

INFORMATION

Friday, December 15, 1967  
2:30 p.m.

Mr. President:

I have sent a copy of General Westmoreland's letter to Bob McNamara for comment. The letter concerns the motivation of our Vietnam veterans towards dedicated and responsible citizenship.

*Pres file*

W. W. Rostow

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MACJOO

11 DEC 1967

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

This letter responds to your request for my views and recommendations concerning the motivation of our Vietnam veterans toward dedicated and responsible citizenship. The opportunity to comment is welcomed.

Assuredly, a serviceman in Vietnam receives a one-year course in the duties of citizenship. Through his sacrifice, discipline and willing contribution, he learns the importance of cooperation. He has an opportunity to participate in civic action. He gains an understanding of a foreign culture and he learns the importance of human dignity. He becomes aware of his own importance as an individual; during this year of trial and comradeship he learns the great strength the individual brings to the group and the worth of the group in any important endeavor. This experience fits him admirably to become a leader in our nation's future.

Thus the transition the serviceman makes from duty in Vietnam to the domestic pursuits of his individual future is a particularly critical time in terms of the man's value as a citizen. As he sheds his uniform, his entry into civil society in terms of opportunity, reception and the verification by his friends and neighbors of the worth of his service in Vietnam must equate with or hopefully be even more inspirational than his year of combat duty.

So it seems to me that for the United States to insure itself of the full contribution toward citizenship from each returning serviceman we in Vietnam must do our share, and our structure at home must do

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its share as well. Our objective is common: to provide for the nation the full worth of the Vietnam veteran in stabilizing influence, citizen service and leadership so necessary today and in the future to keep America strong and free.

We are now accomplishing much toward this end in Vietnam, and we can do even more. Our current programs contributing materially to motivation of the servicemen in Vietnam to become a useful and productive citizen on his return to the United States include:

1. A combat orientation as part of his welcome to his unit so the serviceman clearly understands our objectives here and the environment in which we pursue them.

2. A Character Guidance program and related religious programs which help to give each individual an understanding of the importance of integrity and responsibility together with spiritual strength and moral development.

3. Programs for the public acknowledgement of individual and unit valor and service by awards, decorations and home town press releases, command newspapers, ceremonies and recognition by senior officers prior to the serviceman's departure from Vietnam.

4. Explanation of the serviceman's rights as a veteran by briefing and counseling teams from the Veterans Administration at two departure sites in Vietnam.

We plan to do more, particularly in those areas where additional stress can consolidate and highlight the months of training in discipline, patriotism, citizenship, human relations and leadership the serviceman has already received. We will intensify the motivation of the individual as a citizen through the Command Information Program; our Armed Forces communications media; religious education; and particularly in our out-processing procedures.

I consider this out-processing a key factor in climaxing the serviceman's tour in Vietnam in terms of his future activity as a good citizen. This embraces activities which provide comprehensive information on veterans' benefits, job opportunities, retraining programs, and the situation Vietnam veterans will find on return to the United States. Debriefings at parent units, in-country departure terminals,

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and debarkation centers together with appropriate personal recognition from senior officers and Veterans Administration guidance are major features of this out-processing.

In this connection, I consider the recognition of the serviceman's contribution of paramount importance. This recognition not only crystallizes the serviceman's identification with both the war and our objectives as citizens but it can go a long way toward motivating the serviceman to continue his contribution in the quieter pursuit of his post-service life as a civilian. Accordingly, I suggest the production and distribution to appropriate military agencies of three special short professionally prepared films. These films, which should be done in color, should apply the latest in camera, music and sound techniques, and conceivably be introduced by prominent screen personalities, offer the best medium for achieving this necessary orientation through recognition.

Thus, the first film would illustrate for the serviceman the magnitude of his achievements in Vietnam and relate his personal effort to the whole. This film would give the serviceman a total perspective, relating his own contribution to our pacification objectives, to our actions here, and to our progress. This film emphasizes his share therein by showing the scope and sweep of our accomplishments. This film would include a few frames of my own personal salute and thanks as well. I also feel certain we could obtain the cooperation of President Thieu for an appearance in the film in which he would express his thanks and the gratitude of the Republic of Vietnam for the serviceman's effort. Thus this first film would identify the serviceman's individual role, impress him with its worth in the light of the total enterprise, and orient him toward continuing this contribution as a private citizen.

The second film similarly professionally produced and including commentary by prominent screen personalities, would portray graphically the many opportunities, advantages, and responsibilities of private citizenship as provided by the Veterans Administration and related programs. This would assist the serviceman in assessing and organizing his future in terms of both obligations and opportunities.

Both these films, I believe, should be shown the serviceman prior to his departure from Vietnam, but relatively close to his actual out-processing.

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A third film, of similar quality, should be shown the serviceman just prior to his departure from debarkation or discharge points in the United States. I suggest that this third film be a statement of the thanks of our nation personally expressed by you. In this filmed appearance, you could include your enjoinder to the serviceman to take up his responsibilities as a private citizen and to accept his role in the community as both an obligation and a privilege particularly significant in the light of his important service in Vietnam.

This kind of orientation, in my opinion, will provide the greatest impact on the returning serviceman. The necessary follow-up could take the form of a personal letter from a senior government official dispatched to the veteran a short time after he has been discharged. This would be of major value in assisting the serviceman's transition to private citizen.

I am particularly concerned about what happens after the serviceman returns to the United States and is discharged or transfers to a new duty station. There may very well be a serious let-down after the intense year of pressure here; and the military and civilian segments of the nation must both take great care to protect our servicemen in their initial vulnerability to pressure groups of many kinds. Some of this may be accomplished by proper orientation in military separation centers but it is even more significant to continuing good citizenship that the vigorous institutions of the state and the community address this matter. Thus the Junior Chamber of Commerce, our many patriotic and veterans organizations, labor unions, various industrial organizations, educational institutions, and fraternal organizations need to make a conscientious effort to help the returning serviceman locate and identify himself with the positive values and traditional concepts inherent in a free society. Similarly, I think our returning servicemen must be encouraged to affiliate with a political party, so as to stake out their interest and connection with self-government from the outset of their civilian status.

The military establishment can go only so far in assisting this important transition from uniformed ranks to the community. The military can provide the basic orientation and the fundamental motivation but it is the civilian sector of our nation that must capitalize on this and embrace the veteran in such a way that his potential for

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citizen service, so marked while in uniform, is not lost once he is discharged. Thus I recommend that the Department of Defense and other Federal agencies, together with state and municipal mechanisms and civic groups develop a comprehensive program under your general encouragement which provides a dignified and attractive familiarization of the serviceman with his rights, obligations and benefits as a citizen veteran of the war in Vietnam. His local opportunities for work, housing and education, together with his Federal opportunities in government work, law enforcement, the Peace Corps and the Teachers Corps should all be outlined and illustrated through a coordinated effort that can achieve positive results.

These magnificent young men have proven themselves in battle. I am confident they can do equally well in their civilian endeavors. They will be the leaders of tomorrow just as the Veterans of World War II and Korea are the leaders of today. We in Military Assistance Command, Vietnam will do everything possible to facilitate the transition to responsible citizenship.

Faithfully yours,

Signed  
W. C. WESTMORELAND  
General, United States Army  
Commanding