

17 September 1980

SUBJECT: Conversation with Former US Official in Vietnam

Reference: Meeting of 9 Sep 80 between a US civilian and Mr. R. Destatte and Ms. J. Johnson, DIA/DI-7C.

1. The purpose of reference meeting was to resolve a number of questions regarding events in the southern Mekong delta region during the evacuation of South Vietnam in 1975. The US civilian, hereafter referred to as Mr. B, was a US official in the Mekong delta for more than one year; and departed Rach Gia, SVN at about 1500 hours, 30 April 1980. Mr. B was contacted through the US agency that employed him in Vietnam, and the interview was granted on the condition that his identity remain confidential.
2. Mr. B was the principal officer in four provinces in the delta (An Xuyen, Bac Lieu, Choung Thien and Kien Giang). During the month of April 1975 he worked out of Rach Gia during the day and spent the nights at the consulate general at Can Tho. His duties took him throughout these provinces. He said he had been offered the chance to leave Vietnam about three months before the fall, but had decided to stay on because he wanted to see the final stages of the war and because of the obligation he felt to assist his employees escape.
3. Mr. B confirmed that he had arranged with Mr. Arlo Gay, a US civilian living in Rach Gia, to take a number of Vietnamese evacuees from the mainland (Rach Gia) to Phu Quoc Island at the end of April 1975 by boat. Mr. B said he had purchased a 70' Vietnamese fishing boat and given it to Mr. Gay, fully stocked with provisions and fuel (about 600 gallons), and told Mr. Gay that the boat was his to keep after he had accomplished his part in the evacuation.
4. Emergency planning assumed that Americans in the delta would become cut off from Saigon, and forced to evacuate to the West across the Gulf of Thailand. The American consulate in Can Tho had four Air America helicopters available to assist in the evacuation; it was assumed that these helicopters would need refueling in travelling to Phu Quoc or evacuation ships in the Gulf of Thailand. Mr. B said he had attempted to arrange for the use of Mr. Gay's fish storage barge as a refueling stop for helicopters on an island off Rach Gia (he believed it was Tien Te Island). Mr. B established a second refueling stop on a hill on this same island, placed 10,000 gallons of aviation fuel at the island refueling sites, and stationed one of his American employees on the island to operate the radio, together with a group of about 13 Nung guards. The guards soon tired of the island and most were removed and taken back to the mainland. The American and a few guards remained in place until a few days before the fall, when the American's legs had become so badly stung by jellyfish that he could no longer remain.

5. Regarding the events of the 29th and 30th of April, Mr. B said he had one of the Can Tho helicopters available for his exclusive use (a Huey, probably a UH-1H, painted silver and blue) and flew many trips throughout his four provinces to pick up evacuees. He mentioned having stopped in Ca Mau (Quan Long), Kien Long, Kien An, Hieu Le, Rach Soi, and Rach Gia, as well as on Phu Quoc, Hon Tre and Tien Te. He said that he had not stopped at Kinh Dai or elsewhere on the peninsula between the Cai Lon River and the Gulf because that area had long been controlled by the VC. The helicopter was based at the airport about 7 kilometers south of Rach Gia. Mr. B left the mainland for the last time around 3 p.m. on April 30. He had been in contact with the US ships in the morning and learned that the evacuation was completed out of Can Tho and Saigon but decided to continue his efforts to evacuate his employees. He was accompanied on some of these trips by Vietnamese women and Nung guards. He said that he had a briefcase with American currency with him.

6. Regarding the presence of Caucasians in the delta in 1975, Mr. B said there were about 12 American government officials there; during April, all but Mr. B and the person at Tien Te Island remained at Can Tho, and all 12 were evacuated. There were about 7 Frenchmen in Kien Giang, but he remembered only two - one a red-haired woman about 50 who appeared to be deranged, and one man who was rather seedy and was not involved in social activities with the local authorities. He said the French attitude, as he remembered it, toward the impending fall of the Saigon government was rather indifferent - the French had not left in 1954 and saw no reason to leave now. He believed that foreign technicians, possibly French, were used to make occasional repairs at a French-Vietnamese seafood processing plant in Rach Soi; but he was not aware of any who might have been there at the end of April. He said his knowledge of foreigners in the Rach Gia area came from the local Province National Police Chief, LTC Thieu, who he believes now resides in the US. He also recalled that a German medical missionary team, consisting of a German doctor, Dutch nurse and German medical technician had been in Ha Tien but believed they had rotated several months before the fall and he didn't know if they had been replaced. A number of French persons, as he recalled, had lived in Ha Tien; he did not know their identities, nor if they remained in the delta to the end.

7. Mr. B also recalled persistent reports that American prisoners were detained in the U Minh forest area after 1973. He believed some reports may have been inspired by common knowledge about rewards offered by US casualty recovery teams for information about Americans missing in the delta. He said that, on one occasion, he directed an employee to go into the area where these sightings were reported but that the man could not take his boat into the area because of enemy control. These reports were consistent in the limited details given--describing bamboo detention cages in a plantation area. Mr. B, recalling that some US PWs were held in the U Minh forest prior to 1973, considered it possible that there was some factual basis for the reports--to the extent that some of the reporting sources may have known about the pre-1973 PWs, but were not aware that this knowledge had become outdated with the

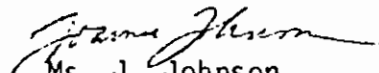
release of US PWs during Operation Homecoming. In any event, the sources of these reports became quite vague when pressed for specific descriptive details about the PWs and the camp; and Mr. B was never able to obtain confirmation of the PWs or the camp, despite persistent efforts to do so. He also said he had heard of stories of a black man and a white man speaking a foreign language (not specified) and serving with a battalion of VC troops in the area north of Rach Gia, but he had never seen them or heard that they were definitely American.

8. When questioned about the name Martha Anderson, Mr. B said he did not recall having heard it before. Regarding Peter Ivre, Mr. B recalled the name Ivor but could not recall the context. He said he would call if anything about the name came back to him.

9. Mr. B was very cooperative and answered questions to the best of his recollection, indicating areas where he no longer remembered details.

10. Mr. B is 38 years old, approximately 6' tall, slim build, has dark brown hair and blue eyes, and is Caucasian.

  
Mr. R. Destatte  
IRS

  
Ms. J. Johnson  
IRS