

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

June 10, 1969

His Excellency Nguyen Ngoc An
Minister of Information and Chieu Hoi
Saigon, Viet-Nam

Dear Mr. Minister:

This letter will be written in English because you understand it so well, even though, for convenience, we used to talk in French. At the outset, please forgive my long silence since March 6, when I shook your hand for the last time in Saigon. I said then that I knew I would return some day, and I look forward to that day. I have not written before this because it was necessary to do many things here to start a new life in the United States, and also because I did not feel qualified to understand the prevailing attitudes of people in this country. Mr. Jones did keep me informed, however, concerning the continued progress of the Chieu Hoi program under your leadership. I have the impression that the program is stronger than ever in its basic concept, and if there are sometimes problems, these problems are ones of administration and execution rather than of philosophy or leadership. I do wonder whether you ever were able to obtain the services of a good manager who would serve under you to make sure that the details of the program were faithfully executed. In any case, I congratulate you on the great contribution which Chieu Hoi has been making to the success of the efforts of the Government of Viet-Nam to bring the war to a successful conclusion.

As I indicated to you in Saigon, it is very apparent that now the United States is, in some respects, the weaker member of the partnership in which our two countries have joined to oppose Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Most people here do not understand the war. They do understand that America has made an important military contribution, but they are increasingly coming to realize that this military contribution can not lead to victory unless an even more important political contribution is made by the Vietnamese themselves. Thus, I strongly feel it is in the interest of Viet-Nam and of our common ~~good~~ ^{cause} that Viet-Nam become more self-reliant with every passing day.

From this distance, I attach the greatest importance to the new Village Development Program described by President Thieu in his speech at Vung Tau on April 21. If real power can be given to the village officials, including local command of security forces, the power to tax and raise

funds, and to direct the efforts of the Rural Reconstruction Cadre in the village, I think it will help to build the strength which is needed in the countryside to resist Communist infiltration and subversion. Such would also be consistent with the ancient traditions of Viet-Nam. President Thieu's concept is simple and clear and is of the greatest value, but, as usual, the crucial question will arise in the area of execution. For example, will it be possible to protect the village administration from excessive interference by the District Chief and the Province Chief, since these officials have long since become accustomed to directing everything in the Province, District and villages? Again, will the village officials truly be able to draw their own funds from the Province treasury, or will there be administrative delays and interferences which will, in fact, deprive the village officials of the power which President Thieu wishes to give them?

I remain as convinced as ever that no force from the outside, including from North Viet-Nam, could defeat the people of the South once their national interest has been aroused. With men like yourself in the Government, I remain convinced that South Viet-Nam, despite decreasing support from the United States, can achieve its own salvation and justify its right to exist as an independent nation until the final reunification of Viet-Nam becomes feasible.

So much for political questions and the war. For me Viet-Nam is a much more personal thing than that, since over the years I have learned to admire and respect the many Vietnamese friends whom I have had the privilege to meet. It does seem as if I have been destined to remain in Washington for perhaps a year, and my duties will be to help train young men who will be going to serve in Viet-Nam. This is a difficult task because the organization of the American effort has become so complex and widespread that it is sometimes difficult to do things as they really should be done. I hope to visit Viet-Nam in September for about ten days to reacquaint myself with the latest developments, and look forward to seeing you at that time. In the meantime, Mr. Minister, please accept my sincerest best wishes for you and your organization. Please convey my warmest regards to your colleagues whom I consider to be close comrades, not just for the moment, but for the future. The great affection which I feel for my Vietnamese friends and their beautiful country will not be altered by this period of separation. With my most cordial, personal best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Ogden Williams
Viet-Nam Training Center