- overhead to light up the sky. But neither advisors nor Vietnamese troops possessed the night-vision goggles distributed to U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan today. In Afghanistan, 35 years later, we could see better at night. On one occasion, I was in a U.S. army C-130 flying from Kandahar to Kabul. There was a night vision lens about 8 feet in diameter on the floor of the C-130. You could clearly watch the mountainous terrain pass by below and see people and vehicles moving on the ground.

Vann regularly issued his signed DEPCORDS instructions to IV CORPS province and district personnel. They touched on many subjects. One had surfaced during our VTC training –Vann’s insistence that DSAs have thorough knowledge of the districts where they were stationed.

After arriving in Can Tho in February, 1969, he instructed that DSAs “be the world’s leading expert on his area of responsibility within 30 days of arrival at post.” Other DEPCORDS directives he sent down through the Region IV CORDS chain of command pronounced how advisors should deal with their counter-parts. One directed that: “It is imperative that all advisors use every effort to short-circuit the administrative lethargy which exists in the GVN –that could include recommending up the American chain of command that an official be removed.”

There was much laziness and incompetence in the Ben Thanh District government’s military and civilian offices. FSOs Herb Gross and Bill Weingarten had told me to expect that. In Ben Thanh, I never recommended that a Vietnamese official be removed, although I did so in the next district I was assigned to. I came to know that our Vietnamese counterparts were aware of the possibility that their CORDS advisors could send a recommendation for their removal up the CORDS hierarchy. And it could end up on President Thieu’s desk.

I lucked out with my counterpart, Deputy Province Chief Phu. Village and hamlet councils, ordinary Vietnamese citizens, and district military personnel went out of their way to show Phu respect. They usually followed up on his soft-spoken instructions. We maintained a productive relationship during my CORDS assignment in Ben Thanh.

Another Vann CORPS IV wide directive instructed that all CORDS advisors who had a Vietnamese counterpart: “Will send his counterpart a letter at least once a month wherein he will compliment him where appropriate; identify problems and recommend corrective action; inform the counterpart that unless the issue is resolved, it will be brought to the attention of the next-higher advisory echelon. “A copy of each district counterpart letter,” Vann concluded, “must be sent to the U.S. provincial level.”

I thought that the Vann requirement was useful. It stopped just short of overreach. It reminded that the GVN, not the U.S., was implementing the pacification programs. The U.S. military was withdrawing from Vietnam. At the time, all assumed that U.S. financial and material support would continue. But, at some point, the large CORDS field advisory team network would be withdrawn. The GVN had to prepare for that day.

The monthly CORDS Advisors’ letters were a functional prod to pressure our Vietnamese counterparts to do their job. Mine followed Vann’s sandwich approach --positive at the beginning and end, problems and corrective action in the middle. The positive note at the end was the latest list of civil self-help projects our district team’s AIK kitty was funding.

Here is an example of one of my DDSA letters to Phu:

“This last month of the dry season has been a good one for Ben Thanh District. Progress was made in implementation of the 1969 Pacification Plan. On May 9th, yourself representing the district, Mr. Viet, and Lieutenant Tuan of the Province Revolutionary Development Cadre office lectured a combined meeting of village

and hamlet officials on the implementation of the 1969 village development plan. Most of the participants had just gone through the provincial training program. This meeting reinforced and added to the village and hamlet officials' knowledge of the VSD process. You subsequently organized two groups of district Revolutionary Development cadre officials trained in the operation of the 1969 Pacification plan in My Tho. They traveled to all of the district villages to assist village and hamlet officials to implement the plan.

One shortcoming in the implementation of the 1969 pacification plan at this point is the failure of the province to allow the villages to pick up their checkbooks in order to implement projects. You have done all the necessary steps leading up to this final step. Villages cannot finance the plan unless they possess their checkbooks. In addition to the village development plan, work on the Tan Hiep electrification project is proceeding well.

I would like to recommend that you continue to use your two district development teams to the maximum extent possible on propagating and explaining the 1969 pacification plan at the village and hamlet level. Mr. Viet especially is very knowledgeable on all of the details of the plan and the progress made.

At the end of June, there will be an informal conference between province and district officials on the second phase of the 1969 VSD plan (September–December, 1969). To help the district better understand how to guide the villages in spending the second tranche of money (U.S. \$600,000), I would like to urge you to make sure deadlines on the first phase have been met by them.

You should urge the VIS propaganda office to do better. It is very weak.

I wish to thank you for helping me to transport the construction materials for the AIK Phu Kiet Village dinh repair project.

Presently the U.S. advisory team is contributing to the following self-help projects.”

The letter ended with the status of the team's AIK projects selected in consultation with the District Chief and Phu. Most of the listed AIK projects were located in the priority contested hamlets: two self-help hamlet bridge projects; school kits for students in a third hamlet; wood to repair a destroyed school; materials for repair of a cistern in one hamlet; and school furniture for another.

Phu's letters in response to mine were substantive and polite. They went into detail about what the district government was doing to address the problems I mentioned. Unfortunately, up to my departure in November, 1969, he was unable to report significant progress in the two specific problem areas that were the VCs strongest suits: land reform and propaganda.

On land reform, he wrote:

”I met with the land reform office in the province and asked them why can’t we train more land reform cadre? He answered that sometime in the future he is waiting for a new decree that will be discussed by the national assembly, and accordingly we have to wait for that decree before we can proceed.”

On propaganda:

“I tried to get the propaganda cadre to go out to the hamlets and villages, but they’re not from those villages, especially the insecure ones, so they’re reluctant to go out.”

Q: This is June 13th and we’re picking up with Ambassador Tomsen in his tour in Vietnam.

TOMSEN: We were introduced to the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) during our 1968 CORDS training at the VTC. After experiencing the HES first hand in Ben Tranh District, I came to agree with our VTC HES lecturers that it probably was a good enough indicator, not an infallible estimate, of security trends in the district. It became a joke –but a half-serious one-- that incoming DSAs would tend to downgrade their predecessors’ evaluation in order to show progress during their tenures. When those DSAs left, then their replacements would do the same and start over. The DSA major of neighboring Chau Thanh District once told me his “Higher Ups” wanted him to raise his HES ratings. Of course, that false image of progress boosted his personal performance prospects as well. There were flaws, there’s no question, but it was about as good an evaluating technique as could be devised at that time.

President Thieu’s declaration that all hamlets in South Vietnam should be A’s and B’s by the end of 1969 collided with HES realities. His main purpose was to counter equally extravagant territorial claims by Hanoi’s negotiators at the Paris talks. Thieu’s political goal undermined the credibility of the GVN’s HES assessments.

Some district chiefs shied away from fictionalizing their HES evaluations and paid for it. Colonel Hop’s boss, the province chief, and the Vietnamese major general commanding the 7th Division one day summoned Hop to My Tho. They accused him of downgrading Ben Tranh hamlets. The province chief underscored his displeasure by serving Hop black coffee while the two senior officers criticized his performance. In August, Hop was transferred to a lower priority provincial staff position in Kien Hoa Province.

Major Thoms and I attempted to get as close as we could to the situation on the ground in our HES ratings. We took turns visiting hamlets when the district chief or members of our district team disputed a hamlet’s low rating. In September, for example, I visited 2 Luong Hoa Lac village hamlets near the VC Horseshoe sanctuary along the district’s southeast

border to check on pacification progress. Our team's HES ratings for both hamlets was V. District military and civil pacification programs had spread into Luong Hoa Lac's contested and E hamlets between Highway 4 and the 2 V hamlets. The stepped-up 7th Division military operations into the Horseshoe during daytime hours were showing better results. On the other hand, VC nighttime incursions into the 2 V hamlets remained relatively easy.

The failure of one of the district's S-3 officers, Lieutenant Hai, to show up at the 1430 appointed time for our departure from headquarters was the opening sign that the V hamlet designations remained accurate. I guessed he worried about his personal safety.

The non-resident hamlet chief of the first hamlet we visited was happy to receive our party. While standing outside, about 50 yards from the hamlet's center, he pointed to an abandoned one-story school, overgrown top to bottom with vines and foliage, on the other side of a small canal. I suggested that we take a look at the school and assess the damage. Without hesitation, he blurted out: "De khi khac!" That translates as "Some other time!" He obviously believed the school was booby-trapped and we would probably not be coming back alive.

That was the second indication that the V designations would not be removed anytime soon. The third indication surfaced during our conversation with the Luong Hoa Lac Village deputy district chief for security back at the village council office. After briefing us on genuine pacification progress in some C, contested Luong Hoa Lac hamlets, he advised that security in the 2 insecure hamlets would require the raising of 2 more PF platoons. He recalled a depressing incident during daylight in the second hamlet. Someone outside the hamlet had invited a local teenage to have tea with him in a teahouse. When the teenager refused to work for the VC he was shot dead on the spot. Needless to say, we were unable to raise the ratings of these 2 hamlets above the V level.

After the 1968 TET Offensive devastated VC ranks, Le Duan's Politburo accelerated the flow of North Vietnamese political cadre and NVA regulars into South Vietnam. Rigid communist discipline insured their smooth integration into VC formations.

Q: Let me ask a question here. In your experience during your time there, would you say the majority of the sympathizers with the communists were people of the lowest socioeconomic strata? Or were there sympathizers throughout South Vietnamese society? Teachers, academics, artists –I don't know, people who might typically be considered more sympathetic to communist ideals?

TOMSEN: The great majority of the VC and their sympathizers came from the lowest socio-economic strata of South Vietnam society. Most of those carrying guns were from the poorer rural families –sharecroppers and landless laborers.

Q: A quick question. The Viet Cong were South Vietnamese who had been convinced of the fact that running the country as a communist country was the future, and they were loyal to the North? Or were these Northerners who were infiltrating the South?

TOMSEN: The answer is all three.

The Viet Cong (VC) were South Vietnamese responding to the communist narrative that a revolution to overthrow an unjust, corrupt government was necessary. They obeyed the commands coming down from the Hanoi Politburo in the North.

Since the formation of the Vietnamese Communist Party in North Vietnam during the 1940s, Northerners and Central Vietnamese had dominated the Politburo. Southerners played a minor role. During the French War, the Politburo purged the Southerners then leading the Southern branch of the party. That's when Le Duan, a Central Vietnamese, took command of COSVN. So, Northern and Central Vietnamese dominated the Politburo in Hanoi. Le Duan and Le Duc Tho were thoroughly familiar with South Vietnam and the COSVN leadership they had led for a decade. VC political cadre and VC military units in the South loyally followed Politburo orders without regard for regional differences.

Communist propaganda likewise appealed to some of the lower socio-economic strata in South Vietnam's urban areas. For instance, cyclo drivers and construction workers. They too saw themselves victimized by social and legal injustices that allowed their families no ladder upwards.

In Ben Thanh, I thought that the peasant population in the poorer, most remote regions of the district were the most susceptible to communist recruitment. They suffered from the firepower regularly targeting their areas from government and American forces usually during the day; and from communist forces, usually at night.

My own personal experience was that the GVN pacification drive back into the rural areas that the VC had overrun in the mid-60s was drawing some of the lower strata in the countryside towards the government side. The VC offered no economic assistance outside land reform –even that economic relief was neutralized when the GVN's land reform program went into high gear in 1970. Armed VC squads forcefully entered peasant homes at night to extract taxes or part of a peasant household's stored rice. The VC practice of brutality against civilians working in government positions, teachers, health workers, hamlet council members generated fear and quiet bitterness.

Aside from the repressive feudal landowning system, the rural peasantry's primary grievance against the GVN was government corruption. I spoke Vietnamese but was never able to elicit inside information on the trail of hidden corruption lines in the district. The transactions were concealed from the view of advisors. An envelope of cash a wealthy individual leaves on a table after a meeting with an official, to give an example. Or a Saigon general sends an emissary to a province chief ordering him to replace a

district chief with a military officer in the general's corruption circle. A police officer at the district level purchases a province level position offering more illicit income.

I heard from FSOs in the embassy that a military network of graft beginning with Thieu's immediate relatives and a few top generals in Saigon extended downwards to province and district chiefs. Commanders at lower levels collected the salaries of Ghost Soldiers and sent a portion of the money collected up the chain of command. Wives of generals were reputed to manage their own corruption networks.

So, despite discreet probing, I was never able to verify one instance of high-level corruption. Minor corruption, "*tien nuoc*" (tea money), of course frequently occurred in the bureaucracy. On the other hand, ordinary Vietnamese citizens knew that no civil servant could live on the small salary he was paid. People routinely tolerated *tien nuoc* to get licenses or receive other services without much resentment.

Young FSOs at the U.S. embassy in Saigon discreetly complained that the embassy leadership and MAC/V generals were too accepting of high-level corruption. They cited senior embassy officers as insisting that the internal stability of the GVN leadership in a wartime environment was essential. Fighting corruption was on their list of issues they discussed in their meetings with Thieu, but it was not near the top. Decades later, those same evasions would later be heard from Embassy Front Offices in Afghanistan and Iraq during those wars.

My impression was that the great majority of South Vietnamese, including the religious minorities, Catholic, Cambodian Buddhist, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, worried about unforeseen dangers that would follow a North Vietnamese Communist victory. They despised the more aggressive Northerners with their traditional air of superiority over passive Southerners. I sensed that the rural and urban Vietnamese middle and upper classes, the officer corps, down through draftees in the military, civilian government officials and merchants wanted a continued U.S. presence to preserve South Vietnam's existing freedom, independence and way of life from North Vietnamese regimentation.

Working at the district level, I could not see the extent of communist sympathizers, agents, and cells implanted in the government and society generally. As you say, there were certainly those attracted to communist ideals, including artists, teachers and like-minded idealists. I would say that probably the most effective communist propaganda theme portrayed South Vietnam as under American occupation and the GVN as an American puppet.

If you will indulge me again, let me relate some more first-hand stories taken from my memory, notes and diary at the time. You can read many others recorded in the ADST oral histories of FSO and AID personnel who worked at the district level elsewhere in South Vietnam.

None of these are earth-shaking. They are anecdotes, real ones, describing endeavors of one CORDS DDSA in one district in the Mekong Delta. Some of my recommendations to Vietnamese counterparts were acted on. Others were not.

An example of the latter: I once informed my counterpart, Deputy District Chief Phu, that 11 of the 12 winners of a village council election came from only one of the village's 7 hamlets –the most wealthy and populated market hamlet where the village government was headquartered. Phu agreed that something had gone wrong. Quickly, in an afterthought, he sheepishly added that the more educated people lived in the market hamlet. Those living in the other 6 hamlets were not interested in serving on the village council. Based on my meetings with officials from those hamlets, I disagreed with Phu's argument. But, I left that one pass, hoping he might think about it and raise it again with me. He did not.

The 1969 pacification plan emphasized OB construction and VSD self-help development projects in the 4 contested villages in the district. I thought that the hamlets closest to the village centers benefitted the most. The poorer hamlets nearest to VC sanctuaries benefitted the least. I began one of my monthly counterpart letters to Phu with the Vann-recommended compliments on progress areas:

“The 10 villages in Ben Tranh District have nearly completed more than 70% of the 111 projects planned under the first (\$400,000 per village) phase of the (1969) Village Self-Development Program –all but three of these projects were in the category of local development. Most involved livestock raising but also included projects to repair road, dig canals, buy water pumps, repair market places, build schools, and purchase sprayers. The number of families participating in Ben Tranh in these projects was 1,763. They are contributing (in dollars) \$2,464,350 and the government of Vietnam is contributing \$4,800,000. By the 15th of September all of the projects with a few exceptions will be completed.”

I ended my letter by urging the district government to ensure that more village self-help projects go to the poorer hamlets in the 4 contested villages.

Probably not coincidentally, a few weeks later, District Chief Hop invited me to accompany him to an assemblage of recently-elected village council members. They had just returned from the excellent one-month village government training program in Vung Tau.

Hop could be a passionate speaker. He was at this ceremony. He gave a rousing, extemporaneous speech reminding the village councilors about their responsibilities in exercising their new governing and financial powers. He stressed the importance of getting VSD projects out to the more remote hamlets and poor families exposed to VC pressures. As I was soon to depart Ben Tranh at the time, I was unable to check on whether his exhortation was implemented by this latest batch of village councilors.

Free and fair local elections was another pacification program that fell short in the execution phase –as they sometimes do in other countries, including the U.S.

In Vietnam, I thought that village and hamlet populations going through the election process were comfortable that the candidates who won represented them “enough,” despite the flaws.

One morning, Colonel Hop invited me to accompany him to a hamlet election in My Tinh An Village scheduled in one of the villages contested hamlets. We turned off Highway 4, and drove east on a long, rebuilt dirt road leading to the hamlet. As we approached the hamlet, Colonel Hop’s jeep kicked up clouds of dust that could easily be seen in the distance from the school polling site along the road.

About a half-mile from the freshly painted hamlet school where the voting was scheduled to take place, we could make out a crowd of locals sitting and squatting down in the school yard. As we got closer, the men and women slowly stood up and formed a standing line in front of the school door. It was obvious that the voting procedure had been staged to begin when the district chief’s jeep was spotted, not according to a regular voting schedule.

When we drove up, about a dozen uniformed PF soldiers were directing voters into the school house and to the voting stations inside. Suppressing a laugh, I politely noted to Colonel Hop and the hamlet chief that the PF presence was violating regulations prohibiting police or soldiers from being present near the polling site. The hamlet chief artfully responded that PF assistance to the voters was necessary to protect them. After returning to their homes, the VC would demand to know why they had voted in a GVN election. The voters could reply that the PF had forced them to vote.

Later in his office, the hamlet chief ticked off security and development pacification projects that were well-received by the hamlet population. He triumphantly informed that a VC sniper the previous week had fired at a movie screen erected by VIS in the hamlet center. That night, a large number of hamlet dwellers were enjoying the movie when the VC sniper holed the screen. The audience continued to watch to the end of the movie and walked home!

Poorer families in two contested Luong Hoa Lac hamlets, groups that pacification program was supposed to draw into the GVN fold, lost out when the province chief in My Tho refused to sign off on two Satake Japanese rice milling machines purchased using VSD funds. I wrote to Deputy PSA Gross, hoping to get this reversed: “The project is a good one and will help the poor rice farmers who must deal with middlemen and transport the rice to My Tho for milling. In fact, construction of the huts in these two hamlets to house these machines has already begun. The Vietnamese here tell me that the province chief has come under pressure from Chinese rice mill owners (in My Tho, the prominent capital) to scrap the project.” As my departure was then imminent, I never learned whether or not the province chief’s hold on the rice machines was lifted.

Major Thoms, the DSA, and his S-3 McWilliams, encountered similar difficulties during implementation of the district's military pacification programs. The problems had much in common with deficiencies in RF and PF units' performance in other provinces after returning from their training programs in Can Tho. By the end of 1969, the sheer numbers of GVN territorial forces were far outnumbering local VC in provinces throughout South Vietnam. OB construction and the arming of PSDF militia to defend their hamlets were pushing VC guerillas out to the unpopulated periphery of districts.

VC commanders, their main force battalions and guerrillas that survived the Tet Offensive were cunning. Although outnumbered, they looked for openings. PF and RF lethargy and poor leadership too often offered openings to exploit. They struck opportunistically and then retreated before U.S. air power and GVN reinforcements could arrive.

The quality of PF commanders and their PF platoons varied widely in the district. The best platoons fought hard, sometimes heroically, to defend their villages and hamlets. But many platoon leaders ignored their training instructions taught at Can Tho. The main task of our 6-man MAT team and the RD cadre team circulating from hamlet to hamlet in the district was to follow up on the tactics taught in Can Tho. If MAT and RD team members were not present, PF commanders often let down their guard. They routinely set night ambushes no further than the perimeter of their OB at night, or did not venture outside the OB at all. Nighttime VC tax squads would gather funds in hamlets within 100 yards of some PF OBs.

On one occasion, a young PF soldier guarding a bridge during daytime noticed a mine drifting towards the bridge he was guarding. Using his M-16, he fired several rounds at the mine. He eventually hit it just when the mine approached the bridge. The mine exploded and he was killed.

Another tragic incident occurred about 300 yards from the district government compound in Tan Hiep. To the east of Tan Hiep there were rice fields, then a canal dyke path. In broad daylight a PF platoon led by its commander was walking on the dyke. Contrary to warnings during their training, they were bunched up as they walked. Guidelines taught at the Can Tho training center and by the MAT team called for at least 10 paces between each soldier on a patrol such as this one. The patrol was instead pressed together into a compact formation heading towards a road leading to the district capital.

The VC chose that moment to initiate the first phase of their deadly ambush—from the side of the district capital. Probably only 4 or 5 VC opened up with automatic weapons on the line of PF soldiers, one closely following another, on the dyke. The initial burst killed most of the platoon. The rest of the platoon jumped off the dyke and huddled on the other side. At that point, a second group of VC were positioned to fire directly at the remaining PF. The platoon was virtually annihilated.

During my time in Ben Tranh, such well-planned, successful VC operations were rare. War is usually characterized by ebb and flow. During 1969 in Ben Tranh that pattern favored the GVN. For every successful operation from the depleted VC ranks, the GVN's expanding military penetration into rural areas registered many more successes than VC successes.

To cite two examples during one week:

A district RF-PF nighttime operation that Lieutenant McWilliams accompanied trapped a VC tax collection team inside a deserted home. The district force threw multiple grenades through the windows that exploded inside, killing the VC and scattering their collected piastres throughout the house's inside and also out the windows.

The thickening PF-RF OB presence in the district increasingly threatened the major NVA infiltration route through northern Ben Tranh. A VC guiding an NVA unit shifted to the middle of the district to cross Highway 4. But, there he ran into a night-time PF ambush. The PF platoon leader fired his .45, killing the VC guide instantly. The NVA unit quickly fled northwards through a hail of bullets back towards the Plain of Reeds.

My conclusion when departing Ben Tranh was that the VC, while still resilient and fighting back, were slowly losing ground and population in Ben Tranh. When I arrived in Ben Tranh, all village and hamlet officials were appointed by military province chiefs. When I left, village and hamlet chiefs were being elected and empowered by GVN development funding. The march of GVN OBs outwards from Highway 4 and refugees returning to plant the fall rice crop demonstrated pacification progress. In sum, the GVN was in the driver's seat in the pacification war. Obstacles, big and small, were impeding progress. Most in Ben Tranh District were not insurmountable.

One military tactic employed by Colonel Hop and, I heard, other district chiefs, baffled me as I was leaving for my next assignment. That was his tendency to leave open a back door for the VC to escape when he had them surrounded. The respected 6th Century B.C. Chinese war strategist, Sun Tzu, wrote of this tactic in his epic, "The Art of War." He recommended:

"It is military doctrine that an encircling force must leave a gap to show the surrounded troops there is a way out, so that they will not be determined to fight to their death."

Colonel Hop's willingness to let the VC escape to fight another day, or to perish in another battle elsewhere, may have been preferable to losing some of his own troops in a final attack. But, who knows?

A second puzzling Vietnamese military behavior was the unwillingness of district and province chiefs to cooperate with each other to conduct large-scale joint operations into

VC bases purposely established along provincial boundaries. The much higher GVN troop numbers and firepower could have overwhelmed the VC occupying these bases.

This practice had long-term costs. Major VC bases in the Delta astride interprovincial borders were vital to local communist guerrilla war strategy and preserving regional supply lines. In Ben Tranh, the southern border with Go Cong Province (the Horseshoe) and the northern border with Kien Tuong and Long An Provinces (Plain of Reeds) could have been assaulted and destroyed by combined far larger GVN territorial forces and nearby ARVN 7th Division regiments. But Major Thoms' and my proposals to Colonel Hop to coordinate with his District Chief counterparts in districts across the Dinh Tuong provincial border were brushed off.

One of the most difficult tasks I had to fulfill in Ben Tranh was to investigate incidents involving soldiers from the 3rd Brigade of the 9th Division's killing of civilians and destruction of livestock and homes. The counterproductive body count measurement of progress still dominated 9th Division Commander Julius Ewell's strategy. The 3rd Brigade's undisciplined firepower killed civilians and destroyed property and livestock in both pacified and contested areas in the district.

One of my jobs was to travel to the site of the incidents, usually on the next day. I interviewed witnesses, and prepared detailed investigation reports. I drove to 3rd Brigade headquarters, 5 miles north of Ben Tranh District, and submitted the report to the Brigade's S-3 officer in his office. I batted only 50-50 in arguing for payment of the limited amount of compensation offered. Major Thoms and military members of our team were as appalled as I was.

The brigade's reluctance to acknowledge mistakes was frustrating, sometimes outrageous—especially when civilian lives were lost. I and other CORDS advisors in the Brigade's AO assumed that 9th Division commanders' reluctance to pay compensation or to take disciplinary action against guilty soldiers and officers stemmed from worry that too many admissions would damage their personal prospects for promotion. Also, their brigade's official combat record.

There were times when I returned again and again to insist that the Brigade's S-3 sign off on compensation payments. In some cases, the S-3 would do his own flawed investigation, discover discrepancies in my investigation reports, deny compensation, and close the case. I had no recourse to appeal.

In one of his DEPCORDS circulars to IV CORPS CORDS personnel, John Vann stressed the importance of avoiding civilian casualties in the pacification "People's War" underway in the countryside:

"I wish to emphasize that the net results of the unwarranted killing of civilians makes the task more difficult of eventually restoring GVN influence. CORDS advisors are expected to influence an aggressive hard-hitting offensive against the

enemy at all times. At the same time, they are also charged with being the conscience of the U.S. effort in Vietnam and of ensuring to the extent possible the security and welfare of the civilian population. There are occasions when the security requirements are such that justification does exist for the attack on and destruction of a populated area. These, however in my judgement, are rare and have as a basic requirement friendly troops in contact with enemy forces and pinpointing locations within that populated area. I know of no other real justification for attacking a populated area. It is my desire that this memo be read to all CORDS advisors for the express purpose of ensuring that they exercise the utmost discretion in either calling for or condoning attacks upon populated areas and/or religious institutions.”

In a conversation with CORDS personnel, Vann once accused 9th Division Commander, Major General Julius Ewell, as being “especially cold-hearted.” Vann criticized Ewell’s division as being “apathic about civilian casualties.” Dinh Tuong’s PSA, Colonel Amos, once scolded a military officer on his staff for giving him a written request to personally bring an atrocity by 9th Division troops to Ewell’s attention. “I can’t send that to a major general,” he declared.

General Ewell held fast to General Westmoreland’s body-count philosophy. Civilians formed the great majority of the division’s body-count claims. Ewell’s six month “Speedy Express” operation in Dinh Tuong and Long An province while I was in Ben Tranh claimed a body-count of 10,899, according to one study. But only 748 weapons were captured. U.S. casualties numbered 267. Bruce Kinsey, a CORDS FSO in Long An, attended a Long An Province briefing for Ewell. Ewell asked why a battalion of the 199th Light Infantry Brigade had killed only 32 VC the previous month.

After the 1968 Tet attacks, U.S. strategy had shifted to helping the GVN win back the rural population that had been lost to the enemy. The shift recognized that the war could not be won by U.S. military power alone. The population was the war’s center of gravity. The CORDS-assisted GVN pacification drive into the countryside was making progress. By needlessly killing civilians and destroying their property, the 9th was alienating the population, aiding the VC, ultimately causing more U.S. and GVN casualties, and undermining GVN/CORDS pacification progress.

The 3rd Brigade’s engineering company and its civic action arm cooperated with our and other CORDS district teams to implement important pacification projects –building bridges and supplying rebar, wood, roofing and cement for many pacification construction projects. But the unnecessary killing and destruction by the 3rd Brigade’s combat arms, by far, outweighed the contributions of the brigade’s engineering company to pacification programs.

Our district team eventually obtained the 3rd Brigade’s commitment not to fire into populated areas of Ben Tranh without our clearance. The commitment was not honored in practice.

On April 28, 1969 I recorded that on March 20

“An American cobra helicopter flew over Tan Ly Dong Village and bagged two cows in a field in broad daylight. A helicopter killed two water buffalos.” – “Last week, an American helicopter flew over a village and shot dead five people.”

In a May 7, 1969 letter home to my parents, I wrote about counterproductive that 9th Division practices:

“Some of the most outrageous acts are performed ranging from charging down Highway 4 with their horns blowing well over the speed limit in their huge trucks, pushing people off of their motor scooters, grabbing the rifles of PSDF personnel guarding bridges.... Six people were needlessly killed and 3 wounded by a helicopter in the district I am working in, including a 14-year old. Compensation for the dead in “mistakes” such as this is \$40-\$60 to the family of the dead and \$20 to the wounded, if paid at all.”

A 3rd Brigade captain once dropped by our team compound in Tan Hiep. He boasted about a 3rd Brigade bombing operation to destroy a hamlet in Long An Province. That exercise began with leaflet drops to warn the population to evacuate the hamlet.

Reading now from my diary:

“When they didn’t, he said, they bombed the hamlet anyway, dropping 300-500-pound bombs. “You know,” he said, “those people instead of running away or staying in their homes, actually went outside their homes and tried to put out the flames.”

In early November, just before departing Ben Tranh, I investigated another dreadful incident that occurred during the annual rice harvest. Reading from my diary:

A peasant at harvest time with a basket of harvested rice on his head approached the door of his hut at dusk. A 9th Division sniper shot and killed him. He had 7 children. The sniper squad took his body to 3rd Brigade headquarters at Tan An. I investigated at the incident site, interviewed and submitted a claim. I made several trips to argue with a 3rd Brigade S-3 captain to return the body to his family or show me the reason for holding it. The peasant’s Vietnamese family wanted the body back for a decent burial. This was important in the Vietnamese culture.

The S-3 officer insisted he had no proof the dead peasant was not a VC -a standard 9th Division rationale to increase their high body count claims. He showed me the written description of the incident prepared by the sniper’s company commander. It claimed the dead peasant was advancing on a paddy dyke towards a tree line. I pointed to a map I had inserted in my account of the incident

correctly depicting that the dyke leading to the tree line was on the other side of the house from where he had been shot. After more acrimonious exchanges, on my third visit, the S-3 captain released the body to the family, but without the compensation payment I had demanded.

Let me stress here that the U.S. military officers and enlisted men I served with in CORDS were equally upset about the 3rd Brigade's body count priority. The DSA in Ben Tranh fully supported my incident reports on 3rd Brigade outrages in our district causing civilian casualties and setting back pacification progress. He signed his name on the "thru" line in this last incident report I sent forward.

After every war, the U.S. military does "Lessons Learned" reviews to prevent mistakes made in the last war from creating obstacles in the next war. With that in mind, I later pulled together my Ben Tranh notes to write a paper describing the counter-productive results of the 9th Division's body-count emphasis in Ben Tranh District. After returning to Washington in late 1970 for my next assignment, I submitted the lessons-learned paper to the Defense Department.

On September 30, John Vann made one of his unannounced visits to our district team in Ben Tranh. He personally piloted his helicopter onto our helicopter landing pad in Tan Hiep. The DSA was gone. I briefed him on the status of civilian and military pacification programs in Ben Tranh, the order of (GVN-VC) battle; economic trends; cooperation with counterparts; prognosis for the future; current problems and how we planned to address them. I answered his questions.

Vann thanked me for the briefing and flew off to another district. The next day I received orders from IV CORPS headquarters assigning me to the position of DSA in Lich Hoi Tuong District, Ba Xuyen Province, the Lower Delta.

After a 10-day delightful "visitation" vacation with Kim in Bangkok, I returned to Ben Tranh, packed my trunk, flew first to Can Tho IV CORPS regional headquarters, then on to Soc Trang, the capital of Ba Xuyen Province.

Q: This is June 17th (2016), and we are continuing with Ambassador Peter Tomsen and his tour in Vietnam.

TOMSEN: Thanks, Mark.

After nine months as a Deputy District Senior Advisor (DDSA) in Dinh Tuong Province, IV Corps, focusing on development and governance assistance, DEPCORDS Vann had promoted me to be a District Senior Advisor (DSA) in Lich Hoi Thuong District in Ba Xuyen Province in the lower Delta.

Replacing a military officer, I would be the only civilian DSA among the 8 DSAs in Ba Xuyen. The other 7 were U.S. Army majors with a decade or more experience behind

them in their military careers.

The leave practice in CORDS provided for 3 R&R trips for married FSOs on an 18-month unaccompanied assignment in Vietnam. I had taken my first one on the military R&R flight from Saigon to Hawaii where Kim and I were married in June 1969. I used the second to be with Kim in Bangkok for two weeks before returning to Vietnam to begin my Ba Xuyen assignment as Lich Hoi Thuong DSA in mid-November, 1969.

In Bangkok, fortunately, Kim had a friend, Bach-Mai Larsen, a Vietnamese-born wife married to USAID officer Gary Larsen. Gary was stationed in An Giang Province. Bach Mai was also living in Bangkok as a safe haven wife. Kim and Bach Mai spent time together, shopping, exploring the city, and savoring Chinese duck noodle soup to satisfy their cravings while awaiting the birth of their first child. They provided moral support to each other until Gary and I finished our Vietnam assignments.

After returning to Vietnam in late November, 1969, I stopped by John Vann's apartment in Can Tho on my way to Soc Trang, Ba Xuyen Province's capital. I had heard that between midnight and 2:00 am was a good time to knock on his door and see him if he was not away on an overnight at some PF OB in IV CORPS. Vann did his paperwork in the wee hours. His staff said he slept a maximum of 4 hours a night.

Luckily he was at home. On this first and subsequent visits to the Can Tho regional CORDS offices from Ba Xuyen for meetings, Vann always cheerfully received me for a nocturnal chat in his apartment. For an hour or so, I would update him on pacification developments in one of the 92 districts in his IV CORPS domain.

Following a day of consultations at IV CORPS Can Tho headquarters, I boarded an Air American flight to Soc Trang, Ba Xuyen Province's capital. The Soc Trang airport was dual use for both military operations and civilian flights. The Japanese Air Force had used it in 1944 to support the Japanese conquest of British colonial Singapore and Malaysia—in the process sinking the British battleship *Prince of Wales*, and battlecruiser, *Repulse*.

Ba Xuyen, like most other Delta provinces, was very flat. It was one of the top rice-producing provinces in South Vietnam. The VC used the jungle and mangrove tree lines along canals and rivers as military bases, transportation, supply and communication routes through the province. They were infested with booby traps, hip-deep marshes, river snakes and mines.

Highway 4 coming down from Saigon ran through Can Tho, then transited Soc Trang on its continuing way south. It next passed through Ba Xuyen's southern neighbor, Bac Lieu Province, before ending in Ca Mau at the southern tip of Vietnam.

Ba Xuyen's strategic, two-lane East-West My Xuyen highway intersected Highway 4 in Soc Trang. Its eastern terminus was Lich Hoi Thuong District. The My Xuyen road

passed through Lich Hoi Thuong village, the district capital. It ended at Trung Binh fishing village and its port on the South China Sea.

Ethnic Cambodians comprised at least 30% of Ba Xuyen's half-million population. (The Cambodian minority in southern Vietnam is sometimes referred to as *Khmer Krom* --"Cambodians Below"-- or below the Mekong.) The Lower Delta had been part of the Khmer state before the Vietnamese *Nam Tien* (March to the South) in the 18th and 19th centuries. Cambodian communities still predominated in Lich Hoi Thuong's rural villages and hamlets. Five large pagodas played important roles in the lives of the district's Cambodian population. Our district team drew drinking water from the pagoda well in Lich Hoi Thuong district center.

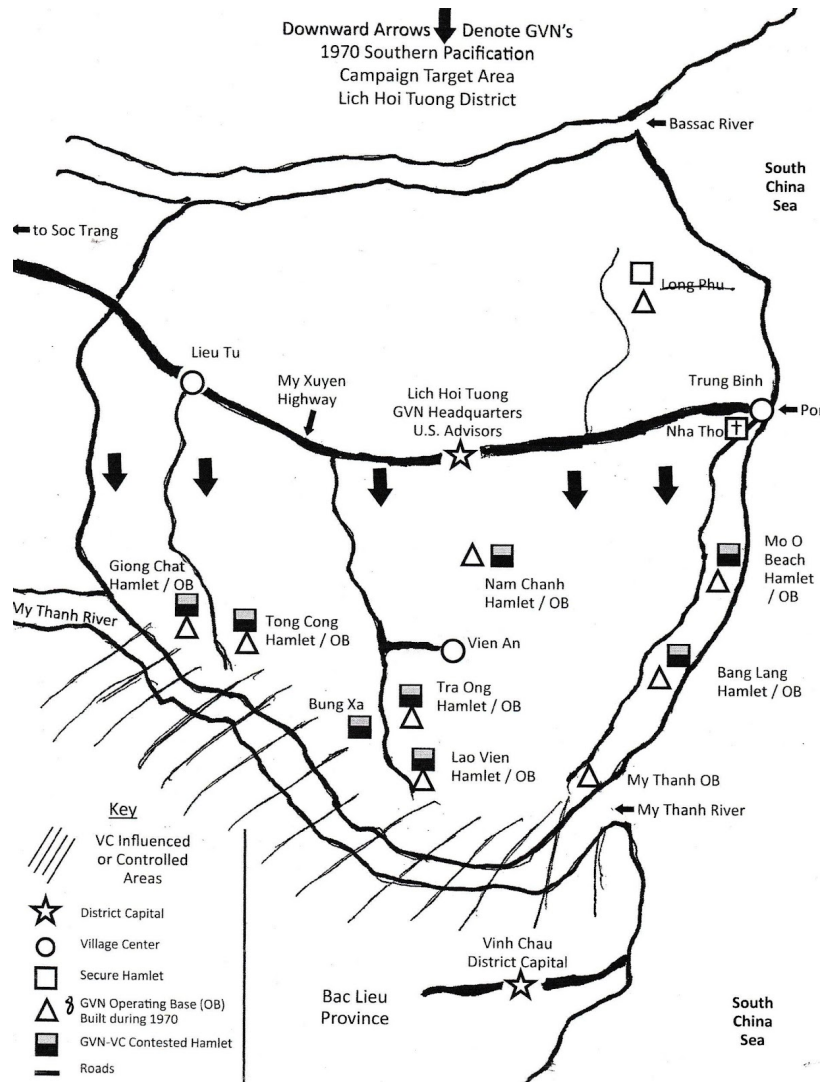
Vietnamese Catholics constituted some 15% of Ba Xuyen and Lich Hoi Thuong district's populations. Catholics were centered in the district's coastal hamlets surrounding Trung Binh village center. Like the Cambodians, the Catholics were among the most anti-communist groups in South Vietnam. Senior Cambodian monks from their pagodas, like catholic priests from their churches, made many of the key decisions in their respective communities. Usually, but not always, their decisions coincided with GVN preferences. Senior catholic generals in Saigon discreetly assisted catholic villages and their PF, RF and PSDF units. The Cambodians did not enjoy that advantage.

The ethnic Chinese, about 7% of Ba Xuyen's population lived mostly in Soc Trang and urban centers in the district, including Lich Hoi Thuong village center. As elsewhere in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia, Chinese clan networks dominated the rice trade, bribing government officials to ignore official price ceilings and to protect their rice shipping convoys to Saigon and other cities.

Interestingly, remote Chinese communities dating back to Chinese boat refugees fleeing the 17th Century Manchu overthrow of the Ming Dynasty --*Minh Huong*: Ming (boat) migrants--still existed side-by-side with rural Vietnamese and Cambodian communities in southern Lich Hoi Thuong. A Minh Huong Chinese community in Bung Sa hamlet, Vien An Village, in Lich Hoi Thuong's southern zone were descendants of that century's Chinese emigration wave into the Mekong Delta. They spoke a different dialect of Chinese than the Chinese merchants in Lich Hoi Thuong village --their forebears emigrated to Vietnam centuries later, during the Manchu dynasty.

As in Ben Tranh District, VC-control of some hamlets in Lich Hoi Thuong District dated back to the communist-dominated Viet Minh war against the French in the 1950s. Up to July 1968, the VC controlled or influenced (especially during nighttime hours) most hamlets north and south of the East-West My Xuyen Highway through the district to Trung Binh port on the South China Sea. VC-control was firmest in the southern village hamlets in Lich Hoi Thuong, above the My Thanh River separating Ba Xuyen from Bac Lieu Province.

When I arrived in Lich Hoi Thuong, the southern 2/3 of the district was mostly contested, VC influenced or VC controlled. The 74th VC main force mobile company in the district was part of the VC provincial Soc Trang Mobile Battalion. Local VC guerrilla bases were scattered around the district –in the south-- Mo O and Bang Lang Hamlets, down the coast from Trung Binh Village port; Lao Vien and Tra Ong Hamlets in Vien An Village located in the mid-southern portion of the district; and Giong Chat and Tong Cang Hamlets of Lieu Tu Village along the districts southwest border with My Xuyen District. The first DSA sent to Lich Hoi Thuong District Center in 1967 after CORDS'



establishment was a Lieutenant Colonel. A two-man MATS team moved in with the DSA's three-man district team in late 1967. The DSA's weekly reports described the VC threat in the district as extending north from the My Thanh River up to the three village centers along the My Xuyen road -Lich Hoi Thuong, the district capital, Trung Binh on the South China Sea, and Lieu Tu Village near the district's far western border with My Xuyen District. VC mines and road blocks prevented travel on the road. The road became impassable during the rainy season when it was washed out at many places. VC

influenced or controlled hamlets also covered the northern rim of the district south of the Bassac River.

The VC controlled the three north-south roads connecting the three village centers on the My Xuyen road to their hamlets in the district's southern zone. VC company-size ground attacks or mortar fire hit the Lich Hoi Thuong village headquarters RF and PF military garrisons and the advisors' adjacent compound periodically. Only the arrival of helicopter gunships and fixed-wing air support from Soc Trang airfield called in by the district team ended the attacks. An attempt to station a PF platoon, the MAT team, and some RD cadre at the northern Long Phu hamlet had to be abandoned when the VC attacked soon after they arrived.

According to the files in our district house, most of the DSAs appeals for help went unanswered by CORDS Province personnel. Two examples: Province failed to provide more rebar, sandbags, wood and claymores to fortify the district team's compound. It did not respond to the request for a provision of a team motorboat to use on the canal that paralleled the My Xuyen Highway. In short, the impression from the first Lich Hoi Thuong DSA's reports was one of resentment about lack of support from province; frustration about the VC-blockade surrounding the district headquarters - advisors' team house compound; and plain isolation.

By far, however, exceeding other annoyances, was the incompetence, inaction and excuse mongering of the portly District Chief, Major Diep Van Sau. Major Sau's family remained behind in Soc Trang.

The advisors reported Sau's unwillingness to utilize or even to discipline his RF and PF troops. He had no intention of going on the offensive anywhere in the district. He would accept advice, but not carry out the advice. The advisors reported one occasion involving two PF OBs guarding both sides of an important bridge on the My Xuyen Highway near Lieu Tu village center. The bridge was crucial to connecting the provincial capital Soc Trang in My Xuyen District with Lich Hoi Thuong District headquarters. One night, the VC blew up the bridge. The few PF actually on duty in the 2 OBs offered no resistance.

Fortunate for Lich Hoi Thuong, the massive VC attacks during the 1968 Tet Offensive bypassed the district. Only one ground assault was launched against district headquarters. The 74th VC mobile company and Lich Hoi Thuong local guerrillas were mobilized to support the VC Soc Trang battalion's suicidal attacks on fortified Soc Trang city and airfield. As elsewhere during the 1968 Tet general offensive aimed at spurring a nationwide "uprising", the VC suffered heavy losses. The GVN CORDS supported push back into Ba Xuyen rural areas during 1969 benefitted from the loss of VC combat power.

In Lich Hoi Thuong, Province Chief Ha fired Sau soon after the 1968 offensive began.

Sau was replaced by Major Thuan, whom the advisors praised for his aggressiveness. During the three-month APC and the first phase (February-end of May) of the 1969 pacification campaigns, Major Thuan's RF, PF and PSDF forces cleared the northern third of the district above the My Xuyen road corridor. The American Seabee company from the CORDS Province team in Soc Trang paved the highway from the My Xuyen District border through Lieu Tu village to Lich Hoi Thuong Village Center. The Seabees also repaired the Lieu Tu Village bridge.

Unexpectedly, in April 1969, Province Chief Ha moved the aggressive Major Thuan to Ke Sach District in northern Ba Xuyen. He sent Major Sau back to Lich Hoi Thuong District. The province rumor mill speculated that Thuan had been "too" corrupt and Sau enjoyed close personal ties with Colonel Ha.

I arrived at Soc Trang CORDS province headquarters for one full week of briefings in late November 1969 --six months after Colonel Ha reappointed Major Sau Lich Hoi Thuong District Chief. The second phase of the 1969 Pacification campaign was ending.

My DSA civilian rank in the Province's military pecking order was unique. Happily, during my nine months as the lone civilian DSA in Ba Xuyen I never once felt like a civilian outsider on Dr. Evans' overwhelmingly military CORDS team.

Ninety percent of the briefings I received from the CORDS province staff in Soc Trang dealt with the military dimensions of pacification. John Vann's observation that it did not matter if the importance of security among pacification programs amounted to 90%, 50%, or 10%. Without security, nothing else accomplished in economic programs could survive over the long run. I found that most of my time as DSA was preoccupied with security-related issues --from OB expansion into contested and VC areas to PF and PSDF training and deployment; to acquiring weapons and equipment for new OBs; to de-mining and rebuilding roads into pacified areas; to ensuring that I and my 13-man district advisory team were safe and effectively supporting district military operations.

During my week of province meetings, the U.S. Lieutenant Colonel head of the CORDS S-3 military operations staff on the CORDS province team briefed me on province-wide military pacifications programs. He described what my predecessors had accomplished in military-related areas and what would be expected of me as DSA in Lich Hoi Thuong District. The S-3 Ops briefings were followed by meetings with S-1 Personnel, S-2 Intelligence, S-4 Logistics, S-5 Civil Ops, and S-7 Communications.

I also spent time with CORDS supervisors of key civilian offices managing non-military pacification programs that I had come to know well in Ben Thanh: Joe Chudzik, the hard-working director of the office handling economic development and governance; the USIA official heading up the Information and PsyOps office; the CIA officer managing the Phuong Hoang intelligence gathering office; and the USDA contractor covering Land Reform, IR-8 and agricultural credit programs.

The staff offices on the province team showed me weekly and monthly reports I and the other 7 Ba Xuyen DSAs were required to prepare on district developments. The many reports, I was told, were eagerly read up the chain of command in Saigon and in Washington. I burned tons of midnight oil in Lich Hoi Thuong personally writing reports or editing reports prepared by my district and MATS team all sent to province headquarters.

There was the familiar monthly HES report. Also, the monthly counterpart letter to Major Sau. Plus 14 others! The 10-part Weekly Activities Report was the longest. Among other things, it mandated weekly updates on progress in OB construction, the number and mission of company-size or above district military operation; the results of the operations; U.S. counterpart participation in those operations; the number of district PF, RF and PSDA planned and deployed; statistics on training of district forces; precise information on U.S. personnel meeting John Vann's night operations requirements; and so on. The last page of the Weekly Activities Report called for a narrative description of military and non-military pacification progress in Lich Hoi Thuong. For example, a successful ambush and resulting enemy casualties; the completion of an OB; scheduled or actual arrival of a Seabee team to grade a road; completion of a school or health clinic project; results of village or hamlet elections. The last section asked for "Significant Events" information, such as U.S. or Vietnamese VIP visits to Lich Hoi Thuong.

The province CORDS briefings described the numerous assets that were provided to DSAs to implement their responsibilities. Examples: Working together, U.S. CORDS S-3 advisors and the Province Chief's S-3 offices provided weapons and equipment (never enough) to outfit the PF and PSDF units returning to Lich Hoi Thuong from training programs in Can Tho; S-3 provided specialized EOD (Explosive Ordinance Disposal) to defuse and destroy mines and booby traps such as artillery rounds connected to trip-wire detonators; province S-4 transported cement, rebar, sandbags, concertina, barbed wire, and wood to build new OBs; S-4 also responded to requests for construction materials for schools and clinics; S-7 repaired district team PRC-25 and H-4 radios, and supplied small H-1 radios to plug PF and PSDF units into the district radio net. Province's help was vital to repairing our advisory team's jeep and team house generator when they broke down.

The Province team's aviation unit at Soc Trang's military airfield provided critical air support to district teams. About five times a week the "Swing Ship" (S) helicopter dropped off freight and mail, landing on our helicopter pad and at the rotating MAT locations. When OBs were under nighttime attack in our district, we radioed the province for "Firefly" (cobra gunship) support to lay down fire around the besieged OB. We could also call for help from C-130 gunships.

Q: Very quick question. You mentioned C-130s as military attack aircraft. I had always known them to be as aircraft that just transport things. Had they been refitted? (June 17, 2016 interview)

TOMSEN: Yes, these C-130s were refitted with 50-caliber machine guns and rocket launchers fired by the pilots or door-gunners. They were called “Spookies.” At times, they tragically misused their firepower against civilian targets. In 1970, Vann got so fed up he mandated that C-130 and helicopter pilots in IV CORPS had to first clear their targets with the DSA in the district where the targets were located.

Province Senior Advisor (PSA) Dr. John Evans, a retired Army colonel and veteran of Vietnam deployments, chaired monthly meetings of his 8 DSAs in Ba Xuyen. After Dr. Evans’ meetings, DSAs gathered for drinks at the bar and dinner in the Officers’ Club before overnighing at the CORDS compounds and driving back to our districts the next morning. We spent many hours discussing our experiences of working with our respective district chiefs and the province staff; managing our district teams; resolving pacification challenges; and most of all, exchanging stories -many laced with hilarity.

Those were the most enjoyable moments I spent during my 18-month CORDS assignment.

PSA Evans found time to spend separately with his DSAs in his office. We each sent him a monthly personal letter updating him on events in our districts. He responded with personal letters to us that covered each issue we raised. I learned a great deal on management and leadership from watching him operate.

Dr. Evans was a firm but fair leader and excellent manager. A Ph.D., he was the prototype of the military-scholar who one sometimes meets in the military —easily conflating hard power and soft power. He was tall and lean. He listened attentively to others rather than lecturing down to them. He was articulate in both speaking and writing; loyal to his subordinates; and devoted to the successful implementation of the U.S. CORDS pacification programs in Ba Xuyen Province. He had earned the esteem and friendship of Colonel Ha, the highly decorated Province Chief. They daily met together and were often on the phone working out common approaches to problems.

When alone with the PSA, our conversations drifted afar to world geopolitical issues. Most of the time, we discussed pacification in Lich Hoi Thuong District. He was always helpful. Once, he wisely suggested that I not pursue a complaint against the Province team’s air unit commander at Soc Trang air field. A formal province investigation undertaken at my request had skirted the air unit’s accountability in failing to respond to a VC attack on an OB in Lich Hoi Thuong District.

To provide more background: In mid-January, 1970, well after nightfall, at 0230 hours, I radioed the aviation unit and requested Firefly helicopter support for a PF OB under fire. The helicopter was not deployed. Contrary to normal practice, that night the Firefly crew had earlier returned to base and had been released from duty. The investigation claimed “miscommunication” within the aviation unit to explain the mistake.

Dr. Evans' advice to let the matter stand was sound. The VC attack on the OB had not lasted long. It probably would have ended before the helicopter would have arrived. There were no friendly casualties. Letting the matter stand instead of appealing was the right course. Not appealing took into account my personal relations with the aviation unit personnel and province military staff monitoring the incident. A few months later, Dr. Evans angrily rebuked the same commander when one of his helicopters strafed a civilian settlement without obtaining prior clearance from the DSA in that district.

I had limited contact with Dr. Evans' Deputy Province Advisor, a senior Lt. Colonel. He concentrated on internal province team matters. I do recall a morning meeting him one-on-one in his office. In a sentence, he grimly lamented that a popular Army Captain on the province team had been killed the previous night — by VC ground fire while on province liaison duty at the door of the Firefly helicopter.

He then turned to the matter that I had raised. I cannot remember what that matter was. On my way out, I expressed my grief at the Captain's death. I had gotten to know him socially. Later, I noticed that, aside from a few more individual expressions of sincere regret I heard that day before returning to my district, life and CORDS operations went on as before. I wondered about, but never came to grips with, why the span of attention devoted to the night-before death of the Captain was so limited. Perhaps due to fatalist resignation that losses in war were inevitable?

Q: Just a quick pause here. Your chain of command went up through the Pentagon. Even though you were a Foreign Service officer, the chain you worked in as a CORDS official was a military officer? So in essence you were on detail to the Pentagon as a Foreign Service office. Did you also have reporting responsibilities to anyone in the State Department?

TOMSEN: No. I received no taskings from the Embassy. As in Ben Tranh when a DDSA, I was still on detail to AID assigned to CORDS. CORDS was financed by the Pentagon budget. Over 85% of CORDS personnel were military. Civilians were a minority. Not surprisingly, CORDS procedures, regulations, even stationary for reports and letters conformed to DOD instruction manuals. For instance, the middle-top of documents we sent forward from Lich Hoi Thuong District read:

Headquarters
Lich Hoi Thuong District
Advisory Team
Ba Xuyen Province

The signature box at the bottom read:

Peter Tomsen, FSO-5 (vice major for the other 7 DSAs in Ba Xuyen)
District Senior Advisor

After the week of province briefings, Lieutenant Ken Henrici, my able Deputy DSA, picked me up at province headquarters for the 40-mile drive in our team military Jeep on the My Xuyen Road to Lich Hoi Thuong.

Lich Hoi Thuong District was shaped like a cat's head. The length and width of the district each measured about ten miles. The top 30% covering the cat's forehead had been largely pacified by the end of the 1969 pacification campaign. The contested and VC influenced or controlled district hamlets lay in the lower two-thirds of the district down to the My Thanh mangrove swamps. Long-time VC bases, bunkers and booby traps spread out on both sides of the My Thanh River. Vien Chau District in Bac Lieu Province lay along the other side of the My Thanh VC sanctuaries.

The cat's chin protruded southward where the My Thanh River jutted furthest towards Vien Chau District. The area marked the southernmost point in the district. Vien An village center was six miles north of the cat's chin. Two VC local guerrilla bases were located in the Vien An village hamlets of Lao Vien and Tra Ong, less than four miles above the My Thanh River.

Two southern Trung Binh hamlets along the coast, Mo O (Eagle's Beak) and Bang Lang, were also occupied day and night by VC guerrillas. In the districts far west, less than five miles above the My Thanh River, the Lieu Tu village hamlets of Tong Cang and Giong Chat along the border with My Xuyen district had been controlled by enemy guerrillas since the 1950s.

The VC administered two large provincial rice storage warehouses in Tong Cang and Mo O.

VC tax squads regularly taxed hamlets in the district's southern zone, collecting roughly 20% of annual family incomes in cash or rice. The My Thanh mangrove swamp sanctuaries continued westward along rivers and canals to Chuong Thien Province and on to NVA bases inside Cambodia. Supplies and armaments for the VC 74th main force company and VC guerrillas in the district were funneled along this infiltration route from Cambodia. Some supplies were also shipped by junks moving by night into the mouth of the My Thanh river from the South China Sea and onward to VC bases in the district.

Lich Hoi Thuong's district capital resembled Ben Tranh's Tan Hiep district town. About 9,000 inhabitants resided and worked from one-or two-story concrete houses and shops along the main district road, the My Xuyen highway to Soc Trang. The government military and civilian offices and our advisory compound were located on Lich Hoi Thuong Village's southern perimeter, surrounded by concertina, barbwire and walls of mud and sandbags. An RF company and two PF platoons provided security for Major Sau's headquarters and our district team.

Our modest hooch was located next to the District Chief's two-story, Western-style house. Up to the 1954 division of Vietnam, it had been the residence of the French

District Chief, a lieutenant. I was told that one fateful night, a Vietnamese guard serving in the French lieutenant's security ring around the house opened the outer gate and the house's front door to permit a Viet Minh assassination team to enter. The Viet Minh shot and killed two French NCOs on the ground floor and the French lieutenant upstairs before making good their escape.

During my first two months in the district, I reduced the size of my district team from 13 to 11. I eliminated the district team position of village and hamlet security NCO. I divided that position's responsibilities among 2 other NCOs. I also reduced the MAT team from 6 to 5 by not replacing the MAT Heavy Weapons NCO when he departed post.

The lowering of our team size left a lighter American footprint in the district. It helped team morale and did not generate the negative effect among local Vietnamese that the American commitment was diminishing. It reinforced the reality that Americanization of the war effort was over. Gradual Vietnamization was the way ahead for the GVN and the U.S.

New personnel periodically replaced members of my 6-man district advisory team and my MAT team when they finished their one-year Vietnam tour. To simplify matters, I will stick with the names of the NCOs who were there when I arrived, even though some may have departed.

Lieutenant Ken Henrici, first rate in every respect, was my deputy from the start. He continued in that position under FSO Mike Owens, my successor, after I left in July, 1970. Ken's even temperament, habits of hard work, high motivation to get the job done and good relations with Vietnamese counterparts overlapped with my work style. He was also the team's S-2 and Advisor to Major Sau's S-2. Every day, with members of our team, Ken and I travelled separately to different parts of the district with Vietnamese counterparts. We accompanied RF-PF military operations, monitored PF and PSDF training progress, OB construction, road building, and the range of non-military pacification programs, from village and hamlet elections to VSD projects.

Each of the enlisted members of my team did an outstanding job in performing their responsibilities. Thankfully, no bickering or interpersonal rivalries, envy or jealousy within the team surfaced during my 9 months as DSA. (That same team cohesion continued under Mike when he succeeded me.)

All team members, including myself, equally did their share of nighttime radio duty in the TOC (Tactical Operations Center) room. I stressed the importance of liaising in a respectful manner with Vietnamese counterparts. I arranged for the three senior NCOs to alternate in joining Ken or myself on daytime military operations. Ken and I, with one of our NCOs, alternatively fulfilled John Vann's requirement for nighttime operations.

SFC John Johnson, an E-7, the senior NCO and our S-3 (Military Operations) NCO worked closely with his Vietnamese S-3 counterparts and the American S-3 CORDS staff

in province to maintain the critical flow of OB construction material and necessary weapons to equip the PF platoons and rapidly expanding PSDF militia in the district. He travelled around the district with his S-3 counterparts training PF platoons. Lieutenant Speeds' MAT team trained Trung Binh village PF and PSDF and accompanied them on field operations.

SFC Maxwell worked with Vietnamese counterparts to distribute H-1 radios to all OBs and PSDF units in the district. He coordinated with CORDS province S-4 to keep all of the team's equipment repaired and maintained.

Our conscientious team Medic, Staff Sergeant Erb, advised his Vietnamese military and civilian counterparts --doctors and other health workers in the district hospital, villages and hamlet clinics. Spec-4 (corporal) Manuel Lopez, his radio hoisted on his back, accompanied Ken and I on operations. There were two Vietnamese interpreters assigned to our team. One did not speak English (perhaps a draft dodger?), so I sent him back to province.

The surest signs of low morale among isolated CORDS teams in Vietnam were boredom and passivity. I kept a daily work schedule that kept each team member busy. Lieutenant Speeds' MAT team in Trung Binh performed well in training local forces under difficult circumstances But I sometimes worried that its 5-member size was too big for full time work in one village. On my departure in July, province agreed with my recommendation to phase out MAT team 118 in Lich Hoi Thuong at the end of 1970. By that time, Lt. Speed and his NCOs had finished training the Vien An and Trung Binh PF and PSDF militia.

The 7-page "Standard Operating Procedures" province memo sent to DSAs in Ba Xuyen on their arrival instructed that "When the tactical situation permits, one team member may spend one overnight in Soc Trang each weekend." I rotated weekend passes into team members schedules, giving one member at a time a weekend pass to enjoy the night life of Soc Trang. That usually entailed happy hours at the NCO club followed by an expensive several hours with young ladies at "Lizzy's Establishment" a block away. Lizzy, I was told, had been widowed when her American husband, an NCO, had been killed in action.

The team's weekly schedules tracked closely with the CORDS advise and support mission. For example, one of SFC Johnson's tasks was to inspect at least one OB per day with his district S-3 counterpart. Their findings were reported to District Chief Sau, copying me. Staff Sergeant Erb made his rounds with Vietnamese medical counterparts in the district, visiting hamlet clinics. They fulfilled medicine requests and resolved issues. He coordinated with district medical offices to organize at least one MedCap a month.

I kept everyone informed of my own engagement with province CORDS officials, also military and non-military developments in the district and province generally. I strove to make clear and quick decisions rather than temporizing.

Regional DEPCORDS Vann liked to repeat his dictum that “the main job of advisors is to get Vietnamese counterparts to do their job.” If they failed, we were to report upwards to higher headquarters in the CORDS chain of command.

On reading into the 1967 and 1968 files after arriving, I had good reason to worry that Major Sau would prove to be one of those District Chiefs friendly on the outside but lazy, incompetent and corrupt on the inside. Two different DSAs had emphatically urged his firing as Lich Hoi Thuong District Chief, no doubt contributing to his removal in mid-1968.

Colonel Ha’s decision to bring Sau back to Lich Hoi Thuong was a good one. I and Mike Owens later found him an excellent counterpart. I never knew precisely why Sau turned over a new leaf on his second time around. It might have been a case of once bitten, twice shy. Perhaps Colonel Ha warned that he would not get a third chance. Whatever the inducement, Sau transmuted from one of the weakest to one of the most pro-active district chiefs in Ba Xuyen.

It was not a complete changeover. After his return, Sau still demonstrated a tendency not to enforce discipline among his commanders and troops, a problem identified by his previous DSAs. Mike also later faulted him on this score. Like other district chiefs under pressure to raise HES figures to excessive levels, he also took issue with my more conservative rankings –later with Mike as well.

Those initial issues faded as our personal relationship became progressively warmer. Our district team was important to improving the security and economic conditions in Lich Hoi Thuong. My Vietnamese language capability, I thought, helped. So did our nearly daily travels together around the district in his jeep meeting RF and PF at OBs, village councils, and ordinary district residents.

By his second inning as district chief, Sau was very familiar with each of the four villages in the district, their leading citizens, and important ethnic and religious figures. He had good political instincts, gave inspiring speeches at civic gatherings and to military groups; he was also a good listener to complaints of village and hamlet officials, later following up on many of them.

We coordinated in getting province to fulfill Sau’s requests —he to Colonel Ha, and I to Dr. Evans. For example, soon after my arrival, our joint protests reclaimed the district’s 4.2 heavy, long-range mortar that was languishing in a province warehouse.

In Ben Tranh, District Chief Hop and DSA Thoms had not accompanied district troops on operations, including daytime ones. I knew from conversations with other DSAs that most of Ba Xuyen district chiefs also shied away from operations, delegating that responsibility to their military deputies, usually army captains. In contrast, Major Sau was in front of the second platoon during Lich Hoi Thuong military operations, whether

day or night. I walked side by side with Sau along with my radioman, PFC Lopez and one of my team's NCOs, as did Mike Owens after I departed.

Soon after my arrival in the district in November, Major Sau laid out his 1970 district pacification plan for my consideration. I thought that was a positive sign. It was his plan. I agreed to his plan. So did Colonel Ha and Dr. Evans at province level.

Sau's strategy was a Southern one. It built on what had been accomplished during the 1969 pacification northern push in the district. The Seabees took the first step -blacktopping the rest of the trans-district My Xuyen road from Lich Hoi Thuong center to Trung Binh port on the coast, in December 1969. That gave a big boost to district rice farmers transporting their bumper rice harvest from farm to market during December 1969 and January 1970. It supported Sau's ambitious 1970 strategy to build 8 OBs above the VC My Thanh River sanctuaries in the south. Also, to shift the district's 2 veteran RF companies and PF platoons to protect and man the new OBs in the southern zone.

The VC 74th Main Force Company backed up by local guerrillas remained in control or were active in the 80 square mile southern portion of Sau's 1970 southern pacification zone in the district. The area encompassed 22 contested or VC influenced hamlets above the My Thanh. They stretched from the Trung Binh hamlets along the coast west through Vien An village and its cluster of hamlets in the south-center of the district over to Lieu Tu hamlets along Lich Hoi Thuong's western border with My Xuyen district.

Sau's plan envisioned repairing and grading the three insecure north-south roads in the district's east, center, and west from the My Xuyen Highway down to the My Thanh mangrove swamp. The Trung Binh road along the coast to the mouth of the My Thanh was the first priority. Repairing the Vien An road in the district center and the Lieu Tu road along the districts western edge would follow.

Major Sau's plan was a bold one. It benefitted from significant advantages over VC forces. Foremost among them was the depletion of VC ranks during the 1968 Tet communist offensives. VC commanders had not compensated for those loses and were on the defensive. Secondly, ethnic Cambodians made up some 70% of the population in the South. They were very anti-VC. Some 8,000 had fled to Soc Trang and secure hamlets along the My Xuyen highway during the mid-1960s and received refugee assistance. As pacification programs advanced, they gradually returned to their hamlets before the rice planting season began in late June-early July, 1970. They would lend their labor to repairing the three north-south roads, building and manning the new OBs, re-occupying the deserted or lightly-occupied hamlets above the My Thanh, and furnishing recruits for hamlet PSDF units.

Sau gave initial priority to the coastal Trung Binh hamlets. First on his list was repairing the coastal road to the Mo O beach resort hamlet half way down the coast, later onward to Bang Lang hamlet. VC guerrillas continued to occupy bases in both hamlets. After rapid construction of 2 OBs in Mo O and Bang Lang, Sau hoped to leapfrog down to the mouth

of the My Thanh river on the South China Sea and build another OB there, named the My Thanh OB. It would block enemy boat traffic into and out of the river's estuary. Successful completion of the My Thanh OB would be accompanied by Seabee grading of the coastal road to the My Thanh OB.

With the arrival of the dry season in early December, Sau mobilized one RF company, Trung Binh's 5 PF platoons and 3,000 refugees to repair the first six-mile stretch of the (altogether) 10-mile coastal road past Mo O and Bang Lang to the My Thanh. Daily, Sau led large 300 strong RF-PF sweep operations against and around Mo O and Bang Lang. The VC guerrillas long ensconced there abandoned their bunkers and fled to VC bases along the My Thanh.

In mid-January, Sau's district forces and refugees from southern Vien An and Lieu Tu hamlets began work on the 2 north-south roads in the center and western parts of Lich Hoi Thuong District. Four more OBs began to go up near the southern terminuses of the Vien An and Lieu Tu roads. The new OBs would extend the government's strategic screen against the My Thanh VC sanctuaries from the South China Sea across the district's far south over to the Lich Hoi Thuong-My Xuyen border.

One of the two new Vien An village OBs was planned for Tra Ong hamlet. That OB would also defend the nearby Chinese-Cambodian hamlet of Bung Sa. The other OB was planned for Lao Vien hamlet, only two miles north of the My Thanh mangrove line, just above the cat's chin. The Tra Ong and Lao Vien OB construction site areas had been under VC control for decades.

Along the district's far western border, work also began on the north-south road coming down from Lieu Tu village center on the My Xuyen highway and ending at Giong Chat and Tong Cang hamlets --long-time VC mini-bases. Tong Cang lay less than 2 miles above the VC My Thang sanctuaries.

Colonel Ha turned down Sau's request for 4 more PF platoons to support his 1970 pacification plan. Ba Xuyen Province's less secure eastern districts, closer to the Cambodian border, were in more need of new troops. Indeed, at one point, Colonel Ha "borrowed" one of Lich Hoi Thuong's RF companies. Sau's and my sharp protests to Colonel Ha and Dr. Evans brought the company back to the district within two weeks.

Daily military operations by the district's two RF companies and PF platoons were critical to keeping the VC at bay while the seven new OBs along the My Thanh were under construction. Construction of the eighth and lowest priority OB, Nam Chanh, could be delayed. It would be situated 3 miles south of Lich Hoi Thuong village center to guard the southern approaches to the district capital and government headquarters.

Sau and my appeals to our province bosses, Ha and Evans, had secured return of the district's 4.2 mm long-range mortar. Our attempts to obtain an additional 81 mm mortar failed. To compensate, the CORDS Province S-3 and his Vietnamese counterpart

“convinced” the catholic leadership of Trung Binh village to give Sau the village’s old French 81 mm mortar in need of repair. Sau’s S-4 repaired it and attached a modern sight apparatus to improve accuracy. Sau placed it at the new Mo O OB. From there, the 81 mm provided enfilading fire across the district’s southern zone now under pacification. After its return, the heavy 4.2 mm mortar in the district military compound laid down 20-30 H and I mortar rounds nightly into the VC My Thanh sanctuary locations. It also targeted suspected infiltration routes leading from them to the new OBs and southern hamlets.

Major Sau told me that his lack of sufficient troops was the biggest obstacle to implementation of his 1970 pacification strategy. After much discussion, we concluded that some PSDF units defending hamlets in the already secure My Xuyen highway corridor could take over the My Xuyen road OBs now occupied by PF platoons. He chose the five best-led platoons to augment district combat power in the southern pacification zone. Three would go mobile in the South. They would join the RF and PF units there building, occupying and defending the new OBs. The fourth platoon would become a mobile training unit, moving from hamlet to hamlet in the south to train PSDF units guarding the southern hamlets. The team S-3 Advisor, Sergeant Johnson, assisted Sau’s S-3 staff to train the PSDF to assume the village security responsibilities of the 5 PF platoons re-deployed to the southern pacification zone.

Fortunately, the 1969 pacification plan called for raising PSDF numbers nationwide to 1,316,000 “armed,” PSDF, with 1,750,000 in the “support” category. There were fewer than 700 effective PSDF in Lich Hoi Thuong district in November, 1969 when I arrived. Major Sau and I were able to persuade province to raise the 1970 PSDF numbers for Lich Hoi Thuong up to 2,556. Although only part-time, the district’s PSDF would play a critical role in defending the gains of the 1970 pacification drive in the southern zone.

To increase PSDF numbers, Sau called on the Cambodian Buddhist abbots in each pagoda of the district. He asked the abbots to encourage young Cambodian draft dodgers (dressed in yellow monk robes hiding in the pagodas) to join PSDF units. Over a thousand left the pagodas and entered the PSDF hamlet training program.

As in Ben Tranh District and other parts of South Vietnam, many PF platoons performed well. But not a few suffered from low-motivation and weak leadership. They were full-time soldiers but poorly paid. Notwithstanding their training in Can Tho, too many could not even zero the sights on their weapons when they returned from their training. They suffered from low discipline and chronic absenteeism. Drinking was a problem. Days before I arrived in Lich Hoi Thuong, on November 4, 1969, an intoxicated platoon leader in Trung Binh shot and killed the parents of his assistant platoon leader. The latter retaliated by killing the platoon leader and his mother.

Major Sau’s chosen 5 mobile PF platoons proved their worth. They had aggressive leaders. They became partners of the better armed RF companies in combat. They toiled alongside civilian laborers repairing the north-south roads; joined RF and PF daytime

sweep operations above the My Thanh; and helped defend the new southern OBs and hamlets threatened from the VC My Thanh River sanctuaries.

Our district team's 2 senior NCOs training PF and PSDF, Sergeants 1st Class Johnson and Maxwell, and the MATS team in Trung Binh worked closely with Sau's mobile PF training platoon and RD cadre to create several "Special" PSDF hamlet defense squads. The training focused on the PSDF defending the hamlets closest to the VC My Thanh sanctuaries –providing better weapons, more grenades and ammunition, and preparing a hamlet defense plan to fit local conditions. The hamlet defense plan stationed PSDF guards out on hamlet perimeters at night –the first line of defense against an approaching enemy.

In the event of a VC attack, the PSDF would retreat to the hamlet fort. The forts were stockade-like structures made of stone, bamboo, and hardened mud. They were surrounded by concertina wire and boobytraps. The hamlet defense plan identified escape routes out of the hamlet to the nearest OB in case of a large VC attack.

The hamlet chiefs, their security assistants and the PSDF commander were trained to use the hamlets' H-1 radio to contact the nearest RF or PF OB --also district headquarters if air support or medevacs were necessary.

Sau and I harassed province Vietnamese and U.S. CORDS S-3 offices for more weapons and ammunition to arm the newly trained PSDF units. Equipping ARVN conventional divisions with M-16s had made available many thousands of WWII-era weapons --M-1s, M-2s and Thompson submachine guns for distribution to PSDF. We negotiated hard with province to get Lich Hoi Thuong's fair share of weapons and ammunition. There was also a great demand for PSDF weapons from each of the Ba Xuyen's other 7 districts to keep pace with the increase in PSDF forces in their districts.

Major Sau and I were on hand when the first U.S. Sierra "S" supply helicopter ferried a huge load of construction materials to the Mo O and Bang Lang OB construction sites on Christmas Day, December 25, 1969. During the previous weeks, thousands of refugees who had fled those VC-controlled coastal hamlets had been trucked from Lich Hoi Thuong and Trung Binh to clear roadside brush and repair the coastal road down to Mo O and Bang Lang. District troops and civilian laborers completed construction of the Mo O OB by mid-January, a remarkably short amount of time. Work on the Bang Lang OB 3 miles south of Mo O and the road between the two OBs was completed by the end of February, ahead of schedule.

Major Sau did not pause to celebrate. His goal was to complete and occupy all of the eight new OBs by the time the rainy season was in full swing in late July. I thought that was a bridge too far, given the huge amount of construction work entailed. Furthermore, the timing of the inevitable VC counter-attack was unpredictable. Sau shared that concern. But he planned to push the envelope as far as it would go.

On completion of the coastal Mo O and Bang Lang OBs, Sau coordinated with Lich Hoi Thuong and Trung Binh village leaders to assemble over 4,000 laborers from both villages to repair the coastal road the rest of the way down to the My Thanh River –a distance of four more miles. At the end of March, I reported to province CORDS headquarters that the roadwork had been finished and the new My Thanh OB was 20% complete, held back only by a shortage of sandbags and cement.

I requested province to send a Seabee team to grade the repaired coastal road. In my monthly counterpart letter to Major Sau, I wrote: “Congratulations, You are now there to stay on the My Thanh River.” Seabees arrived in May. They graded the repaired 10-mile coastal road.

Eager to return to their old homes before rice planting time, vehicles of all kinds loaded with lumber, household goods, men, women, and children travelled back to their abandoned hamlets in the district’s southeast quadrant.

Vigorous construction of the other 4 new OBs in the middle and western zoned of the district began in January, 1970. The Giong Chat OB in the lower southwest corner of the district started on January 4. Work on the OB at the former VC logistics base of Tong Cang further south began on March 26. Troops and civilian labor finished repairing the north-south Lieu Tu - Tong Cang road in early May. By mid-May the Giong Chat OB was finished and occupied by an RF company and one PF platoon. Tong Cang OB was 75% complete, waiting for Major Sau and I to extract from province the needed cement sandbags, wood, and wire to finish the job.

In my June 8, 1970 Activities Report to province, I was able to inform that the Giong Chat OB had been finished and occupied. Refugees were flowing south on the Tong Cang road from Lieu Tu Village center to reclaim their homes and rice fields.

The third road into the southern 1970 pacification target area cut through the center of the district to Vien An Village market, four miles south of the district capital of Lich Hoi Thuong village and district military headquarters. The road was in relatively good shape down to Vien An Village. It was in a bad disrepair and mined as it continued south to the two VC mini-bases areas above the My Thanh at deserted Tra Ong and Vien An hamlets.

Refugees from the My Xuyen road corridor and district RF and PF troops completed repairing the road from Vien An village to Lao Vien hamlet in February. Construction of Tra Ong and Vien An OBs was completed in April, 1970. Returning refugees and Special PSDF Squads reoccupied Vien An and Tra Ong hamlets. Returning residents began re-building their homes. The mixed Chinese-Cambodian Bung Sa hamlet adjacent to the Tra Ong OB prepared to defend against VC counterattacks. In addition to the RF company in that OB, two PF platoons were less than a mile away at Vien An village center. The Bung Sa hamlet’s ethnic Chinese-Cambodian Special PSDF unit was one of the toughest in the district.

The 8th OB envisioned in Sau's 1970 pacification blueprint was built next to Nam Chanh hamlet. Nam Chanh was in a strategic location mid-way between Lich Hoi Thuong village center to the north and Vien An village center to the south. Although 7 long miles from the VC sanctuaries along the My Thanh, it was well placed to reinforce district forces defending Vien An village center and the 2 new Vien An OBs. Construction of the Nam Chanh OB was completed in July.

At some point in February or March, I cannot remember exactly when, Major Sau and I discovered that the three long-secure catholic hamlets near Trung Binh village center were hoarding —some would say hiding— a large stock of weapons. We heard that the numbers considerably exceeded those necessary to equip the local PSDF. We assumed that catholic generals in Saigon had provided the excess weaponry to the three catholic hamlets. Trung Binh's priest, cathedral, and catholic high school were located in one of the larger hamlets, Nha Tho ("church") hamlet. To our knowledge, no VC had ever penetrated these hamlets and probably never would.

On a regular basis, Sau and I cooperated closely with the young friendly, dynamic catholic priest of Nha Tho hamlet. His lovely towering Gothic church on the coast looked out at the great expanse of the South China Sea. The homes of his large congregation spread outwards from his adjacent medieval-looking mansion in a well-ordered manner.

The priest once told me he had done military service as a chaplain in the South Vietnamese Army. We became friends.

The priest had reluctantly agreed to give up the old, broken 81 mm French mortar in Trung Binh. Convincing him and the village council to give up its cache of stored PSDF weapons proved a more difficult challenge. The priest's Nha Tho PSDF unit alone numbered 75 -far more than a PF platoon.

Major Sau did the talking during our call on the priest over tea at his residence. Sau's presentation, I thought, was compelling. He stated that he had not received enough weapons from province to arm all district PSDF units with the GVN minimum mandated 17 weapons per hamlet. The VC menaced the string of newly occupied, beleaguered hamlets above the My Thanh River mangrove swamps. The five most vulnerable hamlets nearest to the river—Tra Ong, Vien An, Bung Xa, Giong Chat and Tong Cong were especially in danger.

After patiently listening to Major Sau's request, the priest politely turned him down. Trung Binh needed the weapons to defend itself. It was providing weapons to the newly liberated Trung Binh hamlets of Mo O and Bang Lang along the South China Sea coast. Sau was disappointed. He had lost face. I felt the priest could have released a token amount of his stored weapons to help the district chief, but he chose not to do so.

Sau and I had kept Colonel Ha and Dr. Evans informed about our attempt to pry PSDF weapons out of Trung Binh's excess capacity. Sympathy for Sau's negotiating setback

and Sau's PSDF weapons' dilemma motivated Ha to step in. He ordered that an additional 100 M-1s and M-2s plus boxes of ammunition and grenades be provided to Lich Hoi Thuong to arm PSDF in the district.

Beginning after my November, 1969 arrival in district, I or Lieutenant Henrici with our team radioman Lopez and one NCO accompanied either Major Sau or his deputy Captain Thuc, on daytime sweep operations above the My Thanh. The operations protected the road building, and OB construction activities. It shielded refugee return to liberated hamlets. We walked across fields of rice stubble left behind by the rice harvest, hiked for hours on the mud dikes between them, past dogs clawing into field rat holes, pulling rats out of the holes and killing them. The dead field rats were hung in rows outside homes and hamlet markets to sell to families planning evening BBQs.

Ken and I rotated in fulfilling John Vann's requirements of twice weekly nighttime operations. Sometimes we did so with Vietnamese counterparts. At other times, we went alone with our NCOs. MAC/V instructions gave us basically 3 choices to draw from in conducting the night operations --establishing an ambush site "not less than 500 meters" from our advisory compound and remaining there between 2100 hours and 0400 hours; overnighting in a hamlet with a PSDF unit; or supervising the night's H and I fire into the VC sanctuary area along the My Thanh.

Ken and I never encountered VC during our nighttime operations. Daytime operations were different. Sharp, staccato-like VC machine-guns bursts coming out of the My Thanh mangrove swamp was a familiar sound. Bullets whizzed past our heads and kicked up dirt around us. The RF and PF with us would respond with a loud and continuous fire towards the VC location until the VC stopped shooting. Major Sau, Ken and I each carried holstered 45s on operations. We never had occasion to use them. VC booby traps and sniper fire did take their toll on RF and PF troops every week. I or Ken called in medevac choppers to evacuate wounded soldiers.

I was very lucky that no member of my district or MATS teams was killed or wounded during my 9 months in Lich Hoi Thuong.

Mike Owens was less lucky. His deputy, a U.S. army captain, and his NCO medic were severely wounded by a VC booby trap near the My Thanh mangrove swamps during a daytime operation. The 2 American advisors were in a line of RF-PF troops walking on a rice dyke. The booby trap was probably a buried 105 mm artillery round or a 4.2-107 mm mortar shell. It was planted next to the dyke and triggered by one of the PF soldiers walking on the dyke. The powerful explosion killed him instantly. In addition to the 2 district advisors, it badly wounded 4 other PF. Back at the hooch, Mike called in a (helicopter) dust-off. All were medevaced to a hospital in Can Tho where they recovered.

Throughout the Vietnam war, VC offensive operations usually occurred during nighttime hours. VC activity had died down temporarily when Sau initiated his aggressive southern pacification thrust south beginning in December, 1969. Its intensity may have caught the

VC off-guard. Or, they might have chosen instead to attack first on the Vien Chau district side of the My Thanh.

Pacification progress continued on road and OB construction in the pacification zone. From January to May our intelligence indicated that the Main Force VC 74th Company was down to an estimated 70 fighters. VC local guerrillas numbered about 100. They had pulled out of their mini-bases in hamlets in the pacification target area and linked up with the VC 74th Main Force Company in the My Thanh sanctuary.

It was only a matter of time before the VC 74th Company and Lich Hoi Thuong local VC guerrillas fought back against the GVN push into the district's southern zone.

The VC numbers were too low to halt the GVN OB building campaign. But their hardened, veteran commanders and fighters could disrupt the pacification advance—a pattern underway in other IV CORPS provinces.

On January 13, the VC simultaneously attacked the RF-occupied Tra Ong OB under construction and the nearby Tra Ong hamlet. District 4.2 mortar fire and a U.S. helicopter gunship we called in sealed the small but symbolic government victory. Only one PSDF militiaman was wounded. The VC lost one killed, one wounded and left behind six weapons during their hasty retreat.

At the end of the month, on January 30, a PF ambush at the edge of the My Thanh mangrove swamp intercepted and killed the VC district communist party chief. An RF patrol killed a VC courier. A document he was carrying revealed a VC plan to mount a surprise Tet offensive on February 16 against the Giong Chat, Tra Ong, and Lao Vien OBs. These attacks did not materialize.

After regrouping, the next VC foray from their mangrove hideouts in April fared no better than the first. On the night of April 30th, the VC hit the far Western Tong Cang OB and nearby Tong Cang hamlet with Chinese 82 mm mortar rounds, grenades, heavy machine gun and small arms fire. That same night, another VC unit attacked the Lao Vien OB and adjacent Bung Triet hamlet near Vien An Village center. A combination of RF, PF, and PSDF forces resisted the assault. Supporting fire from the district military compound's 4.2 mm mortar and a helicopter gunship we called in helped repel the assaults an hour after they began. VC casualties that night included the VC district chief who was also the VC district security commander.

The early momentum of the 1970 pacification push to the My Thanh raised popular morale in Lich Hoi Thuong District. Major Sau handed out awards to the Bung Triet and Tra Ong PSDF Special PSDF squads. But Sau knew from experience that the VC remained a formidable adversary. They were motivated, experienced fighters, very familiar with the district's battlefield space, and in touch with an unknown number of VC infrastructure hidden in the district government and population. They retained unchallenged control of their bases on both sides of the My Thanh.

Since 1964, the Vietnam war had ebbed and flowed. The GVN was enjoying momentum in 1970. The Americans were withdrawing. Washington was supplying massive amounts of military and non-military aid and advice to support the GVN pacification effort in the countryside. But now the main burden was on the GVN's shoulders to win the war.

With these uncertainties and assets in mind, I suggested to Major Sau that he test just how weak the VC had become by invading their My Thanh sanctuary. If district forces met minimal resistance, Sau could mount larger attacks aimed at eliminating the sanctuary all together. I repeatedly proposed that he coordinate with the Vien Chau District Chief across the My Thanh in Bac Lieu Province to demolish the enemy bases on both sides of the river. The two districts could launch simultaneous operations to squeeze and grind down VC manpower. Or, they could merge their two district forces in occasional unified operations to destroy major VC redoubts on one side of the river or the other.

That would set the conditions for the complete pacification of Lich Hoi Thuong and Vien Chau districts. Sau and his Vien Chau counterpart could mobilize civilian and military personnel in the two districts to clear away the foliage along the river. If not in 1970, they could prepare plans to pacify the My Thanh River area in 1971.

I informed Major Sau that my conversations with the U.S. Navy Coastal Division 13 headquarters south of Saigon assured me that U.S. naval vessels and Coast Guard cutters under its command would support district amphibious operations along the My Thanh. The cutters were 83 feet long and mounted 50 caliber machine guns and 81 mm mortars. The mortars could be lowered to a horizontal level and fired directly into the mangrove swamp.

In November, I collaborated with the DSA in Vinh Chau to arrange for meetings between our two counterparts and ourselves. Two meetings took place in December, one in each district. They were not successful. The two district chiefs were united in insisting that their respective province headquarters had to take the lead in clearing the My Thanh sanctuary. That was a task that only better armed province RF companies amalgamated into battalions could accomplish.

Privately with Major Sau, I advised that if he did not take the upper hand when the VC were weak, he may not have the opportunity to do it later. U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships were available now to support district amphibious operations to eliminate VC bases along the My Thanh. They would eventually join the U.S. withdrawal.

I hit a brick wall. Sau would not budge. Although Dr. Evans agreed with me, I suspected that the district chief would not be this firmly against the proposal if Colonel Ha did not agree with him. In Ben Thanh, I guessed that each of the province and district chiefs on different sides of the province border were fearful they would lose the most troops in a joint operation. In both Dinh Tuong and Ba Xuyen, our GVN counterpart were probably adhering to Sun Tsu's maxim to leave a back door for an enemy to escape!

Major Sau did respond with alacrity when I asked his opinion about unilateral seaborne attacks against VC bases on the Lich Hoi Thuong side of the river. I suggested that two back-to-back district amphibious operations using Coast Guard cutters or U.S. Navy ships could throw the VC off balance, destroy some of their bases, and demonstrate that their sanctuary was now vulnerable to ground assaults.

Sau and I worked out the details. The U.S. ship would pick up a 200-man or so district force at Mo O in the early morning hours. It would move into and up the My Thanh as silently as possible. The troops would be off-loaded at a clearing opposite VC base area known to our intelligence. The ship would provide covering fire as the district force attacked and destroyed the VC base. The force would exit the mangrove swamp and unite with a district blocking force near the new Tong Cang RF OB.

Major Sau proposed that I and his deputy for military affairs, Captain Thuc, lead the first riverine operation. He and my deputy, Lieutenant Henrici, would lead the second operation.

On March 19, in darkness at 0400 hours, at the Mo O beach, Captain Thuc, two of his S-3 officers, myself, radioman Lopez, one of my NCOs, Lt. Speed and one of his NCOs, together with 150 RF and PF district troops, boarded a Coast Guard cutter at Mo O.

Maximizing the odds for surprise, we silently entered the My Thanh and crawled along upstream. The dark overgrown, jungle-like foliage on both sides was variously about 12 to 15 feet from the cutter. I stood with Captain Thuc on the starboard (Lich Hoi Thuong) side near the cutter's bow. Increasingly thick, tangled masses of vines, branches and leaves from tall tropical vegetation stretching out from the shoreline inhibited our view. Next to me, a coastguard gunner stood grimly at the controls of his 50-cal pointing towards the invasive vegetation, sometimes hanging only a foot or so from the heavy machine guns muzzle.

At my request, the cutter's young commander shifted to a lower gear to allow Captain Thuc and I to look for a clearing where we could disembark not far from the VC base. It was about 0530 hours. The first sunlight rays were beginning to sneak through the thick mass of jungle around us. The elite 30-man district Intelligence Squad crowded in behind Thuc and me, anxious to be the first ones to disembark.

At a point we guesstimated to be just south of the VC base area, we spotted a lonely mud clearing along the shore about six square feet in size. Two or three faded but still noticeable vertical groves in the mud implied VC sampans had beached there --indicating the VC base may not be far away.

The answer was not long in coming. I asked the Cutter's commander to anchor and place the boat's gangway on top of the clearing. The Commando Squad disembarked first, moving about 25 feet inland from the water and halted. When Thuc and I and part of a PF

platoon were also ashore, the Commando Squad's leader, a sergeant and the point man, sent a whispered alert back to us to stop. He gingerly pulled away vegetation to his right just off his path of advance, opening a tiny space at waist level. The opening exposed an ugly, giant, green Chinese claymore mine facing anyone—or everybody—walking up from the small river clearing. It was ideally positioned to blow away an invading formation like ours.

The Chinese claymore was widely used by the North Vietnamese and VC during the Vietnam war. Near two feet in diameter, it was feared for its wide and long distant kill zone. The claymore was fastened to a post. A tiny wire extended from its back down to the ground where it disappeared under the thick underbrush.

Fortunately, we had surprised the VC and did not fall victim to the Chinese claymore. Aside from the large casualties we would have suffered, the whole operation would have had to be called off, forcing us to retreat back to Mo O.

A muffled, two-minute conversation between Thuc and I weighed the pros and cons of disposing of the claymore. Attempting to cut or rip out the visible wire was dangerous. There could be other tripwires attached to it. Time was running out. The VC base area was very close. So, a C-4 charge was placed next to the claymore. We boarded the cutter and moved back downriver about 60 yards, blew up the claymore, quickly disembarked again and charged towards the supposed location of the VC base.

The earsplitting C-4-claymore explosion had obviously warned the VC that we were coming. Meanwhile, the cutter unleashed its full firepower emitting a continuous high-pitched roar that was heard loud and clear as far away as the district capital. Its machine guns and 81 mm mortars, pointing horizontally, tore into the jungle on both sides of the river.

Hurriedly moving north brushing aside vines, thorns, tangled roots and dense mangrove shrubs, the sharp clatter of automatic weapons fire signaled two firefights underway ahead. Bullets flew. So did grenades and shouts. Sadly, our first casualty was the commander of our intelligence squad, our point man. A VC popped up from a bunker and shot him in the forehead. A hail of gunfire instantly killed the VC. Another firefight in and around the complex of VC huts, bunkers, sampans, rice storehouses, and enormous clay water jugs continued for fifteen minutes before the VC fled, disappearing into the mangrove swamp, trailed by fifteen more minutes of automatic weapons fire from district forces.

The loss of the district's Commando Squad leader was a great blow. He was the most admired and experienced commander in the district. Two VC were confirmed dead. An unknown number were hit and wounded during the firefight as they fled into the mangrove swamp.

Captain Thuc and I oversaw the piecemeal destruction of the VC base. District RF EOD specialists, Lieutenant Speed and his two NCOs utilized C-4 and grenades to blow up 8 subterranean bunkers containing sleeping mats, weapons and other supplies; 5 sampans; 2 large and several small huts. PF soldiers shattered the large urns containing drinking water. They rounded up and carted off assorted VC weapons and ammo, 100 kilos of rice, money, several boxes of VC documents, propaganda materials, VC flags, photos, and diaries.

We emerged from the mangrove swamp and were given a hearty welcome by the district blocking force led by Major Sau, Lieutenant Henrici at his side. We had lost only one soldier, but he was the most capable one in the district. Otherwise the riverine surprise attack had been a big success.

It was a relief to walk into the celebrating, happy faces of the Vietnamese and American military in the blocking force. The adrenaline really started to flow that night back at our team house and district headquarters. So did Hennessy cognac.

By radio and in a formal letter to the Navy Coastal Division 13 commander, I highly commended the impressive performance of the Coast Guards commander and his crew. I also thanked the Navy Division's commander for his support.

Looking back today, the district's riverine "through the back door" surprise attack destroying the VC base may have been the first assault into the Lich Hoi Thuong VC My Thanh sanctuary ever. The operation sent a message to the enemy that their sanctuary was now vulnerable to ground attacks. The planned follow-on foray into the sanctuary in June led by Major Sau with Lieutenant Henrici reinforced the message.

But, in the larger context, correctly or not, Major Sau and his superiors had opted to allow the VC My Thanh safe haven to survive. They would not attempt to destroy it. Like numerous other communist sanctuaries along provincial boundaries, the policy would continue to pose a long-term threat to the GVN pacification strategy.

The 1970 GVN military pacification campaign in Lich Hoi Thuong District put the VC on their back foot. The GVN's non-military pacification programs capitalized on major VC weakness—their inability, even after gaining military domination, to go beyond land re-redistribution. VC violent methods of "class warfare" justice, extortion of "taxes" from peasant families, impressment of youth, threats and terror usually provoked refugee flight to government-controlled territory, leaving behind empty or mostly empty hamlets. The GVN civil pacification programs funded by the U.S. to the tune of \$900 million a year exploited this VC shortcoming.

In Lich Hoi Thuong District, Major Sau understood the importance of development in an essentially political People's War. He sent district trucks to transport the 1969 rice harvest from district hamlets to rice mills in Lich Hoi Thuong and Soc Trang. Like a typical American politician, he devoted hours to discussing local affairs with hamlet and village

officials. He was the main speaker at national holiday events in the district, most notably the annual Tet festivities. The three-day Cambodian Buddhist holiday in April provided a pagoda setting to deepen his relations with ethnic Cambodian religious leaders.

During these occasions, I enjoyed the banquets. I must add, however, that it was difficult to swallow, much less digest, one so-called Vietnamese delicacy --2-3 inch long whitish coconut worms with scales that were extracted from the interior of palm trees, deep-fried and served with beer.

In the early Fall of 1969, during my last few months in Ben Tranh District, I had witnessed tangible evidence of rising living standards in rural and urban areas alike. That same trend continued in Lich Hoi Thuong. The VSD IR-8 and other development programs were contributing to the increase in family incomes of ordinary Vietnamese. There were bumper crops in 1969 and 1970. Metal roofing materials replaced thatched roofs, brick walls replaced mud walls. More trucks, cars, and motor scooters appeared, transporting goods and people on paved highways and recently repaired side roads reaching into newly pacified areas. Farmers used Japanese rototillers to plow their fields. Village and hamlet governments were building new or repairing old schools, renovating *Dinh*s, constructing maternity clinics, foot bridges, administrative offices for local governments, irrigation canals. Along the Trung Binh Village coast, work was underway to repair desalination dykes, create shrimp ponds, and modernize fishing wharfs. Nobody was swimming yet at the Mo O beach. That would change in a few months' time.

During 1970, village and hamlet governments in the district implemented about 80 VSD self-development projects. Local district officials coordinated with social welfare and refugee service offices in Soc Trang to provide cash and material benefits to thousands of refugees returning to the district's southern pacified zone during 1970. The Soc Trang provincial branch of the Agriculture Development Bank offered credit to district farmers preparing to plant the next rice crop in late summer.

Most of the village chiefs, members of the village councils, village deputy chiefs for administration and finances had attended the five-week Vung Tau training program for Village Administration during 1969 and 1970. Hamlet chiefs and hamlet security commanders in secure hamlets had already passed through Hamlet Management training programs in Soc Trang and Can Tho. More local officials from the district's southern, newly pacified hamlets followed them as the district's 1970 pacification drive above the My Thanh reclaimed previously VC-dominated or contested areas. Village elections were conducted in March 1970. Hamlet elections took place in the late spring and summer months.

The Thieu Administration's 1970 Pacification Plan placed new emphasis on democratic development in the GVN's 1970 pacification plan. The plan directed that more governing prerogatives be passed to democratically elected village and hamlet councils. Supervisory authority over the village police force and village PF platoons was shifted from ARVN

district chiefs to the elected village councils and their village chiefs. The district chief's revised role was to support and encourage village leaderships --not to dominate them.

The 1970 plan mandated that, without district chief approval, village governments on their own would be able to select and to carry out VSD projects using their village checkbooks and financial procedures. It gave village councils new taxing capabilities and the flexibility to use tax revenues to invest in public projects they would choose. For the first time, the 1970 plan called for provincial council elections. They were held in the late summer of 1970. That step also sought to wean away authority from the provincial and district military chain of command and pass it on to elected representatives.

Notwithstanding my points supporting the plan's democratization initiatives, Major Sau was dubious about empowering local governments at the expense of district chiefs. He and other ARVN officers probably thought the Americans had compelled Thieu to do this.

Sau thoroughly enjoyed socializing and working with elected officials in the district. He was obviously popular. He looked for opportunities for roadside stops to chat with shopkeepers, PF guards, and children playing. I believed that, more than most GVN military officers of his rank and experience, he would be receptive to agreeing with the empowerment of local civilian leadership. His response on the topic during our discussions at district headquarters and in his jeep traveling around the district, however, added up to a sort of "Ok, I'll go along with it."

In practice, Sau did go beyond the margins --but not far beyond. He spoke less on VSD issues at village and hamlet meetings. He found ways to give the impression of village council ownership of decisions he quietly supported. He gave ground on non-military pacification issues he believed unimportant. He neither gave ground on military-related pacification issues nor on matters where civilian and military issues intersected. For example, his backing of a PF soldier running against a civilian in a hamlet election, or the situation where the only two district candidates in the first-ever elections for the Ba Xuyen Province Council were militia officers in the district!

In sum, there were, in Sau's mind and also in the minds of the elected civilian officials in the district, a number of reasons why the 1970 Pacification Plan's instructions could not be implemented in a very meaningful way. Culturally, Vietnam remained a Confucius-Mandarin influenced society. The Vietnamese population had never experienced local elections, including when the country was a French colony. Authoritarian Vietnamese rulers had come and gone for centuries.

Ergo, for the great majority of Vietnamese, traditional, risk averse and seeking security in wartime Vietnam, it was culturally advisable to nestle in the "*Dan Anh*" —the "*Dan*" referred to a "flock" of birds in V shape formation flying across the sky led by one point-bird, "*Anh*," or "Big Brother." The point-bird, Major Sau, was not chosen by secret ballot.

I had come to know all of the village and hamlet chiefs in the district and many village council members. I believed none of them was interested in personally alienating the District Chief. Sau was preferable to some of the other more arrogant and bullying district chiefs they had known. He had performed the “*Dan Anh*” role well. He was successfully leading the pacification drive in the district.

In the end, elected officials in the district chose to stick with the previous dispensation of authority in the district. Major Sau continued to direct all district military forces and the police chief. He deferred more to elected officials regarding the VSD and other civil development programs, but retained veto leverage on major decisions in these areas. Elected village and hamlet governments accepted this arrangement. They took what minimal additional authority he allowed from the 1970 Pacification Plan and made the best of it.

Voter turnout was high in the March 1970 village elections and the string of hamlet elections that followed in the summer. As in Ben Tranh, elections favored the more educated and wealthier candidates living near the village market. Candidates campaigned energetically. Voters expressed enthusiasm. Members of my district and MAT teams and I monitored the campaigning, polling stations and vote counting. In contrast to my experience regarding voting in Armenia and Afghanistan two decades later, we did not uncover massive covert government interference in the mechanics of the polling process. That, of course, did not rule out behind the scene’s “arrangements” made beforehand by Sau in league with Colonel Ha to nominate several PF and RF candidates. But there were surprises.

Before the March village election in Trung Binh, nearly 100% of the village council was catholic hailing from 2 catholic hamlets near the village center. The Trung Binh catholic priest was *de facto* chairman of the board. The Chairman of the Village Council was catholic. His catholic brother-in-law was the Deputy Village Chief for security.

The largely Cambodian populations in Trung Binh’s southern, older and newly pacified rural hamlet populations elected mostly ethnic Cambodians. So did the mostly Cambodian Vien An and Lieu Tu southern hamlets. Fortunately, the habitually drunk, appointed village chief of Vien An lost to a better candidate, also an ethnic Cambodian.

The Cambodian majority in the southern Trung Binh hamlets elected 3 ethnic Cambodian members to the Trung Binh Village Council, ending the previous catholic domination. The incumbent catholic village chief barely won re-election.

Major Sau injected a dose of diversity by appointing the brave Chinese PF platoon leader from Bung Sa to occupy the new —and periodically VC attacked— Tra Ong OB. During one of my visits, I gave him a 60-mm mortar and a large handheld search light to bolster his OBs defensive capability.

The national political parties, President Thieu's pro-government six-party alliance, the Dai Viet and Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD) nationalist parties, played no part in the elections as far as I could see. There was negligible Western-style election activity --only one rally in Lich Hoi Thuong town. No election posters or written platforms. Candidates, their relatives, and personal supporters campaigned door to door, inside homes, lobbying for support of extended family vote clusters --their own and others. One hamlet chief's happy predicament of having four wives and numerous offspring assured his easy re-election.

Most of the village chiefs and members of the village councils elected were middle-aged. They took their civic responsibility seriously. A number were retired ARVN officers with military experience. The PF commander elected to be the deputy village chief for security of Vien An Village was one of them. Another PF platoon leader Sau chose was elected to replace the civilian hamlet chief of Nam Chanh Hamlet --the site of the 8th OB under construction. The latter wound up with the consolation prize of a seat on the Lich Hoi Thuong Village Council.

In Ben Tranh, I had concluded that those pacification projects that Vietnamese themselves planned and implemented were the most successful. To the extent that they entailed local Vietnamese input in terms of designing, labor and material, they were even more successful. That was also the case in Lich Hoi Thuong.

The most wasteful case was the CIA-advised Phoenix "Phuong Hoang" program targeting VC cadres. Its shortcomings were enumerated in the earlier Ben Tranh interviews. The Phuong Hoang program's convoluted paperwork agitated the district chief, his S-2 staff, and the Village Intelligence Organization Coordinating Committee. For example, CIA acronyms, a "Ten Most Wanted List," complex regulations requiring village clerks to create and maintain classified cards on VC suspects and their relatives sowed confusion. Ben Tranh District Chief Hop used his own intelligence networks to target the VC infrastructure in the district. Sau did that in Ben Tranh.

The district's Vietnamese Information Service (VIS) -the GVN agency disseminating propaganda- was more effective in Lich Hoi Thuong than in Ben Tranh. But it still fell short. Each village center and some hamlets were given a working TV set to broadcast government propaganda. As in Ben Tranh, the Chinese soap operas were very popular. VIS absenteeism and poor implementation at the hamlet level also hobbled VIS effectiveness in Lich Hoi Thuong.

I would list VSD self-help development, land reform, the promotion of IR-8 rice cultivation, refugee return, and MEDCAPS as the most successful non-military pacification programs in Lich Hoi Thuong during my time there.

Occasionally, refugees resettling in the southern pacified hamlets complained that the Refugee and Social Welfare offices in Soc Trang were not delivering promised follow-on payments and material after their return. Overall, these province-level agencies

provided valuable help. Local village and hamlet officials did the most in assisting returning refugees to start their lives again in pacified areas.

The impressive results of the IR-8 promotion campaign throughout Vietnam were evident in the district. The district government's medical staff and Sergeant Erb's MEDCAPS were very successful --another good example of what the government could provide and the VC could not.

On February 15, 1970, the VC were still harassing Tra Ong hamlet in Vien An village during nighttime hours when a highly successful GVN-U.S. district team MEDCAP treated 400 people in the hamlet. PF and RF from the Tra Ong OB and Tra Ong PSDF provided security.

After the VSD and IR-8 propagation, Land Reform was the government's third most effective pacification program. Major Sau moved even before President Thieu signed the Land Reform Bill into law. On March 27, at a ceremony in the district center, he handed out 17 land titles taken from land the French colonial government had designated for future use to tenant farmers. Right up to my July departure and my successor Mike Owen's arrival, Sau kept province and district land reform offices busy surveying district fields to clear the way for more tenant farmers to gain ownership of land. I understand from Mike that Sau and his senior staff continued to give land reform a high priority during Mike's 12 months as DSA.

My DSA Assistance in Kind (AIK) budget, about U.S. \$80,000, was an effective tool to support village self-help projects that were too expensive for VSD projects to cover. Our district team debated how we could get the most out of our AIK fund. We coordinated with Major Sau and village councils to choose projects and monitor them during implementation.

Lich Hoi Thuong and Trung Binh chose electrification of their village towns and adjacent hamlets. Trung Binh, the most populated village in the district, also requested a long dock needed to berth its large 25 ocean-going fishing vessels —plus another 200 smaller coastal fishing boats. The deep fishing ships went out to the South China Sea for two-week voyages, returning via Saigon where they sold their catch.

Vien An requested a deep drilling well to bring fresh water up through saline soil. Lieu Tu asked for a school and clinic for the recently pacified hamlet of Giong Chat.

Q: So, it seems one interesting element of your role in the CORDS operation is you began to get to know a number of industries, at least agricultural industries like livestock management and rice, the necessity of how to prepare land and how to store food and so on. It seems a very important element of your education as an officer, seeing all of this together with the military aspects.

TOMSEN: Yes. Back in Ben Tranh, I worked with local officials in Tan Hiep, Ben Tranh District capital, to start electric cooperatives. I knew nothing about electric cooperatives before that. In Lich Hoi Thuong District I assisted the village councils of Lich Hoi Thuong village and Trung Binh to launch their electrification projects. The Tam Hiep project had used high U.S. wooden telephone poles. The 2 cooperatives in Lich Hoi Thuong had to make do with 12-foot high metal telephone poles! The Lich Hoi Thuong village council electrification project was up and running by the time I departed Vietnam in July, 1970. Trung Binh's project was still struggling ahead.

The Trung Binh Dock project expanded into the Trung Binh Dock-Harbor project. The dock could not be fully used until the harbor -filled with trash and all kinds of debris- could be cleared and dredged. Hundreds of laborers did the clearing. Part of our AIK fund and a good chunk of Trung Binh's VSD budget rented a dredging rig from a Soc Trang firm to finish the job. The village Trung Binh VSD program also financed the construction of an ice storage facility near the harbor for freezing fish. These Trung Binh AIK-assisted projects went forward at a pace the town council set, which was slow. Neither project was near completion by the time I departed.

The AIK-assisted Vien An deep water drilling project went well. Major Sau and I with Vien An notables participated in the inaugural ceremony. I had never seen a land drill so towering --80 feet high! After the speeches, the monster gave out a great screech as its drill bit angrily churned into the earth, hardened by the dry season. It took 2 weeks to journey down to the freshwater hundreds of feet below.

Our district team monitored village VSD projects to confirm that they were not double-billing AIK projects. That scheme was known to line the pockets of district chiefs. Per John Vann's instruction for DSAs to report cases of corruption up the CORDS chain of command, I did report several such egregious examples where the previous district chief had doubled-billed projects. He was fired and sent to a regular ARVN battalion.

Q: Who removed him?

TOMSEN: The Province Chief, Colonel Ha.

Public indignation sometimes exploded over collusion between corrupt GVN officials and Chinese merchants to raise the price of rice. In April, 1970, I sent a memo to province reporting a casual conversation with a Vietnamese mill owner in Lich Hoi Thuong village. While his criticism of the Chinese rice monopoly was probably self-serving, his remarks coincided with the cyclical rice price-fixing drama that was an annual ritual.

According to my source, after the 1969 rice harvest, local Chinese mill owners in the district coordinated with Chinese rice merchants in Ba Xuyen Province and Saigon to hoard rice stocks until a few weeks before the USAID late Spring 1970 shipments of rice

arrived in-country. The U.S. timing of the rice imports was designed to keep the rice supply high and affordable until the next harvest. That also kept inflation down.

Government officials and Chinese merchants coordinated in Saigon to dump rice on the market countrywide during those weeks before the U.S. rice arrived -above the GVN-mandated rice price that was publicized in newspaper, radio and on TV. The higher market price above the official rate provided big profits to Chinese rice merchants and payoffs to GVN officials.

Mobs of angry student protesters were in the vanguard of public protests that erupted in Saigon and major cities every year. The GVN was compelled to enforce the official price level it had announced. Some high-level officials lost their jobs in Saigon and the provinces. That included, in the case of Ba Xuyen, the Deputy Chief of Administration, the second highest ranking province official after the province chief. But huge profits had already been made.

Mike and I worked very closely with Major Sau for a combined 2 years. We came to respect his personal character and obvious commitment to helping the people in the district. But we were not so naive as to assume he did not get a share of the funds stolen from pacification programs budgets. We also did not know how much the district police chief was siphoning funds off in his bailiwick; which Vietnamese contractors were passing money to the district chief; which positions were purchased; and which warehouses were being pilfered. We presumed that, hidden from us, village chiefs and council members were keeping what they could from the VSD program; and giving a cut to the district chief who took his own cut after passing the rest to the province chief –and so on up the military chain of command to generals in Saigon. The corrupt gravy chain was not something new. It dated back to Mandarin times. As in Ben Tranh, I found it difficult to mine the shaded underground channels of cash transfers to Saigon.

When a CORDS DDSA in Ben Tranh specialized in development areas, I did not sit in on My Tho Province meetings chaired by the Province Chief or by the Province Senior Advisor, both Colonels. Nor did I spend much time at CORDS regional headquarters in Can Tho. Ben Tranh DSA, Major Thoms, had concentrated on the more time-consuming military pacification programs. That necessitated his frequent trips to My Tho for meetings with the large provincial U.S. CORDS military staff there.

We 8 DSAs in Ba Xuyen Province probably spent 20% of our time at CORDS Soc Trang Province headquarters dealing mostly with military issues. In Lich Hoi Thuong, support from the 200-plus Ba Xuyen CORDS military staff led by Dr. Evans in Soc Trang was critical to making progress in district military programs, less so regarding development programs. Consequently, I and Mike later, were often in our district team's jeep with one of our NCOs driving on the Lich Hoi Thuong - Soc Trang - My Xuyen highway to attend meetings in Soc Trang.

For all of its positive attributes, CORDS was still a bureaucratic institution. Too many meetings and paperwork. The 8 DSAs in Ba Xuyen were summoned to attend monthly meetings chaired by Evans in his office. Each of the province “S” (for Staff) military offices used our joint presence in Soc Trang to engage us on their specific issues in our districts. The DSAs exploited the opportunity to lobby for province staff commitments to resolve problems in their districts. For each of us, commitments from the provincial CORDS staff officers were sometimes met, sometimes only partially met, delayed, or not fulfilled at all.

The main reason was normal bureaucratic culture: rules, regulations, and risk-averse “clearances;” the stress on process over achieving results; and plain laziness. In addition, there was only a finite amount of supplies to satisfy all 8 districts. For example: cement, sand, sandbags, rebar, wood, concertina wire, barbed wire to build the numerous OBs, schools, village *dinh*s, health clinics, village and hamlet offices, PSDF hamlet “forts,” and the many development pacification projects in each of the districts. And Ba Xuyen Province was competing for countrywide pacification resources with 43 other provinces in Vietnam.

Each district in Ba Xuyen was different. The three easternmost, especially Nga Nam closest to NVA sanctuaries in Cambodia, were high priorities in military areas. Lich Hoi Thuong was the only district in Ba Xuyen on the South China Sea coast. The sea port of Trung Binh connected Ba Xuyen Province with Region 4. It delivered important maritime economic benefits, including fish and shrimp.

The province’s J-4 (Logistics) element sent the Seabee road construction team to Lich Hoi Thuong at the beginning of our 1970 pacification drive. The team paved the My Xuyen Highway from the district capital, Lich Hoi Thuong Village, to Trung Binh Port. That gave a huge lift to the district’s 1970 pacification campaign.

The U.S. Navy Coastal Division 13 Headquarters near Saigon provided critical assistance to our district’s amphibious operations along the southern My Thanh River district boundary with Vinh Binh District, Bac Lieu Province. Division 13 ships also off-loaded OB and road construction material at the Mo O beach resort south of Trung Binh’s port on the South China Sea.

Joe Chudzick, head of the CORDS Province Development office and Fred Zimmerman’s Agriculture Office in province met our every request for help on self-help economic development projects, land reform and IR-8 rice dissemination.

While lobbying province military CORDS offices for more assistance, I purposefully avoided asking Dr. Evans, the “boss,” to intervene on my behalf. In the long run, acquiring a reputation of dealing directly with the province staff and not going around it was the best strategy. The one exception was when I was turned back by an aggressive demand from S-1 (Personnel) to accept another NCO on my MAT team.

My DSA predecessor in Lich Hoi Thuong was still wrestling with the province to sort out a number of relatively minor but nagging problems when I arrived in November 1969. After he left, it took several more time-consuming efforts with S-4 (Logistics) and S-6 (Communications) to resolve them. We used our team boat motor, a Boston Whaler, to move around the district on canals and along the South China Sea Coast. Soon after I arrived, S-4 returned the boat's motor that had been in the S-4 mechanics garage for 2 months. Unfortunately, they sent back the wrong motor. We returned it back to province, then had to wait three more weeks for them to repair and return our motor.

It took province a month to repair our PRC-25 radio that we used daily on military operations. In the meantime, we were forced to "borrow" Lieutenant Speed's MAT team's PRC-25. Our team's minesweeper was sent to the S-4 shop for repair. We finally got it back four months later. Fortunately, one of the MAT team's NCO was an EOD (Explosives Ordnance Disposal) specialist. His expertise proved invaluable in disarming VC boobytraps.

We were lucky to get the Seabees to our district whenever we could —there was only one Seabee team assigned to all of Ba Xuyen Province. In addition to paving the My Xuyen road from Lich Hoi Thuong Center to Trung Binh, the Seabees' grading of the long coastal Mo O road was vital to protecting the new line of OBs along the South China Sea coast down to the My Thanh River. I tried to entice them back with a bulldozer to help us reopen the Mo O beach resort. They would have had access to the empty Mo O beach to swim during breaks!

The Seabees passed on the beach resort project. The resort was eventually reopened a few months after the construction of the 3 coastal OBs. But it took six more months of district military operations before Vietnamese families from inside and outside the district came in large numbers to enjoy the resort.

I received many commitments but no follow-throughs answering my oral and written appeals for the Seabees to grade the other two north-south dirt roads through the middle and far western zones of the district, down to the VC My Thanh River sanctuaries. Sau and village governments mobilized thousands of civilian laborers to clear the roads. Hamlet families built "backyard ovens" that produced bricks to reinforce the road surfaces -every poor family supplied one square meter of bricks, and wealthier families, three square meters of bricks.

Needless to say, Province's military air support, day and night, was vital to the success of the district's 1970 pacification southern push to the My Thanh.

Dr. Evans began his monthly province meetings in his CORDS office by summarizing recent events and current province goals and objectives.

The DSAs made brief presentations about their districts and answered questions. The presentations by each of the provinces military components were much longer. They were

also heavily weighted towards levying more requirements on the DSAs. In other words, the major thrust was higher headquarters telling DSAs how better to do their jobs. The DSAs took this as routine, not unusual. After all, we were the “demandeurs.” The senior staff officers had the resources. My notes, written down during one monthly meeting, give a typical account of the proceedings:

Dr. Evans:

Report to me on 3x5 cards all important visits to your district. For example, if John Vann flies in for a briefing.

The “Free Fire Zone” term has been renamed “Specific Strike Zone” to contain in time and space the target of air strikes and prevent civilian casualties.

If you cannot persuade your District Chief to do something important, send me a narrative description of the issue in your monthly letter that I can put in my counterpart letter to Colonel Ha.

DPSA, Lt. Colonel:

Standard appearance guidelines of district and MAT advisory teams are falling down. Soldiers should be in uniform; I don’t like bare backs. When you drink a coke or beer, dispose of the can properly. After taking the noonday snooze on a couch, put the cushion back. The snooze is between 1200 and 1400 hours. Nobody should snooze before 1700 hours. But if everything is wrapped up by 1630 or 1645 hours, you can lay down. Only one beer is allowed during the noon break. I expect officers in the chain of command to see that these rules are obeyed, especially by themselves.

Intel S-2, Major:

Your monthly requests for Phantom-3 (Note: fixed-wing combat aircraft. End Note) strikes on VC bases must be sent forward on the 10th and 25th of every month. Get your requests in on time. Your S-2 should monitor your district’s (nighttime) H&I fire to ensure it does not cross the paths of province air assets you call in. The VC are recruiting to add another battalion to their Soc Trang Province Main Force Regiment. Province S-2 is not getting enough intelligence from agents in your districts. Send us more intelligence.

Operations S-3, Lt. Colonel:

Emphasized Vann’s priority on night operations, in particular, correctly setting night ambushes by PF and RF throughout your district. Encourage your district chiefs to employ mechanical ambushes. (Note: “Mechanical” involves attaching wire and electronic detonators to Claymore mines and hiding them near the ambush spot. End Note) OBs should not be undermanned at night when the VC are active. Soldiers can sleep in the OB during daylight and set ambushes at night. Ambush teams must not use the same routes every night. Send me your districts’ statistics on how many nighttime ambushes are set along with the times ambush teams move out and when they return to their OB.

Keep your briefing charts up to date. You cannot predict when a VIP will show up. Make sure district patrols vary their routes when coming back from long operations. If the VC are penetrating an OB, order soldiers defending it to abandon the OB or hide in the bunker, then fire artillery into the OB.

Continuously recruit PF and RF soldiers in your district to compensate for gaps created by casualties and desertions. The recruits will be sent with the next batches assigned to the twice-a-month Can Tho training classes. They start on the 9th (PF) and 16th (RF) of each month.

Logistics S-4, Captain:

A Spec-5 will be visiting each district to give a class on preventive maintenance. Boat motor lubrication is ready for pick up. If you already have a grease gun, send the extras back to us. The size of helicopter landing pads in your district must be 20x50 meters. Check thoroughly for booby traps in landing pad areas.

Communications S-6, Captain:

Hold traffic in the province radio net to a minimum. State “acknowledge” when you receive a province order that does not require a substantive response.

Civilian Staff, USAID Development, Joe Chudzick:

Lays out the reporting requirements on elections in the district, including VC attempts to prevent voting, cases of fraud observed, activity by Vietnamese political parties.

Agriculture and Land Reform Advisor, USAID's Fred Zimmerman:

Be aware that the land ceiling is 15 hectares with 5 more added if a religious structure is involved. Landowners are paid 20% upfront cash, and 80% in bonds to be redeemed over the next 8 years. Come to my office to get the aerial reconnaissance maps of your districts.

CIA Senior Province Intelligence Advisor:

Get people to know their local cop. We need more police home-search operations of homes occupied by known VC families. Make sure your district's monthly “neutralization” list is in province by the 26th of each month.

Dr. Evans' Vietnamese counterpart, Colonel Ha, conducted much larger monthly province meetings. They were more formal than Evans' weekly meetings. The audience numbered in the hundreds and included both Vietnamese and U.S. CORDS staff.

The Province Chief's assemblies took place inside a large Soc Trang hall complete with stage, speakers' rostrum, microphone and tripod apparatus to hold briefing charts. The eight district chiefs and their DSAs sat side by side near the front. After Colonel Ha's opening presentation, each district chief, then Vietnamese Province military section heads on Ha's staff, by turn, took their charts onto the stage. Each briefed from the rostrum,

answered Ha's questions, and returned to their seats. The Vietnamese to English translations lengthened the meetings to between 4 and 5 hours.

About my second time attending Colonel Ha's monthly conclaves, it struck me that the huge Vietnamese majority in the hall was listening attentively to each Vietnamese briefer. They clearly valued the meetings as demonstrations that the Vietnamese, not Americans, were now in charge of the pacification war—an impression that may have been repeated monthly in South Vietnam's other 43 provinces.

Throughout, PSA Evans, we DSAs, and other American CORDS advisors sat quietly next to our Vietnamese counterparts. I neither recorded in my notes nor can recall a single occasion when an American spoke.

Permit me to read from notes from one of Colonel Ha's meetings while it was underway:

I am sitting in a province meeting hall waiting for the meeting to begin. The province chief, Colonel Ha, just walked in and everybody stood up, including yours truly, one among several hundred in the audience. The first district chief to brief is always the one from Thanh Tri. He is Lieutenant-Colonel Ninh. Lieutenant-Colonel Ninh is thought to have a very close friend in President Thieu's office. Others say he is President Thieu's first cousin, and the rumor is that he is slated for a province chief position somewhere in I CTZ (Corps). Usually when Ninh finishes his briefing, he leaves the meeting which can run for five hours as the other district chiefs and more run through their briefings.

Lieutenant-Colonel Ninh is a central Vietnamese and he talks very rapidly. His narrative is haphazard and not informative. Birds fly in and out of the large windowed hall and circle around at the top of the high ceiling.

After Ninh makes his presentation he comes back into the audience and chats with the My Xuyen District Chief, his friend. The briefing goes on as the next district chief makes his presentation. Then Ninh goes on stage and has a tete-a-tete with the smiling province chief, Colonel Ha, even as yet another district chief briefs. Everybody notices this. Then Ninh returns to sit next to the My Xuyen District Chief. Everybody is surprised that he has not left the hall by this time.

The My Xuyen District Chief briefs. (Ba Xuyen's province capital, Soc Trang, is located in My Xuyen District, Lich Hoi Thuong's neighbor to the west). He is trying to do the same thing Major Sau is doing—to move south, expand his PSDF hamlet militia to release PF platoons to conduct mobile operations in the district's remote south opposite the VC My Thanh sanctuaries.

Major Sau leans over to me and sadly explains that the My Xuyen District Chief had gotten a bulldozer. Lich Hoi Thuong, he whispers to me, has asked twice with no results. I whisper back suggesting he keep trying and I will try, too. He whispers he is tired of asking.

The Long Phu District Chief is next. He speaks with a heavy northern accent. He is middle aged, looks like he would be a college professor or a high school principal if the war was not going on. Colonel Ha is pressing him on his PSDF and the trouble the province capital is getting from a VC mortar squad that comes into his district and shells Soc Trang. The Ke Sach District Chief is next. He is still building operation bases like mad. The briefing chart he uses states that 22 PSDF were killed last month. Major Sau whispers, 'It was between 50 and 60.'

It is Major Sau's turn next. He briefs on his southern strategy. Then he puts in the pitch for the bulldozer. Colonel Ha listens but does not respond. The next briefer is Major Nam (the district chief of the contested far western Nga Nam district). He looks like Rock Hudson. He's a very aggressive district chief, according to his briefing.

The meeting has been going on for three-and-a-half hours. All of the district chiefs have briefed. Major Rin, the officer responsible for the Village Self Development (VSD) program at the province level just walked onto the dais with his assistant. The assistant plops down Major Rin's set of charts.

It is 12:44 and the province chief is talking about the goal of bringing all hamlets up to A and B level. He says it is not difficult, all we must do is try. He expects all OBs under construction to be finished by the end of June.

The province chief points out a problem that all districts are facing: when the PF return to their villages, they often do not go into the operating base at night, nor do they patrol in their areas. Colonel Ha says often only a few men out of a 35-man platoon are present for duty. Nonetheless, they receive their payments. They are soldiers but they do not serve. Major Sau whispers that he will transform two more PF platoons into mobile units. Colonel Ha says that village and hamlet officials must work hard, especially the security chiefs, to get their PF soldiers out at night on ambushes.

The meeting finally ends at 13:10 in the afternoon. It was four hours and 10 minutes long.

Q: Wow.

TOMSEN: Yes. And another "WOW" was just around the corner. Neither Dr. Evans nor Colonel Ha, nor the district chief briefers nor myself and the other CORDS DSAs in the large audience foresaw that next "WOW." The focus of the war was about to shift back to conventional battles fought by large combat formations from both sides, the largest conventional clashes since the 1968 Tet Offensive. This time, the South Vietnamese and Americans would be on the attacking side against NVA Cambodian sanctuaries.

On April 29, 1970, President Nixon appeared on U.S. television to explain why he had approved the U.S.-GVN invasion of Eastern Cambodia that had just begun. Like results

from the 1968 Tet Offensive, the U.S.-GVN invasion to destroy North Vietnam's Cambodian logistical bases would be a success, militarily. But it would become a domestic political setback for the Nixon Administration's Vietnam strategy.

During my State Department career, I made only one visit to Cambodia. It was an official one in 1994, as EAP-PDAS (East Asia Pacific Bureau, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State). When DCM in Beijing during the late 1980s, I periodically met Prince Norodom Sihanouk who was living in exile in China. He truly lived up to his reputation—at once mercurial, wily, preppy, charming, multilingual, great sense of humor, the very symbol of Cambodian nationalism, indeed of Cambodia itself. He was, by far, the most popular and loved Cambodian of his generation.

Prince Sihanouk and his wife, Princess Monique, invited Kim and me to their lively dance-dinner parties at their palace-in-exile in Beijing. We swirled around the dance floor, dodging Princess Monique's small white dogs playing with each other below, amongst Chinese Foreign Ministry couples, diplomats from East and West, including North Koreans in somber Mao suits. Kim, by instinct, diplomatically turned down a North Korean invitation to dance.

Sihanouk's Cambodian Paris band, flown in from Paris, played Cambodian, American and French hit tunes. Sihanouk, himself, often took the microphone to croon in each of these languages. Once, when Kim and I were gliding past him while he sang, Sihanouk unexpectedly switched from French to English and belted out the Platters' soaring "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" melody. His Paris band did not pause at all in changing from one song to the next!

My other limited involvements with Cambodia were less enjoyable. Those long nights as a junior officer in our Bangkok Embassy's communications room monitoring whether B-52 bombs would fall on North Vietnamese Army (NVA) bases in Cambodia, as opposed to civilian populated areas.

Nearly three decades later, during my 1994 trip to Cambodia, I was informed by Ambassador Charlie Twinning that Cambodia's then two Co-Prime Ministers, Prince Sihanouk's son, Prince Ranaridh, and Hun Sen, an ex-Khmer Rouge cadre, former Hanoi ally and now Chinese ally, would not meet with me together—I had to call on the 2 Co-Prime Ministers separately. They were engaged in deadly skirmishing with one another for wealth and power without regard to the Cambodian people still emerging from Khmer Rouge atrocities.

The First 1947-1954 Indo-China War was underway when Sihanouk became king of Cambodia. He secured Cambodian independence from France in 1953, then maneuvered to maintain it during the Cold War decades. Sihanouk shifted among changing regional pressures from the U.S., China, North and South Vietnam, leaning toward one side, then another, until those forces brought him down.

Discarding the neutrality required of Cambodia in the 1954 Geneva Accords, Sihanouk instead decided to lean towards China and North Vietnam as the likely winners of the Vietnam War. In 1966, he visited Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in Beijing. He agreed to tolerate the string of NVA sanctuaries Hanoi was building in eastern Cambodia. The sanctuaries stretched from the South China Sea north to the Cambodian, Laotian and South Vietnamese tri-border junction opposite South Vietnam's III CORPS.

Sihanouk also agreed to open the Port of Sihanoukville on the South China Sea to unload voluminous North Vietnamese war material and other supplies arriving by ship. When the U.S. Navy began intercepting North Vietnamese vessels, the Soviet Union arranged for Soviet bloc Eastern European flagged ships to transport the cargo. The military armaments and supplies were then put on trucks and driven north on the "Sihanouk Trail" running parallel with the South Vietnam border. That logistical corridor eventually linked up with the labyrinth of roads, canals, rivers, and footpath known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, snaking through jungles south from North Vietnam through Laos.

The Sihanouk Trail was estimated to carry 70% of Hanoi's war freight moving on both North-South logistics corridors. The Sihanouk Trail abutted NVA sanctuaries opposite III and IV CORPS, and 90% of II CORPS on the South Vietnam side of the border. The Ho Chi Minh trail bordered I CORPS, and the northern 10% of II CORPS.

In 1965, Sihanouk broke diplomatic relations with the U.S. He re-established them three years later. Still, when the Americans showed him ground-level photographic proof of the sprawling NVA sanctuaries in eastern Cambodia, he took no action.

During 1968, the Khmer Rouge began its insurgency against Sihanouk's government. Sihanouk silently approved President Nixon's 1969 escalation of the U.S. bombing campaign in Cambodia. A year later, his army chief, General Lon Nol, took matters into his own hands when Sihanouk was vacationing in France. Lon Nol ordered Hanoi to withdraw its troops from eastern Cambodia within 72 hours. He closed Sihanoukville port to ships carrying North Vietnamese cargo. On March 18, 1970, Sihanouk was still vacationing in France when Lon Nol deposed him.

Sihanouk fled to Beijing and created a Cambodian National Front that included the Khmer Rouge. That pleased the Chinese and Hanoi. With North Vietnamese help, the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh in 1975, concurrently with the fall of Saigon. Praising the Khmer Rouge as "patriots," Sihanouk returned to Cambodia and moved back to his royal palace. But, he was powerless to stop the Khmer Rouge genocide campaign against the Cambodian people. After 9 years, he moved back to Beijing and spent the rest of his life in exile, passing away in 2012 at the age of 89.

The Nixon Administration's decision to treat the Vietnam War as a broader Indo-China War by openly attacking the North Vietnamese Cambodian sanctuaries made sense, militarily. North Vietnam was blatantly using their Cambodian sanctuaries as springboards for large-scale attacks into South Vietnam. Hanoi still boycotted the Paris

Peace Talks. The U.S. was gradually withdrawing troops. It needed to buy time to continue the withdrawal, to assist the GVN's pacification push into the countryside, and to better equip South Vietnam's expanding conventional forces.

Further, it was thought that a massive cross-border ground operation to destroy and dismantle the NVA bases in Cambodia would project American resolve to Hanoi and its bankrollers in Moscow and Beijing. It would also instill confidence among South Vietnamese, particularly the ARVN, that Vietnamization was the right way forward.

The NVA reacted to General Lon Nol's coup by driving the small (37,000 countrywide) Cambodian garrisons out of eastern Cambodia. It sent weapons and advisors to pockets of Khmer Rouge guerrillas opposing the government. By mid-April, 1975, NVA elements had advanced to within 20 miles of Phnom Penh.

Beginning on April 29, over 90,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese troops rolled across the Cambodian border. North Vietnamese troops fought a rear-guard action, retreating eastwards deeply into Cambodia and northwards where they occupied the Laotian city of Salavan, less than 60 miles from Thailand.

The ground-air invasion destroyed the great bulk of the NVA's logistical infrastructure and military bases in eastern Cambodia. American troops walked into one sprawling base they called "The City." It lay adjacent to Snoul, at the neck of the notorious Parrot's Beak invasion corridor into the upper Delta only 35 miles from Saigon. It was a square mile complex containing over 400 huts, 18 mess halls, a hospital, a maze of bunkers, a pig farm, training grounds, and storage facilities holding thousands of tons of weapons, ammunition, food stuffs, and a fleet of trucks. Opposite II CORPS, American and South Vietnamese invaders overran the main NVA logistics base of similar size in northeast Cambodia.

U.S. units in the invasion were ordered to penetrate no further than 19 miles into Cambodia and to withdraw back to South Vietnam by May 30, one month after crossing the border. South Vietnamese forces under the aggressive General Do Cao Tri continued the invasion. Covered by American air power, Do's forces pushed 100 miles into Cambodia to Kampong Speu, southwest of Phnom Penh. Another of General Tri's columns further north crossed the Mekong, routed the NVA's 88th regiment and captured the key provincial capital of Kampong Cham. South Vietnamese forces handed over their captured territory to the Cambodian army and were back inside South Vietnam by July 22—when my CORDS assignment was ending.

According to U.S. military sources, the U.S.- South Vietnamese cross-border ground assault killed more than 11,000 North Vietnamese; captured or destroyed 22,000 weapons; 7,000-8,000 tons of rice; 1,800 tons of ammunition; 431 vehicles; and 55 tons of medical supplies. VC sources after the war informed that a South Vietnamese brigade barely missed netting key VC COSVN leaders escaping north towards Laos.

Inside South Vietnam, the Cambodian invasion of eastern Cambodia raised the morale of the South Vietnamese government and military. General Lon Nol's regime was given a reprieve from North Vietnamese pressure. U.S. supplied weapons and training expanded the Cambodian Army to 150,000 troops, enough to keep the Khmer Rouge at bay until days before the Fall of Saigon in April, 1975.

The North Vietnamese loss of Sihanoukville port and the destruction of NVA supply depots in eastern Cambodia delivered a major blow to NVA/VC cross-border infiltration. It took Hanoi two years —until the Spring of 1972— to initiate its next large-scale offensive into South Vietnam. And then it shifted to large-scale conventional attacks from northern Cambodian and Laotian NVA bases opposite I, II and III CORPS. No IV CORPS district or province capital was lost during the NVA's 1975 offensive.

The gains achieved by the Cambodian invasion came with a high political cost to the Nixon Administration. Anti-war demonstrations spiked. Campus unrest and student strikes forced closure of hundreds of U.S. colleges and universities. On May 4, Ohio National Guard troops killed four protesters at Kent State University. Two students died at Mississippi's Jackson State College. 100,000 marched to protest the Vietnam War in Washington, D.C. Another 100,000 marched in New York City to support the Cambodia invasion.

Congressional mostly Democratic Party opponents of the war started what would become a five-year legislative process to cut off congressional funding to the GVN to defend South Vietnam against Soviet-backed massive North Vietnamese offensives.

Most U.S. military and civilian CORDS personnel in South Vietnam were not aware of the Cambodian invasion until Vietnamese and U.S. troops crossed the border on April 29. In Lich Hoi Thuong, I was alerted by the rough shaking of my bed and long, distant, roars of bombs dropped by dozens of giant B-52s across the border in Cambodia.

Major Sau and his staff were delighted that South Vietnam and its American ally were finally on the offensive against the Cambodian sanctuaries. The euphoria was tempered when Hanoi ordered VC counterattacks inside South Vietnam to divert American and South Vietnamese attention from their thrust into Cambodia. Hundreds of nighttime enemy assaults lit up the Delta and elsewhere in South Vietnam. The VC temporarily occupied Lieu Tu's recently won Giong Chat hamlet. They repeatedly attacked the Tra Ong OB near the Vien An village center. VC guerrillas buried landmines and set ambushes along roads.

Q: It's June 21st (2016) and we are continuing with Ambassador Tomsen and his tour in Vietnam. We're now in what year?

TOMSEN: It's late May, 1970. I have entered the last two months of my 18-month Vietnam CORDS assignment due to end in late July. South Vietnamese and U.S. forces have overrun the long-time North Vietnamese sanctuaries in eastern Cambodia stretching

290 miles north from the South China Sea up to the South Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos tri-border juncture opposite II Corps. The Lon Nol military coup in March, 1970, overthrew Sihanouk, replacing a pro-Hanoi government with a pro-U.S., pro-GVN government. Lon Nol closed the port of Sihanoukville to communist ships.

The U.S.-GVN invasion destroyed thousands of tons of communist weapons, ammunition and food supplies inside Cambodia. The U.S. pulled back to South Vietnam after one month, on May 30. South Vietnamese forces continued fighting in Cambodia until July 22. The Hanoi Politburo ordered VC attacks throughout Vietnam.

The pattern of periodic spurts in VC activity, plateauing out after a few weeks, was a familiar cycle during the war. In nearly every case, a major political event would spark the beginning of a cycle: a breakdown or revival of the deadlocked Paris talks; the beginning of another U.S. bombing campaign in North Vietnam; or a North Vietnamese attempt to discredit Thieu's periodic claims that all hamlets in South Vietnam would be under GVN control by the end of 1970.

The U.S.-GVN invasion of Cambodia was another such event. The North Vietnamese leadership ordered VC units in the south to go into action to take pressure off NVA forces retreating from their Cambodian sanctuaries deeper into Cambodia and northward into Laos.

In Lich Hoi Thuong District, the 74th VC mobile company and VC guerrilla squads came out of the Mangrove swamps along the My Thanh. They ramped up nighttime attacks in the district's southern pacification zone. VC senior political cadres and commanders were determined fighters. But their manpower had still not recovered from the 1968 Tet battles. They lacked ammunition and supplies. They could not sustain major operations for long, especially in the south- eastern Delta.

The VC attacks during late May and early June -like those at the outset of Major Sau's OB building period in early 1970 --mainly targeted Vien An village hamlets in the district south-center, and Lieu Tu village's hamlets in the district's far southwest. Major Sau shifted one of the district's RF Company from the coastal My Thanh OB to reinforce the RF company occupying the Lieu Tu-Tong Cong OB located just above the VC My Thanh sanctuary. He transferred one of his mobile PF platoons to reinforce the Giong Chat OB, a mile west of Tong Cong, only 2 miles above the My Thanh.

The predominantly ethnic Cambodian hamlet PSDF in the southern Lieu Tu and Vien An hamlets, backed up by nearby RF and PF in OBs, fought back. District H and I fire pummeled known VC movement routes day and night. Our district team called in air strikes to support besieged OBs.

The VC launched two company-size ground attacks on the Tra Ong OB near Vien An village center on May 15. The Chinese-Vietnamese OB commander, whom I had personally come to know, radioed for air cover. A U.S. gunship's arrival overhead ended

the first attack. A larger VC force took advantage of foggy conditions the following night to begin a second assault on the OB. This time the U.S. province air command responded that they were unable to help. Their air assets were tied up in other Ba Xuyen districts under VC attack that night.

I radioed my contacts at U.S. Navy Division 13 headquarters to ask if they could provide naval support from one of their ships. They responded affirmatively and moved a destroyer into position off the coast. I heard, very faintly at first, a Navy officer's voice crackling on our PRC-25 radio. Our voice communication got clearer as the destroyer moved closer to shore into firing position.

The officer asked me for the coordinates which I gave him. Amazingly, within minutes, we heard the sharp retort of shells from naval cannon as they landed precisely on the coordinates I had given. The VC attack abruptly ended.

During an informal radio conversation with the same navy officer after the VC retreated, I asked him how their destroyer's canon fire could be so accurate given the ocean waves rolling the ship. "Computers," he answered, then digressed into a detailed technical explanation that went over my head.

I sent a thank you letter to the Naval Support Division 13 commander, commending his command's critical support in driving back the VC attack on Tra Ong OB.

During the VC mini-offensive, the GVN IV CORPS commanding general convened a meeting of IV CORPS Province Chiefs and their PSAs in Can Tho. He warned the Province Chiefs of "severe punishment" if they lost any more OBs. His IV CORPS U.S. counterpart, Major General McGowan, urged stepped up military operations against VC-NVA infiltration routes, specifically mentioning along the My Thanh river in Lich Hoi Thuong and My Xuyen districts.

After the Can Tho meeting, Province Chief Colonel Ha and PSA Evans brought the 8 Ba Xuyen district chiefs and their DSAs together in Soc Trang. The regional training commander in Can Tho, General Hanh, was also present. They ordered heightened vigilance and increased district military operations. Dr. Evans told DSAs to tighten up security at their district and MAT team compounds. General Hanh instructed district chiefs to send 150 RF and PF recruits every month to training facilities in Can Tho to replace heavy losses suffered in the wave of VC attacks. The Nga Nam District Chief, who had just lost an OB, bravely stood up and remonstrated that the catholic priests in his district were impeding his ability to recruit RF and PF soldiers. General Hanh, a catholic himself, fell into embarrassed silence.

Back at our advisor compound, I or one of my senior NCOs walked the perimeter of our advisory compound every night, inspecting the barbed wire, concertina, knee-level tanglefoot wire, hanging cans and claymores.

The uptick in VC attacks overlapped with a visit by Kim to Lich Hoi Thuong.

Q: So they allow a spouse to visit?

TOMSEN: Yes. It seemed like a good time when scheduled before the upswing in activity! CORDS regulations allowed for a one day visit to post. I flew up to Can Tho and met Kim when she arrived at the Can Tho airport on an Air America flight from Saigon. We stayed at the CORDS hotel. I introduced Kim to John Vann at a reception that night. He offered his pilot and helicopter to fly Kim and me to Lich Hoi Thuong, and bring us back to Can Tho the same day.

The next morning, Vann's helicopter flew us to Lich Hoi Thuong. I introduced Kim to Major Sau and my advisory team. We boarded the team's Boston Whaler later-than-scheduled, to travel down the main district canal to Trung Binh Village on the coast. We planned to call on the young catholic priest at his lovely sea-side residence in Nha Tho hamlet. As good luck would have it, our meetings with Major Sau and members of my district team delayed our departure by two hours.

The priest and a PSDF honor guard warmly received us. We had a wonderful visit. We toured the hamlet and his beautiful Gothic seaside church followed by lunch at his residence. We then returned to our district advisory compound. Vann's pilot flew us back to Can Tho. The next morning, Kim and I caught an Air America flight back to Saigon.

Back in Lich Hoi Thuong a few days later, I learned that a VC squad had been hiding along the canal to ambush us that morning. When it got too late in the day and traffic along the canal increased, the squad picked up their weapons and left.

Major Sau and I were busy day and night keeping up with the flurry of enemy activity. I or Lieutenant Henrici accompanied Sau and Deputy District Chief, Captain Thuc, on multi-company operations in the district's southern zone. Local force commanders set up nightly ambushes.

In mid-May, MAT team leader, Lieutenant Speed, who was training PF and PSDF units in Trung Binh, told me about his concern that the newly appointed Trung Binh Village Deputy Chief for Security, Nguyen Van Diep, was not responding to the need for increased village defense measures. Diep had proven lazy and incompetent when commander of a PF platoon, the most underperforming one in Trung Binh. Once, a member of his platoon tossed a grenade into the compound of another PF platoon, wounding a soldier. In his more senior village security position, Diep was not obeying Major Sau's orders to step-up village patrols. His only strong point was his family tie to his brother-in-law, the Village Council Chairman.

On May 23, Speed sent me a written note hand-carried by one of his NCOs. He reported that he and two on his MAT team were accompanying two PF platoons led by Diep in a pacified hamlet of Trung Binh Village. An advance element of one of the PF units and the

two American advisors had already crossed a small canal when Diep ordered a halt and immediate return to Trung Binh center. PF in both platoons and Lt. Speed wanted to continue the patrol. But Diep said he feared the VC were ahead, beyond the canal. The two platoons and MAT advisors returned to Trung Binh.

On May 24, the next day, I instructed Speed to cease daily operations outside his OB by 1400 hours. I attached his note to an urgent letter to Dr. Evans. A team NCO carried the letter to Evans in Soc Trang. The letter informed the PSA that Sau and I agreed that Diep was failing to fulfill his security responsibilities during the VC offensive. He was also endangering the MAT team's security. Major Sau was separately reporting this same conclusion to Province Chief Ha. Sau and I both recommended that Diep be relieved. Dr. Evans concurred. So did Province Chief Ha. Diep was replaced by the aggressive Mo O PF commander.

June, 1970, was a happy month for our small but growing family. Our first child, daughter Kim-Anh, was born, premature, at the U.S. military's Third Field Hospital in Saigon on June 6th. I left Lieutenant Henrici in charge and flew to join Kim and Kim-Anh in Saigon, arriving the next day. The military hospital did not have a scale to weigh babies, so the doctor estimated her weight at six pounds. Healthy, happy, and active, she was released from the hospital after three days to come home to her grand-parents' family home at 210 Gia Long Street.

I flew back to the Delta to complete my tour, ending on July 18. The embassy authorized Kim to remain in Saigon until the baby was six-weeks old, mature enough to travel. The embassy in Bangkok helped pack out our belongings in Kim's apartment and prepare to send them to our next address somewhere in the Washington, D.C. area.

VC activity diminished during my absence. On the night of June 27, a group of some 40 VC briefly re-occupied the vulnerable Lieu Tu Hamlet of Giong Chat. Just a month earlier, Giong Chat's refugees had returned to plant the annual rice crop. The outnumbered hamlet PSDF force and the hamlet population fled to the nearby Tong Cong OB. The PSDF returned with 70 RF and PF troops and drove the VC back into their My Thanh mangrove swamp redoubt.

Following past patterns, the VC counter-offensive in Lich Hoi Thuong ran out of gas. Work on district civilian projects resumed in the district's south, including construction of the school in Giong Chat supported by our advisory team's AIK fund. My replacement, FSO Mike Owens, arrived in late June. We were able to enjoy a two-and-a-half week overlap.

Q: Practically when you're about to leave?

TOMSEN: That's right. The next month, on July 2, Major Sau, and Lieutenant Henrici boarded another Coast Guard cutter at Mo O in the early morning hours to carry out the second amphibious My Thanh operation mentioned by Major Sau back in January. Better

late than never. The cutter, again, was critical to achieving equally favorable results. The enemy was caught by surprise.

The Navy deployed its new OV-10A peculiar-looking “Black Pony” twin turboprop light attack aircraft to provide air cover for the riverine operation. I had never seen them—or anything like them—before. They swooped low over the mangroves firing their 4 mini-guns and dropping bombs on suspected VC bunker sites. The Coast Guard cutter leveled out its 81 mortars and 50 CAL machine guns, firing directly into suspected VC base areas.

There was only light contact with the enemy after the landing. A navy EOD team helped destroy numerous bunkers, seven sampans, and food supplies. District soldiers captured weapons and documents. Coast Guard sailors and Navy EOD team members joined them in scooping up VC flags and banners and other VC souvenirs. Deputy District Chief Thuc and I were in the welcoming blocking force to celebrate when Sau and Ken emerged from the mangrove tree line. I sent another letter to Naval Division 13 Headquarters commending their outstanding support given to this second successful district amphibious operation.

My successor, Mike Owens and I benefited from our overlap before I departed the district. I introduced him to members of my district and MAT teams. We visited all four villages and many hamlets in the district. Together with Major Sau, we met with village councils, hamlet chiefs, hamlet security chiefs, RF company commanders, platoon commanders and PSDF leaders. During meetings with Colonel Sau and his staff, we discussed the status, problems, and future direction of district pacification programs. We accompanied Sau on military operations and inspection visits to OBs. We watched Sau preside over local ceremonies. We went out on night ambushes and oversaw nighttime H&I fire operations.

Mike and I visited each of the U.S. CORDS military and civilian staff elements at province CORDS headquarters in Soc Trang to press the flesh, lobby for assistance and resolve district issues. Mike’s engaging personality, sunny disposition, and sturdy character representative of his native Texas ensured that he would do a great job as DSA in Lich Hoi Thuong District.

At the request of a “Mr. Askew” at DEPCORDS Colby’s CORDS headquarters in Saigon, I wrote a four-page analysis of CORDS operations at the district level as I had witnessed them, plus recommendations for the future. I reviewed the positive contributions CORDS had made since 1967. Vietnamization had advanced with U.S. help over the past 3 years. I suggested that “the process of dismantling CORDS to the point where it is a skeleton of what it is today should begin.” Our Vietnamese counterparts -military and civilian- were now thoroughly familiar with the pacification programs. Newly arrived U.S. CORDS military officers were advising Vietnamese counterparts who had more military experience than their American advisors. We should continue a CORDS advisory liaison function at the province level, but in areas where the

Vietnamese are the least efficient. For example, GVN military supply channels from Saigon down to hamlet PSDF militias. I recommended phasing district advisory teams down to one or two CORDS personnel as conditions permit, taking care to maintain confidence among the population that the U.S. was not abandoning Vietnam. At the end of his CORDS tour a year later, Mike advised province that Sau and his team were more than capable of dealing with the diminishing VC threat and implementing economic development. He proposed the termination of the district team on his departure in July, 1971. The CORDS Province Team agreed and implemented his recommendation.

The birth of our first child on June 6, 1970 had been an exceedingly happy moment!

Another happy moment occurred when, John Howard Burns, the Director General of the Foreign Service himself with one aide arrived, unexpected, to visit me in Lich Hoi Thuong at the end of June. His helicopter touched down on the team helipad near our hooch. He wore a business suit and tie. I thought it considerate of him to come all this way to meet with a DSA —not a title found in the State Department's personnel list! Ambassador Burns told me he was on a swing around South Vietnam to meet FSOs serving in CORDS. He had met DEPCORDS Colby in Saigon and John Vann in Can Tho. Both, he said, complimented the contribution the State Department's Foreign Service Officer cohort was making to CORDS success in South Vietnam. His Vietnam trip, he said, was to hear our views about our CORDS experience.

We talked for some two hours about my time in Ben Tranh and Lich Hoi Thuong. I answered his questions. Before departing, I was pleasantly surprised when he asked for my preferences on an ongoing assignment. I had not sent in my preferences, even though the assignment cycle was to begin in 2 months. I answered India, China and the Soviet Union, preceded by language training in each case. These assignment destinations had been in the back of my mind since entering the Foreign Service. I had set my sights on serving in the three great Eurasian states. I mentioned India, preceded by Hindi/Urdu language training, as first on the list. Since I spoke Nepali, which is closely related to Hindi/Urdu, I thought the 10-month Hindi-Urdu language training would be relatively easy and provide lots of extra family time following the 18 months CORDS field posting. Ambassador Burns and his aide then flew on to his next CORDS FSO stop.

On July 18, 1970, I signed over responsibility for the district team's equipment and personnel to Mike. I bid farewell to Mike, members of my advisory team, and Colonel Sau and drove to Soc Trang. Dr. Evans presented me with a Meritorious Honor Award at CORDS Province headquarters.

I flew to Saigon on July 20. On July 26, 1970, Kim, Kim-Anh, and I boarded Pan Am flight 1 destination Washington, D.C. and our next assignment: Hindi-Urdu language training at the Foreign Service Institute in Rosslyn.

Q: It's June 24th (2016) and we are concluding the portion of Ambassador Tomsen's tour in Vietnam (ending of the CORDS assignment).

TOMSEN: Yes, Kim and I and Kim-Anh flew back to Washington, D.C. We barely managed to find time to buy a house in Northwest Washington during the two-week hiatus between leaving Vietnam on July 26 and starting Hindi-Urdu/India Area Studies at the Foreign Service Institute, then located in Rosslyn, Virginia, on August 10.

I never imagined that in a little over 2 years-time, the State Department would send me and about 25 other former CORDS FSO veterans back to South Vietnam on TDY. We would be tasked with monitoring the implementation of the January 1973 peace agreement Secretary of State Kissinger and Politburo member Le Duc Tho had signed. Nor could I anticipate that in 1975 I would return to Saigon from India to evacuate Kim's family and other Vietnamese. Two decades later, when PDAS in the State Department's East Asia Pacific Bureau, 1993-1995, I supported EAP Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord's negotiations to establish official relations with the Vietnamese government. I made two trips to Hanoi for talks with Vietnamese Foreign and Defense Ministries to help advance that process. The normalization process concluded with our 1995 restoration of relations with Vietnam.

My 1969-1970 CORDS assignment gave me invaluable experience during my career derived from working within a U.S. military structure. I was immersed inside the military world -its hierarchy, its culture, its acronyms, call signs, how to lead, and how to follow, and so much else to note. I left the Vietnam CORDS assignment with profound respect for the U.S. military officers and NCOs I had the opportunity to work under and with--and also with great admiration for their professionalism, patriotism and commitment to serving their country in a wartime environment.

Subsequent to CORDS, I had no Foreign Service supervisory authority over any U.S. personnel during the next 11 years. I did not reach the level of management responsibilities commensurate with the Lich Hoi Thuong DSA position until appointed DCM at the American Embassy in Beijing, China, in 1985, fifteen years and five assignments later.

In a 2019 post-retirement conversation, Mike Owens and I speculated that the majority of CORDS civilian and military personnel during 1969-1973 believed that we and our Vietnamese counterparts were on the right side of the conflict. We had both volunteered for CORDS. We were motivated by patriotism and a drive to do our job and to do it well. Mike aptly captured our mood: "It seems doubly remarkable how we threw our younger selves into the challenges of the time!"

Most historians studying the Vietnam War agree that the successful CORDS-supported GVN pacification drive into South Vietnam's rural areas from late 1969 to 1973 had put communist forces in retreat for those years --giving the GVN time to concentrate on the next North Vietnam conventional offensive.

The remaining U.S. troops in-country had departed in March 1973. CORDS was also phased out in 1973. The Vital U.S. logistical and financial support continued to back GVN pacification expansion into the countryside.

The GVN's ongoing, successful chipping away at the remnants of VC control in rural areas and the South's ability to defend itself against the next expected Hanoi offensive remained dependent on that continued U.S. logistical and financial assistance during 1973 and 1974. In late 1974, the hopeful U.S. Vietnamization policy sustained for 6 years under administrations of both political parties was derailed when the Democratic Party controlled Congress' cut by more than half U.S. then ended military assistance to South Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was doubling military assistance to communist North Vietnam in preparation for Hanoi's massive conventional attack in 1975. Superior in manpower and firepower, the attack would overwhelm South Vietnam's capability to resist, fatally weakened by the Congress' severing of the lifeblood of U.S. military aid to the GVN.

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the young CORDS FSOs in my generation working at the district level probably had a range of sentiments regarding their CORDS assignment from "it was a waste of time" to bitterness that, at the end, American assistance to the GVN was dramatically shrinking, then terminated in early 1975 --at the same time that Soviet military aid to communist North Vietnam was dramatically escalating-- thereby denying South Vietnam's 20 million population a fighting chance to preserve their independence.

One last CORDS-related task I assigned myself to do back in Washington was to write a paper on the 9th Division's body-count strategy that needlessly took so many civilian lives and proved counter-productive to U.S. and GVN pacification objectives. I knew there was not much chance that the paper would influence the U.S. military's approach to Third World, political more than military, guerrilla wars. It was a depressing topic. But I wrote it in hopes it might spark Pentagon re-thinking about its military doctrine in Third World conflicts. Smart use of the rapier was more conducive to good results than routinely reaching for the sword.

Discipline is, of course, a top priority in military organizations. Disciplined use of firepower in the densely populated 3rd Brigade's AO could have contributed to the success of the GVN-U.S. pacification campaign. The 9th Division Commander in Dong Tam, Julius Ewell, and his 3rd Brigade commander in Tan An failed to exercise such discipline. The body-count approach was counterproductive to U.S. and GVN pacification goals.

Flying above Ben Tranh District and districts in Long An Province, 3rd Brigade helicopter crews gunned down livestock, shot peasants working in the field, or fired into hamlets killing civilians. We pleaded in vain with the 3rd Brigade senior officers to change the brigade's ROE (Rules of Engagement). But, the brigade's counterproductive military operations continued until it was withdrawn from Vietnam in October 1969.

After returning to Washington for language training, I wrote a 12-page “Lessons Learned” paper on why the U.S. military needed to change its ROE in guerilla wars to integrate political goals with military objectives. The title was “A Political-Military Perspective of U.S. Military Operations Abroad.”

Bruce Kinsey, a CORDS FSO who served in Long An from 1967 to 1970, in a letter dated April 12, 1971 described 3rd Brigade incidents in Long An Province that set back pacification progress in that province. I included one of his several examples in my paper. I cite verbatim below one of Bruce’s examples. It describes unfortunate confrontations between 3rd Brigade troops and hamlet dwellers in The Chu hamlet. The Chu was a pacified-rated hamlet in Thu Thua District on Highway 4 south of Tan An, near the Ben Tranh border. Bruce wrote:

It’s six o’clock in the evening. Stan Ifshin, another Vietnamese-speaking advisor from Thu Thua District (the DDSA), hotfoots it into my office. In tow is a Vietnamese officer, the well-known S-2 of Thu Thua District, who’s caught so many VC lately. A man from The Chu has come to see him, and he’s boiling mad. American soldiers from the 9th Division, 3rd Brigade, came through The Chu earlier that afternoon in a “sweep operation.” They search all the houses. They steal all the radios, some of which USAID placed in these homes earlier. When a village official from across the road comes over to protest, they slug him in the face and knock him to the ground.

There’s more. They take two of the prettiest girls in the hamlet. The girls protest, show their ID cards, claim they are not VC. The GIs rough them up and throw them into a jeep, heading off for Tan An.

The DDSA and the S-2 arrive shortly. The DDSA says it’s the first time in his life he’s really scared. The villagers shout. The PF tell him that they and the RF from the hamlet have had it. No more operations against the Viet Cong, they say. We’re staying here to protect our families from the Americans.

The DDSA says he’ll see what he can do.

At 9 o’clock that night, the girls were finally released. The GIs, maybe they’re scared of the consequence, had left the girls alone. They had put them in the Brigade’s “tiger cage” at HQ because they were “VC suspects.”

The radios are never found.

Through my complaints, which were long, loud, and often, a 3rd Brigade investigating officer eventually came down from the Brigade S-5, but as far as I know, no punishment was ever made.

After presenting some ground-level illustrations in Vietnam of why U.S. military ROE should change in fighting guerrilla wars, my paper suggested an organizational change—that the G-5 Policy and Planning staff be expanded to incorporate a new political-military specialty: uniformed political-military officers to advise brigade and division commanders on military tactics in the context of a guerrilla war underway.

I gave as an example 19th Century British military officers conversant in Indian languages and Indian political culture that had accompanied and advised British commanders in the field on political-military issues.

I concluded the paper with an appeal to recognize the importance of political factors in a guerrilla war.

“If this recognition is denied, then our government, our military services, the public and history itself must resign themselves to...situations (in future wars) similar to those described in the attached documents.”

In 1973, I sent my paper to a Pentagon policy office, not expecting a response. But a response did come. A polite middle-aged civilian in a suit and tie invited me to lunch at a stately restaurant inside the Pentagon. I don’t remember his name. He obviously had read the paper. I answered his questions, trying to be persuasive in the process. I never heard from him again.

So, my paper came to naught. But I still have a copy.

Q: It is interesting that somebody at a relatively high position gave it enough credence that they actually wanted to talk to you about it. But as so many larger think pieces that aren’t generated out of the administration or its appointee, you’re up against that. It’s coming from somebody who was not part of their decision-making group. And then, it’s also something that recommends a rather large change, both conceptual and practical, in how we handle these sorts of things. It’s kind of too bad, but ultimately what would have been great had it been possible would be if you could have turned it into a journal article or a small book. But time and we were on to the next thing and nobody wanted to bring them back.

TOMSEN: Yes. It might have helped to make our military intervention in Afghanistan more effective.

Q: I understood that in Afghanistan, at least maybe later, the whole notion of PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) did have that basic idea. In other words, PRTs often had a military element for security and defense but either an AID individual or an anthropologist or someone else was the lead for the interaction with the local Afghan town or council or whatever. Or do I have that wrong?

TOMSEN: That was the concept originally. In congressional testimony, I supported the creation of PRTs. In the end, the PRTs were made subordinate arms of the narrow U.S. military and CIA tactics in Afghanistan that ultimately failed, as had occurred in Vietnam.

CENTCOM and U.S. military commanders in Kabul turned the PRTs into province-level military components in the military chain of command in Afghanistan. The PRTs supported short-term, tactical military operations and tactical intelligence gathering in their provinces planned at higher levels. That entailed performing a liaison function with and materially supporting unpopular local warlords focused on aggrandizing their personal military influence.

So, the PRT concept failed in the implementation stage. It did not emulate the CORDS integrated military-civilian chain of command implementing one integrated strategy—a strategy designed to support the Afghan partner to accomplish overall political goals in a “People’s War” context. Instead, there were four or more separate policies pursued by the military, the CIA, the embassy and AID, each with their own budget, their own individually controlled assets, their own personnel.

Also, while there were a few exceptions, the PRTs never got down to the CORDS district “cutting edge” level --the level of the majority rural population where the war would be won or lost. State Department and military representatives who were assigned to the PRTs did their own agency thing separately. Afterwards, most concluded that the PRTs in Afghanistan were not effective.

The Department sent me back to Vietnam in 1973, 2 years into our 5-year India assignment. The India posting began in the late summer of 1971 in our New Delhi Embassy. I was first assigned to the embassy’s consular section as a visa-issuing officer. In the Fall of 1972, I was transferred to the U.S. Consulate General in Bombay to replace the political officer who was departing. Finally, 4 years after entering the Foreign Service, I received a standard political (POL) position where I could compete with peers in my POL cone.

By then, our second daughter Mai-Lan had been born. We became a family of four. Not to mention our three Lhasa Apsos -Dickie, Tashi, and Yanghi, that had Tibetan names.

We immensely enjoyed our Bombay posting. Our apartment balcony overlooked the Arabian sea. You could see the doves out there drifting lazily on the surface of the glimmering water. The evening sunsets on the distant horizon were stunning.

Bombay is the New York and Hollywood of India –the movie as well as the financial capital of the country. We were often invited to “Bollywood” functions because I was an American consul in town. Not the consul general, but one of four consuls in various specialties like consular, economic and so on.

On one occasion we were at a reception given by a Bollywood producer. His name was Sippy. He grabbed my arm and asked me to get into a photograph. I agreed. You always want to show the flag. I found myself standing next to Hema Malini who was a famous Indian movie star of the time. She smiled during her photo-op and I did too. She didn't seem interested in a follow-on conversation, so we just separated and filtered into the crowd of Bombay's elite party-goers. The party went on past midnight.

Several months later, on a visit to the Pokhara Nepal College where I had taught, my Nepali friend and former colleague, the History Professor, pulled out a copy of a Bollywood magazine, one of those glossy-style movie magazines. He pointed to the photo of me and Hema Malini on an inside page. My stock in his family quickly soared above that of a Peace Corps volunteer teacher.

Q: May I ask just one question about the whole Bollywood thing. This is the early '70s before Indian movies really become known in the U.S. Had there been connections between Bollywood and U.S. producers? Were you as a consul being importuned for visas so that some Indian actors or producers could go to the U.S. and do things related to film?

TOMSEN: Yes. All American consulate employees were hit up for visas. I was never asked to support visa applications for Indian movie actors going to the U.S. In those days, there was negligible demand for Indians from India in Hollywood films.

Q: The other humorous thing, having served in Eastern Europe, I talked to many people who fondly remember Bollywood movies, because when they were part of the Warsaw Pact or COMCON, Indian movies were some of the few foreign movies they were allowed to see. As much as those 1970s movies look a little silly to us, they were a breath of fresh air for the kids growing up in Poland, Romania, Hungary, the Soviet Union.

TOMSEN: That was so true in many parts of Asia, too. Afghanistan, Indonesia, Thailand, often places where Indians were a minority. The music is joyful. The plots are colorful. But they usually lack a linear storyline. There are no sexual scenes. The most you see is a young girl smiling, happily singing on the top of a hill. Then a young man appears to court her. He brings a rose up to her, and he is singing too. He might dance around her. Or, not touching, they dance in opposite directions! It was said that these simple scenarios, lots of music, dance, romance, but never a kiss or anything like that, appealed to the great bulk of the Indian population, young and old, who were poor to very poor. Bollywood movies provided a momentary escape from everyday hardship.

Our Bombay consulate general pressed Indian government officials and Bollywood directors hard to cease intellectual thefts of American movies. Bollywood movies would hijack an entire plot in successful American films like *Love Story*, a famous movie from that period. They translated it into Hindi and chose Indian actors to play the same parts with the same dialogues used in the American movie script. Jack Valenti, who was the head of the Hollywood Motion Picture Association (MPAA), came out once and

reinforced our complaints. But there wasn't much that could be done, given the lack of copyright agreements. India's politicians didn't want to interfere. The censors were very strict in Indian movies. That's probably one of the reasons why they were popular in Warsaw Pact countries in Eastern Europe.

The Bombay posting was free of the pressures one finds in a large embassy like Delhi, Beijing or Moscow. I wouldn't say the assignment was leisurely because we were always busy. We covered a consular district with 200 million people -Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (which means "Central Province") and Gujarat.

One of my responsibilities was to tour the consular district and meet with state governors, local leaders, reporters and ordinary citizens to report on economic and political conditions. In December, 1972, I was on one of those field trips, this one to Madhya Pradesh, in the jungled middle of India, with Kim and one Indian Foreign Service National (FSN) who worked in the consulate POL section.

Madhya Pradesh is one of the more impoverished states of India. It has its fair share of downtrodden untouchables, tribals, and lower castes. Towards the end of our trip we were in the Madhya Pradesh capital, Bhopal, on December 9, 1972, meeting officials. I just happened to pick up a copy of the local edition of *The Statesman* --a newspaper that dated back to the British colonial period. Inside the newspaper, I was surprised to see an article on the Kissinger negotiations to reach an agreement with the North Vietnamese on a resolution of the Vietnam War. As you know, Vietnamization was going forward. We were withdrawing. There was still a lot of domestic opposition in the United States to the Vietnam war. We were down to about 75,000 troops, from the peak of about 550,000 in mid-1968.

The newspaper article informed that, and I quote, "100 Foreign Service officers in Washington and abroad had been alerted to stand by to move to Vietnam immediately after a cease-fire agreement was signed --the mission of these officers will be to report on working of the cessation of hostilities in the areas where they will be stationed. Emphasis has been placed on calling up officers with Vietnamese or French language capabilities."

I told Kim that I couldn't see how I would be missed by whoever sifts through the personnel files of officers who have experience in Vietnam. Very likely, there would be something waiting for me in Bombay when we returned. In those days, there were no cell phones.

Later I learned that Ambassador William Sullivan, the State Department senior official with Kissinger in the secret Paris negotiations, had convened the meeting in the State Department. His audience was language officers in the Department selected to go back to Vietnam to report on the ceasefire after the agreement was signed. He told them at the beginning and the end of the meeting that the subject matter was highly sensitive and secret. Kissinger's negotiations, although largely completed, were still ongoing.

But, given this very juicy topic and in the all too familiar Washington tradition, Sullivan's comments were quickly leaked to the media. As you know, there's a section of the bottom floor of the State Department which is set aside for the press corps covering the State Department. A line of little booths with telephones in each booth was located not far from Sullivan's briefing room. Reporters move-sometimes rush-to the booths after the noon briefing to get their stories out. Someone at the briefing leaked Sullivan's comments, probably even before Sullivan got back to his office on the sixth floor! The story immediately became front page news in the U.S.

After returning to Bombay, I prepared a summary of the trip to Madhya Pradesh to present to the Consul General, David Bane, in his office filled with memorabilia from his long Foreign Service career. His previous appointment was Ambassador to Gabon. Bombay was his last career assignment. He looked like Anthony Eden. Tall, a white mustache and white hair, he was always well-dressed in a suit and tie. He was, as said in that era, "Old Foreign Service." One who viewed himself as having the responsibility to mentor younger officers like me. He was always very kind and included Kim and me in receptions and dinners he and Mrs. Bane hosted.

Q: That was also a moment of time in the Foreign Service in the early '70s when a DCM or Consul General could take the time to sit down with you and listen to an entire field report. Nowadays, you'd be lucky if your Consul General actually reads more than the summary.

TOMSEN: And that means few others will have enough time and interest to do so in Washington –except maybe for some in the intelligence community.

Q: Precisely. Unless it's something huge. You had mentioned you visited Bhopal. Of course, later on the chemical spill. I imagine had you been reporting on that, yeah, the Consul General would have taken time to listen. But otherwise, a regular field visit, that was another era.

TOMSEN: It was. Do you remember the State Department dispatches? I found many from the '50s and '60s in the consulate files. Long dispatches on 1950s crop production statistics; local food shortages; Congress Party politics; a visit to a military base. The classified dispatches would be placed in the diplomatic pouch for a 3 or 4 week sea journey to the Department.

Q: Whether they were read there or not? I think historians might have read them, but I'm not sure how many others.

TOMSEN: They may still be in the Department's archives! So, reflecting the disinterest in old field trip reports, Consul General Bane was not interested to hear about my trip report. He told me with a serious look that he had something else on his mind. He handed me a secret telegram from the State Department that basically repeated the contents of Sullivan's briefing I had read in *The Statesman*. The telegram started with a paragraph

stating the great importance that the Secretary of State and others in the government placed on reaching an early, just agreement with the North Vietnamese on a political settlement of the Vietnam War.

After I read the cable, the consul general asked if there was anything I would want him to do. He said he realized there was a very good possibility that some of the people being placed on standby to go to Vietnam would want to resist the assignment for personal or other reasons. It was his belief that the DCM in Delhi, Galen Stone, would be understanding in the matter and he himself would be glad to write any personal message directly to Washington on my behalf.

It was typically considerate of Ambassador Bane to offer me a way out of returning to Vietnam. And also natural that he would want to keep his political officer on station. But, I believed it should be my responsibility to comply if called upon, which I expected to happen. Kim was already packing to fly with our daughters to Saigon to visit her parents, as we did each year.

Thanking Ambassador Bane for his concerns, I responded that, given the importance of a Vietnam peace agreement among our foreign policy goals, I thought I should return to Vietnam if ordered to do so. He generously responded that this kind of attitude would probably make the assignment much more fulfilling as well as enjoyable. He added that Bombay was of less than marginal significance to American foreign policy at the time.

A second and third cable arrived from the State Department the next day providing more detail on the TDY assignment. TDY personnel would receive per diem plus an allowance for working in a combat zone. I would be assigned to one of the four newly-established consulates general in the four regional capitals of Vietnam, coinciding with the four military regions. I assumed I would work out of the consulate general in Can Tho and cover parts of the Lower Delta where I had served in CORDS.

Still in Bombay, I was not able to discover the full text of the agreement from press reports and department cables reporting on Kissinger's negotiations. In my diary entry of December 11, 1972, the same day I met Consul General Bane, I was skeptical that the accord could work. The U.S. had minimal leverage to compel Hanoi to honor its commitments. The North Vietnamese had failed in their Spring offensive in 1972 to overrun South Vietnam. They had taken heavy casualties. We liberally used B-52 bombing to hit large clusters of their forces invading South Vietnam. The threat of renewed U.S. bombing of Hanoi, Haiphong and other areas of North Vietnam, and the approaching November 1972 U.S. presidential elections probably factored into Hanoi's decision to reach agreement in the secret talks.

The North Vietnamese were likely worried about trends favorable to the U.S. in the triangular relationship among the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union. The Sino-Soviet split had widened since 1969 when Soviet and Chinese forces clashed on the Ussuri River separating the Siberian border with Chinese Manchuria. The Chinese were beginning to

move towards the U.S. That reinforced our containment policy against the Soviet Union. In early 1972, Nixon and Kissinger went to China and signed a number of agreements including the Shanghai Communiqué. We began selling U.S. arms to China. Nixon's productive summit in Moscow later in 1972 upgraded U.S.-Soviet relations. That added to our geo-political flexibility in the trilateral relationship.

The North Vietnamese, no doubt, monitored warming U.S. ties with Russia and China. The Soviet Union was their quartermaster. Soviet arms, military supplies and food and much else flowed into Haiphong harbor by ships coming from Vladivostok. That supply chain was critical to their military operations. But, I recorded in my diary, if history was any guide, this would not deter the North Vietnamese from their long-term goal of uniting all of Vietnam under their control. The Paris negotiations were just another tactical zigzag on the path towards that strategic objective. The South Vietnamese for their part would dig in their heels against any provision that would qualify their legal status as a government.

Q: Based on your descriptions in the past, they kind of waxed and waned because the North Vietnamese were obdurate and not interested at first, but as these other geopolitical things began -the U.S. recognition of China and so on- they became a little more interested in real negotiating.

TOMSEN: Yes. I think their supposition was that the Americans are not like the French, even though there's tremendous domestic pressure in the United States on Nixon and Kissinger. The Americans were slowly reducing their force size in Vietnam to satisfy the public and Congress. The war could go on for a lot longer and possibly evolve into a Korea-like stalemate where American air power would stand in reserve to hammer future NV invasions.

So, to get the Americans out more quickly, they temporarily switched focus to diplomacy, concluding a 1954 Geneva-type agreement, which they did not intend to implement. As with the French in the 1950s, that entailed giving ground on some American demands in return for a time-bound date for early American military withdrawal of U.S. ground forces, air and naval assets inside South Vietnam.

The American-North Vietnamese negotiations in Paris had remained deadlocked from mid-1968 to May 1972 when both sides had reason to break the logjam. There were two sets of talks: public and secret. The public U.S.-NV Foreign Ministry channel started in mid-1968 in Paris when I was in Vietnamese language training. In mid-1970, when I was DSA in Lich Hoi Thuong, Kissinger began a second, highly secret, set of talks in Paris with Le Duc Tho. Tho was considered to be the member of the North Vietnamese Politburo closest to Le Duan. The GVN was not aware of the secret channel, nor were the media. The Nixon Administration hid them very well.

Prior to May, 1972, the North Vietnamese had tenaciously insisted that the U.S. satisfy 2 preconditions: announce a date certain for its military withdrawal and remove President

Thieu and his regime from power. The U.S. preconditions were that Hanoi had to withdraw all of its forces from South Vietnamese territory, accept the Thieu regime as the governing authority in South Vietnam, return U.S. POWs, and participate in democratic elections to choose a new South Vietnamese leadership.

In May 1972, Nixon and Kissinger moved to break the deadlock, six months before the U.S. presidential elections. Kissinger informed Tho in Paris that the U.S. would now accept a stand-alone ceasefire in South Vietnam, thereby dropping the U.S. precondition that Hanoi must withdraw its troops from South Vietnam. Tho disingenuously agreed to Kissinger's demand that Hanoi would not augment the size of its forces in the South or inside their Laos and Cambodian sanctuaries after the ceasefire began.

On October 21, only a few weeks before the November U.S. elections, Tho, in response, abandoned his precondition that the U.S. remove the Thieu regime. He agreed to the GVN's role as a formal participant in the ceasefire and elections. Kissinger accepted Tho's demand that the North Vietnam- controlled VC political arm, the PRG (People's Revolutionary Government) could also become a full party to the implementation of the Paris Peace Agreement.

On October 22, an emotional chain reaction erupted when the U.S. briefed the unknowing Thieu in Saigon about the contents of the Paris Accord. Thieu passionately denounced the U.S. concessions. In a radio broadcast, he accused the U.S. of sabotaging the peace settlement. The North Vietnamese angrily cut off the Paris talks and published parts of the agreement.

On December 18, Nixon launched an intensive 11-day bombing campaign which mostly emphasized Hanoi and Haiphong. U.S. aircraft mined the harbor at Haiphong to cut off most Soviet military material coming to North Vietnam. That severe bombing campaign compelled the North Vietnamese Politburo to resume the talks, and on January 23rd, the negotiations resumed in Paris between Tho and Kissinger. On January 27th, the agreement on "Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam," was signed by representatives of the U.S., NV, SV and the VC/PRG. The agreement went into effect the next day, January 28.

In December, Nixon sent letters and emissaries to Thieu, reassuring him that if North Vietnam violated the Paris Accord, he would again take severe retaliatory action against Hanoi. He also pledged to continue U.S. military and economic aid to South Vietnam.

What I am going to do next is give you the main provisions in the Paris Agreement that I and the other TDYers needed to know to carry out our responsibilities.

First, the ceasefire institutions: There were 2: the Joint Military Commission (JMC) and the International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS). Together, these two commissions were to supervise the ceasefire, investigate and resolve ceasefire violations.

The 4 signatories to the Paris Agreement were the members of the JMC --the U.S., NV, the GVN and the VC/PRG. Representatives of Canada, Indonesia, Poland and Hungary sat on the ICCS.

The headquarters of the JMC and the ICCS were at “Camp Davis,” next to the well-guarded U.S. military sector of Tan Son Nhut airport. Housing and dining facilities were located there. Subordinate branches of the JMC and ICCS were to be established in South Vietnam’s 4 regional capitals, and below them, 7 provincial capitals.

ICCS representation was mostly military but also included some civilians. The 4 ICCS delegations were balanced between non-communist and pro-communist nations –Canada and Indonesia on one side, Poland and Hungary on the other. The in-country ICCS structure exactly paralleled the JMC structure from Saigon down to the province level.

In the event of ceasefire violations, the JMC was empowered to direct the ICCS to investigate. The ICCS was to send their findings upward to JMC offices. In number, the JMC and ICCS personnel in country grew to a whopping 4,200.

The U.S. military withdrawal was to be completed within 60 days, “X+60,” dating from January 28, 1973 to March 28, 1973. North Vietnam was to return all American POWs by that deadline. The 16,000 U.S. military advisors in South Vietnam would also withdraw by that date. That would include the U.S. military officers assigned to the JMC. They, too, would depart by X+60.

North Vietnamese military personnel would simultaneously withdraw with the departing U.S. military representatives from the JMC at X+60. That would leave only the GVN and VC representatives to conduct JMC operations. A forlorn hope was that the reduced JMC membership would become a forum for GVN-VC reconciliation.

Other provisions in the Paris Agreement limited NVN and GVN troop replacements to a one for one ratio; respect for the DMZ as a demarcation line; creation of a national conciliation committee of the 3 Vietnamese sides to organize elections; and the convening of an international conference within 30 days to guarantee the Paris Agreement.

I departed Bombay for Vietnam on January 29, 1973. Kim and the girls had already gone ahead. They would be with her parents in Saigon, not marooned in Bombay for the duration of the TDY.

Q: So there was enough of a sense of security that both the Department and you felt you could have your family there during this time?

TOMSEN: Yes. Kim would be with her parents. Our children would get to know their grandparents and learn to speak Vietnamese.

Kim and her father met me when I arrived at Tan Son Nhut airport on January 29, 1973. We drove to the family home at 210 Gia Long Street. On February 1, a Wednesday, I checked into the Embassy Personnel Section to fill out various forms, financial and so on. I was given a PX Commissary card that would only be good for two months since all U.S. military will have departed by that time. The personnel officer informed me and other incoming TDYers that it was “the decision of the embassy” that all of us had to be at our assigned posts in the regions within 48 hours.

Q: So it's July 14th (2016), happy Bastille Day. Returning to Ambassador Tomsen's connection with Vietnam.

TOMSEN: Thanks, Mark. So I spent the entire day at the American Embassy in Saigon after arriving from India the previous day, January 29, a day after the Paris Accord went into effect.

As mentioned in the last interview, my first stop was Personnel. I received my marching orders to fly to the Region IV capital, Can Tho, within 48 hours. I went to the cashier and converted \$150 into Vietnamese piasters, then wandered over to the Political Section to meet political officers stationed there and other TDY FSOs who had arrived and were about to go out to the provinces to report on the ceasefire.

I sought out a friend, David Schiele, a specialist on North Vietnam in the political section. We had studied Vietnamese together at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) five years previously. I went off to India after my 18- months CORDS tour. David went to a university for one year to study Southeast Asia, which of course included Vietnam. He served as the North Vietnam specialist in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) after that academic year. He was then transferred to the embassy's political section in Saigon.

David described Hanoi's 1972 Spring Offensive that began in April and extended into the summer. The NVA's surprise attack enjoyed initial success, overrunning the northernmost province of Quang Tri near the DMZ ARVN's 1st Division stopped its advance at Hue, the historic-cultural capital of Vietnam. Multiple NVA columns struck from Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries into the Central Highlands, seeking to seize one or more provincial capitals to claim a PRG or VC province they administered inside South Vietnam. Hanoi's offensive was defeated and driven back across the border by U.S. B-52 bombing and South Vietnamese ground forces.

Q: I'm recalling at that time the use of the expression “carpet bombing.” Was that actually what was going on?

TOMSEN: Carpet bombing to my knowledge was part of the American military's failed strategy before the Vietnamization policy that replaced it. Carpet bombing alienated the Vietnamese population. I heard but can't confirm that, for the first time in combat, the U.S. used precision-guided lasers to pinpoint ground targets during Hanoi's 1972

offensive. Foreign observers were amazed at the ability of precision-guided munitions to largely avoid civilian casualties while bombing military targets in North Vietnam.

John Vann personally played a major role in defeating Hanoi's 1972 offensive. In 1971, he had been transferred from IV to II CORPS. He was given full advisory responsibility in military as well as civilian areas in II CORPS. From his helicopter above the battlefield, he radioed targeting information to B-52s and South Vietnamese artillery. He guided South Vietnamese regiments to reinforce troops defending provincial capitals. During a final battle near Ban Me Thuot while the North Vietnamese forces were retreating, Vann's helicopter crashed. He was one of the few American heroes who died during the long Vietnam War.

David assessed that the performance of ARVN in defeating Hanoi's offensive was impressive. Retreating North Vietnamese forces had hung on to a few border enclaves in the Central Highlands. The former Marine base at Khe Sanh in the north became a contested area. The North Vietnamese suffered tremendous casualties. The U.S. military estimated over 60,000 dead. South Vietnamese were 20,000 dead. We lost about 600 because we had already downsized to a great extent.

The highlight of the busy day at the embassy was the invitation from Ambassador Bunker to 6 TDYers, including myself, to meet with him in the late afternoon. Joe Bennett, the embassy political minister-counselor and number 3 ranking embassy officer, briefed us in mid-afternoon.

Bennett reviewed the history of the Paris negotiations and the main provisions of the agreement. In addition to our ceasefire reporting responsibilities, he tasked us with reporting military, political, and economic developments in the provinces we covered. He asked us to do occasional think-pieces on broader trend lines in our areas and recommend proposals for U.S. policy. He ended his comments with some foreboding vibes –neither he nor anyone in the embassy believed all parts of the Paris Agreement would be honored. Hopefully, it would “start something that would eventually lead to more lasting peace.” He concluded with the thought that “the Soviet Union and China might play a hand in this.” That turned out to be wishful thinking.

Ambassador Bunker led off his meeting by stating that our reporting from the provinces would be read with great interest by President Nixon and other senior officials in the national security apparatus. Turning to the South Vietnamese reservations about the Paris Agreement, the Ambassador seemed to reveal, albeit faintly, that Nixon and Kissinger had conceded too much at the secret talks. Bunker recalled that in November 1972 when the negotiations were largely finished, “Our friends were more obstinate at that time than our enemies. Some significant changes had to be made in the draft due to President Thieu's insistence.” The South Vietnamese, he told us, “were also unhappy that the North had not been required to withdraw from South Vietnam. That had been our demand for many years until mid-1972 when the 1972 North Vietnamese offensive was still underway.”

Q: And we were drawing down and so really would not be able to do more than stop the advance rather than pushing back.

TOMSEN: Yes. Ambassador Bunker told us “there was little that could be done about this.” He stated that we pointed out to the South Vietnamese that they had almost one million regular troops under arms and almost one-half million in local forces. Northern forces comprised about 145,000 and, “about 45% of the VC regiments numbering 10,000 to 20,000 in South Vietnam were filled with NVA regulars. The South today is much superior in airpower, naval assets, and logistics. It is therefore a logical deduction that the South Vietnamese will be able to defend themselves.”

The ambassador asked us to monitor closely the two international bodies that would be supervising the ceasefire, the JMC and the ICCS, and to report our findings.

Ambassador Bunker then gave the floor to DCM Whitehouse (the father of the current Senator Whitehouse). He told us we would not be expected to go into North Vietnamese and VC controlled areas, but it would be useful for us to send in reporting from others that do.

He next listed the seven inter-provincial JMC/ICCS headquarters, including Soc Trang in region 7, where I would be stationed. The Americans and the North Vietnamese would be part of the JMC until X+60.

Whitehouse predicted that ICCS investigations of ceasefire violations would likely suffer from divisions between the communist and non-communist ICCS members. This split will be reflected in their reports sent forward to the JMC, which itself will be divided. The Canadians had suffered frustrations with the Indians and the Poles in the Geneva Conference-created ICC. They have told us that they may pull out of the ICCS at X+60 if the same problems paralyze the ICCS.

Q: The date of X+60?

TOMSEN: Yes. You’ll recall that the Paris Agreement Treaty called for the U.S. to complete its military withdrawal from Vietnam by a date certain, X+60. So, X+60 denoted March 28, 1973 -60 days after the January 27 Agreement went into effect on January 28. The Agreement also required the X+60 departure of the U.S. military representation on the 4 party JMC in Saigon, the 4 regional JMCs, and the 7 provincial JMC offices. The North Vietnamese military would also pull out of the JMC at X+60. The GVN and VC representatives would remain on the JMC –theoretically to explore paths to reconciliation.

The Paris agreement limited the U.S. uniformed military presence in South Vietnam to the diplomatic DAO contingent in the U.S. Saigon mission. The DAO contingent grew to

800 plus, not counting U.S. military contractors. Their main function was managing the flow of U.S. military aid to South Vietnam after the U.S. military withdrawal.

The following day along with 3 other TDY FSO colleagues I boarded a flight to Can Tho. While leaving Saigon, I felt gratitude about the high-level attention Ambassador Bunker, DCM Whitehouse, Counselor Bennet and the POL section had given us at the onset of our TDY.

In Can Tho we stayed at the new U.S. consulate general compound –one of 4 established in each of SV regional capitals at the old CORDS compound.

Tom Barnes, a senior Foreign Service officer and Southeast Asia specialist was the new Consul General and our boss. He received us in his office next door to the old CORDS hotel. He handed out our responsibilities for the next six months. I would be based in Soc Trang, Ba Xuyen Province. Soc Trang, sometimes known as Khanh Hung, would host the interprovincial region 7 JMC/ICCS contingents.

From Soc Trang, I would cover Lower Delta provinces, Ba Xuyen and its southern neighbor, Bac Lieu Province. When possible, I would monitor events in An Xuyen Province at the far southern tip of Vietnam and its capital, Ca Mau. Tom asked us to report on the ceasefire and other developments in our assigned areas. Our reporting messages would be sent directly to the embassy from Can Tho and onward to Washington. Or, they would be tucked into the consulate general's daily situation report, which was cabled to the embassy and Washington consumers.

Q: These were all unclassified?

TOMSEN: No, all classified.

Q: Oh. We had classified communications?

TOMSEN: Yes. We wrote our reports out in long hand. USAID civilians still in the province or we TDYers would act as couriers. The drive from Soc Trang to Can Tho took about two hours. Or, we could fly to Can Tho using the CIA-managed Air America planes. The Can Tho consulate's secretaries typed up our hand-written reports. The consulate's code room then encrypted the messages and transmitted them to Saigon and to Washington. Tom Barnes repeated Joe Bennet's request that we occasionally send in longer analyses on political-economic developments in our areas –basically classified airgrams.

Q: The reason I'm surprised is you had no access to encryption where you were. You literally had to do all this by hand and then it got encrypted back in a secure area? Wow.

TOMSEN: Exactly. Once I sent a “think piece” -a long airgram- to the consulate. It got stuck in the back of one of the file drawers and was never typed up! Everyone was busy during the TDY!

Q: The very old Foreign Service. An airgram is a longer piece that you would write on “with South Vietnam?” It would be many pages: - typically unread. You would write it and get credit for it.

TOMSEN: Maybe in INR they’d read it. And perhaps the CIA. You were lucky if the contents found their way into a policy document. Our reporting from the field would be based mainly on our meetings with province and district chiefs, local officials, business owners, religious leaders, ordinary Vietnamese, whether pro-GVN or not.

We TDYers were returning to provinces and districts where we had worked only a few years before. We knew well numerous Vietnamese in those areas. In Ba Xuyen, I sat in on Soc Trang daily military operations (S-3) and intelligence (S-2) briefings. I met privately with province officials and Lich Hoi Thuong District officials. We had known each other from my Lich Hoi Thuong DSA posting 2 years previously. Most were still there!

On February 17th, Tom Barnes sent us a memo noting that on February 15th the 4 old regional CORDS compounds in South Vietnam had formally become the 4 U.S. Consulates General. CORDS, in effect, was phased out as an organization. AID civilians continued to support the GVN to carry on its pacification policy with U.S. logistical and financial support. They also were now under the umbrella of the 4 new consulates general.

TDYers would carry the title of vice consul. The consulate general (which I will hereafter render as “consulate”) would be provided calling cards. We would receive a modest representation fund to host functions for Vietnamese and foreign guests. During the next six-month TDY, I and other TDYers in the Delta would communicate by radio with the consulate and with each other. We worked seven days a week, 10 or more hours a day. It was a fascinating time and assignment. Vietnam was turning a page in its tragic modern history. So was the United States. Events we saw and experienced were part of that evolution.

Q: Here is on the ground what is the success of Henry Kissinger’s realist, balance-of-power foreign policy, that Nixon went along with and bought hook, line, and sinker. Address the larger strategic issues and let the smaller ones fall where they may.

TOMSEN: We certainly witnessed events at the lowest level! Back in the U.S., domestic political pressures on the Nixon Administration continued in the Democratic controlled anti-war Congress. According to the annual Gallup Poll, 50% of Americans considered the Vietnam war a mistake.

Q: And happily back then, polling could not be troubled by social media; polls were reliable to the extent that they used the proper methodology and so on.

TOMSEN: Yep. So I drove to Soc Trang after the introductory meetings with the consul general and his staff. I rented a two-bedroom townhouse on a very busy street. Lots of cyclos, bicycles, women in *non la* (conical hats), men in normal attire or black pajamas going by, chickens squawking, etc. Soc Trang was a typical South Vietnamese provincial town in Ba Xuyen Province, with a population of a half-million.

I arranged for a U.S. helicopter to take me on an initial swing through my general area of reporting responsibility, with a first stop in Ca Mau, the capital of An Xuyen. An Xuyen was the remote, southern most Vietnamese province. The helicopter landed on the helicopter pad next to the former CORDS An Xuyen compound, surrounded by concertina and watchtowers. The oppressive humidity in the air explained why there were not many people around, American or Vietnamese. After a short briefing we lifted off. I spent the remainder of the day catching up on developments in Bac Lieu Province.

Back in Ba Xuyen Province, my first meeting was with my old CORDS counterpart, Major, now Colonel, Sau. It was a pleasant reunion. We had developed close personal relations during the nine months we worked together in Lich Hoi Thuong District, he as District Chief. I was the DSA. He was now in Soc Trang, preparing to be the senior South Vietnamese military officer on the Soc Trang JMC after the Americans and North Vietnamese left on X+60.

In a Soc Trang café, Sau, as always, got right to the point. On the upside, he said he looked forward to working with the VC representative to the Soc Trang JMC after the Americans and North Vietnamese ended their participation on March 28.

Q: What happened to him?

TOMSEN: Towards the end of my TDY, he was transferred.

Colonel Sau was hopeful that the Paris Accords would work. He would try to generate forwarded progress in the 2 party GVN-VC Soc Trang JMC. That would have a positive effect on lowering tensions and organizing elections in Ba Xuyen Province. Although he and other provincial officials had never met local VC commanders, they had conversed with them on the radio and exchanged communications in writing over the years. So, they knew each other.

If an election were held, he insisted, there would be no doubt as to the winner: the government of South Vietnam. The Viet Cong would get less than 15% of the vote in Ba Xuyen. The Cambodians, about 40% of Ba Xuyen's population, would vote for the government. The Cambodian Buddhist leaders opposed the VC.

On the ceasefire, Sau stated that the government was not going into VC base areas as a policy because of the agreement. However, if the VC attempted to make incursions into government territory, the provincial forces would unleash a vigorous response into their base areas. This was happening right now, he complained. Au said that the raising of a VC flag anywhere in the province was an invitation for artillery fire. This had happened on several occasions until the VC flag was either lowered or destroyed by artillery fire.

Colonel Sau's statements about the government's attitude toward maintaining the ceasefire were not surprising and not reassuring. They did coincide with a consulate briefing that the incidents of NV/VC violent land-grabbing attempts just before and after the ceasefire suggested they had the same mindset. In the days before the ceasefire, the North Vietnamese came out of Cambodia and into Tay Ninh Province, only about 30 miles west of Saigon. They attempted to grab the Tay Ninh provincial capital. South Vietnamese troops pushed them back into Cambodia.

On February 9, I attended the province chief's daily briefing. The S-3's huge wall map depicted in red dots several VC-controlled spots, far smaller than was actually the case. Likewise, the GVN-VC contested areas' color—about 8% of the province—was much less than reality dictated. Altogether, the map unrealistically projected GVN control of 96% of Ba Xuyen territory.

The briefer considered that new GVN OBs could be constructed anywhere in GVN-VC contested space that the briefer claimed. He described plans to build 10 new OBs near the VC-controlled red dots in the summer, and 10 more by the end of 1973. Most, if not all, would certainly penetrate what the VC would claim to be VC or contested territory. Any territory outside of the miniaturized VC spots, therefore, was subject to South Vietnamese military operations.

The briefer described GVN multi-regiment military operations as “security patrols,” even though they would involve several hundred troops. The briefer also detailed air and artillery support for the “security patrols” pushing into VC base areas.

After the briefing, I called on Thach Piech, a senior Cambodian monk in the lower Delta, at his large, ornate pagoda. I had met him previously during my CORDS assignment. He was surrounded by younger monks, sitting cross-legged around him. Thach Piech stated that, like other religious minorities, the Cambodians opposed the VC. Cambodians would support President Thieu if elections were held. But, he declined to endorse Thieu's newly-formed Democratic Party. Ever mindful of acquiring maximum maneuverability regarding Vietnamese generally, he told me with a smile: “The Buddhist Temple is the political party of the Cambodians.”

After more meetings in Soc Trang, I drove to my old district, Lich Hoi Thuong, to elicit opinions from friends and acquaintances I had known when I was the DSA. The drive was bumpy and slow. Upgrading the road from Soc Trang to Lich Hoi Thuong had been made the number one priority self-development project in Ba Xuyen Province at the time

I departed in 1970, at a cost of \$47 million in Vietnamese piasters. Now it was worse than ever, including when I had first arrived in the district. Barriers of mud piles, deep potholes, broken culverts indicated that most of the appropriated money had been siphoned off by corrupt officials in the province and district.

Q: So what's going on now with the ceasefire, both the South Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, essentially North Vietnamese soldiers pretending to be Viet Cong, are maneuvering and trying to get the best strategic position for when the Americans finally leave, bearing in mind what all that means?

TOMSEN: During the TDY in Ba Xuyen and Bac Lieu provinces, I did not find any evidence of the kind of North Vietnamese infiltration that had been filling the ranks of the VC in the upper Delta's Ben Tranh District. Some of my contacts in Lich Hoi Thuong District thought VC activity did increase slightly during the NVA '72 offensive. I was told that, at that time, VC snipers in the mangrove swamps along the district's My Thanh River border with Bac Lieu Province shot at swimmers at the Mo O beach resort.

But, those whom I interviewed in the district during this first visit thought that the districts' RF, PF, and PSDF forces still had the upper hand. As you recall, the government's construction of the string of OBs, built and manned during 1970 and 1971, above the VC sanctuaries in the My Thanh mangrove swamps kept the VC on the defensive. Nearly all of those southern OBs and adjoining hamlets were now occupied by ethnic Cambodians, who were very anti-VC. Mike Owens later told me that the security situation continued to improve through the end of his tour as DSA ending in July, 1971.

During Mike's tenure after I departed, the Seabees and district road workers built a road from Lich Hoi Thuong district center to the Mo O beach resort on the South China Sea. Hundreds from the district and as far as Soc Trang came to enjoy the surfing and seafood on weekends. Mike and his team showed open air American movies at the district government compound every week. Some such as "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" drew crowds of people. Children would call out to Mike: "Ong Thieu Ta! 'Butch Cassidy' mot lan nua!" (Mr. Major, 'Butch Cassidy' one more time please!).

The Lieu Tu village chief, an ethnic Cambodian, greeted me warmly when I drove up. He proudly escorted me through the recently renovated village market center. He quickly organized an impressive walk-by review for the 2 of us past a hastily assembled line of PSDF standing at attention in black with their M-2 carbines at shoulder-rest, grenades hanging from their belts. The village chief was a retired army sergeant from the elite Vietnamese 1st Division in I CORPS. Lieu Tu's 7 hamlets, guarded by his PSDF units, stretched south from the My Xuyen Road down to the VC mangrove sanctuaries on the My Thanh.

At the end of February, I returned to Lich Hoi Thuong for a longer visit to dig deeper into the post-ceasefire situation in an area I was familiar with. Captain Tong, the former military deputy to Colonel Sau in the district government, was now a businessman in

Lich Hoi Thuong village. He bluntly stated that, “The war will continue until one side, the government or the Communist will win.” There would be no elections. He predicted that the government would defeat the next big North Vietnamese offensive. That might lead to some form of accommodation. He disparaged the ceasefire and attempted a political settlement.

My meeting with my always-informed friend, the catholic priest in Nha Tho (“Church”) hamlet in coastal Trung Binh Village was the highlight of the day. I arrived at his home during the afternoon “snooze hour.” I sent my vice-consul calling card ahead with a messenger to alert him that I was standing outside.

Smiling broadly and carrying a bottle of wine, he soon emerged, clothed in a black vest with a white collar. We stepped over to a pleasant sitting area in his garden. During our frank conversation, he spoke with the confidence of one who remained in close touch with high-ranking government and military officials in Saigon. He correctly anticipated that the North Vietnamese would use the ceasefire to strengthen their military position in Laos and Cambodia. Instead of allowing elections which they would surely lose, they would attempt another invasion in 1974 or 1975. He echoed Captain Tong’s prediction that the South would repel the invasion.

He agreed with my speculation that much of the money designated for the Soc Trang–Lich Hoi Thuong road had been pocketed by government officials. Surprisingly, he also seconded my conjecture that President Thieu was a skillful politician but corruption might prove to be his undoing. He recalled that Thieu in his Vietnamese New Year’s message a couple of weeks earlier had vowed to “cleanse” the government. The priest predicted that President Thieu would deliver an appeal for national unity later and return to the issue of corruption. He then leaned forward and declared: “If he doesn’t, he will have to go.”

Q: So there were some very clear-eyed people at local levels who really understood what was going on?

TOMSEN: Yes, very many of them. Government corruption, sometimes venal corruption, was Thieu’s biggest problem.

On my return to Soc Trang from my second visit to Lich Hoi Thuong, I reported to Can Tho that preparations to receive the JMC and ICCS delegations in Soc Trang were in disarray. The U.S. JMC Lieutenant Colonel due shortly to depart Vietnam at X+60 (March 28) and a DOD civilian contractor were the only ones working to assemble the JMC/ICCS office and housing facilities. Ba Xuyen Province officials did not seem interested. The North Vietnamese and VC JMC contingents had not arrived.

The organizational confusion was not limited to JMC/ICCS sub-regional headquarters in Soc Trang. That was evident as early as January 28, the day the Paris Agreement was supposed to go into effect. On that day, a 14-member VC delegation landed at Tan Son

Nhut Airport on an American-piloted C-130. The VC delegation refused to sign the GVN immigration forms. There was a 20-hour standoff while the VC sat in the C-130. Finally, American-driven black limousines pulled up plane-side. The VC delegates got into the limousines; their baggage was loaded up. They were driven to their heavily guarded, prison-like, Camp Davis compound inside the airport. The same impasse took place when the North Vietnamese delegation arrived from Hanoi the next day, also on an American C-130. They were driven directly to the site of the first JMC meeting after an eight-hour standoff.

The South Vietnamese in the aircraft control tower at Tan Son Nhut air base had instructions to harass the Soviet Ilyushin plane that had come in with the Hungarian ICCS delegation. It prevented the Hungarian plane from departing on the basis that its pilot had not paid the \$280 equivalent in piasters parking fee. An American colonel intervened and the fee was waived. The Ilyushin was allowed to taxi back to the runway. The control tower kept it there, engines running, for three more hours before it could finally take off.

In the following weeks, JMC and ICCS airplanes and helicopters, with white markings to identify them, occasionally encountered ground fire. In April, a Canadian officer died when an ICCS helicopter was shot down. In Pleiku, an angry mob stoned a VC delegation and its American escort when it attempted to drive into the city. The delegation returned to Saigon.

The North Vietnamese and VC reacted by refusing to disperse their JMC representatives from their 4 main regional headquarters' compounds to the 7 provincial sub-headquarters, including Soc Trang.

On X+60, February 28, the U.S. Lieutenant Colonel who had been the U.S. representative on the Soc Trang JMC departed. The North Vietnamese and VC JMC representatives had, for safety reasons, refused to deploy to the province level. That made the GVN JMC representative the sole member of the Soc Trang JMC office! The non-arrival of the VC JMC representative pre-empted Colonel Sau's intention to engage his VC counterpart in reconciliation talks. Sau received orders to proceed to Kien Hoa Province for another assignment. The junior GVN JMC military officer continued to staff the Soc Trang JMC, now down to one man --himself.

After returning from my second trip to Lich Hoi Thuong, I spent two days helping the DOD contractor complete preparations for the arrival of the ICCS Soc Trang team. Lodging and dining facilities were arranged at the old CORDS compound.

The ICCS meetings were to be held at a nearby schoolhouse. The schoolhouse had been plastered with banners broadcasting: "Down with the Communists" and "There would be no peace until the Communists are defeated." A huge South Vietnamese yellow and red government flag had been placed on the top of the schoolhouse. When the contractor tried to remove the flag and banners, he was accosted by the local hamlet chief and PSDF

who were armed. The loud, sharp sound of ammunition clips snapping into place signaled that the banners and flags would not be taken down that day.

I intervened with GVN province officials. They forced the hamlet chief to allow the U.S. contractor to take down the flag and banners. The contractor converted the schoolhouse into an office for the ICCS's use.

Q: The contractors were locally hired? Or were they Americans coming in?

TOMSEN: The contractor was an American who hired local workers.

Q: Halliburton or Caterpillar...

TOMSEN: Can't recall. It was a large contracting firm that worked for the Defense Department around the world.

Q: For defense contractors, good to the last drop.

TOMSEN: Right. I was on hand when the ICCS Soc Trang contingent arrived in late February, 1973. I had already read a classified report on an abortive ICCS investigation in Region I. It pointed to the problems ahead. The U.S. and GVN delegations at Saigon JMC headquarters presented photographic evidence to the Saigon ICCS office that the North Vietnamese had placed anti-aircraft batteries around the old American base at Khe Sanh after the ceasefire had begun. The Polish and Hungarian ICCS members refused to investigate, stating that the photographs had been doctored. They denied that there were anti-aircraft weapons at Khe Sanh. The Canadians and Indonesians argued that the ICCS visit to the area would answer the question. The two Communist sides stonewalled. The investigation did not take place.

In Soc Trang, it did not take long to conclude that the Soc Trang ICCS region 7 sub-headquarters would suffer from the same structural defects as its superior body in Saigon –and, the ill-fated tripartite ICC (International Control Commission) had experienced after the 1954 Geneva Convention. At that time, the one pro-Western ICC member, Canada, was consistently outvoted by Poland, a Warsaw Pact Soviet ally, and the supposedly neutral Indian member. In the mid-1950s up to the 1962 Chinese invasion of India, India's Nehru government had leaned towards the Sino-Soviet Communist bloc. ICC reports consistently went 2 to 1 against the Canadians. That made no real difference since the ICC had no enforcement powers anyway!

The U.S.-North Vietnamese Paris Agreement, likewise, provided no enforcement powers to the ICCS. As foretold by Ambassador Whitehouse, the JMC, established to oversee the ICCS, would also be divided: the U.S. and GVN on one side and North Vietnam and the VC on the other side. Since both ceasefire institutions operated on the basis of consensus, that is, unanimity of opinion, their inevitable internal contradictions guaranteed paralysis.

Paralysis or no, our TDY responsibility to monitor the ceasefire entailed getting to know the members of the local ICCS delegation and accompanying them on their field investigations of ceasefire violations. I passed many hours socializing with them at the former CORDS -now ICCS- compound. I facilitated their communications with GVN officials. I coordinated with the Canadians and Indonesians, especially Canadian diplomat Manfred Von Nostitz, even while standing aloof from the investigation process. The Province Chief, a colonel in the elite Vietnamese Rangers, occasionally stopped by the compound to shake hands and chat in fluent French and English with the ICCS delegation members.

The Polish delegation head was a suave French-speaking Lieutenant Colonel named Pawelski. He sought opportunities to project that he was of aristocratic lineage. He and his young civilian interpreter, Franckiewics, were obvious intelligence officers with KGB links, as were the two Hungarians. The Hungarian Major and his interpreter, Atpos, a Lieutenant, no doubt also a pseudonym, deferred to the Poles during ICCS investigations.

Manfred, a descendant of the prominent 19th century Prussian noble, Otto Von Bismark, was destined to rise high in the Canadian diplomatic corps. He led the 3-man Canadian ICCS contingent. Manfred was ably-assisted by two Canadian army officers, Major Roe and Captain Fortier. The Indonesians, Major Arafin and Captain Rangtabean, joined the Canadians in countering the clumsy maneuvers by the Poles and Hungarians to sabotage ICCS investigations. Manfred was brilliant in picking apart their duplicitous arguments. Years later, we re-connected on an Islamabad golf course –he was the Canadian Ambassador in Pakistan and I was U.S. Special Envoy on Afghanistan.

The socializing during the numerous off-hours often ended up around the old CORDS bar at the end of the day. The camaraderie with the Poles and Hungarians overlaid a permanent undercurrent of mutual aversion.

“Lizzy,” the Madame of the brothel near the old CORDS compound, had no need to hide her hostility towards the Poles and Hungarians. She angrily denied the “Communists” in the ICCS delegation access to her girls.

Q: It's amazing. A brothel owner stands on principle.

TOMSEN: (Laughter) If you want to read my diary, it gets even more entertaining!

As I mentioned, the refusal of the North Vietnamese and VC to take their places in the 7 JMCs at the province level gave a free-hand to the lone GVN JMC representative to monopolize JMC-ordered investigation. During my TDY, the Soc Trang GVN JMC representative ordered over 50 investigations into alleged VC violations of the ceasefire. Not one investigation addressed GVN violations, although the South Vietnamese government was also violating the ceasefire.

In the final analysis, the GVN monopoly did not matter much. The Poles and Hungarians scuttled all evidence gathered that suggested VC complicity.

The Canadians, Indonesians, and myself grew familiar with their tag team tactics. At investigation locations in the field and back at the ICCS schoolhouse office, they waited for the Canadians and Indonesians to first present their testimony and witness transcripts of V.C. ceasefire violations. The Polish Lieutenant Colonel would defer to the Hungarian Major to dispute the evidence. The Hungarian would list a series of specious points, centered on false “inconsistencies” about the facts presented by the Canadians and Indonesians. The Polish Lieutenant Colonel would follow up by concluding that there was not enough agreement on the facts to permit the required unanimity. The two sides routinely sent conflicting versions of the incidents to the JMC offices in Soc Trang and Can Tho.

One typical example of a failed ICCS field investigation involved the VC massacre of a pro-GVN family in a rural Bac Lieu Province hamlet—4 killed and 1 wounded. After a day-long visit, the Hungarian written account concluded that an accidental explosion caused the casualties. It contended that there were many points in the Canadian-Indonesian report that were not clear and inconclusive.

Tomsen reading from the Hungarian text in that ICCS Report: “We saw blood of different colors on the floor.... The hamlet chief contradicted himself in his two testimonies... The third body was shot through the arm and had a broken skull, suggesting the death was the result of a concussion from an explosion and not a gunshot, if there really was an attack. We do not know what happened, how it happened or who caused it.”

The Polish Lieutenant Colonel summed up that a tragedy no doubt had occurred. “We believe the most possible and true possibility is that it was an accident.”

Towards the end of March, the embassy in Saigon instructed the four consulates general to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the ceasefire on X+60, March 28, two months after the Paris agreement was signed. Consul General Barnes asked the 7 TDYers in Region 4 to write individual analyses on how the ceasefire was working in our areas.

All of our assessments were gloomy. I wrote that the Soc Trang ICCS had failed to supervise the ceasefire in sub-region 7. The ICCS’s structural divide coincided with unwillingness of the 3 Vietnamese sides to end offensive operations and to observe the ceasefire. Until commanders in the field receive orders reversing those they now have, I suggested, the ceasefire provisions of the Paris Accords will not be implemented and the JMC/ICCS ceasefire machinery will not work.

If present circumstances prevail, I reported, the South Vietnamese, the VC and North Vietnamese will continue to write off the JMC and ICCS. The Canadians will implement their threat to withdraw; the Indonesians will likely follow.

Q: Today is July 20th, and we are returning to Ambassador Tomsen's tour in Vietnam.

TOMSEN: Other TDYers in Region 4 reached the same negative conclusions I did on the ceasefire's failure. It seemed to us that the U.S. was the only party to the Paris agreement attempting to breathe life into the carcass of the ceasefire machinery. The only way to salvage the ceasefire agreement was high-level orders from Saigon JMC command levels of the 4 Paris Accord signatories to observe the ceasefire.

In April, the JMC headquarters in Saigon issued a top level "Appeal" to all subordinate JMC/ICCS units in-country to enforce the ceasefire. The Appeal was widely disseminated by Vietnamese radio, TV and newspapers. Simultaneously, I and other TDYers received an urgent message from the embassy on our radios to report the provincial level reactions to the Saigon JMC appeal to save the faltering ceasefire.

I first visited the Soc Trang police station to draw out feedback. The senior officers I met there informed me that the provincial police headquarter had not seen the appeal.

I called on the Ba Xuyen Province S-3, the colonel in charge of provincial military operations. I found him in his chair, legs on the table, casually reading a Saigon Vietnamese-language newspaper. He answered my questions with a blank stare. Peeking over his shoulder, I pointed to a blaring front page headline in large black print announcing the appeal in Vietnamese. The full Vietnamese text of the Saigon JMC ceasefire appeal appeared under the conspicuous headline. The colonel, whom I knew, laughed aloud and responded: "This is the first I have heard about it!" He showed no inclination to carry out the appeal.

The civilian Deputy Province Chief, whom I met next, was refreshingly candid. He answered that everybody knew that the appeal came from the Americans. There have been no similar instructions received from the GVN in Saigon. I reported these reactions to the Can Tho Consulate in raw form as there was no need to elaborate.

Later in April, Kim and our older daughter Kim-Anh came down from Saigon for a weekend visit. She joined me in hosting an evening reception in our townhouse for the Province Chief, his senior provincial staff, their wives, the 4 nation ICCS members, the single GVN JMC officer, and some elderly Vietnamese civilian notables in Soc Trang.

Kim loaded up a long table with delicious Vietnamese and American dishes. They included "*cha gio*," or Vietnamese egg rolls, renown for being "the best" egg rolls in Asia. Bowls of "*nuoc mam*" fish sauce with spicy red chilies were placed on the table, next to the cha gio. For the uninitiated palate, "*nuoc mam*" is like soy sauce for the Chinese and Maggi sauce for the French. Fish sauce is extracted from fermented fish. The finest nuoc mam comes from South Vietnam's Phu Quoc Island. Believe me, nuoc mam is a fabulous topping for this superb cha gio dish!

It was not unusual for nuoc mam to weave itself into the fingers of the cook. That was Kim in the kitchen preparing a medley of American and Vietnamese menu items for our reception. The Polish “Count” arrived at the party. I was tied up with other guests. Kim did not have the time to wash her hands as she rushed to the door. While Kim greeted him, the Polish guest regally bowed and courteously kissed her hand. The Polish count’s gesture was unexpected. He could not possibly have escaped imbibing the smell of the spicy fish sauce! He graciously stood upright, then quickly marched straight ahead, passed out-stretched hands from other guests into the crowded living room without a pause. Kim and I gave him credit for his diplomatic reaction without a trace of remorse.

The flow of whiskey and cognac enlivened the mood of the party. As is the custom in most of Asia, the women huddled together in conversation in one area and the men in another. The senior Hungarian hardliner was the one exception. He slid over to a corner and avoided contact with other guests.

The province chief was in a jovial mood throughout the evening. Speaking in both French and English, he sought out each one of the ICCS delegation members. Hilariously at one point, he forcibly seized the drink of the Hungarian hardliner and involuntarily refilled his glass. The Hungarian at first resisted but the province chief, a tough combat veteran, grabbed the Hungarian’s wrist and literally dragged him across the room for a private chat, foisting another drink into his fist.

The reception relieved the tension in the air at the ICCS compound. That didn’t last long. The VC detonated a mine under a jeep in which the wife of the Bac Lieu Province Chief (another colonel), four of his children, and the wife of a district chief were riding. They all perished. The driver was wounded.

The ICCS team traveled by helicopter to the site of the incident, arriving about 22 hours after it occurred. The 2 VC who had allegedly detonated the explosion were captured and had confessed. Their signed statements were provided to the ICCS members. The VC team leader was a trained explosives specialist whose role was to lay mines and booby-traps along roads.

During the discussion by ICCS team members about the incident, the senior Canadian representative on the investigation -Major Roe- (passages taken directly from Major Roe’s report) quoted the Communist delegations as claiming that “There were numerous discrepancies and contradictions which prevented their arrival at any firm conclusion as to who laid and detonated the mine.”

Projecting standard frustrations with the Poles and Hungarians, Major Roe wrapped up the written Canadian-Indonesian position on the divided investigation: “The evidence as discussed in parts of this report and in the team’s discussion outlined previously” (that included transcripts of witnesses of the event) “provides incontrovertible proof that the Polish and Hungarian delegations are acting under orders not to find the Viet Cong guilty of violating the ceasefire agreement. Moreover, the adoption of an ‘adversary’ attitude by

the Communist delegations in refusing to explain the rationale used in arriving at their conclusions is in direct violation of Article 18 of Chapter 6 of the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam.”

A testy mid-May radio conversation between the Bac Lieu Province S-2 intelligence Chief and the VC commander in Bac Lieu reinforced the hopeless prospects for GVN-VC reconciliation. The conversation quickly deteriorated into acrimonious dueling. The VC commander bragged about a VC ambush that resulted in many South Vietnamese casualties. The S-2 chief was reminded about a recent successful GVN attack on a VC regimental base camp. The VC declared that fighting would continue as long as the Americans kept advisors in Vietnam. The S-2 rejoined that the VC had been probably sleeping –the Americans had left months ago.

During overnight conferences in Can Tho or while visiting one another, the TDY FSOs in the Delta discussed the damaging influence the Thieu regime’s corruption was having on popular support for the GVN. In one conversation, four of us agreed that government corruption had grown substantially since we had served in Vietnam. The TDYer in Dinh Tuong joked that corruption had “burgeoned like a pregnant woman” during the five years he had been gone. Some long tried and true forms of corruption continued, supplemented by new forms of corruption that had since been created. The bulk of it was practiced in military channels.

Q: The graft and corruption, the money’s not repaid, began at the bottom but moved all the way up to Saigon?

TOMSEN: Yes. The money mainly moved through the military hierarchy.

Q: A remarkably efficient system of bribery.

TOMSEN: Yes. I reported from Soc Trang a fascinating conversation on corruption with the outspoken civilian Deputy Province Chief for administration. He was the second highest official in important Ba Xuyen Province. He began by noting the government could possibly lose an election to the VC should the VC skillfully support neutral candidates instead of running themselves, and by exploiting the problem of government corruption. Village self-development funds, taxes collected, even the funds for war victims, he said, find their way into the pockets of province officials and up the ladder to Saigon. The patronage system, he complained, was well institutionalized. President Thieu proclaims anti-corruption campaigns. If a sincere effort is made, perhaps the middle and lower level government officials will fall in line. The strongest resistance will come from the president’s personal inner circle that oversees the military. But, even if a little progress is made at lower levels, he said, it will be well received by the people.

In a June conversation with the thickset, straight-forward Ba Xuyen Province Chief Colonel, he asked me what I considered to be the main problem in the province. I answered that, in my mind, corruption topped the list. To my amazement, he readily

agreed. By way of one example, he told me that during his short period in Ba Xuyen, he had been bombarded by offers of money and gifts, mostly from the wealthy who wanted to keep their sons out of the military or to avoid taxes.

Q: Let me ask a general question. In the unlikely event that an incident would have been found to have been an actual ceasefire violation that everybody agreed to and that the VC had been implicated, what would have happened to the VC found guilty of it?

TOMSEN: It would have gone up to the JMC regional level in Can Tho, the regional capital. In each of the 4 regional capitals, the VC were part of the JMC. Their representatives on the Can Tho regional JMC rejected any VC culpability for ceasefire violations sent up from the Soc Trang level. So, the issue of punishment of the VC for ceasefire violations did not arise.

Q: Had you gone all the way through where there were sanctions to be applied? Or what would happen in the event an actual ceasefire violation was found to be true and all parties agreed there was a ceasefire violation?

TOMSEN: Unanimity was necessary under the Paris Accords to find one of the Vietnamese warring parties guilty of a ceasefire violation. But the presence of contending Vietnamese sides on the JMC in Saigon and the 4 regions meant that this unanimity was not possible. Each side, the GVN side and the communist sides would veto any decision that found it was at fault.

The Communist – non-Communist ICCS structure also divided ICCS reports sent to Can Tho from Soc Trang. The reports were merely filed away since no blame could be levied against either side and no action would be taken. The same fate awaited reports sent to the JMC/ICCS in Saigon.

Today, I may be the only person in the world who has kept copies of the useless Soc Trang ICCS reports! Their uselessness and the embedded paralysis in the JMC/ICCS ceasefire commissions, no doubt, satisfied a key North Vietnamese demand at the Paris talks. The Paris Agreement contained numerous other unenforceable provisions that the 3 Vietnamese sides ignored. They included the restrictions against North Vietnamese troop augmentations in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Q: So, was there a strong feeling among the Western observers that this was essentially just a face-saving way for the Americans to leave?

TOMSEN: Some might have wished that. The three Vietnamese sides and the Republican Administration did not.

The South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese assumed that all those unfulfilled parts of the agreement were never going to be fulfilled anyway. The Americans would complete their withdrawal and get their POWS back. They would continue to provide military and

other aid to South Vietnam. The Soviet Union and China would continue to provide military and other assistance to communist North Vietnam. The war would continue until either the South Vietnamese GVN or the Hanoi Politburo would win. Simple as that.

My interviews during the TDY, for example with Captain Thuc and the catholic priest in Lich Hoi Thuong, reflected determination and optimism that the South would defeat Hanoi's next general offensive. American air power had been critical to throwing back the 1972 offensive. GVN ground forces did the rest. They routed North Vietnamese divisions in toe-to-toe fighting in I CORPS and drove them back across the border.

South Vietnamese confidence continued after the Democratic-controlled Congress passed the Case-Church amendment in June 1970 denying further funds for American air support to South Vietnam. But the GVN, its military, and the South Vietnamese public did not anticipate that Congress would next cut military aid by more than half, then end it, while the Soviet Union was increasing aid aimed at doubling the size of the NV army. Throughout the war, the U.S. had been the only source of military aid to the South Vietnamese government. Matching Soviet military assistance to Hanoi was vital to maintain South Vietnam's ability to defend itself.

Q: It just looks from the outside like something that was designed to fail.

TOMSEN: The Paris Agreement was certainly doomed to fail, but the 17-year old state of South Vietnam was not. It had one of the largest and battle-tested armies in the world when the Paris agreement was signed. In his Oral History, Mike Cotter shares my view that, if our military aid had continued at adequate levels, the ARVN could have prevailed during the 1975 Hanoi offensive. Mike was another TDYer in Vinh Binh Province. Please read his oral history.

During the 1975 invasion, 2 North Vietnamese divisions attacked IV CORPS and Long An Province, the southernmost III CORPS province below Saigon. The 21st ARVN Division met and decimated the North Vietnamese 4th Division south of Can Tho and drove it back into the Viet Minh Forest. The 7th ARVN Division together with riverine patrol boats tore up the 8th NV division in Long An Province. No province or district in IV CORPS fell to the enemy during the 1975 offensive.

Any other questions or points?

Q: Just the larger one, which is the decision was made that there was no longer enough value for the United States to support the South Vietnamese regime, period. In other words, we were leaving in an honorable way and we knew what was going to happen after we left. That is some 10 years after the entry and the belief that the fall of South Vietnam would, per the domino theory, result in many other countries falling into Communism. I guess my question is at that point in 1973, we either no longer cared about that issue or we no longer believed it. Larger things were going on that we were more interested in at least under Nixon and Kissinger; the whole balance of the USSR

(Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, aka Soviet Union), China, the larger balance of power at that time. These smaller states seemed not to be as much of a concern now as they were 10 years earlier.

TOMSEN: I agree that by 1973, the global chessboard looked very different than it had in 1963 when the Southeast Asia domino theory was taken seriously during the Kennedy Administration. The Korean War was still recent history. The MAC/V patch worn by U.S. soldiers in Vietnam portrayed a large white sword placed in front of the Great Wall of China symbolizing the then-Sino-Soviet bloc competing with the U.S. and its allies in Southeast Asia. The 1,000-year history of Sino-Vietnamese enmity made that presumption of millions of Chinese troops flooding into Vietnam nonsense.

The deployment to Vietnam of a large U.S. army in the mid-1960s to win a People's War that only the South Vietnamese could win was a huge U.S. policy mistake. That "American military first" U.S. policy was doomed to fail. And it did.

Johnson's shift to the new and effective U.S. policy of Vietnamization could have succeeded in the long run if it had been resourced by the Administration and Congress.

The Nixon and Ford Administrations continued the Vietnamization policy. All U.S. troops had been removed by March 28, 1973. Annual Congressional appropriations of \$1-2 billion were necessary to sustain South Vietnam's military capability to resist the next North Vietnamese invasion --to ensure long term success of the Vietnamization policy and South Vietnam's survival. The Democratic Congress' drastic reduction, then cut-off, of U.S. military aid in late 1974 and early 1975 denied South Vietnam the resources needed to survive.

The cratering of Sino-Soviet relations in the early 1970s did devalue South Vietnam's Cold War importance. The "loss" of South Vietnam to a united Sino-Soviet communist bloc was no longer an overriding concern. The 2 communist giants were at loggerheads.

But it would be another mistake to conclude that our troop withdrawal meant that South Vietnam was no longer of enough value to the U.S. to continue support to the GVN. The U.S. continued to have important residual moral and geopolitical interests in continuing military and financial support to South Vietnam to resist communist North Vietnamese aggression after our troops had been withdrawn. U.S. allies in Europe and Asia and the Soviet Union were watching to see if the U.S. would demonstrate the same resolve we had evidenced in Europe after WWII and in supporting South Korea to repel communist North Korea's invasion.

The Thieu government was autocratic. It was corrupt. Corruption infests many governments, including our own. It, understandably, deemed the country to be in a continuous state of existential war. It did set red lines (e.g. anti-communism) that the media could not cross. It jailed political dissidents that crossed other red lines it considered too critical of the regime.

But the Thieu regime, the GVN, was not a Third World police state. It was far from the Hanoi Politburo ruled North Vietnamese-style communist regime --forcefully regimenting all aspects of political, economic and religious life on the Soviet and Chinese communist models.

South Vietnamese citizens saw themselves as living in a free society, sharply differentiated from a communist one. Elections were flawed. That also occurs in many countries, including our own. But, there was an outspoken parliament and media critical of the government. There was freedom of religions for religious minorities and a market economy not monopolized by a communist dictatorship. In a past interview, I noted that the vast majority of the 20 million South Vietnamese strongly opposed a North Vietnamese communist takeover of the South because of the freedoms they enjoyed and the South's historic antipathy to North Vietnam.

So, as you say, we had concluded our March 1973 military withdrawal in an honorable way. But the word honorable could not apply to Congress' subsequent and shameful rebuff of the Ford Administration's request for adequate levels of military aid to continue the U.S. Vietnamization policy to support South Vietnam's survival during 1974 and 1975.

The Democratic Congress' actions in 1974 and 1975 forced a dishonorable U.S. exit from the Vietnam war, not an honorable one. And it compelled, in turn, the humiliating, frantic evacuation of the American embassy and many thousands of Americans and Vietnamese on April 30, 1975.

During the final months of our TDY, most of the TDYers assumed that American assistance would continue and the ultimate outcome of the war was not a foregone conclusion. The seven TDY FSOs in Region 4 saw more of each other in July, as the end of our TDY approached. We found time to compare notes during consulate meetings in Can Tho and while traveling together in each other's provinces' Barnes was transferred to Bangkok to be Political Counselor. Veteran diplomat and no stranger to wars, Wolfgang Lehman, replaced him.

During June and July, I visited 3 other Mekong Delta provinces -Dinh Tuong, Chong Chien, and An Giang. My road trip through the middle of the consular district to An Giang indicated firm GVN control. The area was mostly populated by the 3 million strong anti-VC Hoa Hao minority in the Delta. I was amazed at the long distances a TDY colleague and I were able to travel by road at night! I found security much improved in Ben Tranh District in the Upper Delta where I had served my first CORDS posting.

Conversely, the American senior civilian representative in Chuong Thien Province told me during my June visit that a "kind of conventional war" had broken out between 2 South Vietnamese divisions, the 21st and the 9th, and North Vietnamese regiments that had recently infiltrated into the U Minh Forest from nearby Cambodia.

Fighting between the South Vietnamese and Viet Cong moderately increased in other parts of the Delta during the summer after the American military withdrawal. Air travel became more hazardous. On June 20, a violent storm struck the Vietnamese-piloted Huey that I was the sole passenger in over Chuong Thien Province just to the West of Ba Xuyen. The pilot was reluctant to fly too high. We plunged directly ahead into turbulent dark clouds, bouncing up and down and sideways. At one point, and I quote from my diary: "I thought we were going to make a complete turnover which of course would have been the end since the chopper could not have possibly recovered."

Canada withdrew its ICCS delegation as threatened from Vietnam on July 31, 1973, after six months. As you recall, they had announced at the time of the Paris accord signing, "We're in for six months, but if it's like after the Geneva Accords, we're gone." During the six months of the "ceasefire" up to July 31, there were 18,000 reported ceasefire violations and 70,000 civilian and military casualties.

Iran replaced Canada on the ICCS. As an institution, the ICCS remained in Vietnam until the fall of Saigon in April 1975. It was ignored and ineffective, and lampooned from all sides.

After withdrawal and the return of 591 U.S. POWs, the U.S. was the only signer of the Paris Accords that continued to honor its commitments. The U.S. Navy demined Haiphong Harbor, even while massive numbers of North Vietnamese troops were moving south in violation of the agreement. The demining was completed in July, 1973, allowing Soviet ships to supply ever greater amounts of ordnance and supplies for the Hanoi's next invasion of South Vietnam.

If there was an American assumption that its fulfillment of U.S. Paris Agreement commitments might have a positive effect on the 3 other signatories, that turned out to be fanciful. So did the faint hope that the Soviet Union and China would weigh in with Hanoi to uphold its commitments.

American-promoted international conferences in 1973 to buttress the Paris Agreement also were based on fanciful assumptions. Those conferences and their final statements absurdly echoed the July 21, 1954 "Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference on Restoring Peace in Indochina." The 1954 conference included the North Vietnamese, the State of Vietnam in the South, the U.S., France, the Soviet Union, Britain, China, Laos, and Cambodia. It expressed unrealistic satisfaction about "the ending of hostilities in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and organizing international control and the supervision and execution of the provisions of these agreements."

Nineteen years later, the international conference called for in the January 1973 Paris Accords was duly convened in Paris from February 26 to March 2, 1973. The four signers of the Paris agreement, the four ICCS countries, the UN Security Council permanent members, and the UN Secretary General participated in the conference. In the

conference's March 2 "Final Act," the participants pledged their support to implement the Paris agreement. The March 1973 Paris "Final Act" proved as fruitless as the 1954 Geneva "Final Declaration."

In June, U.S. diplomacy again to no avail brought the four parties that signed the agreement back to Paris to renew their commitment to end the Vietnam War by signing a follow-up, second ceasefire agreement. In it, Kissinger, Le Duc Tho and 2 representatives of the GVN and the PRG declared their determination "to strictly observe the ceasefire throughout South Vietnam."

Two months before Le Duc Tho signed on to the second, June 13, 1970 ceasefire commitment in Paris, Le Duan's Politburo had already begun preparations for the next massive North Vietnamese offensive to conquer South Vietnam in 1975. The top-secret document formalizing the Politburo decision to launch the invasion to conquer the South is dated March 27, 1970! It was published and translated into English 3 decades later.

The Politburo decision to begin preparing for the 1975 invasion of South Vietnam, backed up by burgeoning Soviet military assistance, overlapped with the Democratic majority in Congress' veto proof legislation to vote the U.S. out of the Vietnam war in late 1974 and early 1975. The congressional action publicly confirmed to Hanoi that the U.S. would provide no further assistance to South Vietnam to defend itself.

During the Can Tho Consulate's end-of-TDY wrap-up conference in Can Tho in July, a group of us went out one night for dinner at a local restaurant. Our general impressions were that the three Vietnamese sides would continue the war. The GVN without U.S. military forces in-country but with U.S. military aid would continue to hold its own. The North would invade again.

My TDY terminated in the last week of July, 1973. Kim, older daughter Kim-Anh, and I drove up to Saigon from Can Tho to spend some time with Kim's parents (our second daughter Mai-Lan, then one year old, was staying with her grand-parents in Saigon) before we returned to Bombay. While in Saigon, I asked for and received a one-on-one appointment with Ambassador Graham Martin, who had been in-country for only a month, having replaced Ambassador Bunker. I had occasionally been in embassy meetings with Ambassador Martin during my Bangkok TDY, but we had never had a conversation. Ambassador Martin cordially received me. His spacious office was informal and welcoming, lit up by traditional floor and table lamps more characteristic of offices that would be found in a home than an embassy.

Q: And he was a career officer or an appointee?

TOMSEN: He was a political appointee from North Carolina who had held important domestic and ambassadorial postings since the Roosevelt Administration. His last 2 appointments were ambassador to Thailand and Italy. He lost a son who was in the 4th Division fighting below the DMZ. He was respected, reserved, experienced, and had

a patrician bearing that exuded authority.

I asked for and received his permission to be candid. For about 20 minutes straight, I discussed my and other Vietnamese-speaking TDYers' views on the ceasefire and the strong and weak points of the Thieu government. On the latter, I stressed the debilitating influence that corruption had on Thieu's personal image and popularity. I said there was still time for Thieu to follow through on his New Year's speech to cleanse his regime, introduce reforms and strengthen his image as South Vietnam's national leader.

I had hoped my comments would have elicited at least a question. It did not. Ambassador Martin simply did not respond. I sensed he might not have welcomed my views. They probably clashed with his views. He courteously saw me to the door and said goodbye.

The next day, Kim, our two daughters and I flew back to Bombay. That was the end of my TDY assignment in Vietnam.

Q: Can you wrap up Vietnam by describing your return to Vietnam during the April 1975 Fall of Saigon?

TOMSEN: Yes. In July, 1973, following the Vietnam TDY assignment, we returned to our seaside apartment in Bombay with the lovely view of the Arabian Sea.

I happily plunged back into reporting on state politics in Western India. In April, 1974, the embassy transferred me to the Political Section in New Delhi to cover Indian domestic politics on the national scene. The position expanded my window into classified information on the latest political-military developments in Vietnam. Down the hall, I had access to DAO and CIA as well as State Department reporting. The daily U.S. media "Wireless File" carried U.S. newspaper accounts of Vietnam-related events.

I closely monitored the erosion of congressional support for South Vietnam unfolding in Washington during the second half of 1974 into 1975. The Watergate crisis steadily weakened Nixon's ability to function effectively in domestic and foreign policy areas. On October 10, 1973, Nixon chose prominent Republican Congressman Gerald Ford to replace Vice President Spiro Agnew. Agnew was forced to resign due to a bribery scandal. The Watergate-related impeachment action against President Nixon led to his resignation on August 9, 1974. He was replaced by Vice President Ford. Fortunately, it wasn't Spiro Agnew! (Laughter)

Q: We were lucky.

TOMSEN: Yes, we were!

Ford would face the cold political reality in a congressional election year that anti-war Democrats dominated the Democratic majority in both houses of Congress. The anti-war Congressional Democrats enjoyed virtual veto-proof leverage over his administration's

ability to maintain military aid flows to South Vietnam adequate to ensure its survival. The November 1974 elections further increased the anti-war Democratic majority in both Houses of Congress.

President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger underestimated the growing congressional hostility towards continuing military aid to South Vietnam after Nixon's ouster. On August 10, 1974, the day after Nixon resigned, Ford sent a letter to Thieu assuring that "the existing commitments this nation has made in the past are still valid and will be honored in my administration."

Quite the opposite was true. The Democratic leadership in Congress was out to legislate away—to expurgate—the Vietnam burden. Senate Majority leader Mike Mansfield was stridently opposed to any further aid to South Vietnam. Left-wing Democratic Congress members joined and founded anti-war lobbying groups that invited North Vietnamese "Freedom Fighters" to speak at their demonstrations in New York and Washington.

They declared it morally reprehensible to appropriate more aid for the Thieu regime. Democratic Congresswoman Bella Abzug embarrassed her bipartisan congressional colleagues during a meeting with Thieu in his Saigon office. She stridently announced to his face that the U.S. would not appropriate "one more dollar" to support South Vietnam.

Prominent Senator Frank Church suggested to President Ford he would support a 3-year aid package of only \$2.5 billion, roughly \$800,000 a year. Ford unsuccessfully attempted to bargain it upwards. A key Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jacob Javits, told Ford in a White House meeting that he would give "not one nickel for military aid to Thieu."

The wording of the annual Gallup Poll asking whether the Vietnam War was a mistake (60% in January 1974 said it was) dated back to the failed U.S. military interventionist policy of the mid-1960s. Of course, the U.S. military's attempt to win the Vietnam War had been a mistake. Nearly all agreed with that by 1969. For that reason, President Johnson had begun the U.S. troop withdrawal and introduced the new Vietnamization policy. It was continued by Nixon and Ford. South Vietnamese, not Americans, were doing the fighting and dying after 1972

In my opinion, the public polling after the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam in 1973 should have changed from "was the Vietnam War a mistake" to "should the U.S. continue to support South Vietnam to defend itself against North Vietnamese communist aggression."

American troops had departed. We had lost 58,000 Americans soldiers and spent hundreds of billions defending the GVN against Soviet and Chinese Communists-backed North Vietnamese offensives to conquer South Vietnam. Beginning with Kennedy and Johnson, American presidents of both political parties had reiterated America's strong commitment to help South Vietnam to defend itself. A million South Vietnamese had

died. The U.S. was the sole provider of military assistance to the South Vietnamese armed forces. South Vietnam's population was in danger of forceful absorption into the totalitarian Soviet-style North Vietnamese Communist state –where human and political rights vanish and brutal gulags misnamed “education camps” were waiting.

Major General John Murray was the senior most DAO officer and Defense Attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. Per the Paris Agreement, he enjoyed diplomatic status –chief of the embassy Defense Attaché Office in Saigon. General Murray and his DAO team were based at the “Pentagon East” military base inside Tan Son Nhut airport. They managed the logistical flow of American military aid into South Vietnam.

Murray was aghast at the great damage looming congressional aid reductions would inflict on South Vietnamese military capabilities. He cabled 4 warning scenarios to Washington that coincided with cascading military aid appropriation levels:

1. A FY'75 reduction to \$1.1 billion from the \$1.45 requested by the Ford Administration would weaken but not destroy the South's capability to roll back the expected North Vietnamese attack in 1975.
2. \$750 million would make the South hard-pressed to defend itself.
3. \$700 million would cover only 45% of ammunition and military equipment requirements to meet the next North Vietnamese offensive.
4. The South would not be able to defend itself if the appropriation was \$600 million or below.

Murray's estimates turned out to be prophetic.

Monitoring the trendlines in U.S. assistance to Saigon in the second half of 1974 from New Delhi was depressing.

In May, Congressional Democrats first reduced the FY '74 budget (ending on June 1, 1974) for military aid to South Vietnam from the administration requested \$1.4 billion to \$1.12 billion. That amount was further reduced in the fall of 1974.

Without explanation to Ambassador Martin and General Murray in Saigon, a vital FY'74 \$300 million (\$1.4 billion today) funded ammunition shipment already in the pipeline on the way to South Vietnam was diverted to Israel. Congress took no action on President Ford and Ambassador Martin's plea to replace the vital ammunition shipment.

The Ford Administration requested \$1.45 billion in military aid to Saigon for the FY 1975 appropriation beginning on July 1, 1974. Anti-war Democratic Senators in the Senate and their Democratic counterparts in the House slashed the Administration's request by more than half, down to \$700 million. Further line item changes dropped the level to \$500 million, below Murray's doomsday prediction.

Disgusted, Murray asked for retirement. He was replaced by another highly respected logistician, Major General Homer Smith. Smith would be the last DAO General to serve in South Vietnam.

While the Democratic Congress was legislating away South Vietnam's capabilities to defend itself, the Soviet Union was secretly escalating its provision of equipment, weapons, ammunition and fuel to North Vietnam. (Actual Soviet domestic and foreign military expenditures were routinely shrouded in secrecy and disinformation.) Moscow's largess to North Vietnam nearly doubled the size of the next North Vietnamese invasion force from 12 divisions in 1972 to 22 divisions in 1975. The emphasis was on conventional main force infantry-armor formations capable of rapid movement. Fuel for North Vietnam was not a problem –the Soviet Union was a leading global exporter of oil.

The changing balance of combat power in favor of North Vietnam during the Fall of 1974 was apparent to me in New Delhi and to others who followed Vietnam War developments. Intelligence reports informed that South Vietnam's army and air force were beginning to ration bombs, artillery shells, and bullets. Artillery units and infantry soldiers were restricted to less than 10 rounds per day, according to one reliable source. The shortage of fuel, bombs and ammunition kept ARVN tanks and APCs at their bases and air force planes on the ground. The expected invasion would steadily draw down fuel, ammunition and spare parts stocks that would have to be replenished.

The drastic reductions in U.S. military aid to sustain the South Vietnamese armed forces simultaneous with the virtual doubling of the Soviet-backed North Vietnamese army was ominous. ARVN's 12 divisions had, with some exceptions, fought well against the NVA's 1972 invasion force of equal size after American combat ground forces had been withdrawn. But they would now face 22 NVA divisions during Hanoi's next general offensive in 1975. Hanoi was positioning superior numbers and firepower on the Laotian border less than 50 miles away from I and II CORPS coastal cities.

The 20,000 South Vietnamese forces in I CORPS under CORPS Commander Ngo Quang Truong had driven the NVA back to their Laotian bases after 3 months of desperate fighting in 1972. Truong was probably the most able field commander on either side during the Vietnam War. His CORPS command included the 3 toughest and tested ARVN divisions in the country: The elite Airborne Division, the 15,000-man Marine Division, and Truong's old 1st Division that had gained fame during Hanoi's 1968 and 1972 offensives. 54 veteran Ranger battalions and RF-PF territorial forces augmented Truong's I CORPS ground combat forces. In 1975, the South Vietnamese air force could not match U.S. bombing capability. But, its 1,500 war planes did guarantee air superiority during the expected North Vietnamese invasion.

Hanoi's growing preponderance in troop numbers and firepower coupled with U.S. aid reductions stunned Thieu and his senior generals. They correctly assumed that more Congressionally mandated reductions were inevitable. In March 1975 the Stevenson-Mathias Amendment would terminate all U.S. aid to South Vietnam. In early

April, Congressional leaders confirmed to Ford that he could expect no further aid appropriations for South Vietnam.

Although the odds were heavily against them, Thieu and his senior generals had no choice but to defend the South against the coming North Vietnamese invasion. Future U.S. aid could not be counted on.

Thieu and his inner circle secretly developed a contingency plan to withdraw forces from vulnerable northern I and II CORPS to more defensible lines in southern III and IV CORPS –in other words, to give up over 60% of South Vietnam's territory at the outset of the invasion. It was a risky gamble. Thieu chose not to consult with Americans in formulating his contingency strategy. Ambassador Martin knew of the plan but did not press Thieu for details.

Thieu's withdrawal contingency made sense under the dire circumstances. It envisioned withdrawal of ARVN forces to enclaves along the coast, including Hue and Danang. They would be evacuated by sea and transported to III CORPS ports and Saigon. The shorter defensive perimeter defending Saigon would stretch from Phan Thiet on the sea through III CORPS to Tay Ninh Province, 40 miles from Saigon on the Cambodian border. North Vietnamese divisions advancing south would suffer from long supply lines and be vulnerable to powerful counterattacks and defeat north of Saigon.

The contingency strategy aimed at compensating for diminishing munitions and fuel was a desperate one. Vietnamese soldiers in all ranks redeployed over three hundred miles south would be loath to leave their families behind, unprotected. The North Vietnamese occupation of half of the country would be another morale crusher after the huge U.S. cuts in military aid. President Thieu's incompetent execution of the contingency strategy dealt yet another blow to South Vietnam military predicament.

Let me now shift to the timeline of the North Vietnamese invasion and the NVA advance toward Saigon. Kim and I tracked the deteriorating situation from New Delhi. We looked for the opportune time for me to fly to Saigon to evacuate Kim's family while commercial airplanes were still flying into Saigon.

During February Tet celebrations in 1974, Kim and I had visited Saigon where I filed immigration petitions for Kim's family at the embassy consular section. We hoped that the approval process would have progressed to the point where I could evacuate them to the U.S. or to India.

The NVA invasion began in December, 1974 when a large North Vietnamese invasion force crossed the Cambodian border into Phuoc Long Province (see map) in the Central Highlands and halted. Phuoc Long was strategically located only 60 miles north of Saigon. This most blatant North Vietnamese violation of the Paris Agreement was obviously intended to test the American reaction.

Washington's response did not go beyond statements protesting the violation. A few weeks later, on January 14, 1975, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger told a congressional hearing that the U.S. was not fulfilling earlier President Nixon pledges to Thieu, that the U.S. would mount "severe retaliatory action" if Hanoi violated the ceasefire. The reminder evoked no congressional interest in increasing military aid to the GVN.

The Hanoi Politburo watched the U.S. reaction for six more weeks until March 9. On that day it unleashed a coordinated, powerful two-pronged attack into I and II CORPS. The main target was the Central Highland's Ban Me Thuot military base in II CORPS. A second NVA column of main force divisions struck through I CORPS to occupy the strategic coastal region between Hue and Danang. Ban Me Thuot fell on March 12 after resisting for only 2 days.

On March 12, the day the NVA occupied Ban Me Thuot, Thieu triggered his contingency plan in a manner that guaranteed it would fail –and with it ensure ARVN's defeat. He ordered General Truong to send the Airborne Division to Saigon and to defend I CORPS without it. The Airborne Division's departure opened gaps in Truong's front lines.

During the next few weeks of combat, Thieu created dangerous battlefield disorder by moving around Truong's forces. On March 13, he ordered Truong to abandon the northern provinces and prepare to evacuate by sea to III CORPS. On April 19, he reversed himself and ordered Truong to defend both Hue and Danang at all costs. The next day he countermanded that order and directed Truong to withdraw from Hue and defend only Danang.

By that time, in the confusion of troop movements and counter-movements, NVA mechanized pincers had broken through to the coast north and south of Danang. The 1st Division in Hue was isolated from Danang and disintegrated. Several Marine battalions were also lost; the rest were desperately fighting before Danang.

On March 23, Thieu blundered again. He instructed Truong to send the already degraded 15,000-man Marine division to Saigon. It was too late. Danang's defenses were collapsing. On March 29, 7 NVA divisions were fighting their way into Danang. General Truong was wading out to a Vietnamese naval vessel to be rescued when, in his last radio communication, Thieu ordered him to mount a counterattack and retake Danang!

Meanwhile, also in early March, Thieu's orders to his II CORPS commander to abandon the Central Highlands and retreat to coastal enclaves produced more disasters. Thousands of Vietnamese civilians clogged narrow roads in the mountainous Central Highlands and the North-South Highway 1 along the coast. Panicked soldiers intermingled with the refugee throngs. North Vietnamese artillery pounded the inter-mixed civilian-military masses of humanity on the mountain road from Ban Me Thuot to Nha Trang. It was called the "Trail of Tears."

On March 30, the North Vietnamese occupied Danang. 100,000 South Vietnamese soldiers surrendered.

Thieu's debacle in the North thoroughly discredited him as a political and military leader. On April 2, South Vietnam's Parliament demanded his resignation. Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky and other generals began coup plotting. Thieu arrested seven of the plotters. He replaced his Prime Minister with a personal loyalist. Afterwards he rarely left his presidential palace. When Thieu did resign, he created a power vacuum by turning authority over to his elderly, half blind Vice President, Tran Van Huong.

After Danang's fall, Ford sent Army Chief of Staff and former commander in Vietnam, General Frederick C. Weyand, to Vietnam to meet Thieu and bring back his assessment of the situation.

On April 5, Weyand informed President Ford that unless the U.S. provided quick military assistance to stiffen GVN resistance, the South Vietnamese Army could not hold out.

On April 8, before Ford's appeal to Congress for emergency military aid, the South Vietnamese 18th Division and a Marine Brigade threw back the southward Communist advance at the strategic crossroad of Xuan Loc, 38 miles north of Saigon in III CORPS (see map). For two weeks, 25,000 South Vietnamese soldiers fiercely held the line against a rising tide of North Vietnamese infantry and armor.

Between April 9 and April 14, 2 attacking NVA divisions in IV CORPS were defeated with heavy losses.

On April 10, Ford addressed a joint session of Congress. The ARVN successes at Xuan Loc and in IV CORPS reinforced his appeal for aid. He blamed Congress for not permitting adequate assistance to Saigon. He requested \$722 million in emergency military assistance and the lifting of Case-Church restrictions in the event U.S. military intervention became necessary to help American citizens in Vietnam. He asked for a response by April 17.

On April 16, in a speech, Ford publicly denounced Congress for preventing his administration from keeping America's commitments to Vietnam.

On April 17, Democratic congressional leaders rejected Ford's final aid request.

Evacuation to the Forefront:

Congress' termination of aid to South Vietnam emphatically underscored the imminent fall of Saigon and my trip to Saigon to evacuate Kim's family. This brings us up to the timeframe of my April 53-page diary on the evacuation and Fall of Saigon. It has been stored in our basement for over three decades and has never seen the light of publicity.

The first three entries, April 18, 19 and 20, were written in Delhi after Congress rejection of further military aid to South Vietnam.

Kim's friend, Vang Ramp, a Vietnamese spouse of an American NGO worker in Delhi, asked for my help. She gave us a list of 10 of her relatives to evacuate. David Veitch, a Canadian diplomat, wrote a long letter for me to present to the Canadian embassy in Saigon requesting that it evacuate relatives of his Vietnamese wife who were listed in his letter.

On April 18, I made reservations for an April 21 Pan Am flight to Saigon. As things turned out, the Saigon leg of the flight was canceled and I had to take Taiwan's China Airlines into Saigon from Bangkok.

Kim and I drew up a list of six relatives whom I had already petitioned for: Kim's parents and her three brothers in Saigon -one of them was an infantry captain. Also, an aunt whose nursing profession would hopefully also qualify her for immigration status. The aunt had received nursing training in the United States before returning to her hospital job in Saigon. Kim said if we did not get this aunt out, she would probably die of fright. She was always the one most horrified about prospects for a Communist takeover, even to the point of selling her automatic mixer in 1970 to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Communists!

Q: One thing about the immigration status -certainly the direct family would qualify under family reunification; the aunt could theoretically have been considered a refugee.

TOMSEN: Yes. Also, INS could waive legal immigration restrictions in order to grant refugee parole status in the U.S.

Q: And also qualified under....

TOMSEN: There are shortages of nurses.

As you know, the normal immigration process can take years. But in the event of an emergency evacuation, I thought my State Department status might help.

From Delhi, I sent several back-channel telegrams to Saigon requesting help from two former colleagues who had previously served with me in Delhi. They were now in Saigon. One was a consular officer at the embassy. The other was "Terry," now in the CIA Station in Saigon. Terry was the only one to respond. He called the house and stopped by once to see if everybody was OK. But nothing else happened afterwards.

So, on April 18, it was clear that my returning to Vietnam to evacuate the family was the only option left. I knew that I would encounter unforeseen obstacles once in Saigon. U.S. immigration clearances would be just one of them. GVN laws on passports and exit visas were another.

Isolated in New Delhi, I knew nothing about inter-agency battles in Washington raging over the issue of evacuation of Vietnamese endangered by their association with the U.S. after Saigon's fall. Declassified documents on secret White House meetings released decades later reveal that Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, CINCPAC Commander Admiral Gayler, the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, General Brown, and CIA Director Colby pressed for an Americans-only evacuation. Ambassador Martin in Saigon in coordination with Kissinger in Washington insisted that the U.S. had a moral obligation to evacuate 150,000 Vietnamese –those who had worked for the U.S., were relatives of U.S. citizens, or were at “High Risk.”

During a briefing at the White House hosted by President Ford for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee members, Democratic senators -including Javits and Biden- were unanimous in insisting on evacuating only Americans.

Ford supported Kissinger and Martin's mixed evacuation option. Martin and Kissinger used their private one-on-one secret communication channel to evacuate over 60,000 Vietnamese refugees and 6,000 Americans during the last weeks of April. On several occasions, Martin exercised his Chief of Mission authority to send military and CIA officers back to Washington for running independent evacuation operations without his personal approval.

Under Martin's tight direction and supported by his DATT, General Homer Smith, the 1,000 or so essential American staff running the military airlift and manning key embassy positions were “trickled out” through the final days before Saigon fell on April 30 (April 29 Washington time). This approach pre-empted the possibility of DOD and CINCPAC terminating the airlift after all Americans had departed. Trickled out Americans comprised a small minority among the great majority of Vietnamese passengers boarding each military evacuation flight.

In early April, following the loss of Danang and Nha Trang, Martin had accelerated the “thinning out” of non-essential American officials in the Saigon mission and in regions III and IV consulates. Told there was nothing much more they could do, hundreds quietly packed suitcases went to Tan Son Nhut airport and flew out on commercial flights. Many other State, AID, DAO and CIA personnel were flown to Bangkok on CIA Air America aircrafts.

Beginning on March 26, the Danang Consulate General staff had quietly evacuated the bulk of American and Vietnamese employees in Region 1 by the time infectious panic ripped through the city. On the last day, March 29, the consulate used a barge pulled by a tugboat to evacuate the remaining 140 Americans and Vietnamese employees from a sea wharf opposite the consulate.

Declassified cables exchanged between Martin and Kissinger in their private channel at the time highlighted their determination to prevent the Saigon evacuation from

descending into the panic and chaos that characterized the evacuation of Danang. Beginning on March 28, civil and military discipline completely broke down in Danang. Mobs of armed soldiers, desperate men, women and children swarmed departing boats, capsizing them, violently fighting one another for space to escape. Many drowned. An angry mob broke into the consulate's front door while the last consulate Americans fled out the back running for the barge. Consul General Al Francis, who had gotten separated by the crowds, escaped to a Vietnamese naval vessel off the coast.

The twin dangers of anarchy and retribution against Americans surfaced at the Danang airport when an American chartered civilian aircraft was mobbed by a massive crowd of soldiers and civilians. Deserters swinging and firing their weapons fought their way on board. The crew desperately closed the doors and the plane started to taxi through the crowd. People attempted to lay down under the wheels and clung to wheel axles. Shots were fired at the Boeing 727 as it lifted off. The same scenes of disorder, violence, everyone for themselves threatened the April 2 evacuation from the U.S. Nha Trang consulate further down the coast. Only the American consulate staff got out on helicopters.

Martin and Kissinger's foremost concern was that a similar wave of anarchy and possible retribution against Americans could erupt in Saigon –derailing the evacuation and endangering the lives of Americans and Vietnamese associated with Americans. They considered it imperative that the embassy's evacuation be discreet and hidden from Saigon's population as much as possible.

To this end, within the large Saigon mission, Martin individually farmed out evacuation assignment piecemeal, only to the Political Section, DAO and the CIA Station to unobtrusively transport thousands of Vietnamese evacuees to the airport. Political officer Lacy Wright recalls in his Oral History that only 15-20 embassy personnel were aware of the massive semi-clandestine evacuation operation. Martin kept USIS Director Alan Carter and some other agency heads in the dark –with heart-breaking consequences later for the evacuation of their Vietnamese employees and families.

Martin was later criticized by members of his Country Team for his “close hold” methods. Also, for delaying the full-scale airlift until after Congress' confirmation on April 17 that it had terminated aid to South Vietnam. Martin responded that secrecy was essential to prevent a Danang-like panic in Saigon and retribution against Americans, possibly by angry ARVN soldiers. He also contended that a GVN-North Vietnamese political settlement and peaceful surrender remained a possibility until the last 2 days before the Fall of Saigon. A negotiated surrender would open the way for a safer, more orderly evacuation.

DAO's General Smith's large DAO “Pentagon East” compound and airplane runway at Tan Son Nhut airport ideally met the conditions for a concealed large-scale air evacuation out of South Vietnam. The outer Tan Son Nhut perimeter was well-guarded by ARVN.

An inner security ring surrounded the DAO airport compound. DAO converted its huge auditorium into an evacuation processing center. It was called “Dodge City.”

In Washington, Martin and Kissinger took steps to keep evacuation operations out of the American and international media. To prevent leaks, only select national security offices were aware of the secret airlifts’ huge scale and organization.

Before I flew to Saigon, State Department cables had been sent worldwide prohibiting employees from traveling to Vietnam. The GVN cooperated with the ban by instructing its diplomatic posts abroad not to issue visas in American passports. This ban did not affect me. The GVN consul in Delhi had given us multiple entry visas when we returned to Vietnam for TET in 1974. About the time I arrived in Saigon on April 21, our Saigon embassy had also sent out a circular message to all posts banning USG employees from traveling to Vietnam. I hoped I would not be declared *persona non grata* when I stepped into the embassy and ordered back to New Delhi.

The diary entries that follow provide one small window on the situation before and during the Saigon evacuation up to April 25. To give better context, before 4 of the 9 diary entries, I will provide brief background notes relevant to the day’s events. Additionally, I insert occasional parenthetical sentences inside the diary sections. They clarify events that need clarification today. Those sentences in parenthesis are also not part of the diary’s 1975 text.

Friday, April 18

Situation around Xuan Loc worsening. NVA bypassing it on two sides and heading towards logistical center at Long Binh and Bien Hoa airbase outside Saigon. Saigon may be in a vise and under heavy artillery fire within two weeks, maybe one.

Dispatched cable to Saigon, info Washington, informing of my intention to make “unofficial, purely private” three-day trip to Saigon to see family. Since this is a non-official trip, hopefully they will not order me to cancel it.

Saturday, April 19

The Department has, in effect, given the green light for me to go through a cable merely “strongly urging” me to “postpone” my trip -as though the future holds better prospects to go than now! Fortunately, this is still in the realm of advice, and not an instruction to cancel. So, I will go.

Disconcerting news comes from the battle-fields in Vietnam and from Phnom Penh. Phan Thiet, the last coastal city above Vung Tau, which is at the end of Saigon’s lifeline to the South China Sea, fell yesterday. (This increased the importance of Saigon River wharfs in and near the city for evacuation by sea.)

Twenty NVA combat divisions seem to have arrived in SVN and are plunging south. Saigon probably cannot muster 10 divisions. In Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge announced that they have beheaded the Cambodian leaders who have fallen into their hands. Many got out in a rush by land transportation to the Thai border.

The *Enterprise* and *Hancock* are joining some other carriers (and ships) in the (U.S. fleet gathering in the) South China Sea.

The South Vietnamese, including troops and police, will resent and may turn on U.S. efforts to get Americans and particularly their Vietnamese friends out. Ugly situation indeed. Made more so by the GVN's insistence that all Vietnamese citizens traveling need passports, and the impossibility for VN to get passports unless they are highly placed or rich to the tune of \$14,000/passport. It appears that the USG will have to put what pressure we have on Thieu to allow us to clear (Vietnamese citizens) through GVN (immigration) authorities to fly them out (of the country). It would be almost impossible to squeeze an enormous number of passports out of the red-tapeish Interior Ministry in a short period as the country falls.

If Thieu is overthrown by a coup, or attempts to flee the country, 2 different situations could ensue: chaos and a rapid NVA takeover -likely; or a conciliation government that could, by fulfilling the PRG's first condition for a ceasefire through replacing Thieu, produce a lull in the fighting and an orderly evacuation such as occurred in North Vietnam in 1954 when the French gave up -unlikely.

Received a letter from Kim's father today. The family is worried. There is talk of list. (Appears to me that) The best one is the U.S. Embassy's list, the worse the "other side's" list.

Sunday, April 20

Not much in the Indian papers about situation in SV. A *Washington Post* article talked about the phenomenon of thousands of Americans coming out of the woodwork in VN -(contractors)deserters, dope addicts, etc..., and with their girlfriends, wives and children. They are putting great pressure on the Saigon (embassy) consular staff. The line extends for hundreds of yards. Reportedly, Chinese businessmen in Cholon, Saigon's Chinatown, are giving \$35,000 to Americans to marry their daughters, to make them eligible for evacuation. According to a *Post* Peter Arnett article, the SVN are doing well at Xuan Loc. The Brigadier General commanding, (Le Minh) Dao, was Province Chief in Dinh Tuong when I was there and is a fire-eater. But he and the ARVN may soon be overwhelmingly outnumbered.

During Hanoi's 1972 invasion, there were about 12 NVA divisions operating in the South. Now there are 20-22, all armed and equipped with handsome Soviet stuff that far and away exceeds the limits set down by the Paris Accord. And Congress has been cutting back U.S. aid promises since that accord at an accelerated rate. Absolutely disgraceful. The VN do not seem to have recognized the full extent -the totality- of their abandonment. Congress has destroyed our ability to stay the course in helping the South Vietnamese, whom we have assisted to preserve their freedoms and fought with. The (Soviet-model communist) totalitarian governments have a distinct advantage in creating and pursuing long-term policies. It is too bad the VN have to pay the price in blood and suffering.

The April 21 diary entry is next. It relates my travel to Vietnam, arrival in Saigon, and my first day in Saigon. My April 21 arrival coincided with the same day President Thieu resigned. He boarded a CIA Airplane and was flown to Taiwan.

A few days prior to my April 21 arrival, Ambassador Martin ordered a *covert* evacuation of Vietnamese relatives of American citizens and "High Risk" Vietnamese. High risk was broadly interpreted to mean all Vietnamese who had worked for or had worked directly with the American diplomatic mission and U.S. military in Vietnam. The Ambassador had no choice but to make the evacuation a covert one hidden from the Saigon population and the media. The brief time remaining before Saigon fell made it impossible to comply with GVN passport and immigration requirements for the thousands of Vietnamese evacuees. Hence Political Section's Shep Lowman's comment to me when I arrived at the embassy that the massive evacuation underway was in the "Black," (clandestine) channel.

An April 19 INS cable had permitted evacuation of relatives of U.S. citizens, but only after the citizens had signed financial sponsorship affidavits guaranteeing transportation and resettlement costs for the Vietnamese relative refugees. The embassy Front Office composed and printed hundreds of these evacuation affidavit forms. They were distributed to those conducting the evacuation.

The forms were used, or it could be charged, purposefully misused by POL, DAO and CIA officers managing the covert movement of Vietnamese evacuees to the airport. We were in a rush. We liberally wrote down the names of fictitious sponsors in the U.S. with their fictitious addresses in the U.S. That was sufficient to satisfy the U.S. DAO contractors at the Tan Son Nhut Dodge City evacuation hall clearing passengers for evacuation on military aircraft.

In the evacuation's final weeks, the contractors did not even bother to look at the forms while tens of thousands of evacuees paraded by them on the way to board airplanes. The evacuation qualification guidelines gradually morphed into any Vietnamese lucky enough to be a friend of an American conducting the evacuation, or a friend of a Vietnamese evacuee, or a frightened GVN employee on the street seeking to escape, or someone by chance latching onto a group of evacuees at an assembly site waiting for an embassy bus.

The evacuees would be quietly picked up and taken to a safe house, sometimes called a “staging” house or area. It was usually a villa located within a walled enclosure, the type that many U.S. and senior GVN officials lived in. The evacuees would be grouped, placed in vehicles, and in some cases buses, and driven past the Vietnamese and American military guards at Tan Son Nhut to the gigantic Dodge City hall at DAO’s “Pentagon East.” From there they were boarded onto C-130s and C-141s spiraling down from the sky to avoid anti-aircraft fire, and flown out of the country. Most evacuee flights went to Guam. Many also went to Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

Shep Lowman, a highly respected Vietnam-hand, was Chief of the Embassy Political Section’s Internal Affairs unit. He managed the Political Section’s covert evacuation channel. His deputy, Lacy Wright, and political officer Art Kobler, both accomplished Vietnam specialists, assisted Shep. So did dynamic Junior Officer Joe McBride.

The Embassy DAO (Defense Attaché Office) and CIA ran their own covert evacuation channels. I also worked with embassy DAO and CIA embassy personnel to evacuate their Vietnamese employees in the DAO channel.

One challenge I faced in Saigon was the embassy Front Office’s understandable chagrin that I had arrived in Saigon while they were attempting to send as many American employees as possible out of the country. I didn’t blame Ambassador Martin and his DCM, Wolfgang Lehmann, for their displeasure at my showing up while they were fielding a thousand balls in addition to the evacuation. They probably were aware that the Department, by telegram, had approved my 3-day private visit. But, I also knew well that DCM Lehmann, the point-man for the evacuation, could order me to depart immediately. Fortunately, I had enjoyed good personal relations with him when he was Can Tho Consul General during my 1973 TDY assignment.

Also, fortunately, I had come to know Eva Kim, Ambassador Bunker’s and Martin’s Personal Secretary, during my previous Vietnam tours.

Q: Eva Kim?

TOMSEN: Yes. An unsung hero. Eva had personally created the affidavit form used for the evacuation. She controlled its distribution from the Front Office. Years later, Eva was the Political Under- Secretary’s secretary in the Department.

Q: That’s how I know her name.

TOMSEN: Just a wonderful person. She gave me the forms that I used to evacuate Kim’s family and other Vietnamese.

By chance, I encountered DCM Lehmann in the Front Office shortly after arriving in Saigon. He seemed ready to tolerate my evacuation effort, while also making his

displeasure clear. The next day, his mood shifted to an unsmiling “When are you leaving?” demand.

Begin Monday, April 21 diary entry:

New Delhi to Bangkok to Saigon. Took off from a rainy Delhi on a Pan Am flight at 6:16 A.M. after sleepy exit from our home at 13 Malcha Marg near the embassy.

Airport: Exemption certificate (the Rs.15 exit fee) counter. This was literally surrounded by a group of six or seven bantering Chinese negotiating with the Indian fonctionnaire who was trying to end the seemingly interminable show so as to move on to the next traveler. Only one of the Chinese -the smallest and apparently lowest ranked- could speak English. He and the Indian Babu, would stumble through an exchange. The Chinese would then about-face blurt out the Indian's latest message in Chinese. A loud discussion would ensue among the Chinese, followed by new instructions shouted back to the go-between, who would then resume negotiations with the official. After 15 minutes of this comedy, the official stamped the exemption certificates. Apparently, the Chinese were transit passengers who wandered past the lax airport security apparatus in the main terminal, and found themselves in the position of having to (formally) exit India!

Surprising, there is Kim. How did she get in? Oh, forgot the checkbook. Let's have some coffee. On to the Indian equivalent of a snack bar. Two friendly boys in uniforms that were once white smiling proudly behind a chugging, coughing, occasionally roaring espresso coffee machine. Pace seems to relate to the erratic voltage. Something terribly wrong has happened to that machine in the country of the Bhagavad Gita that prides itself on its spiritual splendor.

Three middle-aged Germans look alarmed. One castigates the Indian espresso coffee makers for misunderstanding his order —coffee, not tea— and then insists that his cup be filled beyond the halfway point. Time to pay. Ah, no change. Of course, a common occurrence in any Indian shop. Well, please give us change when it comes. It came. A German coin with the number 50 on it and an American quarter. We look around the room as an overweight German steward barks orders to his crew of German and Japanese flight attendants. The Germans dutifully listen; the Japanese giggle among themselves. We comment on the room, about 40' x 20', walls unpainted and smudged, cobwebs, a motley collection of chairs and tables, all more than balancing out a few scattered, enormous, magnificent works of art —Moghul paintings and some Hindu sculpture pieces, lost on the wall.

(During the Bangkok stopover in the transit Lounge) I was fortunate enough to grab a New Yorker (magazine) with a lengthy article by Robert Shaplen, who has

deeply involved himself in Vietnam since 1946. His April 21 "Letter from Saigon" begins, "This capital is a lost cause, fatalistically awaiting the climatic hour of the 30-year Indochina war, can, at best, become a hostage for peace on predominantly Communist terms."

Just prior to the North Vietnamese capture of Phuoc Long, the Chief of Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces visited Hanoi. He agreed to another increase in Soviet military aid. In late February, Nikolai Firyubin, a Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, bolstered the Soviet commitment. (After the war, the Soviet Union- not China- would be Hanoi's most valuable geo-strategic partner.)

According to Shaplen, the GVN has lost half of its main divisions, large elements of Ranger units, untold numbers of territorial forces, and somewhere between \$700,000 to \$1 billion worth of material, as well as half the Air Force. Hanoi, he says, has 18 divisions in SVN. The South has perhaps seven or eight now.

Shaplen says the rout in the north was precipitated by poor generalship by Thieu, who should not have first ordered the withdrawal of the army from I CORPS, then issued orders to reverse the retreat.

Shaplen ends by half-foreseeing a Coalition Government after Thieu's exit. I don't know.

Nor is it confirmed that the NV will Permit the PRG (Provincial Revolutionary Government) to set itself up in the South. NVA bayonets, not the VC, are acquiring the victory. The NVA constitution sees only a united VN. The Lao Dong (Communist) Party is an all-VN Party. A totalitarian, unitary VN is a near certainty.

Bangkok-Saigon: China Airlines 818.
(Pan Am had canceled its onward flights to Saigon; I switched to Taiwan's China Airlines). Last 20 minutes we descend over hundreds of square miles of rich Mekong Delta rice land, crisscrossed by man-made canals and rivers. The land is absolutely flat as far as the eye can see. "The Delta" is aptly named. There is the muddy Saigon River. In the distance, eight-ten funnels of smoke in different places twist upward. It could be the war. It is probably peasants burning off the land preparatory to planting.

(I wrote the preceding diary passages in the Bangkok airport transit lounge at mid-day, the remainder on board the China Airlines flight into Saigon. The following entry was written during the night of April 21 at Embassy Political (POL) Section officer Lacy Wright's home):

Approximately 2200 hours.

Incredible. Just incredible the past five hours. Grab a taxi at the airport. On the way in, the driver says that the Vietnamese were being *rut* (thrown away) by the Americans, and are all frightened out of their wits.

On arriving at the Embassy, I head towards the Consular Section. En route, on the lawn, I meet Shep Lowman, the very good head of the internal unit of the Political Section. In answer to my first question, he responds, "We're getting the families of FSOs out now via the Black (covert) Channel. The Political Section is also handling evacuation of Vietnamese." How fortunate! Tell him that I am around to help during my stay. We walk to Lacy's house, a short walk from the embassy.

(From Lacy's) Phone Kim's parents and ask them to prepare for my visit. Plan to come by in a few hours-time, at about 7:00 pm, to take them to a safe house, before 8:00 pm curfew, one person limited to one suitcase or box, per evacuation guidelines.

When I got there at 7:30 p.m., a half hour before curfew, not much had been packed.

At ten of nine, we finished loading the car, just as a patrol of soldiers walked by. A group of paramilitary police were at the next corner watching us. I concluded the best thing to do was to postpone to morning. I drove away with the luggage.

Whew! Time and suspicious soldiers overtook us.

The military situation is worsening. A strategic withdrawal from Xuan Loc has commenced.

Back to the embassy, (while) the ambassador's secretary, Eva Kim, was preparing my (sponsorship) forms for Kim's family, the DCM, half in jest and half seriously, quips that for every thousand U.S. citizens (evacuees) in any one period, the embassy has 400

more coming in. Definitely a dig at me. The Front Office has been refusing everyone entry, including a Counselor in the American Embassy Bangkok! Wonder how I made it.

Thieu, sobbing, resigned, at long last tonight, turning over everything to his Vice President. This might, but probably won't, ease the military pressure in hopeful anticipation of negotiations. The NV have always plunged into openings when available.

They will do so now. Anything else is wishful thinking. The battle of Bien Hoa and then Saigon is approaching.

The evacuation will be difficult but still possible. Ambassador Martin must be given credit for moving ahead with a flexible interpretation of Vietnamese

evacuees. He's allowing the smuggling operation to go forward with a cover of evacuating U.S. citizens.

At Shep's request, back to the Political Section. Wade through a sheaf of 1,000 (plus) telegrams from alarmed Vietnamese relatives in the States writing to the President, the Ambassador and anyone they can think of to help get their relatives out of Vietnam. Pick up a large pile and drive back to Lacey's.

On the way, stopped by a group of boisterous gun-toting PSDF (People's Self-Defense Force militia) at a (night-time curfew) road-block. One asks for cigarettes. Tell him I don't smoke and start to move away. He demands 200 piasters. Slowly accelerate ahead, holding my breath and not looking back. Fortunately they just stand there.

Back at Lacey's. Ironic. Came to see if I could force a stubborn consular section to put our family on the evacuation list. Now, I'm processing a (evacuation) list.

How disconcerting to plunge into these cables that one can never read in total. All heart-rendering, most from Vietnamese wives desperately trying to get their relatives out. Through the lines of the telegrams and letters one can glean the tremendous hope and trust the writers have invested in their written appeals. It's their last chance and only hope. Yet there are now only five of us working on all evacuation efforts in the political section. Including getting out the Vietnamese employees working in the embassy and in the consulates.

U.S. press reports that the White House is assessing the possibility of evacuating from 500,000 to 1,000,000 Vietnamese. The six- or seven-man consular section is completely devoted to handling the exit of U.S. ex-servicemen, deserters, drug addicts, contractors, and their Vietnamese dependents. DAO, Political, and CIA personnel are running the blockade at the airport with their own little covert operations, carrying groups known to them, such as (for us) the (POL) families of FSOs. Tens of thousands in the letters (and faxes) will never be contacted.

"We will be lucky to get our local employees out," one man in POL, an evacuee from Danang (states). (He) is preparing the list of (all) local employees and has a long way to go.

Walking through the embassy you can see the great anguish on the faces of the local employees. Sometimes they ask me whether I've come to help my family, already knowing the answer. They are aware that (in Danang Consul General) Al Francis and his officers arranged for the locals to board barges on the river and (travel) down to the coast (to Saigon). It worked. In Nha Trang, the local (employees) were less fortunate. NVA tanks could appear outside the city.

Choppers were called in. The U.S. American Consulate staff and maybe a few local employees made it out.

Shep said two very large barges (capable of transporting 6,000 people each) are moored at the Saigon River. (They are) standing by to take out Vietnamese local employee and others whom we gather from the mountain of messages. Everyone agrees that if the NVA strikes quickly, we may get none of these people out. The exits to the barges may be blocked by chaos, or the barges may not make it down the river to the sea.

Q: It's July 22 and we're now concluding in 1975 Ambassador Tomsen's last connections with Vietnam before the Fall of Saigon.

TOMSEN: Thanks. We are now moving to the background notes for my Tuesday, April 22, 1975 Vietnam diary. It's my second day in Saigon.

During the morning of April 22, I and Political Officer Joe McBride moved to Shep Lowman's house, a few blocks away from Lacy's.

Earlier in the day, at 7:00 am, I phoned Kim's father at 210 Gia Long Street. I gave him the address of the staging house the family should go to, arriving about 8:00 am. To mitigate further suspicion by neighbors (later it was confirmed that the next-door neighbor had been a VC informant for many years) and neighborhood security personnel, I informed him that I could not return to the house. I would meet the family with their luggage -which I had collected the night before- at the staging house later that morning.

Adroitly, each member of the family left the house per their normal daily routine. Older brother and Army Captain Dat departed on his motorcycle towards the Ministry of Defense where he worked. He changed direction and arrived at the staging house gate entry. Another brother, Nam, did the same. Kim's father, mother, Nam's fiancé and family long-time nanny and helper transited the sprawling vegetable market at Cho Ben Thanh on the way to the staging house. Kim's aunt, the nurse, separately arrived there from her apartment. Youngest brother Cuong set off on his bike for school, but this time deterred to drop the Gia Long house key off at the home of another aunt, Co Dong. I would meet her later that morning.

After we reunited at the staging house, Kim's father gave me a list of 11 other relatives to evacuate if possible. I assured him that I would try. For the moment it was a relief to see that Kim's immediate family was now poised to be taken to Tan Son Nhut Airport to board a refugee flight out of Vietnam.

During the late morning and early afternoon hours of April 22, I arranged for the relatives on Kim's father's group 2 list to assemble at the Gia Long house. I delivered the David Veitch letter concerning his Vietnamese father-in-law to the Canadian Embassy. Also

arranged for the Vang Ramp relatives to stand by for evacuation –one suitcase per evacuee.

At Shep's suggestion, I agreed to be a driver for the DAO evacuation channel. Shep was relying on the DAO channel to evacuate some of his relatives in the Vietnamese military, in addition to some High-Risk Vietnamese officials and their families who were POL section contacts. Shep gave me lists of CIA and AID Vietnamese employees to evacuate.

On Tuesday afternoon, I visited the embassy motor pool and met the same Vietnamese dispatcher I had known during my previous tours in Vietnam. He permitted me to check out a 3-row embassy van that was ideal for smuggling evacuees to the airport. The vehicle's diplomatic NG (Ngoai Giao) license plates boosted its authority. It could carry up to 20 crammed-in Vietnamese at a time!

Unfortunately for me, late Tuesday afternoon, the DCM summoned me back to the Front Office. His forbearing attitude (of the previous day) shifted to a firm "You must leave ASAP" instruction. The changed tone may have been related to Ambassador Martin's and the DCM's furious reactions to the unauthorized, sudden arrival in-country of two other FSOs -Lionel Rosenblatt and Craig Johnston. Secretary of State Kissinger was equally outraged.

I knew Lionel but not Craig. During the Saigon evacuation, we shared the same motivation to get as many vulnerable Vietnamese out as possible. The three of us spent the next several days before departing trying to escape Front Office notice. The DCM summoned me back twice more to nail down the specific time I was leaving the country.

Q: That's amazing. So up until now, you had remained invisible to the Front Office but somehow they found out that you were there.

TOMSEN: After arriving on April 21, I was tolerated but had not become *persona non-grata*. Maybe the Department's cabled clearance for my private visit to Saigon acted as a buffer then. On April 22, the Front Office wanted me out. The DCM also told me to inform Lionel and Craig if I saw them to report to the Front Office immediately. They had to become invisible. I could not. The Front Office knew that I was staying at Shep's and working out of POL. I was only a phone call away.

So, I, too, tried to keep my distance from the Front Office, but had to respond promptly to instructions to visit the DCM.

Q: The embassy staff had a number of separate smuggling operations going on that are not coordinated with each other?

TOMSEN: That's correct. I was basically a driver. And lucky to be one of those in the small group covertly implementing the evacuation on the ground. I sensed that Ambassador Martin and DCM Lehmann were keeping details of the evacuation very

close hold. So I did not ask for details. As far as I could see, POL, DAO, and CIA managed 3 discreet operations. Tactically, each channel decided when and where to relocate their staging houses—POL changed theirs about every day. CIA utilized Air America flights to Bangkok to evacuate their employees. Separately, all three reacted to the unpredictables that arose daily, sometimes hourly. Each focused on its evacuee pipeline. Daily, they coordinated to help each other.

At Shep's request, I collaborated with the CIA Station's (the late) Grant Ishikawa and "Terry" to transport CIA Vietnamese employees to Tan Son Nhut in the DAO channel. I also drove numerous DAO-chosen Vietnamese families to the airport. I worked with a USAID officer to evacuate him and his Vietnamese relatives. And I evacuated Kim's family and others using the POL channel. There was an embassy Emergency Evacuation Center in the embassy's 4th floor communication room led by Pol-Mil officer, Jim Devine. It coordinated daily bus and vehicular evacuation runs to the airport.

Begin Tuesday, April 22 diary entry:

Walk over to the embassy lounge, talk to Art Kobler who is helping to operate the (POL) channel operation. Pick up the vehicle at the motor pool with the family's luggage. Drive to the staging house. Kim's family has arrived. About 14 more members of (former CORDS advisor) Gary Larsen's family are assembled there too. Some got out the day before.

Give U.S. dollars to Kim's parents. Her mother said they decided not to take the gold. Left it at home. Kim's aunt, the nurse (Di Dao), looks very tired and concerned. The rest looks OK. Kim's father gives me a list of 11 immediate relatives. (I will) try to evacuate them also. Say goodbye and drive back to the embassy. Will (hopefully) meet the family later at the airport.

I begin to fulfill promises made in New Delhi —evacuate the 10 relatives of Vang Ramp, the wife of the CARE official in Delhi, including a police captain, (named) Tong. And deliver David Veitch's letter to the Canadian High Commission in Saigon.

Vang did an excellent list of names of her relatives, phone numbers and addresses in Saigon, plus phone numbers of her relatives in the U.S. who will sponsor. I call Tong, a captain in Saigon's fifth precinct police station. Ask him to meet me at the Continental Hotel's veranda restaurant in 50 minutes.

Take an embassy car with driver to the Canadian embassy. There's no consular officer there, only a Charge (d'Affaires). The place is crowded with VN. One woman tugs at my arms and says she wants to emigrate to Canada and can I help her? I say I am not a Canadian.

A short French-accented young man walks out (of the embassy). The Charge? I introduce myself and ask to speak to him privately on behalf of Veitch. He quickly propounds that he is too busy, maybe he cannot see me. He turns indecisively around toward his office. (Repeats) I don't want to see you, but then ushers me into a small room three or four steps away. He tells me how busy he is and why I can't take his time (this all takes five minutes). I begin to tell him about Veitch's problem. Relatives have written to the Veitches in Delhi that his father-in-law should leave Vietnam. However, the father-in-law is a Buddhist monk, an old man, hard of hearing, and faces no danger from the communists. Veitch is not sure about the wisdom of the idea, and asked me to ask the Canadian officer for help.

Instead, a flustered Charge is in front of me, perhaps the most beleaguered official in Saigon. He asks what is bulging out of the envelope in my hand. Tell him it's money for David's father-in-law. He pulls it out of the envelope, shoves it into my hands and tells me he will not deliver money. What should he do with the letter? (I tell him to) send it to the addressee. I remind him that I am only trying to help a Canadian government official. "Is he CIDA?" (Canadian aid organization, not diplomatic), he asks in a disparaging way. Yes. Well, tell him I have been getting all of his messages and we have not been able to do anything because the government will not issue passports. Do you understand? We can't do anything!

Thank him and begin to leave. He catches me, perhaps as an afterthought, and asks me to call him back in the afternoon when he is freer. He writes down his telephone number. I did. He said he appreciated my effort to help a Canadian. Would do whatever he can, which he did not think could be much, and asked me again what he should do with the letter.

In a state of relief, return to the embassy car. Skirt a large Buddhist-Catholic "Peace" – "End the War" demonstration at the Saigon (Catholic) Cathedral. (Take) a round-about course to the Continental restaurant. (Release the car and embassy driver).

About five or six out of 30—40 veranda tables are occupied. Newsmen with large movie cameras, tripods, slung over their shoulders walk by, en route to the demonstration site. Order some coffee. Groups of young boys shout past the hotel guards from the nearby sidewalk, hawking wares, shoe-shining services. One girl breaks through, collects 20 piasters from me for an orphanage, and gives me a box of incense sticks. Nice touch.

The overtures from the sidewalk continue. Move to the center of the room. Not many customers. Digest the wide "paysage" of the center of Saigon including the National Assembly Building. The redlight Tu Do street also containing some of Saigon's best stores stretches ahead. This center of Saigon looks a bit busier but basically the same.

A rather chubby VN (must be Captain Tong) in full uniform drives up on a motor-scooter and parks it in front. Steps up to the veranda. I walk over. We introduce ourselves, order coffee, and huddle.

Tell him I think I can get him and the rest of the people on Vang's list (10 in all) out of the country. He says that he will not go as long as there is a chance that the communists can be defeated. (Assure) him that possibility (is) now totally out of reach. Tong thanks me.

He notes that one of the ten on Vang's list is in Vung Tau. (Respond) that's the best place to be now besides Saigon, since one can grab a boat. (Ask) Tong to go home, have his family members pack one bag apiece, and stand by 24 hours a day for my phone call. I will give an address to which they should proceed immediately. Above all, don't tell anyone, other family members, anyone about their intentions (to flee the country). When the call comes, they should pick up their bags and go immediately to the destination.

(Give to Tong) the present staging area address but clarify that it may or may not be the place he will go. Pay the bill.

Ask Tong to drop me off (from his Motor-scooter) at Co Dong's and Chu Thai's -Kim's aunt and uncle --who the family had told to stay put earlier in the morning. (They are on the list of 11, group 2). After some 30 minutes of wrestling with Saigon's crazy street numbering pattern, we arrive at Co Dong's tiny rowhouse.

Ring the bell. Neighbors across the narrow street peek out windows and doors. Chu Thai excitedly lets me in; starts to talk. Maid is near. I ask him if we could go to an upstairs' room. Intercepted on the way (up) by Co Dong who grabs me and pleads for help. Upstairs Chu Thai emotionally exclaims, "I want freedom! I want freedom! I must have freedom!" Give them Kim's father's list of 11 evacuees. Ask them to go to the abandoned 210 Gia Long Street (house). They have the key. There is a telephone (at the house). Stay put. One suitcase (apiece). Be prepared to leave at any time. (They should alert) the people on the rest of the list to go to 210 Gia Long. Walk downstairs, hop on the back of Tong's motor-scooter. We circle around to head back out to the main street. En route (back), see the lady neighbor across the street trying to maneuver herself past Chu Thai's house gate. Chu Thai stands directly behind the house gate, holding it tightly closed, an enormous smile on his face behind his glasses, shaking his head, "no, there's nothing."

Back through the Saigon traffic to the Embassy. Say goodbye to Tong, arrive POL about 12:00. Gather lists of Vang's and our family's second group of relatives, walk up to the Ambassador's secretary, Eva Kim (in the Front Office). Ask that

she type (the names) on the sponsorship forms. She begins to prepare. The bespectacled staff assistant intercedes, rudely denies my request.

Back to POL.

Joe McBride, who has been busy at the airport evacuation site, is compiling lists of GVN high risk priority evacuees. (Shows me) a xeroxed copy of an enormous CINCPAC list containing names and addresses of relatives of wives of U.S. military personnel in the Pacific area. All of these people will presumably be on the barge operation in an emergency, or make up part of the outflow should a political agreement allow a 1954-type, larger evacuation. Latter, of course, in my opinion, is not very likely. The NVN may talk or hint about a political agreement as they prepare for the coup de grace. Experience rules out concern about international opinion. They will probably attack Saigon with their forces already poised.

Shep returns. He calls Eva and asks her to prepare my lists. Eva does.

Joe walks into Shep's office with three pistols. Asks if I want one. Tell him no. He puts one in his briefcase, the rest in his safe. Shep says that he has gotten every one of his wife's family out except for one brother, a helicopter pilot. The pilot has not abandoned his unit in Can Tho, but may soon, hopefully tomorrow. Shep plans to use the DAO channel to get him out.

He asks if I want to work with DAO tomorrow as a driver. I agree. Shep gives me 2 lists prepared by Grant Ishikawa (CIA) and Jerome Jacobson (USAID Deputy Director).

The DAO channel formerly was (I had heard) smuggling people into Tan Son Nhut under the floorboard of vehicles, in trunks (thereby violating Ambassador Martin's ban on evacuating Vietnamese without his approval).

First stop is the AID Deputy Director's (house). Nice gentleman, fiftyish, very concerned about his daughter-in-law's Vietnamese family of about eleven. Ask him to have the family at his place tomorrow morning. Ask him if we can use his large, walled-in house to stage other families. He agrees.

Return to POL and call 210 Gia Long. A relative, Co Ba (older aunt honorific) surprisingly answers the phone and asked why I had forgotten her and her family. I say I was glad she was there and ask to speak to Co (Aunt) Dong. Co Dong picks up the receiver and says "You forgot Co Ba and her family. Tsk! Tsk!" Actually, Co Ba isn't on the list Kim's father gave me. Her husband told Kim's father they had their own evacuation plan. I tell Co Dong that today now looks impossible but I will be in touch tomorrow (regarding the pickup time).

Grant Ishikawa and Terry drop by (POL Section) with their CIA list. I outline the form requirement to them. They assure that they will have them done by 6:30.

(DCM) Lehmann wants to see me. Go to his office. Repeats that he is under enormous pressure from Washington to cut back on U.S. employees here at any cost. When do I plan to go! Tell him tomorrow at 1:00 pm. I am scheduled out on China Airlines' flight to Bangkok. He asks me if I have seen Lionel Rosenblatt or Scott Johnston. I respond no. He instructs me to contact him immediately when I see them, and to tell them that the DCM wants to see them before they see anyone else. He wants to chew them out, he says. Recount to him the unnecessary rudeness of the staff assistant and leave.

Back in POL. Grant (Ishikawa) gives me the forms for his people whom I will pick up tomorrow. A cable comes in from Washington from Jim Bullington (on the Department's Vietnam Task Force) asking that his wife's guardian and family be evacuated. The address is near the Tan Son Nhut entrance.

It is 1900 hours. Curfew is one hour away. (Drive to the street address.) Knock on the front door. No response. Ring the bell and knock harder. Finally, somebody peeks from behind the front door. I tell her that I am an American, go inside and ask to talk privately. (Taken) into an upstairs study. He's a lawyer. Brief him on the procedure. He gives me a Canadian visa application containing all the information we need (for the POL sponsorship form). There are seven of them. Leave after 10 minutes. (Passed information to Shep. 9 members of the Bullington family were taken to the airport in the POL channel and boarded a C-130 bound for Guam on April 24.)

Go to 210 Gia Long. Ask the relatives assembled there to be ready by tomorrow morning. Return to embassy. Will stay at Shep's house tonight since a group of 14 U.S. local (FSN) employees have come up from Can Tho and are staying at Lacy's. Call Lacy about the status of Kim's family. He informs eight (all) have gone to the airport.

Looks like I will be busy tomorrow and will not make that 1300 China Airlines flight. Draft cable to Kim (for Front Office clearance) stating all's going well and will be on the way back after one more day. (That is, one day after the April 23 China Airlines flight I was scheduled to take.) Hope DCM clears the message. Send it upstairs for his approval.

Shep plus POL-MIL officer (Jim Devine, an FSO managing the Embassy Emergency Evacuation Office) and myself check out embassy car. Drop Jim off at his house directly behind and near the fence of the Presidential Palace. Smart salute from ARVN guards near gate as we drive by (the palace). Jim cheerfully asks if we need some booze. He emerges from his house with half bottles of

Scotch, Gin, and a six-pack of tonic water. So tired and hungry that I am not sure I should drink.

Continue to Shep's. Bounce around scaring up supper from bread in icebox, cheese and a tin of ham. Joe McBride's suitcase is lying open on the living room floor. Lionel calls looking for Joe. Tell him about the DCM's search (for him and Craig). He is aware of it and says that he intends to keep out of Front Office's sight. To bed at midnight.

Background notes introducing the Wednesday, April 23 diary entry.

TOMSEN: Wednesday began with my unsuccessful attempt to lift a high-risk evacuee's suitcase loaded with gold bullion into my embassy van.

Tensions were rising in Saigon. On Tuesday, the day before, outnumbered and flanked by 3 North Vietnamese divisions, the 18th Division had been forced to pull back from Xuan Loc. The new defensive perimeter to the east, west and north of Saigon lay only 20 miles away from the city. More NVA divisions were flooding south. The final Battle for Saigon would begin on April 26.

After we met on Tuesday, April 22, Kim's aunt had spread the word to the others on Kim's father's list of 11 (one could not be reached) to gather at the Gia Long street house. She had the key. We communicated by phone. That worked. Then more relatives beyond the 10 moved into the house, probably relatives of relatives and friends too of the family and some other Vietnamese from off the street. The numbers in the house climbed above 30. At mid-day on Wednesday, I drove by the Gia Long family home. There was no surrounding wall, no gate entry. The knots of people in front the house the day before had grown to throngs of on-lookers milling around.

Through Wednesday, April 23 morning and the early afternoon, I was a DAO channel driver inside multiple DAO convoys transporting DAO, CIA, embassy and AID Vietnamese refugees to the Tan Son Nhut airport DAO evacuation hall. I had planned to use my large embassy van to take Kim's second group of refugees, the Ramp family relatives, and AID's Jerome Jacobson's Vietnamese relatives to the airport in the DAO channel.

By early afternoon that intention was derailed by unpredictable events confirming that I would not be able to catch my afternoon flight to Bangkok –DCM Lehmann would not be pleased. The U.S. colonel and his civilian contractor assistant managing the DAO channel faced a growing tide of high-level ARVN generals and other senior officers with their families seeking evacuation. The DAO contractor made clear to me that the ARVN military evacuees took precedence over Jerome's and my Vietnamese families. The spurt of ARVN officers and their families would enlarge the already overflowing crowd of refugees at the Dodge City evacuation hall.

Another difficulty was extricating Kim's 10 relatives from the packed family house at Gia Long Street. I needed time to move them to a staging house for later transport to the airport.

Fortuitously, around 3:00 pm, the DAO contractor took me off DAO channel duty. He told me that the DCM's secretary had been continually phoning him to inform that the DCM urgently needed to see me. I took that opportunity to shift back to the embassy's POL channel in order to evacuate Jerome's and my refugees.

My third and final meeting in the Front Office with DCM Lehmann was pleasant. He was glad to hear my revised plan to depart the next day on a C-130 evacuation flight to Clark Air Base in the Philippines—a deadline I was determined to meet. He also signed my cable to Kim. A technician in the Delhi Embassy code room personally delivered the message to Kim at a dinner party in New Delhi hosted by the Deputy Political Counselor that night.

Begin Wednesday, April 23 diary entry:

Up at 6:20. Walk over to Lacy's, two blocks away, and one block from the Embassy. The Can Tho (consulate) Vietnamese (local FSN employees) are sitting in the living room next to the door, luggage at their side. A bowl of VN noodles on a table in another room. Try them. Cold, but tasting good with a cup of coffee! (Speak with) Miss Tuyet (whom I had known during the 1973 TDY) among the Can Tho group. Walk over to the embassy, sign out the van. Drive back to Shep's.

Our first group (in the DAO channel) has arrived, Senator Truong's wife and two teenage children; three of the CIA-sponsored people; and another group (sponsored by DAO).

Begin to load the van with Senator Truong's wife. She is in tears. Laments that this is the second time that she has had to flee her country ("mat nuoc" - I lost my country.).

In 1954, she recounts that she had been forced to put the family's valuable religious artifacts under the floor boards before leaving (Hanoi). Her family (probably) was among the better-off in the north. Bend down to pick up her largest suitcase. I could see that times had not changed. Cannot get it off the ground! Shep walks by. Says we cannot take it. (The suitcase is filled with gold bullion). From then until we arrived at Tan Son Nhut, she asks me four times to help her get the (left behind) suitcase to the plane. (I heard later that someone in POL had delivered the suitcase to her at the airport!)

The DAO operation is a smooth one. All you need is a full colonel, his VN driver, and a black limousine with (military diplomatic equivalent) "T" license plates. The colonel leads the convoy out of the secretive staging area, (the "DAO

house”), which is 200 yards from the Tan Son Nhut airbase entrance. (I am at the wheel of my van in the convoy). As he passes the VN army guards, the colonel leans toward his driver, signals (with his fingers) to the guards through the window how many cars he is leading. If a problem were to arise --none really did though we had plenty of draft-age young men in the cars— he was to step out (and resolve it).

Before each airport run, Greene, the DAO house manager, instructs the U.S. drivers to answer questions from the VN guards by saying the passengers were off to see their relatives at Phu Quoc (a South Vietnamese island off the tip of Vietnam).

(Other cars are late arriving before one late morning run.) Greene, about 35, is very fidgety. Says the tension is electric. He will be glad when all is over. Chat with Greene. Mention that present situation brings out the best and the worst in people. He says he would put it differently. The present pressures show who the pri_ks are!

Our forays (to the airport) go smoothly. Utter a sigh of relief after each convoy drives past the VN guards to the U.S.-managed Dodge City evacuation hall. Outside the hall, VN men, women, and children are lined up on all sides of the building with their luggage, waiting for the lift-off to safety.

Became a professional people-runner, making multiple runs during the morning and early afternoon when I was pulled off.

Pick up another Grant group. This one at Grant’s villa, near Lacy’s. The maids at Grant’s ask me if they were leaving the country. Avoid the question. But all the VN, servants, guards know (the answer). Off we go, through the crowded streets of Saigon back to the DAO staging house and airport.

One load is the family of a DAO man handling logistics at the evacuation site. It’s getting hot now. Sweat is weighing down my shirt. I drive up to the large house, near USAID II. Once inside, ask that the driveway gate be blocked and secured, and load the van. (Still room for more in the van after loading.)

Off to AID Deputy Director Jerome Jacobson’s villa to add to this pickup –nine people, relatives of Jerome’s son. Plenty of VN military outside (as I drive up). Should I drive around the block? No. Beep! The guard opens the gate. In I go. The gate is locked (behind me). There are (now) 25 people. Three more (arrive). The common-law wife and two children of the Assistant Legal Advisor at AID. These three will have to wait. Back behind the wheel, sweating profusely. To the DAO house. Run the airport gauntlet again with 25 people.

About 12:30 the colonel tells Greene he has probably “50” ARVN evacuees later in the afternoon. There will be more. “Yes. Sir. Yes, Sir,” answers Greene. This is bad. It means I will never get Kim’s remaining relatives out. And we have the van, with a capacity of 20 plus people, the best single asset for the operation.

Next trip is expended in picking up three inter-related VN families who (worked at) a DAO BLQ (military bachelor’s living quarters dormitory). “Just take 20; if there’s 50 waiting, turn around and run,” Greene says. A contractor comes along to give directions. Says he is married to a VN, has five or six kids, has lived in VN for years and intends to stay on under the Communists. I advise him to leave. (But) he’s made up his mind.

We wind through warrens to the warren where they live. He goes up three flights to reconnoiter, comes back with the word there are 34 assembled. Impossible. I go up. Tell the family leader that 20 is max. He begs for 25. Time is slipping. I say Ok, but he has five minutes to pick them (out of the crowd). We end up with 28 packed into the van with luggage. Vietnamese are small, but this is much too many! The contractor is forced out onto the bumper and yells street directions to me (because) my view through the rear-view mirror is blocked.

The remaining relatives (left behind) pull up beside us in two cars about 100 yards from the DAO house! Stop and tell them they must go on as the staging area is secret. Out comes three or four extra bags from their cars. They are plunged into the heap of humanity inside. The three grand-mothers (the matriarchs) dressed in the NVN black from head to foot are chanting Catholic prayers over folded hands in the front (passenger) seat. The cars drive off. Go to the DAO house.

Curious VN are starting to frequent the entrance opening into the long driveway. At the end is the DAO house. We unload. Greene says the embassy called and urgently needs the van for a pouch run to the airport. OK with me.

My and Jerome’s VN need to go out today. (They) are obviously low priority now with the colonel’s nominees coming in. General Pham’s (3 stars) and General Hung’s (2 stars) families are upstairs. I will have better luck getting the rest of my priorities out in Lacy’s (POL channel) groups.

I also have to meet the DCM, whose secretary has been calling DAO to tell me the DCM is waiting to see me! He’s had it with me. (Missed my afternoon China Airlines flight to Bangkok.). First drive to Gary Larsen’s parents-in-law. They do not want to leave. One son in ARVN was MIA. They do not wish to leave him (behind). Another son, a doctor, is going to stay (here in Saigon with his parents).

Drive to the embassy and turn in the van. Call Lacy and arrange to get my remaining 20 plus out today (via POL channel). See Lehmann. (Amicable meeting.). Assure him That I will depart on one of the military EVAC flights

tomorrow to Clark Air Base. That will give me time enough to clear out the 9 Ramp relatives and the next 10 of the 29 Tomsen relatives, plus Jerome's remaining VN.

The DCM shakes hands and says "good luck." I return the wish. His secretary thanks me for taking care of Dr. Doi –head of the medical faculty at Saigon University. Eva gives me the affidavit forms. We say goodbyes.

Back to POL. Call Captain Tong. Give him Jerome's (staging house) address. Ask him to take his family to that address and wait. Inform Kim's aunt at (the crowded) Gia Long house via a sealed letter hand-carried by Jerome's driver that the 10 family relatives there, only 10, should accompany the driver to Jerome's house. (Family relatives taken to Jerome's villa.)

Joe McBride says a DAO officer just informed that one of the three or four "reconstituted" GVN divisions, the 3rd, formerly in I CTZ (CORPS) actually has about 50 members. It does not, in fact, exist, except on paper. Could this be true of the two Marine brigades supposedly back in action? ARVN is now in the process of beating a "strategic retreat." There are just too many NVA divisions, and too much armor for ARVN which has seven divisions maximum operative.

The ARVN soldier, the PF, RF, an PSDF out there still slugging away is the saddest symbol of the present predicament. He is ordered to take on an enemy that will inevitably overwhelm and probably kill him. Will the killing move to a higher intensity over the next few weeks? Or will NV wait for the Saigon Government to disintegrate gradually in view of its inevitable fate, a new peace group takes over for a surrender? Will those refugees attempting to leave –and which the NVN/PRG would not want except for vengeance— be allowed to evacuate?

I order a hot dog at the (embassy) cafeteria but can only eat half of it, given the pressure. Check out a Scout from the motor pool. Will pick up the Ramp and Tomsen relatives (at Jerome's house). Make two runs from Jerome's place to Lacy's new staging house, a fenced-in villa. Jerome requests the three-member AID (assistant legal attaché's group) go too. Acquiesce. New affidavits typed up by Eva.

Jerome offers to drive his own vehicle in moving our VN from Lacy's staging house to the airport. While loading his trunk with luggage, comment to him that the past few days had been the toughest emotional ones I have had to face, ever. He says that they should also be looked on as good ones, since we were saving lives.

Art (Kobler) says that the PX is selling goods at enormous discounts and literally giving away booze to any American who wants them. A DAO contractor told me

he had processed a package for shipping. Because of the backlog, he was given May 20 as the shipment date. Fat chance that we will be in Saigon then!

One puzzling thing is why doesn't the other side close down the airport? They may be able to do it now with incessant shelling and the SA-2s (Soviet Surface to Air anti-aircraft missiles) that intelligence sources say are out and around Tan Son Nhut.

We load my 2nd group of relatives, the Tong family, Jerome's Vietnamese and about 30 more whom Lacy had assembled into a bus and a van with NG plates for the airport run. The first (the bus) is driven by a VN local who had been evacuated from Danang. The second vehicle is driven by Jerome. Lacy takes the luggage. Art and I take the AID assistant legal attaché's three. It's 7:00; curfew is 8:00. Better get moving.

Before going, I give Lacy a note on the group of VN remaining at 210 Gia Long and ask him to help. I call Greene to get him to pick them up as well. The contractor who says he will stay on after the NVA overruns Saigon takes the message.

Art and I stop off at Lacy's to pick up my luggage, which is a shoulder bag. The maid excitedly asks me if I am leaving the country and if Lacy has. Respond he is coming back to dinner. Run over to Grant Ishikawa's house and give him a note about the (remaining) Gia Long group. Says he will see what he can do. Also phone 210 Gia Long. Tell them that the embassy has directed me to leave the country. I have asked others to get them out, but can't guarantee if someone will come. (Someone did come and evacuated them.)

Off to the airport, hopefully for a flight to Clark rather than Guam, which would be in the opposite direction from Delhi. Everything goes smoothly past the (airport) guards. Pentagon East is (still ringed by) refugee crowds outside.

A contractor (at the Evacuation Hall) tells me that Americans have either evacuated or assured the evacuation of key VN military families at the airbase to keep their cooperation for our evacuation. The family of the head of MI (Vietnamese Military Intelligence) at Tan Son Nhut (has departed), for example. The guards are aware of what's going on. Practically every car has draft-age males. Our last convoy includes one captain and two lieutenants with their families.

(Meet) Lionel Rosenblatt and Scott Johnston inside. They were both working on VN in Department assignments. Lionel on the Emergency Indo-China Task Force.

Lionel says they came (to Saigon) because over the past two months they became convinced that the Administration and Department were going to do nothing for

VN (evacuation). The only material on contingency planning was written by them. No one else cared. Disgusted, they took leave and came out without seeking permission. The head of the task force found out and sent a cable to the ambassador asking him to do them in when they arrived. But many are protecting them.

Long night (April 23-24) at the airport. Wander down to a cafeteria with a contractor and a (former) Vietnamese Foreign Ministry official –UCLA grad—who worked in the Foreign Ministry.

It is maddening to sit by and watch the DAO (sponsored) refugees stream directly to the airplanes without manifesting. We, the embassy and non-military (sponsored) refugees, wait. Part of our problem revolves around bad relations with the DOD (contractor) civilians –two GS (General Service) looking types, about 50-ish, (who) draw up the manifest lists. Joe McBride argues with them each time they have a “coordinating” discussion. They have the power. And they use it. They delay manifesting our lists. Meanwhile, a few families in our group applied separately for the manifest list for (airplane) seats and were given them earlier than ours. The DOD-types complain we don’t help them. Joe, shouting, retaliates that they did not ask. Unfortunately, in this situation, they have all the leverage. We wait.

End of April 23 diary entry.

Background notes for diary entries April 24, 25 and 26.

I passed the first 9 hours of the day among the huge crowd of refugee men, women and children at the Tan Son Nhut evacuation hall. There was no room to lay down. A constant low roar from a multitude of voices coursed through the air.

An estimated 10% of the crowd were U.S.-born husbands and fathers who had navigated the embassy’s consular section and obtained emergency immigrant parole documents for their Vietnamese wives and children. After Shep’s briefing on the covert evacuation channels shortly after my April 21 arrival, I had only visited the embassy’s consular section once seeking a document for another FSO family. The obviously snowed-under consular officer I met rebuffed my request. He shouted that he was too busy doing IR (Immediate Relative) petitions and “did not give a damn about FSO families anyway!”

Kim’s family and I flew out of Vietnam on separate C-130s during the mid-morning of April 24: they towards Guam, me towards the U.S. military base in Clark Air Base, 40 miles from Manila in the Philippines.

After landing at Clark, I spent the rest of April 24 and the early morning of April 25 struggling to escape a Catch-22 passport-Philippine visa entanglement. I had entered the Philippines on a U.S. military aircraft without a Philippine visa and entry stamp in my

diplomatic passport. The sovereignty-sensitive Philippine government's immigration authorities would prevent me from exiting the Philippines because I did not have the visa and airport arrival stamp. I could not take a U.S. military flight out of Clark because I did not possess official U.S. government travel orders!! I was still on personal leave. Without the Philippine visa and arrival stamp, I was technically marooned at Clark!

Thanks to help from military and State Department offices at Clark and advice from a friendly Philippine government official in nearby Angeles City, I was able to take a Clark Air Base taxi to a hotel in Manila, arriving in the early evening of April 24. After checking in, I crawled into my hotel room bed after 42 hours without sleep. I returned to India on April 26 after an overnight in Bangkok to meet with Embassy officers closely monitoring events in Vietnam.

Begin Thursday, April 24 diary entry:

The Tan Son Nhut airport still awake. There is a full moon out—which is good because the other side generally waits for less light at night before striking. Humdrum of refugee chatter in the bowling alley. Chu Thai (Kim's uncle) tells me his brother, educated in the U.S to be an air traffic controller, had several days ago descended from an airport tower at Tan Son Nhut, grabbed a plane and left the country.

03:30 a.m. Our group (is cleared). We will fly out of the country (myself) to Clark (Kim's relatives) to Guam.

Walk outside to a major seated at a card table with a Sgt. and lady interpreter (for passport/visa check). Chat with Phuong, an embassy representative (selected by Joe) who works for us as Americans depart.

He asks if the POL girl interpreter had gone. (I seem to have remembered that she did.) Reply I did not know. He said it would hurt morale among VN local employees if we moved out some (embassy) locals without giving some assurance to the rest. Phuong, a Cambodian-Vietnamese from Ba Xuyen, will be sending his family out tomorrow. It will keep him attached to his work, Joe says. It probably will.

It's now 05:00 a.m. Been up 23 hours without sleep. After one-half hour wait, ushered behind a building to a baggage and safety check by two friendly GIs who crack the same joke with an equal punch to each passenger. Then it's hurry up and wait for 2 hours. Three buses pull up. I help a Sergeant to load them, speaking VNese. He orders his men to reserve a front seat in one bus for me ("The most I can do, sir."). Five (nearby) loaded buses have been lined up for the past three or four hours.

No planes.

We wait. The Spec-4 at the door of our bus asks me to make sure no one gets out (and exits the bus). He walks over to a row of oil drums, lays down on one of them, lights up, and looks at the early morning rays of light. A red-headed USAF (United States Air Force) major walks by.

In the clear night air, open window, hear the Spec 4 ask him how things are going. In a thick southern accent, he says that things were going fine until the army and marine generals in Saigon started arguing to take over the evacuation operation. Major states he had planes taking out refugees every 30 minutes a day ago. Now (DAO Army Major General Homer) Smith was insisting that things be done “his way.” Buses of people were (now) coming from somewhere, crossing the tarmac to the airplanes, while buses holding people in line have to wait. Says he has no control over the “politics” of the situation so could just follow orders. Says he sure wished that he could get the (Air Force) authority back he had yesterday.

Our plane finally arrives. It’s 9:00 o’clock. Spotted by a woman passenger, a speck high in the sky, 20,000 feet or more, spiraling down. The pilot doesn’t want to take any chances with NVA SAM’s (Soviet surface to air missiles).

Minutes later, the plane, a C-130, is down. Three buses roll up to the rear of the plane.

Everybody scrambles aboard. Only seats for a few. The hard floor for (myself and) the rest. Two U.S. guards, armed with automatic M-16s and pistols, had leaped out and were facing outward in different directions, rifles in hand. Rather stupid and provocative. VN MP’s (Military Police) are also wandering around, looking at the passengers. As sensitive as VN are, such provocation -while not accomplishing anything- could provoke an exchange of fire. At the most, the U.S. guards should sling their arms and look less menacing. I so inform an officer in the rear of our C-130 after we take off.

It was an uncomfortable (on the cramped floor) four-hour flight to Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

On the runway at Clark, the large transport plane disgorges (more than) 100 men, women and children (with luggage). All shuffle into one of Clark’s reception centers. A large auditorium partitioned off into areas (each) with 150 or so seats filled with refugees from previous flights.

(On entering the reception center from our flight, our refugee passengers) are immediately overwhelmed with (this scene drew a tear or two) the affectionate smiles and services of a score of Clark Air Force wives bearing sandwiches, milk for the babies, coffee, coke, crackers and cookies. Now, in safety, they are literally besieged by people –volunteers with big hearts— attempting to help.

Mention to one of (the officers) desire to get back to Delhi. In 30 minutes, the message works its way up to the colonel commanding the reception center. He directs me to the Embassy Liaison Office, staffed by State Department consular officials. Hire a Clark taxi. Go to the liaison office and a warm reception from John Hoag, the consular officer on duty, and his NCO.

There follows a bewildering afternoon of meetings with NCOs at various immigration and travel offices at Clark. Attempts to grab a USAF (air) lift to U Thapo (Thailand) fail because I can produce no travel orders. I am on vacation! Faced with the one alternative of going out by commercial airline, I go to the Clark immigration office. I need an arrival stamp in my passport showing that I have arrived (in the Philippines) before I will be able to clear immigration at Manila airport en-route out. Clark immigration says the GOP (Government of the Philippines) demands a Philippine visa there!

Take a chance and illegally leave Clark for the Philippine immigration office (to seek a visa, exit stamp) in Angeles (called “ Sin City,” three miles from Clark).

Arrive (at the Philippine government immigration office) at 4:45, 15 minutes before closing by the good grace of an Air Force wife who picks me up as I was walking. (The Office’s Supervisor) Mr. Hipaldo, says that he cannot issue even a temporary visa into my diplomatic passport. Only Manila can do that. He suggests I purchase an onward ticket to Bangkok (at the base) and then try to talk my way through immigration (at the Manila Airport, an hour’s taxi ride east of Clark).

Sounds like good advice. Return to the Clark travel office. They have everything (for airline reservations). Get ticketed (requested seat, not confirmed) for tomorrow’s 0800 Philippines Airlines’ Manila-Singapore-Bangkok flight. Will take Pan Am 1 to Delhi at 0100 hours the next day from Bangkok.

Thank everyone at the travel office and the embassy liaison office for their help. Agree to take their pouch to the embassy in Manila. Set off on the three-hour ride to Manila in a Clark taxi. Cost \$23 including tip. Very friendly driver. Drop pouch at (our) enormous embassy. Stay at the Philippine Village Hotel (near the airport). Good steak dinner, albeit a lonely one, and a glass of wine. After 42 hours, to bed at around midnight.

Begin Friday, April 25 diary entry:

Up at 6:00. Pay my hotel bill and head for the airport and inevitable collision with Philippines immigration. Confirm a seat on the PI (Philippines Airlines) flight to

Singapore. Acquire my ticket. Pay my exit fee. “Where’s the visa and (arrival) stamp?” is the first question asked by the immigration officer. Next stop: Superintendent of Immigration.

Amicable chap. After a discussion, he reluctantly orders one of his officials to stamp my entry at Manila into my passport (disregards the visa requirement). That he will probably not do many more times. The airport announcer is asking PI 510 passengers to board the airplane as I enter the exit lounge.

Nice flight. Read *Time* and *Newsweek*. A reporter attempting to get out of Xuan Loc tells an interesting tale. (Vietnamese piloted) Chinook helicopter landed on the road link to Saigon outside Xuan Loc. It was immediately overwhelmed with refugees to the extent that people inside were literally suffocating. But the reporter and his U.S. friend got on easily and were not ordered off. He attributed it to a continuing (VN) acceptance of Americans. Perhaps this (South) VN acceptance of Americans is so strong that it will continue to the end. Or perhaps the (South) VN will recognize the totality of the abandonment, and combined with the realization that all is lost, turn on the remaining U.S. personnel in Saigon. (The acceptance among the crowds attempting to escape continued to the end –including making a corridor for U.S. nationals picking their way through the crowds to the embassy gate on April 29).

1245 Singapore to Bangkok flight cancelled, because next leg of flight’s journey to Hong Kong imperiled by Indo-China situation. Luckily, grab a 1430 China Airlines flight to Bangkok.

In Bangkok, talk to POL Counselor (former boss during the TDY and Vietnam-hand) Tom Barnes; had dinner with John Lyle and Gary Larsen. Gary facing the impossible. His parents-in-law, Saigon Southerners, still refusing to leave, but say they might leave at the end. Ten or so other relatives reluctant to go unless this head of the family and his wife go. They are Saigon VN with deep roots. Will they adjust to the States? Will the Communists be that bad? Gary asks my opinion if he should go over (again) to convince them. I say it’s up to him. I went to Saigon with many questions and gaps of knowledge. But you don’t know what will happen. He went (to Saigon) one week ago and didn’t get far (in convincing his parents-in-law to leave). He leaves dinner early with a view toward arranging a trip tomorrow to Saigon to try again to convince his parents-in-law. He may not succeed in getting an aircraft. (Gary’s courageous attempt to fly back to a collapsing Saigon was blocked at the Bangkok airport. Flights had been canceled due to the dire security situation in and around Saigon.)

John Lyle, staff assistant (to the Ambassador) in Bangkok, has access to very classified stuff. Says that the NVA has 16 divisions within striking distance of Saigon.

Begin Saturday, April 26 diary entry:

Took Pan Am flight from Bangkok to Delhi. Got back home at 0530. Slept all the way.

Taxied home to a happy family reunion.

End of Vietnam Evacuation Diary

Two Contradicting Narratives:

There have been numerous TV documentaries, books, articles, debates about the Vietnam War since the fall of Saigon 45 years ago. Nearly all expound on the lost cause anti-war narrative that justify the reasons why the Democratic-dominated Congress in 1974-75 decided to cut below half, then end, U.S. military aid to South Vietnam: The corrupt Thieu regime was a dictatorship suppressing the South Vietnamese population. His regime rejected Hanoi's peace initiatives to end the war. South Vietnam's people believed Thieu's government had lost its legitimacy to govern. The Vietnamese armed forces had lost their will to fight. The decent interval of supporting the lost cause was over. Further support to South Vietnam to defend itself was throwing good money after bad.

In my opinion, that has been a false narrative. There is an opposing narrative.

The opposing narrative begins with America's long support for freedom in the world. The South Vietnamese 20 million population's fear of a North Vietnamese military victory in 1974 and 1975 was at one with South Korean population's fear of a North Korean military takeover of South Korea, both then and now. That same South Vietnamese fear of living under North Vietnamese communist rule can also be compared, then and now, to Taiwanese' and the population of Hong Kong's fear of living under the rule of the Chinese communist government on the Mainland.

The Thieu government was indeed corrupt and unpopular in many quarters (not unique problems, including in the U.S.). But, like the South Korean, Taiwanese and Hong Kong populations, South Vietnam's population valued their non-communist way of life, the freedoms they did possess, their free-market economic prosperity, and ties to the democratic West. The South Vietnamese media and parliament were restrained but were outspoken and critical of the government in many areas. There was freedom of religion and freedom to travel.

The population in the South knew that none of these freedoms would survive should Communist North Vietnam achieve a military victory over the South's armed forces. Mass concentration gulags, they correctly assumed, would await them.

The second narrative is the accurate one. It underscores that the South Vietnamese people and armed forces overwhelmingly supported defending their country and their way of life against Soviet and Chinese backed communist North Vietnamese military attacks. It contends that the South had a least an even chance to defeat the expected North Vietnamese military invasion in 1975 if adequate U.S. military and financial (not direct military) support had continued.

Before the Democratic Congress' 1974 severe reduction then termination of military aid, the six-year successful U.S. Vietnamization policy had substantially upgraded the South's armed forces. By 1974, the GVN pacification campaign in rural areas, where most of the population lived, had weakened the VC to the point where they were no longer an important factor in the main force war underway. The only option left to the North and to its Soviet and PRC supporters was to mount a massive conventional invasion of the South employing unprecedented firepower, armor and manpower.

There is little and in nearly all cases no attention given to the successful U.S. Vietnamization policy in the first narrative's TV documentary and other media coverage of the last 6 years of the Vietnam War. Lost in the decent interval rhetoric is the bipartisan support for the Vietnamization policy that was consistent from 1968 up to the fall of 1974. Democratic President Johnson earnestly initiated the Vietnamization policy in 1968. Republican Presidents Nixon and Ford continued it until the Democratic Congress cut off military aid to South Vietnam in late 1974 and early 1975.

During my 1973 TDY as the last US. troops left Vietnam I found South Vietnamese confident that ARVN would defeat the next North Vietnamese offensive. The assumption that ARVN would prevail was, I believe, shared by most of the South's civilian population and in military ranks.

In recent years, respected American Vietnam specialists and authors have upheld the second narrative. George Veith's "*Black April*" is the most authoritative account of the South-North Vietnamese order of battle during the fall of 1974 and the North's 1975 invasion. Published in 2011, for the first time, it draws on hundreds of high-level, original, translated, classified sources from the North Vietnamese Politburo and NVA military archives, also numerous interviews with South Vietnamese officers, and U.S. Vietnam experts.

Keith sums up that, by 1973, the South Vietnamese military "had developed into a fighting force quite capable of defeating the North Vietnamese." -- "If it had been adequately supplied, and with steady American post-ceasefire support," he writes, "the outcome of the war might have been vastly different."

Colonel William LeGro, the chief of Military Intelligence in DA's Saigon office, 1974-1975, wrote that "unit for unit and man for man, the combat forces of South Vietnam repeatedly proved themselves superior to their adversaries. . .substantial American support for an indefinite period would have made the difference."

LeGro concludes that congressional failure to provide “adequate U.S. support in arms, ammunition, and equipment” caused a massive shift in the “military balance...in favor of the invader.” “The capabilities of the South Vietnamese armed forces declined until they were unable to withstand the final NVA offensive.”

Congress’ denial of adequate military assistance to South Vietnam sealed South Vietnam’s defeat—even before the first column of the NVA’s brand new Soviet-built T-54 tanks attacked Ban Me Thuot on March 9, 1975. It also inexorably led directly to the rushed and ignominious U.S. exit from Saigon on April 30, 1975. The UPI photo flashed worldwide of an American Air America helicopter pilot lifting desperate Vietnamese civilians up a ladder to his rooftop helicopter was taken at a CIA safehouse—not from the embassy roof. But it will remain in history the close-out, humiliating image of America’s long involvement in the Vietnam War.

In contrast, the warm embrace the American government and the American people gave to over a million Vietnamese refugees escaping life under North Vietnamese communist rule is a gratifying one: During the tumultuous 2 weeks before the Fall of Saigon, Ambassador Martin, DCM Lehman and DAO’s Major General Brown led the massive, covert evacuation effort that allowed 130,000 to flee Vietnam to Guam, Clark Air Base and the American fleet 25 miles offshore. That was the “first wave.” Another 130,000, the “second wave,” known as the “boat people,” risked their lives to sail to ports in Southeast Asia for resettlement in Western countries, mostly in the U.S. The U.S.-supported U.N. Orderly Departure Program (ODP), arranged for the safe departure of tens of thousands more over the next decade. In the end, an astounding 1.5 million Vietnamese eluded possible death, the fears, tight controls and “re-education camps” of the North Vietnamese communist party to live in freedom in the U.S. and the West.

Looking back at my own return to Saigon on April 21, I am grateful that Ambassador Martin and DCM Lehman did not throw me out of the country before I had exhausted my 3 day (extended by circumstances into the 4th day) visit to Saigon. Eva Kim’s extraordinary kindness and personal assistance was vital to satisfying the paperwork necessary for me to transport evacuees to the DAO airport evacuation hall. I was able to play a role along with other embassy officials and the U.S. military in evacuating some 100 plus Vietnamese during my three and a half days in Saigon.

Shep Lowman, Lacy Wright, Art Kobler and Joe McBride bravely managed the POL channel operation, funneling many hundreds of refugees to the airport. All four relentlessly continued to evacuate Vietnamese until they, with Ambassador Martin and DCM Lehmann, boarded helicopters taking off from the embassy roof on the last day.

Lionel Rosenblatt and Craig Johnston’s bold breakaway from Washington to evacuate refugees in Saigon received well-deserved praise from the *Washington Post* on their return and a friendly “Welcome Back” meeting with Secretary of State Kissinger.

Kim's family left Saigon for Guam in the "first wave" of the evacuation. On May 7, 1975, a week and a half after I returned to New Delhi, I received a DAO telegram from Guam informing that our family had left on a military flight with other Vietnamese refugees bound for Travis Air Force Base near the Marine Camp Pendleton base in southern California. They then flew on a commercial flight to McLean, Virginia at the end of May to reunite with relatives there. A second reunion followed in 1976 when Kim, I and our two daughters returned to McLean to begin Russian language training after our India assignment ended!

Q: We'll break here because we're at the end of your connection to Vietnam and go on to your subsequent tours.

Q: It's September 1 and we are continuing our interview with Ambassador Tomsen in his tour in India. What year did you arrive in India?

TOMSEN: I arrived in India in 1971, during September, after 10 months of Hindi-Urdu language training at FSI in Rosslyn. Kim, Kim-Anh, then aged 1, and I landed at New Delhi's Palam Airport in the early morning hours. We were greeted by my new boss, the chief of the Consular Section, Consul Art Macias.

Q: What position were you assigned to?

TOMSEN: I was assigned to the vice-consul visa issuance position. Art and I filled the 2 Foreign Service Officer slots in the Consular Section. Today, the visa section has moved far beyond one officer as you can imagine.

I was on two back to back assignments in India, separated by Home Leave. I was hoping at some point during the 5-year tour to be assigned to a Political position. I was a POL cone officer. POL positions at my rank in the New Delhi embassy and the three consulates general -Bombay, Madras and Calcutta- were scarce as hen's teeth. There was one POL slot at my O-5 level in the embassy political section. The 2 political slots in Calcutta and Madras were Bengali and Tamil speaking positions. The Bombay POL position used to require Hindi-Urdu, but no longer did.

My predecessor, Hank Janin, had kindly left behind a letter stating that he had recommended that his and my O-6 vice-consul position be downgraded to an O-7 or O-8 level since it only involved visa issuance. Art, the consul, and I were O-5s.

Hank wrote that I would be "physically isolated from the rest of the embassy" in my tiny visa interview cubicle. It was next to Art's office in a separate building in back of the embassy. It was indeed isolated from the chancery. I convinced myself to make the most of my situation—learn more about India, hope and prepare for a POL assignment where I could compete with FSO-5 and FSO-4 officers in my own cone.

That did happen. I was transferred no less than 4 times during my India tour!

After 7 months of issuing visas, I was moved to the embassy's Front Office to be Staff Assistant to Kenneth B. Keating, the Ambassador. Six months later, in 1972, I was happily assigned to the Political Officer position in Bombay.

Unexpectedly, in January 1973, as described earlier, the Department sent me back to Vietnam on a 6-month TDY.

Not long after returning to Bombay, the embassy transferred me back to Delhi. I was assigned to the embassy's Political Section --the Hindi speaking position covering domestic Indian politics.

The 4 moves in less than 2 years made our life in India a roller-coaster!

I enjoyed the first visa-issuing assignment. It was an enlightening window on India! Interviewing up to a hundred Indians a day improved my conversational Hindi and familiarity with Indians.

Q: What were the major issues other than the day-to-day visa requirements? What were the other major issues you were facing at the time in the position?

TOMSEN: Really none. I was the only one on the visa line in our 2-man consular section. Art managed the American Citizens Services portfolio. He responded to congressional and VIP inquiries, lost passports, parents complaining that their kids in remote ashrams were not responding to their letters and returning bodies of deceased Americans to the U.S. Art also represented the section at Country Team Meetings in the Chancery building.

Hundreds of Indian non-immigrant visa applicants lined up in front of the consulate daily. I did all the interviewing. I was interviewing every minute, it seemed. There was no time for anything else. The Indian diaspora to the U.S. had begun!

The open space 3 foot by 3-foot window of my small wooden cubicle inside the consular section was my communication channel to the 3 consular section FSNs receiving and processing Indian visa applicants during the day. The FSNs would periodically hand through the window a pile of completed visa applications. One by one, Indian tourists, students, businessmen, Sadhus, Tibetans, European and Australian hippies would be funneled piecemeal into my cubicle for an interview. Applicants sat on a chair in front of my desk. Many were Sikhs and Hindu Punjabis from the Punjab. The Sikhs were mostly farmers bound for Yuba City, California, where Sikhs have lived since the late 19th century.

On one happy occasion, a Tibetan monk I had known well at the Tibetan camp in Nepal when a Peace Corps Volunteer passed through my cubicle. He was on his way to a Mongolian "gomba" --monastery in English-- in New Jersey to provide religious services to Mongolian-Americans settled in that area. He showed me a photo of his monastery

located on a typical street in suburbia. The garage was the monastery flying prayer flags above. The rest of the one-story house was reserved for his living space.

The hardest part of my job was dealing with applicants' lies, subterfuges and false documents. A great many medical, undergraduate, graduate degrees, birth certificates and the like were perfect to the eye but fabrications. It was a common practice in India to replicate documents. I did strive to give each applicant a full opportunity to persuade me that he or she was planning to return to India after a temporary stay in the U.S. But I learned early on to take with a large grain of salt everything I heard or saw. I sometimes phoned the relative of the applicant's in his or her presence and enquired in Hindi why the applicant was going to the U.S. In over 70% of those cases, the result was disastrous for the visa applicant.

Q: At this time as you're working with visas, had a greater migration of Indians to the U.S. begun, either as students or as entrepreneurs? Or did that come later?

TOMSEN: Great question. It had already begun in the late 1960s. The drought during those years produced famines and gave it impetus. But the 1965 changes in the INS (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service) law was the main reason. That law erased the previous strict restrictions that permitted only 100 immigrants annually from India and many other Asian countries. It gave precedent to doctors, nurses, engineers, scientists and students in the engineering and sciences. Students applied in droves. Art once told me that he never witnessed an Indian student who had returned to India. There were few good employment opportunities for Indian degree holders in India at the time.

Indians were one of the first to take advantage of the elimination of Asian quotas. The chain migration of relatives followed quickly. As a visa officer in the early '70s, I could already see the snowball effect. When I was Director of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka affairs in the State Department beginning in 1982, I would go out and speak to Indian-American communities around the country. By that time, there were almost a million Indians who had come to the States, legally and illegal. The girls wore saris, boys dressed up in kurtas at these large India gatherings. They spoke perfect Americanized English; their clothes denoted their cultural heritage.

India's big population base, which was then about 900 million, also helped lift the number of immigrants. So did the hi-tech boom a generation later. The 1920 U.S. census had listed only 4,900 persons of Indian origin in the U.S., mostly Sikh farmers in northern California and Yuba City. Today, Indians comprise the fastest growing foreign population in the U.S. —about 2.4 million.

You may recall from an earlier interview, that my only dissent message during my Foreign Service career recommended replacing the "I want to change from a non-immigrant to an immigrant" status once in the U.S. on a temporary non-immigrant visa. My Canadian colleague had shown me the Canadian government's sensible decision to require non-immigrant visa holders already in Canada to return to their home country

to apply for an immigrant visa. That was only fair to those in the home country who were taking the legal path to Canadian immigrant visa.

Those “blue” INS sheets kept coming informing me that an Indian who had assured me he was not an intending immigrant had changed to immigrant status after arrival in the U.S. I once received a blue sheet displaying the photo of a 19-year old Sikh young man who had received a student visa, then changed over to a green card by marrying an American in Las Vegas!

Before my arrival, Art told me he had repeatedly turned down a middle-aged Indian he could see was lying. Art, quite correctly, held to his position even after congressional letters rolled in endorsing him. Sometime later, the Indian sent Art a letter from the U.S. informing that he had been granted a green card. Despite Art’s accurate conclusion that this man was an intending immigrant and did not qualify for a non-immigrant visa, he somehow got to the U.S. and applied for immigrant status.

In India, culturally, being “chalekh,” that is, cunning or clever, has a positive connotation. I had to bear that in mind.

I asked my Indian FSN to measure the extent of the change-of-legal status problem, statistically. His memo estimated that 55% of Indians immigrating to the U.S. did so legally. 45%, overwhelmingly students and tourists, applied for immigrant status after arriving in the U.S. During my time on the visa line, I probably denied over 65% of the student applicants and 80% of tourist applicants.

Q: No question (that) it’s a worldwide phenomenon which began to change after your consular tour; it may have begun in the early ‘70s but as there were more ethnic conflicts and reasons for people to leave, not just for economics but for persecution. Suddenly Sikhs are coming not just for a better life but because they live in conflict zones.

TOMSEN: Yes. The promise of a better economic future, just a job, continued to propel emigration from India to the U.S. The outbreak of communal riots and killings, mostly Hindu versus Muslim did too. Once, I turned down a young Muslim Indian. He told me at the end of that interview that, if you don’t give me the visa, “I’m going to commit suicide.” I had to respond that the decision was his, not mine --I hoped that he would not do that!

Every religion has its fanatics, “My God is better than yours.” So did a Sikh fanatical religious priest in 1982. His followers militarily occupied the holiest Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab. The Indian army attacked and reoccupied it. That led to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by 2 of her Sikh bodyguards four months later. Hindu massacres of Sikhs immediately erupted in Delhi, killing hundreds. Sikhs immigration to America increased.

Q: All of those different reasons begin to change and you begin to get more minorities within these countries that are trying to get out one way or another and get to the U.S.

TOMSEN: Yes.

Q: Yes, and the U.S. is not the only place that migrants fleeing one thing or another –war, desertification—you see it in Europe.

TOMSEN: Yes. There are now billions in the developing world being squeezed by sectarian and political violence, failed governments, poverty, corruption, the march of deserts and looming water shortages. Fortunately for India, it benefitted more than Pakistan from the democratic, administrative, military and education institutions left by the British when India and Pakistan became two independent states.

India's successful 17 general elections since 1947 have provided political stability and a safety valve for underlying ethnic and religious tensions. The regular changeover of political parties in power has met Jared Diamond's definition for a democracy. That is: a peaceful change in ruling parties after at least 2 elections. The party going out of power accepts defeat. India has met that criteria. Pakistan has not, partly because its leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah was assassinated 13 months after independence. He was very much a democrat. His deputy, Liaquat Ali Khan, was assassinated in 1951, about four years later. Since then, the Pakistani military has taken over directly or has a veto power behind the scene over Pakistan prime-ministers and parliaments during Pakistan's history.

Q: After the breakaway of East Pakistan and it's becoming an independent country, Bangladesh, what sort of relationship does it have with India?

*TOMSEN: It had a very close relationship at the beginning –the Indian army's intervention in the 1971 war sped Bangladesh's independence. It would have happened anyway, but the Indians invaded and quickly defeated the Pakistani army in East Pakistan. There was an especially close Bangladesh-Indian relationship in the war's aftermath. Later on, the Islamic religious roots in Bangladesh played a role in Bangladesh's re-establishing relations with Pakistan. But Bangladesh is still cautious with Pakistan, which remains under the ultimate control of the Pakistani army and its powerful military intelligence agency, known by its acronym, ISI. Then, as now, Pakistan's generals foster and control radical jihadist proxies inside Pakistan to advance Pakistan's foreign policy goals outside Pakistan. The ISI sponsored the *Hezb ul-Mujahidin* terrorist force that brutally killed thousands of Bengalis during the 1971 Bengali uprising.*

Today, radical jihadism remains anathema to the great majority of Bangladesh's population and Muslim clerics. That helps keep a balance in Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan and India even though there's a big difference in the religions of India and Bangladesh.

The buildup to that 3rd Indo-Pakistani War that began in December 1971 coincided with my first months in the consular section. Armies on both sides came out of their cantonments and amassed on the border as I settled into my visa issuance routine.

In November, I was on an Indian train en-route to Calcutta reading *Time Magazine*. A photo of an Indian tank column raiding into East Pakistan was on the front cover. An Indian seated nearby me cast an angry glance at the photo. Soon a menacing murmur among other passengers surrounded me. I closed the magazine and tucked it into my briefcase.

The major geopolitical feature of the South Asian Sub-continent since the British left in 1947 has been Indo-Pakistani rivalry. Indian military assistance to Bangladesh's breakaway from Pakistan demonstrated the divide. Its roots go back to the Mughal conquest of India and even before.

The short but furious 2-week Indo-Pakistani war proved a catastrophe for Pakistan. It created a near-catastrophe for me in my cubicle in the consular section. Nixon and Kissinger the previous year had relied on Pakistan's good offices to arrange Kissinger's famous secret trip to China. Kissinger made the breakthrough in Sino-American relations that improved Sino-American relations. On the other side of the Cold War divide, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi signed the Indo-Soviet treaty in August 1971, improving Indo-Soviet relations.

A week after the Indian invasion of East Pakistan, and a week before Pakistan's surrender on January 16, 1972 it seemed a typical day for me in the consular section. One of my Indian consular assistants passed through my small cubicle window visa forms filled out by nine well-dressed, middle aged applicants. Their financial documents were in good order. My assistant told me that they spoke impeccable English. They intended to travel to New York on business. I decided to interview one member of the group. If he was legitimate, we could approve the other 8. The one I interviewed was erudite and polished. We discussed the war and other subjects. He told me he spoke Persian and had spent years in Iran. I directed my consular assistant—who may have also worked for Indian Intelligence—to issue the visas.

Several days later, numerous global media outlets announced that the new cabinet of the Bangladesh government-in-exile based in India had arrived at the UN in New York. Over Pakistan's heated objections, they requested Bangladesh's admission into the United Nations. A major debate ensued. The U.S. supported Pakistan.

Kissinger personally transmitted one of several irate cables to our embassy in Delhi demanding to know why the Bangladesh delegation had been given U.S. visas. A senior member of the Political Section made a rare "walkover" trip from the Chancery to our isolated consular building, reached through a tunnel. He testily asked if we actually interviewed visa applicants. I had to reply that I indeed did interview one member of the delegation. He stalked out the door back to the chancery building.

I phoned Kim and described my blunder. I speculated I might be fired –we may need to find another career.

Perhaps thanks to DCM Galen Stone, who had also served in the Saigon embassy at a higher level, I was not fired. During December, the previous month he had made the trek from the second-floor Front Office in the chancery to my small cubicle. Smiling, he handed me an FSI Honor Roll certificate and offered his congratulations. I had not known that FSI issued Honor Role certificates –in my case for the 3+ in spoken Hindi and 3+ in reading plus my Area Studies paper, “Rural Politics in India.”

In April, 3 months after the Bangladesh visa disaster, Galen informed me I would be re-assigned to the Front Office as Staff Assistant to the Ambassador, Kenneth B. Keating. Keating would be returning to Rochester, New York in two months’ time. The previous Staff Assistant had left for a Department assignment in Washington. The Special Assistant position in the Front Office was vacant. It would not be filled. Galen would soon be Charge. His secretary remained. I would be the only Front Office substantive staffer to support him.

Once at the Staff Assistant desk in the Front Office, I could see the reasons for my good fortune. There were none of the usual pressures experienced in the Front Offices of major embassies. U.S.-Indian relations were in the doldrums due to the U.S. tilt towards Pakistan during the war. They would remain there until the end of my India assignment in 1975.

Mrs. Gandhi and her political advisors were giving the embassy a cold shoulder. The Soviet Union and the flow of Soviet military and economic aid were in vogue. Mrs. Gandhi’s diplomats attempted to steer the Non-Aligned movement even closer to Russian positions. Her speeches in India furiously whipped up hysteria against the CIA’s nefarious interference in Indian affairs.

Edward Durell Stone’s beautifully designed Ambassador’s Residence located next to the embassy has received many thousands of Indian guests over the years. It was named Roosevelt House. I was at the front door to welcome about 15 prominent Indian government VIPs early one evening. I did not have much to do at my duty station. Following what must have been a pre-arranged script, one by one, the Indian guests phoned the embassy operator sending word they were unable to come. “They’re falling like flies,” joked the ambassador to the senior embassy officers waiting to help host the dinner party. Only one junior government minister showed up.

So, my Staff Assistant work was anything but busy. I did have a ring side seat on how a large embassy operates and how it daily coordinates with the State Department. Like all staff aides, I arrived at the embassy’s communication center early in the morning to grab the morning “take” of messages from Washington and other overseas posts, sorted them

by priority, scribbled notes on the margins and placed them neatly on the Ambassador's or Charge's desk.

Ambassador Keating's calling had been politics –as a Congressman and later as a Senator. Robert Kennedy captured his senate seat in 1964. President Nixon appointed him ambassador to India and later to Israel. He was 72 and a widower when I became his staff assistant. He rarely left the embassy on official business. A private person by nature, he was invariably polite but correct with embassy personnel. He seldom opened Roosevelt House to the embassy community. During his last 3 months in India, I spent more time with him than anyone else, including Galen.

The Ambassador's day began at mid-morning. Around 11:00 am I gave him the morning cable traffic while he sat comfortably next to the lovely Residence swimming pool, after he had taken his poolside breakfast. Sometimes he would be in a robe, at other times a swim suit. Some days he would remain at Roosevelt House. Some days he would walk over to the chancery after lunch and return to the Residence in the afternoon.

Every workday evening, I would carry a bundle of cables from embassy sections for Ambassador Keating's clearance, signature and onward transmittal to Washington that night. We met in the Roosevelt House's handsome, book-lined study. With his lawyer's eyes and sharp mind, he regularly found mistakes in substance or grammar that embassy sections and I had missed.

I periodically arranged for the ambassador's lady guests (embassy wags put it "girl friends") to be picked up at the airport and taken to Roosevelt House. I kept an eye on timing. One would leave in the daytime, another would fly in that night. They would spend most days at the poolside with the ambassador –only occasionally would one accompany the ambassador in his limousine, flag flying, on a window-shopping tour of New Delhi.

Q: That was the old Foreign Service!

TOMSEN: Yes. The Staff Assistant job brought me in contact with all levels of embassy personnel, from counselors in the Political, Economic, and Science sections to the CIA Station Chief and DATT, to mid-level and junior officers, the USIA Director, USAID Mission Chief, secretaries and Indian FSNs. The Consuls General in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras phoned occasionally to ask me for information or to pass a message to the DCM or Ambassador.

So, occasionally, my Front Office staff position made me a go-to guy. I did not let this go to my head. My low rank guaranteed I would again fall down to a junior slot in the embassy bureaucracy! Fortunately, my language capability made me the MC at the annual FSN awards ceremonies presided over by the DCM. I prepared for my role by pulling together witty Hindi phrases from popular Indian comedians. They went over well while the DCM handed out awards.

Delhi was quite understandably classified as a hardship post. We had to boil our water. We could not be sure that the meat bought locally was without parasites as there were no government inspections of the quality of the meat. Moldy or otherwise diseased food was a problem. Unhygienic conditions existed outside on the street and especially in densely populated areas in Delhi—which were many. There was a lack of good health facilities. Pollution -air and surface!- was another problem.

Nonetheless, our small family looks back on the 5-year Delhi assignment as the most enjoyable and exciting during our career. The high point, Kuai-le (double happiness in Chinese) was the birth of our second daughter, Mai-Lan, on October 5, 1972 in the small but well-run British High Commission hospital, one block from our embassy. At the time, we had a full-time Indian nanny from the Khasi tribe in Assam. Plus 3 Tibetan Lhasa Apsos that were part of the family. My mother helped to take care of our two daughters.

As you know, all little girls love to ride horses. By the time Mai-Lan was 2 and Kim-Anh 4, the four of us were members of Captain Singh's nearby horse-riding club. Early mornings found us trotting past the American and Chinese embassies, or on the "Viceroy's Trail" behind the Presidential Palace, and down park-like "King's Way" in front of the palace and government office buildings, back to Captain Singh's stables. These outings took about 40 minutes.

On weekends, we searched for adventures. We took overnight train trips in a sleeper car north to Pathankot in the Punjab. At the train station, we grabbed a taxi for the two-hour ride up to Dharam Sala nestled in the first Himalayan Range high above the Indian plain. Dharam Sala was the Tibetan Dalai Lama's home-in-exile. It was a Far Pavilion-type setting. A mostly Tibetan enclave in India—a Tibetan market, Tibetan restaurants, monasteries, prayer walls, and plenty of fresh mountain air. We stayed in a colorful, rented guest house. On Sunday afternoons, we reversed gear and returned to Delhi the way we came.

Like with others in the embassy, our house was comfortable. Three bedrooms, a living room, dining room, a kitchen, a closed-in patio outside surrounded by a flower garden. One afternoon I came home to confront a quarrel between the bearer/sweeper and the mali (gardener). The bearer/sweeper kept the inside floors swept clean and did other inside-the-house chores.

The mali worked outside. He was also of a low caste. His job was to maintain our small lawn and tend the flower garden. The mali insisted the bearer was responsible for sweeping the outside patio. The bearer refused, claiming he only worked inside the house. So, I had to make the call—it went in favor of the sweeper. With the house, we also inherited a Hindu Bengali cook.

Our social life revolved around small dinner parties at home for Indian officials and their wives, members of Parliament, journalists and embassy colleagues. We made efforts to

make friends with Indian families beyond the diplomatic community. We often saw a medical doctor who treated our embassy families, Dr. Duke Chawla, a Sikh, and his Irish wife who was a nurse. We became lifelong friends with the Puri family, also Sikhs.

The Consular Section relied on Dr. Chawla to help resolve medical emergencies involving destitute American citizens, some with drug abuse and psychiatric problems. That, sometimes, required Dr. Chawla's assistance to put patients in straight-jackets and send them back to their parents in the U.S. The airlines required such patients to be accompanied by a nurse. So, Dr. Chawla's wife, an Irish registered nurse, often accompanied the patients to the U.S.

A Sikh family related to the Puris, the Duggals, once invited Kim and I to join about eight other British High Commission and Sikh couples at a New Year's celebration inside a Rajasthan castle topped with lofty battlements on a hilltop northwest of Delhi. Kim and I were the only American couple at what turned out to be an orgy inside the castle walls. The British guests engaged in wife (and husband) swapping, heavy drinking, laughing, singing, and rancorous bridge games. We stayed up New Year's Eve and watched the colorful fireworks welcoming the New Year. Not interested in joining the orgy, we quietly retreated to our room for the rest of the night. We departed the next day after breakfast for Delhi as soon as it was polite to do so.

Assisting a Soviet defector's escape to the U.S. was an exciting event during my staff assistant assignment. I will give him the pseudonym Ivanov.

Ivanov and his wife, like Stalin's daughter Svetlana, were somehow able to coax their passports out of the Soviet Embassy to make their escape. Svetlana had come to India five years previously to attend the funeral of her Indian husband. The Soviet Embassy returned her passport to her after her husband's burial. She walked 200 yards down the street, entered the American Embassy, and identified herself to the Marine Guard on duty. Within hours she was on a Qantas flight to Rome and the U.S. with a new passport.

Q: I'm pretty sure that defection made the cover of Life (Svetlana) when she arrived (I'm now in junior high school). There was quite a lot of news about her; she was a minor celebrity for a little while.

TOMSEN: Yes. George Kennan was by that time at Princeton. He invited her to stay with him. He spoke perfect Russian and proved a fine host. In India, on 2 occasions, the pro-Soviet Gandhi government had turned over defectors asking for asylum to the Soviet Embassy for transport back to Moscow. Those returnees no doubt were not greeted well after their arrival at Sheremetyevo Airport. So, we needed to take that into account.

Q: She (Svetlana) was an unusual character in the Cold War.

TOMSEN: Yes, she was. In Ivanov's case, he saw the large "American Peace Corps" sign over a door in New Delhi and walked in. Norman "Norm" Bramble, a friend of mine who

had overlapped with me during our Peace Corps service in Nepal, met him inside. Norm was director of Peace Corps training in India. Ivanov stated he was Polish and wanted to defect to America.

I was at my desk when Norm phoned me. I was the only one he knew at the U.S. Embassy.

I cut Norm off after his first few words announcing that a Polish defector had just walked in. We assumed the Soviets and Indians bugged embassy phones. I told Norm in Nepali to send his guest to our house in New Delhi and hung up. Galen was out. So, I asked Ambassador Keating for guidance. He answered: "Get Terry." Terry is the pseudonym I will use for a veteran CIA officer in the embassy's CIA Station.

I briefed Terry and also phoned Kim at home to let her know that some guests would shortly arrive. Soon Terry and I were in my car driving to our house. The Ivanovs had already arrived. Ivanov, his wife and young daughter were with Kim in our living room. Kim had discovered that she and Mrs. Ivanov could converse in French and that they both loved art. So, Kim took out several art books to survey with Mrs. Ivanov and divert her from her anxiety.

Neither Kim, nor I, nor Terry spoke Russian. Kim and Mrs. Ivanov used their French to interpret our conversation. Ivanov informed us that he was a Soviet, not a Pole. He was the Director of a Soviet aid project—construction of a giant Soviet steel mill in Northern India. They had checked into the Delhi Youth Hostel. Terry took notes and arranged for a pick-up at 9:00 am and trip to the airport the following morning.

At 8:00 the next morning, I was back at my desk in the Front Office. Kim phoned. She said she had examined the Delhi phone book and discovered that there were two Delhi Youth Hostels --one in Old Delhi, another in New Delhi. Terry was going to the Youth Hostel in Old Delhi. I thought I should quickly go there to confirm that the Old Delhi Youth Hostel was the correct one for the pickup.

To avoid detection, I walked out of the back entrance to the embassy and caught a taxi two blocks away. Arriving at the Old Delhi Youth Hostel, I paid the driver at the bottom of a narrow, about 150-foot, dirt road leading up to the hostel. The surrounding streets were crammed with Indians shopping in bazaars and stores. Inside the hostel, the clerk on duty told me that there were currently no foreign guests.

As I was walking back down the dirt road, Terry arrived in a sedan driven by a lady wearing big dark glasses whom I had never seen before. Terry also wore dark glasses. As he slowly opened his car door, I told him that those whom he was looking for were not in this Old Delhi Hostel. I had already confirmed that. There was another Delhi Youth Hostel in New Delhi on Janpath Road. They must go there.

Probably following agency trade craft tactics, Terry ignored my presence. Without responding, he brushed past me and began walking up the hill to the Youth Hostel looking straight ahead. He still did not react when I caught up with him and reiterated that it was getting closer to 9:00 am. I had checked already. Those he was looking for were in the New Delhi Youth Hostel on Janpath. After a few more steps and processing of my information, like an automaton, he did an about face, walked past me downhill without a comment or acknowledging my presence. He got back into the car and drove off to the New Delhi Youth Hostel.

Terry gave the Ivanov family American passports at the New Delhi Youth Hostel. They flew to the U.S. that same day.

About three weeks later, the widely circulated *Times of India* carried an article we thought was sourced to the Indian government. The headline declared that a Russian defection had been “Pre-planned.” The article scolded the Soviet Embassy for waiting a week before reporting to the Indian Government that the Soviet official was missing. *The Times of India* article continued:

Investigations reveal he was not seen in the capital after May 28th. Investigating agencies are however making discreet inquiries in diplomatic circles to find out more.... The authorities sounded a nation-wide alert on June 7th, sealing the borders, asking all checkpoints to check for this person. It is believed he had already flown out of India with the help of a foreign mission here which gave them refuge in its country. The tourist hostel confirmed that the Soviet... stayed for two days with his family. They spent most of their time in the room; twice or thrice foreigners visited the ...family but their nationality has not been ascertained.... The Soviet embassy declined to comment. The U.S. embassy said it had no information about the missing Russian.

In September 1972, Galen sent me back to the Consular Section to be Acting Consul. I replaced Roger Wright (that's also a pseudonym) who had succeeded Art Macias. A few days earlier, Roger had urgently phoned me in the Front Office from his townhouse on the embassy compound. He asked that I come to his place immediately. He said he was in bad shape. His voice was cracking.

I hurried over on foot. Every room in his townhouse was in shambles. Roger related that the previous night, the Ashoka Hotel (located a half-mile from the embassy) had contacted him through the embassy duty officer. The hotel's nighttime manager demanded that he come to the hotel. An American woman was on a rampage, wrecking furniture in her room.

The woman had previously come to the attention of the consular section. She was a young, attractive blond from California with psychiatric problems. She had a penchant for marijuana readily available in India. One morning, the Marine Guard phoned me and asked that I come down to his guard post in the first-floor front lobby. There the young

woman stood in a light nightgown, chained at her wrist and latched on to the wrist of a tall, very embarrassed Indian man. She complained to me he was persecuting her. She had been forced to bring him to the embassy. The Marine Guard and I managed to unchain them. They walked together out the embassy gate and down the street. Consular FSNs followed up on the case. They found that she had spent time in the huge, dark, forbidding Delhi psychiatric hospital.

Roger, unfortunately, became her new victim. He paid her hotel bill and paid for the damage she had done to the hotel property. He invited her to spend the night with him in his home. A bad decision. In a rage, she destroyed his apartment before he was able to physically expel her from the embassy grounds. Sitting next to him that morning, among broken living room furniture, he said he was in desperate need of psychiatric help. He requested that he be med-evacuated to the U.S.

After consulting with Galen and the embassy doctor, we sent a message through the medical channel to the Department requesting his immediate med-evac to the U.S. to receive psychiatric treatment. We informed the embassy security officer of the incident, given the destruction of embassy property. The security officer unhelpfully used his independent security channel to Washington to report that the American woman could be an agent of a “foreign power.” Dealing with that issue became a long side story unnecessary to relate today.

From my new office in the Consular Section that same day, I phoned Dr. Chawla. He coordinated with the Delhi psychiatric hospital to compile a medical dossier on the American woman’s illness to cable to the Department.

The Department quickly approved Roger’s med-evac. We put him on a flight to the U.S. accompanied by Dr. Chawla’s wife, a nurse. My FSNs and I tracked down and phoned the mother of the American woman. Her daughter also needed medical help. Her mother came to India and took her back to the U.S. We never heard back from mother or daughter.

Years later, I was told that Roger was sent to a medical institution in northern New York state for treatment. Afterwards, he was posted to an embassy consular section in one of the Caribbean states.

Q: That’s a typical hard-luck story you run into with American citizen services. It could be anywhere.

TOMSEN: And you try to help them.

Q: Today is September 8th and we’re continuing with Ambassador Tomsen in India.

TOMSEN: Over the next several months, I had two jobs: staff assistant to DCM Stone and chief of the Consular Section. After wrapping up the day’s consular work in the late

afternoons, I would return to the Front Office and put on my staff assistant hat to assist Galen. Ambassador Keating had departed in August, 1972, further reducing the Front Office workload. The Acting Consul job gave me valuable experience in consular areas outside the visa-issuing function. Fortunately, the junior officer who replaced me on the visa line was outstanding. I focused on less demanding immigrant visas, answering Congressional and other correspondence, and assisting citizens visiting our office every day.

Our FSNs in the consular section were fabulous. During late afternoons, they would place a stack of immaculately prepared letters and cables to be signed by me. Christian churches in New Delhi attended by American Embassy families and Americans in the private sector had created a “kitty” of cash to fund the cost of air travel to the U.S. by American citizens who had run out of money and luck in India. The consular section drew down on the kitty to give loans on a case-by-case basis. Nearly all of the loans went to wandering young American “world travelers” as they were called in those days. During my time in the consular section, all of the loans we provided were paid back.

Thousands of Americans, Brits, French, Aussies, Nordics and other world travelers in the 1970s made their way on vans, transport trucks, trains, vehicles and on foot from Western Europe through Turkey, across Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan into India. In India, they tended to follow the marijuana trail --summers at Hindu ashrams and Buddhist temples in the Himalayas and winters on beaches along the Kerela coast.

The American world travelers who consular officers met were sometimes fascinating. They felt very much at home in India. The Brahmacharis, mostly Hare Krishna followers, wore white robes, were vegetarians, spoke gently and practiced celibacy –in their words, channeling sexual energy into spiritual energy. One example: I gave travel loans to three Brahmachari young women when they came to see me in the Consular Section. They were college graduates who had studied at the Chicago Ramakrishna Mission under Guru Swami Bhuteshananda. They had just spent nearly two years at his Hare Krishna ashram in Hardwar along the Upper Ganges, and were going back to the U.S.

The mental cases were sad. One night, for example, an embassy officer phoned Kim and I at home. He told us an American girl was dancing alone and naked in Connaught Circle, a park at the center of New Delhi. Kim and I drove downtown, brought her to our home and phoned her parents. While waiting for the arrival of her parents to Delhi, Kim bought her some clothes. She returned to the U.S. with her parents.

In October 1972, Galen informed me that the Department had “paneled” (assigned) me to be the Political Officer in our Bombay Consulate General. The next month, November, Kim, our two daughters and a potty chair, two Kasi nannies, and our three Tibetan Lhasa Apsos travelled by train from New Delhi to Bombay to begin our new assignment.

As described in our earlier interview, I was elated to finally be assigned to a Political position. But my Bombay assignment was short lived. The following month, in

December, the Department directed me to stand by to return to Vietnam on the 6-month TDY. I departed for Saigon in early January, 1973 and returned in July –when we were due for our one-month home leave. After the home leave, Galen Stone’s successor as DCM, David Schneider, re-assigned me to the embassy Political Section in New Delhi. I would fill the language officer POL slot reporting on Indian domestic politics at the national level.

At first, we were disappointed. We liked Bombay. The Consul General, David Bane, was a wonderful boss. Deputy Principle Officer, Charlie McCaskill, pleasantly helped me settle into my new responsibilities –political and economic reporting from India’s crowded economic-financial capital. On weekends, we often drove on Nepean Sea Drive down to the majestic Taj Mahal Hotel, a beautiful colonial-era 5-star hotel looking down at the Bombay’s Port. En route, we stopped at a tiny roadside restaurant, Kabob Corner, for delicious kabobs. A high, enormous sign financed by wealthy Parsi businessmen along the seaside roadway blared out the city’s rejoinder to Mrs. Gandhi’s anti-CIA rhetoric:

*“Breed my countrymen,
Breed,
You only have the CIA to Blame!”*

The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission’s representative in the consulate advised Indian operators managing the Tarapur nuclear reactor in Bombay. India had been careful not to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The fact that the Canadian corporation that sold the Tarapur Reactor to India was in Canadian Prime Minister Pearson’s parliamentary district ended resistance from those arguing that India intended to go nuclear. The first Tarapur reactor began generating electricity –and also irradiated uranium-- in April 1969. In August 1970, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi announced that India had not ruled out nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes. She gave the green light for India’s first nuclear test 6 years later.

At consulate staff meetings, the AEC representative, John (I cannot remember his last name), kept us up to date on the shocking lack of safety at the Tarapur facility –radioactive waste regularly flooded into the Bombay River that wound through the city into the sea.

During my travels around the consular district and in India’s most populous city, I saw first-hand the seemingly irresolvable poverty conditions in India. Western India was in its third successive year of drought. The poorest rungs of the population especially were ravaged by food and water shortages. Purposely maimed children were put out to join the numerous beggars on street corners. Drivers and pedestrians drove or walked by beggars pretending they were invisible; emaciated elderly men and women combed garbage pits for something to eat; starving refugees from drought-affected areas lay in train stations, along the roads, under bridges and inside large empty concrete pipes.

Four million were employed on public relief projects in the consular district. Though the government of Maharashtra had set 12 kilos (kilograms) of rice per month per capita as the target and eight kilos per month as the minimum subsistence level, in fact people were getting only four to six kilos at most. The enormity of the economic problems in India generally in relation to the paucity of resources available was exacerbated by India's annual population growth rate. At that time 13 million more Indians were born each year, roughly equivalent to the population of Australia!

Q: It had at that time the highest birth rate—even higher than China's.

TOMSEN: Yes. At the time, the UN estimated that by 2018 China's population would be at 1.42 billion, India's at 1.35 billion. That turned out to be pretty accurate. The UN projects India's population will surpass China's in 2024.

The food shortages contributed to horrible Hindu-Muslim riots that Muslims usually got the worst of. Rumors of petty incidents would ignite a communal clash. A Hindu accuses a Muslim of killing a cow. A Muslim accuses a Hindu of insulting the Prophet. Once started in a village or town, the killing was hard to stop.

In India, an astounding cultural-religious resiliency—a sort of fatalism—inside the masses absorbs the shocks. Practice good karma in your present station of life and stay on the path to moksha --liberation from the temporal world.

In the West, there would be a revolution. In India, Mother India goes on. India's intractable economic problems occasionally drive ruling parties out of office. Some years later, the opposition party leaders who have failed to resolve the intractable problems are themselves voted out of office, replaced by the party that they had defeated. The timeless Indian *Chakra* keeps turning.

There were a number of Soviet Bloc consulates in Bombay. One day, unexpectedly, a thin, youngish diplomat from the Czech Consulate walked through the consulate's front door and asked for asylum. There was no CIA Base in Bombay. Mr. Bane and I talked it over, sent a classified report to the embassy in Delhi and the State Department and asked for guidance. We were sent the "necessary documents." I escorted him to the airport. He flew to the U.S. I hoped afterwards that the incident had not deepened Indian government suspicions that I was not really a State Department Foreign Service Officer!

After returning from Home Leave, the new DCM and long-time India hand, David Schneider, brought me back to Delhi in April, 1974. Consul General Bane called me his "Phantom Political Officer."

Back in Delhi, we reunited with many American embassy personnel and Indian FSNs whom we had known before. Changes had occurred at senior levels of the embassy. Ambassador Daniel Moynihan and his wife resided in Roosevelt House. Liz Moynihan was very popular. She made many friends inside and outside the American community

and became a recognized expert and author on Mughal gardens. David Schneider was DCM. The brilliant Paul Kriesberg was Political Counselor and my boss.

We were assigned to my predecessors' two-story house, 2 blocks from the embassy. It had a small but neat lawn and a few trees. My predecessor's cook and his wife became part of the family. The Soviet embassy acquired the home on the other side of our fenced-in yard. We tried but were never able to meet the single occupant –and only saw him twice during our 2-year posting back to Delhi. One day his large dog made the mistake of jumping the fence and tangling with one of our Lhasa Apsos. Luckily the dog fight did not last long.

Mai-Lan was one-and-a-half and her sister Kim-Anh was four when we returned to Delhi. Summers were hot and humid. Daytime temperatures languished between 110 degrees and 115 degrees. Birds fell dead from the sky. We made good use of the swimming and wading pools at the embassy. Mai-Lan's second birthday party was an international one: Japanese, British, Canadian 2-year old children, plus older sister Kim-Anh.

Kim-Anh was in kindergarten by the 1974-75 school year. Mai-Lan cried bitterly when we escorted her to the embassy pre-school facility. We tarried with other parents, wondering how long our children would cry. Mai-Lan cried and demanded that her sister, Kim-Anh, stay behind for company. She cried even louder when the 3 of us left. Shortly, afterwards Mai-Lan was happily playing with the other pre-schoolers. She was completely exhausted after returning home a few hours later.

Do you remember the days when we could order large items to be sent to post by the Sears Mail Order Catalogue? Well, we ordered a swing set for the yard from Sears! It took 3 months for it to come by sea. I built a cardboard walk-in doll house on our second-floor balcony. Kim took driver's lessons in Delhi. Her Indian driving teacher almost fainted while she drove and he sat in the passenger seat on the high-speed airport road! Her Indian driving license cleared her for driving in India, also later in Taiwan, Beijing, Moscow and Helsinki!

Some evenings I would stop in at Indian restaurants patronized only by Indian customers to fill a few of our kitchen pots with chicken curry to bring home for dinner. As you know, in the U.S. Indian restaurants patronized by Indians, Chinese restaurants patronized by Chinese, and so on, are likely to be very good!

For six months, a high-caste Brahmin yoga instructor taught Kim and I the fundamentals of yoga breathing, relaxation and exercise during early mornings. We renewed our membership at Captain Singh's riding club. One of our treasured photos shows Mai-Lan, age 2, on top of a huge black horse she chose. Kim-Anh was next to her, perched on a saddle atop a handsome white pony.

For the final 2 years of our India posting, 1974-1976, some 70% of my time was devoted to meeting, entertaining and doing research on movers and shakers in Indian politics. I

prepared reporting messages and analyses on political trends of interest to Washington national security agencies. Contacts were key. I attempted to develop relations with members of Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party, her relatives and advisors. I called on key Members of Parliament (MPs) in their offices, also on editors and journalists, labor leaders, and members of opposition parties. The leading opposition party was the conservative Hindu nationalist Jan Sangh –the forerunner of today's conservative BJP Party led by Mahendra Modi. I also sought out elected members of smaller parties. The Socialists and Communists had light representation in Parliament but were well-represented in some state legislatures.

Ambassador Moynihan was intrigued by the remarkably complex interaction of India's ethnic, caste, regional and national political factions. A politician himself with a sharp academic mind and marvelous wit, he often phoned me at my desk to ask questions about an article on Indian political infighting he had just read, or on some public comment by Mrs. Gandhi about the U.S. He enjoyed coming across the Indian tendency towards hypocrisy. I was with him once during a press conference in Madras. Madras is a port city on the Indian Ocean. The Indian journalists demanded to know why the U.S. was using Diego Garcia island in the Indian Ocean as a military base. With a smile, Moynihan replied: "Why call it the Indian Ocean? It could be named the Sea of Madagascar!" The next day, Indian newspaper headlines loudly protested: "Moynihan calls the Indian Ocean the Sea of Madagascar!"

About 30% of my time was expended on the road traveling around India. I visited about 10 of the 17 states during my 2 years on the internal political reporting beat –representing the embassy during official embassy visits to meet governors, giving speeches at colleges, rotary clubs and Indo-American friendship societies. India is a large country. Some of my trips lasted a week or more.

I gave special attention to face-to-face conversations with Indians at the district and village levels –farmers, shopkeepers, newspaper reporters, and particularly young IAS (Indian Administrative Service) civil servants in rural district capitals. That was where the rubber hit the road in monitoring national and state political/economic trends.

In British colonial times, the main task of the British district "Collector" had been to collect taxes from businesses and large landowners. He was also the district "Magistrate" overseeing law and order and maintaining stability. After independence, the Indian IAS district officer kept the title of Collector. His District Magistrate responsibilities were subsumed in the Collector title. The Collectors' functions were expanded to economic and social development, and acting as referee in managing local disputes. The young collectors I called on outside Delhi were courteous, open and friendly.

District collectors usually occupied the same white concrete two-story office-residence building their British predecessors had worked in. The lawn in front had long since become at least an ankle-high field where a cow or two now grazed. The building needed a fresh coat of whitewash. His desk would be covered by loosely sorted piles of "files."

Red ribbons would be wrapped around files in the pile on the desk closest to his chair. Our discussions would take place over tea served by a peon. It would last at least two hours.

Kim once accompanied me on a 10-day official visit to Rajasthan. A meeting with the Governor, a plain-spoken veteran Congress politician, kicked off the trip to his state. He invited us to dinner in the governor's mansion. The dinner table was about 30 feet long. It was used for official banquets or meetings with large groups. He occupied the chair at the head of the table. Kim and I sat on each side next to him leaving 90% of the dining table surrounded by empty chairs.

Rajasthan was one of 2 states –Tamil Nadu was the other— where the state government had sidestepped Mrs. Gandhi's orders to expel American Peace Corps Volunteers. The Peace Corps in Rajasthan was popular. Volunteers had introduced commercial fish ponds in the state and taught English.

As the only Hindi-language officer in the embassy, I was dispatched to the embassy front gate to meet with anti-American demonstration leaders. I discussed their grievances and took their petitions. After their photo-taking, they picked up their anti-U.S. posters, bullhorns, loud speakers and cameras, boarded their buses and cars and left. Embassy sections occasionally asked me to translate or check the accuracy of sensitive Hindi language documents. I also interpreted for visiting VIPs in their conversations with Indians who did not speak English.

Q: What were some of the reasons that people would protest in front of the U.S. embassy? Were they spontaneous, or planned by whatever the political leaderships were?

TOMSEN: It was the latter. Mainly it was Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress Party's left wing using the U.S. as a bogeyman to promote her domestic political agenda. By 1974, the Soviet-financed Communist Party of India (CPI) was an important cheerleader of Mrs. Gandhi's foreign and domestic policies. Anti-U.S. articles written inside KGB offices in Moscow were published in CPI newspapers. The Soviet embassy bought up the magazines and newspapers the CPI published at above cost to help finance the CPI. The CPI joined their left-wing Congress allies in organizing nearly all the demonstrations at the embassy.

The Indian political elite generally shrugged off the anti-American demonstrations as much ado about nothing. So did we. Throughout Mrs. Gandhi's surge to the left up to her electoral defeat in 1976, pro-American sentiment remained strong at all levels of Indian society outside the left-wing bloc. Then, as now, India was not going to water down its long-delayed independence with alliances with either the East or the West, including with the Soviet Union.

While the economy worsened, by 1969 Mrs. Gandhi had nationalized the 14 largest banks. In 1972, she nationalized 106 insurance companies. In 1973, she rolled six private

steel companies into one, nationalizing most of the steel production in India under the umbrella of the Steel Authority of India, a state corporation. Some of these steel plants had previously been profitable. When they became nationalized, they became unprofitable. The labor unions favored nationalization because it protected workers' jobs and workers' benefits. That also added to the growing inefficiency of Mrs. Gandhi's centralizing economy. The one steel plant that escaped the bullet of nationalization was the Tata Iron and Steel Company in eastern India – West Bengal and Bihar. The Tatas were Parsi, originally from Bombay. Their steel enterprises were an important part of the Indian economy.

Q: This is interesting; take a moment to describe what Parsis are.

TOMSEN: The Parsis originally emigrated from Iran in about the 9th Century AD to escape Muslim persecution. They brought their ancient Zoroastrian religious traditions with them. Zoroaster preached in the 7th Century BC. One Parsi Zoroastrian tradition in Bombay was --and is-- to deposit their dead in "Towers of Silence" to be eaten by vultures. That is also a ritual the Tibetans separately practice by placing dead bodies on mountain ledges to be eaten by vultures.

An early 20th Century Tata elder created the Tata Iron and Steel Company. He and his sons and grandsons adopted liberal labor and Western-style management practices. They introduced an 8-hour day, subsidized housing for their workers and provided free medical care and schools for the children of workers.

The Tata clan today remains a part of the Bombay business elite. Its members are urbane and wealthy. They send their children to the United States and Britain for education. They speak with American or Oxbridge accents. They intermarry. They support free market economics. There were a few Parsis in Parliament whom I met on occasion. They were in the conservative opposition. Pilo Mody was the most active. He weighed over 300 pounds. When I looked down at him from the Parliament's visitors' balcony, he seemed to fill 2 chairs. His speeches criticizing Congress' leftist policies were eloquent and brought much laughter from the floor.

Q: Quite an enlightened labor policy.

TOMSEN: Yes. Today, Tatas owns manufacturing enterprises in 50 countries.

Q: They also moved beyond steel to steel products, cars, various things. It's quite an international corporation.

TOMSEN: Yes.

Q: One other question about Mrs. Gandhi. It's the early to mid-70s. At some point she leaves office and comes back. Is it at this point where she's beginning to promote the sterilization campaign?

TOMSEN: No. Later she permitted her son, Sanjay, to unleash his sterilization campaign.

In the early 1970s, when I arrived in India, Mrs. Gandhi had already been Prime Minister for 3 years. Before that, with a brief interruption, her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, had been Prime Minister since India's Independence in 1947. After her assassination in 1984, her oldest son Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister. South Asian political dynasties are not uncommon. For example, the Bandaranaiques in Sri Lanka, Bhuttos in Pakistan, Koiralas in Nepal are some other South Asian political dynasties which continue for generations.

So, it was almost a foregone conclusion that Mrs. Gandhi would take over as Prime Minister in 1967. She was Prime Minister for a total of 16 years. During most of the 1970s she dominated the Indian political scene. In contrast to her father, she followed an authoritarian track domestically. She dealt harshly with her critics in opposition parties, in her Congress party and in the Indian media. She manipulated the Hindu Indian persecution complex of long subjugation by the Muslims, then the British.

Q: The long period of the Mughal?

TOMSEN: Yes. And directly afterwards the British, together almost 500 years. When India became independent, the Americans were replacing the British on the world stage. In one psycho-political analysis sent to Washington, I identified two Indian complexes left over from history that confounded progress in Indo-American relations. I don't think either is important today. But, back in the early '70s they were. I wrote that we needed to take those complexes into account. One was the persecution complex that was receptive to charges that we were practicing British colonialism using international capitalism. The other was the inferiority complex related to India's long modern history of foreign domination under first Mughal then British rule.

So, in the early '70s, anti-U.S. propaganda that we were the inheritors of British colonialism and attempting to mold India and the world to our capitalist-imperialist goals did gain traction. That happened even while in the late 1960s American ships were delivering 10 million tons of PL-480 wheat to feed up to 12% of India's population! The understandable backlash in the U.S. Congress about the "ungrateful" Indians evoked, in turn, a resentful reaction from Indians!

Q: You're right. To add to what you're saying, in the '70s everywhere I went there were efforts to collect money or clothes for the starving in India. As a child growing up in the late '60s and early '70s, all we heard about were children starving in India. It's as if there were starvation or famine or hunger nowhere else in the world; it was all in India. The other element of India that we learned in college was their lead of the Non-Aligned Movement and what that meant; the whole dependency theory and the whole north-south arguments and domination and colonialism. These notions that extractive industries taking the natural resources of the country and none of the money remains in the country; it's post-colonial and forms these former colonies into a post-colonial status of simply

extractive natural resource locations. This argument was what I heard from high school through college and graduate school into the mid- '80s. It really did not change for a very long time, but eventually it did. Eventually the rhetoric of India –I don't know why—India became a country much more open to free market ideas and to trade, which it had not been for a long time. This began, as I recall, in the mid- '90s as their middle class began to grow and their industries began to export. Suddenly, as a larger and larger exporting country, they began to like trade and change the rhetoric of their approach to economic relations with other countries. From my own observation, a long evolution but one that seems to be still going on.

TOMSEN: Yes. In the 1970s, I was observing and reporting on the earlier phase of the evolution –Mrs. Gandhi attempted to centralize economic and well as political power in her own hands. As you indicated, after Mrs. Gandhi in the 1990s the Sikh Finance Minister ManMohan Singh, later India's 2-term Prime Minister, began implementing market reforms. They continue today –India's GDP steadily rose. So did per-capita income producing a growing Indian middle class. Exports increased, also development of a vibrant technology sector.

During 1974-1976, Mrs. Gandhi and her inner circle were steering the economy in the opposite direction toward centralization and stagnation. She did not personally understand economics. But she knew how to force economic centralization to accumulate personal political power. She had inherited the Nehru dynasty mantle to rule India. She stood astride the fragmented Indian political establishment. She knew every facet of it. The decisive Indian victory over Pakistan in the 1971 War strengthened her position.

One by one, Mrs. Gandhi marginalized her political opposition. Morarji Desai, the Gandhian leader of the traditional, conservative wing of the Congress Party lost his cabinet portfolio. She skillfully exploited divisions inside the Jan Sangh and socialist parties. Several of her judicial appointees and her media supporters hounded her party opponents.

Mrs. Gandhi drew her most important advisors from her upper-class Kashmiri Brahmin caste. They loyally implemented the economic centralization --socialist policies that strengthened her authoritarian course. R.N. Kao, her spymaster, dug up dirt on the opposition parties. T.N. Kaul, India's pro-Soviet Ambassador to Russia became Foreign Secretary. He reinforced India's Russian bias in Indian foreign policy. P.N. Haksar became Mrs. Gandhi's economic policy Czar. All three, Kao, Kaul and Haksar were Kashmiri Brahmins in her sub-caste.

Haksar had studied under the Marxist-Socialist Harold Laski at the London School of Economics in the 1930s. Laski espoused the Soviet central planning doctrines that Stalin was implementing. Haksar, like Laski, pressed for the state to occupy the "commanding heights" of the economy to lift the poor out of poverty.

I collaborated with a British High Commission colleague to craft, on paper, a diagram of Mrs. Gandhi's informal governing network of loyal Kashmiri Brahmins and other relatives and friends. I wrote a 7-page analysis entitled "*Authoritarian Trend in India*" that documented her authoritarian direction. The classified airgram focused on her attempts to control national political and economic levers; to suppress the opposition parties; silence media criticism; and marginalize independent-minded judges on the Supreme Court, also on the High Courts at the state level around the country. My British colleague and I, together, had access to good sources covering about every area of India's politics. Mine included some contacts from the second and third rings of the Kashmiri Brahmin clan around Mrs. Gandhi. There was no shortage of Indians in these circles who opposed the prime minister's authoritarian course.

Political Counselor Paul Kreisberg added supportive paragraphs to my airgram. He was in personal contact with a very sensitive source --an Indian political operative with personal access to Mrs. Gandhi's most private thinking. Paul put my airgram's summary into a classified telegram with "Immediate" precedence and sent it off to Washington addressees. Ambassador Moynihan predicted the analysis would be read with interest in the White House.

In 1974, Moynihan introduced the proposal of writing off India's PL-480 rupees debt to the U.S. at a Country Team Meeting. It was a brilliant idea. the enormous debt had grown to over 16 trillion rupees, equivalent to over \$2 billion at the time. Forgiving the debt, which would never be repaid anyway, would improve the U.S. image in India during its lowest point ever in Indo-U.S. relations. It would contravene the Indian dependent-superior complexes burdening the Indo-U.S. relationship. Forgiving the debt made sense in economic terms as well. The Indian government was using a percentage of the interest from domestic PL-480 rupee sales to expand government investment in failing public sector enterprises at the expense of the private sector.

Q: We examined the entire issue of food assistance during the period in the '70s and '80s in graduate school. In nearly every case, although you could not blame donors for giving food to people who are starving, the economic problems it caused for the local market and the suppression of local prices and the knock-on effect of farmers not being willing to plant because of not getting a market price and creating the very dependency they were decrying through this aid policy. What they needed to do was allow more market mechanisms even in the food market. It took a very long time for them to understand that and adopt it to some extent. Then you can go in with USAID in explaining to farmers how to grow, what markets are, how to get you food to market --the entire farm to market instruction, including roads and understanding how market conditions operate. To these small farmers, they had no notion of how things worked. You needed to both educate them on basic marketing skills --Peace Corps is still doing that all over the world with other resources like coffee and flowers and nuts, these high value things, telling them how they can profit from growing them. This is what we were learning in graduate school at the time India was still taking this PL-480 (public law 480) food aid. As of now, PL-480 has

diminished significantly and farmers all over the world are growing more and being part of the market, having a stake in the market.

TOMSEN: In my experience during that period, everything you said is true. The PL-480 predicament verified Moynihan's idea and your analysis.

Washington cleared off on his proposal to erase the PL-480 debt. Mrs. Gandhi sent her agriculture minister to the PL-480 check presentation ceremony. She probably was too embarrassed to attend. Moynihan spoke first. In his following remarks, the minister avoided thanking the U.S. Perhaps he thought Moynihan should thank him! In private embassy conversations, Moynihan expressed amusement at this latest example of Indian hypocrisy.

During a subsequent Country Team Meeting, Moynihan proudly announced that the 16,640,000,000 Rupee check he gave to the minister had made it into the Guinness Book of Records as the largest single check in the history of banking!

The American-generated Green Revolution introduced high-yielding varieties of wheat seed, better fertilizers and mechanized farming. The Green Revolution boosted agricultural production in the Third World. It did not really take hold in India until the late 1970s when it substantially increased Indian agricultural production. In the mid-seventies, the UN estimated that 35% of the world's extreme poor still lived in India. Most were non-literate, landless Untouchables and Tribals surviving on less than \$1 a day.

During 1974, Mrs. Gandhi's socialist policies were badly damaging the Indian economy. The economic growth rate fell from 3.3% to only 1.2% that year. Driven by the high birth rate of 3.6% in 1974, new births (and corresponding food demands) rose to 14.5 million.

The media and the Morarji Desai "Old Guard" of the Congress Party criticized the government's failing performance. Violent "Naxalite" uprising by landless laborers in West Bengal spread into nearby provinces in Eastern and Central India.

Mrs. Gandhi gained a brief patriotic respite from her critics when she authorized India's May 18, 1974 "peaceful nuclear explosion" at an army testing ground in the Rajasthan desert. The underground test was not detected by the CIA beforehand. It evoked a frenzy of praise and flag waving around the country. India had broken into the small club of nuclear powers and was catching up to China. The test utilized plutonium taken from the Bombay Tarapur reactor.

Our reporting analyses to Washington on the test connected its timing to Mrs. Gandhi flagging political fortunes. The nuclear test's respite from domestic political pressures lasted only 3 weeks.

A huge anti-Gandhi rally in June, 1974 was led by an elderly leader of the anti-British 1930s Civil Disobedience Movement, J.P. Narayan. The non-violent rally quickly energized popular hostility to her government. It also gave new life to the conservative Congress Party leader Morarji Desai who had been languishing in the political wilderness.

Q: Yes, and very long-lived.

TOMSEN: Right. In India, old politicians never completely fade away. In Morarji's case, he became the next Indian Prime Minister!

J.P. Narayan's movement against Mrs. Gandhi gained momentum on the national stage. Like Desai, Narayan had been one of Mahatma Gandhi's disciples at the head of the anti-British civil disobedience rallies before Independence. The similarity in Indian politics was powerful --the pre-Independence disobedience campaign against the unpopular, autocratic British Viceroy, the post-independence disobedience campaign against an unpopular Prime Minister. It was an opposition campaign at home in India's political culture.

Mrs. Gandhi's government responded with more authoritarian measures. She invoked anti-terrorism laws from the colonial period, jailing opposition and student demonstrators. The railways union, the largest union in the country, went on strike in July. Her government suppressed the strikers, arrested thousands and expelled their families from government housing. Criticism of the Prime Minister soared in Parliament. Gandhi accused her opponents of threatening law and order. She decried interference from the CIA.

Political Counselor Paul Kriesberg, myself, and my British High Commission counterpart together worked a combined network of over 50 Indian contacts near and outside Mrs. Gandhi's inner circle, politicians, media, student leaders and government officials. We tracked the growing J.P. Narayan movement. We kept a low profile, monitoring enormous rallies from their fringes to avoid accusations of fermenting unrest.

J.P. Narayan's marches, rallies and strikes expanded nationwide. Mrs. Gandhi's crackdowns only fueled the movement. Those closest to her showed increasing nervousness. Paul's source with the best access told him she was considering martial law and ruling by decree.

One paragraph of the "Authoritarian Trend" airgram described a court case filed against Mrs. Gandhi in her parliamentary constituency after her 1970 election victory. Most cases take years to wind their way through lower courts up to the regional High Court. This one had finally reached the Allahabad High Court in Uttar Pradesh province near Delhi.

I made 2 trips to the area and interviewed those familiar with the case. Mrs. Gandhi's opponent, Socialist Party candidate Raj Narayan, had documented how her Congress

campaign's use of government workers and vehicles had helped her win the election. One of her relatives predicted to me that the high court would rule against her. And it did.

On June 12, 1975, the High Court in Allahabad decided in favor of Raj Narayan, her Socialist opponent. It voided her election to Parliament and therefore her position of India's Prime Minister. This set off a crisis that led to Mrs. Gandhi's downfall.

We closely followed the exciting chain of events in our reporting. The government asked the Supreme Court to overturn the High Court decision. In June 24, 1975, the Supreme Court ordered a stay until it determined whether Mrs. Gandhi should resign. That further rattled her inner circle.

The next day, June 25, Paul and I were on the margins of a J.P. Narayan rally of over 100,000 demonstrators in New Delhi. The atmosphere was festive. Men, women and children cheered. Narayan passionately called for an uprising. He implored the police and army to disobey government orders if they deemed them unconstitutional or immoral.

Within hours, at Gandhi's request, the President of India declared a Constitutional Emergency. That gave her sweeping extraordinary powers that the police and Army used to jail over 140,000 without trial. Hundreds of opposition leaders, including J.P. Narayan and Desai, plus editors, journalists, students and others were jailed for 2 years. The Emergency allowed Mrs. Gandhi to rule by decree, suspend freedom of speech, media, assembly, and other civil liberties. She amended the constitution, exonerating her from the Allahabad election fraud verdict.

Back at my desk in the Political Section the next morning, I picked up the phone to make a call. We had assumed that our phones were tapped. This time it was explicit! Instead of a dial tone, I heard excited voices in Hindi speaking inside a government police office responsible for wire-tapping. After a few minutes of entertainment, I gave up on the call and hung up.

I drove for a couple of hours through sections of Old and New Delhi to gather impressions to report to Washington. When I returned, a CIA officer in the embassy station informed me that Indian intelligence agents had followed me during my drive-around. They got angry when they lost me in crowded Old Delhi!

Political unrest went underground. The government continued to fill the jails around the country. Democratic-minded Congress Party officials resigned. They included the Cabinet Information Minister who went into hiding.

Mrs. Gandhi issued a 20-point economic plan aimed at the impossible task of jump-starting India's moribund economy. Soon Soviet-style *Pravda* propaganda articles appeared with photos of happy workers proclaiming dramatic progress in the 20-point plan. Censored newspapers listed wild statistics about progress in urban and rural reforms. The government created a "Garibi Hatao" ("Eliminate Poverty") slogan. It

proliferated onto huge placards above buildings, over bridges, at railway stations and airports, in newspaper headlines and in radio, TV broadcasts.

A Peace Corps volunteer stationed at a village in Rajasthan whom I met by chance at the embassy snack bar told me he had been invited to a fictitious land reform event by the District Collector. As the only foreigner in the area, he qualified as a notable. That day, village residents were gathered near the village Tundikhel, a sort of old New England town Common, the grassy common ground where cows grazed. The cows were gone. The village common was divided into about 50 rectangular squares, marked by white chalk. A single Harijan (Untouchable) landless laborer stood in front of each square. The District Collector's car could be seen stopping on a road about a half mile from the village. He came the rest of the way by foot with his retinue.

One by one, the Collector handed out land-owning certificates to the Harijan new land-owners standing before their new plot of land. The plots were theirs to build a new home. A photographer took photos of the land transfers.

The Peace Corps Volunteer joined the Collector and members of the village council over a cup of tea after the ceremony. Following remarks, the Collector walked back to his car and drove off. The Peace Corps Volunteer told me that, within only a few hours, the Harijans had left the village Common to return to their hovels on the outskirts of the village. The cattle were back grazing. Village life continued as before. Newspaper articles carrying the land reform ceremony's photos fraudulently provided more evidence supportive of the government's land redistribution program underway in rural India.

You asked about the government's sterilization program. Mrs. Gandhi's equally strong-willed son Sanjay, who had nothing to do before the Emergency, created and implemented the program. He led the family planning part of the Emergency's ill-fated Great Leap Forward. In addition to tamping down India's high birth rate, Sanjay put himself in charge of eradicating casteism and abolishing dowries in India.

Sanjay Gandhi's well-publicized forced-sterilization program was one of the many emergency programs that angered the Indian public and contributed to Mrs. Gandhi's downfall. The government's statistics recorded over 2 million vasectomies in 1975 and 8.3 million more during 1976. Our embassy FSNs described police chasing down males between 15 and 50 years of age in rural areas trying to escape across fields. They were taken to a mobile vasectomy clinic in a bus or truck where a doctor would perform the procedure.

Overnight, our 60-year old Muslim cook went into hiding. He told us that he feared getting caught in the vasectomy net, along with his son and grandson. Several months before, he had proudly announced to Kim that he had a son. Kim asked if it was his grandson. He insisted it was his son!

Others at the embassy reported their Indian staff vanishing, frightened about falling victim to the vasectomy blade. One weekend, I was playing tennis at the embassy. I asked the ball boy, who looked about 15, where he was from. He answered Uttar Pradesh, Mrs. Gandhi's and Sanjay's home state. With a serious look on his face, he said he had come to Delhi because he was afraid of the vasectomy squads.

My five-year India assignment ended in July, 1976. By that time, it was clear that Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency was exacerbating India's problems. Popular political discontent against her continued to rise. India's and her own international image were suffering.

I departed Delhi to begin Russian language training 4 months before she revoked the Emergency in January, 1977. I guessed out of worry about the personal legacy she was leaving behind in the history books. She announced new elections later in 1977. All political prisoners were released. Media controls were terminated, civil liberties restored.

Morarji Desai led a coalition of opposition parties to victory in the 1977 elections. Mrs. Gandhi's Congress was overwhelmingly defeated. All Congress candidates in her large state of Uttar Pradesh were resoundingly defeated. She and Sanjay lost their seats. Her Kashmiri mafia advisors immediately resigned. India returned to being India.

Q: So you go back to the U.S. for Russian language training?

TOMSEN: Yes. We departed in the summer of 1976, 7 months before Mrs. Gandhi's resounding 1977 election defeat. India was a wonderful posting for our family. I went into Russian language training for 10 months. Kim also signed up for full time language training.

Q: It's September 14th and we are continuing with Ambassador Tomsen, the end of his tour in India and preparation for going to the Soviet Union.

TOMSEN: Yes. After completing language training, I was assigned to fill the Asia Watching position in the Political External wing of the Political Section (POL/EXT).

My career goal was to serve in India, the Soviet Union and China before retiring. I had bids on Moscow and Beijing for my next assignment. Secretary Kissinger's GLOP policy requiring out-of-area assignments may have helped me get the Moscow assignment after 3 tours in Asia. The GLOP out-of-area requirement ruled out China, another Asian country. My postings in South Asia, Vietnam and Thailand probably fit with the Moscow Asia watching job.

Q: This is a good place to ask a question about what was then called the Russia Club. As I recall, in the 1970s and '80s, officers could not just ask for a position in Russia and hope to get it. You needed to be recommended and even possibly to have somebody known to the Russia hands to be able to get a position, if I understand it right.

TOMSEN: I don't know if that's right but that did happen in my case, also with other bidders. In Delhi, Political Counselor Paul Kriesberg and a colleague, Bob Ober, weighed in for me. Bob had served in Moscow. Bob followed the Soviet-Indian relationship in the Political Section. He and Paul wrote letters to the Soviet Desk in the Department recommending me for Russian language training followed by the assignment to the Political Section in Moscow.

Q: You received the assignment and your next step then was language.

TOMSEN: Exactly. My goal was to serve in the 3 Asian giants-- India, Russia and China--during my Foreign Service career. When opportunity offered, I traveled widely in Asia with Kim and with embassy colleagues. We visited Soviet Central Asia and Siberia, most of India's states and China's provinces. We preferred trips into the Inner Asian mountain chain shaped like a huge "T": the Himalayas separating Chinese Tibet from India and Nepal at the base of the "T"; then north on the T's stem to the Karakoram range shared by China, India and Pakistan; continuing north on the stem through the North-South Pamirs dividing Afghanistan and China; and ending in the East-West Tian Shan range at the top separating Russia and China.

Q: Those trips certainly in the '70s and '80s are rough trips. There were still not the most open or modern accommodations in a lot of those places.

TOMSEN: Right. That was especially true of the bathrooms available along the way!

The sheer size of Siberia and Tibet necessitated week-plus visits. Another embassy officer and I traversed the Russian side of the Tian Shan range. We visited Frunze. Then drove into the Pamirs as far as Osh. Osh is only about 200 miles from Kashgar on the Chinese side of the Pamirs. At that time Kashgar was the most interesting bazaar in Central Asia. I stopped there twice during our China assignment. Its population was about a million (mostly) Uighurs and around 2 million donkeys. Many biblical era scenes! In China we made two visits to Tibet. Our older daughter, Kim-Anh, and I also visited Urumchi, the capital of Xinjiang, China's western most province bordering the Tian Shan, Pamir and Karakoram ranges.

Q: In Tibet, did you go through the Potala? Was it open?

TOMSEN: Yes. I also visited the other great Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Shigatse and Gyantse. Those two cities are close to the Nepali border. The Tibetan culture is really under pressure, like the Uighur culture in Xinjiang, from state-sponsored Chinese immigration.

When we left China after our first tour in 1983, we took the Trans-Siberian Railroad, a five-day trip across the Siberian taiga ending in Moscow.

I began Russian language training and Soviet area studies programs at the Foreign Service Institute in September 1977. That, altogether, made the Soviet assignment about three years. The Russian language instructors were conscientious and devoted to giving us the gift of this beautiful language. We, language students, bought heavy winter clothing to survive the Russian winter and to meld into the population.

Q: As an aside, I went to Moscow once in the very first week of November and I had a regular winter coat and just my shoes. I went to one of the open markets; the ground was so cold I could not leave my feet on the ground. I had to keep hopping from one foot to another because there was not enough leather in my sole to protect my feet from the cold. Of course, my American winter coat was nothing. It was like just wearing a raincoat. And that was the first week of November!

TOMSEN: Did you buy anything in Moscow?

Q: I was only there for a week. I just went through it. But just to give anyone listening an idea of just how cold it gets in Russia, and how you have to dress at that level of warmth.

TOMSEN: Well said. It frequently got down to 30 degrees below, a few times when we were there-- more than 50 degrees below!

One happy event during language training was the Russian language instructors' receptivity to Kim and Katrina Hamilton's continuing beyond the wives' and secretaries' 3-month course into the advanced Russian courses. Katrina was the wife of Economic Officer Jerry Hamilton. The two wives rapidly mastered 100 pages of dialogues (a condition to remain with the class) and caught up with the advanced classes. In Moscow, Kim spoke better vernacular Russian than I did.

One day, all State Department language trainees were brought to the State Department for a security briefing. A DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State) managing Soviet affairs received us in a classified room. He announced that the Soviets had established an elaborate radiation microwave capability targeting the embassy. The microwave attacks were directed from Soviet equipment on the roof of a building across the street from the embassy. They were attempting to jam our electronic equipment and, it was assumed by many, to activate listening devices they had installed in walls inside the embassy.

The DAS acknowledged that the microwave radiation directed at the embassy created health risks. If an officer chose to break his Moscow assignment, he or she would be "taken care of" in another onward assignment. None of us broke our assignment. His briefing was discomfiting. A few days later, it was even more discomfiting to learn that the briefing was probably triggered by a leak published in the *New York Times* about the microwave attacks on the embassy!

Our Russian language training coincided with the gradual transformation of U.S.-Soviet relations during the '70s from the era of détente which flowered at the 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev summit to détente's collapse in 1979 when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. The Soviet Union, having achieved parity at the '72 summit, had energetically moved beyond parity. In terms of quantity, the Soviets passed the United States in the number of missiles it had deployed, including ICBMs (Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles). Regionally, its medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) were in the process of being deployed, pointing at Europe and China. I didn't say quality because usually we had the qualitative edge. On quantity, Khrushchev boasted of Sputnik, when they got a jump on us in the 1950s: "We'll soon be producing missiles like sausages."

Q: People today may not realize the extent to which that issue was one of a cottage industry among American experts. Easily from '76 or '77 well into the Reagan administration, articles in Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy and every magazine talked about the strategic balance of missiles, and whether the Russians or we were ahead or what kind of strategic negotiations we needed to have in order to right the perceived reduction that was being argued about. The debates on this went on and on and were among the most important issues of those years.

TOMSEN: In the presidential debates, too.

Q: Now in another era, you seldom see articles about this at all. The issue's completely changed.

TOMSEN: That could change again in the future!

Q: There was an entire course at Georgetown University when I was there in the mid-'70s just on strategic missiles.

TOMSEN: Did you take it?

Q: It was '78 or '79 when I took an entire course about the strategic balance in missiles.

TOMSEN: What was the conclusion of the course? Was it threatening?

Q: At Georgetown at that time, professors tended to think we needed more, period. Whatever our qualitative advantage was, we needed more. We needed INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) in Europe and we needed to continue to build the number of missiles we had regardless of the qualitative advantage we had which some people used to argue that we didn't need to invest further in strategic forces but rather in the modernization of all our other military assets.

TOMSEN: All of this fit into our containment policy which started under Truman after George Kennan gave the conceptual framework in his Mr. X article and the Long Telegram transmitted from Moscow in the late '40s: if the Soviet Union expanded out

from its borders, as Russia had done throughout its history, the United States and its allies would seek to contain the expansion. Under Kennan's thesis, overtime, the containment pressures would exacerbate nascent domestic contradictions inside the Soviet Union leading to the Soviet system's collapse. That did happen some 35 years later. But in the late 1970s there was a feeling among commentators and media and politicians not only in the United States but around the world that U.S. power was receding. Failure in Vietnam; the 1973 oil embargo; and Watergate fueled that impression. President Carter was elected narrowly over President Ford on a platform of putting Vietnam behind us and reducing American over-extension in the world. You hear that today too, after failures in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Indeed, one of Carter's campaign pledges was to withdraw our army from South Korea. The Soviet Union and Russian propaganda portrayed the inevitable enlargement of the global "socialist" community – the image was the Soviet Union and Communism were on the move and the dominoes were falling in Southeast Asia. Countries were moving into the Russian orbit. Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, South Yemen. In Africa with the aid of thousands of Cuban troops, pro-Soviet regimes were taking over in Ethiopia, Angola, Namibia and joining the "socialist camp."

Q: Somoza in Nicaragua; so many things fed into that narrative. The Soviet Union was on the march.

TOMSEN: Yes. So that was the backdrop when we arrived in Moscow on a Pan Am flight. The Soviets allowed only three entry points for American officials: Leningrad, Moscow, and Vladivostok. That thorough KGB surveillance continued during the in-country travel of embassy personnel. From the Baltics to Siberia, Soviet hotels routinely checked embassy personnel into the same KGB-prepared bugged hotel rooms!

The frantic pace of work in our Moscow Embassy POL section was evident immediately on arrival. Our family of 4 waited over an hour for our embassy pickup. The young POL/INT officer arrived flustered and apologetic. He said his POL supervisor sent him racing to the airport in his own car a half hour after our plane had landed. He drove us to 45 Leninsky Prospekt. We moved into our ninth floor flat. The building was old; the apartments were Spartan, but adequate. Fortunately, Emma McNamara, the wife of Ted McNamara, my immediate supervisor, had left a large casserole of lasagna and other food and drinks in the refrigerator. But I had no time to settle in. Our pickup junior officer and I jumped back into his car, repaired to the POL section in the embassy, and plunged into the daily work flow.

We spent our time in POL ferreting on what was going on behind the pellucid curtain of internal and external Soviet politics and Soviet society generally. That required laboriously mining Soviet sources – Soviet propaganda outlets and during our rare meetings with Soviet officials. A constant stream of Carter Administration VIPs gave Ambassador Malcolm Toon, DCM Jack Matlock, Political Counsellor Bill Brown and we embassy notetakers access to high-level Soviet policy-makers. Ambassador Toon's

official requests to meet Soviet leader Brezhnev, other politburo members and even the Soviet Defense Minister were rebuffed. Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in Washington, meanwhile, periodically met President Carter and Secretary of State Vance, and Carter's national Security Advisor Brzezinski.

There was pressing interest in Washington agencies on practically every subject the embassy reported on. We were told our cables were avidly read in Washington --in the White house, State, DOD, CIA and other government offices. We were on the scene; we spoke Russian; read the Russian media. A low-ranking political officer's conversation with a Soviet official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs might end up on the President or the Secretary of State's desk the next day.

It was never boring, which was a good point. We felt we were doing significant work.

Q: And it had that reputation in the service even into the '80s when I joined that if you go to Moscow, prepare to work in very close quarters and very late hours; that was the way things worked.

TOMSEN: Right. It had its upsides and downsides. We had to assume KGB monitoring was constant. We had very minimal contact with ordinary Russians. When we left the Soviet Union for our next assignment in 1979 on another Pan Am flight, a group of about 7 of us embassy officers and our family members cheered when our plane cleared Soviet air space and flew over Germany to Frankfurt.

I had the impression that the mid-level Soviet Foreign Ministry officials POL/EXT officers met at the Foreign Ministry felt similarly segregated. They knew that we knew that the official standpoint they repeated were the same formulations we read in Soviet newspapers. In other words, propaganda. We also knew that the first radio program they listened to every morning was *VOA* (the *Voice of America*) and that all conversations in the offices where we met were taped. Many of our Foreign Ministry meetings were conducted in one tapping office on the ground floor. Of course, the tapping was a further disincentive for our foreign ministry contact to be forthcoming!

Nearly all of these lower-level conversations at the Foreign Ministry were useless. Both the Soviet Foreign Ministry official and the embassy officer were lucky if one morsel of new information surfaced. My first 3 meetings with the Soviet Korean Desk officer in the Soviet MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) were dull as well as unproductive for both of us. Each time he asked when the U.S. troops remaining in South Korea would be withdrawn as President Carter had declared. Each time I ambiguously answered that the issue was under consideration in Washington. In one meeting, I used the shorter version of "North Korea" in Russian rather than the long "Democratic People's Republic of Korea" in references to North Korea. Probing for a morsel, he asked why I did not use North Korea's official name.

Q: They would parse it all the way down to something that small?

TOMSEN: Yes. They did. On the U.S. troop presence in South Korea, NSC Advisor Brzezinski eventually convinced Carter to keep our troops in South Korea. When the Soviet Korean Desk officer routinely asked the same question at our fourth meeting, I was able to give him the unwelcome answer that U.S. forces would remain on the Korean peninsula!

Of course, by the late 1970s the Soviet leadership was already getting old. As you know, the Achilles heel in dictatorships is the succession of aging leaders. Leaders try to keep control until they die. They enjoyed great power and class status with enormous privileges hidden from the population --like beautiful apartments and access to special stores, palace-size dachas in the countryside, their children went to the finest universities to prepare them for leadership positions.

Q: And of course, the older you get the less likely you are to be flexible in the way you think about any policy, which also became a difficulty for the Soviet Union. With Carter, you're right – Brzezinski was the harder line voice and for the first year or two of his presidency, Carter was really trying to take on this view that the U.S. couldn't modernize its way into superiority or equality with the Soviets. As you approach the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Brzezinski's voice got more and more compelling and it eventually became the one that was the controlling view in the Carter Administration, to the point that when Carter was running against Reagan he had already submitted a budget to Congress that effectively increased the size of the military to what Reagan was running on. But it was too late for Carter in a lot of other ways, but Carter's Administration had already begun to switch its approach to the Soviets. I imagine that also had an effect on the embassy and the way things began to go for you out in Moscow.

TOMSEN: It did. In these initial years, from 1977 to 1978, before the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter and Vance chose to rely on professor Marshall Shulman to guide Soviet policy. Shulman taught Russian history and Soviet studies at Harvard, Columbia and Brown before moving to the State Department after Carter's election. He and Vance supported a liberal approach to improve U.S.-Soviet relations. Brzezinsky, like Ambassador Toon in Moscow, advocated a hardline approach.

It was like the *Yin* and the *Yang*. When Marshall Shulman or Vance would give a speech, it would be the liberal *yin*; and when Brzezinski gave a speech it would be the hardline *yang*. In Moscow, Ambassador Toon looked for opportunities to publicly vent his opposition to the Vance-Shulman *yin* approach. His late Friday afternoon press conferences and the news-hungry U.S. press corps were his favorite outlet. I joined other mid-level officers in the back row of his lively give and take with reporters. One time, he called the elderly Soviet Politburo members Neanderthals. The reporters loved it. So did we. Front page articles in the U.S. the next day drew State Department back-channel rebukes of Toon's freelancing.

As you say, the Brezhnev politburo was on automatic pilot in terms of policy. There was minimal flexibility. In 1982, Brezhnev died at age 79. He was succeeded by KGB chief Andropov who was already in poor health; he lasted a year and a half and died. He was succeeded by senior Politburo member Chernyenko who was 74. Chernyenko died after about 13 months. We used to monitor Brezhnev's health condition on Soviet television. Brezhnev would speak with an incoherent drawl. Once we saw Chernyenko standing close behind Brezhnev on a stage at a party conference. Amazingly, the shorter, chubby Chernyenko was holding Brezhnev up with one arm pressed against Brezhnev's back so he would not fall! Brezhnev had a penchant for cars; we gave him Lincolns and Cadillacs and the Germans gave him Mercedes.

Embassy Moscow was the largest embassy we served in during my Foreign Service career. The number of officers in POL/EXT exceeded the number of officers in the entire political section in New Delhi. Bill Brown, our Political Counselor, supervised two POL sub-sections: POL/EXT led by Ted McNamara; POL/INT led by Dick Combs. An arms control unit including DOD arms control specialists also reported to Ted. CIA officers were embedded throughout the embassy, including the Political Section.

Outside the embassy, living in the Soviet Union and raising a family was a Foreign Service experience like none other! Our nine-story (ten counting the upper KGB listening attic) Soviet apartment building resembled the usual drab, dirty white, Soviet-style concrete buildings spread through Moscow. Two stout "dezhurnayas," officious, upper middle-aged Russian concierges so to speak, monitored the 20 or so American embassy families occupying the building's apartments. They managed the top "electronics" floor that operated the eavesdropping equipment in every apartment in the building. We never locked our door knowing that our handlers barred outsiders from entering the solitary single door into the building. Kim noticed that the dejurnayas often brought mud from their shoes into our apartment. So, she wrote a note in Russian asking them to wipe their shoes before entering. She misspelled one Russian word. The intruder made a correction of the spelling when leaving our apartment. Militsiya (uniformed, armed, tall Soviet intelligence guards) outside monitored the apartment door, street side. They used their batons to shoo away Soviet pedestrians walking too near the door. Our children were unable to make friends with Russian children. They played hide and seek inside the building and watched embassy-supplied children's movies during the day.

Q: One recollection about this: as late as 1999 when I started my tour in Armenia, the only international hotel that you could stay in still had one of those concierges on the bottom floor. This is now an independent country and they still ran it where every key was under her control. You had to go to her for the key, and return it when you went out. While I was there, between 1999 and 2001 that ended because the management of the hotel was turned over to Marriott, who upgraded it and they created a regular key system. But when I first arrived, it was still that way.

TOMSEN: The apparent phasing out of the concierge/watchdog employment function?

One day our oldest 8-year old daughter spotted a man using binoculars to peer into our apartment from an upper floor window across the street. He did not flinch when Kim and I joined our daughter to stare back at him.

During our family visits to tourist sites in and around Moscow, chance encounters with Russians did occur sometimes. One Sunday, we visited Suzdal, a beautiful setting of colorful Russian orthodox churches located outside Moscow, near Zagorsk (now Sergiyev Posad), a monastic center that dated back to the middle ages. Kim and the kids had walked to the usual no-door, all gender, outhouse-like restroom. I stood outside, quietly singing to myself an American folk song, "Down by the Ohio." Three Russian youth behind me picked up the tune during the second stanza. I was stunned but sang on. They sang every English word with me to the end. Kim and the kids returned. They went their way chatting and giggling about our encounter. We resumed our Suzdal tour.

There were daily reminders that we were living in a police state while working in the embassy. Every few months I visited the Embassy doctor to burn off one or two warts on my hand. The scars remain today, centered in the flesh web between my right-hand thumb and the adjoining finger. A decade later, the NSA (National Security Agency) discovered that many embassy officers over the years, including myself, were victims of invisible KGB spy dust placed on door knobs and steering wheels --designed to trace our movements as we walked or drove around Moscow.

Embassy officers traveling in pairs in non-prohibited zones outside Moscow were required to submit their itineraries to the "Miscellaneous Services" embassy office staffed by Soviet local employees assumed to come from Soviet intelligence agencies. Miscellaneous Services made the travel and hotel reservations, obviously giving the KGB a heads'- up about our trips. We also assumed that most "chance encounters" in hotels and restaurants and during travel might not be by chance. Our Agency colleagues confirmed that a KGB training facility for prostitutes indicated that some chance encounters might feature young ladies. Often the staging point was a four-chair dining table in a restaurant inside the hotel where embassy officers were staying at. Usually a dance floor was located next to the dining tables. After a decent interval, a young woman would initiate the chance encounter by approaching the embassy officers' table and sitting down on one of the empty chairs. Her game plan was to strike up a conversation and ask one of the embassy officers to dance.

On two occasions during our time in Moscow, Soviet waiters spiked glasses of vodka of Americans. One involved the *U.S. News and World Report* correspondent traveling in Central Asia with his wife. He passed out and collapsed on the restaurant floor. The waiters and customers in the restaurant rebuffed his wife's appeals to help carry him to the elevator and up to their room. Afterwards he wrote a detailed article about the event that was published in *U.S. News and World Report*.

Kim was the receptionist in the embassy commercial office located at one end of the embassy, facing the street. One morning she tangled with KGB plainclothesmen stationed in 2 black volgas parked along the curb outside. The incident began in front of the consular section located at the other end of the embassy, also facing the street.

One morning the KGB guards standing in front of the embassy assaulted a Pentecostal family of 12 from Siberia seeking American visas. The U.S.-Soviet consular agreement gave Russian visa applicants unimpeded access to the consular section. A sign in Russian near the sidewalk next to the door invited visa applicants into the embassy. The KGB guards instead roughed up the Pentecostal family. The family ran down the street and tried to enter the commercial section. The two black KGB volgas along the curb disgorged several KGB toughs. They intercepted the Pentecostal family members, beat them, even the children, and pulled them screaming into the volgas.

Hearing the ruckus, Kim rushed outside. By that time, several of the Pentecostals had been bundled into one of the volgas. It was pulling away into the street traffic. The rest of the family was inside the second volga still struggling to get out. Kim grabbed the back door of the second volga and held it open. At this point, Rick, a barrel-chested visa officer and karate expert, was sprinting down the street from the consular section. The KGB driver saw him coming. He slowly guided his volga out onto the street. Kim ran forward to keep holding the door open. A KGB thug inside wrestled the door shut with a bang. At that point, Rick caught up to the melee, just in time to deliver a screeching Karate blow to the trunk of the volga, bending it inwards. The volga shot into the traffic and disappeared. The Pentecostal family was sent back to their village in Siberia. Six months later they returned, this time in a smaller group. They stopped outside the consular section in a taxi and rushed past the guards into the consular section. The guards managed to detain the last one, but the rest -7- got into the embassy. The 7 remained there until Soviet-U.S. negotiations allowed them to immigrate to the United States.

Q: I remember this making news in the U.S. I don't remember how long they were there.

TOMSEN: The family lived inside the embassy 24-7 for 5 years. They resided in a basement room which had a window with steel bars. The KGB guards would roll their billy clubs along the window bars to keep them awake at night. An embassy wife coordinated embassy families to provide for this Pentecostal family's welfare: food, clothing, English and other classes for the children. Congress passed legislation allowing them to immigrate. The Reagan Administration eventually succeeded in extracting Soviet permission for the 7 plus 10 other family members still in Siberia to settle in the U.S.

The embassy and the State Department in Washington protested recurrent Soviet violations of negotiated U.S.-Soviet consular agreements. The violent assault on the Pentecostals seeking U.S. visas was just one example. Soviet leaders obviously did not

force KGB compliance with the agreements. And Washington, unfortunately, tolerated the impasse, eschewing reciprocity.

Some embassies, the Chinese and Rumanians for example, did not hire Soviets. We employed dozens. One day a Seabee engineer noticed a suspicious wire stretching along a tiny crevice between the wall and floor of the room where Soviet workers changed clothes. He followed the wire backwards to the inside of a chimney where it wound upwards to the embassy roof. The other end of the wire entered an underground heating duct. The duct extended to and then exited embassy property into a Soviet apartment building. The Seabees walled off the duct at the embassy perimeter. The Soviet Foreign Ministry and Soviet Embassy in Washington shrugged off the written American protest delivered by hand.

The 1977 Moscow Embassy fire occurred 3 weeks after we arrived. AARs (After Action Reports) did not reach a clear conclusion on the origin of the fire. One possibility was that a hot plate for coffee-making in the Economic Section on the eighth floor near our Political Section was not turned off. Another blamed an old, defective transformer in the same room bought locally.

Around 10:00 p.m., a phone call from the embassy instructed me to come immediately. Kim and I arrived within minutes. Ambassador Toon and senior embassy officers were unsuccessfully trying to monitor the Soviet firefighters racing into the building to see if they were really firefighters. The fire was contained to the upper floors. It spread to the roof. The Station Chief stationed himself near the classified area with a .45 pistol in hand. Some Seabees on one part of the embassy roof attempting to guard communication equipment reportedly mooned Soviet helicopter pilots surveilling the embassy from above.

Ambassador Toon stood at the entrance to the embassy issuing orders to embassy staff. He told me to inspect the unclassified residential wing of the embassy to make sure everyone was out. I found only one person, a USIA officer, still asleep and escorted her out. Soviet firefighters departed about 2 hours later having put out most of the fire in the upper floors. Many embassy officers and their wives worked for 2 days to clean up the damage. We bundled up in winter clothes and gloves to work at our desks. Our offices were even more cramped after the fire.

A few weeks later during nighttime hours, Kim and I were driving home after a dinner hosted by the Pakistani DCM and his wife at their apartment. The night darkness turned into exceedingly bright daytime when we passed by our embassy on the drive back to our apartment. Towers of flame much more powerful than occurred at our embassy lit up the entire sky above the building across the street from our embassy. The pulsating sheets of fire obliterated the middle and upper floors, including the roof top that was used as a platform for the KGB's radiation equipment targeting the American embassy on the other side of the street.

Looking through my office window the next morning, the buildings' upper story and roof had disappeared. Great billows of dark smoke continued to spiral upwards from blackened windows. Western reporters phoned their contacts in the embassy angling for sensational information on whether the Americans were the source of the fire. There was no press guidance. I frankly answered that I did not know who started the fire.

Q: Honestly, how could an American get in there to start a fire in a building controlled by the KGB?

TOMSEN: True. Gaining physical access to that building would seem impossible. We did benefit –temporarily at least-- from the destruction of the microwave generating equipment. That alone was enough to inspire the spate of media inquiries.

The Moscow embassy fishbowl –we surrounded the wagons—threw personnel from all U.S. government agencies together –State, DOD, CIA, NSA, U.S.I.A., Agriculture and Commercial. Today, the camaraderie continues at our annual “1977 Embassy Fire” reunions. We mixed together at work and during lunch at the embassy snack bar; our kids played together in our American-only residential buildings; the Marine-hosted childrens’ movie shows on Saturday mornings at the embassy Marine quarters were a big community event. The annual Marine Ball was the social highlight of the year.

One cold winter evening, Bernie Loeffke, an embassy army attache, and I walked several city-blocks to a large Soviet diplomatic reception staged at a downtown hotel. Bernie and I would later serve together in China.

Bernie was in uniform. I wore a dark business suit and tie. About 7:00 p.m., we returned on foot to the embassy. We passed the KGB guards in front and walked through the paved embassy portal into the paved parking compound behind the embassy building. Suddenly, a Soviet taxi hurtled through the portal. It screeched to a halt behind us. As we abruptly turned, the taxi driver’s frightened eyes fixated on ours. They cried out, “Help Me!” Someone in the rear seat of the taxi thrust the barrel of a shotgun out a window. Pointed upwards, it exploded with a roar. All of this happened in about 3 seconds.

An excited young Russian man jumped out of the taxi, leaving the shotgun inside. As soon as his feet touched the ground, the taxi driver floored his accelerator and raced out of the rear compound back towards the street. That probably took another 2 seconds.

Bernie and I accosted the young Russian. We told him to leave the embassy compound immediately before the embassy guards arrested him. The U.S. was thousands of miles away across Soviet territory. We escorted him towards a tiny exit trap door inside the rear perimeter wall of the embassy. He dashed through it and vanished into the night. We never heard whether or not he made good his escape.

We prepared and distributed a report of the incident that night. That did not stop Ambassador Toon from severely dressing down Bernie (and indirectly me) at the Country Team Meeting the next morning. Ambassador Toon may have had a point --that we had acted recklessly. But we might have saved the young Russian's life. Several months later, another armed Russian male seeking asylum barged past the embassy guards into the consular section. Consular section personnel evacuated the section. The Russian chained himself to a table and waited. Some of us did not agree with the ambassador's decision to allow a Soviet sniper in an adjoining building to execute the man by a single shot to the head.

The Soviets fielded their spies in the U.S.; the CIA station in Moscow fielded our spies. One of ours was the most junior GSO (embassy's administration section's General Services officer) Marti Peterson. The KGB mistakenly considered Marti to be too junior and young to be a trained CIA spy. But Marti turned out to be the only spy from either side whose exploits are today portrayed in both the Spy Museum in Washington, D.C. and the KGB Spy Museum in Moscow.

One afternoon I went down to the embassy snack bar for lunch. I joined Cliff Gross, the Consul, at his table. Asked how his day was going, Cliff answered: "Not very well." He explained that in the wee hours of the morning, he had been awakened by an urgent call from KGB Lubyanka headquarters. The Soviet caller insisted that he come at once to pick up an arrested American diplomat. The long and the short of it is in Marti's book, *"The Widow Spy."* She had managed "Trigon," a Soviet KGB officer spying for the U.S., for over a year under the nose of the KGB in Moscow. The KGB finally caught up to Trigon --who committed suicide after his arrest. KGB agents arrested Marti. As a diplomat, she enjoyed diplomatic immunity. She insisted that her KGB interrogators release her to the U.S. Consul. Within 24 hours, she was on an American plane bound for the U.S.

Another book, *"The Billion Dollar Spy,"* relates other CIA espionage successes during and after our 2-year Moscow assignment. The leading players in the book are Adolf Tolkachev, a Soviet military designer of weapons and radar systems, plus Station Chief Gus Hathaway, and Case Officers John and Kissa Guilsher. Kim and I shared a table with John and Kissa at the Marine Ball.

Bill Brown's Political Section was a beehive of activity. Ted McNamara managed our POL/EXT. He specialized on arms control issues. An Air Force arms control expert and his staff assisted him. Dick Miles covered Soviet relations with the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. Jack Sontag covered Soviet relations with Eastern European countries. I covered Asia, concentrating mostly on Sino-Soviet relations.

Mind-boggling, serial-lying was the daily fare in the Soviet media. *"Pravda"* was the Communist Party's newspaper. Pravda means "Truth." The ridiculous untrue tales published in *Pravda* were at once a source of humor and irritation in our POL/EXT morning meetings. We exchanged the latest information on our separate areas. Each of

us submitted Soviet media items to place in the daily Soviet press summary cabled to Washington agencies.

One morning Dick threw his copy of *Pravda* on the floor in disgust. *Pravda* dwelled on the joys of living in the Soviet Union contrasted with the oppression in the West. Dick had just read an article reporting that a private airplane had gone down in Minnesota, injuring two people. *Pravda*, like all Soviet radio, TV and other newspapers, had ignored the crash of a Soviet airliner near Moscow the previous week killing over 100 people. A typical Soviet television portraying life in the United States, would show an average American city with only a few cars on the street and numerous homeless sleeping on benches.

A retired British ambassador to Russia once stated: "Lying on principle and habitual untruthfulness is what you experienced in the Soviet Union endlessly." The Marquis de Custine, a French aristocrat who traveled extensively in Russia, wrote in *La Russie en 1839* (*Russia in 1839*) "The government lives by lying," and "In that country, a sincere man would be taken for a lunatic."

Soviet officials we called on rattled off the same propaganda lies in Moscow and around the country, from Lvov (which was taken from Poland by Stalin after the Second World War) to the far western Russian port of Vladivostok in the Far East. Once the political counselor and I called on the foreign ministry's deputy minister handling Southeast Asia. His name was Igor Rogachev. We were following a big Vietnamese military buildup on the Cambodian border. It seemed like the Vietnamese were going to invade Cambodia. Most of the military equipment for the Vietnamese army came from the Soviet Union. Rogachev knew what was going on, not only in the Vietnamese army but also in the Vietnamese politburo. We directly asked him, "Are the Vietnamese going to attack Cambodia?" He answered, "Of course not." The next day, the Vietnamese attacked Cambodia.

Q: It's September 29th, we're resuming our interview with Ambassador Peter Tomsen.

TOMSEN: At our last session, we discussed the difficulty of meeting Russians beyond the KGB barrier. We were shielded from the population. The population was shielded from us. Every now and then we did break through the barriers and encountered a warm reception from friendly Russians.

Our annual turn for a week vacation in the embassy dacha in the beautiful Russian birch and pine forest north of Moscow offered a rare chance to do so. We walked and cross-country skied through trails in the woods for hours. Once we visited a nearby, lovely old Russian Orthodox church. Church priests, we were informed, were usually KGB employees. Inside, Kim, myself and our girls were startled to see a young peasant couple chasing and hounding the middle-aged priest around the inside of the church. The mother carried a baby. They begged the priest to baptize their baby. Probably noticing our entry, the priest moved to a large water basin. He scooped up some water and threw

it on the head of the child, mumbling something while the child was crying because of the cold water. The couple left the church, happy that their child had been baptized.

One morning, we skied until noon and returned to the dacha. After lunch, I strapped on my skis and sped back into the forest, hoping to leave behind any surveillance. Deep into the woods, I ran across an elderly Russian also on skis. He introduced himself as Andrei Andreyevich -the second name being the patronymic connection (to his father). I said I was an American diplomat on vacation at the American Embassy dacha with my family. At long last, I inwardly rejoiced that, at last, I could spend time with an ordinary Russian citizen without exposing me or him to Russian intelligence!

The next hour and a half could have been a movie. Snowflakes drifted downward through the trees. Andrei Andreyevich followed a ski trail to his wood cabin in a clearing next to his wood pile. He invited me inside. His wife wore a standard Russian peasant dress. She served hot apple cider. Andrei Andreyevich was a jovial host. We sat facing the fire in the fireplace chatting, sipping cider. After about a half-hour, I glanced outside and noticed darkness had begun to set in. It was winter; the sun was setting. The cider had made me a bit woozy. I needed to start back to the dacha quickly –and stay balanced on my skis! I said a polite goodbye to Andrei and his wife and left. Too much cider and too little light remaining caused me to fall into a snowdrift. But, I did somehow manage to make it back to the dacha before total darkness!

The Russians are famous for embracing children regardless of nationality. Kim took our daughters to children activities during the day –the circus, puppet shows, a *Little Red Riding Hood* musical. The Anglo-American school in Moscow was excellent. Our second-grade older daughter's British teacher emphasized essay writing. We cherished her essays. Our younger daughter was in kindergarten. During snowy mornings, inevitably one or more of the children in our 45 Leninsky Prospect apartment building would forget their lunch boxes. Mothers would lean out their apartment window and drop the lunch boxes past multiple floors onto the snowbank next to the school bus. The kids picked them up and climbed into the bus!

My main responsibility in the political section was reporting on the Sino-Soviet side of the Great Power U.S.-Soviet-Chinese triangle. I made several trips to Siberian and Central Asian borderlands to gather information on trendlines in Soviet relations with China. White House, State Department and other national security agencies were always on the lookout for on-the-ground reports from the field.

I visited Siberia 2 times. Siberia is larger than the United States, including Alaska. Most of it is as cold as northern Canada and uninhabitable. I also took 2 long trips to Central Asia regions bordering Iran, Afghanistan and China.

During our trips, like Soviet embassy diplomats traveling in the U.S., we called on local officials at each stop. We sought out information on the general region. My embassy travel companion and I struck up conversations with anyone who would talk to us on

economic, political and military topics. Next to the Afghan border in Tajikistan, a young civilian reservist informed us his army regiment was being activated. A local government official described a shooting incident in a contested enclave along the Sino-Soviet border. In bazaars and shops we gathered information on area food prices, the size of the next crop, possible food shortages in the region.

We sometimes hired young Soviet tourist guides to show us around cities of interest like Irkutsk and Khabarovsk, visiting museums and interesting historical sites. We assumed our guides were connected to Soviet intelligence. Yet, some were very candid, eager to improve their English, and occasionally outspoken about sensitive political issues.

The museums demonstrated the communist “socialist reality” of class struggle. They were still interesting to tour. A local museum in the Buryat Mongolian Republic exhibited lamaist monasteries, robes and Tibetan texts, statues and other artifacts of the Dalai Lama’s Gelukpa (yellow) Buddhist order. The main theme was class warfare –Buddhist monks suppressing the downtrodden masses. The fantastic Irkutsk Limnological Institute in Irkutsk exhibited the underwater ecological systems of Lake Baikal. The institute’s deep-water films and photos were a pleasant departure from socialist realism –underwater fish, shrimp, octopus and lobster do compete with each other for food and space. But they do not indulge in class warfare! We stumbled across another unique Siberian museum further east near Yakutsk. It displayed the clothes, yurt structures and tools of the earliest Hun settlements.

Jim Schumaker, Ambassador Toon’s staff assistant, joined me on my longest (two weeks) and most productive visit to Siberia during the summer of 1978. For the first time, and it turned out the last time, the Soviet government approved a foreign diplomatic mission to view the giant 2,687-mile Baikal-Amur Railway (RR) project under construction along the northern rim of Lake Baikal in central Siberia.

The ambitious RR project was the centerpiece and most expensive part of the current Soviet 7-year plan. It had two main objectives. One was military-strategic: to provide an alternative RR corridor from European Russia to the Pacific-- 500 north and paralleling the Trans-Siberian RR near the Chinese border. The trans-Sib RR was vulnerable to Chinese interdiction in the event of a Sino-Soviet war.

The second objective was economic: to exploit the trove of minerals, gas and oil deposits underground below the permafrost.

The Soviet leadership’s urgency given to building the Baikal-Amur RR was symptomatic of the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations. Jim’s and my goal was to gauge the status of the project and the prospects for its success in traversing lightly populated Siberia. If successful, it would provide a second, more secure, transportation corridor from European Russia east to the Sea of Okhotsk, north of Sakhalin Island.

Q: And Sakhalin Island had always been part of Siberia and not of Japan or any other power?

TOMSEN: The huge island went back and forth between Japan and Russia. Japan won the 1904 Russian-Japanese War in Northeast Asia. The 1905 Treaty of Portland mediated by President Roosevelt gave Japan control of the southern half of Sakhalin. At Yalta in 1945, Roosevelt succumbed to Stalin's demand that the Soviet Union annex southern Sakhalin. Stalin did not stop there. He also convinced Roosevelt to accept Soviet annexation of Japan's 4 northern islands, the "Northern Territories" just north of Hokkaido.

Jim's and my first stop was the city of Irkutsk, capital of the sprawling Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Republic in central-eastern Mongolia. It bordered on Lake Baikal, the deepest freshwater lake in the world. Also, one of the largest --60 miles wide and 400 miles long on a finger-shaped north-south axis. We spent the first day of our trip in Irkutsk listening to non-stop briefings by senior officials overseeing the Amur-Baikal RR project. The second day we boarded a small aircraft and flew over 400-mile northwards over Lake Baikal to Severny Baikal, "Northern" Baikal city, on the lake's northern tip. Watching from the air, the lake's deep blue waters were amazingly beautiful. Further north, it was still summer, but huge white ice floes still floated on the surface. We looked down at thousands of (fresh) water seals resting on the floes and sand beaches. Vast pine forests spread outwards from the lake's shores. As far as the eye could see, rolling mountains extended outwards towards the horizon on all sides. Approaching Severny Baikal giant barges crowded around the port, disgorging their cargoes shipped north from Irkutsk. Some were returning in lines stretched south back towards Irkutsk.

We spent 3 days in Severny Baikal, a small city of tall, prefabricated apartment buildings, office buildings, warehouses, stores and the port on Lake Baikal. The days were filled with briefings. Our hosts, mostly RR project executives and engineers, were genial and committed to their RR construction mission. We spent another day viewing the track laying east of the city. Laborers, young Russian KOMSOMOL (Communist Party Youth League) workers, mostly from European Russia, Siberian Buryats and Yvenskis lived in barracks spread out from the city along the first 50 miles or so of RR construction activity.

Our briefings were optimistic in depicting great progress. We did witness progress. We expected that. But, the more we actually witnessed, the more we heard in conversations with rank and file officials and workers, the more probable future problems surfaced.

Soviet propaganda echoed the 7 Year Plan's prediction that the Baikal-Amur RR project would be completed by 1983. We concluded that the Baikal-Amur RR project would not be completed by 1983 or in the foreseeable future. To begin, the sheer magnitude of the project, far to the north of Irkutsk, the short construction season, and the permafrost challenges would slow progress. The severe weather would damage machinery and

equipment that would need to be replaced. The inefficient Soviet bureaucracy would add to the difficulties.

The most obvious problem to us was a labor shortage. Not a surprise. Since Stalin's rule, the Soviet government had fought a long uphill battle incentivizing families and workers to move to Siberia. It transported millions of criminals and political prisoners to Siberian forced labor camps. Thousands of Japanese soldiers captured in Manchuria in the closing days of WWII were sent to Siberian Gulag labor camps. But Moscow was never able to deploy enough workers to maintain infrastructure in Siberia while implementing new ambitious projects like the Baikal-Amur RR.

Jim and I counted no more than 50 laborers at any one time unloading barges at the Severny Baikal port. We counted, at most, 100 workers laying track on any given day. The party's appeal for Russian youth, including KOMSOMOL (Communist Party Youth League) enthusiasts, to help build the railway did not bear fruit. KOMSOMOL and other Russians from European Russia were a minority of the laborers. Those we talked to were earning only 80% of their base-pay, plus room and board. The majority local Buryats and Yvenkis told us they received only a 10% pay wage increase. These incentives were far from sufficient to attract the 1,000s of laborers needed to implement the huge project in the time framework established in Moscow.

Back in Moscow, we documented our pessimistic prediction about the timeframe of the Baikal-Amur RR construction process in reporting cables to Washington. Somehow our skepticism may have been registered by Soviet authorities during our time to Siberia or back in Moscow. Whatever the case, all future requests by our embassy and other Western embassies in Moscow to visit the Siberian RR project were routinely denied.

Our pessimism did survive the test of time. The Baikal-Amur RR was not declared finished until 1991, the year the Soviet Union collapsed. Yeltsin's Russian government contended with many higher priorities than the controversial railway project. The Siberian population actually fell after the collapse of the Soviet Union. China and the Soviet Union normalized relations after the Soviet 1989 withdrawal from Afghanistan, lowering the national security pressure to build the RR.

Articles on the internet written by contemporary Western travelers describe abandoned settlements and stations along the RR line and underuse of the railroad. Much of the line is single track. There are reports that climate change is melting the permafrost and the tracks are falling into soggy peat moss fields.

Jim and I returned to Irkutsk and flew east to Ulan Ude and Khabarovsk along the Amur River in Eastern Siberia.

Q: Before we leave your trip out east, what we would get as students in the West – while you were there I was studying the Soviet Union, and there would be stories in the New York Times and Washington Post about these brave new cities being built in the Russian

Far East and never being connected to electricity or water and being abandoned like Potemkin villages. Was that your experience?

TOMSEN: We experienced the same during our visit. Interesting that Chinese central planning today is also famous for building ghost cities. Soviet central planners in Moscow wasted vast resources on the ghost settlements and RR stations along the Baikal-Amur RR line. An underwater tunnel connecting Sakhalin Island to the Siberian mainland was begun in the Stalin era. Construction since then has periodically stopped, started, and stopped again until today. You mentioned electricity: most of the Baikal-Amur line is still not electrified.

During our Aeroflot flight from Ulan Ude to Khabarovsk, we looked down on Central Siberia's sweeping, barren terrain. Flying south-east, gradually the panorama of brown gullies and hills gave way to the endless forest pine that floods through southeastern Siberia below the permafrost in the Amur River basin. Khabarovsk is a beautiful city on the Amur border with China. The Soviet Far Eastern Command is headquartered in the city. At the time of our visit, one million Soviet troops were stationed along the Sino-Soviet border under the Far Eastern and Trans-Baikal commands, from Vladivostok on the Pacific to the Mongolia-Soviet-Chinese tri-border region. We noticed 2 (strategic heavy) "Badger" bombers on the Khabarovsk airport tarmac as our plane was landing—another reminder of the then highly militarized Siberian-Manchurian border region.

An Intourist guide met us at the airport and took us to our hotel. After dinner, while the sun was setting over the Amur, we strode along an embankment of the river. The fabulous sunset reminded me of the sunsets looking out from our apartment over the Arabian Sea in Bombay.

The next day we visited the largest bookstore in Khabarovsk. Embassy travelers always stopped at bookstores to try to vacuum up books on the local region.

Q: And also to get an idea of what the Soviet authorities were allowing people out there to read.

TOMSEN: Yes. Every once in a while, you'd get a book that went into detail on political, economic or social issues. Since the '50s, an embassy political officer, dubbed the publications officer, spent time traveling around the Soviet Union, going to book stores and buying books. Ben Tua was the publication officer in the embassy; he gave me a list of seven books to attempt to buy at the Khabarovsk bookstore --one of the largest in Siberia. We knew that the embassy travel office staffed by Soviets had conveyed our travel itinerary to the KGB. The KGB "arrangements" for our visits included alerting local bookstores when we were coming. Sometimes the notification process broke down. Or we dropped in on smaller bookstores that they overlooked.

Their notification of the large Khabarovsk bookstore did happen. The bookstore was late to open the day after we arrived. We had to wait until a little before noon before the

doors opened. Once inside, I went to the Khabarovsk regional section of the book stacks but found none of the 7 books on Ben's list. I gave the list to one of the clerks on duty and asked for help. She disappeared into a back room and returned to inform me that the store carried none of the books on the list.

At least this result was not as bad as my experience at a bookstore in Irkutsk. I found an informative book on the local economy in that book store and attempted to pay for it. The cashier literally grabbed the book and placed it under the counter beneath her. She curtly claimed that my purchasing the book was "nielsiya," the Russian word for "forbidden."

Our calls on local Soviet officials in Khabarovsk were utterly unproductive. So, I sought out other bookstores elsewhere in the city. One, a remote KOMSOMOL bookstore, was unprepared for my arrival. I bought several books on Vietnam from the Soviet point of view –and a book in English meant to train Soviets about U.S. ballistic missiles! (Laughter.)

The next day, we flew back to Moscow on Aeroflot. The all-day and night flight took us over 9 time zones with one refueling stop. We were served the common Aeroflot fare of (roast) chicken, "*kuritsya*," for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. (The Chinese airlines served boiled chicken.) We speculated that Aeroflot must own a very large chicken farm.

I gathered and reported bits and pieces of information during other trips –one with Kim—to Central Asia areas bordering China, Afghanistan and Iran. In Tashkent, the largest city of Central Asia, I called on the fascinating regional Muslim religious leader, the jocular Mufti Babu Kanov. Certainly a KGB officer of some rank, Kanov represented the Soviet Union at international Islamic conferences and was a Soviet Muslim fixture in major Soviet delegations at United Nations General Assembly and other large gatherings. One of his humorous and intriguing comments to me that I passed on to Washington without comment related to the long- term prospects for Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution after the Shah departed Iran – "In Iran, sometimes the kings are ruling and sometimes the ayatollahs are ruling. It goes back and forth."

Escaping Moscow for travels in the vast hinterland was personally a joy as well as professionally worthwhile. But I spent most of my 2-year Moscow assignment in my tiny POL/EXT office between Ted McNamara's and Dick Miles' focusing on Soviet relations with Asia.

To stay on top of my portfolio, I called on Soviet foreign ministry officials and Soviet "scholars" in Moscow's Asian think tanks –the prestigious Oriental Institute, the Far Eastern Institute and the International Economic Institute. I never ended up in a room with the Foreign Minister Andrei Gromykov, known as "Mr. Nyet" (No!). I did come to know the respected and often outspoken Mikhail Stephanovich Kapitsa, Deputy Foreign Minister and Director of the Foreign Ministry's Department of Far Eastern Affairs. I did that in my embassy role of low-level, escort-note taker accompanying DCM Matlock and

VIP visitors from Washington. Kapitsa was the leading Soviet specialist on China in the Soviet government. His father had been the most renowned Soviet specialist on China in his generation. Kapitsa was a China scholar as well. He was tall, big, about six-foot-four, always well-dressed. He spoke perfect English as well as Chinese. Unlike most other Soviet officials you met, Kapitsa frequently dispensed with the ideological and focused on real substance –often in a booming voice.

I also kept in close touch with my diplomatic counterparts in other embassies to gather information on Sino-Soviet relations. They too attempted to extract nuggets of information from the foreign ministry and think tanks on Sino-Soviet ties.

Another valuable source of information on China was “*znaniye*” lectures. *Znaniye* means knowledge in Russian. Soviet specialists on Asia and other global regions periodically delivered *znaniye* lectures in downtown Moscow lecture halls. Some addressed China, India and Southeast Asia. During winter, I would put on my Russian clothing, shapka, great black coat and scarf to mix in with the audience, mostly elderly pensioners inside the unheated, dimly lit lecture halls free of charge. The audience sat in bleachers that looked down at the speaker’s rostrum below. The MFA or think tank lectures honed to the latest Soviet propaganda themes. The question and answer period was the most valuable time to harvest reportable information.

Each meeting with Kapitsa produced a long reporting cable always well-received in Washington. He was one of those larger than life individuals who turns head whenever he enters a room. He had a marvelous sense of humor, was reputedly a heavy drinker and womanizer. He had served briefly as ambassador to Pakistan but left after a short period.

One prediction Kapitsa regularly posited in his meetings was that China’s long-term goal was to push southward into the South China Sea. That has proved prescient, although we discounted it at that time. Sino-Soviet border tensions were the main focus.

Like other Soviet officials, Kapitsa was acutely sensitive--to put it mildly-- about prospects for U.S.-Chinese collusion against Moscow, especially military cooperation. The scenario had been propounded by American China scholar and occasional government official, Dr. Michael Pillsbury. First in classified form at the Rand Corporation, later in published articles in major newspapers and magazines advocating U.S. arms sales to China. In a 1975 *Foreign Policy* piece and again in a 1977 article in *International Studies*, Pillsbury called for U.S. dual-use technology and military sales to China. During this period after the ayatollahs took over in Iran, we moved our clandestine listening devices on the Iranian-Soviet border over to Xinxiang in far western China. That U.S. intelligence program monitored Soviet nuclear testing sites in Soviet Central Asia. The Soviets, no doubt, followed this development closely; but, Kapitsa never raised it with us in our meetings.

I once accompanied prominent *Washington Post* national security correspondent Don Oberdorfer to meet with Kapitsa. The giant Soviet diplomat exploded when Oberdorfer raised the arms sales articles appearing in the U.S. press and asked for his reaction. Kapitsa literally thundered, "The Soviet Union will not stand idly by" if the U.S. sold arms to China! Back at the embassy, Oberdorfer asked me for my opinion on Kapitsa's angry warning. I answered, "In the end it will all be bluster." Which I shouldn't have. Fortunately for me, Oberdorfer did not reveal me as the source in his article. He attributed my comment to "an American Embassy official." His article landed on the front page of the *Washington Post*. The next morning, DCM Matlock sent down to POL a copy of Oberdorfer's article taken from the morning American media summary that all embassies abroad received from State. Jack put one large black exclamation mark and 3 or 4 question marks next to my "in the end it will all be bluster" prediction. I did not respond to Jack's question mark, hoping there would be no follow up. Happily, there was no follow up.

On another occasion in Kapitsa's office, I was seated next to the American China specialist Allen Whiting who wrote China Crosses the Yalu. Whiting asked Kapitsa for his opinion on American arms sales to China. Like a huge bat, Kapitsa rose, stretched his body over the bottles of Stolichnaya vodka and Armenian cognac in the middle of the table, bent low almost nose-to-nose with the diminutive Whiting and shouted "Don't do it!" A few months later, the Carter Administration began selling arms to China. The Soviet reaction did not go beyond furious propaganda denunciations in the media.

On April 20, 1978 Kapitsa proved a skilled, helpful and tolerant counterpart in handling the Soviet military's tragic shoot down of a South Korean Airliner, KAL 902. The KAL passenger plane had wandered into Soviet airspace near Murmansk because of a navigation error. A Soviet jet firing air-to-air rockets killed 2 Japanese passengers sitting in the plane and badly damaged one wing. The plane landed on a frozen lake. The other 107 passengers, the pilots and crew survived the landing."

The shoot-down instantly gained world-wide media attention critical of the Soviet Union. The Soviets protested the violation of Soviet air space. South Korea did not have an embassy in Moscow. The South Korean government frantically asked for U.S. intervention to negotiate the release of the plane, crew and passengers. The Japanese paralleled the Korean appeal in Tokyo and Washington. They cited the large number of Japanese passengers who were on the flight.

Late on the same day of the shoot down, I accompanied Jack Matlock's demarche to Kapitsa in the foreign ministry to demand release of the detained passengers and the return of the airplane. Kapitsa quickly resolved the tragedy. The passengers were flown to the Murmansk airport. The pilot signed a confession that he had penetrated Soviet airspace. In our foreign ministry meeting, Kapitsa assured us that the Soviet government was making arrangements to fly the passengers and crew to Paris on April 22. The plane would be returned later.

Kapitsa made only one request: that all publicity about the release be withheld until the passengers and crew were out of Soviet airspace.

After Jack and I returned to the embassy, I drafted the cable to Washington. It emphasized honoring Kapitsa's request. I made it NODIS --that means "no distribution" one of our most highly restrictive distribution instructions. The message was sent only to Washington and to our embassies in Seoul and Tokyo to be seen by the most senior officials. We assumed that the restricted distribution and high classification would protect Jack's agreement with Kapitsa's request to hold off publicity until April 22nd when the KAL passengers and crew will have departed the Soviet Union.

Q: As a quick aside, having worked in the Operations Center where you have to do distribution of incoming cables, when you get a NODIS it only goes to seventh floor principles --the Under Secretaries--and the individual Assistant Secretary with responsibility for that area. So literally no-one below an Assistant Secretary would see it until the distribution was opened; usually in the distribution line it'll say "NODIS until some date: and then others can see it.

TOMSEN: Good protocols. What about overseas embassies?

Q: With embassies, it would only go to the ambassador and DCM and they would decide if anybody else should see it.

TOMSEN: So, we did all we could in the embassy to meet Kapitsa's request. Jack, myself and others in the embassy were flabbergasted to discover the next morning that the contents of the cable had been leaked and printed prominently in all of Seoul's major newspapers.

Within minutes, the wire services spread the news worldwide that the passengers and crew would be released before they had left the Soviet Union. Probably the South Korean President, the Prime Minister, or someone around them thought their public's anxiety level about the fate of the passengers needed to be lowered at any cost, including violating Kapitsa's deadline. Kapitsa was in good humor when he received Jack and me later in the afternoon. He joked that none of us could have prevented the Korean leak. He was right.

Monitoring and analyzing the Soviet approach to Sino-Soviet relations was my highest priority. But reporting on Soviet relations with Japan, North and South Korea, India, Afghanistan, Vietnam and Southeast Asia were also important.

Q: What about the Indians?

TOMSEN: The Indians knew a lot but would not share, so I didn't provide much to them. But I regularly traded information with my Russian-speaking Japanese counterpart, Hiroshi Hashimoto and our Chinese counterpart, Li Fenglin. Li was an

accomplished Soviet specialist. We communicated with each other in Russian; he did not speak English. Li was a treasure house of information and very anti-Soviet, commensurate with the Chinese government's position at the time. Mike Mace, my counterpart in the Canadian Embassy and I also often exchanged information.

On India, the Soviets worried about Indira Gandhi's loss in the 1977 Indian elections. The 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty stood firm. New Prime Minister Desai Morarji made 2 trips to the Soviet Union, including his first trip abroad as prime minister. During that trip, I reported from Moscow the signing of new economic and military agreements. But I also reported that the Soviet watched warily as the octogenarian, ascetic Desai hosted a visit to India by President Carter that injected some new balance in India's relations with the U.S. and Soviet Union.

It was fascinating to watch on Soviet TV --and report-- a 1977 Soviet state dinner for Desai hosted by Brezhnev. Think the Yogi and the Commissar. Indian Foreign Minister Vajpayee disregarded Desai's injunction not to drink alcohol during the banquet. Vajpayee instead stood and clinked his glass of vodka with Soviets at the banquet. Desai lifted his glass of carrot juice. That was a bit more palatable than the Himalayan goat milk he drank every day, or one of his other more human-origin options that I will not describe.

Q: Knowing enough about Indian culture...

TOMSEN: Yes. But the Soviet strategic concerns proved unwarranted. Desai's shaky coalition of socialists, nationalists, and far-right Hindu factions did not disrupt the Indo-Soviet strategic partnership. Mrs. Gandhi returned to power in the January 1980 elections. That was just in time to order the Indian UN delegation in New York to change the previous Desai government's vote in favor of condemning the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from "for" to "abstention." The resolution gained a large majority of 104 countries "for" and only 18 "against," the 18 from Soviet clients in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. India's tilt toward the Soviet Union continued up to Mrs. Gandhi's assassination in 1984.

During my two-year assignment in Moscow, Afghanistan began its descent into civil war and anarchy. That contrasted with the stable and modernizing status it had enjoyed during the previous 50 years. Seven months after the Soviet invaded Afghanistan, Carter signed off on a CIA covert assistance program to the Afghan Resistance opposing the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. It would expand into the billions over the upcoming years.

Carter's decision in July, 1979 was probably partially influenced by anger over Soviet involvement in the killing of the U.S. Ambassador in Kabul in February 1979, 4 months earlier. The shocking calamity occurred when a militant Afghan group opposed to the pro-Soviet Afghan regime kidnapped Ambassador Adolph "Spike" Dubs, one of the leading Soviet experts of the State Department, off of a Kabul street. High-level Carter

Administration officials to Ambassador Dobrynin in Washington; the American Embassy to the Soviet Embassy and the Communist Afghan regime in Kabul; and the American Embassy to Soviet officials in Moscow all delivered the same message: do not assault the hotel room where Ambassador Dubs was being held by the two Afghan kidnappers. Instead of endangering the Ambassador's life, negotiate his release.

First in the hotel lobby, then in the hallway outside the room where Dubs was held, Political Counselor Bruce Flatin repeatedly conveyed the U.S. appeal for restraint to the senior Soviet security officer and Afghan policemen commanding Afghan troops in and around the hotel.

In an outrageous rebuff to our appeals for restraint, Afghan commandos supervised by the Soviet advisor assaulted the hotel room where Dubs was held. One embassy officer noticed the Soviet advisor signaling with his hand an order to snipers in a nearby building to begin shooting. Ambassador Dubs was killed in a hail of bullets along with the kidnappers. Afterwards, the Soviets advisors involved referred Kabul embassy officers to duplicitous Afghan authorities for information. Bruce demanded access to an accomplice of the hijackers who was captured alive inside the hotel. American interrogation of the accomplice, still living, would be an important part of the U.S. investigation into the tragedy. The next day Afghan police showed Bruce the body of the accomplice lying dead on the ground after his execution. Both the Soviets and the pro-Soviet Afghan government responded with either lies or silence to further embassy's attempts to gather reliable information on Ambassador Dub's murder.

In September, 2 months after Dub's killing, Yuri Gankowski, a Soviet Afghan scholar I occasionally met, invited me to lunch at the Berlin Restaurant in Moscow. Like the other Asian scholars who were cleared to meet with diplomats, I assumed he was KGB. We also assumed that the message he passed to me was a low-level Soviet attempt to disclaim Soviet complicity in Dub's murder.

A waiter escorted us to a 2-chair corner table in the restaurant. A small, thin, cheap vase containing a few fading plastic flowers stood between us on the table. Gankowski pulled up one of the unattractive flowers. I did not react to his poor attempt at a joke – "I hope there's not a listening device here."

I pressed for answers on Dub's murder by Afghan soldiers supervised by a Soviet advisor who was obviously guiding them. Gankowski reiterated the Soviet lies given to our embassy in Kabul. He disingenuously claimed that the Soviet advisor had no choice because Dubs was about to be killed anyway inside the room. Two decades later, Vasily Mitrokin, a Soviet KGB archivist in Moscow, defected to Britain with 2 trunks loaded with classified KGB documents. As part of his debriefing, Mitrokin said that the KGB wanted to get rid of Dubs because he knew too much about the Soviet Union. The KGB exploited his kidnapping as a cover to kill him.

Q: This is a good place to stop.

Q: It's October 7th, we're continuing with Ambassador Tomsen on his preparations for his tour in China.

TOMSEN: During our last session, we discussed the momentous deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations. Mao had deferred to Stalin during the negotiations of the 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty in Moscow. Mao died in 1976, the year before my 1977-1979 tour in Moscow began. My assignment coincided with the rapid acceleration of the Sino-Soviet dispute after Mao died. The Carter Administration's decision in 1979 to sell arms to China strengthened the Sino-U.S. side of the Great Power triangle. Simultaneously, 2 loose groupings of middle-level and smaller states coalesced around the Soviet side and the Sino-U.S. sides of the triangle. The re-alignment featured anti-Soviet major powers – the U.S., NATO allies, China and Japan concluding bilateral treaties and joint statements implicitly targeting Soviet attempts to establish Moscow's hegemony in Asia. On the other side, the Soviet Union concluded friendship treaties with pro-Soviet neighbors of China – Vietnam, Afghanistan, earlier India, and further afield, Yemen and Ethiopia. Meanwhile, Soviet-ally Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia -a Chinese ally- became embroiled in a bloody border dispute. If the border dispute escalated into a war, as it did, it would threaten to draw in the Soviet Union, China and potentially the U.S. as well.

By late 1978, my second year in Moscow, Deng Xiao-ping had sidelined his Cultural Revolution opponents to become China's supreme leader. Once in control, he became an unremitting opponent of the Soviet Union. He criticized the 1950 Sino-Soviet treaty of alliance signed in Moscow by Mao-Tse-tung as an "Unequal Treaty" that was "imposed" on China. Deng personally and Chinese propaganda shrilly denounced 3 Soviet hegemonic attempts to suppress China: the stationing of 1 million troops along the Sino-Soviet border; the manipulation of Soviet-ally Vietnam to threaten China from the South; and the Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan from the West.

During my meetings with Soviet China specialists in the foreign ministry and think tanks, they accused Deng of being the "Number One Anti-Soviet" in China. That was an apt characterization! In speeches and visits abroad, Deng's main goal was to rally Americans, Japanese, and other governments to confront Soviet hegemony. The Taiwan issue had impeded full normalization of Sino-American relations after Nixon's 1972 summit with Mao. Deng moved decisively to break the deadlock --and make 1979, my last year in Moscow-- a very eventful and exciting one!

On December 15th, 1978, I was concentrating on winning a hard-fought paddle tennis game outside Spaso House, Ambassador Toon's residence. An embassy colleague ran onto the court and shouted, "We normalized with China!" I put down my paddle, changed clothes and rushed back to the embassy: State Department cables and all wire services carried simultaneous announcements from Washington and Beijing that the U.S. and China had established full diplomatic relations. The December 15, 1978 Sino-American Normalization Communique and accompanying "Joint Statement"

stipulated that formal Sino-U.S. bilateral relations would begin on January 1, 1979. The two countries would establish embassies and exchange ambassadors on March 1, 1979. The embassies would replace the Liaison Offices that had been agreed to in the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué.

The December 15, 1978 Sino-American normalization communiqué was the most important U.S. diplomatic agreement of the 1970s. Looking to the future, it could also be said that the communiqué marked the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union which imploded 11 years later, in 1991.

The sudden announcement of Sino-American normalization caught the Soviets off-guard. I spent long hours attempting to stay on top of the Soviet reaction, evaluate it, and report to Washington. It took the Soviets three days to put together their official public reaction. It was published in the January 18 edition of the Communist party newspaper *Pravda*, the most authoritative Soviet news outlet. *Pravda* focused its anger on China --China had demonstrated its view of the Soviet Union as the “Main Enemy.” The government daily *Izvestiya* and other less authoritative media outlets condemned both the U.S. and China. A radio broadcast criticized “NATO countries” plans to supply arms “to China” and “to grant access to the up-to-date Western technology, particularly in the military field.” A Soviet Mandarin broadcast to China stated that the Deng regime had “bowed” to U.S. pressure.

From January 29 to February 4, 1979, Deng conducted a red-carpet state visit to the U.S.: to commemorate Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations. He met with President Carter, publicly signing agreements calling for resistance to Soviet hegemony. Deng attended a rodeo in Texas. He wore a huge cowboy hat. As you know, he was short --about five-foot tall. His head sort of disappeared under the cowboy hat. During his State Department visit, Deng asked the United States to accept 500 Chinese students. In the ensuing years, that number rose into the thousands, then over 10,000. China passed Canada as having the most foreign students in the United States.

Q: It's still true. China can send as many students as we want. If we would be willing to increase the number of student visas for Chinese students, they could fill them. As long as U.S. universities are willing to take them – they have a surplus of students who want to go to U.S. universities.

TOMSEN: Yes. That fit into Deng's long-term agenda to modernize China -while rolling back Soviet expansionism. The December 15, 1979 Sino-American normalization announcement was part of a dramatic rapid-fire sequence of events that we reported from Moscow. Together, they reordered global geopolitics.

The first event in the chain reaction occurred in June 1978. A Vietnamese delegation arrived in Moscow to sign up for COMECON (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance). COMECON was the Soviet-sponsored economic organization designed to integrate the economics of Soviet allies in Eastern Europe and the Third World into the larger Soviet

economy. China reacted by terminating economic aid to Vietnam. In August 1978, a month later, Deng visited Tokyo and concluded a friendship treaty with Japan. It included an anti-hegemonism clause aimed at the Soviet Union that later appeared in the December 1978 Sino-American normalization communique.

During the morning of November 3, 1978, I was surprised to read an intelligence report in my office informing that Vietnam's top leaders, Communist party chief Le Duan and President Pham Van Dong, had arrived in Moscow. With great media fanfare the next day, the Soviet and Vietnamese leaders signed a 25-year treaty of friendship and cooperation. It included a security clause that mandated immediate consultation if either was attacked –with a view to “eliminating the threat.” The next day, November 5, the leader of another pro-Soviet neighbor of China, Afghan Communist leader Taraki arrived in Moscow. Photos and banner headlines in the Soviet media portrayed Brezhnev and Taraki signing another friendship and cooperation treaty with a mutual security clause.

In Indo-China, the Sino-Soviet diplomatic jousting ambiguously aligned the Soviet Union with Vietnam in the event of war. China's 1974 friendship treaty with Cambodia bonded China and Cambodia. Deng's normalization of relations with the U.S. and Japan was a hedge against possible Soviet intervention if China attacked Vietnam.

Deng fully intended to do that if Vietnam attacked Cambodia. Citing Cambodian Khmer Rouge aggression against Vietnamese territory and citizens, Vietnam invaded Cambodia on Christmas Day, 1978 and ousted the Khmer Rouge regime.

The follow-on China invasion of Vietnam was a foregone conclusion. So was its timing. We reported to Washington that the 1950 20-year Sino-Soviet treaty stipulated that either side could officially terminate the agreement beginning on February 15, 1979. The Chinese invaded Vietnam on February 18, 1979, three days later. The implication was that China was prepared for war if the Soviet Union attacked China in support of its Vietnamese ally.

To reduce the possibility of a full-scale Soviet invasion of China, Deng announced that China's war aims were limited. The Chinese armies that crossed the Vietnamese border on February 17, 1979 were to punish the Vietnamese and teach Hanoi a “lesson” --not remain to occupy Vietnamese territory. Most of Vietnam's army was fighting in Cambodia. Eleven Chinese armies numbering over 300,000 troops made up the invasion force. Its military objectives were Lang Son overlooking the Red River Valley and Hanoi, Vietnam's capital. Also, Lao Cai on Highway 4 leading down to Hanoi. About 60,000 Vietnamese troops stubbornly fought back but could not stop the Chinese human wave attacks. On March 5, the Chinese captured both Lang Son and Lao Cai. On March 6, China announced it had opened the gate to Hanoi, punished and taught the Vietnamese a lesson. It would now withdraw back to China. On March 16, a month after the invasion began, all Chinese troops had returned to China.

During the invasion, I and Bob Ober, the new POL/EXT chief and a former colleague in India, plus many in the embassy mobilized to report the Soviet reaction to China's invasion of Vietnam. Washington eagerly consumed whatever the embassy reported about Soviet intentions. Mainly, whether or not the million Soviet soldiers arrayed along the Soviet-Chinese border would attack China. I was the Asia Watcher and in the hot seat—sounding out my Soviet contacts, also Asia watch colleagues, like Japan's diplomat Hiroshi Hashimoto, in other embassies, attending embassy meetings, and tracking Soviet media reports. I had little time to return calls from reporters.

The initial Soviet reaction was strident and threatening. During national security crises, Soviet strategists used more secure KGB communication lines to coordinate military moves. On the eve of China's invasion of Vietnam, our SIGINT intercepts reported a huge upswing in the volume of KGB communications to Soviet military headquarters in Siberia commanding the million Soviet troops arrayed along the Sino-Soviet border. We could not read the traffic but it was an ominous sign. A Brezhnev speech printed in huge black headlines on the front page of *Pravda* warned “ruki proch ot V'yetnama” – “Take your hands off Vietnam.” Soviet TV, national and international radio and print media loudly echoed Brezhnev's warning. The Soviet press announced massive new shipments of arms and military equipment being shipped to Vietnam by air and sea to resist the Chinese invasion.

Beneath the rhetoric and military movements, Soviet leaders faced a dilemma on how far to go in assisting their Vietnamese ally. Soviet credibility was at stake, not only with Hanoi but indirectly with other treaty allies who were watching. Moscow's nuclear arsenal was far larger than China's—but China's nuclear missile deterrent was capable of taking out Moscow. Soviet forces on the border boosted chemical as well as conventional and tactical nuclear weapons. The winds from Siberia blew south. But China had a long history of swallowing up invaders.

Two days after the Chinese attack, I put on my black winter coat, Russian-style black shapka, boots and scarf and drove to a downtown Moscow auditorium to attend another night-time Znaniye lecture, this one on Southeast Asia. As luck would have it, I had seen the lecture announced in a Russian newspaper before the Chinese invasion. A colleague in the embassy's agriculture section accompanied me. The auditorium in February was freezing cold. Everyone sat down with their winter coats on. We blended into the crowd. As usual, most were retired elders. Many were WWII veterans. The speaker was a scholar from the IMEMO, the International Economics think tank in Moscow. I expected he would stick to the party line on the Sino-Vietnamese war. As sometimes happens, I hoped the question and answer period after his lecture would elicit tidbits from internal Soviet classified documents or private conversations in his think tank.

It turned out that attending the lecture paid off! The speaker meticulously avoided any indication that the Soviet Union would attack China. Amazingly, he did not once touch on the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. The audience was furious. One questioner after another forcefully demanded to know why the speaker had not mentioned the Chinese

attack on a Soviet ally. Others passionately demanded that the Soviet Union attack China.

The condemnations of the speaker from the packed auditorium rose to a low roar. Over a hundred hands were up beckoning for attention to ask a question. Shouted questions grew more strident when the audience saw the speaker gathering up his notes at the rostrum planning to leave. An elderly man in a front row seat with a loud voice yelled: “You completely ignore the Chinese invasion!” The departing speaker turned back and shouted into the microphone above the din: “It’s a border provocation” --“granichnaya provokatsiya” --not an invasion. A swarm of apparently old WWII pensioners left their seats and rushed the stage. We hastily joined the rear of the charging mass to hear better. Visibly shaken and running towards the curtains bordering the stage, notes in hand, the speaker yelled back, “Ok, it’s a large--*bolshaya*-- border incursion” and disappeared behind the curtain.

My reporting cable to Washington interpreted the speaker’s depiction of China’s large scale invasion of northern Vietnam as a border provocation demonstrated a Soviet attempt to downplay the size and importance of the Chinese attack to the Soviet population. The Soviet leadership had decided to accept Deng’s claim about China’s limited war objectives, that China would withdraw after reaching the rim of the Red River basin. The tone and content of the speakers’ lecture and answers were another indication, among others at the time, that the Soviets would not go to war against China on behalf of their Vietnamese ally.

In the end, the Soviets did not intervene. The Chinese withdrew. The Vietnamese lost the short border war. The Chinese could assume they had “punished” Vietnam but had suffered heavy casualties.

Q: Did the action that China took have any effect on Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia?

TOMSEN: It didn’t. The Vietnamese army drove the Khmer Rouge back to their jungle redoubts. Hanoi’s invasion ended the Khmer Rouge genocide that killed 2 million Cambodians. Hanoi established a pro-Vietnamese Cambodian regime. The Vietnamese army withdrew after an 11-year occupation. The Soviet Union’s strategic alliance with Vietnam continued to hold firm, even though Moscow had not directly intervened to assist its Vietnamese ally. China wanted to demonstrate primacy over the Soviet Union in East Asia by conducting an invasion of Vietnam and withdrawing --sort of saying: “This is our sphere of influence; stay out; we are the Middle Kingdom.”

On April 13, 1979, the Chinese gave formal notice to the Soviet Union that they were pulling out of the long defunct 1950 Sino-Soviet treaty. A series of Sino-American agreements followed on the heels of the Sino-American normalization joint statement in economic, trade and some military areas.

Kim and I were fortunate to be in Moscow to enjoy the celebration of the establishment of Sino-American diplomatic relations on New Year's Day, 1979. Since Mao's communist army marched into Beijing in 1949, the American Embassy and Spaso House had been closed to the Chinese. The Chinese Embassy had been closed to Americans. My diplomatic colleague, Li Fenglin, broke the ice after the December 15, 1978 announcement of full diplomatic relations. He invited Kim and I, POL/EXT Chief Bob Ober and his wife Liz, to visit the Chinese Embassy.

Li and his wife gave us a personal tour of the 20 or so acre Chinese Embassy property acquired during the heyday of Sino-Soviet friendship. Undulating green lawns were interrupted by Chinese-style red monastery temples with sloping roofs pleasing to the eye. One walking path took us onto a lovely red bridge spanning a tiny meandering creek. In the distance, a typical Soviet multi-floor, bland, cement Chinese embassy building fronted *Druzhby* (Friendship) Street.

There was no happier guest at the American Embassy's New Year reception hailing the Sino-U.S. normalization of relations than the white-haired Mr. Tang. I never knew his full name or age. He had been a butler at Spaso House since the 1930s, long before Chinese-American relations deteriorated. He was also among the guests --and probably the proudest one-- at the Chinese Embassy reception!

Prior to the 2 embassy receptions, just a few days after the dramatic December 15, 1978 announcement of normalization, Kim and I privately hosted the first Chinese diplomatic guests at an American diplomatic function at our apartment for dinner. The evening was unique. Not least because the KGB guards at the gate in front of our American diplomatic housing building, also the 2 dzhernayas stationed on the ground floor were shocked when Li and his wife arrived outside in the signature Chinese embassy vehicle, a black Mercedes. A Chinese, not Soviet, driver was at the wheel.

Our Chinese guests walked past the guards into the apartment's ground floor where the elevator was. The dzhernayas conspicuously stared at them as they walked by. The elevator was not working; or perhaps the dzhernayas had locked it down. Nothing new. Our Chinese guests began the 9-floor stair climb to our apartment, followed by the senior dzhernaya just one step behind. All the way up to our apartment. The dzhernaya had a grim look on her face at our door. She then continued one floor higher, most likely to confirm that KGB listening devices in our apartment were working to record our conversation. We and the Lis enjoyed a delightful evening.

Later in 1979, we invited the Lis back for a dinner party with Canadian, British and Japanese colleagues, and their spouses --this time to play "Diplomacy". Diplomacy was a game played on a pre-WWI European map festooned with pieces representing competing armies and fleets of Britain, France, Russia, Austro-Hungary, Germany and Turkey. Drawing straws, Li was given Russia. During the game, the combination of German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish forces defeated Li's Russian forces and seized Moscow. Instead of disappointment, Li was delighted!

Reporting from Moscow on the Soviet reaction to the historic Sino-American normalization of relations and its dramatic aftermath was a thrilling high point in my Foreign Service career. My subsequent 2 postings in Embassy Beijing gave me a front row seat to report on the Great Power Triangle from China.

On March 15, 1979 the Department cabled that I would be given my first next assignment choice –chief of the Beijing embassy’s POL/EXT sub-section.

Kim, our two daughters and I had barely a week to move back into our McLean home before my first year of Chinese language training began. We would relocate to Taiwan for the second year at the Department’s Chinese Language School outside of Taiwan’s capital, Taipei. The Department’s FSI’s (Foreign Service Institute) language training wing in Rosslyn overlooked the Potomac River from the Virginia side. It lived up to its reputation of excellence in terms of superb instructors and teaching materials. I found the Chinese language to be tough, especially learning the characters. Eventually, I got up to about 2,300 characters memorized. I had learned Vietnamese tones. There are 5 tones in Vietnamese, 4 in Chinese.

After seven months of first-year Chinese classes at FSI in Washington (FSI/W), the Foreign Service Institute terminated my first-year training at FSI/W and transferred me to the second year Chinese Language School (CLS) in Taipei.

Q: I’ve never learned Chinese, but when I read a few Chinese classics and the description of the classics, scholars who did the translation said that an average Chinese will have knowledge of 5,000 characters –average level of education—and that scholars would be above that. Already at 2,500 in two years, you are well on your way to speaking fluent Chinese compared to the average Chinese person. That’s remarkable to be able to do that in two years, because they have a lifetime of education from childhood till high school to learn those characters.

TOMSEN: I must admit that once in Embassy Beijing, I forgot hundreds of characters that I did not encounter reading Chinese newspapers, magazines and documents! I did learn new ones on the job. But I was below 2,000 by the time my assignment ended!

The Chiang Kai-shek Republic of China (ROC) regime on Taiwan retained the ancient, literary Chinese characters as its official alphabet after fleeing to Taiwan from the Chinese Mainland in 1949. Well before Mao Tse-tung announced the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the communist party insurgency had begun developing an alphabet of simplified characters to encourage literacy in China. The old, detailed, complicated characters impeded learning among the masses. The complicated characters contained more, sometimes many more, strokes and radicals. That severely limited the ability to read to the educated classes –that is the ruling elites, the Mandarin administrators and judges. Chinese educators and scholars had to master the ancient characters before assuming their positions. FSI students assigned to

Singapore concentrated on learning the complicated characters; those assigned to Hong Kong and the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) studied both versions. Those of us assigned to the People's Republic of China (hereafter referred to as China) learned the simplified characters.

Q: Was it possible once you learned the simpler version to make out the more difficult one?

TOMSEN: It is. But if you know the simplified characters, it's more difficult to shift to the complicated ones. If you know the complicated characters, it's easier to shift to the simplified ones. If you really want to dive into Chinese culture, history and literature, pre-communist Chinese civilization in general, memorizing the complicated characters is mandatory.

In March 1980 during the seventh month of my first year of Chinese at AIT/W, I was unexpectedly transferred to be Principal of the second year Chinese Language School of advanced Chinese language training in Taipei. One fine morning, Jack Matlock, our DCM in Moscow, invited me to his office on FSI's ninth floor. He was then the Deputy Director of FSI overseeing language studies among other duties. Jack was probably the leading Sovietologist in the State Department, maybe in the U.S. Government. Less than a year into the new Reagan Republican Administration, the Department would send him back to Moscow as Charge d'Affaires to replace the Carter Administration's outgoing Ambassador. Later Jack would become President Reagan's senior advisor on Soviet Affairs in the White House and President H.W. Bush's ambassador in Moscow.

Jack told me that I would be taken out of first year Chinese language training program to manage the CLS second year program in Taiwan. He said the tour of the current Principal and "Scientific Linguist" at CLS was being cut short. That was leaving a one-year-plus gap in leadership of the school. I never heard whether my predecessor had asked to be relieved or whether he had been removed. Whatever the case, Jack said I would fill the gap until the next Chinese linguist, Neil Kubler, arrived in late July 1981. Unlike the departing current Principle, Neil Kubler held a Ph.D. in linguistics. He had written his dissertation in Chinese!

Jack also did not mention why I had been chosen to lead CLS while still in my first year of Chinese language training. I guessed it may have been my previous experience of studying 4 hard languages at FSI.

I asked Jack how I should manage the 3 quarterly exams and final exams of students at the school. He said I would test each student with the CLS senior language instructor.

The senior language instructor was Mrs. Chen, known as Da Chen, "Da" meaning "Big" but in her case "supervisory." Da Chen had been teaching at CLS for over 20 years. She had taught Chinese to a whole generation of former and current FSOs. As supervisory instructor, she tested students in the presence of the Principal. The two would then

decide the student's grade. During my year, Mrs. Chen and I would determine the grades in the speaking and reading exams. Our grades and the tapes recording the speaking exams, and the reading tests, were pouched to FSI in Washington (FSI/W). The 2 senior Chinese language instructors at FSI/W reviewed our scores. During my 1980-81 year as Principal, no grade among the 80 or so we forwarded to Washington for authorization was changed. Dr. Neil Kubler tested me shortly before I moved on to my Beijing assignment in August 1981.

During our second meeting at FSI/W, Jack handed me a pile of reading files on the 25-year history of the CLS. I would be doing two full-time jobs: second-year Chinese language student and, simultaneously, Principal- "Scientific Linguist." That underserved job title was placed at the top of my Work Requirement Statement and EER!

The CLS was one of 8 sections of the *de facto* U.S. Embassy in Taipei: the American Institute on Taiwan or AIT. Under the PRC normalization agreement, we had de-recognized the Republic of China and changed the name of our embassy in Taiwan to AIT. As a section head, I attended country team meetings chaired by former ambassador, now AIT Director, Chuck Cross, or his Deputy Director, Bill Thomas. Bill was my immediate supervisor.

The CLS was located in a hilly suburb outside Taipei. As Principal, I supervised 36 school staff and 22 students and administered a budget of slightly over \$1 million. Obviously, my management responsibilities would rule out attending many daily classes. I could partially compensate by speaking only Chinese with staff and students during work days. I developed my reading skills mainly during nighttime hours.

The CLS files at FSI/W on the two most recent CLS second-year classes threw up warning flags. FSI goals for advanced language training in overseas schools (Chinese/Taipei, Japanese/Yokohama/Arabic/Tunis) reasonably assumed that the great majority of students working hard would reach the minimal "full functional" fluency level of 3 in speaking (S-3) and 3 in reading (R-3) after 2 years of training.

The CLS practice of individualized instruction reached that goal during the first 2 decades of its existence. Since the mid-1970s it had failed to do so.

A second warning flag was the 3-6 group student-group learning classes my predecessor had advocated. The 1977 and 1980 Inspection Reports on CLS took issue with the Principal's belief that group classes of this size do not "deter in any way from the learning process." The 1980 report, completed a month before my arrival, advised that "AIT Taipei" and CLS "should vigorously pursue greater individual classroom instruction."

That recommendation coincided with my own experience. The quality of FSI's language instructors and teaching materials was critical. But the amount of speaking time for students in the classroom is the third crucial component to language learning. In terms of

class size, this 3rd component was less important in the first year when students concentrated on dialogues, grammar and the tones. Once the fundamentals were in place, one-on-one –1:1—speaking classes were especially crucial to rapidly building speaking skills during the second year. Almost invariably, in group classes, there is someone who lags behind.

The bottom line: individualized classes simply gave more classroom time for students to speak Chinese. That was especially important at the advanced second year stage when individualized instruction permitted students to race ahead at their own pace not impeded by the slower progress of others. It wasn't a coincidence that the 2 Foreign Service officers who did the secret negotiations with the Chinese on the Sino-American normalization documents, Chas Freeman in Washington and Stape Roy in Beijing, had graduated from CLS at the 4 level.

Jack Matlock was my only chance to secure an increased CLS budget to support at least a 2:1 ratio. He spoke interpreter (minimum S-4) level Russian. He supported my request for a 2:1 ratio per student. That allowed for two 1:1 daily speaking classes and two 1:1 daily reading classes per student. Group comprehensive classes in afternoon hours would feature TV and radio classes; students could attend Chinese lectures at the nearby Chinese Cultural University. The FSI/W budget office pushed back but Jack held his ground.

I arrived in Taipei in late May 1980 as the 1979-1980 CLS class of 15 was testing out after their 2 years of language training.

Q: Did the majority get 3/3 after two years?

TOMSEN: No. Due to the group classes priority, over 50% of the 15 students received a combination of 2s and 2+s; in addition, one student received a 1+ in reading. Only 3 out of that current 1979-1980 CLS class reached the minimum S-3, R-3 FSI objective. It was the worst class scores in the 25-year history of CLS. The students complained to me about the lack of individualized instruction. That had been the standard before the mid-1970s. Most of the class privately hired tutors outside the school.

I could see that they were capable students. There was no pedagogical reason why, with more CLS individualized instruction, nearly all could have reached the 3-3 level. It was not only the students who lost out. So did the effectiveness of U.S. China policy demanding officers be able to communicate professionally without an interpreter during one or multiple China tours.

My first month-and-a-half as CLS Principal was action-packed. During July 1980, before the arrival of the new 1980-1981 class in August, I hired 6 new full-time language instructors plus 5 part-time instructors. The number of students, including my 9 classmates from the first-year course in FSI/W, jumped to 22. For the first time, over

50% of the class were destined for the embassy and 4 consulates general inside China. That demanded more classes to teach the simplified characters.

I rented two nearby bungalows to expand classroom space and reduced the size of the school kitchen to create another classroom. With Da Chen in the lead, senior instructors began upgrading the old Advanced Chinese Speaking text to accommodate Mainland China themes. We initiated a project to elevate at least one promising student to the S-4, R-4 level every year. I eliminated the annual one-week bus tour around Taiwan with spouses where English was mostly spoken and replaced it with 1:1 or 2:1 student-instructor tours with only Chinese spoken. We invited Chinese professors from the next door Chinese Cultural University and National Taiwan University to deliver Chinese language lectures to the afternoon group comprehension classes on Chinese history, economics and politics.

In a private letter, Jack asked me to “critique” FSI language training programs generally “while comparing your various experiences in the various languages, as appropriate.” Jack asked me to pouch my response directly to him in private letter form. I wrote back that, “To the extent possible, FSI resources should be directed towards the classroom level where languages are actually taught or not taught.” That included keeping the student-teacher ratio down.

Taking off from the saying “Don’t leave wars entirely to the generals,” one could add “Don’t leave language learning entirely to the linguists” and FSI/W budgeteers. In the end, the Department’s embassies and consulates are the consumers of the final product. The State Department’s major contribution to the Washington interagency policy process was solid expertise on individual countries, their societies, and their languages. Language training is the most important part of FSI’s responsibilities to create that State policy-making diplomatic expertise. FSI’s Area Studies and specialized courses are also important. But, above all, FSI’s overall budget should give the highest priority to language training, given its critical value-added contribution to the success of U.S. diplomacy. In that context, individualized instruction is essential during second year advanced Chinese language training.

The first half of the new 1980-1981 school year went smoothly; the second half did not. The newly inaugurated Reagan Administration transferred Jack Matlock back to Moscow as Charge d’Affaires. The FSI/W pressures for group classes would return.

Mid-term testing scores of the new 1980-81 class of students demonstrated the benefits of returning to individualized instruction. In the February-March exams, with 4 months of training still ahead to finals, 5 of the 22 students received S-3s, 6 received R-3s. Most of the remaining students reached 2+s. We put one promising student on the track to the 4 level.

A March 24, 1981 cable from FSI’s Associate Dean for Budget, Plans and Operations called for a “Revised Financial Plan” for the school. It announced that “FSI Management

is much concerned with student-teacher ratios in all FSI language programs.” It mandated CLS in Taiwan to reduce the school’s student-teacher ratio to 3:1 and to reduce the number of full-time Chinese language instructors from 9 to 6 to accommodate the shift back to group classes.

Deputy AIT Director Bill Thomas and I cabled back separate reclamation. We pointed out that overall teachers’ salaries accounted for only 14% of the total student budget. The Dean of FSI/W’s Language School’s response to Bill informed that, “I am under orders to increase the size of classes both in Washington and Overseas Schools.” The FSI/W response to my letter declared “The ...goal of a 3:1 ratio is simply required by the present stringencies.” I heard later from Dr. Kubler, my successor, due to arrive in July, that the 3:1 ratio goal would be placed in his Work Requirement Statement!

Up against the FSI/W brick wall, Bill and my only recourse was to ask for help from heavy artillery in the State Department’s East Asia and Pacific Bureau –most specifically to request intervention from the EAP Director of China Affairs, Chas Freeman. Chas, a previous S-4 R-4 graduate of CLS, fired away. He had been President Nixon’s personal interpreter during Nixon’s famous 1972 visit to Beijing. Chas’ superior was Assistant Secretary John Holdridge. Chas prepared a very strong letter to the FSI Director from Holdridge. Holdridge signed the letter demanding continuation of CLS “individualized instruction” already in place.

Holdridge’s letter worked. FSI/W agreed to continue the 2:1 ration through the rest of the year and during Dr. Kubler’s first year. Four months later, Dr. Kubler and Da Chen administered final exams. All but one of the 22 full-time students tested at S-3, R-3 or higher. One reached 3+ in both spoken and reading exams. Four received S-3 and R-3+s. Dr. Kubler tested me at S-3, R-3. In their written evaluations of the 1980-1981 school year, the students unanimously believed that the re-introduction of individualized instruction was the school’s most important asset.

Kim and I packed up and moved with our daughters Kim-Anh and Mai-Lan to Beijing for our first China assignment. Dr. Kubler and I remained in private communication. The FSI/W pressures for shifting to group classes did not abate. Within two years, group classes at the school began creeping back. The program to move one student a year to the 4 level was eliminated in 1990 for budgetary reasons.

End of Part One