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TO: Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Jr

Dear Admiral Zumwalt:

I would like to coordinate with you as closely and frequently as possible on our upcoming trip to Vietnam, because I have found it take enormous energy and planning to complete a fraction of what one hopes to do on each trip to Vietnam, and I believe you are hoping to do very much in a very short time period.

The Vietnamese have a custom of having one agency host each delegation's visit. That Vietnamese organization essentially "owns" the delegation and its members during the stay. They will cooperate with other organizations but each government agency has its own rules and as is the case with any country, especially Vietnam, the rules can be cumbersome and work quite slow at times. Interestingly, the military is usually very efficient.

The press will have to be given permission by the appropriate agency to accompany us. They will have separate "minders". You will be welcome to see and visit almost any place and any person, if available and not too controversial, but time is usually needed and availability varies markedly, as it would elsewhere. You will be welcome to meet with any level of government official you wish, including the president, the communist party leader, foreign minister, health ministers, or members of the 10-80 Committee, the Agent Orange researchers, etc.

Everything moves very slowly in Vietnam, so organizing as much in advance as possible is very useful. Also, cars break down, phone and fax lines do not work, etc. with great frequency. We will have to be prepared to be very flexible.

It seems to me reasonable to have all their scientific publications long before we go. Then we can focus on people and places. Essentially, the Vietnamese research suggests an increase in some types of cancers, eg. liver cancers, and some congenital malformations from potential Agent Orange exposure. Their weakness is in exposure estimation, control for other possible causes of health effects, and not having good control populations. Also, their research is done by the equivalent of our Veterans Administration, a government agency which has many talented people, but is not up to the highest standards of academic research, and is partially funded by the national government in Hanoi with an eye to the propoganda value of any positive findings. My impression is that negative findings would make the government very unhappy. For this reason, we will have to do most of our research with our own US teams, even though we must work with the Vietnamese who do understand their country better than we do. There are competing groups of Vietnamese Agent Orange researchers with widely different points of views as to the health consequences. We will be presented with the "official" view unless we can have private informal meetings, which will be highly unlikely on a very short trip.

I plan to be back in Washington briefly May 16 for a research meeting at EPA. I hope to involve them in dioxin research. If you think we should meet for a short time then, I will try to arrange it. We can also communicate by fax or phone. If there are people such as veterans' groups or congressional staffers I should meet with, I might be able to leave May 17 instead of the 16.

Please get back to me when convenient so that we may begin to plan all aspects of the trip. With warmest regards, I remain

Arnold Schechter