

rcp3rd

From:
To:
Sent: Wednesday, May 17, 2006 9:42 PM
Attach: Vlad and inspectors - note to Rufe, 5-17.doc
Subject: Provincial Reconstruction - Vlad anecdote

At 10:38 AM 5/15/2006, you wrote:

Vlad,

I wonder if you ever received this as I never heard back from you about it so I'm sending it again in hopes you can help me out.

All the best, Rufe

cc: [unclear] 5/15/06

Dear Rufe,

below is a note from me, also in WORD attachment.

Sorry to reply late.

Your memory is excellent and the anecdote is on target with one exception. This is the resolution of the case. It was dropped when Sam Wilson, then my boss, scared the hell out of the poor inspector who would not drop it when Sam, whom I had turned to for help, asked him to. I don't know what Sam did, but my sense at the time was that he had enough information on the inspector to have him thrown out of country summarily and was brutally frank in telling him to get off our backs.

Here is a slightly fuller version, if useful. Please feel free to draw on it as appropriate. Feel very free, too, to disregard any parts that are too digressive.

I had an unfortunate "inspection" by two USAID inspectors while in Vinh Long Province. The matter got off to a bad start because I had no idea they were coming and was away from the provincial capital all day on business, returning well after the inspectors had left from their surprise visit. The bad start was made worse because my Vietnamese USOM associate, Nguyen Thai Hao, was at our office (the garage of our rented house) when the inspectors arrived and was, quite naturally, cooperative with them. They asked him to open our bar-lock cabinet where we kept our papers, some cash, and weapons, and he did so -- whereupon they gave him an unwarranted security violation for knowing the combination on the grounds that there were classified materials in the cabinet (presumably meaning some Limited Official Use materials we both had access to, the only non-public material we had in province and mostly generated by us. Mr. Hao as a USOM employee had full access to this material).

After looking around, these fellows found fault with a number of things, including improper possession and storage of weapons (the small arms and grenades we stored were issued to me by the local MAAG [U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group] detachment); poor security practices; some paperwork irregularities I don't remember; and a charge of misuse and unauthorized alteration of government property, or words to that effect.

This last item lingered on and was a particular nuisance. It had to do with the repainting of the International Scout Harvester 4-wheel drive vehicle I had been issued. The vehicle was issued in bright yellow colors and I decided to repaint it after Mr. Hao and I were shot at one morning en route from Vinh Long town to the city of Sadec, an old and important town some 40 minutes drive west from Vinh Long. The volley of shots came from the south side of the provincial highway from a brush and banana line perhaps 100 meters from the road, and the episode caused us to rethink our traveling strategy. One change was in regularity of travel, which became less predictable. Another was to drive faster along uncertain sections of road. A third was to repaint the vehicle we most often used, which I had recoated with a conventional green color similar to that used on various trucks and other everyday local vehicles. The repainting cost about \$15 dollars, which I took from my petty cash funds, and seemed like the kind of trivial decision one makes when managing a sizeable and complex provincial program with poor communications to Saigon or other places.

I was astonished to learn that these inexperienced pedants wanted to make an issue of it. They did, and I was stuck with a bad report in my personnel file and periodically harassed with bills for reimbursing the U.S. government

for funds misused, and forms to acknowledge that I had damaged or otherwise misused government property. I finally got our from under this nuisance by complaining vigorously to my new boss, Sam Wilson. Sam, a man of very direct action when called for, had a most forceful conversation with the inspector in charge of this matter and explained how the inspector's own career might suffer if he were not more reasonable, and the issue went away.