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Ch. VII 38

MEMORANDUM FOR CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

SUBJECT: RVNAF Leadership (U)

Although the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization program is moving toward completion, we still see frequent instances of the RVNAF failing to perform up to reasonable standards. The Snoul battle is merely the most recent and most blatant incident. I am concerned, as I know you are, about these unfortunate RVNAF failures to acquit themselves in a manner which could be expected, given the level of force composition, training, and equipment.

In many cases the reason for poor RVNAF performance has been poor morale and leadership, not insufficient equipment or support. These are areas in which we can do relatively little to aid them. They must solve these problems themselves. The will, desire, and initiative to perform the security jobs must come from the RVNAF, the GVN, and the people of the Republic of Vietnam.

In my discussions with General Abrams, U.S. Commanders and advisors completing tours of duty in Vietnam, and other knowledgeable individuals, good leadership is almost always pointed to as a key ingredient to improved RVNAF performance. It is also an area where we can have some impact by pointing to weak leaders and being persistent in our efforts to convince President Thieu and other key leaders of the necessity for further action.

RVNAF has, of course, made some quantitative improvements in leadership. There is still a long way to go. RVNAF assumed greatly increased combat responsibility during the past year. Yet I am informed less than 2% of the total officer promotions were awarded on the battlefield; and nearly half of their infantry battalions (61 of 133) were still commanded by captains at the end of 1970. Promotions to captain or above in 1970 fell 70% short of the established goals, and only 66% as many promotions were made in 1970 as in 1969.

More importantly, recorded progress in quality of leadership has not demonstrated the sense of urgency the military situation in SEA requires. At the end of 1970, 9% of ARVN/VNMC battalion

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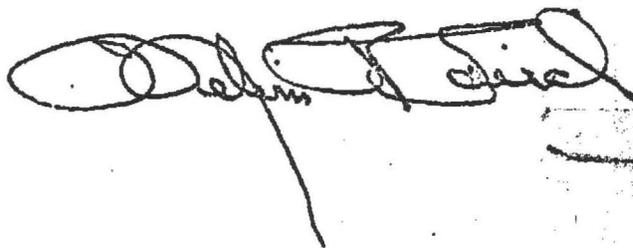
and higher commanders and 36% of company grade officers were rated poor or only adequate by US advisors. The percentage of commanders rated poor or very poor actually increased during the year. It is not clear that the new MACV procedure for removing ineffective officers is functioning as intended.

I am aware of General Abrams' recent session with President Thieu and his steady dialogue with the JCS on RVNAF leadership. General Abrams has my full support on this question. I believe we should review again on an urgent basis the RVNAF leadership situation. It might be useful to undertake the following actions, in full cooperation with the GVN and the RVNAF:

- A survey of RVNAF leadership in the Lam Son 719 and Snuol operations down to the battalion level. As a minimum, the survey should identify those leaders who performed well or poorly, and should give examples of leadership accomplishments and/or failures. It also should indicate what has been done to replace the leaders who performed badly.

- A compilation of the 75 best and 75 worst ARVN/VNMC commanders throughout Vietnam at a field grade level. This list would consider officers now serving on the various staffs as well as current commanders, and would draw on past and present advisory ratings, modified by the results of the Lam Son 719 and Snuol surveys as appropriate. How can the 75 best commanders be put in the 75 key roles and the 75 worst "rehabilitated" or relieved?

I am sure there are many other measures that could help. I am especially interested in the views you and General Abrams may have. I would be interested, too, in actions, if any, that we can take here in Washington to support General Abrams in his efforts to improve RVNAF leadership.



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