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I'm no military strategist, but it seems to me that if you are involved in the civil war of another nation that what you are fighting for is the hearts and minds of the populace first and traditional military targets second. The trend that stands out to me in this section of Appy's book is that while we clearly recognized the threat from enemy sympathy amongst the locals, we failed to react to it in a thoughtful way. The American method for dealing with locals grew increasingly hostile as our sense of unease from the locals increased. Consequently we inflamed any dislike they may have had and created our own enemy. The cliché about putting a fire out with gasoline could be well used here. This negative feedback model was sure to foster increased sympathy for both the enemy and eventually for their cause. If we ever had a chance to motivate the people of South Vietnam to stand with us against a communist movement we squandered it with our callousness towards their people, property and their customs.

Jonathan Schell spells out the problem wonderfully in his interview. He refers to operation Cedar Falls, in which we attempted to completely clear out an area call the Iron triangle. While he states that the operation was considered a success we can read his doubt about the long-term consequences. "But they left out what I believed was fundamental---that we were destroying villages and throwing people off their land. The unmistakable fact was that the general population despised the United States and that if they hadn't despised it before we arrived, they soon did after we destroyed their villages." Throughout the interview with Schell he expresses his amazement that this was happening. It was clear to him that this kind of approach to the war was counter-productive. How much of this kind of treatment was happening can be judged by how unaffected some of the American soldiers were by it. Jim Soular recounts another village depopulation in which helicopters were used to transport the locals out of a village. It's important to remember that these very simple people were being forcibly removed from their homes in a very loud, very intimidating way. "There were only four of us with sixty of them.... We started lifting off and one of the Vietnamese in the back stood up and freaked out....We were probably sixty feet off the ground, maybe more. The crew chief just thought, fuck it, your out of here, and pitched the man out the back end....when he hit the ground. He just laid there." Later Jim Soular remembers asking the crew chief what happened and is answered with what seems like an off handed explanation about making a point by throwing "...his ass out of there." Jim says

that he might have done the same thing. Fifty-nine South Vietnamese people watched as an American soldier simply threw one of their own to his death because the poor man was panicked. While Jim seems to have considered the event as noteworthy, it seems that his fellow soldier did not.

Another poignant example of this can be found in Philip Jones Griffiths' recount of an interrogation of a terrified boy that he guessed to be about fourteen. "The American was yelling to the interpreter. 'tell him we're gonna kill his father unless he tells us where the VC are hiding.' And the kid was shouting, 'I don't know, I don't know...' Finally the American said, 'Okay, kill the father.' They dragged the father off to the side and they shot. The kid was totally shattered. Then the American said, 'Okey, he doesn't know anything.' So they brought the father back and this kid looks up and couldn't believe his father wasn't dead because he'd heard the shots....They weren't doing anything they hadn't done many times before." When I put myself in this kid's head I feel a deep rage. I cannot imagine that this young man didn't become a Vietcong. It's hard to make allies out of a population that you don't treat with a sense of human dignity.

There are consequences to such inhuman treatment of the locals in their actions. Fred Branfman recalls the words of his friend Ngeun, a former Pathet Lao soldier for us. Fred was asking if it was hard to get volunteers to sacrifice themselves by falling on the barbed wire and acting as a human bridge so that their comrades could attack an American emplacement. Ngeun said "No, no. You don't understand. Everybody volunteered. They killed my mother, I want to go first, I want to be the one." We were creating our own enemies. Each time we treated one of the population unfairly we fostered sympathy for the Northern cause, each time we dislocated a family we created resentment to ourselves and each time we maimed or killed a civilian we bolstered the ranks of the Vietcong. The resulting collusion between the guerillas and the locals can be seen in Vu Hy Thieu's recollections of his war experience.

"Sometimes, at sunset, near our jungle base, we'd move close to the edge of the rice fields to watch the people working. We could do that safely because the puppet troops didn't dare stay in the fields after dark. We often played with the buffalo boys and they leaked tidbits of information about the puppet soldiers...." The relationship between the NVA and the locals could be described as non-threatening, maybe even friendly. The idea that a 'foreign invader' would "play with" the local herders is telling about the loyalties of the common population in the South.

The interrelation between the threat that we felt from the locals and the threat that they felt from us was much like a chicken and egg scenario. Unfortunately for the Americans the damage we did to our own cause was slow healing, and seemingly only considered important by the press and the antiwar movement.

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