Interviewer:
Could you state your name please?
Bruce Kinsey:
My name is Bruce Kinsey, K-I-N-S-E-Y.
Interviewer:
Great. And your date of birth, please?
Bruce Kinsey:
December 31, 1940.
Interviewer:
And what was your title in Vietnam? What was your capacity?
Bruce Kinsey:
I was in Vietnam for 26 months, and I had three different positions. I began as a Deputy District Senior Advisor in Long An Province, south of Saigon about 40 miles. After I had done that for the better part of a year, I moved up to Province Headquarters, and I was the Deputy for what was called Development on the Province Team, the Province CORDS Advisory Team. My boss was a full Colonel, and I worked there for I think a year. And then my last month or two in Vietnam, I was in Saigon on a group called the Pacification Studies Group.
Interviewer:
So the overall, the years you were there were from?
Bruce Kinsey:
I was there from April of 1968, early April of 1968 until June of 1970.
Interviewer:
And todayâ€™s date?
Bruce Kinsey:
Dear, what is todayâ€™s date?
Interviewer:
Today is - actually, Iâ€™ll tell you - itâ€™s November 19 - Iâ€™m sorry - November 19, 2012.
Bruce Kinsey:
Iâ€™ll confirm that.
Interviewer:
Okay, good; thank you. Just a little bit of biographical background; you joined the Foreign Service at a very young age. Where did you grow up?
Bruce Kinsey:
I grew up in soy bean fields in Illinois. I was born in Peoria, Illinois. My dad was with the Caterpillar Tractor Company. And then I moved when I was in the eighth grade to Decatur, Illinois, which is further south, and thatâ€™s where I graduated from high school. I was a upper middle class American guy. I got interested in foreign things rather early. I found I had a knack for foreign languages, and I pursued that as a kid, and was an exchange student to France in the summer of 1957, when I was 16 years old. A wonderful life-changing experience -
Interviewer:
I bet.
Bruce Kinsey:
That made me want to go into the Foreign Service. I had been accepted at Northwestern University, and I spent my first year of college there, but transferred after one year to the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. And I joined the Foreign Service in September of 1962, after graduating from Georgetown.
Interviewer:
I think you mentioned in the bio that you were the youngest Foreign Service Officer?
Bruce Kinsey:
At that time, I was the youngest Foreign Service Officer ever, but a wonderful guy named

Joe Lake came into my Foreign Service class. And it turned out he was accepted into the Foreign Service a little bit after I was, but he was younger than I was.
Interviewer:
How old were you when you were accepted?
Bruce Kinsey:
21.
Interviewer:
Wow.
Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
So you had a few postings before you were sent to Vietnam.
Bruce Kinsey:
I was in Sri Lanka, which was then called Ceylon - a pear-shaped island off the coast of India, south coast of India. Independent country, British Commonwealth at the time. And I did mostly political reporting there, and that was my first brush with things Vietnamese.
Interviewer:
I was going to ask you, yes.
Bruce Kinsey:
In 1965 a bunch of riots broke out in Saigon and elsewhere in South Vietnam. The Buddhists staged a full-scale rebellion - pardon me - against the government of President Diem, and he handled it in a very ham-fisted way.
Interviewer:
This was 1963.
Bruce Kinsey:
19 - Iâ€™m sorry, youâ€™re right.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bruce Kinsey:
Weâ€™re talking 1963. He handled it in a very ham-fisted way; tear gas, some people were shot, some pagodas were raided, and Buddhist monks began burning themselves in the street. Ceylon, where I was, is a Buddhist country; followed the same form of Buddhism that Vietnam did, and this was very unsettling to the Ceylonese. So I took it as my brief to follow this situation, and in the process I began learning about what was going on in Vietnam. I was really the only person in the Embassy who was even remotely interested in all this.
Interviewer:
Really.
Bruce Kinsey:
But I found it fascinating. I was then, after two years in Colombo, I was sent to a Consulate, a Consulate General in Stuttgart, West Germany, where I issued visas for the better part of two years. But at that point, American policy in Vietnam was a hot topic in Europe, and we began getting requests for somebody to come out and talk. Stuttgart had lots of universities, and the Germans are very civic-minded, and they want to know whatâ€™s going on in the world, and they want to talk to people about it. And I talked to about 50 student and civic groups over the course of two years.
And I had a presentation that I gradually developed, with maps and everything, about the American commitment to Vietnam, and our treaty obligations, and the history of the county, and so forth. It got quite heated at times. And all of this obliged me to dig even further into -
Interviewer:
And this is very early in the -
Bruce Kinsey:
It was.

Interviewer:
In the American involvement.
Bruce Kinsey:
Thatâ€™s right. This got me quite involved in studying about Vietnam, and the more I learned, the more fascinated I became with that country. I came back from Germany very concerned, and I volunteered to go to Vietnam.
Interviewer:
When you say you were concerned, could you explain that a little bit more? What were you -
Bruce Kinsey:
Well, I was fascinated with what we were trying to do and the way we were trying to do it.
Interviewer:
Did you have reservations, though, about American policy at that time, American involvement?
Bruce Kinsey:
I had just questions about it. I had defended the policy for the better part of two years publicly, and I was convinced that there was a lot of misunderstanding about our motivations. There were people in Germany who were accusing us of wanting to make Vietnam a colony of the United States. Others thought that this was something that American arms merchants were sponsoring. This is an old European theme. It doesnâ€™t make sense to us, but it does to them. Others thought it was just kind of Yankee colonialism run amok. Things were not helped by some off-hand comments that were made by American military people and others about our situation in Vietnam, and that were taken wildly out of context in the local press.
I had a lot of success doing this, and I convinced a lot of people to at least give us the benefit of the doubt for a while. But I wanted in the fight. I began to feel very strongly that this was where the action was. I was a young guy, and -
Interviewer:
Ambitious?
Bruce Kinsey:
And - well, I was I guess adventurous is maybe the better word. But I knew there was a lot going on. Iâ€™d read a fair amount, and I knew that the situation was complicated. I also knew that the State Department that I was part of was simplifying things quite a lot in what it was telling people. I read through some of the documents, and some of the things I read concerned me.
Interviewer:
They were such as what?
Bruce Kinsey:
Well, they were trying to make it look as if this was a whole-scale North Vietnamese invention - or invasion - of the South. And then Iâ€™d find other documents where they quoted â€œSo-and-so was the defector,â€ or â€œSo-and-so was captured, and he was from Such-and such a Province,â€ and Iâ€™d go to the map and find out that that Province was always in South Vietnam; it wasnâ€™t in the North. So I knew that this was - there was no question that the North Vietnamese incited all this. There was no question that they supported it, that they devised the planning. But there was a full-scale insurgency -
Interviewer:
Right.
Bruce Kinsey:
In South Vietnam that had to be dealt with. So anyway, I volunteered, and I had - it wouldâ€™ve been my third foreign posting in a row. Usually the State Department doesnâ€™t do that, but in this case they needed people to go to Vietnam.
Interviewer:
It says here you volunteered for the Vietnam Training Center in Arlington, Virginia.
Bruce Kinsey:

Thatâ€™s right.
Interviewer:
What exactly was that?
Bruce Kinsey:
VTC was the brain child of an amazing man by the name of Everett Bumgardner. Ev Bumgardner was a USA Officer. His wife was Vietnamese. Heâ€™d been in Vietnam since about 1950. He was up at the Consulate in Hanoi when Vietnam was in French hands. He spoke the language. He knew the country and its psychology extremely well. And he was charged in 1960 - late â€˜65 - with setting up a training center for civilians who were going to do field work with AID and other agencies in South Vietnam. And I was his first volunteer. He called me in January of 1966 and said - Iâ€™ll never forget it.
He said, â€œI understand you want to go to Vietnam.â€ And I said, â€œYes, I do.â€ And he said, â€œWonderful.â€ Anywayâ€¦Ev set up what I think may still be the best training program for paramilitary operations ever in the history of the country. We spent a year -
Interviewer:
And he was a State Department -
Bruce Kinsey:
He was a USIA, the United States Information Agency -
Interviewer:
Okay, gotcha.
Bruce Kinsey:
Which is now part of the State Department, unfortunately. Then, it was an independent organization. It had originally been set up by Archibald MacLeish. It grew out of the information part of the Office of War and Information in the Second World War. But at that time, I think Ed Murrow was running it, Edward R. Murrow.
Interviewer:
The Edward R. Murrow.
Bruce Kinsey:
The Edward R. Murrow. USIA was a great organization. Novel, bright people - a lot of them were college professors - who did a lot of cultural exchange work, and cultural presentations overseas. They analyzed foreign literature. They quietly subsidized publishing in foreign countries. They ran university-level lectures, brought people to this country, trained journalists, and they were a very with-it, bright bunch of fun guys to be around. Ed was very committed. He knew that this insurgency could be beaten if we could just get the right combination of people and planning and organizations to do it. And so we set out. He said, â€œIâ€™m setting this thing up. When do you - when are you coming to Washington?â€
And I said, â€œWell, Iâ€™ve got to be there in a week, but I donâ€™t know what to do.â€ He said, â€œWhat do you think we ought to do? Iâ€™ve got a bunch of other guys here. Weâ€™ve got to build this program.â€ And I said, â€œWhy donâ€™t you put us in French training, just to kill time? So we learned French for six weeks or so before the program got started. We started on April 1, 1966, in a converted parking garage in Arlington, Virginia. No windows, not enough air, little rooms smaller than this. Most of the time, we were learning the language, but we were also learning the various organizations, Vietnamese and American, that were fighting this war. What they did, who they were, what success theyâ€™d had. The various programs that were existing at that time. We learned the history of Vietnam. We learned the culture of Vietnam, extensively.
And we were doing a lot of this in Vietnamese, as time went on. We -
Interviewer:
And this is 1966?
Bruce Kinsey:
â€˜66.
Interviewer:

At this time, was there any sort of - how extensive was American civilian involvement on the service, civilian development side in Vietnam, as opposed to the military side?
Bruce Kinsey:
It was quite extensive. AID hadâ€¦at that time, I think they may have had 1,000 people. They had - by that time they had set up an organization called Provincial Reps, Prov Reps, and the AID guy would advise the Vietnamese Province Chief. There was a Provincial Representative in almost all the Provinces; maybe they missed a few. And there was usually a Deputy there as well, a Deputy AID guy. These tended to be young guys. They did not have a lot of special training. Some of them were vagabonds. They were an unruly lot. A lot of them were kind of anti-military. They were very sympathetic to the Vietnamese. Numbers of them learned the language, but there was not a cohesive program, coherent program to train them in the language before they went out there. Nonetheless, some of them learned it. In addition, there of course were other people. There was no coordination of the various US agencies that were involved. There was AID. There was USIA, or as it became, the Joint US Public Affairs Office, a combination of military and USIA -
Interviewer:
USIA was - who is this?
Bruce Kinsey:
United States Information Agency. PSYWAR guys. There were CIA people in most Provinces; there was a small CIA team. And letâ€™s seeâ€¦and the State Department was there, of course, in the Embassy. But the only Provincial activity they had would be there were a few political reporters who hung out in a couple of the major cities outside of not Saigon, but others, and toured areas. They were reporting mostly on Vietnamese internal political stuff; they did not follow the Vietcong.
Interviewer:
But all these various US agencies and operatives were all acting essentially independently. There was no sort of coordination. Is that what youâ€™re saying?
Bruce Kinsey:
Bingo. There was no coordination. And MACV, the Military Assistance Command, was before â€˜65 when US troops arrived, was an Advisory organization, and they had Advisors in every Province and an Advisor team, and they were in most Districts as well. And youâ€™d have usually in the early days it was a Captain; later on, it became a Lieutenant Colonel, and in important Provinces, it was a Colonel who was the Senior Advisor for what they called the Sector Advisor. The Districts you had a Captain or a Major being the District Senior Advisor. They advised strictly on military things. Now, the problem was they didnâ€™t get any special training in any of the civilian activities, and yet the people they were advising had - this was by 1963 and a half - this was a military government.
So every Officer was a military Officer that they were talking to. And these guys had all kinds of responsibilities, from drilling wells, to stamping out malaria, and getting books to the school kids, and so on. Well, the military guys didnâ€™t know anything about this. The civilians knew some; they knew some things. But there was no integration of these things. In fact, there were nothing but stovepipes going up to Saigon, over to Washington, and back.
Interviewer:
I think the modern term is silos.
Bruce Kinsey:
Okay. All right.
Interviewer:
Right - but same - gotcha.
Bruce Kinsey:
But by 1967, this was an ungodly mess. It truly was.
Interviewer:
How so?
Bruce Kinsey:

Well, you had the Vietnamese Province Chief would open his door in the morning and thereâ€™d be five American Advisors clamoring for his attention, each wanting to do something entirely different, and often in conflict with one another. If he wanted to do something that involved a military operation with the police, for example, supporting it, heâ€™d have to talk to two different people.
Interviewer:
So thereâ€™s no coordination.
Bruce Kinsey:
There was very little coordination. The coordination did not come until a man named Robert Komer was ordered by President Johnson to begin coordinating the American effort. He started in Washington, and he brought some cohesion to the agencies that were creating this problem in Washington. I cannot tell you - Iâ€™ve done considerable research in this, â€˜cause Iâ€™m writing a book on all this stuff, and the amount of vituperative conflict among the Americans trying to take credit for this, that, and the other thing, trying to clamor for resources, attention, backstabbing the other guys, was just shameful. And here we were -
Interviewer:
This is visible to you as a 23, 24-year-old - at that point 26-year-old.
Bruce Kinsey:
I was older by that time, but -
Interviewer:
It was all very visible.
Bruce Kinsey:
But it was dissipating this incredibly increasingly important political, military, psychological effort that we were trying to put forth. Ambassador Komer, to make a long story short, finally succeeded in bringing these disparate organizations together in one unit. It is one of the most masterful pieces of bureaucratic footwork that I have ever seen. He was incredibly adept.
Interviewer:
And how did he manage this?
Bruce Kinsey:
By hook and crook, by tantrum, by listening, by conviction, by convincing, by enlisting allies, by making promises, by threats. Mostly by virtue of the fact that he had the ear of Lyndon Johnson. But the idea of combining a bunch of unruly civilians with a bunch of spit and polish, mostly Army people - the Marines, by the way, were much better at pacification than at dealing with civilians -
Interviewer:
Really.
Bruce Kinsey:
And in getting with the program than the Army was, until CORDS came along. CORDS was Civil Operations and Rural Development Support. It was something like over 4,000 people. It was 60% military, 40% civilian.
Interviewer:
And CORDS was Komerâ€™s -
Bruce Kinsey:
CORDS was Komerâ€™s -
Interviewer:
Baby.
Bruce Kinsey:
Komerâ€™s organization. The various agencies - AID and CIA and so forth - simply supported it administratively, lent people to it, but once those guys went in, their boss was whoever was running the CORDS program at that level.
Interviewer:

And when was CORDS officially created?
Bruce Kinsey:
CORDS was officially created in May of 1967. Now, that was six weeks after I had started training, so the first class, the training class that I was in at Vietnam Training Center was all civilians. As time went on, military people came in, and by the time the Training Center closed down in I think late â€˜72, it was primarily military. The civilian agencies just did not have enough personnel to field an extensive advisory organization clear down to the District level. There were 230 Districts, and there were cities, of course, that had to be staffed, and then various things at the Provincial level, and so on. So there were a lot of slots that went unfilled. The military ended up sliding into positions like Public Health Advising and so on.
This couldâ€™ve been a disaster, and in a few places it was. Sometimes you still had this out and out war between a civilian and a senior military guy in a Province, and those were pretty ugly. But Komer and his successor, Ambassador Colby, who later headed the CIA, came down very hard on this. They had to have full authority. Westmoreland, General Westmoreland - the way this thing worked was CORDS was part of MACV, and there was an Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS who was a civilian. His Deputy - he had one military Deputy and one civilian Deputy, and so forth, all the way down to the line; all the way down -
Interviewer:
So this parallel structure was all the way down the line?
Bruce Kinsey:
Thatâ€™s right. Thatâ€™s right. So as time went on, and as the Vietnam Training Center had a tremendous impact; the quality of the advisors improved substantially as guys began to be cycled through the Vietnam Training Center. And while most of them did not learn the language, they at least got a smattering of it, but they showed more cultural sensitivity, they knew about the programs, and so on. Heck, when I first arrived there, my boss was an Army Major who had had no special training whatsoever in advising. He didnâ€™t know what the programs were. He spoke not one word of Vietnamese. He was a Major whose primary ambition in life was to become a Lieutenant Colonel. He literally did not know what I was doing there. I showed up, and he didnâ€™t know who I was.
Interviewer:
This was in Vietnam.
Bruce Kinsey:
This is in Vietnam; and I had to tell him, â€œI am your Deputy,â€ and that literally blew his mind. He didnâ€™t know what to make of that. He couldnâ€™t deal with it, and he set off to the Province and tried to find out, â€œWhat is this all about, anyway?â€ I mean nobody had told him these things. And he came back, and he sort of -
Interviewer:
Was that the militaryâ€™s failure, or was that -
Bruce Kinsey:
Well, it was - I donâ€™t know if it was a military failure or not, but it was a -
Interviewer:
Communications failure or something.
Bruce Kinsey:
It was a failure. He and I - for various reasons, I ended up just operating on my own. It was wonderful. The District Chief -
Interviewer:
Just before - tell me a little about your arrival in Vietnam before we start to get -
Bruce Kinsey:
My arrival in Vietnam?
Interviewer:
Yeah. But when actually did you arrive in Vietnam?
Bruce Kinsey:

I arrived in Vietnam in early April of 1968, just a few weeks after the end of the Tet Offensive. First thing I did was go up to Bien Hoa and meet John Paul Vann. Mr. Vann was -

Interviewer:

Weâ€™ll get to him later, sure, I hope.

Bruce Kinsey:

Well, we can talk about him now.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Bruce Kinsey:

Vann was hands-down the most charismatic and gifted Advisor that we had in Vietnam. I would compare him to Phil Sheridan. If youâ€™ve ever read about General Sheridan, the man who cleaned out the Shenandoah Valley for Sam Grant in 1864, he was a diminutive guy, only 5â€™2â€, with piercing blue eyes. And people - Iâ€™ve read three different accounts of people - in first meeting Phil Sheridan, and they said within two minutes you knew this was a man you could follow into the jaws of hell. I felt that way with John Vann, and so did everybody else who ever met him, with a few exceptions. He generated very strong emotions in people, and a few of those emotions were negative, but most were quite positive. Mine were positive.

I wouldâ€™ve followed this man anywhere. I spent a couple of days with him, going around with him.

Interviewer:

This is still during his military career, right? Heâ€™s still -

Bruce Kinsey:

No.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Bruce Kinsey:

No, by this time - John Vann resigned from the Army. Heâ€™d been a Lieutenant Colonel, and in 1963 he was an Advisor to the Vietnamese Army, and he watched as a far superior Government of Vietnam force got routed by a Vietcong unit. A helicopter, a US helicopter was shot down; the pilot and the copilot were killed. ARVN went berserk, didnâ€™t know what to do, ran under fire. And he had seen enough of this kind of thing that he just got disgusted with it. He came back and asked to - he prepared a briefing for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and was told, â€œYes, theyâ€™d be very interested in hearing what you have to say.â€ And he wanted to lay out a whole new way of advising the South Vietnamese military.

He waited in the anteroom until someone came and said, â€œThe meeting is over and theyâ€™ve decided they donâ€™t want to hear from you.â€ He resigned shortly thereafter; went to Colorado, got an MBA, started working for an aircraft company, and AID found him. Hired him back to Vietnam as a Senior Advisor. So when I encountered John Vann in III Corps, in early â€˜68, he took me around to a couple of different Provinces, and he was absolutely amazing. We were in a Jeep, and we were in Binh Long Province, which had a lot of French rubber plantations that were still operating, paying off the Vietcong.

But Vann had a network of people who informed him - of school teachers and missionaries and guys like the owner of this plantation - and he was on top of everything. He knew everything that everybody was doing. And weâ€™re in a Jeep, and heâ€™s driving. He always drove himself. And weâ€™re going into the gateway to this French Michelin plantation, and hereâ€™s a Special Forces team with mine sweepers, and they say, â€œHold on.â€ â€œWhatâ€™s going on?â€ he said. â€œWell, we think there are mines here. Weâ€™ve located one right here.â€ â€œIâ€™m in a hurry,â€ he says. â€œCan I straddle it?â€ And they said, â€œYeah.â€ They all ran away, and he goes over it, with me in the Jeep. Things like that. Then later on, we had a lunch with the owner of the plantation.

And after we climbed back in the Jeep, and a couple of vehicles, and he said, â€œThereâ€™s a hamlet down the road here that I want to visit.â€ And somebody said, â€œWhy?â€ And he said, â€œBecause the hamlet chief was decapitated last night.â€ And he said, â€œI want to go in there. Itâ€™s important to get in fast when things like that happen and reassure the people.â€ So we go down this road, and the road was yay wide, and it was heavy jungle on either side, and weâ€™re sitting, going hell bent for leather down this road. And the civilian Advisor sitting next to me says, â€œ* {:.person} Bruce, just between you and me, weâ€™re crazy for doing this.â€ I had a pistol; thatâ€™s all I had, so. But we got there, and the people were kind of in shell shock.
And when Vann got out of the Jeep, they greeted him like he was God. â€œThank God Mr. Vann is here; everythingâ€™s going to be okay.â€ Thatâ€™s the kind of man he was. He personally assigned me to my District, and then came down after Iâ€™d been there about six weeks and checked out the team and so on, briefed the team.
Interviewer:
What was Vannâ€™s concept of fighting the war; what did he think was the effective way to -
Bruce Kinsey:
Vann was very much against large-unit operations. He had some wonderfully quotable things that are still good to remember. Somebody asked him, said, â€œWhatâ€™s the best weapon for fighting the Vietcong?â€ And he said, â€œThe best weapon is a knife, because you have to get up close to him, and you know exactly who youâ€™re dealing with, who youâ€™re going to do in. The second best is a pistol, because itâ€™s not easy to miss. The worst is an airplane, because youâ€™re going to kill a lot of the wrong people.â€ And boy, did we. And artillery was probably worst of all, because it hit buildings and did all the wrong things.
He said - somebody said, â€œHow can we make so many mistakes in Vietnam when we have ten years of experience here?â€ He said, â€œWe donâ€™t have ten years of experience. We have one year of experience ten times.â€ Every military assignment was just a year, and then the guy would go back, and just about the time he learned the lay of the land, heâ€™d be transferred to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, or something. So you didnâ€™t have a lot of in-depth knowledge among military people of things Vietnamese. He was an amazing man who had a vision of - he had a good moral compass, I think, generally, and he did not like to see civilian casualties. He didnâ€™t like to see people swaggering and throwing their weight around just because they had a uniform on.
He did not wear a uniform, ever. This is a man who later on was the only American civilian ever to be given command of field units, American combat units, in Vietnam. This was allowed. It took a special Act of Congress to do it, but they had so much respect for Mr. Vann that they gave him command of US field units in II Corps, which -
Interviewer:
That was in 1972, I believe, right?
Bruce Kinsey:
Thatâ€™s right, yeah. He was up there from I think â€˜71 and â€˜72. John Vann was just a little scrappy guy, Scots Irish guy who reminded - I went to his funeral at Arlington in â€˜72, and Komer spoke and said, â€œHe reminded me of a banty rooster. He was always kicking and squalling.â€ He had no compunctions at all about taking on military doctrine, and people who were very senior Generals. Komer said, â€œI was asked three times to fire John Vann by Generals who got their noses out of joint because of what he was saying, but damn it, John Vann was right. He was right.â€
Another one of his aphorisms was there was a question. How important is security, physical security, when youâ€™re trying to pacify a place? Is it 10% of the solution, or is it 90% of the solution? Vannâ€™s answer was classic. He said, â€œWhether itâ€™s 10% or 90%, itâ€™s the first 10% or the first 90%.â€ And i came to see that he was absolutely right. You canâ€™t pacify a rebellious place until you have by and large secured its perimeter, and you can then work with whatâ€™s going on inside. But to try to do it with hit

or miss application.
Or simply by virtue of going in and trying to buy peopleâ€™s loyalty by digging wells, or putting up a school, or inoculating the kids or something, without some quid pro quos, and without security, we showed many times over in the early years of that war that that just doesnâ€™t work.
Interviewer:
Are you saying you need to embed soldiers in the communities, or?
Bruce Kinsey:
You had to find some way of doing something like that. And we tried a lot of different things, and finally beginning in â€˜65, early â€˜66, we began to have - the CIA devised a group called the Revolutionary Development Cadre, or Rural Development Cadre. 59-man teams, guys in black pajamas who went out and worked in - they would be assigned to a particular hamlet, which means maybe a couple thousand people, max.
Interviewer:
These are Americans in black pajamas.
Bruce Kinsey:
Nope, these are Vietnamese.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bruce Kinsey:
These are Vietnamese, and they were trained in Vung Tau, on the coast, and trained for three months, and then formed up into these teams and went out and worked in the hamlets. They taught school, they taught public health, sanitation, they organized self-defense forces, set up intelligence nets. Tried to round up, recruit defectors from the countryside, set up a hamlet defense plan. Now, when they first went in, there would be usually a Company, a couple hundred South Vietnamese soldiers of some kind who went in, and supposedly secured the area. The program did not go well for the first couple of years, because that security often was lacking.
And they were lightly armed, and they were kids. Most of them were city kids at the beginning. A lot of them were draft dodgers. It was a kind of ragtag program for a while, but it worked often enough, and as we got the hang of it, it worked somewhat better. It helped establish a link between what was going on in that hamlet and the rest of the government. It was imperfect. It was not a substitute for good government. But we did not, by and large, have good government in Vietnam; that was the problem. That was the problem. We had lousy government.
Interviewer:
Explain that a little. What were the signs of that? What did you see? â€˜Cause thereâ€™s been a lot of talk about the corruption -
Bruce Kinsey:
Sure.
Interviewer:
Of the regime.
Bruce Kinsey:
And there was loads of it. The District Chief who was the Chief of my District was an ARVN Major, and he got his job - he was one of two candidates for that position. The other guy, he challenged him to a drinking match, just for the fun of it, and during the drinking match, Major Vien poisoned the liquor of his rival. The man died the next morning, and Major Vien got the job. He drank too much. He had no interest whatsoever in anything other than military activity. He was -
Interviewer:
This was in Long An Province.
Bruce Kinsey:
This is in Long An Province, my District, the easternmost District in the Province, which

was a pretty strategic place, and we had this doofus as the senior government representative there. His Deputy for Security was even worse; he was a drunk, and he left the compound, the District compound with its sand bags and barbed wire, only once a month. To go on a pay run for the Popular Forces soldiers, who were the little ragtag security guys with French shotguns and so on in each village. And he had a bundle of cash. Well, he took 10% off the top. Beginning Friday at noon, he would get drunk, and he wouldnâ€™t sober up until Monday morning. He stole everything that wasnâ€™t nailed down.

Including supplies from the Catholic Relief Service. It got so bad that I had to go up to Saigon and tell CRS, â€œDonâ€™t send us anything more. Itâ€™s all being sold onto the black market.â€ He and I had a running battle, and because of that, I made a lot of friends in Vietnam. I had one village chief, my favorite guy. The village chiefs were, by and large, sitting on fences, politically. And I talked to this man and said, you know, â€œHas either one of these guys ever been out here to talk to you?â€ This was a man, by the way, who was sleeping in a different house every night, because the VC were after him. And I said, â€œDo you know these guys; would they ever come out here?â€ And I said, â€œHow about Captain Lang; would he ever come out here?â€

And he said, â€œIf that man ever came out here, people would kill him.â€ And he said, â€œIâ€™d be the first.â€ And I said - first I shook his hand, and we had a good laugh, and I said, â€œDo you have a gun? Do you have a weapon?â€ And he said, â€œNo, I donâ€™t; they donâ€™t trust me.â€ So the following week I went to the CIA Station guy in Long An and got - I tried to get a pistol for him through US Army channels. â€œOh no, we canâ€™t do that.â€ This is 1968. This country had been in full-scale rebellion for eight years. Hereâ€™s a village chief trying to wave the GVN flag out there, running around scared to death for his life for eight years, and he doesnâ€™t have a sidearm. What is wrong with this picture?

So I gave him a Belgian 9 millimeter pistol. That Saturday morning he went into the marketplace and arrested two VC agents. The following week, a couple of ragtag guerrillas walked into his office with AK-47s, laid them down, and said, â€œWe want to surrender. Weâ€™ve heard things are changing around here.â€ And they did, and we took back that village and numbers of others with similar - I mean, think of that. One pistol. What one pistol in the right hands can do. We didnâ€™t need a B52. We didnâ€™t need a Division of US Army troops. We needed the right pressure in the right hands at the right time. I went back and saw this man. I looked him up in 2006.

And I had to polish up my Vietnamese for a couple months to do it, but I thought I would probably find a tomb, or a story that he had been executed. Instead, I found him. My son was with me, and we searched him out, and he remembered me fondly. And i said, â€œWhat happened to you?â€ I tried to get him out, by the way. I tried through the CIA to get him out in those last awful final days of April 1975, and I was told by the agency that it was just too confused and they were unable to do it. So I got there, and I said - we had this emotional meeting, and I said, â€œYou know, I tried to get you out of here.â€ And he said, â€œI know you did.â€

And I said, â€œWhat?â€ And he said, â€œTwo men, two civilians came down here from Saigon in April of â€˜75 and asked for me, and they said, â€˜We can get you out, and we can get you to the United States.â€™â€ And I get teared up just thinking about this. And I said, â€œWhy didnâ€™t you go?â€ And he said, â€œI talked it over with my family, and then I asked them, â€˜Could I take my family with me?â€™â€ He had a wife and daughter. â€œAnd they said, â€˜No. Thereâ€™s not room.â€™ And he said, â€˜Iâ€™ll stay here.â€™â€ And thatâ€™s what heâ€™d done. And I said, â€œWhat in the world did you do? Did they put you in prison or what?â€ And he said, â€œThe people of this village protected me.â€ He said, â€œYou remember when you first met me I was sleeping around in a different place every night?â€

He said, â€œI went back to doing that, and after a few months, the dust settled.â€ And when I asked for him, it was as if you had asked for President Lincoln or somebody. I went

to the current village chief in his old office and said I was looking for this man, gave his name. And he went like this.
Interviewer:
He was a legend in -
Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah. Yeah. So - there were loads of men like him in South Vietnam. There were thousands and thousands of them, who were sticking their necks out every day. And it took the United States and the government of Vietnam years to realize that you had to reach out to them, genuinely, and trust them, and help them. Let them lead you to victory over the Vietcong. And in many parts of Vietnam, they did that. After the South Vietnamese government, thanks to the shock of the Tet Offensive in â€˜68, finally began to get its act together - finally. And so did we with the unified CORDS organization.
And things gradually got better. The government got a little bit better. Security got a little bit better at first, and a lot better beginning in â€˜69. And until you had in some cases whole Companies. we had a whole Company of Vietcong in one Province surrender en masse; they negotiated a surrender, and itâ€™s the only time this happened, and they were all enlisted in the South Vietnamese Army.
Interviewer:
A whole Company?
Bruce Kinsey:
An entire Company of men up in Quang Ngai Province - or maybe it was Quang Nam, I canâ€™t quite recall, so.
Interviewer:
I mean -
Bruce Kinsey:
Up in II Corps.
Interviewer:
In the bio you gave me, you mentioned the fact that in your Province - and I canâ€™t pronounce the name of it - or your District - is it - can you pronounce the name of the District?
Bruce Kinsey:
No. I donâ€™t want to give that to you, because if that gets out, my village chief might be in trouble.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bruce Kinsey:
Okay?
Interviewer:
But you were saying, though, that the area where you were based went from 42nd out of 44 Districts in security -
Bruce Kinsey:
Long An Province when I arrived was 42nd in security out of 44. There was this kind of convoluted system of rating pacification. The system was crude at first; got better as it went along. But it was at least consistent internally. When I arrived, Long An was 42nd of 44, and when I left, it was 3rd. I would like to take total credit for that, but I was part of a team, and we had a good team.
Interviewer:
Itâ€™s fascinating, though, by just once again in your bio, you list some of the various teams that you had underneath you, and itâ€™s remarkable the breadth.
Bruce Kinsey:
It is. It is. I hadâ€¦letâ€™s see, I had an AID Agricultural Advisor who worked with farmers, giving them what we called miracle rice that was a much more productive strain of rice than the local brand. But it was also a little temperamental, and you had to train people in how to

use it; it took more water. I had a team of Filipino Civic Action guys, who went around and passed out pigs and chickens, and showed people how to cast in concrete flush toilets, rather than having a board out over the swamp.
I had an Engineer Company, I think it was. I may have said Battalion in what I gave you, but I think it was a Company. And they worked mostly on roads, clearing roads. I had a team of Korean vehicle mechanics who were on contract to AID, and they took care of the vehicles for the Province team and both the Vietnamese and the US Province team. I had a young Foreign Service Officer on his first tour, who was totally bewildered, hated Vietnam, and I never found anything productive for him to do. The best by far group that I had was a Seabee team. I think they were about 14 men strong, Navy Construction Battalion team, and I had them doing bridge building.
They built a couple of schools. They rebuilt the Catholic high school in town. I learned later this was strictly against the law, and you werenâ€™t supposed to use American funds for this kind of thing, but they were welcomed in open arms and they did a great job. The best thing they did - we had a two-day training program for all the village and hamlet officials in the entire Province. We brought them into the Province capital, and the Seabees showed them the elements of well-drilling, how to use hand pumps, electrical generators, water wheel things to lift the - â€˜cause water was critical, especially in the eastern side of the Province where you had salt water intrusion.
I canâ€™t remember. Simple vehicle maintenance, bridge building so they could build larger bridges that would take heavier loads. And this was the first time that anybody had really paid attention to these people, who were out there on the front lines, and they loved it; they absolutely loved it. Who else did I have? I had a US Army Captain, *LARRY REEVES*, who had taught himself enough Vietnamese. He was a very introverted guy, but in Vietnamese he became Mr. â€œHi, how you doing?â€ And he was just great. The Army did not know what to do with this poor guy; he was an engineer by training, college grad, but they didnâ€™t know what to do with him, and they gave him to me. And he worked - I assigned him to the RD [Rural Development] Cadre.
The black pajama guys, and he went all over the Province working with these people, teaching them effective ambush techniques. And with his engineering background, he showed them better ways to do projects, self-help projects and construction and things like that.
Interviewer:
It also says here you had a group of US AID Public Health Nurses.
Bruce Kinsey:
We did, and they had - they did clinics. They had mobile clinics that would go around treating people, but they did a lot of public health education. They had what they called a well-baby clinic, where they would teach mothers how to care for their babies better.
Interviewer:
What was the population of this District, approximately; any idea?
Bruce Kinsey:
My District - Lord, I donâ€™t know. Long An Province had I think 300,000 people in it or so. My District probably had 30,000 people, Iâ€™d guess.
Interviewer:
Equivalent of a -
Bruce Kinsey:
A county.
Interviewer:
Small-size city - yeah -
Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
A county seat.
Bruce Kinsey:

It was a county. It was - the Province town only had maybe 2,000 people in it, and the rest were villages and hamlets.
Interviewer:
What Iâ€™m hearing you saying, though, is that first of all, you were supporting, though, with all these various disparate teams, you were basically supporting the infrastructure, or creating infrastructure that did not previously exist.
Bruce Kinsey:
Well, yeah.
Interviewer:
And also the thing I hear, too, is that on a more abstract level, you were showing that the government cared; that they were sort of investing in the local people for the first time.
Bruce Kinsey:
Thatâ€™s right. Thatâ€™s well-put. Our being there kind of legitimized certain things. The government of Vietnam was terrorized. Beginning in 1960, the Vietcong selectively assassinated thousands - thousands - of village chiefs, hamlet chiefs, and school teachers, and police people. They began to cut off the fingers of the government of Vietnam, which was not great to begin with. But the government of Vietnam began to pull in, out of the countryside. You had things like they had a very - in 1957 they had a very - a model malaria eradication program in South Vietnam. The Vietcong went after the malaria sprayers.
Just started decapitating them, and after a while, malaria became a big problem in the rural areas. Government, even in the most mundane, its most mundane functions, just began to shut down, and move into the towns.
Interviewer:
And from the Vietcongâ€™s perspective, it was a brilliant strategy.
Bruce Kinsey:
Yes, it was. It was. This was not a bunch of hotheads, by any stretch of the imagination. These people were not just motivated; they were very well-organized. The essence of the chief characteristic of the Vietcong was superb training and organization, and that was their strong point. It was also I found their weak point; it made them predictable, and it sounds hard to believe, but after a while, after I had got there and really began to internalize things, and my command of the language improved - which it did just by leaps and bounds - I got to the point where I could predict what they were going to do; where they were going to put their energies. And I was right, and I would get ambushes set up in particular places, â€˜cause I knew they had to respond.
Their doctrine made it such. They had to demonstrate their authority over certain things, and we began to defeat them in detail. I mean one or two and three and a time. But when you do that, when you get some guy decides to surrender, and you - Iâ€™d parade him around in my Jeep as I took him back, people say, â€œHey, man, theyâ€™re coming apart at the seams out there. Look at that. Theyâ€™ve got this guy with his hands tied, bringing him in. He was either captured or he gave up.â€ I always spread the word that they gave up, and I spread rumors about what the Vietcong were doing.
â€œDid you hear? Thereâ€™s a whole Battalion of Vietcong that defected down in Such-and-such a Province.â€ I spread a rumor like that one evening about sunset. It was entirely untrue, but I was known as a straight-shooter, and I knew theyâ€™d believe me if I did this often enough, or if I didnâ€™t do it often enough. Anyway, the next morning I went out to another village clear on the other side of the District, and I said, â€œDid you hear what happened down in -â€œ whatever Province it was. â€œYeah, an entire Battalion -â€œ this was about 8:00 in the morning. â€œAn entire Battalion of VC surrendered.â€ That rumor had traveled all the way through Vietcong-controlled territory to another village. I loved messing with their heads that way. It really seemed to unsettle the other side.
By Colby -
Interviewer:
It also speaks to the power of perception versus reality.

Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah, and the VC, that power of perception had been on the side of the VC all along. I mean I was told so often, â€œOh, you canâ€™t go there. Thatâ€™s too dangerous. You canâ€™t go down that path. You canâ€™t drive there.â€ And I knew John Vann taught us, â€œYou go. Show them what you can do. The VC cannot possibly be everywhere. They canâ€™t possibly do all the things that they - they canâ€™t possibly have infiltrated all the places theyâ€™re supposed to have infiltrated. Thatâ€™s baloney.â€ And he was right. Most of the people didnâ€™t want to have anything to do with this war. The Vietcong were a distinct minority; probably never more than 10% of the population. But they had propaganda cadre embedded at the very lowest level of their organization in the hamlet squads.
And they used rumors and intimidation and a whole bunch of other things to get inside peopleâ€™s heads. Well, I found you could do the same thing for us.
Interviewer:
When did you leave Long An Province?
Bruce Kinsey:
I left Long An, went up to Saigon, in like March of 1970, and by that time it was very clear - I remember distinctly on my way up to Saigon, I went up Route 4, and over on the right in the rice fields, there were John Deere tractors, small John Deere tractors in the fields, and Iâ€™d never seen them there before. I had never seen - Iâ€™m sorry, Kubotas - they were Kubotas, orange ones. I had never seen them there before, and I thought, â€œMy God, things have really changed from going out there and harvesting by hand to this.â€ And that started to go on all over the Province.
William Colby in his book - what was it? Lost Victory, I think itâ€™s called - said that by the time he left Vietnam, he could drive from one end of Long An Province to the other, unaccompanied. He could not have done that when I arrived. It wouldâ€™ve been dicey still when I left, in certain Districts. But by the time he left, Long An was pacified. It was a peaceful place, and the Vietcong were down to squad-size activities. We had situations - we organized self-defense forces, and we had one situation where the North Vietnamese - it was in this village that I was telling you about, with the village chief and his gun.
A North Vietnamese unit wandered into this place, and asked some peasant, just after sunset, â€œWhere is a safe place to set up camp for the night?â€ And he said, â€œYou go down here 400 yards.â€ He knew that there was an ambush down there, but he sent them into it, and they were wiped out. He had the confidence to do that. He knew that there wouldnâ€™t be repercussions, because the local VC were very - and the fact that these guys were wandering around and lost meant there were no guerrillas to guide them. And we had more and more things like that, straws in the wind. So we took back Long An, and we took back a large part of the Mekong Delta.
Which in mid-1965 was - the rural areas of which were firmly in Vietcong hands. That war was going well. The problem, of course, was that thanks to the Tet Offensive and the fact that you had pictures of dead VC and NVA guerrillas on the steps of the American Embassy and so on, it took five weeks to recapture Hue was sort of the straw that broke the camelâ€™s back in this country in terms of public opinion.
Interviewer:
Also some very heavy weeks of very heavy American casualties, too, obviously.
Bruce Kinsey:
Oh, terrible, yeah; a couple hundred in a week at that point. However, that Offensive - we didnâ€™t know it at the time, but that Offensive really sapped the enemy side. It did one thing that had not happened before. It was the North Vietnamese who ordered this Offensive, and they put Vietcong main force and even village-level guerilla units at the front of the assault on Saigon, and those guys got decimated. That really strained relations in between those two sides, so that was something that we could exploit psychologically. I had our -
Interviewer:

Was that known at the time?
Bruce Kinsey:
We didnâ€™t begin to realize that until summer. The prisoner interrogations and so on, and the fact that large-unit activity was way down, we werenâ€™t getting as many shellings, and so on. The VC tried in what was called mini-Tet, in May of â€˜68 for a couple of weeks, to replicate Tet, and my District got cut off, but it very quickly was - we reestablished things. And after that, the VC were on the defensive, which they had not been when I was just months earlier, when I had walked into that place. And so there is the story of a - to me, Vietnam is a tragedy. I came to know the Vietnamese people very well. They were good, and brave, and very intelligent.
Very energetic, very ingenious people.
Interviewer:
Someone said that - actually, Morley Safer, who I interviewed for this project; the CBS newsman who spent -
Bruce Kinsey:
Right.
Interviewer:
Many years in Vietnam - also a big fan of the Vietnamese people. He said to me that the Vietnamese are the - of all the people in Asia, the Vietnamese are the ones most like Americans in their -
Bruce Kinsey:
They were - yes.
Interviewer:
Ingenuity, and -
Bruce Kinsey:
I think he was right.
Interviewer:
Their entrepreneurial activity.
Bruce Kinsey:
I think he may very well have been right. Iâ€™m no expert on the rest of Southeast Asia, but I connected with the Vietnamese, and they connected with me, very quickly. Weâ€™re both very practical people. Theyâ€™re not doctrinaire. They will find a solution to a problem, and theyâ€™ll keep at it for a long time. So I think that what we did was leave them in the lurch. I think Congress was way on the wrong track. You had horrible things going on in 1965. Whatâ€™s his first name? Lew Sorley, who was a graduate of this institution, I think has taught here, has written several books about Westmoreland and General Abrams, in particular; a very good book on Abrams.
And looking back, found that in those final months of the war, because of the Congressional, US Congressional cut-off of assistance to South Vietnam, you had artillery units in South Vietnam that were not allowed to fire more than two rounds a day.
Interviewer:
These were American units.
Bruce Kinsey:
No. There were no Americans there.
Interviewer:
Okay, this is after that; okay.
Bruce Kinsey:
These are South Vietnamese units - no more than two rounds a day. You had soldiers going out on patrol with only one clip of ammunition. You had radios that they couldnâ€™t get batteries. The whole logistics thing just wound down, and as the military pressure increased, the Vietnamese simply ran out of ammunition, among other problems. Not that they didnâ€™t have some stores, but they had to be very careful about what they did. Before, theyâ€™d been profligate in their use of these things; could do it no more. We

bugged out, and left those poor people to face a ruthless, rapacious enemy on their own. And I think it was a dishonorable thing to do.
Interviewer:
But Iâ€™m also hearing that there was also a - whatâ€™s the word Iâ€™m looking for - perceptual breakage, for the lack of a better term, between what was happening on the - what was achieved on the ground -
Bruce Kinsey:
Yes.
Interviewer:
By group outfits such as yours -
Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
In â€˜68, â€˜69, and sort of the political - certainly the political will of the American people to continue with the war.
Bruce Kinsey:
I was not here to witness this travesty, but stories would come back, and we would sit and scratch our heads. Not everybody was as committed to winning that war as I was, but we knew that we were on the right track - all of us. And weâ€™d see these reports in the newspapers and so on, riots, and burning draft cards, and at one point some books were even burned. My God - what was going on here? We were winning. We were winning, and the cause was right. And you were hearing the basest motives imputed to American soldiers, American civilians, and the loftiest motives being imputed to the Vietcong. Things, tales, just outrageous, totally fabricated tales of how moral and superior the Vietcong were. And they were not; they were nasty bastards. And I do not understand what happened to my country in those two years, 1967, 8, and into â€˜69. The tide clearly turned. But Iâ€™ve read transcripts of Congressional hearings that make me want to retch. A man I knew, a young Captain, was an Advisor to Regional Forces in my Province, and came back.
Was chosen to testify before Senator Fulbright and other Senators in 1970 or â€˜71, I canâ€™t remember which. And there was a Marine Captain who came as well, and they testified truthfully as to the improvements that they had seen, and it went on for quite a while. Mr. Vann was there; he was testifying as well. But at one point, somebody said to one of the Senators, â€œDo you have any more questions for Captain -â€œ what was his name, *Oâ€™MALLEY*, or canâ€™t remember. This United States Senator said, â€œIâ€™m not interested in hearing any more from these children.â€ â€œThese childrenâ€ - my God, what a despicable thing to say. That man was an elected representative to one of the highest offices in the land. Thatâ€™s how far wrong things were.
Interviewer:
But thereâ€™s something else that was going on, is that one of the problems was, it seems to me, was by â€˜69, the US government had lost certainly a certain amount of credibility.
Bruce Kinsey:
Oh God, yes.
Interviewer:
And once you lose a little bit of credibility, even the truth is then doubted.
Bruce Kinsey:
Thatâ€™s right.
Interviewer:
And thatâ€™s the importance of -
Bruce Kinsey:
This was Captain Armand Murphy, was this young manâ€™s name. MACV was a rigid military organization. General Westmoreland was fixed on one thing, which was

annihilating large units of the enemy. He was interested in body count, kill statistics, not in hamlets pacified or wells drilled or other things. General Westmoreland had no interest in nor understanding of pacification.
Interviewer:
Was that different under Abrams?
Bruce Kinsey:
Under Abrams, things changed dramatically. But Westmoreland, no.
Interviewer:
Did you have any dealings with Abrams, or did you ever -
Bruce Kinsey:
I never met him. Never met Westy, either, but -
Interviewer:
Abrams seemed to be more sympathetic to what you were doing.
Bruce Kinsey:
Oh, he was smarter, for one thing. But he turned the United States Army toward pacification duty, for the first time. Westy was out beating the bushes all the time, but - what was my train of thought? Iâ€™ve lost it. Oh - it was tremendous pressure for results, to the point where - and hereâ€™s a guy, hereâ€™s some Regular Army Captain, or Major like my Major, wanted nothing more than to become a Lieutenant Colonel. And the way you did it was to report that everything was progressing well. He had his standard briefing would always end in my District, â€œSir, we have no problems that we cannot solve at our own level.â€ Our District was controlled by the Vietcong.
Two-thirds of the District was controlled by the Vietcong, day and night, and this idiot is standing there saying, â€œWe have no problems we canâ€™t solve at our own level.â€ We needed huge help. And how much did we miss, because this ignoramus is fabricating reality? That happened all up and down the chain, to the point where American units would go out and just shoot anything that moved, as we know, and claim it as a kill. And guys would get bumped up in rank as a result of this nonsense.
Interviewer:
And theyâ€™d be gone in six months, too.
Bruce Kinsey:
Pardon?
Interviewer:
And theyâ€™d be gone in six months, too.
Bruce Kinsey:
And they would be gone, and there were never any investigations of this stuff; rarely. My Lai was an aberration only in the sense that it got uncovered and somebody got punished.
Interviewer:
Did you hear of other My Lais?
Bruce Kinsey:
I knew of other My Lais - not on that scale. But My Lai happened in little ways every day, and I had to go in and clean up some of these situations, and I can tell you that it was one of the most wrenching things I ever had to do. Some 19-year-old door gunner would take a couple of pot shots at sunset from someplace, and then proceed to hose down the area, or call in air strikes, and it was the oldest trick in the world. The Vietcong would sneak in to do exactly that; to provoke exactly that kind of a reaction, and then skedaddle. And then the next night, after all the civilian casualties, all the people were buried, and so on, then the VC propaganda team would come in.
Interviewer:
How do you stop that?
Bruce Kinsey:
Well, I went in, and guys like me, and by the time I left Vietnam, there were about 200 guys like me, and I would go in unarmed, alone, to these places. And I had a mealy-mouthed

speech that I would give, apologizing for this horrible travesty, and promising that there would be recompense for it - we would pay off people. And Iâ€™d check with the hamlet or village chief and say, â€œWhat do they want?â€ They want a well dug, they want their houses rebuilt, they want some tin roofing, they want a new school - anything to defuse those situations. The problem was those situations should never have happened in the first place.
The control over young men, hopped up, scared Americans, juiced up on testosterone and God knows what else - the control was very loose. And you look at My Lai, and thatâ€™s a problem of command control - lack of it. But it happened all the time, and itâ€™s -
Interviewer:
And it happens in other wars, too.
Bruce Kinsey:
Well, itâ€™s - yeah. But this was - I mean - this wasnâ€™t Libya in 1942. This was a war where the war was for the loyalty of people; it was about protecting people, not killing them, for Godâ€™s sake. And the United States Army took too long to get it. There were good men. There were some damn good US military Officers who got it. Abrams was one. I worked for another one. Colonel Asa Parker Gray was my Province Senior Advisor, and he took command and was smart enough to be worried. And he asked me what to do, and I told him, and he took my advice, and together we began to clean up that Province.
He got killed for it; I survived. Itâ€™s time for me to go.
Interviewer:
Do you have to leave? Is - no - itâ€™s 11:00.
Bruce Kinsey:
Fine. Sorry. Okay.
Interviewer:
Well, you had me like - you -
Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah. Here we are. I won the war. Thatâ€™s it.
Interviewer:
We have a little bit more time. I was -
Bruce Kinsey:
All right, anyway, let me tell you about Colonel Gray.
Interviewer:
Please.
Bruce Kinsey:
His predecessor was a bright Bird Colonel, who was one of these cigar-chomping guys who, you know, kick ass, take names, take charge. And he talked a good game, but the Province really wasnâ€™t moving ahead very much. You had this conflict that the United States Army took a long time to resolve, that those who were Advisors in it were faced with every day, and that was you were part of - you were an Army guy. You were a soldier. You were expected to go out there and do your best to win. Only you werenâ€™t in command of anything except a few other Advisors.
And all you could do was advise. And the guy you were advising often was not very good at what he did, mostly because he didnâ€™t know what to do; only you werenâ€™t quite sure of that. He was easy to make fun of. He was littler than you are, he wasnâ€™t as well-trained. And a lot of guys gave up, especially when Colonel So-and-so or General So-and-so would drop in out of the air and say, â€œThings havenâ€™t been going very well here with this unit. When are you going to get these guys off their ass, and get out there and kill some VC?â€ That wasnâ€™t his job. That wasnâ€™t the Generalâ€™s job, either, to do that. Thatâ€™s how you handle line combat units.
Thatâ€™s not how you advise. They were not taught that. There were plenty of good Advisors, but my experience was they just didnâ€™t know what to do, and there were an awful lot of them just sitting around, doing nothing. I was on my District team; we had I think maybe ten men, and most of those guys just sat around all day. Manned the radio, cleaned

their weapons. Theyâ€™d go out on an operation every once in a while. They didnâ€™t leave the compound that much. Go into town, sit down, drink some lemonade. Rarely left the Province town. I would take one along with me every once in a while, but found out very quickly that they didnâ€™t know how to behave, and that they scared people.
So I went out, I dressed in civilian clothes, and my weapons were usually concealed. And the soldiers, the US military that I was with, most of them just didnâ€™t know what they were there for. Dangerous.
Interviewer:
Which makes it very hard to maintain discipline, I would think.
Bruce Kinsey:
It makes it hard to maintain discipline, and it makes it very dangerous. These are guys who are frustrated. Theyâ€™re frustrated sexually, theyâ€™re frustrated physically. They donâ€™t see a lot of action. They donâ€™t really know what theyâ€™re doing there. They see the Vietnamese military units doing things they donâ€™t understand, often screwing up by the numbers, stealing chickens, bothering the local women, no respect for that. That was a Vietnamese problem that shouldâ€™ve been solved with good Advisory work all along the line. It was not. Being an Advisor is hard. The hardest part is not doing it yourself, but convincing this guy to do the right thing, and protecting him if there are consequences of doing the right thing.
Sometimes you have to take the heat. Sometimes you have to protect him from your chain of command. Sometimes you have to protect him from his chain of command. But the point is to get him to start doing the smart stuff. And we I donâ€™t think ever really conquered that problem.
Interviewer:
Tell me about your departure from Vietnam. You left in June of 1970.
Bruce Kinsey:
Right. My last few weeks were with this mixed civilian and military operation, staff operation to Colby, and I got sent out on these fact-finding missions. The one I remember most was going down into the Delta to this - my boss said - he was an American, very good guy, an AID guy named Lee Braddock. And Lee said, â€œWe keep getting reports about this one village thatâ€™s just surrounded by VC, but itâ€™s a garden spot, and the VC never attack it, and it sounds too good to be true. Would you go out, down and find out whatâ€™s going on?â€ So I went down and found out that in fact it was true. They had a good village chief.
And he knew what to do. And when the war began, villages had to sort of choose up sides, and sometimes it would, you know, thereâ€™d be eight hamlets in the village, and four of them would go with the VC, and four of them would go with GVN. And this village chief said, â€œOkay, weâ€™re going with the GVN.â€ Well, the VC came in and kidnapped his wife until he saw the light. I mean these are not social reformers. These are kidnappers. And so they held a council of war, and he said, â€œThey want me to change sides, but Iâ€™m not going to. What are we going to do?â€ And they said, â€œLetâ€™s go get her back.â€ And so I mean this was like the bartered bride. They went after her, and they persuaded somebody to give them a bunch of weapons, and they went in and took her back.
And then they fortified their village, and made sure they got plenty of support from the Province. And we were having fun there day and night; it was great. Paddling around on the - in these areas where they wouldâ€™ve been great for VC ambushes, but these guys knew it was safe, so. I did that for a while, and I worked with some kind of public opinion survey of some sort, I remember, that they were setting up. Came back here, and I spent a year and a half with the Division of Intelligence and Research at the State Department, of all things, reporting on the pacification program. Excuse me.
I got demoralized. I gave that war my all. I had spent - most of my time in Germany was working on Vietnam, and then I spent 14 months in training, and 26 months there, so Iâ€™d

given a big chunk of my life to that country. And I came back to the State Department and found that my level of commitment was - I didnâ€™t expect it to be matched, but I expected people to take Vietnam and this countryâ€™s stated policy seriously, and to try to understand it, and to change their views when circumstances warranted.
And I found that - Iâ€™m not sure exactly when it happened or what accounted for it, but there was a level of cynicism at State, the senior professional people, that was very unsettling to me; and I wasnâ€™t sure what to do about it. I had a boss who just would not hear that things were getting better in Vietnam. He had once been there, long earlier, for like a week. That was his sole experience. We all spoke Vietnamese in that office, except for one guy spoke French. But we had been in the field, and we knew things were getting better.
And we would write that, and he would eviscerate our reports that went to the top echelons of the government. Not just our own State Department, but also the White House, and the Pentagon, and CIA. And after a while, I got pretty disturbed about what was going on, and I wasnâ€™t sure what to do. I had a wife. I had a child on the way. I had a bachelorâ€™s degree in Foreign Service, which that and a nickel might get you a subway trip in New York City. Iâ€™d wanted to be a Foreign Service Officer from the time I was 16 years old. I knew nothing else.
But I realized that I was not fitting in; further, I was a kind of organizational rebel. In Vietnam, I stirred up a lot of trouble sometimes, sticking up for things that I thought were right. And I was right to do it, and some people recognized that, and corrected some reports that were written on me. But at the State Department, they werenâ€™t sure what to do with me. I knew my business, and I was briefing - at one point I was briefing the Secretary of State every day, but they were - I was writing and saying things that were not the company line, and believe me, there was a company line, and it was pretty much, if you wanted to distill it, it was that this war is not winnable.
I didnâ€™t believe that. I knew it wasnâ€™t true. So what to do? And I decided to hedge my bets, and I started taking night courses at the MBA program at George Washington University, just to see what it was like, and I kind of liked it. And after a year and a half, I applied to the University of Virginia Graduate Business School, the Darden School, and was accepted there. The idea was to hedge my bets. I would take leave without pay, which I did. There was a reform movement underway. There were a lot of Junior Officers at State at that time who were very unhappy with the way things were; very rigid organization.
And a lot of nasty things going on under the table - guysâ€™ careers being ruined and so on. Iâ€™ll tell you about one in a minute. But I didnâ€™t like what I was seeing, and I didnâ€™t know what to do about it, and I realized I was rising, and I was going to get in the middle, and by that time I was, what, how old was I - 32 or 33 years old, something like that. And I was going to have, here I was going to have a kid, house, and a mortgage and all that. What am I going to do? State Department Personnel System is an up-or-out system, and many a guy has, at the age of 42, found himself with a pink slip and no prospects, and I didnâ€™t want to be one of those guys. So I went and got an MBA.
There was a reform movement underway, and I kind of watched it, see what would happen. It was designed, it was an attempt by a man named McCumber, William McCumber, to break up some of these cliques that had existed for decades in the State Department, and open up areas for young Officers to rise, and to get rid of some of the unproductive people at the top. The problem was by the time you got to the equivalent in the Foreign Service of a Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel, you were afraid to voice dissatisfaction with the adopted views. The consequences were very serious, and so you had no questioning of things that were going on. It was not that kind of an atmosphere.
How it is now, I really donâ€™t know. Iâ€™m told it hasnâ€™t changed that much.
Anyway, after two years, I got a job offer from a consulting firm in DC. I went back to the State Department for a couple of days and asked around, and Ambassador McCumber had been shunted off to Turkey. The reform movement had petered out, and it really didnâ€™t amount to much of anything. And so I tendered my resignation. It was a very

hard thing to do.
Interviewer:
I bet.
Bruce Kinsey:
But I walked into a pretty good job, and that changed my life.
Interviewer:
I just want to ask you a question, something I probably shouldâ€™ve asked earlier; forgive me, itâ€™s a little out of sequence, but just going back to Vietnam. One of the programs involved in late â€˜68, â€˜69 was the Phoenix program, and you said -
Bruce Kinsey:
Yes.
Interviewer:
You could talk a little bit about that.
Bruce Kinsey:
Okay. I was not involved in the Phoenix program, but I knew about it.
Interviewer:
Did you see the consequences of it?
Bruce Kinsey:
I did. The Phoenix program was a joint United States, CIA, and government of Vietnam program that was aimed specifically at the most influential Vietcong, the political and military apparatus. The Phoenix program didnâ€™t really start until I think late â€˜67 or so.
Interviewer:
So it was going on during your time there.
Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah. Phoenix - what the Phoenix program was, was an organizational thing. It was not necessarily an assassination program.
Interviewer:
Thatâ€™s certainly the popular image of it, if it has a popular image.
Bruce Kinsey:
The popular image of it is crap. It was an attempt, first of all, to organize all the US and GVN resources, intelligence resources, in order to identify bad guys. It was quite amazing. An American Major went around in mid-â€˜67 to all over the country, looking at what the various regions and Provinces were doing in terms of consolidating information, and he found they werenâ€™t. The ARVN S2s and G2s were sitting on all kinds of material - prisoners, and prisoner interrogation reports, and reports from the population thatâ€™d be turned into ARVN units and so on. The national Police Special Branch had their own operation.
There was the District S2, who was usually some First Lieutenant who was running around collecting information on operations and processing other stuff that come into the District Headquarters. US units would collect intelligence operations. There were guys like me running around - I collected all kinds of intelligence on people, and I would turn it in, usually to the Special Branch guys. But there was information galore, but nobody was putting it all together. So in â€˜67, there was this crash program to build what were called - there were two aspects to it. The first one was the DIOCC, the District Intelligence Operating and Coordination Center, and you had - oh, the RD Cadre, the black pajama guys, they were involved in this, too.
And the idea was to put, for at least a few hours a day, somebody from each one of those organizations in the same room, where they could sit and talk about what was going on where, and begin sharing sources, and begin drawing a map of who the bad guys were where, in terms of this Vietcong infrastructure. Weâ€™re not talking mostly about military people; weâ€™re talking about the intelligence and logistics and political cadre of the Vietcong. So there was this physical aspect that was the Phoenix program; it was a sharing of information.

The action arms of the - as a result of this stuff, intelligence operations would be planned and conducted. Sometimes they would be military operations. Sometimes they would be police operations. Sometimes they would be conducted by the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit, the PRU, and the PRUs were strictly a CIA operation. I think that was a mistake. I think they shouldâ€™ve been a joint operation, but they were -
Interviewer:
A joint operation between the CIA -
Bruce Kinsey:
With the GVN, but they were not. PRUs used information which they developed themselves, or which was provided to them, and they were small teams, very highly trained; numbers of them were ex-VC. And they would go out, usually at night, often in civilian clothes, and they would sneak into a place and try to lift a guy. Most of the eliminations that were done - and there were thousands - involved capturing a guy or kidnapping him. If he resisted, then he was killed, and they would then exfiltrate the area, as we say, and one bad guy would be down. These were highly effective.
Thereâ€™s a book - if anybodyâ€™s seriously interested in how the Vietcong was fought, and how they fought, the book to read is by Dr. Jeffrey Race, called War Comes to Long An. And in it, he collected captured-in-action and killed-in-action statistics in Long An Province in the period 1966, â€˜67, â€˜68 - early â€˜68. And he found that the PRUs, this little group of a dozen guys - well, maybe 30, I donâ€™t know, and they operated sometimes and theyâ€™d break down in smaller groups than that - was accounting for about a quarter of enemy casualties in Vietnam.
A quarter of them. Not only that, but they were getting high-quality targets.
Interviewer:
And they were using the knife, not the bomb.
Bruce Kinsey:
They were. They were. There were - they did all kinds of things. They were neat guys. They were tough; they were very tough. And they were very careful about whom they associated with. They didnâ€™t want anything leaking out about where they were going, â€˜cause had any of their operations been blown, they wouldâ€™ve been very vulnerable. They were quite small units. So anyway, that was the Phoenix program, that like so many other things, the Phoenix program got twisted, both in Vietnam, and when news of it came out It was twisted in the United States.
In Vietnam, particularly up in the central part of the country, the PRUs were used to settle old political scores, and land disputes, and to extract money from people, and so on. It was just they were too good. And one of the problems was the image of the CIA Agent who can blend into the countryside and speak 17 languages without being detected, is not true. Most of the CIA guys did not speak Vietnamese, and so too often - their ideas were good, and they were smart, and they did a lot of good, and they were far and away the best agency that we had doing things in Vietnam. But they were not linguistically gifted, and sometimes they got hornswaggled by the guys they had set up.
And in too many cases with the PRUs, thatâ€™s exactly what happened.
Interviewer:
That also seems to me, though, something that happens in many conflicts, where -
Bruce Kinsey:
The revolutionaries become the bandits.
Interviewer:
Well, not only that, not only that, but just sort of local self-interests or local interests or, you know, tribal rivalries, or old disputes all of a sudden get wrapped up in all of a sudden instruments of the policy. And youâ€™re saying, â€œOh, well, hereâ€™s a great opportunity just for me to settle my old score with my neighbor, whoâ€™s been bugging me for ten years.â€
Bruce Kinsey:
Speaking of New Jersey -

Interviewer:
Laughs Ba-dum-bump.
Bruce Kinsey:
Okay, so Congress got wind of this thing, and by the time the left got a hold of it, it became an assassination program, and all kinds of tales were told about it. It was - one of the problems, like so many things, was that the reality got distorted in reporting. Too many of the people who were reported as cadre killed were just some guy who was hauling ammunition. There was that, and so there was an inflation, particularly early in the program, of kill statistics on the cadre. It looked like we were wiping them out and they couldnâ€™t possibly last more than a few more weeks - not true.
But back in this country, we had a few Senators just go ape over this, and the idea that we would ever do this. Now, it has always infuriated me that when the government of Vietnam or when the United States of America did things like this, we were the right hand of Satan. The Vietcong did this for years and years and years and years, and you never heard about it. You never heard a thing about it. This was how Ho Chi Minh came to power, for heavenâ€™s sake, in North Vietnam - by assassinating his political rivals. The VC, it tried to intimidate people.
And if they didnâ€™t, if they werenâ€™t intimidatable, then theyâ€™d kill them. And sometimes they didnâ€™t even try, they didnâ€™t even bother with the intimidation; letâ€™s just do that village chief in. And weâ€™re talking about thousands and thousands of government functionaries, and the United States and the GVN take out - selectively - people who are planning that kind of activity, and weâ€™re the bad guys. Now, whatâ€™s wrong with that picture? Somehow, to me, things just got wholly twisted, and never got put right.
One of the hard parts was coming back to this country after giving my all for what we were trying to do, and people I knew to be very good, and hearing the bullshit that people would spout at parties and whatnot, and on the air, about that war, and not being able to do anything about it. Beyond that, I would, you know, go to some social gathering. People say, you know, â€œWhat do you do?â€ â€œI work for the State Department.â€ â€œOh really - what do you do?â€ â€œWell, I just got back from Vietnam.â€ And the conversation would stop. It would stop.
I had been in the war, and seen things that were central to American policy, and concluded some interesting things, I thought, and nobody wanted to hear about Vietnam - nobody. If you wanted to clear a room quickly, mention that you had been an Advisor in the Vietnam War, and that is the case to this day.
Interviewer:
I want to - I know you have another appointment in about half an hour. I want to give you a little break between this and your next appointment, so I just have a few last questions for you.
Bruce Kinsey:
Okay, fine.
Interviewer:
I want to give you a chance, and so I donâ€™t want to drain you entirely. Bringing - leaving Vietnam and coming up to the present now, obviously, recently the American military has been involved in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are also counterinsurgency.
Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Based upon your experience in Vietnam, almost 40 years ago now, 35 years ago, what is the take-away for - that you would give to young Officers or Cadets here at West Point for the proper way to fight an insurgency, like -
Bruce Kinsey:
Okay.

Interviewer:
Such as that in Afghanistan or Iraq?
Bruce Kinsey:
You canâ€™t do it all by yourself. The United States Army is never going to be able, by its lonesome, to pacify anyplace. It is too much of a multifaceted - it requires too many skills, and no one person has them all. Youâ€™re going to need to draw on not only your own training and your own resources that the Army supplies you, but youâ€™re going to have to draw on civilians, other military, Allied military, the military in the host country. Youâ€™re going to have to be talking with police. Youâ€™re going to have to, as I did, talk with village chiefs. In the Middle East, youâ€™re going to really struggle with the religious structure. And if you can worm your way into the minds of a few mullahs, youâ€™re going to be miles ahead. We found that I think in Kandahar Province. I donâ€™t know that part of the world. All I know is what I read in the papers and what I hear from some people who come back from there. One thing concerns me greatly, and that is that we do not have anywhere near the number of people trained in the local languages to be able to operate effectively. The language gives you - itâ€™s like - it was incredible to me. It was incredible to the Vietnamese that a round-eye like me could speak their language as well as I did.
And I could joke with them, and so on, and eventually get information out of them. They were amazed. Their jaws literally dropped when I would open my mouth and speak Vietnamese, and they just gushed. â€œOh, Iâ€™ve been waiting to tell somebody so long about that problem, and nobody -â€œ you know. â€œAmericans have been through here 20 times, and nobody ever talked to me.â€ I ended up getting most of my information by drinking tea with farmers, several times a day; just stop in and say hello. We do not train in foreign languages well at all, or enough of them.
My training center ultimately trained close to 2,000 men to go to Vietnam and blend into the countryside, and we did, and it made a huge difference. We had 500,000 soldiers there at any given time who couldnâ€™t speak more than 15 words of Vietnamese, and half of those were dirty, and were not very effective at what they did. Well, thereâ€™s a connection between those two things.
Interviewer:
If I could reduce it, it sounds like what youâ€™re saying, to me anyway, is sort of fighting without language is a little bit like flying without radar.
Bruce Kinsey:
I think thatâ€™s a very good - yeah. I think thatâ€™s a very good analogy. It was a magic key, and Iâ€™ll never forget the first time I arrived there, and I started speaking Vietnamese with one of the guards at the gate to the compound, and a crowd gathered, of mostly young people. â€œListen to him,â€ you know? And I was - that was like my first - Iâ€™d been in Vietnam no more than a week, and my Vietnamese was still pretty halting. I got better as I got along. I used to be able to joke with guys, and tell slightly dirty jokes, and things like that. It makes a huge difference. Youâ€™re accepted. Think how we fawn over guys like Hamid Karzai because he speaks such eloquent English. Whether heâ€™s worth fawning over, I donâ€™t know, but we do it again and again and again. We only deal with the guys who speak English.
And usually the problems are caused by guys who donâ€™t, and we ought to do that. Something else - we need to really begin thinking out of the boxes here. The most effective organizations, military organizations that I saw in Vietnam involved the use of mixed forces. Some police, some RD Cadre, some Regional Forces guys, a couple of American Advisors, that kind of thing. The one thing we never did was to form joint forces with Vietnamese. Someday Iâ€™ll write a article about this, but I -
Interviewer:
The actual mixed units.
Bruce Kinsey:
Yeah. I envisage a triangle that is a - starts out being all Americans, with an American Captain at the head, and at least - letâ€™s say there are a dozen guys, and at least four of

them are trained in the language, and the head of the unit is certainly one of them. And they operate for a month. At the end of one month, one local joins them. He is inculcated into the group. He learns some English. The non-local language speakers learn a little bit of his language. The next month, another guy joins and one more American drops out, and so on, until you have an American Officer and an all-local unit, and a local Officer at the head, which at that point, he becomes the Advisor, the American becomes the Advisor.
And you have a fully-trained unit of locals, who are very familiar with American ways, and who probably speak enough English to get along in operational situations. Now, this would contravene a long-held American doctrine, that of unit integrity - the most important thing. Unit integrity does not necessarily mean it has to be all Americans. We had great success in the Second World War by combining the staffs of the British Army and the United States Army, to plan the D-Day invasion, and in the field. Thereâ€™s no reason, I think, that if we have the training resources, we canâ€™t begin doing something like this in these counterinsurgency situations.
Part of the problem is you have men with good intentions and no language skills blundering about, making assumptions that are wholly wrong over who the good guys are and who the bad guys are, or you know, whose house that belongs to, and other low-level things. Knowing the language straightens that all out, makes it very - so much simpler to figure out what the right thing is to do. And it makes you a much more sympathetic person to the people that youâ€™re dealing with. â€œI can surrender to that guy. I trust him. He speaks my language.â€
Interviewer:
Pretty elemental when you think about it.
Bruce Kinsey:
Well, I thought it was a better idea than that, but.
Interviewer:
My last question for you now. This has been - I was going to say, weâ€™ve been talking for two hours. This has been a fascinating two hours; Iâ€™d like to thank you.
Bruce Kinsey:
My wife will tell you that I never hold forth like this.
Interviewer:
How did your experience in Vietnam change you?
Bruce Kinsey:
It made me very angry. Itâ€™s an anger that Iâ€™m afraid I still have not lost. I think some of that came across in this interview. You should not let that happen when youâ€™re an Advisor; whom the gods would destroy, they first make angry. Itâ€™s easy to get angry. Itâ€™s easy to get pissed off. My Major used to throw tantrums all the time, and got nowhere. So it made me pull in. I mean here this was central to me for a long time, and I came back, and I went to business school, and nobody was interested in Vietnam, and few people since then have been.
I finally realized this was something very valuable. I guess the whole Middle Eastern-Central Asian things, those challenges, made me begin to think again about the lessons that I had learned in Vietnam, and whether they might be valuable, and I think some of them are. Not all, but some are, and I wanted to do something about that. The first thing I did was hold a reunion, a States reunion of CORDS guys back in 2007 in Arlington. We got together and sang songs and drank beer and had a wonderful time.
Interviewer:
And youâ€™ve been back to Vietnam, too.
Bruce Kinsey:
And I had - the year before, Iâ€™d gone back to Vietnam, courtesy of my son. Leaving the State Department meant I didnâ€™t make a lot of money in life. But my son is a wonderful fellow, and he knew how much this meant to me, and he took Joan and me back. Greatest experience of my life was going back and seeing that village chief.

Interviewer:
Yep.
Bruce Kinsey:
Anyway, I decided after a couple of years, and hearing from a good friend of mine, Larry Crandall, who followed me into every job I had in Vietnam, and then went to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and fought the Soviets, and he organized Taliban rebels against the Soviet Union. He was an AID guy, and stuck with AID, and continued to do things in Pakistan and Iraq as well. And he told me what was going on, and we both just shook our heads. There is no central training facility. Thereâ€™s not enough language facility.
He recounted stories of Ministers calling him aside and shaking their heads and saying, â€œWho is this guy whoâ€™s supposed to be my Advisor? He does not know what heâ€™s doing. Why do you keep sending me people like this?â€ Itâ€™s insulting. Training people in local language and customs, if weâ€™re going to deal seriously with this part of the world, and try to impress our will on parts of it, we need the tools, the basic tools. And they are language and culture training, and operational training. Third lesson: small units. The smaller the unit is, the better chance it has of success.
All the things that I was involved in that were successful were little units of motivated guys.
Interviewer:
Could you define little units, how many men?
Bruce Kinsey:
Oh, as many as three or four. Sometimes, you know, a Platoon. 59-men cadre team. Once they get to Company size, theyâ€™re hard to disguise, theyâ€™re hard to hide. They make too much noise, and people get scared of them. You donâ€™t want scared people talking to you, so there.
Interviewer:
You say youâ€™re writing a book; might as well give a plug for your book.
Bruce Kinsey:
Oh yes. The book, should it ever be finished, is going to be called Good Guys, and it is about people in the pacification program - civilians and military - in Vietnam, primarily in the 1968 to â€˜72 period. But it will explain pacification programs, what we were up against, a lot of the things Iâ€™ve been talking about here.
Interviewer:
How far along in it are you?
Bruce Kinsey:
Thatâ€™s a good question.
Interviewer:
Painful question, maybe.
Bruce Kinsey:
Iâ€™m maybe halfway through.
Interviewer:
You have any idea when youâ€™re going to be finished with it?
Bruce Kinsey:
I hope - I hope within the next six to nine months.
Interviewer:
Well, I look forward to reading it.
Bruce Kinsey:
So do I.
Interviewer:
Iâ€™d like to thank you for your time today.
Bruce Kinsey:
Thank you.
Interviewer:
Itâ€™s been a great, great, great session.