

Sent pTT.  
Aug. 22.

Saigon, Vietnam  
August 22, 1967

Mr. R. M. Duffield  
Foreign Editor  
The Australian  
GPO Box 4162  
Sydney, Australia

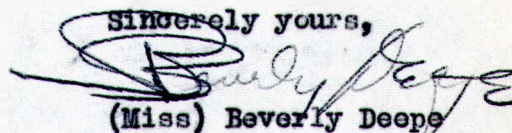
Dear Mr. Duffield:

I'll enclose your requested piece on the Vietnamese election. Hopefully, it's somewhat in the ballpark of what you want.

We heard up here you were on strike. If true, I hope things have settled down.

There's no such animal here as an inch-per-mile map to the best of my knowledge. However, I'm trying to scrounge from the USAF a 1:50,000 scaling, which is about as close as we can come here. I'll send it along to you later.

Sincerely yours,

  
(Miss) Beverly Deepe

P. S. In the event of any payments, could you please send them to me through the Chartered Bank of Saigon. My thanks.

Beverly Ann Deepe  
64A Hong Thap Tu  
Saigon, Vietnam

August 23, 1967

Election—page 1

*Australian*

SAIGON—The Vietnamese elections for President and the 60-man Senate on September 3 are a crucial hinge determining the agonizing issues of peace or war—or victory or defeat—for this country and its Allied supporters.

*Short Range*  
The prospects: more war, at a fiercer, bloodier pace plus more political disadvantages for the newly elected government in Saigon and its Allies.

"These elections mark the end of one ~~chapter~~ chapter and the beginning of another," one Vietnamese political source explained. "But, we don't know what the new chapter is all about. In fact, we don't even know what kind of book the chapters are in. To outsiders, this appears to be a big comedy. But, to the Vietnamese the elections are part of a giant tragedy.

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Election—page 2

The Vietnamese electoral campaign is considered here as a verbal exercise between ten civilian "hawks" and the one military ticket of "super-hawks." All of the leading candidates are, for all extents and purposes, hard-line anti-Communists. All have campaigned that they are for ~~the~~ "peace." Most have advocated discussions with Hanoi—but not with the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (NLF). Only one candidate, Truong Dinh ~~du~~ Dzu, has advocated even unofficial discussions with the NLF. Yet, the purpose of these discussions is to convert the non-Communist ~~and~~ <sup>have them</sup> elements from ~~seeing~~ the NLF and then to join the newly-elected Saigon regime. The context in which virtually all the candidates use the word "negotiation" is to ask Hanoi and the NLF to ~~capitulate~~ capitulate, rather than to compromise. Even the Vietnamese Constitution, promulgated on April 1, under which the elections are being held, is considered as a "hawkish" anti-Communist document, barring a Communist government or a neutralist, coalition government in the South. Hence, the document itself is considered here as a block to any <sup>serious</sup> negotiations with Hanoi and the NLF, ~~but~~ for the Communists main aim in negotiations—the place of the NLF in the future government—would be ignored and beyond the realm of discussion.

Not even the most optimistic officials here believe the Communists are ready for this kind of negotiations.

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These are the three leading Presidential tickets:

\*\*Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, 44, has ~~g~~ been a military officer for 19 years. He attended an infantry school in France early in his career and later two American military institutions—the Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1957, and a familiarization of modern weapons ~~course~~ <sup>Course</sup> three years later. Thieu led the ~~the~~ 5th Infantry Division to the Presidential Palace in Saigon in 1963 to spearhead the coup d'etat against former President Ngo Dinh Diem. From that group of ~~group~~ coup-leaders, Thieu is the only one ~~to have survived~~ to date. The slight-framed general was born in Central Vietnam and was converted to Catholicism with his marriage. Because of the enormous controversy about Diem, also a Catholic, ~~and~~ the current Vatican line is to avoid supporting a Catholic President during the elections, reliable sources report. Thus, Thieu has the disadvantages of being a Catholic in a largely non-Catholic country, yet none of the advantages of their bloc vote during the election.

Thieu's running mate is Nguyen Cao Ky, the 36-year-old pilot who has served as Vietnam's Prime Minister for the past 27 months.

\*\*Tran Van Huong, 64, is considered the leading civilian candidate. His given name of Huong means "perfume." He served as Prime Minister for ~~approximately~~ nearly three months in late 1964 and early 1965 during the chaotic period in which Vietnam witnessed a number of coups, false coups and demi-coups, all of them leading to an upsurge in Communist activity before the commitment of Allied troops.

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During his brief Prime Minister-ship, Huong cracked down on Buddhist-inspired street demonstrations, which won him the admiration of the Roman Catholics. He is expected to win a large percentage of the Catholic vote. Born in the heavily-populated Mekong Delta, south of Saigon, Huong is also considered the most popular candidate in that area. He taught school in the delta for nearly a decade in his earlier years; many of his students—or the students of his students—~~are actively campaigning for him. Many Army officers, some holding the rank of general, were among his pupils in earlier years.~~ are actively campaigning for him. Many Army officers, some holding the rank of general, were among his pupils in earlier years.

Known for his integrity and ~~his~~ honesty, Huong served as Mayor of Saigon in the mid-50s during the early days of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. He caught the public eye because he rode his bicycle to work, rather than being chauffeured about in a government automobile. He maintained his honesty during this period, although he reportedly was imprisoned backed by the pirate gang known as the Binh Xuyen. Later, jailed by the Diem regime, he wrote a set of poems entitled, "Inspirations from Jail."

His running mate, Mai Tho Truyen, is a leading lay I prominent lay leader of the Southern-styled Buddhist movement, which refused to participate with the more militant Central ~~with~~ Vietnamese breed ~~which~~ <sup>with</sup> toppled Huong. The ticket is expected to win some support from the Southern Buddhists, some Roman Catholics—and ironically, it hopes ~~to~~ to cull votes from the militant Buddhists Huong cracked down on; <sup>is</sup> the line of reasoning being that the militant monks would prefer ~~such~~ Huong over the military ticket.

More

\*\*Phan Khac Suu, 62, was head of the elected ~~Cam~~ Assembly which drafted the new Constitution promulgated April 1 of this year. The assembly has been renamed <sup>the</sup> Provisional Legislative Assembly until the current elections are ~~f~~ concluded and Suu serves as President of this body. He also served as ceremonial chief of state in 1964 and 1965, before the generals took over power in ~~1965~~.  
~~JUNE~~

An agricultural engineer by profession, Suu, like Huong, ~~is~~ was born in the Southern, Mekong Delta region, but is not so well known as Huong. He fought against the French colonialists and later against the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, which <sup>imprisoned</sup> ~~put him in prison~~ and tortured him. He still walks with a limp because of these maltreatments in prison.

Unlike Huong ~~which~~ who is considered to have a rigid way of thinking, Suu is largely considered by Saigon intellectuals as too flexible. Suu—his name means "Buffalo"—is of the Cao Dai religion, an offshoot Buddhist hybrid, but is not considered to be a religious candidate.

Suu's running mate is Dr. Phan Quang Dan, a Harvard-schooled medical doctor born in Central Vietnam. The Suu ticket may make a better showing in the central provinces than Huong because of having Dan on his list.

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The military ticket of the generals is predicted to win easily by a large majority; some Vietnamese political sources predict they will win by 65%. A large turnout of the 5.4 million registered voters (those living in government-secured areas) is also predicted.

The most sizzling question here is, however, not how big a vote the generals get, but whether the results will be interpreted as such to indicate a fair and honest election. The charges of the civilian candidates that the generals are rigging the election are largely considered true here by the rank and file Vietnamese following the electoral race; even a number of important Congressmen in America have voiced concern with the way the election was being handled by the generals. But, for all practical purposes, observers here, including the Western press that is charged with the responsibility of tracking down ~~allowed~~ <sup>ALLEGED</sup> infractions of the electoral law, will be unable to determine whether the election is in fact rigged or fair, except in isolated incidences.

Thus far, the election at best has become something of a fiasco. It has revolved from a verbal free-for-all among the Vietnamese generals in late June to a generals versus certifying committee tiff to a generals ~~ix~~ versus civilian candidates debacle in early August to a deadlock between the military ticket and the ten civilians candidates, who temporarily refused to campaign. Once, they started to campaign, the civilians charged the generals were rigging the election; the American officials here and

in Washington  
President Lyndon Johnson denied the charges—which has caused the civilian candidates simply to counter charge the America Ambassador, Mr. Ellsworth Bunker, with meddling in Vietnamese affairs.

If the election comes off fairly smoothly with the results generally accepted in Vietnam as well as internationally, the Communist-inspired National Liberation Front will have suffered a sizeable, significant political defeat, which would have undermined its claims of being the sole representatives of the Vietnamese people. The election would have established the legitimacy of the anti-Communist, pro-Allied government in Saigon. The Allies here are currently faced with the astronomical dilemma that they have million troops in Vietnam at the invitation of a government that no longer exists—the government of Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat in early 1965— and even when it existed, it was never considered legal, and for that matter, rarely considered a government. Thus, a ~~legitimate~~ legitimate government is needed to legalize the Allied presence here, and whether American-South Vietnamese government policy is to bring in more troops or to begin talking with the Communists, or straddling both courses simultaneously, the Allies need a legal Vietnamese government to validate the moves.

A significant fringe benefit from a popularly-elected, constitutional government here would be a much more palatable regime to justify to the Allied friends and enemies at home and abroad the increasing measure of Allied commitment of ~~group~~ troops and ground support elements.



However, thus far, the Communists have exploited the election fiasco to their full benefit. For months, the Communists had charged the election <sup>with</sup> of being an "American invention" which would be rigged to serve American interests. The <sup>U. S. VIETNAMESE</sup> generals have at least partially proved the rigging charge to have some validity, for they conveniently weeded out and <sup>BARRED</sup> ~~barred~~ prestigious non-Communist candidates who could have seriously challenged them at the polls.

The Communists are expected to mount a well-coordinated pre-election <sup>LARGE</sup> ~~large~~ <sup>military</sup> ~~side~~ <sup>propaganda</sup> ~~political~~ offensive to match their continuing political ~~propaganda~~ against the election. Officials here note the Communists have the capability to launch well-timed <sup>d/</sup> attacks on election day to disrupt the balloting in the remote villages as well as in the center of major cities.

But, more worrisome is the full-scale propaganda war that the Communists have been consistently <sup>gaining</sup> ~~winning~~ at the election. More and More Vietnamese in the government-controlled zones are being persuaded by their propaganda line—as well as by the <sup>M. S. Conduct</sup> ~~misconduct~~ of the generals during the campaign.

On top of the economic and political discontent already dormant here, the election process is bringing a new kind of political disillusionment. While the rural areas under government control appear to be relatively passive about the election, the impact of the blossoming disillusionment has hit a significant element—the middle and upper <sup>class</sup> ~~class~~ in the cities, which makes them ripe for Communist propaganda and subversive recruitment.

The significance of the disillusionment is this: The Allied forces can not win by holding only the cities. They must win sizeable chunks of the countryside—and hence the importance of the current slow rate of progress in the rural pacification program.

But, the Communists can not win by holding only the countryside. They must crack the government's hold on the urban population. Hence, the importance of the battle for the middle and upper-class Vietnamese, which is the backbone of the government support.

Continuously, day in and day out, Radio Hanoi spews out such political material:

"The forthcoming election farce will further exasperate the internal contradictions plaguing the ranks of the U. S. lackeys in South Vietnam....One can thus rightly conclude that the Saigon authority is none other than the shadow of the U. S. policy of using their henchmen. Whether under a 'military' or 'civilian' cover, under an open military dictatorship or with 'Presidential' or 'Congressional' trappings, it will remain an out-and-out puppet administration."

If the events on election day somehow prove the Hanoi prediction correct, the newly elected Saigon government will become more and more isolated from its own people. And, in time, this could aid the Communists in taking over the country.

Conversely, if the results of the election are favorably accepted within South Vietnam and internationally, the anti-Communists will have won a crucial battle in this highly-political war.