A Native Critic on U. S. Role

This is good!!! Could I take the prov. Chief you told about?

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SAIGON.

"You Americans should not be une fleche de paille—a straw arrow," the young Vietnamese province chief explained, carefully lighting a filter cigarette. "You cannot be haughty and arrogant like a turkey. You must help us to increase the prestige of the Vietnamese government and you must respect Vietnamese sovereignty."

With great deliberation, he ordered a tasty array of Chinese dishes in the noisy Vietnamese restaurant. The lively orchestra, playing Vietnamese love songs, French love songs and American melodies, nearly drowned out any attempt at conversation. The fingers of the young province chief followed the syncopated beats by tapping on the white tablecloth—a habit he had learned from two years of study in the United States.

Then he continued his story, which typified the frustrations of a Vietnamese government official.

"You Americans must work side by side with the Vietnamese government people—but the Vietnamese must always be in the forefront, leading the projects," he explained. "This is especially true in the villages and hamlets where the people have been contaminated by Viet Cong (Communist) propaganda about the evils of the Americans. This is your official government policy—that the American government does not want to take over South Viet Nam, but only wants to free it from the Communists.

"But what happens? In my province, all sorts of Americans go directly to the hamlets and villages—to pass out books or to inspect a project—without even consulting me, or checking in with local authorities. One day, I went to visit a very poor orphanage in my province. I spotted an American whom I had met before. He was sitting in his car—and didn't even bother to get out to say hello. I asked him what he was doing there—without my permission and without notifying the provincial authorities he was there. I told him 'Get out! Get out! Get out! You have no right to be here!' And he left.

"In another case, two drunk Americans—I suppose they were CIA—were living in a house in my provincial capital, and someone threw a grenade at the house, but it didn't explode. There was a big flap. I said, 'Who are you and what are you doing here?' Even my American (military) counterpart did not know who they were. How can I as province chief possibly provide security if they don't even notify my office they're in town?"

INNOCENTS

By this time, the fried rice, broiled pigeon eggs and other Chinese delicacies arrived, and the young province chief began to serve his guests. But he continued talking.

"Every one knows the Americans have a big heart and have the very best of intentions," he explained. "But you are so innocent. You like to be flattered—and you must know the Vietnamese are the No. 1 flatterers in the world.

"Your American (military) advisors are very good military technicians, but we need some one with good political brains, because we are fighting the most insidious, the most politically conscious enemy of all—the Communists. But the Americans come to Viet Nam with a New York mind, or an Atlanta mind, but not an Oriental mind. One day some American advisors and I visited one of our districts, and the district chief served us lunch. In our tradition, he must serve us lunch—the Americans are dying for Viet Nam and the least the district chief could do was to serve lunch. But after lunch one of the American advisors paid the district chief 200 piastres (about $3) for the lunch. My district chief was dumbfounded; you are so innocent and naive, and every one is laughing at you."

He then began to discuss the strategic Hop Tac program—the American-backed program to secure and pacify the provinces around Saigon.

"The Vietnamese budget runs from January to December," the province chief explained, "but the American budget runs from June to July. So in the provinces last year, we didn't get any money until September—when the United States appropriations came through. That left me from September to December—three months—to pacify 100 hamlets—what should have taken me a year. It's impossible to do.

"Now, it is April, and I've submitted my 1965 pacification program for the province. But it still has not been approved. I'm supposed to have two regular army battalions in my province for the pacification work—to chase out the Viet Cong battalions. But still I don't have them."

He ignored the almost deafening din of a French love song and continued his conversation.

"Then there's the question of justice. You know an old beggar man on social welfare gets two piastres a day from the government—that's less than $1 a month. But in the provinces, we spend 11 piastres a day to feed the Viet Cong prisoners. Of course, we have the national policy to re-educate the Viet Cong—but is that justice?