

GENERAL WESTMORELAND'S HISTORY NOTES
29 August-4 September 1965

Sunday, 29 August 1965

General Kinnard of the 1st Cavalry Division arrived in town with his advance party and I had an extensive discussion with him. General Kinnard's ideas on how his division would be employed are not realistic to the environment in Vietnam. I am sure that he will reorient his thinking after he has an opportunity to see at first hand the nature of the conflict. He was under the misimpression that he would use his division to secure the Laotian border in the highlands; a mission he feels his command could accomplish. I pointed out to him that this is a task probably beyond the capability of his division but I would give him time to judge this for himself. General Kinnard stated that General Abrams had urged him to press the concept of operating in the panhandle of Laos in order to stop infiltration. I explained to General Kinnard that such a plan was not in the cards in the foreseeable future because of complex political and other considerations. General Kinnard also stated that General Johnson, the Chief of Staff, was much interested in the concept of throwing a cordon of troops across the panhandle between South Vietnam and Thailand. I pointed out that this is a much discussed plan but, in my opinion, completely impractical in the foreseeable future. This discussion served to point out the difficulty that senior officers, who have not served in Vietnam, experience in attempting to understand the situation and the practical problems faced by our military units in fighting the Viet Cong and countering

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the well developed covert infiltration from the north.

Monday, 30 August

I asked Colonel Thompson, the senior US advisor to the Hop Tac Secretariat, to give me a list of the accomplishments of this project since its initiation on 1 October 1964. The list that he gave me was impressive. During the Mission Council Meeting on this date I used Colonel Thompson's report to impress upon the Ambassador and General Lansdale the facts that Hop Tac had truly made progress and was sound in concept, and that we should resist suggestions by the Vietnamese authorities that the structure be torn down and new approaches be taken to provide security and pacification in the heartland of the country and the environs of Saigon. I also prepared a letter to General Co and General Vien of III Corps giving them the benefit of the Hop Tac statistics and urged that they take renewed interest in the program and avoid any radical changes in it [Letter attached]. This letter was preceded by a discussion with these two officers at a luncheon on Thursday, 2 September, following the Combined Tactical Conference. There is a tendency for each new Vietnamese regime to tear down the good things developed by the previous regime and to reorganize so as to pursue some new pet idea. There is a proclivity among the Vietnamese to feel that some simple and novel idea will provide the key to open Pandora's box and bring about miraculous improvements. The ability to organize a project, execute it step by step, and supervise it to insure that things are done properly, is not typical of the Vietnamese mentality. Hopefully, we are making some headway in break-

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ing down this Vietnamese trait, but the present regime has not differed from those of the past.

On this same date, I conducted a background briefing for the press [Notes attached]. I held this briefing since I have detected that there has been considerable misunderstanding and skepticism by the press concerning the value of the B-52 raids. This state of mind came about because the image of SAC had been built up over a period of years by service publicity to the point that the general feeling has been that SAC is a weapon of decision and that, upon its introduction, spectacular military results would accrue--in other words, that SAC is the Sunday punch. In this briefing, I attempted to address the rationale behind the request for SAC strikes and the important role that I feel they are now playing in this counterinsurgency war. There was every indication that the press was very pleased with the briefing and has accepted the rationale and my conclusion that the program is of substantial benefit.

Tuesday, 31 August

Colonel Bankson, a representative of a Department of Defense team sent over by Secretary McNamara to look into the possibility of varying degrees of press censorship, called upon me to discuss the team's mission. I explained to Bankson my deep concern over the irresponsibility of a few members of the press regarding security of military plans and troop movements. These breaches of security affect the welfare of the troops and I remarked that something has to be done about the matter. Fully appreciating the difficulty of imposing censorship

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under present circumstances, I informed Bankson that I leaned toward ways and means of bringing about better discipline among the local press corps.

Also on the 31st, I had a briefing on the new MACV headquarters building. General Rosson, my Chief of Staff, is doing a good job in bringing this into focus and has found a very excellent piece of real estate next to the ICC Compound. Following this briefing, I discussed, with Ambassador Johnson, the political aspects of our headquarters being adjacent to the ICC. He agreed to take it up with Commissioner Seaborn of the ICC. Later that day Ambassador Johnson notified me that Seaborn saw no objection to our plan. I therefore proceeded, on Wednesday afternoon (1 September), to discuss this matter with General Co. He not only agreed to see if the real estate could be made available to us but added that he felt we should also take over the ICC Compound. He stated that he would attempt to find another place for the members of the ICC to reside.

Also on Tuesday, General Kinnard came to see me and requested permission to go to Bangkok to discuss, with General Stilwell, the matter of the 1st Cavalry Division operating in southern Laos. I explained to him that his time could be better utilized getting oriented in-country and urged that he delay his trip for several months at which time it could be accomplished in conjunction with an R&R leave. After some discussion, he agreed to this proposal.

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Wednesday, 1 September

I visited Vung Tau and participated in the opening of a very fine facility. I was impressed with the results of General Sternberg's efforts in preparing and operating this facility. This facility was put in order by two successive teams of six Seabees from Chu Lai who worked while also taking some well-deserved R&R. The men running the facility are combat officers and NCO's who have distinguished themselves in the field and have less than three months to serve in-country. I complimented General Sternberg at the next staff meeting on these practical personnel management measures.

Also while at Vung Tau, I visited the Korean hospital which is filled with many sick Vietnamese, many of who are amputees. The last time I visited this hospital, some eight months ago, I could not get a smile from any of the patients. During this visit I had little difficulty getting a response. I talked to the hospital commander about this and asked what had brought it about. I speculated that the Koreans had won the friendship of the Vietnamese, that they now feel more at home in a hospital run by foreign personnel.

I next visited the 3d Naval District Headquarters and found a vast improvement since my last visit six months ago. Admiral Ward and his advisors have done an outstanding job. The place was clean and more efficient. Improved quarters have been provided for the men and their dependents. The junk repair facility has more than doubled its production.

I visited the Australian Caribou Detachment and all personnel seemed to be of high morale and satisfied with their contribution.

After questioning some of the men and finding that their mail was not com-

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ing through on a timely basis, I suggested that something be done about this. In this connection, my J-1 informs me that US mail from the east coast arrives in four days.

I then visited the Van Kiep National Training Center which has been one of the problem children of the RVNAF. Again, I was surprised by the transition that had taken place. A higher order of leadership was evident. The place was cleaner, the troops looked better, and morale and discipline had obviously improved. I complimented General Vinh of the Training Command, who was present, and the Center commander. Whereas desertions were running approximately 14 percent when I visited the Center six months ago, it was reported to me that now they were down to three percent. I urged that steps be taken to bring this rate even lower.

Finally, I visited Go Cong Province which I had also not visited for several months. Again I was impressed with the progress that had been made and the high order of leadership displayed by the Province Chief, Lieutenant Colonel Thang.

Upon my return, I called on General Co and, in addition to discussing the new MACV Headquarters, I discussed with him the desirability of setting up joint interrogation centers at Province, Division, Corps and in Saigon. These interrogation centers would be manned jointly by Vietnamese and Americans. He agreed and suggested this at the Combined Training Conference the next day (Thursday, 2 September). All the generals agreed and we tasked the two J-2's to work out the details. I expected this problem would be hard to sell, but found it quite to the contrary.

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It was interesting to note that Co brought the matter up at the meeting as his own idea and therefore was given credit for it by his colleagues. This is typical of Vietnamese officers and is an important lesson to be learned by all US advisors in getting things done by their counterparts. I also urged General Co to put the MSS under the J-2 and take it away from the Political Warfare Directorate. He stated that it was only under the Political Warfare as an experiment and after his experiment continued a little longer he would consider moving it. I told him I would have our intelligence and psywar people monitor this experiment.

We then discussed the National Campaign Plan developed by General Thang and General DePuy, the two J-3's. We both agreed the plan was a good one, but I pointed out that it no doubt would have to be modified depending upon the exigencies of the situation. I urged he make the plan known to a minimum number of personnel. He stated it would be known only to himself and the J-3, he would not even include his Chief of Staff. This is important because VC agents have so penetrated the government that compromise can be assumed if more than a few people are aware of the plan.

I discussed the B-52 strike program with General Co and specifically insured that he was aware of the strike scheduled for 2 September on Ho Bo Woods and the ground follow-up by an element of the 5th Division. He was fully knowledgeable and stated that he fully indorses the program. I next pointed out to General Co that I felt proper attention was not being given to the Regional and Popular Forces. Since these forces were the key to pacification, I urged that they not be neglected.

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He seemed to concur. I have learned from long experience that you have to judge the Vietnamese by actions not by words. Sometimes they give the impression they are going to do something and nothing happens.

On this same date, I have dinner with Mr. Reston, of the NEW YORK TIMES, at which time I pointed out to him that he had made a serious breach of security in an article on the economy of South Vietnam, date-line Saigon, 30 August, wherein he stated that the 1st Cavalry Division of 15,000 men would be stationed at An Khe. Mr. Reston was extremely embarrassed about this article and so stated, apologizing profusely. I informed Mr. Reston that, as a consequence, I had to modify certain tactical plans and was seriously concerned about the introduction of the 1st Cavalry Division since its location was now known throughout the world. Later that evening I urged Mr. Reston to use his good offices to try to bring about some organization of the press corps in Saigon so that we could deal with one individual who would act as leader of the group. I feel that such an organization could not only provide better service to the press, but the discipline it would bring about would give us greater confidence in making information available to the press corps. Mr. Reston had himself concluded that this was a better solution than press censorship and stated he would do what he could to encourage it.

Thursday, 2 September

Sir John Wilton, Chief of Staff of the Australian Army, called upon me and discussed the employment of his troops. He was apologetic that certain constraints had been placed by his government on the de-

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ployment of his troops. I informed him that the last proposal that his forces could be used in operations contiguous to Bien Hoa was acceptable at this stage of the war. Sir John pointed out that the Pack Battery that will soon be deployed from Australia to Vietnam could be used wherever I chose, including attaching it to our 101st Airborne Brigade if required. I explained to him that the deployment of the New Zealand battery had become quite a controversy between the US Government and New Zealand. The New Zealand Government wanted very much for the battery to stay closely associated with the Australian Battalion. General Wilton suggested, and I heartily agreed, that we should try to solve these problems in military channels and keep them out of diplomatic channels, which serve only to complicate or confuse the situation.

Upon the initiative of General Co, based on a program that was suggested by his predecessor, General Minh, a Combined Tactical Conference was held, consisting of myself, my Chief of Staff, the J-2, the J-3 and the component commanders and senior advisors of the four corps areas, along with the Vietnamese counterparts of these officers [Memo for Record attached]. It was suggested to General Walt that he bring down Colonel St. Clair, who works directly with General Thi. Since St. Clair was on R&R, Colonel Geiger came instead. General Walt also brought down his Air Wing Commander but I asked him not to sit at the table because we would outnumber the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese are very sensitive on this so I only allow US officers to attend if they have a counterpart. I do not want the American presence to overwhelm the Vietnamese.

At the briefing we discussed the deployment plan for US troops and watched a film on techniques of construction of airfields, such as those employed by the Seabees at Chu Lai. Concluding the meeting, I made three points. First, I discussed the B-52 program. Secondly, I urged that all concerned be alert to the small problems that would develop with the introduction of additional US troops. Although US troops would be well disciplined, all American and Vietnamese should be alert to incidents before they become big problems and more unmanageable. Third, I emphasized the importance of moving out on pacification when American troops begin to operate along with the Vietnamese forces. In my opinion, the combination of the Vietnamese Regular Forces and the Americans could nullify and destroy the VC main force units. Therefore emphasis should be placed on the use of Regional and Popular Forces to provide security in conjunction with a renewed effort to pacify the country. Following the meeting General Co hosted a very nice luncheon at the Officers Club, where an attitude of camaraderie between the Vietnamese and American officers was evident.

These joint Combined Tactical Conferences were conceived by me as a means of getting senior Vietnamese and Americans together to receive briefings and to air problems. Also, I wanted to provide for myself a forum in order to put forth my views to the Vietnamese officers.

Friday, 3 September

I called General Boles to the office and discussed with him my concern that air strikes were being used indiscriminately and perhaps

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wastefully. He stated that he agreed with my concern as he had had some personal experience in connection with this matter. I asked him to draft a charter and for a board of officers to study this problem. The point here is that we have many strike aircraft and forward air controllers riding in O-1 aircraft in-country now. These pilots want to get into the war and be a party to dropping bombs. And, in the final analysis, control must be vested in these pilots and forward air controllers. I want more information as to the judgement they are exercising and would like to impose some practical restraints. This will require study and careful judgement. Of further concern is the waste of conventional bombs, now in short supply.

Saturday, 4 September

We briefed Mr. Nixon this morning. He was alert and receptive. Following the briefing he made an excellent statement to the assembled officers, expressing concern that the present administration has been a little too eager to negotiate. He feels that negotiations at this time would be premature.

At our intelligence briefing this morning I urged that more effect be made to acquire intelligence in the Laotian Panhandle and that we work up a counterpart operations program for the purpose of interdicting and hopefully interrupting some of the well-established supply lines through the Panhandle into Vietnam. Roads are now being built over which heavy traffic can flow after the rainy season. I suggested that the J-2 and J-3 explore the feasibility of tasking the Marine Air Wing to provide adequate armed reconnaissance sorties in the

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Panhandle area south of the 17th parallel. The 2nd Air Division has stated that they are limited because of the shortage of tankers; F-100 aircraft require tankers to operate in the Laos Panhandle area. I was surprised by this statement as I was unaware that the F-100 had such limitations.

During a roundup of the Rolling Thunder missions in North Vietnam I received the impression that the program was somewhat on dead center and needed some rejuvenation involving better tactics and targeting. Also, statistics suggest that the Navy is doing a better job than the Air Force in armed reconnaissance. The Navy seems to have somewhat more sophisticated aircraft for night reconnaissance and are doing a major share of these missions.

I received a review and outline of the historical efforts of the headquarters and was pleased with a concept that has been developed. It is regrettable that the history of the war has not been given the attention it deserves but we have every intention of doing so in the future.

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