

Thursday, February 1, 1968, 1:45 P.M.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Pres file
SUBJECT: General Ridgway's Views on the Vietnam War

General Ridgway, in various newspaper and magazine articles has expressed the view that in Vietnam the U.S. is involved in an open-ended war. He fears that no clear-cut limit has been placed on U.S. military objectives in Vietnam, that the military effort may have outrun political policies and that, in short, the war could get out of the control of the civilian policy makers.

General Ridgway, basing his judgment on his experience in Korea, joined those who opposed an air strike in May 1954 when Dien Bien Phu was falling.

General Ridgway considers Southeast Asia important to America's interests but believes that we should negotiate now to end the war. His position on halting the bombing in return for peace talks is not clear and he discusses his position in a general way.

In answer to a question as to whether his views had caused him trouble, he is quoted in the December issue of Esquire as saying: "I've had no reaction from the Defense Department or the White House. ~~There~~ has been no effort whatsoever to stop me from speaking out. The reaction from other military men has been overwhelmingly favorable judging from the letters I've received.

W. W. Rostow

BKS:amc

Thurs., Feb. 1968
11:10 a.m.

Mr. President:

This picture of North Vietnamese
soldiers' attitudes towards the war
is worth reading.

Profile

W. W. Rostow

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ attachment (NIC Rpt No. 1576/67)

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1. The majority of the NVA in SVN were disgusted because they thought they had been abandoned by their leaders who did not have a true picture of war in SVN. Their leaders remained in HANOI with good food and material while they were fighting for a final victory. None of the soldiers believed they could win. The leaders were blindly calling for more troops and a 20-years war if necessary. At the same time, these same leaders refused the assistance of Communist Chinese infantry, thereby sealing the fate of thousands more young Vietnamese. The soldiers believed that all the field grade officers remained in the North while the soldiers were sent off to the South to die as evidenced by the fact that during the entire infiltration of Company 1 there was no officer over the rank of Senior Captain.
2. The men hated VO NGUYEN GIAP for not accepting Communist Chinese infantry to take the strain from the NVA. The soldiers believed GIAP wanted someday to be able to say that he had defeated the Americans single-handed, just as the French had been defeated.
3. HANOI would continue to send more troops to the South although the draft age would not officially be dropped below 18. However, if a youth remained at home and did not attend school he was safe. Otherwise, the youth would be pressured by his teachers and fellow students which would cause him to "volunteer". HANOI was determined to unite Vietnam without regard to NVA lives and did not seem to want negotiations.
4. The GVN grows stronger daily as the U.S. continues to fight in SVN while, in contrast, the NVA continues to experience shortages of everything-food, medicine and ammunition. The NVA does not have the firepower and must endure such adverse conditions that they will never be able to defeat the GVN. They have no way of successfully combatting the American planes and artillery. The continued bombing of supply routes causes supply shortages and even the stations along the route are desperately short.
5. The general opinion among the patients in the dispensary at Station 10 in Laos in June 1967 was that if they had known the actual situation in SVN, they would have deserted while still in NVN. No one ever dared openly blame the HANOI government or the LAO DONG Party. The wounded were disgusted with the war, since it had brought them so much hardship, and they blamed both the Americans and NVN for continuing the fight. These men complained that they were being killed simply because the HANOI government was too stubborn to negotiate. Others felt that if HANOI wished to continue the fight, it should bring in Communist Chinese infantry. Whether HANOI liked it or not, continued squandering of NVN youth would result in a shortage of manpower. Unless Communist Chinese troops got into the Vietnamese war, the GVN would surely win because of the tremendous American aid to SVN.

(FET Comment: Source opined that eventually negotiations would be HANOI's only recourse since the GVN was growing increasingly stronger with U.S. military help).