

rcp3rd

From:
To:
Sent: Tuesday, March 15, 2005 9:40 PM
Subject: Re: Your information

Rufe:

An almost unpleasantly hot sun here today; I brought in a load of bricks--Home Depot's finest-- to edge the garden walk. Also plan to cover the patio as well, I think bricks will look much nicer than bare concrete. Anyway, it keeps me off the street and away from my desk.

Back to the real world. My recollections of events in Long An vary in their detail and accuracy. Some precise, others hazy or non-existent. My mind has the propensity to "dump" information it doesn't think I'll need later..(Probably trying to compensate for limited capacity!)

I learned the details about your own briefings on Long An in Washington afterwards in "The Best and Brightest", and "JKF and Vietnam" by Newman. Assume there are other references out there. None of the MACV folks asked me anything about your role in the Long An Report controversy...

Mike Dunn told me MACV was trying to get me booted out of the country, but that Amb Lodge told him "I was not going anywhere". That I had quite properly provided you with copies of the report because you were my chief and it was my responsibility to do so.

I do not remember participating in a meeting with the SecDef in Saigon. Our Saigon "rehearsal" for his briefing was for the first of two times he came to Long An. He interrupted me before the 2nd briefing began, by summing up (exactly) what I had told him the first time and asking for updates on the figures I had provided then, and he did this without notes!

Ref the situation of the hamlets in Long An.
The first VC attack on a GVN outpost in Long An occurred August 1960. The original hamlet program was started in Long An Oct 1961. Progress was slow due to lack of Regional Forces and Popular Forces; the Province ranked 3rd from the bottom in completions of all 42 by end of the year. By mid-1963 inroads by the VC on hamlets completed --and under construction-- had reached serious proportions.

I estimated that 90,000 farmers were being required to participate in hamlet building about the time of my arrival in Sept 1963.

Major Fields was the US Advisor then, who gave me a copy of the report he normally submitted thru MACV channels. His departure date is unknown; but he had been removed

before SecDef's first visit. John Vann and Sir Robert Thompson both visited Long An (but not me) before the Diem Coup for their own purposes...

Number of hamlets I reported to you on your visit was the "official" Province Chief's number of 200, of which Maj Fields and I believed 75% had been rendered non-functioning for all intents; destroyed; population forced to return to their original villages, or so damaged as to no longer offer security or GVN administrative services.

Province Chiefs under great pressure from Nhu, to show hamlets met all the criteria, so they lied.

The movie film I have of SecDef, Bundy, Taylor, Lodge et al arriving in Tan An must have been the first visit, since I recall thinking that was the first time I had seen either Taylor or the SecDef. The US military(sector) advisor was by then, LTC Jim Page, an Engineer Officer who had replaced MAJ Fields; the new GVN Province Chief was also a LTC.

My first contact with Amb Lodge about Long An came with an invitation to his home one Sunday for breakfast. Recall Mrs Lodge and a Neice were there, he told me of his desire to do a special program of security and development in Long An to show DC it could be done; that he would bring his personal weight to bear on the GVN to get us some ARVN units permanently assigned..

Here my memory is hazy; I do not recall the details of how and when we kicked off our joint effort prior to the Coup...Mainly to try and get ARVN regulars to deploy in Long An in support of the hamlet program, while we increased our AID...e.g. using PL 480 as pay for the hamlet defenders and Popular Force was one innovation, Only after the Coup did some ARVN battalions actually stay; Then GEN Khanh took over from Minh the musical chairs thing in Saigon was reflected by similar shifts in the ARVN in Long An. Improvement in hamlet security and construction was definitely achieved when we had the ARVN units.

The Ambassador asked me at the breakfast to develop a list and ask for anything I thought would be useful... no limitations. Hence came USAID agricultural, public safety and public works techs; IVS volunteers, the USIS hamlet survey team led by Ev Bumgardner, et al.

My apologies for not being able to give you more exact info, I simply have blank spaces here.

Nixon also came late in 1964; Westy was still only Deputy COMUSMACV and accompanied him. I was on my 4th Province Chief by then. Nixon had been very supportive of our efforts and so stated to the assembled press; when I told Westy that his own presence was appreciated

and I was looking forward to MACV support, he gave me a very funny look and mumbled something like "sure"...interesting.

In closing, must confess I did not read or review the copies of the documents I sent you, except for John's report, It was probably your first heads-up on the disaster approaching in Long An. I think you will find a lot of the details you want from those 142 pages. Bon Chance!