

rcp3rd

From: <Tluche@aol.com>
To: <rep3rd@cox.net>
Sent: Wednesday, May 18, 2005 5:34 PM
Subject: Answer to your Rural Affairs Questions

Dear Rufus,

My apologies for such a late reply to your 3/17 e-mail. Much ado around here, including going up to North Carolina to bring back a new boat.

John Perry was in the Controller's Office (perhaps an auditor), but you know something about his W.W.II OSS experience behind enemy lines for which he acquired the Legion d'Honneur and his lovely wife Columbe. I'm sure he relished the thought of a more adventurous challenge in RA. For a very sweet gentle man, he was a closet tiger.

As for Dick Evans, I don't know from whence he came to join RA, but I first met him in Ban MeThuot in 1957 at the old Field Service house there. (I was then an IVS volunteer.) He was skeptical about us and our work but quite helpful to the greenhorns. As you may know, he assigned himself as mentor to Vlad Lehovich and Dick Holbrook. In addition to mentionable advice, he urged them after encounters with Vietnamese ladies of the day (or night) to use a specific kind of green soap. You may not want to include this in your book.

As for me, I was in IVS from January 1957 through February 1959. I then joined USOM as a Vietnamese Language Officer, thence to the Training Office. (We sent 1,500 Vietnamese to study in the U.S.) and finally to the Program Office as an Assistant Program Officer handling the health and agriculture portfolios.

While an IVS volunteer, I saw many instances of GOVN lack of interest or ineptitude concerning the problems of the average rural citizen. When I had the occasion (not often), I tasked the USOM staff to address this issue. The most frequent response to, say, workers on Agricultural Stations not being paid on time was that it was their problem. Our guys were not stupid or insensitive; it was more a matter of approach. (In hindsight, were they all that wrong that it was a problem the GOVN had to fix, not the Americans. By 1965, our fixing didn't do too well either.)

When Rufus Phillips and Bert Freleigh made their first visit in 1962, I observed that there were some folks who had a chance to get in "close and personal" with the Vietnamese and have greater, positive influence on them. This was also on the wings of the Kennedy Administration when an electric charge began flowing through the American administration, a sense that much was possible if we really, really "got into it." I certainly wanted to be part of this show and had Vietnamese language skills which might have been useful.

And so, the events which followed ended up being life changing. Rufus had a talent for leadership, in my experience a very scarce commodity, with the term often applied to obnoxious jerks with the loudest voices. We all worked hard and well together, with folks giving their utmost. It could not stem the tide of Vietcong motivation and competence or compensate for much inertia in the GOVN. Notwithstanding, it was a magnificent effort and magnificent time, and it is good that it is being memorialized.

In addition to the three mentioned above, I believe we recruited a nurse named Jeannie Wright, who upon leaving Vietnam was murdered in her new Capitol Hill home.

The Quang Ngai pictures of a visit to a "model" Ap Chien Luc portrays my first encounter with the Strategic Hamlet phenomenon, and it looked very workable (not improperly or hastily done as it was later.) I remember the ease and warmth Rufus stimulated among the Vietnamese doing the "show and tell." I also remember asking whether the new semi-elected leaders of the Strategic Hamlet were the same as the former leaders. Unfortunately, I don't remember the answer, but believe it was somewhat ambiguous.

Well, Rufus, those times were good and great enough for all of us, so that our RA reunions will carry on. I'm only sorry I can't make the Lam Quang production, so please give my best to the gang and remembrances of those gone before -- Bob Burns, John O'Donnell, Oggie Williams and the many others. We brave, we lucky few are still here to celebrate.

All the best and love to Barbara. Tom