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The Whole Thing Was a Lie!

Don Duncan

When I was drafted into the Army, ten years ago, I was a militant anti-Communist. Like most Americans, I couldn't conceive of anybody choosing communism over democracy. The depths of my aversion to this ideology was, I suppose, due in part to my being Roman Catholic, in part to the stories in the news media about communism, and in part to the fact that my stepfather was born in Budapest, Hungary. Although he had come to the United States as a young man, most of his family had stayed in Europe. From time to time, I would be given examples of the horrors of life under communism. Shortly after Basic Training, I was sent to Germany. I was there at the time of the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt. Everything I had heard about communism was verified. Like my fellow soldiers I felt frustrated and cheated that the United States would not go to the aid of the Hungarians. Angrily, I followed the action of the brute force being used against people who were armed with sticks, stolen weapons, and a desire for independence.

While serving in Germany, I ran across the Special Forces. I was so impressed by their dedication and élan that I decided to volunteer for duty with this group. By 1959 I had been accepted into the Special Forces and underwent training at Fort Bragg. I was soon to learn much about the outfit and the men in it. A good percentage of them were Lodge Act people—men who had come out from Iron Curtain countries. Their anti-communism bordered on fanaticism. Many of them who, like me, had joined Special Forces to do something positive, were to leave because "things" weren't happening fast enough. They were to

Excerpts from Don Duncan, "The Whole Thing Was a Lie!," *Ramparts*, February 1966. Reprinted with permission.

show up later in Africa and Latin America in the employ of others or as independent agents for the CIA.

Initially, training was aimed at having United States teams organize guerrilla movements in foreign countries. Emphasis was placed on the fact that guerrillas can't take prisoners. We were continuously told, "You don't have to kill them yourself—let your indigenous counterpart do that." In a course entitled, "Countermeasures to Hostile Interrogation," we were taught NKVD (Soviet Security) methods of torture to extract information. It became obvious that the title was only camouflage for teaching us "other" means of interrogation when time did not permit more sophisticated methods, for example, the old cold water-hot water treatment, or the delicate operation of lowering a man's testicles into a jeweler's vise. When we asked directly if we were being told to use these methods the answer was, "We can't tell you that. The Mothers of America wouldn't approve." This sarcastic hypocrisy was greeted with laughs. Our own military teaches these and even worse things to American soldiers. They then condemn the Viet Cong guerrilla for supposedly doing those very things. I was later to witness firsthand the practice of turning prisoners over to ARVN for "interrogation" and the atrocities which ensued.

Throughout the training there was an exciting aura of mystery. Hints were continually being dropped that "at this very moment" Special Forces men were in various Latin American and Asian countries on secret missions. The anti-Communist theme was woven throughout. Recommended reading would invariably turn out to be books on "brainwashing" and atrocity tales—life under communism. The enemy was THE ENEMY. There was no doubt that THE ENEMY was communism and Communist countries. There never was a suggestion that Special Forces would be used to set up guerilla warfare against the government in a Fascist-controlled country.

It would be a long time before I would look back and realize that this conditioning about the Communist conspiracy and THE ENEMY was taking place. Like most of the men who volunteered for Special Forces, I wasn't hard to sell. We were ready for it. Artur Fisers, my classmate and roommate, was living for the day when he would "lead the first 'stick' of the first team to go into Latvia." "How about Vietnam, Art?" "To hell with Vietnam. I wouldn't blend. There are not many blue-eyed gooks." This was to be only the first of many contradictions of the theory that special Forces men cannot be prejudiced about the color or religion of other people.

After graduation, I was chosen to be a Procurement NCO for Special Forces in California. The joke was made that I was now a procurer. After seeing how we were prostituted, the analogy doesn't seem a bad one. General Yarborough's instructions were simple: "I want good, dedicated men who will graduate. If you want him, take him. Just remember, he may be on your team someday." Our final instructions from the captain directly in charge of the program had some succinct points. I stood in shocked disbelief to hear, "Don't send me any niggers. Be careful, however, not to give the impression that we are prejudiced in Special Forces. You won't find it hard to find an excuse to reject them. Most will be too dumb to pass the written test. If they luck out on that and get by the physical testing, you'll find that they have some sort of a criminal record." The third man I sent to Fort Bragg was a "nigger." And I didn't forget that someday he might be on my team.

My first impressions of Vietnam were gained from the window of the jet while flying over Saigon and its outlying areas. As I looked down I thought, "Why, those could be farms anywhere and that could be a city anywhere." The ride from Tan Son Nhut to the center of town destroyed the initial illusion.

My impressions weren't unique for a new arrival in Saigon. I was appalled by the heat and humidity which made my worsted uniform feel like a fur coat. Smells. Exhaust fumes from the hundreds of blue and white Renault taxis and military vehicles. Human excrement; the foul, stagnant, black mud and water as we passed over the river on Cong Ly Street; and overriding all the others, the very pungent and rancid smell of what I later found out was *nuoc mam*, a sauce made much in the same manner as sauerkraut, with fish substituted for cabbage. No Vietnamese meal is complete without it. People—masses of them! The smallest children, with the dirty faces of all children of their age, standing on the sidewalk unshod and with no clothing other than a shirtwaist that never quite reached the navel on the protruding belly. Those a little older wearing overall-type trousers with the crotch seam torn out—a practical alteration that eliminates the need for diapers. Young grade school girls in their blue butterfly sun hats, and boys of the same age with hands out saying, "OK—Salem," thereby exhausting their English vocabulary. The women in *ao dais* of all colors, all looking beautiful and graceful. The slim, hipless men, many walking hand-in-hand with other men, and so misunderstood by the newcomer. Old men with straggly Fu Man Chu beards staring impassively, wearing wide-legged, pajama-like trousers.

Bars by the hundreds—with American-style names (Playboy,

Hungry i, Flamingo) and faced with grenade-proof screening. Houses made from packing cases, accommodating three or four families, stand alongside spacious villas complete with military guard. American GI's abound in sport shirts, slacks, and cameras; motorcycles, screaming to make room for a speeding official in a large, shiny sedan, pass over an intersection that has hundreds of horseshoes impressed in the soft asphalt tar. Confusion, noise, smells, people—almost overwhelming.

My initial assignment was in Saigon as an Area Specialist for III and IV Corps Tactical Zone in the Special Forces Tactical Operations Center. And my education began here. The officers and NCO's were unanimous in their contempt of the Vietnamese.

There was a continual put-down of Saigon officials, the Saigon government, ARVN (Army Republic of Vietnam), the LLDB (Luc Luong Dac Biet—Vietnamese Special Forces) and the Vietnamese man-in-the-street. The government was rotten, the officials corrupt, ARVN cowardly, the LLDB all three, and the man-in-the-street an ignorant thief. (LLDB also qualified under "thief.")

I was shocked. I was working with what were probably some of the most dedicated Americans in Vietnam. They were supposedly in Vietnam to help "our Vietnamese friends" in their fight for a democratic way of life. Obviously, the attitude didn't fit.

It occurred to me that if the people on "our side" were all these things, why were we then supporting them and spending \$1.5 million dollars a day in their country? The answer was always the same: "They are anti-Communists," and this was supposed to explain everything.

As a result of this insulation, my initial observations of everything and everyone Vietnamese were colored. I almost fell into the habit, or mental laziness, of evaluating Vietnam not on the basis of what I saw and heard, but on what I was told by other biased Americans. When you see something contradictory, there is always a fellow countryman willing to interpret the significance of it, and it won't be favorable to the Vietnamese. This is due partially to the type of Vietnamese that the typical American meets, coupled with typical American prejudices. During his working hours, the American soldier deals primarily with the Vietnamese military. Many (or most) of the higher-ranking officers attained their status through family position, as a reward for political assistance, and through wealth. Most of the ranking civilians attained their positions in the same manner. They use their offices primarily as a means of adding to their personal wealth. There is hardly any social rapport between GI Joe and his Vietnamese counterpart.

Most contact between Americans and Vietnamese civilians is restricted to taxi drivers, laborers, secretaries, contractors, and bar girls. All these people have one thing in common: they are dependent on Americans for a living. The last three have something else in common. In addition to speaking varying degrees of English, they will tell Americans anything they want to hear as long as the money rolls in. Neither the civilian nor military with whom the American usually has contact is representative of the Vietnamese people.

Many of our military, officers and enlisted, have exported the color prejudice, referring to Vietnamese as "slopes" and "gooks"—two words of endearment left over from Korea. Other fine examples of American Democracy in action are the segregated bars. Although there are exceptions, in Saigon, Nha Trang, and Da Nang and some of the other larger towns, Negroes do not go into white bars except at the risk of being ejected. I have seen more than one incident where a Negro newcomer has made a "mistake" and walked into the wrong bar. If insulting catcalls weren't enough to make him leave, he was thrown out bodily. There are cases where this sort of thing has led to near-riots.

It is obvious that the Vietnamese resent us as well. We are making many of the same mistakes that the French did, and in some instances our mistakes are worse. Arrogance, disrespect, rudeness, prejudice, and our own special brand of ignorance, are not designed to win friends. This resentment runs all the way from stiff politeness to obvious hatred. It is so common that if a Vietnamese working with or for Americans is found to be sincerely cooperative, energetic, conscientious, and honest, it automatically makes him suspect as a Viet Cong agent.

After my initial assignment in Saigon, which lasted two and one-half months, I volunteered for a new program called Project Delta. This was a classified project wherein specially selected men in Special Forces were to train and organize small teams to be infiltrated into Laos. The primary purpose of dropping these teams into Laos was to try and find the Ho Chi Minh trail and gather information on traffic, troops, weapons, etc....

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... Toward this end we sent people on a mission that had little or no chance of success. It became apparent that we were not interested in the welfare of the Vietnamese but, rather, in how we could best promote

our own interests. We sent 40 men who had become our friends. These were exceptionally dedicated people, all volunteers, and their CO showed up drunk at the plane to bid the troops farewell—just all boozed up. Six returned, the rest were killed or captured.

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To many in Vietnam this mission confirmed that the Ho Chi Minh trail, so called, and the traffic on it, was grossly exaggerated, and that the Viet Cong were getting the bulk of their weapons from ARVN and by sea. It also was one more piece of evidence that the Viet Cong were primarily South Vietnamese, not imported troops from the North. One more thing was added to my growing lists of doubts of the "official" stories about Vietnam.

When the project shifted to in-country operations Americans went on drops throughout the Viet Cong-held areas of South Vietnam. One such trip was into War Zone D north of Dong Xoi, near the Michelin plantation. There is no such thing as a typical mission. Each one is different. But this one revealed some startling things. Later I was to brief Secretary of Defense McNamara and General Westmoreland on the limited military value of the bombing, as witnessed on this mission.

As usual we went in at dusk—this time in a heavy rain squall. We moved only a nominal distance, perhaps 300 meters, through the thick, tangled growth and stopped. Without moonlight we were making too much noise. It rained all night so we had to wait until first light to move without crashing around. Moving very cautiously for about an hour, we discovered a deserted company headquarters position, complete with crude tables, stools, and sleeping racks. After reporting this by radio, we continued on our way. The area was crisscrossed with well-traveled trails under the canopy. A few hours later we reached the edge of a large rubber plantation, we skirted the perimeter. We discovered that it was completely surrounded by deserted gun positions and fox holes, all with beautiful fields-of-fire down the even rows of rubber trees. None gave evidence of having been occupied for at least three or four days. We transmitted this information to the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) and then the team proceeded across the plantation, heading for the headquarters and housing area in the center.

When we arrived at a point 100 meters from our destination, the team leader and I went forward, leaving the team in a covering position. As we got closer, we could hear sounds from the houses, but assumed

these were only workers. The briefing had neglected to tell us that the plantation was supposed to be deserted. Crawling, we stopped about 25 meters from the first line of houses. Lifting our heads, we received a rude shock. These weren't plantation workers. These were Viet Cong soldiers, complete with blue uniforms, webbing, and many with the new Soviet bloc weapons. The atmosphere seemed to be one of relaxation. We could even hear a transistor radio playing music. After 30 or 40 minutes we drew back to the team position. We reported our find to the TOC and estimated the number of Viet Cong to be at least one company. The whole team then retraced the two kilometers to the jungle and moved into it. Crawling into the thickest part, we settled down just as darkness and the rain closed in on us.

Underneath ponchos, to prevent light from our flashlights escaping, the Vietnamese team leader and I, after closely poring over our maps, drafted a detailed message for TOC. In the morning we sent the message, which gave map coordinates of a number of small Landing Zones (LZs) around the area. We also gave them a plan for exploiting our find. It was fairly simple. Make simultaneous landings at all LZs and have the troops move quickly to the deserted Viet Cong gun positions and man them. At the sight of bombers approaching, the Viet Cong would leave the housing area for the jungle. This would involve them having to travel across two kilometers of open plantation into prepared positions. We told TOC that we were going to try and get back to the housing area so we could tell them if the Viet Cong were still there. If they didn't hear from us on the next scheduled contact, they were to assume that we had been hit and hadn't made it. If this occurred it would be verification of the Viet Cong presence and they were to follow through with the plan. We would stay in the area and join the Rangers when they came in.

This time, we were more cautious in our trip across the plantation. On the way, we found a gasoline cache of 55-gallon drums. We took pictures and proceeded. Again the Vietnamese team leader and I crawled forward to within 25 meters of the houses. It was unbelievable. There they were and still with no perimeter security. Now, however, there was much activity and what seemed like more of them. We inched our way around the house area. This wasn't a company. There were at least 300 armed men in front of us. We had found a battalion, and all in one tight spot—unique in itself. We got back to the team, made our radio contact, and asked if the submitted plan would be implemented. We

were told, yes, and that we were to move back to the edge of the jungle. There would be a small delay while coordination was made to get the troops and helicopters. At 1000 hours (10:00 a.m.) planes of all descriptions started crisscrossing this small area. I contacted one plane (there were so many I couldn't tell which one) on the Prick 10 (AN/PRC-10 transmitter-receiver for air-ground communications). I was told that they were reconning the area for an operation. What stupidity. No less than 40 overflights in 45 minutes. As usual, we were alerting the Viet Cong of impending action by letting all the armchair commandos take a look-see. For about 30 minutes all was quiet, and then we started to notice movement. The Viet Cong were moving out from the center of the plantation. Where were the troops? At 1400 hours Skyraiders showed up and started bombing the center of the plantation. Was it possible that the troops had moved in without our knowing it? TOC wouldn't tell us anything. The bombing continued throughout the afternoon with never more than a 15-minute letup. Now we had much company in the jungle with us. Everywhere we turned there were Viet Cong. I had to agree that, in spite of the rain, it was a much better place to be than in the housing center. Why didn't we hear our troops firing?

Finally the bombing ended with the daylight, and we crouched in the wet darkness within hearing distance of Viet Cong elements. Darkness was our fortress. About 2030 (8:30 p.m.) we heard the drone of a heavy aircraft in the rainy sky. We paid little attention to it. Then, without warning, the whole world lit up, leaving us feeling exposed and naked. Two huge flares were swinging gently to earth on their parachutes, one on each side of us. At about the same time, our radio contact plane could be heard above the clouds. I grabbed the radio and demanded to know, "Who the hell is calling for those flares and why?"

"What flares?"

"Damn it, find out what flares and tell whoever is calling for them that they're putting us in bad trouble." I could hear the operator trying to call the TOC. I figured that friendly troops in the area had called for the flares to light their perimeter. Crack—crump. I was lifted from the ground, only to be slammed down again. I broke in on the radio. "Forget that transmission. I know why the flares are being dropped."

"Why?"

"They're being used as markers for jets dropping what sounds like 750-pounders. Tell TOC thanks for the warning. Also tell them two of

the markers bracketed our position. I hope to hell they knew where we are." A long pause.

"TOC says they don't know anything about flares or jet bombers."

Another screwup. "Well how about somebody finding out something and when they find out, how about telling us unimportant folks? In the meantime, I hope that 'gooniebird' (C-47 plane) has its running lights on."

"Why?"

"Because any moment now the pilot is going to find he is dawdling around in a bomb run pattern. Come back early in the morning and give me the hot skinny."

"Roger—we're leaving—out."

I was mad, a pretty good sign that I was scared. The bombing continued through the night. Sometimes it was "crump" and sometimes it was "crack," depending on how close the bombs fell. When it finally stopped sometime before dawn, I realized that it was a dazzling exhibition of flying—worthless—but impressive. The flare ship had to fly so low because of the cloud cover that its flares were burning out on the ground instead of in the air. The orbiting jets would then dive down through the clouds, break through, spot the markers, make split-second corrections, and release their bombs. However, while it was going on, considering what a small error became at jet speeds, a small error would wipe us out. Should this happen, I could see a bad case of "*C'est la guerre*" next day at air operations. I couldn't help wondering also how "Charlie" was feeling about all this—specifically the ones only 25 or 30 meters away. It didn't seem possible, but I wondered if the shrapnel tearing through the tree tops was terrifying him as much as us.

First thing in the morning, my Vietnamese counterpart made contact on the big radio (HC-162D). After some talk into the mike, he turned to me with a helpless look:

"They say we must cross plantation to housing area again."

"What? It's impossible—tell them so."

More talk. "They say we must go. They want to talk to you."

When the hollow voice came through on the side band, I couldn't believe it—it was the same order. I told them it was impossible and that we were not going to go.

"You must go. That is an order from way up."

That figures. The Saigon wheels smelling glory have taken over our TOC. "My answer is, Will Not Comply; I say again, Will Not Comply. Tell those people to stop trying to outguess the man on the ground. If they want someone to assess damage on the housing area send a plane

with a camera. Better yet, have the Rangers look at it, there's more of them."

"There are no other friendly troops in the area. You are the only ones that can do it. You must go. There will be a plane in your area shortly. Out."

Up to this point we had assumed friendly troops were in the area and that if we got in trouble, maybe we could hold out until they could help us. No troops. Little wonder the Viet Cong are roaming all over the place not caring who hears them.

Soon a plane arrived and I received: "We must know how many Viet Cong are still in the housing area. You must go and look. It is imperative. The whole success of this mission depends on your report. Over."

"I say again, Will Not Comply. Over." (Hello court martial.) I looked at the Vietnamese team leader. He was tense and grim, but silently cheering me on. While waiting for the plane I asked him what he was going to do. He replied:

"We go, we die. Order say we must go, so we go. We will die."

Tell me Vietnamese have no guts. Another transmission from the plane:

"Why won't you comply? Over."

These type questions aren't normally answered. I knew, however, that the poor bastard up there had to take an answer back to the wheels. Well, he got one: "Because we can't. One step out of this jungle and it's all over. I'm not going to have this team wiped out for nothing. There are no Viet Cong in the village; not since 1400 yesterday. The mission was screwed up when you started the bombing without sending in troops yesterday. As for the mission depending on us, you should have thought of that yesterday before you scrapped the plans and didn't bother to tell us. Over."

"Where are the Viet Cong now? Over."

"Which ones? The ones 25 meters from us, or the ones 35 meters from us? They're in the jungle all around us. Over."

"Roger. Understand Viet Cong have left houses—now in jungle—have information necessary—you do not have to go across plantation."

This was unbelievable. On TV it would be a comedy—a bad one.

Shortly after this uplifting exchange, the bombers returned, and we spent the remainder of the day moving from one Viet Cong group to another. We would come upon them, pull back, and then an A1-E

(bomber) would come whining down, machine-gunning or dropping bombs.

I discovered that the old prop fighter bombers were more terrifying than the jets. The jets came in so fast that the man on the ground couldn't hear them until the bombs were dropped and they were climbing away. The props were something else. First the droning noise while in orbit. Then they would peel off and the drone would change to a growl, increasing steadily in pitch until they were a screaming whine. Under the jungle canopy, this noise grabbed at the heart of every man. And every man knew that the plane was pointed directly at him. The crack of the bomb exploding was almost a relief. Many of these bombs landed 25 to 35 meters from where we were lying on the ground. The closest any of us came to being hurt was when a glowing piece of shrapnel lodged in the pack on my back. I couldn't help thinking, "These are our planes. They know where we are. What must it be like for a woman or child to hear that inhuman, impersonal whine directed at them in their open villages? How they must hate us!" I looked around at my team. Others were thinking. Each of us died a little that day in the jungle.

At 1730 (5:30 p.m.) the last bomb was dropped. A great day for humanity. Almost 28 hours of bombing in this small area with barely a break.

On the next afternoon we were told by radio to quickly find an LZ and prepare to leave the area. We knew of only one within reasonable distance and headed for it. A short distance from the LZ we could hear voices. Viet Cong around the opening. We were now an equal distance between two groups of the Viet Cong.

Finally they allowed the pick-up ship to come in. Just as the plane touched down and we started toward it, two machine gun positions opened up—one from each side of the clearing. The bullets sounded like gravel hitting the aluminum skin of the chopper. My American assistant took one position under fire and I started firing at the other. Our backs were to the aircraft and our eyes on the jungle. The rest of the team started climbing aboard. The machine guns were still firing, but we had made them less accurate. I was still firing when two strong hands picked me up and plumped me on the floor of the plane. Maximum power and we still couldn't make the trees at the end of the clearing, but had to make a half-circle over the machine guns. All of a sudden something slapped me in the buttock, lifting me from the floor. A bullet came through the bottom of the plane, through the gas tank and the

floor. When it ripped through the floor it turned sideways. The slug left an eight-inch bruise but did not penetrate. Through some miracle, we were on our way to base—all of us. We would get drunk tonight. It was the only way we would sleep without reliving the past days. It would be at least three days before anybody would unwind. That much is typical.

I had seen the effect of the bombing at close range. These bombs would land and go for about 15 yards and tear off a lot of foliage from the trees, but that was it. Unless you drop these things in somebody's hip pocket they don't do any good. For 28 hours they bombed that area. And it was rather amusing because, when I came out, it was estimated that they had killed about 250 Viet Cong in the first day. They asked me how many Viet Cong did I think they had killed and I said maybe six, and I was giving them the benefit of the doubt at that. The bombing had no real military significance. It would only work if aimed at concentrated targets such as villages.

One of the first axioms one learns about unconventional warfare is that no insurgent or guerrilla movement can endure without the support of the people...

We were still being told, both by our own government and the Saigon government, that the vast majority of the people of South Vietnam were opposed to the Viet Cong. When I questioned this contradiction, I was always told that the people only helped the Viet Cong through fear. Supposedly, the Viet Cong held the people in the grip of terror by assassination and torture. This argument was also against doctrine. Special Forces are taught that reliable support can be gained only through friendship and trust. History denied the "terror" argument. The people feared and hated the French, and they rose up against them. It became quite obvious that a minority movement could not keep tabs on a hostile majority. South Vietnam is a relatively small country, dotted with thousands of small villages. In this very restricted area companies and battalions of Viet Cong can maneuver and live under the very noses of government troops; but the people don't betray these movements, even though it is a relatively simple thing to pass the word. On the other hand, government troop movements are always reported...

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I know a couple of cases where it was suggested by Special Forces officers that Viet Cong prisoners be killed. In one case in which I was

an impression for Keller

involved, we had picked up prisoners in the valley around Kai. We didn't want the prisoners, but they walked into our hands. We were supposed to stay in the area four more days, and there were only eight of us and four of them, and we didn't know what the hell to do with them. You can't carry them. Food is limited, and the way the transmission went with the base camp you knew what they wanted you to do—get rid of them. I wouldn't do that, and when I got back to operation base a major told me, "You know we almost told you right over the phone to do them in." I said that I was glad he didn't, because it would have been embarrassing to refuse to do it. I knew goddamn well I wasn't going to kill them. In a fight it's one thing, but with guys with their hands bound it's another. And I wouldn't have been able to shoot them because of the noise. It would have had to be a very personal thing, like sticking a knife into them. The major said, "Oh, you wouldn't have had to do it; all you had to do was give them over to the Vietnamese." Of course, this is supposed to absolve you of any responsibility. This is the general attitude. It's really a left-handed morality. Very few of the Special Forces guys had any qualms about this. Damn few.

Little by little, as all these facts made their impact on me, I had to accept the fact that, Communist or not, the vast majority of the people were pro-Viet Cong and anti-Saigon. I had to accept also that the position, "We are in Vietnam because we are in sympathy with the aspirations and desires of the Vietnamese people," was a lie. If this is a lie, how many others are there?

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...[W]henever anybody questioned our being in Vietnam—in light of the facts—the old rationale was always presented: "We have to stop the spread of communism somewhere...if we don't fight the commies here, we'll have to fight them at home...if we pull out, the rest of Asia will go Red...these are uneducated people who have been duped; they don't understand the difference between democracy and communism...."

Being extremely anti-Communist myself, these "arguments" satisfied me for a long time. In fact, I guess it was saying these very same things to myself over and over again that made it possible for me to participate in the things I did in Vietnam. But were we stopping communism? Even during the short period I had been in Vietnam, the Viet Cong had obviously gained in strength; the government controlled less

and less of the country every day. The more troops and money we poured in, the more people hated us. Countries all over the world were losing sympathy with our stand in Vietnam. Countries which up to now had preserved a neutral position were becoming vehemently anti-American. A village near Tay Ninh in which I had slept in safety six months earlier was the center of a Viet Cong operation that cost the lives of two American friends. A Special Forces team operating in the area was almost decimated over a period of four months. United States Operations Mission (USOM), civilian representatives, who had been able to travel by vehicle in relative safety throughout the countryside, were being kidnapped and killed. Like the military, they now had to travel by air.

The real question was, whether communism is spreading in spite of our involvement or because of it.

The attitude that the uneducated peasant lacked the political maturity to decide between communism and democracy and "... we are only doing this for your own good," although it had a familiar colonialistic ring, at first seemed to have merit. Then I remembered that most of the villages would be under Viet Cong control for some of the time and under government control at other times. How many Americans had such a close look at both sides of the cloth? The more often government troops passed through an area, the more surely it would become sympathetic to the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong might sleep in the houses, but the government troops ransacked them. More often than not, the Viet Cong helped plant and harvest the crops; but invariably government troops in an area razed them. Rape is severely punished among the Viet Cong. It is so common among the ARVN that it is seldom reported for fear of even worse atrocities.

I saw the Airborne brigade come into Nha Trang. Nha Trang is a government town and the Vietnamese Airborne brigade are government troops. They were originally, in fact, trained by Special Forces, and they actually had the town in a grip of terror for three days. Merchants were collecting money to get them out of town; cafes and bars shut down.

The troops were accosting women on the streets. They would go into a place—a bar or cafe—and order varieties of food. When the checks came they wouldn't pay them. Instead they would simply wreck the place, dumping over the tables and smashing dishes. While these men were accosting women, the police would just stand by, powerless or unwilling to help. In fact, the situation is so difficult that American troops, if in town at the same time as the Vietnamese Airborne brigade, are told to stay off the streets at night to avoid coming to harm.

The whole thing was a lie. *We weren't preserving freedom in South Vietnam. There was no freedom to preserve. To voice opposition to the government meant jail or death. Neutralism was forbidden and punished. Newspapers that didn't say the right thing were closed down. People are not even free to leave and Vietnam is one of those rare countries that doesn't fill its American visa quota. It's all there to see once the Red film is removed from the eyes. We aren't the freedom fighters. We are the* Russian tanks blasting the hopes of an Asian Hungary.

It's not democracy we brought to Vietnam—it's anti-communism. This is the only choice the people in the village have. This is why most of them have embraced the Viet Cong and shunned the alternative....

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It had taken a long time and a mountain of evidence but I had finally found some truths. The world is not just good guys and bad guys. Anti-communism is a lousy substitute for democracy. I know now that there are many types of communism but there are none that appeal to me. In the long run, I don't think Vietnam will be better off under Ho's brand of communism. But it's not for me or my government to decide. That decision is for the Vietnamese. I also know that we have allowed the creation of a military monster that will lie to our elected officials; and that both of them will lie to the American people.

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When I returned from Vietnam I was asked, "Do you resent young people who have never been in Vietnam, or in any war, protesting it?" On the contrary, I am relieved. I think they should be commended. I had to wait until I was 35 years old, after spending 10 years in the Army and 18 months personally witnessing the stupidity of the war, before I could figure it out. That these young people were able to figure it out so quickly and so accurately is not only a credit to their intelligence but a great personal triumph over a lifetime of conditioning and indoctrination. I only hope that the picture I have tried to create will help other people come to the truth without wasting 10 years. Those people protesting the war in Vietnam are not against our boys in Vietnam. On the contrary. What they are against is our boys *being* in Vietnam. They are not unpatriotic. Again the opposite is true. They are opposed to people, our own and others, dying for a lie, thereby corrupting the very word democracy.

The Fort Hood Three: The Case of the Three GIs Who Said "No" to the War in Vietnam—Three Speeches

Pvt. Dennis Mora
Pvt. David Samas
and PFC James Johnson

JOINT STATEMENT BY FORT HOOD THREE

The following statement was read to over 40 cameramen, reporters, and antiwar fighters at a press conference in New York on June 30th. The statement was prepared jointly and read by Pvt. Dennis Mora.

We are Pfc. James Johnson, Pvt. David Samas, and Pvt. Dennis Mora, three soldiers formerly stationed at Fort Hood, Texas in the same company of the 142 Signal Battalion, 2nd Armored Division. We have received orders to report on the 13th of July at Oakland Army Terminal in California for final processing and shipment to Vietnam.

We have decided to take a stand against this war, which we consider immoral, illegal and unjust. We are initiating today, through our attorneys, Stanley Faulkner of New York and Mrs. Selma Samols of Washington, D.C. an action in the courts to enjoin the Secretary of

The Fort Hood Three Defense Committee, *The Fort Hood Three*, New York: The Fort Hood Three Defense Committee, July 1966, pp. 9-11, 14-20.