

22 June 1968

Saigon

Dear Mike:

Appreciate your wire about Roche. As I wrote you recently, I had one long evening session with him. Now he has departed. I'm not certain how effective the one session was, and had asked him to stop by for another visit after some of his travels up country. We called him a couple of times afterwards, once to invite him to lunch with Pham Huy Quat, the former PrMin, but he said he couldn't make it. I don't know whether or not he just got in with some of the Emboff's trained seals or not. Sorry, but we can only try out here and only get folks away from the big machine if they are halfway willing. Anyhow, I enjoyed your telegraphic code no end. So did others on the team. Particularly the signature. Thanks!

Dave Hudson was among a stream of visitors last night, after Joe Redick and I returned from a visit to the Cao Dai Holy See in Tay Ninh, where we talked with Superior Phuoc. About the political future of Viet Nam, of course. (Memo on it is one of the many that have gone to Bill Bundy). Anyhow, Dave Hudson spoke about the strategy papers written by a group chaired by Klein for Bill Porter here, on which Dave was our member. The group finally swung to the SLO view that the Vietnamese are the key to getting things done here, and that Americans can best get ahead on the political-social work by handling the Vietnamese with some understanding and skill. This is rather directly opposed to the "more Americans, more money, more equipment" philosophy, of course. I'm sure that Porter, Bob Komer, and others have been goosed hard by LBJ to get going hard on the civil end and "catch up" with the military end.

The real truth of the situation is so doggone subtle, or if you'd prefer, so sophisticated that it is hard to explain and/or educate the US policy levels on how to ever resolve the struggle here. While the US military have been going great guns against large VC and NVA units, the hard fact is that VC are still all over the landscape and their areas of control haven't diminished all that much. But, how does anyone get the policy makers to understand that you must equate hard facts on the ground with the real situation. Trouble is, I feel too for some of the US youths in combat, and am as eager to brag about what they are doing as anybody. But, they simply are not winning the real war here, as you know. It still is going to take the Vietnamese, and a VN military that is not now following its true mission of protecting the people, to bring true law and order, or security, to a countryside so dotted with terrorists. Our Revolutionary Development cadre can do part of the job, but cannot overcome the misbehavior of ARVN with the population. And, Americans cannot substitute for the Vietnamese, if we are ever to get the villagers to believe in their own governmental people. The latter must prove their own case with their own people.

Now, how does a guy go about getting policy folks to understand the nature of the problem they are trying to solve? I've been asked, time

and again, to "head-on clash" with my views, regardless of how contrary, just to get the points across. However, among the lessons of Viet Nam is the very plain one that the only "head on" sort of a "clash" that someone can take is on something awfully simple and so kindergardenish that even a win has little long-term meaning. Witness Bert and his clash over Killen. He won a minor point for the good of the US, which then substituted Charlie Mann. Hardly a gain, long-term.

Or, take a major issue. Rufe Phillips went all out talking to Pres. Kennedy, about strategic hamlets...damned near breaking his heart to put the truth across. The Departments and Agencies most involved then set out to prove Rufe a liar, and got the proof (such as it was) from their folks in Viet Nam; a good many man hours of US effort ~~had~~ were expended away from the main struggle, just for this self-serving deal. Later, of course, the truth came out...after Rufe and his beliefs were discredited among official circles. McNamara learned the truth the hard way, by its coming out later. Yet, a year or so afterwards, he still was insisting on going ahead on the same basis, with Revolutionary Development, and getting angry because the same old malarkey that Rufe had blown the whistle on still wasn't being used as the US measurement nora. So, in effect, Rufe sacrificed himself for a moment of truth, that had no lasting effect at all among the US policy folks.

I'm willing to do damned near anything, to get the US to understand its problem here and set about the right way to solve it. However, I take a dim view of just being argumentative for a short moment in the limelight. What is required is some way to get the policy folks to understand, in a way acceptable to them, what the real score is -- so that they can deal with the true situation. Maybe the two Bills can give you some clues on this. But, don't overlook the big juggernaut that the US has built through its Official Establishment. It is senseless to ask me to throw myself or any of the team in the path of this thing, just to have a spectacle of a big "spla-a-t", which would be us.

Incidentally, I did not mean to criticize Rufe's action with Kennedy. He spoke up for what he believed in at the one place and to the one person he should have. The point is, this wasn't enough to bring the needed change. And, it's the needed change that I'm interested in, because that will shape the world the next generations of Americans will inherit. As of now, I'm afraid that we are building a "pragmatic" world where a buck comes before anything else. Witness the corruption of the VN military, the Koreans, and now, dammit, even the Filipinos who will be coming over here. Viet Nam might well become a sort of US-helped Dickensian school for teaching corrupt practices in all of Asia.

Cheers,