INTERVIEW WITH VIETNAM WAR PARTICIPANT

W / FILE / SUBJ. WI
DATE / SUB-CAT.
11/7/1967

NAME FD-19A (PLAF)

BACKGROUND Squad Leader Local Forces, 1st Battalion, Long An Province

SOURCE THE RAND CORPORATION

HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ON MICROFILM

INTERVIEW WITH VIETNAM WAR PARTICIPANT

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NLF / [illegible]
file / subject
date / sub-category
6/67

NAME FD-194

BACKGROUND PLAF Sq. leader

THE RAND CORPORATION

INTERVIEWS CONCERNING THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT OF SOUTH VIETNAM

FILE NO. FD 19-A

Date of Interview:	November 7, 1967
Date of Rally:	June 6, 1967
Subject's Category:	Military Rallier Local Forces Member
Rank or Function:	Squad Leader
Area of Operation:	Long An Province
Unit Designation:	1st Battalion, Long An

The FD series of interviews have been conducted in support of a study of the personal characteristic and backgrounds of people who have joined an insurgency. This interview is for the information of US and Vietnamese official agencies and personnel on a need-to-know basis. Permission to distribute or show this interview to non-official persons requires the prior approval of The RAND Corporation and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

1.1.0 In 1959. I can't remember which month.

1.2.0 At the end of 1958. I didn't have contact with Front cadres in my own village but rather in the Maquis where I used to go to plant my crops of sugar cane and pineapple. The Maquis was then a jungle area covered with "cham" trees (Ed. note: a local tree from which a dark brownish dye is extracted) located in Ly Manh Village, Tan Binh district.

1.3.1 On June 3, 1967.

1.3.2 That day I was home on leave. In the hamlet, I met an old friend of mine who had served in the same battalion (Front) as me before, but who had already rallied. That friend told me everything about "Chieu Hoi." On the 6th of June 1967, he accompanied me to the Saigon Chieu Hoi Center where I rallied.

1.4.1 My family is Buddhist so it can be said that I, too, am Buddhist. However, in actual fact, I don't practice my religion at all.

1.5.1 Two-thirds of the population of the village were poor. The rest were well off or middle-class. There were only a few rich people.

1.5.2 The Front didn't classify the people in our village because it didn't control the village.

1.5.3 The richer people had more land and more buffalo than others.

1.6.0 I finished Grade 5 (one year in primary school).

1.7.0 I had to go and clear waste land in the maquis in order to plant my crops of pineapple and sugar cane. I also used to cut "cham" trees. I didn't farm.

1.8.0 My father died of illness in 1956.

1.8.1 My mother is still alive.

1.9.0 I am not yet married.

1.9.1 In my family, there are only my mother, a younger brother, two younger sisters and myself. My mother and I are the only two adults in the household.

1.9.2 I had a younger brother who was at that time of military age. He joined the ARVN and died in action during the time I was active in the Front.

1.9.3 My mother.

1.9.4 (See 1.9.1)

1.9.5 My family didn't own any land. That was why we had to plant our crops in the maquis.

1.9.9 I don't know exactly because I didn't calculate how much we produced each year. I only know that what we produced was not enough to live on. My young brother and sisters had to go and work as hired laborers to increase our income.

2.0.0 I don't know exactly how much. I only know we didn't have enough to live on.

2.0.1 Every year we had to borrow. We didn't borrow to plant our crops but to buy additional rice to live on because we would generally be short of rice one or two months of the year. Sometimes, we didn't borrow cash but rice. Each year we would only borrow about six "gia" of rice. The price was about 300 or 400 piasters at that time. We would only borrow from relatives or acquaintances who wouldn't take interest from us. It was also possible to borrow from the Agricultural Credit Office, but those who were poor and landless, as in our case, couldn't borrow from the Agricultural Credit Office. You have to have land in order to be able to borrow.

2.0.2 The majority of the people in the village had to rent land to farm. As I said, two-thirds of the village population were poor; they had to rent land to farm, or had to go and work as hired laborers for those who had land.

2.0.3 Question: How much land did the richest landowners have? Did they farm all their land, or lease some of it? If they farmed their own land, how many helpers did they have to hire at each season? How much did they pay for the helpers?

Answer: The richest landowners in the village had up to 200 "mau" (hectares) of land and twenty buffaloes. They didn't usually farm all their land, but leased some of it to those who didn't have any. They would be paid twenty-five "gia" a year for every "mau" of land leased. They would generally farm most of their land. I don't know how much exactly. I only know that each season they had to hire hundreds of workers to help them with plowing the fields and transplanting paddy. These people would plow and transplant paddy in several phases before the work was over. The workers' wages were 40 to 50 piasters per day plus one meal for each worker.

Q: Do you think such an arrangement was a just one?

A. I feel that the rent was too high. The person who rented land had to spend a lot of money to rent buffaloes, to hire workers helping him to transplant paddy, to buy fertilizers and seeds. Each year, two harvests yield only about 150 "gia." After paying for odd expenses and the rent, the farmer is left with hardly anything. As for the workers' wages, I feel that they weren't very reasonable. I know that in some villages the wages were much lower. I feel, however, that 70 piasters a day would be more reasonable.

2.0.4 Apart from lending cash through the Agricultural Credit Office to help farmers to plant their crops, the GVN didn't have any other aid programs in the village. There was even a lot of injustice in the granting of a loan. Indeed, only well-to-do people were able to make a loan while poor people weren't. The villagers used to complain a lot about this.

2.1.0 On rung No. 8.

2.1.1 I then felt that without a war, I would have been able to work and plant my crops peacefully and our life would have been much better. But even so, we would only have been able to move our life up to rung No. 7.

2.2.1 We all got along well with one another in our family.

2.2.2 My mother loves me very much, and I too love her. Because I love my mother very much, I had a very hard life working and toiling so as to be able to support her.

2.2.3 My mother is very kind, gentle, and easygoing.

2.2.4 We all love one another and have respect for one another in my family.

2.3.1 I always got along well with people in my hamlet.

2.3.2 I had two very close friends. Both of them used to go to work in the maquis with me. Like me, both of them joined and worked actively for the Front.

2.3.3 I didn't have any trouble or conflict with anyone in the hamlet. However, because I was very poor, I often felt that the well-to-do villagers in the hamlet looked down on me.

2.4.0 The local GVN officials were generally arrogant and corrupt. They liked to bully us, beat us, and arrest the innocent. When the Agroville Center was being set up, the local officials used to extract money from the people by forcing those who didn't participate in the construction work (construction of the Agroville Center) to contribute cash. The villagers used to complain a lot about this.

2.4.1 There weren't any (GVN) soldiers in the hamlet. There were only the civil guards who would, now and then, come from the district. Like the local officials, the civil guards were very arrogant. They used to bully and beat the villagers.

2.4.2 My father was beaten up by GVN soldiers once. At that time they had come to the hamlet to ask the villagers to go and do corvee work. When they came to our home, they asked to see our identification papers and my father hadn't yet shown them when they beat him up. This happened in front of my eyes.

2.5.0 I didn't experience any disappointment. I didn't want to outdo anyone. All I wanted was to try to work hard so that my family wouldn't have to live in destitution. As a matter of fact, I did try, but my family was still very poor, so I felt very sad.

2.6.0 Before leaving my family for the Front, I felt that my future wasn't very promising at all. When I made the decision to join the Front, I felt that, later on, when the Front wins the war, I would be given land. That was why when I left to join the Front, I felt that I could look forward to a very hopeful future.

2.7.0 Before I joined the Front I did feel somewhat frustrated because I couldn't have as good a life as others although I had tried to work as hard as they did.

2.8.0 No.

2.9.0 Not at all.

3.1.0 Nobody in my family actively worked for the Viet Minh. None worked for the Front either, except me. I have a young brother who used to work for the GVN, but he is dead now. He was killed in action. I have many distant relatives (on my mother's side) working for the GVN.

3.2.0 When I left the family to join the Front, my mother and young brother and sisters didn't yet know anything about the Front. However, later on, perhaps out of love for me, my mother became very sympathetic to the Front. My two closest friends, as I said, also joined the Front like me. Thus, both of them were sympathetic to the Front.

3.3.0 The majority of the villagers then favored the Front. Perhaps it was because they were poor and believed, as the cadres used to say in their propaganda, that the Front would bring them many privileges. In our village, only those who had a good and comfortable life favored the GVN. These people were very few.

3.4.0 No.

3.5.0 A year before I joined the Front, that is to say in 1961, the cadres often came to see me. They would usually come once every two or three days. They came to persuade me to join the Front forces. In 1960, I also used to have constant contact with the cadres but not as much as the year after. At that time, the cadres would come to see me once in every ten or fifteen days. That year, although I haven't yet joined the Front, I had given them much help several times, such as informing them about the movements of GVN soldiers at the district and dropping propaganda leaflets.

3.6.0 I left my family to join the Front forces in April 1962.

3.6.1 No.

3.6.2 The only GVN official in my hamlet was the hamlet chief.

3.6.3 No.

3.6.4 No. The Village Council was seated at the district.

3.7.1 No.

3.7.2 No.

3.7.3 When I joined the Front, the village didn't yet have any strategic hamlets. It did later on.

3.7.4 The Viet Minh and the French didn't attack our village. The Front attacked it twice. The attacks were made against the district and our village at the same time because the village was just next to the district. The first attack took place in 1960 and the second in 1965.

3.7.5 I don't know.

3.7.6 The Front assassinated one hamlet chief in our village, but it didn't assassinate him right in the village. He was arrested and taken to another place where he was assassinated. In addition, the Front arrested two other hamlet chiefs who were sent to attend a re-education course for two or three days before being freed. I don't know how the villagers felt or what they said about those incidents.

3.7.7 It can be said that my village is a contested area with the GVN controlling it in the daytime.

3.7.8 I don't know about the population or the number of families in my hamlet. I can only say that my hamlet was one of the most populated hamlets in the village.

4.1.0 No.

4.2.0 No.

5.1.1 There was a lot of injustice in the village, such as the granting of loans by the Agricultural Credit Office, the bullying of GVN officials and soldiers, the beating up and arrest of innocent people.

5.1.2 I think that all the poor in the village were exploited by landowners. The wages paid to them were low, and the rent for the land was high.

5.2.0 When I was young, all I wished was to have enough to eat and to wear, and, when I grow up, to have a happy family with enough to live on. I had worked hard, and yet I was still poor and destitute. I often felt that it would be very difficult for me to fulfill my wishes and hopes.

5.3.0 No.

5.4.0 I knew Mr. Diem was the leader of the GVN at that time. However, I didn't feel one way or another about him.

5.5.0 In my opinion, the most important factors for the future of Vietnam are the end of the war, the re-unification of the country, the poor must have land to farm and the end of oppression by officials.

5.5.1 These factors are important in the order I have enumerated them.

5.6.0 I have now completed my course on Chieu Hoi. I now wish to be allowed to go back to my village so that I can look for a job and get married and settle down to a normal and peaceful life.

6.1.0 First of all, I was very fed up with the oppression and injustice that were practiced in our village. I was then looking forward to a brighter future since the cadres had told me that I would later on be given land. Those were the two most important factors in my decision to join the Front. On the other hand, there was another factor too: the cadres' talent in persuading me. They based themselves on the two above factors to persuade me to join.

6.2.0 After I agreed to join the Front, I went home to inform my mother of my decision. My mother loved me very much and she didn't want me to go. I told my mother that in joining the Front, I would later on be given land and our family would be able to have a better life. On the other hand, the cadres had promised me that while I was away from my family it would get assistance from other people. My mother finally agreed to my joining the Front. I left with two cadres to join my new unit, that is to say, the Long An Province Battalion. (See 3.5)

6.2.1 No.

6.3.1 When I left to join the Front, I thought that the war would end soon. I didn't expect it to go on forever with no end in sight. During my absence, my family didn't receive any help from anyone as the cadres had promised. On the contrary, my family became more and more miserable and destitute each day. I became fed up with the war. I wanted to go back to my family and help my people so they wouldn't be so destitute. That was the reason why I decided to rally.

6.3.3 I think that the Americans have given lots of economic assistance to Vietnam. Their presence here can only be advantageous rather than disadvantageous to Vietnamese society. As far as the military aspect is concerned, the more American troops that are sent over here, the more assistance Vietnam will get and the quicker it will defeat the Communists and achieve peace for its people. Hence, I don't have any cause for concern over the large number of American troops here.

6.4.0 I have completed my course on Chieu Hoi, and thus I now have a better understanding of the GVN policies. I can now see my former mistake. The fact that I have a better understanding of GVN policies benefits me a great deal.

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS

7.1 The subject's level of understanding is average.

7.2 His intelligence is also average.

7.3 He was cooperative.

7.4 He was sincere.

7.5 In the beginning before the interview was started, the subject made objections and appeared to be annoyed at being interviewed. The subject said that he had been interviewed several times already during the past two months. He asked why other people at the CHC have not been interviewed while he himself had been over and over again. The interviewer had to explain to him that he will be asked about his conditions of living in order to have the necessary data for a research on social problems. Such a research, it was explained to him, is aimed at bringing improvement in the life of the people in rural areas. Only then did the subject agree to be interviewed. During the first 15 minutes of the interview the subject only gave short-cut answers. Gradually, however, he appeared to become more relaxed, and as the interview went on, more cooperative.

7.6 The interview has been recorded in handwritten notes. It was conducted in the meeting hall of the CHC. There were many people going in and out of the hall; there weren't, however, any interruptions or disturbances.

7.7 The subject didn't have very big ambitions. He only wants to go back to his native village and to have a normal and peaceful life.