

It Changes With Our Men

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SAIGON.

Not long ago, American Ambassador Maxwell Davenport Taylor described life in this turbulent capital city as "a constant surprise" and "a spicy way to live."

Saigon's reaction to the 63-year-old Gen. Taylor is somewhat more restrained. His five-month tenure in the wood-paneled Ambassador's Office on the fifth floor of the American Embassy has caused a mixed reaction among the Vietnamese and Americans living here.

While all are in common agreement that the political situation has plummeted since his July arrival, some say that Gen. Taylor would have had to be a "miracle worker" to have salvaged any sort of stability out of the massive in-fighting among Vietnamese factions, some of which are suspected of being Communist penetrated.

DONE NOTHING

Others have a lukewarm attitude to him. "He's done nothing to be congratulated for or reproached for," one Vietnamese captain laughed. "He tried to please everyone—the generals, the politicians, the Buddhists, the Catholics. No one can succeed in that."

Many in the American community, however, openly blame him for "stiffness and lack of imagination" during the prolonged state of crisis for the past several months. One called him "the original uncertain trumpet," a reference to his polemic book called "The Uncertain Trumpet," named after a Biblical quotation, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

Whatever the improbabilities of out-intriguing the Vietnamese in their course towards political self-destruction, American observers here note two specific effects of Gen. Taylor's brief tenure in office. One is that his tenure has practically nullified the tenure of his predecessor, Henry Cabot Lodge. Gen. Taylor's attempts to assist the stability of the current government is viewed here as a reversal when in late August last year Washington officials and Lodge in Saigon withdrew support from another civilian government headed by Ngo Dinh Diem. It was under Mr. Lodge that Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh came to power in the civilian government—and five of Viet Nam's most competent generals were exiled in a mountain resort city on charges they were attempting to neutralize Viet Nam. Now, 10 months later, at Mr. Taylor's suggestion these five generals have again been returned to powerful positions in the army. Under Mr. Lodge, the systematic program of American economic aid to the provinces continued to flourish—despite two coup d'etats. Now, as even more political instability has diseased Viet Nam, this system is in the process of change and the traditional form of working through government ministries is again slated to be reinstated.

The second effect of the Taylor tenure—which has also hindered Gen. Taylor—is that the current political instability of the Vietnamese has been accompanied by a

little-noticed "American coup" in the American mission. There has been such a rapid turnover of American personnel—in the highest echelons—of each key American agency that a current American joke here is: "If my boss calls, get his name."

The first high-priority task Gen. Taylor assigned himself on arrival was to improve co-ordination of activities within the American mission and to set up a joint Vietnamese-U. S. mission co-ordinating committee to discuss day-by-day implementation of key programs.

Foreign diplomats believe he did an admirable job and would have succeeded except for the Vietnamese government change, with a complete switch of ministers, and the "American coup" in which, since the beginning of the year, the local heads of the Central Intelligence Agency, the U. S. Information Service, the Agency for International Development and the Embassy—all of the U. S. civilian agencies—plus the Military Assistance Command have been changed.

Gen. Taylor brought with him a first-rate embassy staff, including Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, an expert on Far Eastern affairs, and William H. Sullivan, former head of the Vietnamese task force in Washington. They were to assist in the strengthening of co-ordination.

Mr. Sullivan left here last month, officially with "mission accomplished." But no sooner had he departed than a vicious battle broke out in the AID, which led to the resignation of a Sullivan-appointed counter-insurgency expert, Dr. George K. Tanham, in protest against the views of the AID director here.

Some personnel changes were initiated under Mr. Lodge. With the arrival of Gen. Taylor, they increased and caused a lack of continuity in day-to-day implementation of policy.

Despite the pressures of his assignment, Gen. Taylor has been occasionally seen entering the Embassy whistling an incoherent tune with his jacket flopped over one shoulder. At home, he occasionally has a scotch-soda or gimlet before dinner. A safe has been installed in his home so that he can carry classified documents with him to read after work; on week ends he carries home three to five-inches worth of fat reports (in the Pentagon, he used to carry home a suitcase of material for the week end).

He drives around Saigon in a Chrysler "that was dredged up" from a warehouse; his Cadillac "was falling apart with a broken transmission," an associate explained. He is covered by a minimum of security officials, though barbed wire barricades block off the street on which he lives. Unlike his predecessor, he does not carry a weapon. Occasional intelligence reports are received that the Viet Cong Communist terrorists will try to assassinate him, but he appears unconcerned and refuses to change his schedule of activities.

Gen. Taylor is still agile and handsome at 63—a young Vietnamese waitress at an American military installation reportedly told him once at lunch, "You No. 1 sexy." Despite a sprained knee, the tall Missourian still enjoys swimming and aides regularly schedule tennis matches for him.

"He wins more games than he loses," one aid said, "but he does not win them all."