

Faculty Development Grant Final Report

The Other Warrior: Interviews with Andre Sauvageot

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September 7, 2010

Restatement of Project Goals

I was awarded \$4767 for a research trip to Vietnam. The research will be used for a book about the so-called “other war” in Vietnam, the mostly civilian-led U.S. and South Vietnamese attempts to defeat the Vietcong using counterinsurgency, pacification, and nation-building. The book will take a biographical approach, focusing on the lives of 6 principal characters: Tran Ngoc Chau, Edward Lansdale, William Colby, Frank Scotton, Douglas Ramsey, and Jean Sauvageot. This trip focused mainly on Andre Sauvageot. Sauvageot was an American Army Special Forces officer who conducted secret, solo pacification operations in the Mekong Delta in the 1960s. He currently lives in Hanoi during the summer months and agreed to several days of interviews in and around Saigon where he used to work. He allowed me to record those interviews on digital video tape. I filmed Sauvageot as he retraced his steps through South Vietnam. We also spent a few days interviewing locals who were affected by the “other war.” The recordings will have a secondary benefit in providing the base material for a short documentary film that can be edited using ADHI equipment and distributed on the ADHI website.

Review of Procedure

I spent four days in late July and early August 2009 with Jean “Andre” Sauvageot, interviewing him on film at locations in Saigon and in nearby provinces. I also spent three additional days filming local people in various places that were affected the “other war” and Sauvageot’s work. I ended up with nearly twelve hours of video recordings and several additional hours of audio recordings.

Summary of Findings

The interviews have proven invaluable to my project. Since the trip I have completed a book proposal (see below) and begun marketing it to publishers. I have also completed the first two chapters of the book. In addition I am editing the film to be shown online at adhi.edu and incorporated into the Vietnam War class I am teaching this fall.

The Other Warriors

A Proposal

by

Jeff Woods

Approximate Length: 200,000 words

Delivery Date: December 2011

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I. Abstract

In 1946 the Vietminh began fighting a “people’s war” in the name of Vietnamese independence. Drawn largely from Maoist philosophy, the concept of “people’s war” depended fundamentally on the political loyalty of the mass peasantry in the countryside. The Vietminh’s sensitivity to rural political conditions carried its fight against the French and constituted the core strategic legacy it would pass to the Vietcong.

Few in the American Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) recognized rural political loyalty as the center of gravity in the Vietnam conflict. At the height of the U.S. intervention, the military’s focus on destroying the enemy led to indiscriminate allied free fire zone bombing and search/destroy-clear/hold operations. Those tactics wreaked havoc on the South Vietnamese countryside, creating as many enemies as it killed. Moreover, South Vietnamese Government (GVN) corruption and urban elitism left the Vietcong fertile recruiting ground among the rural peasantry. Absent responsive and representative GVN institutions, the communists seized the initiative in the “people’s war.”

While MACV and GVN strategies remained largely insensitive to rural political needs, a small, dedicated group of American advisors and their South Vietnamese counterparts recognized the “people’s war” as the center of the conflict and developed a national strategy to win the hearts and minds of the peasantry from the communists. While several had military backgrounds, most were civilians from the American Central Intelligence Agency, Agency for International Development, United States Information Service, and State Department and the Vietnamese Interior Department, provincial government, and local defense forces. Working in the rural villages and hamlets where the Vietcong lived and breathed, they effectively penetrated behind the lines in this war without fronts. Most carried weapons, but their most potent tools were ideas and money. They were Vietnam’s other warriors, fighting the pacification, revolutionary development, counterinsurgency, nation-building, and populist political war.

The other warriors drew little support from officials in Saigon and Washington through the mid-1960s. But the neglect proved salutary. Independent of military funding and outside the military chain of command, the other warriors were free to experiment in small scale provincial incubators. From the Central Highlands to the Ca Mau Peninsula, they effectively exchanged commitments of local autonomy and development resources for the political loyalty of the rural communities. Their demonstrated success eventually shifted general allied command strategy. In 1965, the same year the United States committed huge numbers of regular combat forces to South Vietnam, the other warriors merged their provincial experiments into a national rural development strategy. Two years later, with the conventional war stalemated, CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development) and the Rural Development Ministry culminated the national effort in winning hearts and minds in the South Vietnamese countryside. But the changes ruffled feathers. The other warriors built a political base that challenged not only the

communists in the hinterlands but also the American military and the Vietnamese central government in Saigon. The changes also came too little, too late. Just as CORDS finished training its first cadres, Tet and Vietnamization sapped the entire American advisory effort of money, manpower, and political will. The other warrior's infant national strategy and their faith in the war effort never recovered.

Mine will be a history of the other war, the allied version of the "people's war," as told through the experiences of those who fought it. It will draw on the stories of dozens of other warriors but will pivot on the experiences of six: Tran Ngoc Chau, a Vietminh soldier who rejected communism and became a South Vietnamese counterinsurgency expert and populist politician; Edward Lansdale, the legendary "quiet" and "ugly" American who brought pacification techniques that he had perfected in the Philippines to Vietnam; William Colby, the former Jedburgh and master spy who became the most powerful voice in Saigon for the other war; Frank Scotton, a civilian United States Information Services officer who stalked Vietcong in the jungle vacuum with a grease gun under one arm and a clipboard under the other; Jean Sauvageot, a twice wounded special forces officer who took up a civilian post, went native, and never fired a shot in nine years in-country; and Douglas Ramsey, a foreign service officer who was captured by the VC and during seven years of imprisonment proved as obsessed with the liberty of his captors as his personal freedom. These warrior diplomats participated in the American and Vietnamese experiment in rural pacification from its beginnings in the early 1950s through the fall of Saigon in 1975, and each could mark his service in decades rather than months. The six were broadly representative of the other warriors philosophically. They also worked in each of South Vietnam's four corps and held critically influential positions in the

various civilian and military agencies working on rural development. In addition, they all contributed directly to the national rural development strategy that changed the war in 1965 and 1966, and saw it sputter and die after Tet, 1968. Each of their stories is remarkable, but collectively they represent the best of the cooperative American commitment to long term political warfare and nation-building not found in the histories of the Vietnam conflict. Their stories also offer stark reminders of the limits and costs of that commitment for the other warriors personally and for the United States as a nation approaching the height of its global power.

II. Historiography

The United States' military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan that followed the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks have given the study of Vietnam's other war new relevance. Several recent books have looked to the pacification, counterinsurgency, and nation-building aspects of the Vietnam conflict for lessons learned. None thus far delivers a satisfying combination of scholarship, scope, accessibility, and humanity. John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (2002) takes a political scientist's approach in searching for useful strategic models from the U.S. conflict Vietnam. It is informative but written for policy-makers more than popular audiences. Thomas Ahern's, *CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam* (2006) contains a raft of new information, but the CIA veteran's narrative style is as dry as kindling. Moreover Ahern compromises the scholarly value of the book by citing classified sources that are unavailable for public verification. Larry Berman's *Perfect Spy* (2007) is far more entertaining but lacks breadth and depth. The historical context is largely abandoned for the

author's reflections on his personal relationship with the protagonist, Pham Xuan An.

Informative and entertaining, Rufus Phillips *Why Vietnam Matters* (2008) is limited in scope, as memoirs inevitably are, and is hamstrung by a superficial concluding chapter on the parallels between Vietnam and the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Older works examining the “other war” in Vietnam are similarly limited. Richard A. Hunt's, *Pacification* (1995) is more comprehensive but suffers as a dull, overwhelmingly bureaucratic history that neglects personal, political, and Vietnamese contexts. Jeffrey Race's *War Comes to Long An* (1973) is an important book written by a veteran of pacification campaigns in Vietnam, but Race's abstractions are virtually inaccessible to the general reader. Zalin Grant's *Facing the Phoenix* (1991) addresses American counterinsurgency and pacification efforts in Vietnam in an engaging personality-driven narrative, but his research and analytical perspectives are shallow and out of date. Michael Latham's *Modernization as Ideology* (2000) offers an important scholarly analysis of a principle motivation for American nation-building ventures in Vietnam and elsewhere, but Latham limits his research to the Kennedy era and neglects important South Vietnamese contributions in determining nation-building strategy. No work to date sufficiently covers the crucial period of the people's war from 1968 to 1975. And none sufficiently connects the historic arc of the other war to the existential crises of the other warriors.

Neil Sheehan's excellent book *A Bright Shining Lie* (1989) is, perhaps, a notable exception. The book highlights John Paul Vann's participation in the other war, effectively personalizing its history. But the book captures only a small piece of the complex and compelling pacification story. It also tends to reduce Vann to a kind of Don Quixote, fighting what the author contends from the beginning is an inevitably lost cause. My book will attempt to

draw on what Sheehan did right and leave behind what he did wrong. My goal will be to write a compelling narrative that weaves together biography and monograph, gives voice to the principle characters rather than the author, remains conscious that nothing in history is inevitable, and admits that no formula governing human relations can be considered a panacea.

Of the six principle characters in the book, William Colby is perhaps the most familiar. Colby's memoirs, *Honorable Men* (1978), and *Lost Victory* (1989), though antiseptic, outline his basic views concerning limited military intervention and grassroots self-development in Vietnam. John Prados's biography of Colby *Lost Crusader* (2003) fleshes out more of the context in which Colby operated, but offers little more of the man, himself. Prados's Colby is too often merely a foil for the author's criticisms of CIA secrecy and America's reckless interventionism. My Colby will be vulnerable, thoughtful, and real, a committed ideologue, a Jesuit at times but a pragmatist at others.

There is also a small but significant literature on Edward Lansdale. Lansdale's memoir *In the Midst of Wars* (1972) contains some wonderful stories and a basic insight into his liberal revolutionary philosophy, but it almost ignores the CIA and ends without addressing his return stint in Vietnam from 1965 to 1968. Cecil Currey's *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (1988) covers the 1965 to 1968 period, but the book is hagiographic at times, makes Lansdale out to be a victim of bureaucratic gate keepers, including a much demonized Philip Habib, and erroneously assumes that Lansdale's pacification formula was certain to work if only he had been put in charge. Johnathan Nashel's *Edward Lansdale's Cold War* (2005) is an important reminder that there are many Lansdales in public memory, some based on intentional fictions perpetuated by Lansdale himself. Nashel also reminds us that Lansdale had a dark side, a sometimes naïve sense of cultural relativism, and even an unacknowledged xenophobia. But in

focusing on the facade of Lansdale, the public imaginings of the man rather than the man himself, deprives Lansdale of dimension, complexity, and life. My Lansdale will be deeply committed and tragically doomed in his pursuit of stable, representative institutions in Vietnam.

Somewhat less well known is Tran Ngoc Chau. Chau, the South Vietnamese counterinsurgency expert and populist politician, makes brief appearances in Prados's *Lost Crusader* (2003) and Neil Sheehan's *Bright Shining Lie* (1988), but is revealed in more detail in Zalin Grant's *Facing the Phoenix* (1991) and Thomas Ahern's *CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam* (2006). Grant and Ahern expose enough of the man to pique but not satiate the reader's interest. Chau served as a symbolic victim in each of the books, the centerpiece of simple cautionary morality tales. Chau deserves more.

Doug Ramsey had his fullest treatment in Sheehan; nevertheless, his was a bit part in Vann's life. Sheehan abandons Ramsey just as the most significant and fascinating part of his story begins, when Ramsey is taken prisoner by the Vietcong. In our book Ramsey will struggle for survival as a p.o.w. Under interrogation, he was forced to reassess his faith in the other war. A matter of sanity and survival, he produced some of the most sober and introspective analyses of the "people's" conflict ever undertaken.

Nothing, other than a sentence here and there, has been written about the final two characters, Frank Scotton and Jean Sauvageot, even though each of these men was on the front lines of the pacification and counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam for close to a decade. They spoke the language, had access to places and people in Vietnam that nobody else had, and understood the country better than *any* Americans who served in the war. The best and the worst of the United States' participation in the Vietnam conflict can be found in their stories: the

ruthless killing, the selfless acts of compassion and empathy, the zealous idealism, and the inevitable hubris. Their tales and none like them have yet been told.

III. Character and Plot

The most critical year of the other war began in February 1965. That month marked the beginning of the deployment of huge numbers of American ground troops in Vietnam and the subordination of pacification efforts to General William Westmoreland's attrition strategy. Nguyen Khanh's rural policies, like Diem's, had alienated the peasantry, leaving the Vietcong fertile recruiting ground. The aggressive military buildup might have been necessary to prevent a communist takeover, but it also played into communist hands, reinforcing the argument that Saigon was a puppet of a foreign capitalist imperialist power. Despite mounting body counts, by mid-year it became clear that Westmoreland's abandonment of rural development for search and destroy operations did little to quiet the Vietcong in the countryside. Khanh's government collapsed amidst a chaotic series of coups and countercoups that spring.

In those months, Vietnam's other warriors seized the opportunity to push the Johnson administration and the Ky and Thieu government that took over in June to restart pacification programs. On the advice of Mac Bundy, Chester Cooper, Robert Komer, and others, President Johnson looked for a pacification czar. His first step was to return other war enthusiast Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge to Saigon where he could rally the country team to reorganize rural development. Prime Minister Ky, meanwhile, appointed General Nguyen Duc Thang Minister of Revolutionary Development and gave him broad powers over a cabinet council that administered pacification operations. In a January 1966 order, Thang merged provincial forces

into the Rural Development Cadre and established a national training center at Vung Tau. The same month American civilian and military officials met in Warrenton Virginia to begin coordinating a new national other war strategy. The Johnson administration convinced Ky and Thieu to adopt the plan at the Honolulu Conference in February 1966, beginning a process that would lead to the creation of the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) and ultimately Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS). In March, several important military officials joined the initiative. Most significant was Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson whose study “The Program for the Pacification and Long Term Development in Vietnam” (PROVN) argued strongly for a greater strategic emphasis on the “people’s war.” Just a year after the United States committed ground soldiers to the conflict in Vietnam, the other war had become a critical component of national allied strategy.

The other warriors had been preparing for the change for over ten years. Like the Vietcong, the allied other warriors inherited their strategy from Mao Zedong by way of the Vietminh. Kieu Cong Cung, Nguyen Be, and many of those who became powerful civic action and rural development leaders in the South Vietnamese Government had at one time fought against the Japanese and French as Vietcong guerillas, as did Tran Ngoc Chau.

Tran Ngoc Chau grew up in Hue, the seat of dynastic rule in Vietnam, a center of Buddhist activism, and the home of one of the country’s great universities. His grandfather Tran Tram and his father Tran Dao Te were mandarins, the former a scholar and the latter a judge. Chau’s family encouraged him to become a Buddhist bonze, and at age nine, he entered the Truc Lam pagoda in Dalat. He studied as a monk for seven years before deciding that the cloistered

life was not for him. He enrolled at the Lycee in Hue just as World War II reached Vietnam. In 1944, at age twenty, Chau followed his two older brothers into the ranks of the Vietminh. For the next five years, he bore arms, first against the Japanese and then against the French, serving initially as an intelligence officer, then as a platoon leader, and eventually as a political commissar. He was several times decorated and once badly wounded.

As a Vietminh guerilla, Chau practiced the principles of Mao Zedong's "people's war." Mao had significantly altered the Bolshevik model of revolution in China. He argued that struggle emanating from an urban proletariat was not appropriate to countries in Asia where the mass peasant population held the greater revolutionary potential. Instead he employed a strategy that relied fundamentally on rural support for guerilla activities. The people, Mao taught, were the water in which the fish/guerilla swam. Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, Truong Chinh, Le Duan and the other Vietnamese communists applied Mao's lessons in Vietnam where the rural peasantry made up some ninety percent of the population. Soldiers like Chau learned to consider the political consequences of their actions first and foremost. When they billeted in family homes, they followed Mao's dictum to "put back the doors" that were provided for beds and "tie up straws" that were offered as mattresses.

Chau fully accepted Mao's lesson that the success of the revolution lay in the hands of the people, but he never acquiesced to the mindless brutality and stifling party orthodoxy of the communist Vietminh. He witnessed the routine arrest and execution of civilians charged with "betraying the people." At one point he even watched helplessly as communist officials of a young female friend who had been sneaking food to her starving mother during the Vietminh siege of Dalat. Disillusioned Chau finally deserted the Vietminh in 1949. He remained a committed nationalist, first joining the forces supporting the independent Vietnamese

government of former emperor Bao Dai, and then, after the French withdrawal in the wake of Dien Bien Phu, he enlisted in Ngo Dinh Diem's new army. Diem's army was by that point being trained and financed by the United States. Through the 1950s, Chau received instruction in counterinsurgency techniques in the United States and British Malaya before returning home to apply them as a province minister in Kien Hoa, in the Mekong Delta. Remembering Mao's lessons, Chau made respect for the peasantry a cornerstone of his own version of a people's war in Kien Hoa's fight against the Vietcong.

Chau's Census-Grievance program was at the heart of his operations. It consisted of a formal census of the heads of households about local social, economic, and security conditions. Census-Grievance teams, recruited from the local population and gathered complaints about both the VC and the GVN, allowing Chau to custom design civic action plans, encourage citizen loyalty through responsive government, and leverage intelligence for surgical strikes against the VC. In 1965 Chau wrote a two volume rural development plan based on his experiences, and General Thang appointed him to a senior position in the Revolutionary Development Ministry. A year later Thang selected Chau to become the headmaster at Vung Tau, the rural development training center that the RD Cadre inherited from the CIA.

The first American advocates of the other war in Vietnam drew more on the revolutionary ideas of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson than Mao Zedong. Like Chau they had experience in the nationalist conflicts emerging during World War II and the early Cold War, but their concepts of counterinsurgency and nation building were rooted in western traditions. The first wave of American other warriors that included Everett Bumgardner, Rufus

Phillips, and others arrived in Vietnam to help Ngo Dinh Diem build a liberal, democratic, anticommunist political base strong enough to withstand Ho Chi Minh's forces. Among this group was Diem's closest American advisor and the United States' foremost pacification guru, Edward Lansdale.

Lansdale had been an up and coming advertising executive in San Francisco when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. With prior ROTC training and what he exaggeratedly called a "fair" control of French and Spanish, he was recruited by the Army's Military Intelligence Service and then the Office of Strategic Services. Spending much of the war learning and training others in spycraft, he took the opportunity to gain field experience on a special intelligence assignment to the Philippines in 1945.

Working as a military intelligence advisor, he led one of the first American Cold War initiatives in Asia, helping the newly independent Filipino armed forces confront the communist insurgency led by the People's Anti-Japanese Army, or Huk. Lansdale believed that the best way for the Filipinos to defeat the Huk guerillas was to deprive them of the people's support. By building strong liberal and representative institutions that were responsible to the people's needs, he argued, popular backing for the insurgency would disappear. Lansdale's strategy drew essentially on natural rights philosophy. Like Paine and Jefferson, he maintained that wars were justified by free men pursuing their basic liberty in the face of tyrannical governments. He also drew heavily on the Christian notion that "brotherly love" formed the basis of all legitimate social compacts.

Lansdale certainly held no illusions about the coercive force of military or economic power. Indeed he used them with abandon. He was perhaps best known for employing a cold,

calculated mix of practical joke and terrorism. In one instance, his commandoes killed a Huk scout near a communist occupied outpost. They punctured the scout's neck, drained his blood, and left his body on a trail for his compatriots to find. The superstitious Huk soldiers who found the bloodless body assumed an asuang, or vampire, was loose in the area and quickly abandoned the ground for government troops to capture. But such tactics were for Lansdale a means to an end. Long term success, he understood, had to be based on representative, liberal institutions. Lansdale's more significant contributions to other war strategy, therefore, arguably rested in his military reform and civic action programs. Lansdale established the crucial link between political loyalty and military success by first reforming the Filipino government's notoriously ill-disciplined military and promoting "brotherly behavior" between soldiers and civilians. He also helped institute a program called EDCOR, or Economic Development Corps, which established villages that grubstaked small farmers and were secured against Huk infiltration. As word spread, even Huk soldiers started laying down their arms and showing up at EDCOR offices asking how they could get a farm.

Lansdale brought the philosophy and innovative tactics from the Philippines to Vietnam as part of the CIA's Saigon Military Mission (SMM) in 1954. As he had in the Philippines, he began creating programs to build rural support for the fledgling Diem government. In central Vietnam, especially Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh Provinces, and in the deep south, in the Cau Mau peninsula, Lansdale's teams worked with South Vietnamese military officials indoctrinating Diem's soldiers in basic courtesy toward civilians and in economic and political development. As Vietminh soldiers withdrew to the North under the Geneva Accords, Lansdale's troops moved in with mosquito nets, medicine, infrastructure building dollars and the promise of liberty and modernization. The idea was to build a groundswell of support for Diem as the leader of a

responsible, representative government that could build into, in Mao's words, a national "willingness to risk all for freedom."

Over a two year period, Lansdale's SMM worked to build a political and military base of support for the South Vietnamese Government. In 1956, after the creation of a Constitution based on the Philippine model and successful elections of a new national assembly, he returned to the United States where he advised military and intelligence officials on pacification and counterinsurgency operations. What he had tried to build in Vietnam, meanwhile, faltered. The Diem regime, rather than embracing liberal democratic reforms including political freedom for opposition parties, alienated the rural population with the forced relocation in the Strategic Hamlet program and crackdowns on Buddhist political opposition figures. Diem's demise in 1963 ultimately revealed the still deeply divided loyalties of the South Vietnamese as well as the Americans.

Lansdale returned to Vietnam with Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge in 1965 to try once again to sell the other war to the South Vietnamese Government. Lodge put Lansdale in charge of a new interagency group made up of CIA, USIA, AID, State Department, and military officers that supported American pacification operations and advised General Thang's Rural Development Ministry. Conscious of his failure with Diem, Lansdale pushed hard for radical election reform and corruption abatement, adding his version of the people's war to the national strategic shift of 1965 and 1966.

Lansdale's populism, his radical faith in Vietnamese self-determination, and his tendency to cross bureaucratic lines made him something of a maverick. William Colby, who in many

ways filled Lansdale's shoes during his absence from Vietnam, was more of a company man. Like Lansdale, Colby's approach to the people's war drew essentially on American revolutionary philosophy. Also like Lansdale, Colby held a romantic view of himself as an American version of Lawrence of Arabia. But Colby, far more than Lansdale had been, was an insider and a political expert with the bureaucratic leverage that his experience as the CIA's Saigon Station Chief and then Head of the Far East Division afforded him. He was as influential in pushing the other war in Washington as Robert Komer, Chester Cooper or Robert Thompson. And he was respected in both Saigon and the Vietnamese countryside, as comfortable counseling Diem and Nhu as building self defense forces among the Central Highland montagnards.

Colby was raised an army brat. His father, Elbridge, was a full time army officer and part time academic, who demanded that his only son adopt the Baden Powell- Rudyard Kipling virtues of self-reliance, self-sacrifice, loyalty, perseverance, and thrift. His mother, Margaret, passed to her son a frontier spirit, impeccable manners, and unquestioning Catholicism. Bill spent his early years a child of the world, following Elbridge on assignments to Panama and China. By the time he was ready for high school, the Colby family settled in Vermont where Bill took up skiing and other outdoor activities and frequented the nearby historic battlefields, including Fort Ticonderoga. It was there that he first learned about Roger's Rangers, a small band of irregular infantry who carried out bloody raids behind enemy lines during the French and Indian War. An excellent student, Colby went to Princeton University where he majored in history and government. In the summer of 1939, before the start of his senior year, he travelled the French countryside, soaking up the language and culture but also bearing witness to the human toll taken by totalitarianism and war. With friends, he pedaled through the Pyrenees on

the French border with Spain where he met waves of refugees escaping the civil war raging to the west.

After graduating from Princeton, Bill applied to Columbia law school, was admitted, and began classes just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Colby dropped out of school to join the army. Recruited by the OSS for his French language skills, Colby became one of the famed jedburghs, dropping behind enemy lines to wreak havoc on the Nazis and aid the resistance movements in France and Sweden. After the war, he finished law school and went to work for OSS leader Bill Donovan's law firm. Bored, he joined the CIA in 1950 and spent the next three years establishing anti-communist stay-behind networks in Sweden. In 1954 he moved on to Italy where he supervised the agency's political operations.

By the time Colby arrived in Vietnam in 1959, the Diem regime was fully entrenched, though communist and non-communist challenges to his oppressive rule grew in number and kind. As deputy chief of station and then chief of station, Colby attempted to counter government opposition by organizing the first strategic hamlets and local strike forces among the Montagnards of the Central Highlands. Like Lansdale Colby drew inspiration from the American revolution, and he was well aware of his predecessors successes in the Philippines, but Colby's direct experience in political operations had been exclusively in Western Europe. In France, Sweden, and Italy, Colby's primary job had been to build political and military coalitions that could challenge first the Nazis and later the Communists. Colby hoped to do the same for Diem by finding common political and security interests among Vietnam's various religious sects and ethnic tribes. Colby based his operations on the concept of the three selves—self-defense, self-development, and self-government. He began experimenting in the Central Highlands among the montagnard communities in and around Ban Me Thout. At the time, Diem

and his brother had been planning to uproot the mountain people by force and turn their fields and villages over to lowland peasants and landowners who had demonstrated loyalty to the regime. Colby persuaded them instead to convert the rural tribesmen into an effective anti-communist bastion. He brought in Green Beret's to train the self-defense forces in basic military tactics as well as various civilian advisors to oversee the construction of schools and dispensaries. The Americans soon raised up a 600-man roving strike force and 3,600 village defenders in what the CIA called the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG).

Given the persecuted status of these aboriginal people, the CIDG initiative was a bit like George Washington trying to build the Continental Army around the Cherokee Nation. Moreover, the montagnards were not exactly representative of the mass rural peasantry at the heart of the political conflict. Nevertheless, Colby's three selfs caught on, even gaining the reluctant approval of Diem and Nhu. Several CIDG-like initiatives followed: the "Fighting Fathers and Sea Swallows," paramilitary bands of ethnic Chinese led by Catholic priests operating in the Mekong Delta; the "shrimp soldiers," a private army developed by a South Vietnamese businessman to protect his import business; the "Mountain Scouts," teams of Vietnamese and Cambodians living in Vietnam formed into squad-sized units whose task it was to interdict early infiltration routes into South Vietnam from Cambodia and Laos; and finally "strategic hamlets," the Diem regime's attempt to isolate the rural peasantry from guerilla influence.

In 1963 Colby's experiments came to an end. Under "Operation Switchback" the Defense Department took over all paramilitary operations in Vietnam. The CIA was forced to concentrate on pure intelligence matters, and under military leadership the "other war" was relegated to a secondary status. It would take Diem's death, Colby's promotion, and a full two

years to switch back “Switchback” and rebuild a national pacification and rural development initiative. Beginning in November and December 1964, Colby lobbied U.S. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy for a national, integrated, interagency, political action program that built on CIDG-like experiments being conducted in Quang Ngai, Long An, Binh Dinh, and Kien Hoa provinces. A year later Colby attended the Warrenton Virginia conference on pacification with Ed Lansdale, William Porter and a group of the most influential American other warriors working in Vietnam where he sold, among others, Chau’s Census Grievance concept as a model for a new national strategy. Colby’s campaign culminated at the February 1966 Honolulu Conference where President Johnson announced a new pacification initiative to save Vietnam.

Among the programs Colby advocated was Frank Scotton’s Political Action Teams. Scotton was part of a new generation of other warriors. Too young to have fought in World War II or Korea, this group of enthusiastic Cold War kids had risen in the ranks of Kennedy-era Foreign Service and Special Forces units. They arrived in Vietnam just as Diem’s assassination and Operation Switchback left a vacuum of power in the countryside. They shared Chau, Lansdale, and Colby’s philosophy and even modeled their programs after their predecessors’, but the new generation was young, aggressive, and determined to push the experiment farther.

Frank Scotton was a Bostonian, the son of a World War II soldier killed in the Battle of the Bulge. For his Irish-American family, there was no greater honor than to fight to defend one’s country. Scotton grew up hoping to emulate a heroic father that he never really knew. An excellent student, he was admitted to American University where he studied Chinese history and sociology. Among his professors was Bernard Schwartz, a leading authority on Chinese

Communism and the rise of Mao. Schwartz taught his young protégé the precepts of the people's war, but the ever restless Scotton hungered to see them applied. After graduating from American, he took and passed the demanding Foreign Service examination and opted for the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). Following intensive language training in Vietnamese, Scotton went to Vietnam in 1961 where he worked for the better part of the next fifteen years.

Rather than turning out brochures and communiqués like most of his colleagues, Scotton took advantage of the relative independence granted him by his boss, Everett Bumgardner. He went into the countryside alone, with a .45, a grease gun, and a bag of money. Scotton started in the central highlands arranging meetings with local officials and learning what he could about the Vietcong's people's war. He also met the wild group of multinational other warriors trying to pacify the highlands. In an abandoned shack near Anh Khe, he found Englishmen Dick Noone, Norman Hurbold, and a group of Malaysians. Noone was especially interesting. His brother Pat had been an anthropologist in Malaya and the originator of Senoi Dream Theory, which held that the tribemen's collective dream world could be shaped to influence group solidarity. Dick Noone had worked in Malaya shaping the dreams of the once peaceful Orang Asli aborigines, organizing them into the Senoi Praaq, a police unit noted for its ruthless slaughter of captured Communist guerillas. Noone convinced Scotton that his biggest problem in persuading the rural Vietnamese and montagnards to brave the jungle and kill the VC was that he had not done it himself. The American immediately took the advice to heart: "Whoever dared the vacuum, could control the vacuum."

Determined to earn the respect of the people he intended to recruit, the novice disappeared into the jungle, alone. He slept by day and laid ambush by night. Unsure who was VC and who was not, he let several armed, black pajama-clad Vietnamese pass by without

confrontation. After a few days of this, he encountered Nai Luett, a CIA trained special forces operative who was hunting VC in the area. Luett told Scotton in no uncertain terms that any ethnic Vietnamese he encountered on the trails in the highlands at night were VC. He then handed Scotton a World War I bayonet and told him that if he carried it, the local montagnards would recognize it as the sign of a VC killer and an ally. Luett then disappeared back into the jungle. By the end of his first week in the vacuum, Scotton had killed more than a half dozen VC guerrillas.

Having established his credentials, Scotton began organizing “armed propaganda teams.” The idea was to apply Mao’s tactics in fighting against the VC. Scotton’s units essentially replicated roving bands VC political cadre, literally fighting the communists on their own turf, using some their own methods but with a liberal, modernist twist. He and his units became famous as ruthless ambushers as well as community benefactors who built schools and hospitals. Scotton out-organized and out-propagandized the VC who lived and worked in the same districts and often the same villages. The more he succeeded in building local anticommunist political and military strength; however, the more the Diem regime felt threatened. To Diem greater rural autonomy meant greater potential political opposition. During the Buddhist crisis of 1963, Scotton was in Qui Nhon working with Buddhist groups to build a local political base. Along with several Buddhist activists, the Diem government added Scotton’s name to a secret hit list. Bumgardner caught wind of the government’s intention and moved Scotton to Dalat to lay low. Weeks later Diem was assassinated.

Over the next year, with no stable government in Saigon, in the midst of the Switchback transition, and still months away from the huge American military escalation, Scotton set out to prove to the American mission and the ruling military junta that Diem had grossly overstated the

degree of government control in the countryside and underestimated the need to gain peasant loyalty. Bumgardner and Henry Cabot Lodge, then in his stint as ambassador, allowed Scotton test his theory in Long An. Situated just south of Saigon, Long An had a significant Vietcong presence. U.S. advisers were being shot at on a daily basis, and most of the strategic hamlets had been dismantled. Fortunately for Scotton, the province chief in Long An, was Le Minh Do, an experienced soldier and a committed reformer. Scotton told Do that he wanted to organize a series of six-man teams. He and Do recruited policemen, civilians, aid workers, local self-defense troops, and former Vietminh. Clad in civilian clothes, squad members carried handguns for protection but concealed them so that villagers would not perceive them as a coercive force. They moved from village to village surveying every family before moving on. The teams learned the attitude of the people toward both the VC and the GVN and made sketch maps of streams, vegetation, bridges and other landscape features. They treated villagers with respect and slept in the field, a bold move that not even indigenous South Vietnamese soldiers attempted.

After only a few months, Scotton's survey had caught the attention of officials leading all branches of the civilian and military advisory effort. In April 1964, Scotton took his Long An experiment to Quang Ngai where he joined USOM and CIA officers in forming 15 man People's Action Teams (PAT). A year later, Scotton extended his range to Binh Dinh where he worked with Nguyen Be in creating mobile teams on the Quang Ngai model. As his programs expanded, Scotton met and befriended Tran Ngoc Chau. Indeed Scotton was among those who encouraged Chau to take a job in Thang's RD ministry, and Chau encouraged Thang to adopt Scotton's People's Action Teams as a framework for the RD Cadre being trained at Vung Tau. Scotton

also met and befriended Bill Colby who made the People's Action Teams a centerpiece of his arguments for a new pacification strategy.

Douglas Ramsey first met Frank Scotton at a briefing in Qui Nhon. Ramsey was assigned to assume Scotton's post as the city's pacification advisor after Scotton received a death threat from the Diem government. He did not stay long. Only a few weeks later, the coup toppling Diem caused a reshuffling of American advisory assignments throughout the country. Ramsey was brought back to Saigon to serve as a security officer in the U.S. Embassy until another post came open. Scotton, meanwhile, began building his Long An teams. Scotton remembered Ramsey's commitment, his intelligence, and his potential as a counterinsurgency/pacification operative and brought him on board. Scotton assigned Ramsey to a survey team sounding out secondary students in Long An schools.

Ramsey was a raw-boned westerner who had grown up on the rim of the Grand Canyon, an avid outdoorsman, who loved to hike, rock climb, and kayak. His father was a railroad laborer turned government worker, his mother a house wife. Born during the depth of the Depression, Ramsey grew up too poor to anticipate going to college, but he was a genius. His perfect scores on the College Board exams gained him entry and financial aid first to Occidental College and then to Harvard Graduate School. In between classes with Henry Kissinger and Richard Neustadt, Ramsey stood for the Foreign Service Exam. He was well on his way to earning his Ph.D. in political science, when the Foreign Service informed him that he had to report for duty or forget a career in diplomacy. Ramsey dropped out of school, took intensive Vietnamese at the Foreign Service language school, and departed for Vietnam in 1963.

Working with the Long An teams, Ramsey received an education in winning Vietnamese hearts and minds. The students he interviewed revealed some basic truths. First, local conditions varied widely, and one could not easily generalize about attitudes across the province. The one universal, however, was that the GVN soldiers, government officials, and policies were as unappealing to the people as the VC, frequently more so. Second, he learned that before the coup against Diem, most of those surveyed predicted that the VC were going to win. The Communists, on this crucial psychological front, were winning the war. Finally, for the most part, people appeared to be neutral in their political ideology. They were “caught in the middle,” as Ramsey put it. Their primary motivations were grounded in the practical daily struggle for survival rather than grand social and economic philosophy.

After a year in Long An, Ramsey took what he learned to Hau Nghia where he was assigned to assist John Paul Vann, the province adviser. Hau Nghia was situated between Saigon and the Cambodian border and was at the time listed as the second most insecure province in Vietnam. VC cadre moved in and out of most villages at will, and VC main force units regularly attacked local defense force outposts. Vann and Ramsey started with the basics: they drove the roads and visited even the most remote villages. They then built schools and hospitals, provided agricultural aid, and recruited local defense forces. Soon they had proved to the people that there were real alternatives to both VC and GVN control. With Hau Nghia added to the experiments in Long An, Binh Dinh, Quang Ngai, and Kien Hoa, pacification and counterinsurgency strategy was starting to gel under the leadership of what Ramsey called the “radical wing of the Lansdale faction.”

But Ramsey’s first months in Hau Nghia were also the months that U.S. ground troops began arriving in Vietnam and Westmoreland introduced his attrition strategy. The

Americanization of the war in 1965 created a dilemma for the “Lansdale faction.” Almost to a man, they agreed that had not President Lyndon Johnson acted, South Vietnam would surely have fallen to the communists, but Westmoreland’s war of attrition was a rigid, unwieldy strategy that did not permit adaptation to varying local conditions, ignored the Maoist roots of the VC’s operation, failed to take into account the complex political and cultural divisions in Vietnam, and could be easily cited as evidence of American imperialism. Scotton, Ramsey, Vann, Bumgardner, and a member of Lansdale’s team just arrived in country, Daniel Ellsberg, who all worked in provinces neighboring Saigon, were able to meet often for dinner and bull sessions. The group concluded that Westmoreland’s strategy would lose the war. While Westmoreland appreciated to some degree what the pacification people were doing, as long as he considered their efforts to be just a sideshow, the other warriors anticipated defeat.

Frustrated, the group decided in the fall of 1965 to make the case to the U.S. Mission in Saigon for a renewed emphasis on counterinsurgency and pacification. Summed up by John Paul Vann in a paper called “Harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam,” they attacked the notion of attrition. Between 1960 and 1964, they argued, the enemy had perceived the Clausewitzian center of gravity to be the rural population of South Vietnam. With communist cadre increasingly active and effective in the countryside, the Lao Dong (the Vietnamese Communist Party) had then ordered the NVA, whose first elements appeared in the south in 1964, and the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN or VC) to concentrate on ARVN and the tenuous South Vietnamese political structure. They had been largely successful. The U.S. buildup had helped to keep the government from collapsing, but now the group contended, the Americans and South Vietnamese had to shift their focus back to the countryside. The current emphasis on conventional warfare would just not cut it. According to their math, the North

Vietnamese could reproduce and conscript at a faster rate than the Americans and their ARVN allies could kill. Moreover, the enemy had nationalism on their side. As Scotton observed, the communists were “imbued with an almost sacred sense of mission.” The Vietcong generation’s mission was “to unify the country and expel the foreign presence.” Instead of search and destroy missions operating out of fixed camps, they recommended encadrement – the intermingling of American and ARVN troops - at every level and the abandonment of fixed positions. They wanted soldiers living and working among the people. Finally, they argued that combat had to take a back seat to political conversion. There would be physical security in the provinces, but it must involve local forces defending their communities and sharing in their own political future.

The missile appealed to Henry Cabot Lodge in Saigon and to Bill Colby at his desk at the Far East division back in Washington, but the Defense and State Departments with the new Ky and Thieu government by mid-1965 were running the show. The Defense Department believed that the Ramsey-Scotton-Vann-Bumgardner-Ellsberg plan would undercut Westmoreland, and both State and Saigon thought it would undermine the authority of the central government. Indeed, McNamara, Rusk, the Joint Chiefs, Westmoreland, and Thieu increasingly viewed the other warriors as nothing less than subversives, Lansdale stay-behinds.

Jean “Andre” Sauvageot left the reservation the moment he arrived in Saigon in August 1964. He stepped off the plane to a giant pep rally given by the new American commanding general in Vietnam, William Westmoreland. Westmoreland announced to the troops, “We are going to win this war by working sixty hours a week.” Sauvageot, as zealous an anticommunist and gung-ho soldier that there was in the army, recalled that “even then it seemed like bullshit.”

Sauvageot entered the army in July 1956. He trained as an infantryman and then attended airborne and ranger school. Like most of his peers, Sauvageot believed that professional military officers had a moral obligation to volunteer for whatever war the United States was then fighting. Also like most of his peers, he believed firmly in the existence of a Sino-Soviet threat to Vietnam and in the domino theory.

After a few weeks in Saigon, Sauvageot found himself in My Tho, where he expected that he would lead a ranger battalion. He reported to the U.S. army colonel in the city who was then serving as an adviser to the 7th ARVN division. The colonel was busy filling a number of new slots. He told Sauvageot that the 7th had only one ranger battalion, and it already had a full complement of officers. “You have two choices,” the colonel told him. “You can be an adviser to a regular ARVN battalion, or you can be an adviser to a district chief.” Sauvageot chose the district job believing that it would afford him more hands-on experience.

Out of district headquarters in Tan Hiep, he spent most of his first year working with the Ruff Puffs, or RF (Regional Forces) PF (Popular Forces). In post-Diem Vietnam, the Ruff Puffs constituted the principal self-defense and pacification forces in the countryside. On patrols with the RF/PF, Sauvageot immediately came to two firm conclusions. He needed to learn the Vietnamese language, and the people shooting at him were all locals, not invading soldiers from the north as his superiors had told him. Sauvageot bribed an interpreter away from a nearby advisory team and paid the man to give him private, intensive language lessons during the evenings. He then talked to as many villagers as he could. He soon discovered that he was in the middle of what was best described as a “family fight.” The PF and RF soldiers in his company invariably had family members who were VC, and their choice to follow the GVN rather than the communists had as much to do with chance and circumstance as ideology.

Among Sauvageot's many duties was to oversee the resupply of remote PF outposts in contested territory. Though his role was mainly administrative, he occasionally called in artillery coordinates from a two-seat Army L-19 escorting resupply convoys. On one such mission, Sauvageot's plane was shadowing a squad of Popular Forces from about a thousand feet. As the soldiers approached a cluster of houses in an area that had been marked on the map as thoroughly VC dominated, he spotted a group of young men with their shirts off. His squad was clearly in danger, but the houses were likely sheltering elders, children, and wives. If he called in artillery strikes on noncombatants, the GVN could never win the loyalty of the people from the VC. Against regulations, Sauvageot asked the pilot to descend for a closer look. Suddenly the bare-chested youths pulled out carbines and opened up. Sauvageot was hit in both arms. Luckily his bleeding was venal rather than arterial, the pilot was unscathed, and though riddled with bullets, the plane still flew. Sauvageot insisted on completing his mission before being flown to the hospital in My Tho. The army debated for weeks whether to give him a medal or a court martial.

Sauvageot soon recovered and returned to his district field operations. The wounds healed nicely, but the trauma had changed him. He could have easily avoided the danger and just called in an air strike, like almost anyone else in his position would have done, but he had committed himself to the idea that the only way to win the war to put the lives of the people, even his enemies, above his own and his men. Coming out of the hospital, he quietly vowed that he would never fire his weapon at a Vietnamese person.

Sauvageot kept his promise, even after he received orders to join one of Frank Scotton's teams in Long An. Scotton needed Vietnamese speakers and Sauvageot had already developed a reputation as an enthusiastic and accomplished linguist. Scotton also needed men who could

stand up under fire. The man he wanted Sauvageot to replace had become spooked during his first sortie with a survey team when a nearby VC unit called out on bullhorns to their Vietnamese brothers: "Give us the American and we'll let you go." Sauvageot spent the next six months leading survey teams in Long An and thoroughly enjoyed it. Like the others, he carried a pistol under the black pajamas he wore, but he told the team of mostly Vietnamese in their own language: "Toi khong ban sung moi nguoi," "I'm not going to shoot anyone." The team would instead trust the people to help them avoid VC ambushes. They never suffered a casualty.

Through 1965 Sauvageot's reputation in other war circles grew. His mastery of the language, knowledge of the people, and commitment to work as the only American on his team allowed him to operate in VC held territory, places most Vietnamese and no American dared go. His access to the countryside and his willingness to accept that sanction for his operations would be denied by the United States government if he were ever shot or captured also appealed to his superiors. By the time the effort to establish a nationally coordinated pacification strategy began maturing, Sauvageot's work was legendary. Many suspected he had gone native, but no one questioned his commitment. Because of his unique rapport with the Vietnamese, in the late spring of 1966, the CIA recruited Sauvageot to handle an increasingly prickly situation at the RD Cadre training center at Vung Tau.

Sauvageot arrived at Vung Tau to find the school in crisis. The commandant of the training center at the time was ARVN Major Le Xuan Mai. Mai was experienced and competent but also a clandestine organizer for the Dai Viet political party and on the CIA payroll. Both affiliations bothered his boss, Cadre Division chief and veteran other warrior, Tran Ngoc Chau. The fiercely independent Chau had chafed at his job from start. He no longer had the independence he had at Kien Hoa and had no confidence that his boss, Minister Thang,

understood pacification. He was also concerned that Thang and Vung Tau had become too dependent on the CIA and Mai was using the school to recruit cadre to join the Dai Viet. With the support of John Vann and many of the other warriors, Chau pressed the ministry for new leadership. Chau persuaded Thang to appoint Lieutenant Colonel Le Van Tinh commandant, but both the CIA and Mai supporters at the training center refused to submit to his authority. At that point Chau convinced Thang to name him commandant.

Sauvageot remembered the day Chau came in to take over at Vung Tau as “very dicey.” Chau was supposed to arrive at the Lam Son camp, the largest of the three that made up the Vung Tau complex, where he was to address the instructors. The auditorium was full, with Sauvageot, the only American present, seated in the front row. The new commandant’s address was scheduled to begin at 9:00 a.m., but the hour came and went with no sign of Chau.

Although Sauvageot did not know it, Nung guards posted at the school gates, loyal to Mai and the CIA, were preventing him from entering. Suddenly, inside the auditorium, a group of cadre, stormed the stage, and announced the appointment of a struggle committee to oppose the takeover by the Ministry of Rural Development and Chau. To boisterous applause, they announced their plan. They would make an appeal to the American embassy to keep things as they were at the same time they sent a formal protest to Thang; if these initiatives failed, they promised, armed struggle would follow. After several tension-filled minutes, Mai came in, and the room fell silent. The coup leaders asked the lone American, Sauvageot, to make some remarks. Reluctantly, Sauvageot took the microphone. “This is a family matter,” he declared. “I am an American adviser working for the U.S. government. The reason for my presence, for the presence of the U.S. government, is to enable the people of Vietnam to be free from a communist takeover. That’s it. We cannot by law or policy get involved in internal conflicts.

We are friends to all of you. Our enemy is the communist monolith in Hanoi, Moscow, and Beijing.” Sauvageot’s remarks evoked neither protest nor applause, just the response he had hoped for.

Over the following days, Sauvageot helped negotiate a peaceful transition of power. Mai was persuaded to leave, and Chau assumed command. All of the signs in the complex were subsequently changed from English to Vietnamese, and the new commandant replaced the CIA’s Nung guards with ethnic Vietnamese. The CIA complained to Thang, causing Bill Colby, a long-time Chau admirer, to admit that the commandant was “too much the mandarin.” Without the support of the CIA, Chau lasted only a few months; he resigned from ARVN and returned to Kien Hoa to run for the lower house of the National Assembly. He was replaced at Vung Tau by Major Nguyen Be. Sauvageot remembered Be as “a brilliant commandant of that training center” who “really firmed up South Vietnamese government control” at Vung Tau. CIA officers remembered Be as a “hypersensitive” nationalist who was “even more prickly and unyielding than Chau.”

The debate raging at Vung Tau over Vietnamese versus American control of the facility was one of several issues that plagued the other warriors just as they reached a critical mass of support for a new national strategy emphasizing the “people’s war.” Corruption and nepotism were constant impediments to cooperation among the GVN ministries. This was especially true as separate factions supporting Prime Minister Ky, who controlled rural development through Ministry appointments like Thang’s, and President Thieu, the Commander and Chief of the South Vietnamese armed forces, struggled for power. Ministry officials like Chau who was a

friend of Thieu but appointed by Ky found themselves in a particularly precarious political position. Interagency rivalry also tormented the Americans. Bill Colby's CIA, Frank Scotton's USOM, Doug Ramsey's State Department, and Jean Sauvageot's MACV bickered over control of pacification as it became increasingly apparent that central coordination would end organizational autonomy. And important advisors who were unaffiliated with a specific bureaucracy, like Ed Lansdale, were trampled as the various other war agencies fought for control.

The infighting was only partially a bureaucratic power struggle. Fundamental ideological differences also divided the other warriors. While they all agreed on the need for a more rice roots, politically oriented effort to defeat the Vietcong, specific implementation exposed philosophical rifts. Douglas Ramsey and Tran Ngoc Chau were willing to accept socialism as a viable economic system in South Vietnam. Edward Lansdale was less willing. Bill Colby pushed the GVN hierarchy to adopt gradual reform efforts where Ramsey and Frank Scotton called for more rapid revolutionary changes and an alternative "third force" government. Jean Sauvageot and Chau argued that the war was essentially a family fight that in the end would be settled by the Vietnamese without foreign intervention, where Ramsey and Scotton accepted far more intrusive American efforts. Lansdale and Colby invested heavily in Vietnamese strongmen they believed could establish a popular South Vietnamese government. Ramsey, Sauvageot, and Scotton never trusted the despotic rulers in Saigon and sought more rural representation and more decentralized structures. Frank Scotton accepted ruthless tactics as necessary to defeat the communists. Andre Sauvageot believed peaceful persuasion held the only path to victory.

Rational civic planning would have been difficult even under the best circumstances, but the philosophical, cultural, political and bureaucratic infighting made it even harder. When the

chaos of war in South Vietnam was added, order and predictability became nearly impossible. Communist leaders also had an uncanny knack for mobilizing forces in ways that compounded the political factionalism and strategic indecisiveness of the anticommunist allies. Following Diem's death, for example, Hanoi went on the offensive, building both conventional and guerilla forces in the South, remaining patient in anticipation of a protracted war but also looking for opportunities to deliver a final blow to South Vietnam. Hanoi's strategy recognized and exploited the fundamental political weaknesses of allied strategy. In the countryside, they specifically targeted pacification operations and effectively propagandized the American military escalation as imperialist and neo-colonial.

As the new province adviser in Hau Nghia, Douglas Ramsey was well aware of the problems posed by the communist initiatives. Hau Nghia, situated between Saigon and the Cambodian border, was by early 1966 the second most insecure province in South Vietnam. VC cadre moved in and out of most villages at will, and VC main force units regularly attacked RD and PF outposts.

Ramsey had taken over operations in Hau Nghia in late 1965 and since then had been working without an assistant. His only companion on his trips around the province was his Vietnamese driver. Late afternoon on January 17 found the two men racing a truckload of rice down a four mile stretch of dirt road leading to Trung Lap village in Cu Chi District. The fighting in the area had been intense of late with the U.S. First Infantry Division and VC main force units trading body blows prior to the customary Tet cease-fire. The rice was for refugees fleeing the battles. Vann had taught Ramsey that the best way to avoid ambush was to drive as

fast as he could; the road to Trung Lap was notoriously hazardous running as it did through a region honeycombed with VC tunnels. With dusk coming on – the night still belonged to the enemy - Ramsey was in a special hurry to get to a safe area.

Just a mile from the village center and a U.S. command post, four local peasants opened fire from the side of the road. The Vietnamese driver took a bullet in the leg, panicked, spun the truck to a halt, and stalled the engine. Ramsey shouldered the AR-15 Vann had told him to keep in his lap when riding shotgun, and emptied a clip blindly out the window. Return fire punctured a can of diesel oil under his feet spraying its contents all over his face. Unable to effectively defend himself, he yelled in Vietnamese, “Toi dau hang! (“I surrender!”).

Scotton and John Paul Vann launched a frantic search for Ramsey, but he had disappeared into the jungle with his captors. They were forced to accept that Ramsey would likely remain in a prison camp for the rest of the war, and the best chance for their friend was to end the war as quickly as possible. They hoped that the new comprehensive other war strategy could overcome philosophical differences and interagency bickering to accomplish just that.

Ramsey’s capture came just weeks before support for the other war achieved critical mass. Following the Honolulu Conference in February 1966, President Johnson appointed William Porter to oversee a full scale pacification reorganization effort in Vietnam, and he assigned Robert Komer to act as a special pacification “lord high needler” in Washington. Porter oversaw the creation of the Office of Civil Operations to coordinate pacification efforts under civilian command. Slow progress in staffing and funding, poor coordination between American and South Vietnamese officials, and constant turf battles between civilian and military

bureaucracies plagued OCO throughout its only year of existence. OCO's failure, however, taught Robert Komer essential lessons that he would use in developing OCO's replacement, Civil Operations and Rural Development or CORDS. Better funded and staffed, CORDS unified all American military and civilian pacification operations under a single chain of command with Komer at its head. CORDS field advisors worked directly with local South Vietnamese officials while Komer and his top deputies pushed the RD ministry leaders to implement more aggressive policies. In many ways, CORDS was the national, unified effort the other warriors had been working for.

CORDS's first class of officers arrived in Vietnam just as the Tet attacks of 1968 changed the political and military realities of the war. Contrary to MACV and GVN promises of mounting success, the Tet offensive proved that the communists were far from being defeated. American public support for the war dwindled and pushed the Johnson administration to consider preparations for withdrawal and Vietnamization. Many of the other warriors who had invested so much in building Vietnamese political will were disheartened to find their own countrymen's so lacking. Yet at the same time, Tet offered an unprecedented opportunity for the other warriors to seize the initiative in the people's war. The VC troops leading the offensive were decimated as the American and South Vietnamese soldiers held their ground. Many of the leaders of the communist infrastructure were killed or publicly exposed. Here was the opportunity for CORDS to fill the vacuum in the countryside, but speed was essential. If the other warriors could not seize the initiative in the people's war and show results that could quickly restore American confidence, their cause was lost.

Bill Colby returned to Saigon aboard Pan American Flight 2 on March 2, 1968, just after Tet. Robert Komer had insisted that Colby be named his second-in-command. As head of the

CIA's Far East Division Colby had played a crucial role in lobbying for the creation of CORDS and impressed Komer with his passion and knowledge. One of Colby's first forays out of the capital upon his return to Vietnam was a visit John Paul Vann who was then heading up the pacification effort in the delta. Attacks prior to Tet had wreaked havoc on an already shaky pacification structure there. In several provinces, including Long An, not a single village was rated "safe," but the VC losses had shifted the balance. With Vann's advice and support, Colby outlined a program for a "peoples' war" based on the "3 S's – Self Help, Self Defense, Self Government." Colby also pressed for a rural offensive using the new Phoenix program, the operation designed to root out and eliminate the VC infrastructure. Under Phoenix, the former Jedburgh coordinated both Provincial Reconnaissance Units to carry out snatch and grab missions and a contingent of lawyers to teach the Vietnamese how to prepare police dossiers against suspected VC.

Colby knew it was crucial to fill the power vacuum Tet had left in the countryside. Convincing Thieu, however, would not be easy. GVN forces had pulled back from outlying areas to protect the cities during Tet. Thieu was reluctant to leave the urban centers vulnerable. Making matters worse for Colby, talk of Vietnamization left the South Vietnamese head of state wondering if the Americans could really be counted on for support. Colby also had to contend credibility gap. Even if he convinced Thieu to move in and actually control the countryside, the general loss of faith in Saigon and Washington's official assessments would make it difficult to convince the public and the press of success. Finally Thieu had no intention of allowing pacification to lead to a populist revolution. If the Americans wanted to fight the VC for peasant loyalty, he would let them, so long as it did not produce a rural political opposition.

Thieu blocked deployment into the countryside for months, and when he did, it was more in the form of occupation than pacification. By mid-summer, Colby and then CORDS director Bob Komer managed only to get Thieu to agree to appointments, not elections, of new province chiefs who were given primary control of the Rural Development Cadre. Thieu also kept a close watch on Phoenix, putting his loyal Interior Minister, Tran Thien Khiem, in charge. The Central Revolutionary Development Council, the South Vietnamese counterpart to CORDS, meanwhile, continued to employ no staff and met irregularly. It would be a full six months after Tet, too late to capitalize on VC losses, for Thieu to finally sign off on the Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC), a plan proposed by Colby to pacify 1000 new hamlets and meet new Phoenix quotas for eliminating VC Infrastructure. Thieu accepted APC only after it was stripped of political development components. The Hamlet Evaluation System, used to measure pacification success, was pared of all social development and political indicators. The result was that APC turned into a South Vietnamese army land grab to be used as leverage in cease-fire negotiations. Colby, Thieu, and CORDS thus abandoned the political war just as the Communists, so weakened militarily by Tet, settled for an essentially political approach in the South.

The abandoning of political development in the wake of Tet marked a significant turning point in the other war. It was here that many of the other warriors' hopes turned to disillusionment. Jean Sauvageot who had signed on in 1967 to act as the CORDS liaison with the Prime Minister's office, worked directly for Colby on special assignments and as an interpreter. Frank Scotton, who had left Vietnam to go to a Taiwanese language study program after a brief stint with CORDS in 1967, returned to work with Ev Bumgardner on Colby's anti-corruption investigation team in 1969. By the beginning of the APC campaign, neither man had any confidence in Thieu or the new Nixon administration and told Colby repeatedly that the war was

no longer winnable. Colby continued to insist that Thieu could come around. Once security was better established in the rural areas, the government could still be convinced to accept political action. Sauvageot and Scotton had continued to see the day to day corruption in Saigon and the deterioration of support for the GVN in the countryside. Their optimism had run out. They still respected Colby, accepted his need to compromise with Thieu, and were even jealous of the CORDS chief's optimism. They would stay and do what they could for CORDS, but both voted absentee for George McGovern and his platform of rapid American withdrawal from Vietnam.

Ed Lansdale's hopes were also dashed on the rocks of political and military reality. Since his return to Vietnam in 1965, Lansdale worked for Ambassador Lodge as a "Special Liaison Officer" for pacification. He befriended Ky, Thang, and even eventually Thieu and fostered greater pacification cooperation with Vietnamese leadership, but Lansdale's call for rural representation threatened Saigon's power. Moreover, among the Americans, Lansdale was a king without a kingdom. Lansdale attempts at interagency cooperation made as many enemies as friends, as USIA, AID, JUSPAO, MACV, State Department, and CIA officials jealously guarded their bureaucratic fiefdoms. Many of his fellow other warriors, including Colby and Komer, agreed with Lansdale's basic call for rice roots reform, but in building CORDS, they rivaled Lansdale for pacification leadership. Lansdale stayed on as a special advisor when Ellsworth Bunker replaced Lodge as ambassador in 1967, but the establishing of CORDS had reduced his job to tutoring Bunker on recent Vietnamese political history and holding get to know you sessions with Vietnamese officials at his house. The final straw came with Tet. The offensive and allied unwillingness to seize the initiative afterward added to Lansdale's resolve that he could do little to change the war. Like Lyndon Johnson had two months before, he decided that his time was up. He returned to the United States in June, 1968.

The other warriors' struggle to rectify their faith in the people's war with the realization of allied crisis of will following Tet lay at the heart of their tragedy in Vietnam. Sauvageot's and Scotton's disillusionment and Lansdale's resignation were testament, but Douglas Ramsey's and Tran Ngoc Chau's stories probed the depths of the catastrophe. Under very different circumstances, Ramsey and Chau continued through the early 1970s to wrestle with the consequences of their personal commitments to a rural political revolution that simply would not ignite. The peoples' war, the thing that promised to set Vietnam free, literally and metaphorically imprisoned them both.

Suffering from terrible neglect, overwork, and periodic starvation, Doug Ramsey moved in and out of six different camps along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border over a seven year period. Sixty different members of the Liberation Front guarded, interrogated, and supervised him during his imprisonment. Some were country boys from the delta or the highlands, some were veteran Vietminh, a few were urban intellectuals, his last camp commandant a physics professor at the University of Hanoi before the war. Ramsey's fluency in Vietnamese and his innate curiosity kept him alive and provided him with some of the most unusual and fascinating relationships of the war. The more Ramsey learned from his captors, the more he accepted that Vietnam had to follow its fate independent of American interests. He remained committed to democratic, representative, rice roots institutions and resisted his interrogators' pressure to persuade him of communist interpretations of American and South Vietnamese motivations, but he admitted, reluctantly and with permanent feelings of guilt, that corruption in the South Vietnamese government and overwrought American intervention were insurmountable barriers to a stable Vietnamese future. "Instead of solid, honest, civilian democratic modernizers," he

told his captors, the Americans had supported “traditional bribe-soliciting and patronage dispensing military politicians like Nguyen van Thieu and eminence grises like Tran Thien Khiem - - plus all their bag men.” “Instead of socialist-leaning counterinsurgency and village administration experts like Tran Ngoc Chau,” the people were represented by “mercurial egoists like Nguyen Cao Ky and city-oriented factional manipulators like Nguyen Khanh.”

Ramsey kept abreast of CORDS and major changes in the war through his fellow prisoners and Radio Hanoi. His captors followed Tet attentively on the radio within earshot. Though communist censors played up VC victories and downplayed allied resistance, Ramsey heard enough of western sources in the broadcasts to grasp the effect Tet had on American public opinion. The attack had clearly been a surprise in most areas, and the people in the South were no more providing useful intelligence on VC activity than they had been in 1965. Ramsey concluded that “the cost of permanently pacifying the country was beyond our willingness, if not our absolute capacity, to bear.” The United States and the hollow government it supported in Saigon had lost the support of both the American public and the South Vietnamese peasantry. For a natural rights revolutionary like Ramsey, this meant his cause had lost “the mandate of heaven.”

From afar, and in a very different setting, Ramsey concluded from Tet what Scotton and Sauvageot had, that the popular political will necessary to save South Vietnam could not be rallied by the Nixon and Thieu administrations. Years of illness and near starvation in prison had taken little of Ramsey’s intellect; his powers of observation and analysis about the war, even based on fragmentary evidence, were acute. His insight, though, further imprisoned him. The realization of the lost cause left him psychologically fractured. Everything he had fought for, the faith that had driven him to risk death and suffer imprisonment, had done nothing for the

Vietnamese. His will to survive fell to its lowest point in captivity. Coming to terms with a probable communist fate for Vietnam was the only way he would stay alive.

Convinced that the United States had taken too great a role in the war and that the promise of South Vietnamese nationalism built on a foundation of freedom and democracy had been too long delayed, Tran Ngoc Chau decided to run for the National Assembly. In 1967, Chau, despite the efforts of the incumbent province chief to defraud him, won a seat in the National Assembly representing Hau Nghia. In the same elections General Nguyen Van Thieu emerged to push Nguyen Cao Ky into a vice presidential role. The Thieu-Ky ticket won but with only 35% of the vote. A neutralist finished second with 19% and was immediately thrown in jail, accused of being an NLF collaborator. The election proved to be a democratic aberration. The military regime in Saigon grew even more aloof from the ninety percent of the Vietnamese who lived in the provinces, and it practiced corruption on a scale that boggled the mind.

By the time Chau was sworn in, Thieu had put together a bloc of supporters which included some 60 deputies, in the process reducing his arch-rival, Ky's contingent to 15. Chau supported his old classmate, Thieu, against Ky but insisted on retaining his independence. Slowly, gradually he began to recruit deputies and prominent anti-communists outside the assembly to his cause. "So there were those of us," Chau wrote, "who felt that while South Vietnam needed U.S. support, the presence and influence of the Americans should be reduced to the necessary minimum...South Vietnamese leadership should be accepted by, and responsible to the grass-roots people, either through a genuinely democratic system or some form of consensus arrangement. The present situation, with a façade of democracy masking what was

essentially the dictatorship of a military junta only discredited the cause of freedom..." And Chau had become a convert to the cause of peace. "I felt that our government and the Americans should be trying to end the war, not escalate it." In Thieu's eyes this was a profoundly subversive philosophy.

Beginning in 1969, rumors abounded that Chau was going to be assassinated or at least arrested and imprisoned. John Paul Vann sent an urgent message to Frank Scotton who was then in northeast Thailand trying to gather intelligence on an incipient communist uprising. "You've got to come back and persuade Chau to flee," Vann said. By this time, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker had allowed himself to be convinced by the ambitious CIA station chief, Ted Shackley, that Chau was a communist agent. Bunker had summoned Vann and told him to stay completely away from Chau. The ambassador did not think to mention Scotton.

When Scotton arrived in Saigon, he went immediately to Chau's house. "Are you and Vann going to stand by and allow Bunker and the CIA to sell me down the river?" Chau asked. There was nothing they could do, Scotton replied. They had tried. But the Embassy including the CIA and even Bill Colby had decided to stick with Thieu and the generals. In the end the American power structure could not be persuaded to back a subversive political movement no matter how populist or popular. Scotton said that he had a Special Forces sergeant, Lonnie Johnson, standing by who was ready to smuggle Chau across the border into Cambodia. "No, Chau said," my destiny is here."

In 1970 President Thieu ordered Chau arrested. Chau was tried and convicted of collaborating with the communists. The government's principal piece of evidence was Chau's meetings with his brother Hien, a North Vietnamese intelligence agent. Chau protested that the

CIA had known about and encouraged the contacts, but Shackley and Tom Donohue, the CIA advisor at Vung Tau, denied any knowledge.

Distraught over Chau's imprisonment and his treatment at the hands of the Americans, Daniel Ellsberg, who had returned to the United States after Tet, secretly purloined the Pentagon Papers. Andre Sauvageot, newly married to a Vietnamese woman, agonized over Thieu's action against Chau but once again left the family squabble to the Vietnamese. Doug Ramsey heard about the arrest on his guards' radio and abandoned whatever hope he had left that South Vietnam could survive. Colby, ever the good soldier, supported his government's decision to back Thieu.

The other warriors' struggle to win the hearts and minds of the rural peasantry was ultimately a test of faith. It was a faith that liberal democratic institutions were not just the ideological ends but also the practical means of Vietnamese independence. Their war transcended territorial control and destruction of enemy forces; it was about engaging the Vietnamese people's will to fight for their own liberty. In a power conscious Cold War context, that pretext was considered by many military and government officials to be soft, naïve, and "other." As successive regimes in South Vietnam collapsed, those leading the war in Washington and Saigon invested in American coercive military force as a prerequisite stabilizing effort. The creation of responsible, representative institutions was given secondary status. Those priorities revealed what the other warriors considered to be the basic problem: Saigon and Washington did not trust the Vietnamese people to provide for their own liberty. By early 1966, it became clear that a cohesive national will to fight had not emerged in the South and that the

communists were not going to be defeated by America's military might alone. A national strategy focusing on the "people's war" finally emerged, but it was too little too late. Tet disintegrated the already crumbling will to fight of the South Vietnamese and American public. Rather than capitalizing on VC losses and seizing the political initiative in the countryside, Saigon and Washington dallied. The other warriors who had risked everything on the premise that a liberal democratic revolution could ignite an anticommunist Vietnamese nationalist movement were crushed by the slow response to Tet and then by Chau's arrest. In the end their faith in their revolutionary ideals wavered but did not break. Their faith in the GVN and United States Government to implement those ideals, however, were thoroughly crushed. The other warriors continued to fight the lost cause for another half a decade, but against Thieu and Nixon as much as the communists.

VI. Sources

The most valuable sources for this book come directly from interviews with the five other warriors and their families. Frank Scotton, who snubbed journalists and historians for nearly forty years, provided me with over forty hours of interviews and access to several boxes of documents. Jean Sauvageot, also rarely interviewed, granted me nearly as much time as Scotton, traveling with me for a week in Vietnam. Doug Ramsey has preferred to offer me his story in writing. He has given me an intensely detailed, nearly two thousand page unpublished memoir that he began writing just after his release from captivity as well as an additional two hundred pages of biographical material I requested from him. Tran Ngoc Chau, equally gracious, provided me with an unpublished memoir that is less extensive than Ramsey's but easily

augmented by Chau's still remarkable memory and frequent e-mails. Colby and Lansdale are no longer living, but Colby left family members behind who have allowed me access not only to their memories but some of Colby's personal documents as well, and Lansdale's extensive papers are available in Washington D.C. and Stanford, California.

Besides these invaluable sources, the volume of material, much of it recently released, in the National Archives is massive. I have collected tens of thousands of documents from the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford libraries, the CIA's CREST database, AID Papers, and CORDS Records. The Sheehan Papers and Foreign Service Officer oral histories available at the Library of Congress have also proved very useful.

I have also conducted some fifty personal interviews with former CIA, AID, MACV, and CORDS officers to fill out the research base.

VII. Author

Jeff Woods has been college professor and writer for 9 years. He has written two books. His first, *Black Struggle, Red Scare* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), studied the relationship between segregation and anticommunism in the American South in the 1950s and 1960s. His latest, *Richard B. Russell: Southern Nationalism and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), was part of Andy Fry's biography in American Foreign Policy Series. Born in 1970, Woods is part of an essentially post-Vietnam generation. Unlike most of those who have written about Vietnam, he did not participate in the conflict, nor has any living memory of the events.

VIII. Chapter Outline

Prologue: The Warrenton Virginia Conference, January 1966.

Book I: 1954-1963

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Tran Ngoc Chau: Vietminh, South Vietnamese Army, Kien Hoa

Chapter II

Edward Lansdale: OSS, Philippines, Saigon Military Mission

Chapter III

William E. Colby: Jedburgh, Sweden and Italy, Saigon Station Chief

Chapter IV

The Other Warriors and Diem

Book II: 1963-1966

Chapter V

Frank Scotton: Braving the Vacuum, Long An

Chapter VI

Douglas Ramsey: Pacification Strategy, Long An, Hau Nghia

Chapter VII

Andre Sauvageot: Going Native, Long An and My Tho

Chapter VIII

Escalation, Experiments, and Alternatives: to the Warrenton Conference

Book III: 1966-1969

Chapter IX

Through the Looking Glass: Ramsey Captured

Chapter X

Confluence: Honolulu, OCO, Chau, Sauvageot, and the Vung Tau Crisis

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CORDS: Colby's Assent and Lansdale's Demise

Chapter XII

Tet: Delayed Accelerated Pacification Campaign

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Chapter XIII

Between Thieu and Nixon: Loyal Opposition of Colby, Scotton, and Sauvageot

Chapter XIII

Ramsey's Captive Audience

Chapter XIV

Chau's Arrest

Chapter XV

Lost Cause