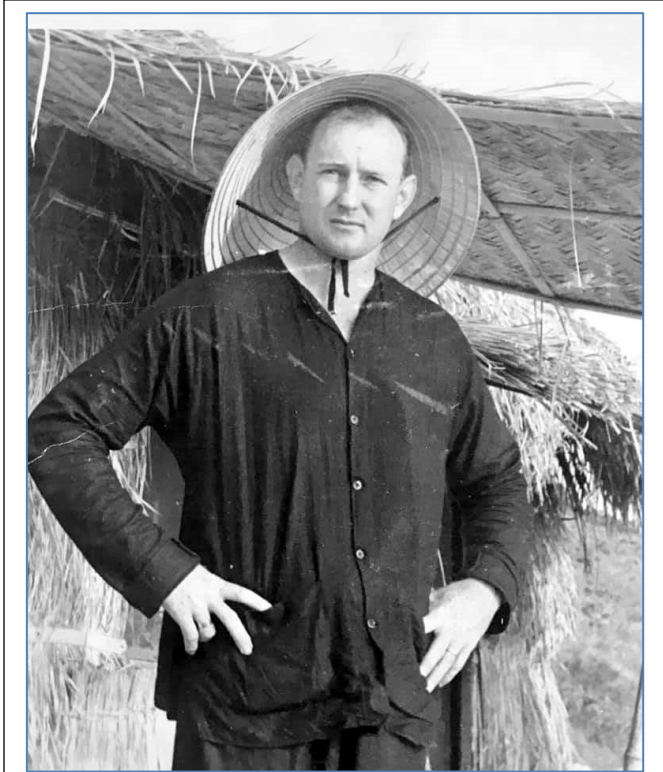


My Unificationist Memoirs - Chapter 6

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Tucker Gougelmann on Paradise Island in 1964

That I should be spiritually drawn into the Vietnamese refugee community came as no surprise to me. My ties to Vietnam ran deep. I first became aware of the conflict there in 1963 when Ed Bronars and my father, both Marine majors at the time, began an in depth study with the famed French journalist, PhD, and adventurer, Bernard Fall. They rented an apartment together in Arlington's Roswell district and immersed themselves in the history of Vietnam, guerrilla warfare, and French military tactics - what worked, what didn't. Ed Bronars would later serve as Oliver North's regimental CO in Vietnam, and retire as a Lieutenant General from the Marine Corps. Eventually, General Bronars became the Director of Oliver North's Freedom Alliance. I'll circle back to that in a later chapter.

At the completion of their studies in the summer of 1964, Ed Bronars and my father deployed. As is typical with the Marine Corps community, the Bronars and Scharfen families resided in relative proximity near Camp Pendleton, and looked after each other while

our fathers placed themselves in harm's way. Part of what our Dads were doing in Vietnam was standing up the Marine Corps component of MACV as the war heated up under Lyndon Johnson's administration. My father had served as the Executive Officer of the 2nd Recon Battalion in Camp Lejeune, an outfit which had kept alive the Marine counterinsurgency and guerrilla warfare expertise, honed during the post-WWI period in Central America and the Caribbean, and further developed through the experience of the Marine observers with Mao's 8th Route Army and the WWII Marine Raiders. It was only natural that my father be assigned to "SOG" or the "Studies and Observation Group," an anodyne name covering the umbrella group for all of the American special operations. When he first arrived in Saigon, my father began the process of inheriting the CIA paramilitary programs currently in progress - a natural transition as many of the "spooks" were Marines. These included CIA operations with the indigenous tribes in Laos, which would later be taken over by Army Special Forces... which is another way of saying, the Marines were among the first there. That is, until my father stepped out of a plane and was greeted by the American ambassador to Laos, Leonard S. Unger, and informed he was there in violation of the 1962 International Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos, and was "persona non grata." He turned around and flew back to Saigon.

His energies turned to the "psyops" and Maritime SOG operations off the coast of Vietnam. These operations were complex, with multiple components but two here are significant. The first was running an interdiction and harassment operation along the coast of both North and South Vietnam. The Communists were smuggling arms and agents by sea and inserting them in the South. SOG operated both Nasty and

Swift Boats to engage and capture the enemy. At the end of July, the SOG boats shelled North Vietnamese shore facilities on two islands off the coast, in an apparent escalation of what had been an ongoing conflict. The Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred on August 2 when the North Vietnamese Navy pursued the SOG operators and opened fire on the USS Maddox in international waters. A second incident occurred on August 3-4, when after shelling another facility, the SOG boats were again pursued by the Northerners. However, we now know that neither the USS Turner Joy nor the Maddox (still operating in international waters) were opened fire upon in this second encounter. That inconvenient detail did not stop Lyndon Johnson from pushing for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and initiating a bombing campaign of the North.

Maritime operations were also involved in the Psychological Warfare component of SOG's mission. During this period of time, my father worked with the storied Marine and CIA operative, Tucker Gougelmann. Here is one of the more creative examples of the many operations they initiated or inherited: The CIA had built a Potemkin Village on Paradise Island off the coast of South Vietnam. The island was the operations home of the "Sacred Sword of the Patriots League" (SSPL) which supposedly had carved out a liberated zone in the North of Vietnam. The objective of this psyops campaign was to undermine the confidence and morale of (and in) the communist government, and eventually, create a rallying point for rebellion in the North. The SOG operators would capture North Vietnamese fishing boats and bring them to this island, blindfolded. When released, they would then spend three weeks in workshops and be indoctrinated in anticommunist ideology and the supposed activities of the SSPL. They received medical and dental care, were well fed and well treated. The catch of the fishing boats was purchased at the island for an inflated price. Before returning to the North, the fishermen were recruited as agents of the SSPL. If a committed communist or political officer was identified during the three week period, incriminating documents were surreptitiously sewn into their clothes before release (a variation on the "poison pen" letter campaign which is worth researching for those interested). Their fishing boats were then returned by SOG to the waters of the North and they were sent on their way. Over time, a number of the loyal communists were executed for their concealed documents. Reportedly, North Vietnamese fishing boats would try to be captured a second or even a third time because of the treatment obtained and prices received for their catch.

There was some official question as to the efficacy of MACVSOG. Maritime SOG and the psyops campaign were never popular with Westmoreland or in Washington D.C. There was fear that, if successful, a rebellion in the North would prompt a Chinese Communist intervention in the war. However, a more accurate measure of the success of SOG psyops methods was that, in the earliest stages of negotiations for the initiation of the Paris Peace Talks, the communists insisted that the operations of the SSPL and Paradise Island had to be discontinued. This occurred in late 1968.

Throughout my father's deployment, and those of our many military friends, I followed the course of the Vietnam War with close and intensely personal attention. I could never be a detached observer of events there. The 6:00 news was a source of profound and extended anxiety in our family. When Lt. Col. Jack Spaulding, one of our oldest Marine friends and the father of seven children, was killed in October 1966, the worst of our fears were realized. I was the one who received the call and delivered the news to my father. It was the first time I had ever seen him cry. The second time I saw my father cry was after I burned my draft card in opposition to the war. Thus, when I met Lan Pham, it seemed a natural continuation of events.

I'm including a picture of Tucker Gougelmann, taken on Paradise Island in 1964. Gougelmann "went native," in my father's words. He married a Vietnamese woman and started a family. He retired from the CIA in 1972 and fled to Thailand when Vietnam fell. He attempted to retrieve his wife and family, but betrayed by a neighbor, the communists captured and tortured him to death, literally breaking every bone in his body. His family and his body were ultimately repatriated to the US.