

DECLASSIFIED 

REAR ADMIRAL L. S. SABIN, U.S.N.

PERSONAL

14 February 1955

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Tex:

It can be said with certainty that our cruise out here has not been devoid of interest and excitement. The only thing I regret is that our LEXES and other training had to be sacrificed at the expense of more immediately important operations. First was Indo-China, next the re-deployment of the Marines and more recently the Tachen Island show. You may be assured of one thing, however, no amount of training that we have missed could have served to demonstrate more forcibly and clearly the necessity for an amphibious unit geared for mobility and ready for action than Indo-China and Tachen. And if anybody needed any further proof of the importance of the Amphibious elements as an integral unit of our National Defense Team, Tachen should have afforded that. I am very proud of our lads, Tex, and personally proud to be a contributing member of your Amphibious Force.

The Indo-China show is in its final act. It is phasing out nicely. I see no problem with the evacuation of material. In fact I was amazed when I went back to Indo-China the latter part of January to see the progress that had been made in evacuation of material. I can assure you that there will be no repeat performance of the China debacle of several years back when so much of our military equipment fell into Communist hands. In Indo-China they will find bare pickings. The place is being denuded.

The refugee situation presents a different picture. It is unpredictable. Estimates have varied from a final rush of fifty-thousand to a maximum estimate of one hundred and fifty thousand before the dead line date of mid-night on the 19th of May. That, plus another consideration of a very highly classified nature, formed the basis of my recommendation for an additional MSTs TAP and four MSTs LST during the final phase. I could not afford to gamble on any refugees not being able to leave at the last moment through lack of transport.



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As to the command set-up, I fully understand why CinCPacFlt did not accept my proposal to turn over the remainder of the operation to MSTS. Nevertheless in view of my Far East Amphibious responsibilities I could not in all consciousness fail to make the recommendation. Also, to all intents and purposes it is now an MSTS show with only a small amount of shipping involved and with little or no Amphibious features involved. However, I certainly appreciate CinCPacFleet's desire to keep control within the Fleet until the job is buttoned up. In this connection, I think the best thing to do is to retain St. Angelo on the job until it is completed.

Now as to the Tachen Island operation. When ESTES arrived in Haiphong on the 22nd of January, I received my first word of its possible initiation. Mel Pride sent a despatch requesting that I proceed by air to Formosa for a conference. That posed a very difficult problem. I was in Indo-China for a final survey with conferences arranged with the Ambassador, General Ely, O'Daniel and other important French and Vietnamese officials. The decisions involved could not be delayed nor could they be delegated. I finally decided that the only thing I could do was to send Walter Winn to Formosa with some key staff officers. This was accepted and, as it turned out, it was best all around.

Meanwhile, Nick Frank was being relieved by St. Angelo. I told Nick to stand by for orders. He was going to Japan to join his flagship Henrico. He had never seen some of his staff, had never had any Amphibious experience and was about to embark on an RCT LEX at Okinawa in early February as his initiation. He got his Amphib training fast in a more realistic initiation. He was pulled off his plane at Sangley, diverted to Formosa and directed to commence preliminary planning for the Tachen show.

I had sent a message stating that I would wind up my Indo-China business as rapidly as possible and that I desired to command the Amphibious phase of the Tachen's. I finished at Saigon on Saturday the 29th and left for Keelung Sunday morning the 30th. Walter had returned with good info on the concept which enabled us to get our initial draft



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of the OpOrder whipped up enroute to Keelung. I had ordered Henrico up there previously in order that Frank would have his entire staff and be ready to leave for Buckner Bay as soon as I had talked to him. I also had ordered all ships involved with the exception of one LST division (which I eventually did not use) to proceed to Buckner Bay. For some reason which I have not yet been able to ascertain, Pride disapproved that and directed me to assemble them at Sasebo. When I pointed out that Buckner Bay was a couple of hundred miles closer to the objective area I got the green light. So when the button was pushed Frank and his outfit were all set at Buckner.

One amusing thing occurred in the preliminaries. I sent CG Third MarDiv (info ComNavFE) a despatch requesting that the shore party load immediately. So help me Hannah, I got a message back that such request had to go to AFFE as the Third MarDiv was under CG AFFE. I knew, of course, that the Third MarDiv was under AFFE but I expected the Marines to take the initiative of doing the mechanics of clearing. All I was interested in was to get the shore party. So I sent Bill Callaghan a message asking him to get me the shore party pronto, which he did. Jim Risley then sent me a message that he was giving me his best shore party expert, Colonel Williams, who was everything he is reported to be. He and his lads did a magnificent job.

There are some important considerations in respect to this operation from the Amphibious point of view on which I will comment separately. They are too involved to include in this letter.

The delay in return of ESTES was somewhat of a blow to the morale of ship and staff personnel. No matter how you present it, you can't get present day personnel to be enthusiastic when they expect to come home after a normal tour and then don't. It doesn't bother me - I'm happy to remain. So are all the senior officers and enlisted men who recognize the reasons and have long since become adjusted to such things. But the modern sailors and young officers are either different or they have not become accustomed to such abrupt changes. However, the Tachen operation was a shot in the arm in that it demonstrated the urgency which always

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exists in this theater - they are, of course, still disappointed in the delay; but not to the extent they were when the news first broke. Their morale is o. k. .

In respect to the re-organization of PhibGruWesPac incident to the re-deployment of the Marines and the consequent reduction to one PhibRon in WesPac, the following comments are submitted for consideration. These will be discussed with Boulware while he is out here.

(a) PhibGroupWesPac:

If the activities which have confronted PhibGruONE in WesPac are any sort of criterion, I find it difficult to endorse the removal of a Phib Group Commander and staff in an AGC from the Far East area. The entire Asian perimeter is a sensitive area. There are overlapping potential requirements for Amphibious operations in both CinCFE's and CinCPac's theater. Southeast Asia is far from stabilized. The Korean situation is fluid and the Formosa picture is explosive. To base the need for a PhibGroup Commander in an adequate flagship (AGC) on training requirements alone is to deny the possibility of emergency operations which would require the seniority of flag command plus the adequacy of his larger staff. This is aside from the multitudinous routine details involving preparation and continuous revision of war plans, conferences, schedules, etc.. The AGC with its command facilities, helicopter, communication facilities and accommodations for large numbers of transients such as newsmen and observers is an invaluable asset to the Far East command. As an important corollary to the foregoing, there is a possibility of conducting a modified DivLex periodically even though only one PhibRon is continuously deployed. This could be accomplished if sufficient overlap were scheduled during the relieving periods to allow two PhibRons to be on station during the time required to conduct the Lex. I think we should take a long, hard look before we do away with a PhibGroup Commander in an AGC in the Far East.

(b) Turn over period:

If there is not to be a PhibGroup Commander in WesPac, then

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we cannot have the gap which has previously existed between the arrival of one PhibRon and the departure of the other. If the PhibRon Commander is to be the PhibGroupWesPac Commander also, it is essential that there be a contact relief.

(c) Planning:

Planning is an important function of the WesPacPhibGroup Commander. The preparations and continuous revision of supporting plans to ComNavFE's emergency war plans places a heavy load on the staff. I doubt whether the PhibRon Commander's Staff can handle this plus all of his additional duties without an augmented staff. If we do not keep a PhibGroup Commander out here, I think you are going to have to beef up the PhibRon Commander's Staff.

(d) Communications:

The Communication load is still another reason for maintaining an AGC in WesPac. Our recent operations demonstrated the need of all communication facilities and personnel with which an AGC is equipped. The present PhibRon flagship allowance is not adequate to effectively handle the volume of communications with which we have been loaded during our tour out here. ESTES facilities have been utilized to capacity. Traffic analysis of the Indo-China and Tachen operations will clearly show the Communication picture for a PhibGroupWesPac flagship.

(e) There are a number of other problems which will need resolution. Among them are the following:

(1) Tacron 3 was to have been relieved by Tacron 5. As it now stands, TacGru 1 will be re-organized into two Tacrons about 1 May. I suppose that the relief Tacron consisting of half a detachment will be deployed in Calvert. How about Tacron 3? Is it the intent to return Tacron 3 to CONUS in Henrico on 5 April or by air at a later date?

(2) I have no information on the plan for relief of the LCURon.

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LCURon 3 was originally scheduled to be relieved by LCURon 1 on 19 March and return to CONUS in ESTES. With the delay in ESTES return to CONUS, what is the revised plan for relief of LCURon 3 ?

(3) We do not have Colonial's schedule. What is the duration of his stay in WesPac ? The C. O. Colonial stated he understood he was to return to CONUS with PhibRon 1. Is this correct ?

(4) Logistics. This subject presents a number of problems. For example, is it planned to maintain, reduce in size or disestablish PhibGruWesPac material pools ? How about liquidation of the arial camera, SCR 610 radio, radar reflector and Herman-Nelson preheater pools ? Then there is the pool of LST(H) special medical equipment. I think it should be maintained but reduced in size. I do not recommend any change in the boat pool. If these pools are liquidated or reduced, of course the load on the LCURon Commander is reduced accordingly.

(5) The large amount of administrative files maintained by ComPhibGroupWesPac will present a problem for the PhibRon Commander upon which action should be taken now if he is to be ComPhibGruWesPac. I therefore recommend that if the retention of a flag officer in an AGC in WesPac is not approved, the PhibRon flagship should be fitted with the following additional stowage facilities:

- 10 4-drawer (legal size) cabinets
- 2 upright steel safes, 5 compartment (63" x 24" x 21")
- 1 4-drawer, fire resistant combination lock file

We are going to be in a bad way for yeomen or Seaman yeomen. Our allowance is 24 and we have now on board twenty four. By 1 April we will lose 10 reducing us to 14. In view of our extended tour, could you see your way clear to helping us out ? I don't think we can carry our load with approximately 42% reduction.

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This has developed into quite an essay but it will bring you more or less up to date. I have tried not to bother you with details but rather to keep you informed by these periodic letters. There is more that I want to tell you about the Tachen operation which left much to be desired as a smoothly working Amphibious re-deployment. If I can find time I will cover this in separate correspondence. If not, I'll wait until I see you to talk it over.

I am very grateful for the free hand you have given me out here. Not once have you "kibitzed" me. It is a wonderful feeling for any subordinate commander to have that kind of confidence from his boss.

Thanks for all your help to Bird. She was in a "tizzy" for awhile but is all squared away now. Remember me to your staff.

With best regards to you and Fay,

Sincerely,

Vice Admiral T. G. W. Settle, USN,
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Coronado, 55, California.