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FROM WALT ROSTOW
TO THE PRESIDENT
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By lip, NARA, Date 7-13-95

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SEPTEMBER 9, 1967

HEREWITH A MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL BRADLEY. I DID NOT PUT INTO IT -- BECAUSE IT WAS MEANT AS A WHOLLY PRIVATE REMARK -- GENERAL BRADLEY'S PREDICTION ABOUT THE LENGTH OF THE WAR. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE -- IF WE MAINTAIN PRESENT TRENDS IN THE FIELD AND HOLD THE FORT AT HOME -- THAT THEY CAN HOLD OUT FOR MORE THAN A YEAR AND A HALF. I AM SURE THAT THE GENERAL DOES NOT WISH THIS PREDICTION TO BE CIRCULATED WIDELY.

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY CALLED ON ME FRIDAY AFTERNOON, SEPTEMBER 8, TO TELL ME SOMETHING OF HIS RECENT TRIP TO VIET NAM, WHICH WILL FORM THE BASIS FOR AN ARTICLE APPEARING IN LOOK MAGAZINE IN NOVEMBER.

1. IN GENERAL, HE EMERGED WITH A SENSE OF GREAT OPTIMISM, WHICH WILL BE REFLECTED IN THE ARTICLE. HE SAID, IN FACT, HE MUST "FIGHT TO KEEP FROM EXPRESSING OVER-OPTIMISM." HE TALKED TO ME IN TERMS OF QUITE SPECIFIC THINGS HE HIMSELF SAW AND HEARD WHICH YIELDED THIS RESULT, RATHER THAN IN TERMS OF GENERALIZATION.

2. HE WAS GREATLY IMPRESSED WITH THE WHOLE LOGISTICAL STRUCTURE: PORTS, BARRACKS, HOSPITALS, BASES. HE UNDERSTOOD HOW LONG IT TAKES TO DEVELOP SUCH INSTALLATIONS AND WAS CONSCIOUS THAT THE U. S. FORCES ARE ONLY NOW ROUNDING INTO PEAK STRENGTH AND EFFECTIVENESS; FOR EXAMPLE, TWO DIVISIONS AND TWO BRIGADES HAVE BEEN IN VIET NAM LESS THAN A YEAR.

3. HE AND MRS. BRADLEY TALKED TO LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF U. S. PERSONNEL. MRS. BRADLEY HAS UNDERTAKEN TO WRITE PERSONALLY TO MORE THAN 500 FAMILIES OF MEN TO WHOM SHE TALKED. OF ALL THOSE THEY SAW, ONLY FOUR EXPRESSED ANY DISSATISFACTION, OR FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND AND FULLY TO SUPPORT THE EFFORT; ONE WAS A MAN DISSATISFIED BECAUSE HE WAS NOT ASSIGNED TO THE UNIT WITH WHICH HE HAD TRAINED; AND GENERAL BRADLEY ARRANGED FOR THIS TO BE DONE. THREE EXPRESSED SOME UNCERTAINTY AS TO U. S. OBJECTIVES IN THE WAR IN VIET NAM.

4. ON THE WHOLE, HE FOUND MORALE SUPERB AND CITED A NUMBER OF EXAMPLES OF SPLENDID MEN WHOM HE MET, ONE A NEGRO SERGEANT WHO WAS AWARDED A SILVER STAR FOR REMARKABLE LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE.

5. THERE IS NOT THE SLIGHTEST DOUBT IN HIS MIND THAT THE WAR IS NOT STALEMATED. WE ARE MOVING FORWARD. HE CITED MANY SPECIFIC INDICATIONS; FOR EXAMPLE:

-- A YEAR AGO IN THE I CORPS AREA, PATROLS HAD TO BE IN COMPANY STRENGTH; NOW THEY COULD OPERATE SAFELY IN SQUADS;

-- U.S. FORCES HAVE LEARNED NEW TACTICS TO DEAL INTELLIGENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY WITH VC TACTICS; PATIENCE (AND LONGER-RANGE RIFLES) IN DEALING WITH SNIPERS; DECEPTIVE TACTICS TO TRAP VC AMBUSHES; IMPROVED INTELLIGENCE OF ALL KINDS, INCLUDING INTELLIGENCE FROM VILLAGERS AS SECURITY BECOMES MORE RELIABLE; ETC.

6. HE GAVE MANY EXAMPLES OF MANPOWER AND MORALE DIFFICULTIES AS SEEN BY LOCAL COMMANDERS, AS WELL AS INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS:

-- IN THE DELTA A UNIT WHICH ENGAGED OUR FORCES BURIED THEIR WEAPONS AND RAN AWAY; 43 WEAPONS WERE DUG UP.

-- A 14-YEAR-OLD BOY BROUGHT IN INTELLIGENCE AS TO THE LOCATION OF A VC COMMANDER. HE WAS PICKED UP AT 4 A. M. HE THEN INFORMED HIS CAPTORS WHERE 24 OTHERS WERE, AND THEY WERE PICKED UP.

-- A CAPTURED NORTH VIETNAMESE PH. D., WHOSE RESIDUAL BASIS FOR CONFIDENCE CONSISTED SIMPLY IN THE FAITH THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD CRUMBLE POLITICALLY, AS HAD FRANCE.

-- REPORTS OF A GROUP OF 700 THAT STARTED INFILTRATION FROM THE NORTH, BUT ENDED UP AS 300.

-- ANOTHER GROUP OF 70 THAT ENDED UP 30.

-- THE CAPTURE OF VC BOYS OF 12 AND 14 IN VC UNITS RECENTLY BROUGHT IN UPON THREAT OF DEATH TO THEIR FAMILIES.

-- THE WILLINGNESS OF FORMER VC-CONTROLLED VILLAGERS TO COOPERATE FULLY WITH THE GOVERNMENT ONCE SECURITY IS ESTABLISHED.

-- THE VC EVACUATING A VALLEY NEAR THE COAST AND BURNING THE CROPS AS THEY HEADED INTO THE HILLS.

-- THE WIDESPREAD UNWILLINGNESS OF THE VC TO ENGAGE OUR FORCES OR THE ARVN, LEADING TO SOME QUESTION ON GENERAL BRADLEY'S PART THAT THEY ARE AS FULLY UP TO STRENGTH, IN SOME CASES, AS CARRIED IN OUR ORDER OF BATTLE.

GENERAL BRADLEY EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS NOT BEING SELECTIVE IN THIS, BUT GETTING SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF A TYPICAL KIND WHICH REFLECT, IN HIS CONSIDERED JUDGMENT, THE TRUE SITUATION.

7. HE RECEIVED AN EXCELLENT BRIEFING AND WAS MUCH IMPRESSED WITH THE KOREANS. HE VISITED THE PHILIPPINE MODEL VILLAGE FOR REFUGEES. THIS IS AN EXCELLENT PROJECT. 491 REFUGEE FAMILIES ARE BEING LOOKED AFTER. 500 CHILDREN ARE IN SCHOOL. ALTHOUGH THE OPERATION IS SMALL, HE WENT BECAUSE WESTY WANTED TO ENCOURAGE THE FILIPINOS TO DOUBLE THEIR FORCE IN VIET NAM.

8. HE HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE VIETNAMESE FORCES WERE IMPROVING IN THEIR PERFORMANCE AND, ESPECIALLY, IMPROVING IN THEIR CONFIDENCE. HE THOUGHT THE 21ST DIVISION FIRST-CLASS. IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT THE VIETNAMESE CORPS COMMANDERS -- FOR EXAMPLE, THE COMMANDER OF II CORPS -- WERE GETTING TOUGH AND EFFECTIVE IN ROOTING OUT OFFICERS WHO WERE CORRUPT OR WHO WOULD NOT FIGHT THEIR MEN EFFECTIVELY. HE VISITED THE VIETNAMESE NCO SCHOOL. THEY CONDUCTED A FIELD PROBLEM WHILE HE WAS THERE, EXACTLY AS THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IN THE UNITED STATES. HE CHECKED IN THE DELTA AND FOUND THAT INDEED THIS WAS A NATIONAL SCHOOL AND THE NEW NCO'S FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY WERE BEING TRAINED THERE.

9. HE FOUND AMONG SENIOR OFFICERS -- EVEN STRONG REPUBLICANS -- A DEEP APPRECIATION FOR THE SUPPORT BEING GIVEN TO THE MEN IN THE FIELD BY THE PRESIDENT.

10. HE EMERGED CONVINCED THAT WE WERE WELL ON THE WAY TO WINNING THE WAR. THE ONLY SERIOUS PROBLEM WAS TO KEEP A BASE OF PUBLIC SUPPORT IN THE UNITED STATES FOR THE EFFORT IN VIET NAM. HE HIMSELF WAS PREPARED TO DO ANYTHING JUDGED USEFUL BY OTHERS TO THIS END.

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