

From Mr. Hacker's logbook at the time of the incident: In Vinh Bing we were called one day at noon to send a photographer out on the Tieu Can road where a civilian bus had just hit a road mine. These were the days when the PsyOps people were making posters with pictures of Viet Cong atrocities on one-half and GVN projects on the other. At the bottom was written "The VC Destroy—the GVN Builds." We had to send our photographer, Tang Be, but he needed security, so Sgt. Joe Whitworth and I went along in the jeep. We must have made an interesting sight – one VN, a red-haired American and another with a big mustache – all in civilian clothes and carrying M-2s, bouncing down a dusty, pot-holed road. We passed the bridge after a fifteen-minute drive and some five minutes later we arrived where the bus had been mined.

The bus was so small and incredibly flattened and twisted – and twenty-six people were dead. All civilians – mostly women, some children, no soldiers. The sun was hot and its effect on the raw flesh of the torn and broken bodies was overwhelming. We arrived at the same time as the Tieu Can District Senior Advisor and two of his enlisted men. They were in flak jackets but no helmets. We began to look over the sight while the few Vietnamese who had gathered at the scene simply stared at the remains of both the bus and the passengers. Bodies, or parts of them, were strewn along the road and some were still embedded in the bus. A foot here, an arm there, the upper half of a torso, but no lower half. The hole left by the mine was approximately 7 feet in diameter and 3-4 feet deep. The explosion had picked up the bus and flipped it in the opposite direction from which it was coming. By this time some relatives and friends had gathered and began to set up a loud wailing and crying.

There was nothing left for us to do so we started our drive back to the province capital driving quickly, alertly and in silence. In our minds the mining was brutal, wanton, savagely cruel and most importantly, pointless. Had the VC who planted the mine been found while we were at the scene probably any one of us had enough hate built up to summarily execute him or them – although we wouldn't have done it; morality, ethics, justice, fair-play – all would have conspired against us and prevented any such rash action. And this is a cornerstone of our dilemma in Vietnam. There is a point to terrorism, even the non-selective type as with the bus. And although morality, ethics, justice and fair-play exist here, they are not mirror images of the American concepts.