



15 May 1966
Washington

Mr. Mike:

Please share this with Rube upon his
return. I'm writing this between phone calls
as the Washington hierarchy crashes along on
the latest crisis in Danang and Hue, so I
don't know when I'll have to drop this and
have to go to one of the "operational centers"
(whatever they are) in town. Hope they serve
coffee!

First, the attached. It is meant for you,
Mike. It was given to me by the very bright
son of one of the UCLA Alumni at an
Alumni meeting I attended several days ago.
His father apparently has made more money
than I since leaving school, since they live
in a whopping big mansion in the Bel Air
district of Washington. The son has tried
out some of his ideas (at a "lover's lane"
at his college), with interesting results. Now
he wants to visit Saigon on his own this
summer, to learn a few things first hand.
He is a political science - military science



student, concentrating on counter-intelligence
with the idea of going into the Foreign Office.
He is a bright, attractive youngster. He plans
to spend some time in U.K. in June, July.
I'd like to encourage him - and
would appreciate it if you would drop him
a note, and maybe spend a short time with
him when he is back this way. He'd probably
come rushing down to Washington to see you.

...
various folks in Washington, including the
VN Task Force, getting brushed off. My
hunch is that the Moore might find this
worth trying. I haven't had time to talk
with Gen. Greene, USMC Commandant, but he
would be worth a try.



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Now, about Washington. The Team has quasi-support in many places, but not a staunch friend who can "do", in supporting us, anyplace. As a realist, I see our support in Saigon and Washington as a series of melting ice floes - and will keep on shifting from one to the other, to keep us afloat. No other course is open at this time.

LBJ has two main advisors on VN now: Walt Rostow and Bob Komer. Walt talks to him more frequently than does Bob. Walt has an international political advisory role, but LBJ asks him all sorts of detailed questions about VN, including those in Komer's and Porter's sphere. So, Walt depends strongly on his assistant, Bill Jordan (a good friend of ours) to keep up with VN affairs. Komer is quite friendly, but with Dick Holbrooke joining his staff, we can expect some subversive moves up close.

Others with a real say include HHHH,



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McNamara, Rusk, and probably Bill Bundy. I've spent time with them, talking bluntly and as realistically as I know how — mostly telling them that they are guilty of overlooking the role of the Vietnamese in all this, that this is where the Team shines, but that we cannot work with our hands so tied or with the frequent knifings. I've also told them (and Lodge and Unger) exactly what I intend to do next and, if I'm stopped, I'm bugging out.

Since what I want the Team to do is political, I saved my heaviest artillery for Bill Jordan and Ken Unger — each of whom has the real, day-to-day say on political work in VN. I told each that, in VN eyes, the situation is worse today than it was last summer, that the prestige of the Embassy, USAID, CIA, and JUSPAO keeps sinking to real lows. Thus, I take a dim view of beating up the same old bureaucratic machine — which has been



out-smarted and out-played by the
black-pajama VC's. Since LBJ mentioned
me by name 3 times in the NSC meeting
(in a way that made me feel like slugging
him as a smart-aleck), I took it that he
was hoping I'd step out and do something.
Therefore, despite the cautious wording of
US policy on the subject of political
"fronts" and alliances in VN at this time,
I was going to work to encourage VN
parties, sects, religions, etc., to coalesce
into one, two, or three "fronts". Any other
work, political, military, or economic, at
this critical moment was secondary to
getting VN on a solid political footing.

We are now in contact, encouraging a
"front", with Catholics, VNQDD, Dai Viet,
Hon Hao, and Cao Dai. Upon my return, I'm
going to contact the Buddhists - unless
Ky is shooting them all. The Cao Dai,
through a top leadership meeting at the
Holy See in Tay Ninh, have invited me to



visit Trinh minh The's grave on Nui Ba
Den mountain. I'll do this. I'm sure it will
kick up a big stir among the VN's - and
even the VC.

Unger told me that Habib is in charge
of political work over the next months, and
told me to "coordinate" with him. I told
him that Phil is a nice boy, did superb
"shadow boxing" during the Thi-Struggle
crisis of Central VN, but that US prestige
went down hill and Ky lost nearly all his
following because of the US looking like
a "paper tiger" - therefore, I really
couldn't miss opportunities to be exploited
by spending too much time educating
folks like Habib, but would keep him
informed as I could. Meanwhile, I told
Unger, I expected Unger to tell Habib to
keep me informed of what he was doing,
so that I could maybe help the U.S. from
getting too black an eye.



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Unger, of course, got really stimed up by this -- so I just said quietly: "how long do you guys want to see the shit kicked out of the U.S. to serve the career ambitions of a handful of Americans? You don't seem to understand that, if the US bureaucracies had done their work, we wouldn't have over 2,000 American kids killed in combat so far." I then analyzed how he, Unger, had lost out to Komer and Rosten in Washington, by trying to play a Departmental game. I pointed out that he and Bill Bundy had fielded one team and ~~and let us down so badly that we were~~ communicate electronically without getting clobbered by one + all. I said that the White House assistants, the VP's staff, ISA and JCS in the Pentagon, and CIA had all commented to me that they didn't see my pouched memos -- our last remaining commo link - and he simply had weakened his own position by not



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distributing them in Washington - and in taking some pride in having such a unique asset in Vietnam. (In my talks around Washington, I purposely mentioned juicy items from these pouched memos - and the professed surprise that my listeners weren't getting these from Unger. I hope they put the pressure on him. Bill Connell was one of these.)

Humphrey, Komer, and Connell were very firm that LBJ expected me to be bolder than I've been. I said okay, I'll get bold, but if or when I get chopped down for it, I'm then publicly blowing the whistle on the poor work of the U.S. in VN. This alarmed them, of course, and they asked me to please stick and take it. I didn't tell them that I'm really going to stick to going around left flank, as we have been doing the past 3 weeks in Vietnam. I have the word out in VN circles -- and, as I see people, I just report what they



say to me, and what they plan to do next. I leave out my advice to them. Although I stick strictly to U.S. policy guidelines, I don't want to be spending most of my time explaining every last move to hedge and Habbit in kindergarten terms they would understand. Somehow, "memcons" are acceptable, where action isn't. So, I'll use their rules, to get us free.

One last thing. I'm hanging on to George Melvin. He is invaluable in this political crunch we are now in. I so told Stoneman and Unger. Stoncy had arranged an AID post in Laos for George. I asked him to please keep it open, but I want George in VN for several more months. He is now doing some superb work for the U.S. (I jumped Unger for the "bad-mouthing" of George).

I said hello to Trueworthy in State.



He seemed unduly happy that I was returning to VN, saying our Team was the only "pure" (unselfish) group the US had there and, if we quit, he and many other Americans would figure the US had really lost and the game was over. I got much the same feeling from many others in staff jobs around town. So, maybe we are the "poor man's MACV or USAID or JUSPAO or Embassy". Guess there are still romantic Americans.

Since most Americans in Washington and Saigon plan and talk about a Vietnam that does not exist, I suggest that all we can do with them is some patient education, while we quietly go ahead and work directly with the VN's. They are the determinant in this struggle, and they are the ones who listen to us.

Ed

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