

INTERVIEW WITH VIETNAM WAR PARTICIPANT

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11/14/67

NAME FD-23A (PLAF)

BACKGROUND Platoon Leader, Local Force, C-40th Company, Chau Thanh

District, Tay Ninh Province

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HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ON MICROFILM

INTERVIEW WITH VIETNAM WAR PARTICIPANT

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NAME FD 23A

BACKGROUND PLAF P/H. lead

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INTERVIEWS CONCERNING THE NATIONAL LIBERATION
FRONT OF SOUTH VIETNAM

FILE NO. FD 23A

Date of Interview:	November 14, 1967
Date of Rally:	June 1967
Subject's Category:	Military Rallier Local Force Cadre Party Member
Rank or Function:	Platoon Leader
Area of Operation:	Chau Thanh district, Tay Ninh province
Unit Designation:	C-40th Company

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.

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- 1.1.0 I heard that the Front cadres were sneaking into my village since 1959. I don't remember what month.
- 1.2.0 The day I first met the Front cadres was also the day I joined the Front. It was some time in May 1960.
- 1.3.1 I left my unit last June (1967). I don't remember the day.
- 1.3.2 The day I left my unit was also the day I rallied at Tay Ninh airfield.
- 1.4.0 I have never believed in God.
- 1.4.1 (See 1.4.0)
- 1.5.1 Thirty percent of the people in the village were in the middle class, meaning they had enough to eat. The rest of the villagers were poor. My family also belonged to the poor class. There was only one rich family in the whole village which had a lot of land. Although this family had a big house in the village, it had moved to live in the province capital of Tay Ninh. My village was right beside the province capital.
- 1.5.2 My village was not under Front control, so the Front didn't classify the villagers.
- 1.5.3 As I have said, there was only one rich family in the whole village. They possessed a large house, a big orchard, a lot of land, and a rice mill in the village. This family also had an ice factory and a Chinese drug store right in Tay Ninh province town.
- 1.6.0 I can read and write, but not very well. I read very slow and sometimes have to think before I can read a word correctly. And when I write, I make a lot of mistakes.
- 1.7.0 I was a hired hand tending cows and water buffaloes.
- 1.8.0 My father regrouped to the North in 1954. One man who came from another hamlet but regrouped North at the same time as my father has returned south and is working for the Front. That man knew my family, so when he met me in my unit, he informed me that my father had died in the North from appendicitis. That is how I learned of my father's death. My father was a regiment commander.

- 1.8.1 My mother is still alive and living in Tay Ninh province capital.
- 1.9.0 I am not married yet.
- 1.9.1 At that time, there were my mother, a younger brother, three younger sisters and myself in the family. My mother was the only adult. I had another older sister, but she regrouped to the North with my father in 1954. I haven't heard anything about her since she left.
- 1.9.2 When I joined the Front, I was the oldest son in the family. I was seventeen years old then.
- 1.9.3 My mother was the head of the household.
- 1.9.4 As I have said, all the members of my family lived together, except my older sister.
- 1.9.5 My mother wasn't a farmer. She bought and sold vegetables.
- 2.0.0 I don't know how much my family income was every year. I only know that my mother had to work very hard, yet we didn't have enough to eat. I had to tend water buffaloes for other people. They fed me and paid me 400 piasters a month. And I had to give this money to my mother.
- 2.0.1 My mother bought rice to eat with the money she made from her business, so we never had to borrow from anyone.
- 2.0.2 About 70 percent of the people in the hamlet had to rent land for farming.
- 2.0.3 The richest family in the hamlet had 100 mau of rice-fields, but it rented all those fields to others. I don't know how much land was rented to each person and what kind of arrangement they had. I only know that the land tenant had to share his paddy with the landowner after the harvest instead of paying money to him. I was very young then, so I didn't pay much attention to such things.

- 2.0.4 I only knew that sometimes the poor in the village were given clothing materials. My family also received some cloth once in a while. I don't know whether it was given by the Americans or the GVN. I never saw any Americans coming to my village. I never saw any other help besides that. The Government probably had other aid programs which I didn't know of because I was too young.
- 2.1.0 I was on the 9th rung of the ladder. I had to work as a hired hand so that my family could have enough to eat. It was too hard for me to work like that.
- 2.1.1 At that time, I didn't have any hope for living a better life.
- 2.2.1 My family life was happy. All the people in the family got along well with each other.
- 2.2.2 My mother loved me very much, and I love her too.
- 2.2.3 My mother was kind, gentle, easygoing, and she loved her children.
- 2.2.4 The brothers and sisters in my family loved one another, and all of us held our mother in respect and affection.
- 2.3.1 All the people in the neighborhood and in the hamlet were kind to me and my family.
- 2.3.2 I had many friends in the neighborhood who often went out with me, but I didn't have any real close friend.
- 2.3.3 I have never had any conflict or trouble with anybody in the village. Nobody hated me or was my enemy; and I hated nobody and was nobody's enemy. As I have just said, everybody was kind to me.
- 2.4.0 At that time, the officials in the village were very bad. They always threatened, bullied, and extorted money from the people. Each of them was as corrupt as the other. I had two uncles who were harmed by the village chief just because they had a quarrel with the village chief over some personal matter. My two uncles were put in jail for one or two months every two or three months. My uncles weren't the only ones

to suffer this; there were many others, too. Anyone who didn't bend himself in front of the officials would immediately be harmed by them in one way or the other. One would also be in trouble if he didn't have anything to offer the officials during Tet.

- 2.4.1 There were no soldiers in the village; there were only SDC members. A number of them were also arrogant and corrupt like the officials.
- 2.4.2 Besides my uncles' cases, my family also experienced mistreatment. After my father had regrouped to the North, the Government intended to put the whole family under arrest. Thanks to someone in the village who knew about it and informed us in advance, my mother was able to take us to Hoc Mon to hide away. We had to stay hiding in Hoc Mon for two years. We only returned to the village when the situation had calmed down. Even then, my mother didn't dare use my father's real name. We had to take my 5th uncle's name instead of my father's name. And since then, we have been using the Truong family name which is my uncle's name (his mother's brother). I only used my real family name -- Tran -- when I joined the VC. We had to do this because my father had been regrouped by the Viet Minh to the North and was holding a high position. My mother was afraid that the whole family would be in trouble if we used my father's name.
- 2.7.0 No, I was not frustrated at all.
- 2.8.0 At the time, I thought of leaving the village to look for a job other than tending the water buffaloes. But that was only a fleeting thought. I didn't think of it any more in later years because my friends had persuaded me to join the VC.
- 2.9.0 I only tended water buffaloes and didn't change my job.
- 3.1.0 In my family, only my father worked for the Viet Minh and I worked for the Viet Cong. I have three uncles who are working for the GVN: one is a policeman in Tay Ninh province capital, another is working for the Military Security in Tay Ninh, and another is the hamlet chief of my hamlet. They have been working for the GVN two or three years now.

- 3.2.0 My mother didn't like the Viet Cong. She didn't want me to join them. I ran away without her consent. And when I was already with the VC, I sent word to ask her to visit me; when we met, she cried and scolded me, demanding that I leave the VC. As for the GVN, when I joined the Front my mother didn't like it and always worried that the GVN village officials would give her trouble. But later on, when I met her again, I realized that she had changed to like the GVN because she was the one who told me to leave the VC to rally to the GVN. My mother has probably changed because all my uncles are working for the GVN and also because another uncle had been killed by the VC. Before I joined the Front, in spite of the fact that my uncles had been mistreated and put in jail many times by the GVN officials, they still didn't like the VC. As a matter of fact, all three served with the GVN later on. As for my friends in the hamlet, they all liked and joined the VC as I did.
- 3.3.0 At that time, I didn't know whether the people in the village liked the VC or not. But I was sure that a great number didn't like the GVN because they were bullied too much by the GVN officials.
- 3.4.0 When I joined the Front, nobody in the family had been killed by the VC or GVN. But four or five months after that, one of my uncles was killed by the VC. He was a "trum van" at the time (Trum Van: the head of a group of hired hands for rice transplanting). After that, I have tried to find out why he was killed, but couldn't.
- 3.5.0 As I have said, I had never met any VC cadres before the day I left home. At the time, some friends persuaded me so I agreed to go with them. I hadn't met the cadres before that, but my friends had certainly met them.
- 3.6.1 There were no GVN soldiers in my hamlet. There was only a squad of SDC members.
- 3.6.2 There were hamlet chiefs and chiefs of "xom" (small groups of houses in the hamlet).
- 3.6.3 The hamlet chiefs and "xom" chiefs lived in the hamlets with their families.

- 3.6.4 The village headquarters was in my hamlet. In the daytime, the personnel worked there but returned to the province town at night because their families were there.
- 3.7.1 I was still small during the Viet Minh time, so I don't remember anything about it now. However, I knew that there was no Viet Minh soldier in the village.
- 3.7.2 No.
- 3.7.3 When I joined the Front, my village didn't have strategic hamlets yet; it only began to have them after I left. All the hamlets in the village have become strategic hamlets now. I don't know how many hamlets my village has.
- 3.7.5 I don't know whether the Viet Minh killed or kidnapped any officials in the village or not.
- 3.7.6 The Front hasn't killed or kidnapped any GVN officials in the village. The VC only killed one person in the village; that was my uncle who I just mentioned. I wasn't in the village when my uncle was killed, so I don't know what the people said about it.
- 3.7.7 When I joined the Front, the GVN had complete control over the village. And it still does now.
- 3.7.8 I don't know the population of my hamlet or village. I only know that my hamlet was the most populated one among others in the village.
- 4.1.0 No.
- 4.2.0 In 1959 I went to Saigon and Gia Dinh once. I went there to visit some friends. I went to Tay Ninh province capital very often because my village was right next to town. I have never been to any town other than those.
- 5.1.1 There was a great deal of injustice in the village at the time because the officials oppressed and bullied the people. All the officials were corrupt.

- 5.1.2 Before joining the Front, I didn't think about whether the landowners exploited the poor or not. Only after I joined the Front did the cadres explain to me that the landowners were exploiting the poor by collecting land rents.
- 5.2.0 When I was young, I didn't think about my future, so I didn't have any wishes.
- 5.3.0 No.
- 5.4.0 At that time, I knew that Mr. Diem was leading the GVN, but I didn't know anything about him and didn't think anything about him.
- 5.5.0 In my opinion, the important factors for the future of our country are: peace, no more beggars while others can't eat all they have, more education for the people, end to corruption, end to "cowboys" and prostitutes.
- 5.5.1 In the order of importance, peace is the most important factor, second is more education, and third is no more beggars while others have more than enough.
- 5.6.0 At present I wish to return home after the Chieu Hoi course in order to find a job to earn my living. I only wish to have a peaceful life.
- 6.1.0 When I joined the Front, I was young and didn't know anything. The main reason for my joining the Front was that I was persuaded by my friends. I saw a lot of people joining the Front, so I joined -- thinking it was fun. Furthermore, I have another reason. I was a son of a high ranking Viet Minh cadre; my family had been threatened with imprisonment so it had to stay in hiding for two years; and upon returning to the village, it had to change its name to escape imprisonment. Therefore, I was afraid that the Government might find out about my background and put me in jail.
- 6.2.0 Among those who persuaded me to join the VC, a few had contacted the cadres. I saw a lot of young men joining, and it would be fun to be with the crowd, so I joined too. My friends fixed the time and date

with the cadres, and on that day, a cadre came to take me and two other friends. That night, all the other young men who agreed to go gathered in one place; a number of cadres came, fired a few shots and took all of them. They fired the shots to give the villagers and the officials the idea that these young men didn't go by their own will but were captured by the Front. And thus, their families wouldn't be given trouble by the GVN authorities. I and my two friends went to a forest and waited there until night, when all the others arrived, and we all left the forest together. Finally, we were taken to the district headquarters (Front). There we were trained before joining the district unit, which was the C40th company of Tay Ninh.

6.2.1 No.

6.3.1 I had been with the unit for a long time, so I became weary of fighting while the war was becoming bigger and fiercer every day. I was afraid of getting killed. Moreover, when my mother visited me at the unit upon my request, she cried, scolded me and demanded that I return home. Therefore, I decided to rally.

6.3.3 I don't know anything about the effect of the American presence on the Vietnamese society. I only think that the Americans are here to help Vietnam. The growing number of American troops in Vietnam is advantageous to the GVN because it enables the GVN to fight the Front more effectively. I only worry that if the American troops are too numerous here, there will be a big war or an atomic war which will kill even more Vietnamese.

6.4.0 Before coming here, I attended a course in Tay Ninh Chieu Hoi service on the GVN policies. I learned that the GVN wanted peace, but the Front created the war and only wanted the GVN to surrender but not to negotiate. In a few days, I will be attending another Chieu Hoi course here. Then I will learn more about the GVN policies.

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS

- 7.1 The subject's knowledge is average.
- 7.2 His intelligence is under average.
- 7.3 He was cooperative.
- 7.4 He was sincere.
- 7.5 Throughout the interview, he seemed relaxed and natural. He never hesitated to answer.
- 7.6 The interview was conducted in the meeting hall of the Chieu Hoi center. There was no interruption.
- 7.7 The subject didn't have any ambition. He only wanted to have a job and a peaceful life.

