

QUESTION: What could we have done to insure that Diem or someone like him was able to prevail?

It would have been Diem maybe for a time and then someone else. We could have figured out some way for orderly change. The communists were thrown very much off their time-table and thinking by Diem and his actions when he was president; when he refused to go ahead with the vote on uniting north and south. Which was correct, I think. He was much stronger than they had ever thought. He was much more a Vietnamese nationalist than any of the communists ever were.

I thought that possibly we couldn't have won, but we could have made enough political points so that any eventual taking over of the South would have to be far more political than the communists planned. They would have to give up points politically to do it. There would have been a lot of compromises and it would have possibly wound up like Yugoslavia.

What the Americans there didn't understand was that the French colonial system in Indochina . . . ran every goddammed thing. When they pulled out, they left behind untrained people. The court system the VNese had wasn't a really effective arm of govt. Diem . . . knew the country very well, but he didn't know how to run anything; he didn't know how to administer. He really didn't. Nor did any of the other VNese. They had a govt with departments and ministries and, Jesus! the ministries had been run by the French and suddenly the door man was brot in. "You are the Minister. All he knew was to sit at a desk. What does he do now? He didn't really have a clue. . . . Some of the VNese intellectuals who had college educations . . . were trying to set up something. But they'd gone into professions, most of them were doctors or dentists, a few lawyers. But none of them were in govt and they needed a whole mass of people trained.

The communists started in '45 the same way, but they didn't rely on the French or anybody else. They ran their own affairs. They killed off a lot of their people; a lot of their officials were liquidated by their own party people for making mistakes. But gradually they got people in who could run things, administer. They learned all [during] the time they were fighting the French.

The VNese on our side hadn't been that way. Even the army had been part of the French forces with French officers running it. [Our] VNese units were almost untrined as a real military force. [During the Viet Minh withdrawal from the South] I called all the province officials together in to Saigon for a meeting. They were practically all Frenchmen as province and district chiefs. [They were supposed to be replaced by VNese] and we didn't have any VNese to do it. We had a few govt people working in Saigon (who had come down from Hanoi) but they had worked in offices. They sat at the door when visitors came in. Sometimes they had experience stamping things--the French system of doing any business of the govt--to stamp something with a rubber stamp and it'd always cost you. Mail a letter, they have to stamp a piece of paper with a rubber stamp.) They badly needed a govt service body of trained people. We we started. But we [proceeded] as tho it could take ten or 20 yrs. We got

Michigan State and AID working on it. [Yet] we need[ed] people representing Saigon thruout the country and we need[ed] [them] tomorrow and [they] should have been there yesterday. Where do we get them from?

I decided [what] our pacification would be. Where there wasn't anybody from Saigon [to send], we can send out an army unit of some sort temporarily and let them try to run something and represent Saigon. At least they had radio communication with Saigon, they have some discipline, some sense of order, they have a HQ in Saigon. So the pacification campaign was getting [the] army out.

As soon as we'd get some people into position there weren't any roads around to supply them. . . . We had to send the army in to bring law and order into those areas, supplanting the Viet Minh pulling out. But there wasn't a civil service of any sort there that meant anything. . . . Some of the VM quit in great disgust [having] discovered that the VM were communist to their great horror. They were patriotic VNese. They came in and tried to help Diem. I started them training people to go out and teach people to fend for themselves in the provinces and districts. I was running a big multiple operation. This was all well on the way when I left. I don't know what happened to all these things afterwards. When I was there . . . we had teams teaching people how to run their own affairs in each town, each district, each province. I had a veterans' organization started. I was begging them to speak up to govt officials on what was needed . . . to give people a voice. That apparently went by the boards. I left it on paper for people to follow thru on; I left organizations intact and had VNese working on them. I don't know what happened.

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