

VIETNAM

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OUR MAN

IN

THE DELTA

TIME AND THE RIVER FLOWING : This is the Mekong Delta country, a patchwork of rice fields, criss-crossed with canals and spotted with peasants' huts. The land here was carried as mud by the Mekong and deposited in its yearly floods. Almost nowhere does it rise more than a few feet above the sea ; its average slope toward the coast is only 10 feet in 20 miles.

GEORGE L. McCOLM,

USAID AGRICULTURE ADVISOR

To An Giang Province



THE MILITARY ASPECT : These Vietnamese troops are guarding a bridge and canal in Long Xuyen, the capital of An Giang Province. Although security is not the problem in An Giang that it is in other areas of Vietnam, VC terrorism and sabotage are certainly not unknown there. The population itself, by virtue of its firm anti-Communist sentiments, forces the VC to operate as foreign legion in the province.



A MAN AND HIS LETTUCE : This man is a laborer on a large rice plantation nearby but cultivates his own land around his house. USAID, through McColm, helps him with fertilizer, insecticide, and advice on cultivation and marketing of his Chinese lettuce crop.

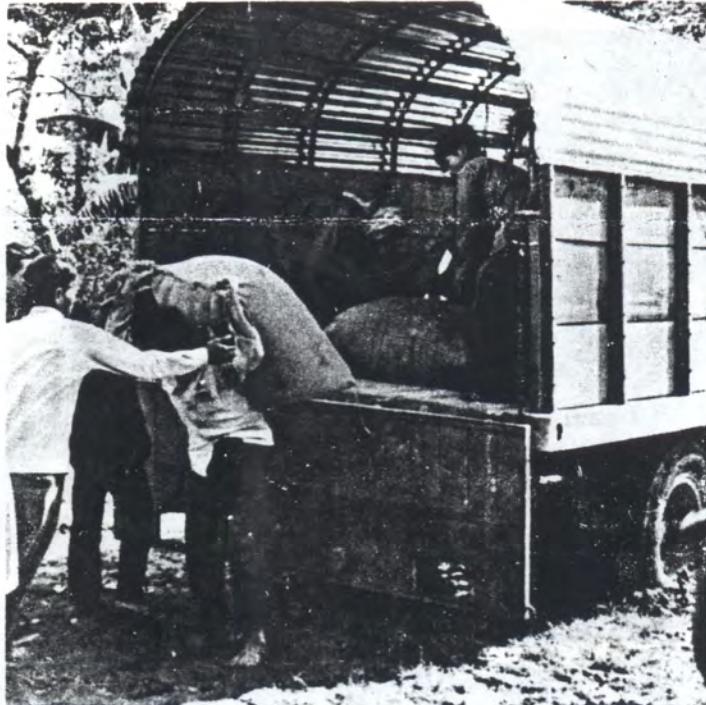


LEARNING TO DRIVE : This is the first labor-saving device since the domestication of the water buffalo for the people of this village. In the old days, plowing was not a job that one did with a smile. Later, this man will have a chance to buy the machine and credit will be made available to him to do so.

The job requires a wide range of expertise. McColm is expected to be ready and able to advise Government agriculture technicians in all phases of their programs of technical and economic aid to the Vietnamese farmer. He must be an expert in everything from water management to the administration of farm credit. When the language problem and the peculiarities of Vietnamese agriculture are added to this and the whole job carried on in the middle of a war, the difficulties of the position begin to become apparent.

Training, in the formal sense, is plainly out of the question for such a job. USAID tries to recruit men who have shown problem-solving ability in other positions and who have demonstrated the adaptability and flexible approach which is necessary to cope with the Vietnamese situation. George McColm came to Vietnam from India where he had worked for two years in soils and water management, training Indian officials and technical personnel in the field. McColm put 40,000 miles on his jeep during this period and was able to use his recently-completed Masters degree studies to good advantage. Previous to this, he had served as Agricultural Training Officer on the Operations Planning Staff in charge of training the 72 officers assigned to the Occupation Government of Japan. Also during this tour of duty, McColm was able to map the maturity dates for Japan's rice using knowledge of crop-temperature relationships which he had been gathering since 1931. ^{During} After the war, McColm assisted in planning the Japanese land reform program.

GARDENING : The common pattern in An Giang has the vegetable garden on the high ground near the canal and the rice acreage in the wetter ground behind the house and garden. This woman owns her land, uses insecticide and fertilizer, and makes more money per acre than most truck farmers in the US according the McColm.



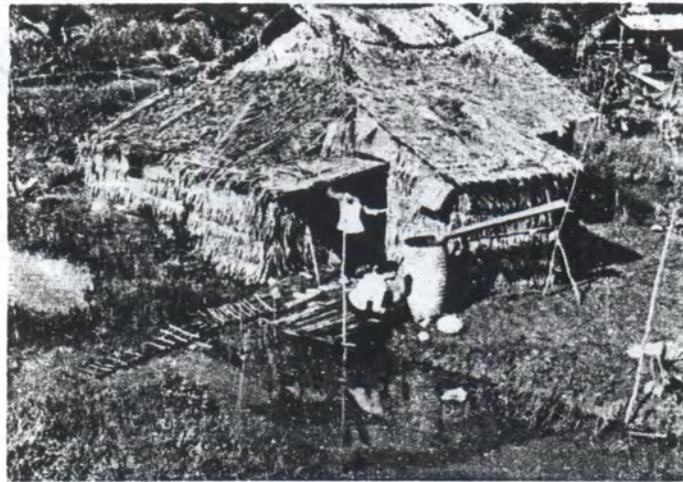
FLOOD RELIEF : This rice seed was bought by the GVN Ag. Service in neighboring Kien Tuong Province immediately after the disastrous 1966 flood which wiped out most of the rice crop in An Giang. After it was flown in by USAID, McColm supervised its packaging in family-sized lots and its distribution to local farmers who lost their crops to the flood.



YARD-LONG BEANS : In Vietnam this isn't a proud farmer's description of his plot but the name of a major crop. These were grown from high quality Taiwanese seed donated by the Republic of China and brought in under USAID auspices.



A RICE HULLER DEMONSTRATION: McColm's wide experience with all types of farm machinery helps to assist the government Ag. Service in staging these presentations of mechanical aids to agriculture. For those farmers who choose to buy the demonstrated machinery, he acts as credit consultant.



A TYPICAL HOUSE IN THE DELTA: If it rains for a long time, the roof leaks. It doesn't leak in a short rain, but once it starts to leak, it is apt to continue long after the rain has stopped. Although these houses look primitive, it is difficult to design realistic improvements in a country where no large timber grows and there isn't a stone in a hundred miles.

Too often there is no time for such well-laid plans in An Giang Province but McColm tries to make his decisions mesh with his long-range plans. He sees An Giang as a potential commercial farming area and is trying to begin movement in that direction rather than to merely improve the existing subsistence farming. In the design of distribution programs, for instance, he favors large grants to responsible individuals rather than the one-farm-one-chicken philosophy of development. At present, McColm feels that the greatest problems to the development of the region are the shortage of rural credit and the unsettled condition of land tenure. Without a source of credit at reasonable, interest, the farmer cannot make the improvements he needs to remove himself from subsistence cycle and until he has firm title to his land he is not likely to extend himself in terms of capital or labor.

As McColm himself has written, there is no instant formula for development but a great deal can be done to encourage it. In view of his past successes and present energy, he seems to have every chance of achieving it in the Delta.



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