

CCLBY

- C: In 1961 Ed Lansdale came out--well, the end of 1960 I guess, shortly after the President's election, President Kennedy's election--came out in, I guess January. He was preceded by the rumor that he was possibly going to be the new ambassador.
- G: I've come across that several times. Was it serious? Do you know whether it was being seriously considered?
- C: I have no idea. I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Obviously he had some background, and he reflected a little bit of that counter-insurgency, political action kind of role that was certainly popular in the Kennedy circle. He was very suspicious of the CIA station I know.
- G: I think you refer to that in your book, that he was sort of stony-faced through the briefing.
- C: Yes. Yes. But eventually I think he came around to--and his own political good sense brought him around to understand what the Vietnamese were trying to do with the strategic hamlet thing. You know he didn't buy Nhu a hundred per cent but he did understand that they were focused at the real level of the war, down in the villages and hamlets, and that that turned out to be a good thing. Then he went away. He didn't become ambassador obviously. I've heard the story that somewhere in the Pentagon

they didn't particularly look forward to that, his being the ambassador on top of the various military chain of command who was over there, whoever it was at the time.

Then, of course, the really important mission, though, was the Taylor-Rostow one, in October or something like that. It came over for about three or four days. Unfortunately I was not there. I had been called over to Manila to meet John McCone, our new director of CIA. I had just come back and had about a half-hour talk with Rostow, and that's all. I've always kind of regretted that, because I had the feeling that the Taylor-Rostow mission, in its report that eventually showed up, did not put an adequate stress on the importance of the strategic hamlet, the village level of the war, the whole counterinsurgency role, but instead really started us off on what I thought was the wrong foot, of focusing particularly on the military and the strengthening of the military.

G: And pressures against the North for a possible--

C: Well, and all that stuff about the North, which was kind of incidental. We'd already been doing a little of that, but I was in the process of becoming disenchanted with it as not being very feasible.

G: These were what, black operations?

C: Yes. Dropping people in and so forth. I guess we ran our first ones in 1960, so it was before that. But--

Excerpted from Wm. Colby Oral History interview with Ted Gittinger

G: Hadn't Lansdale trained some teams way back in the middle fifties?

C: Oh, some of his people had theoretically left some capabilities up in Hanoi when they went away, but no, it played no role at that time. Lansdale was more symbolic. He was looking for the symbolism and the political effect of this, and not unreasonably. Some of his ideas are a little fey once in a while, but he did understand the basic political quality that was necessary to any continuing struggle.