

TOP SECRET

20 September 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Morning Meeting of 20 September 1968



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Godfrey noted that William Beecher's article in today's New York Times reporting that the desertion rate in the ARVN is at a record high is largely accurate.

Carver observed that unearthed in a recent enemy cache in Vietnam were three hundred sweat shirts with Mickey Mouse emblems on them.

Maury reported that our cost-of-living bill passed the Senate late yesterday.

Maury advised that Lee Williams, Senator Fulbright's Administrative Assistant, was contacted yesterday in connection with the case of the Agency employee who has been awarded a Fulbright scholarship.

Maury indicated that briefings have been lined up for Senator Ellender at his convenience.



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*The Director noted the difficulty which an Agency employee is having with the Internal Revenue Service and suggested to Houston that it would be useful if OGC could render assistance in this and other such cases before employees are compelled to utilize expensive private legal assistance.

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*The Director noted [] reporting political turbulence in Burma and asked the DD/P to wrap up the background on this matter in a memorandum for Assistant Secretary Bundy.

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*The Director asked the ADD/I to dispatch the memorandum prepared for Walt Rostow on North Vietnamese strength in South Vietnam to Under Secretary Katzenbach, Deputy Secretary Nitze, and General Wheeler with a cover sheet noting that it is being forwarded pursuant to a discussion at Thursday evening's meeting at the State Department.

*The Director inquired about what information we have about the recent Pugwash Conference in Nice and upon being met with blank stares asked the Deputies to look into the matter and specifically asked the DD/S&T to consult with Spurgeon Keeny, who is looking into the Conference for the White House.

*The Director asked the DD/S&T to ensure that the follow-through paper on what is required to convert the SA-5 into an ABM system is finished by next week.

*DDCI led a discussion on the issue of whether it is not anachronistic to continue the order of Soviet Estimates in such a manner that the Estimate on main trends in Soviet military policy precedes rather than follows upon the individual Estimates dealing with specific military issues. The Director asked [] to ensure that ONE utilizes the period of transition of Administrations to review this matter as well as other Estimates for possible alterations in scheduling and approaches.

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Goodwin noted press reports of the sale of Senator Robert Kennedy's personal memoir on the Cuban missile crisis to McCall's magazine. The Director asked the ADD/I to ready appropriate Agency materials concerning the Cuban missile crisis for whatever use might be required by the publishing of the memoir.

Goodwin noted that Bernard Gwertzman, recently of the Washington Star, has been hired by the New York Times to man its Moscow Bureau.

[]

L. K. White

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*Extracted and sent to action officer

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South Vietnamese Deserting the Army At Increased Rate

By WILLIAM BEECHER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 19—

The Defense Department is concerned about a sharp increase in desertions from the South Vietnamese armed forces.

After a decline from 1966 to 1967, the number has risen in the first six months of this year.

The Pentagon recently directed the American mission in Saigon to give priority to helping the Vietnamese reverse this trend.

However, Pentagon officials insisted the surge did not appear to represent a widespread erosion of morale or a general disinclination by Vietnamese fighting men to play an increasingly heavy role in combat.

Two Factors Seen

Instead, they believe it stems from two factors that they say should not recur:

First, a nationwide mobilization threw 224,000 new recruits into already crowded training facilities this year. This resulted in a deterioration of training and particularly political orientation.

Second, the enemy offensive in February came at a time when about half the Vietnamese Army was home on religious holiday. Some stayed home to protect their families; others joined nearby military units and have never rejoined their original outfits.

"Every indicator in the field shows higher morale since the February offensive," a colonel just back from Vietnam said.

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DESERTIONS RISE IN VIETNAM ARMY

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"The Vietnamese proved to themselves they were good fighting men at that time; they've been much more aggressive ever since."

'Do a Lot of Work Twice'

But, a Defense Department official commented that "rising desertions represent an open wound draining strength when we're increasing strength." He added, "We're having to do a lot of work twice because of it."

Pentagon experts noted that desertions have been a much greater problem in the Vietnamese armed forces than in the United States forces.

In 1965 a total of 110,000 Vietnamese were listed as deserters. The number rose to 115,000 in 1966 but dropped to 80,000 last year, despite a larger total force.

During the first half of this year the number was over 50,000 compared with 40,000 for the first six months of last year. The rate of desertions was 6.5 per cent of total strength for the first half of 1967, compared with about 8 per cent for the comparable period this year.

American officials and military leaders in Saigon are counseling the Vietnamese to take a fresh look and to try to improve conditions of military life.

Pay Has Increased

Pay for privates, for example, has been increased 300 per cent since 1965, but still is said to be fairly low for a man with a family to support. Consideration is being given to another round of increases the first of the year.

The Vietnamese are being urged to improve and extend recruit training with special emphasis on political motivation.

More attention is being urged for a program to build housing for 4,400 families of regular army troops near their military camps. Consideration is being given to expanding the program if the start goes well.

One of the underlying problems, Pentagon specialists say, is that desertion has never been regarded as a particularly serious crime in Vietnamese society. At harvest time, it is not unusual for soldiers to slip home to help bring in the crop. Others simply get lonely for their families and, when failing to get leave, go anyway. Others have been known to leave one unit and join another because they did not like their officers.

In 1966 stiff penalties were imposed for desertion. Those found and convicted can be sentenced to five or more years hard labor in hazardous areas with military engineering units.

The Vietnamese are being urged to find and punish deserters and to persuade the public that desertion is a serious offense.