

Ambassador Frederick
Reinhart and America's
Relationship with
Vietnam, 1955-1957

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By

Ronald B. Frankum, Jr.

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A NOTE ON SOURCE AND NAMES

The Department of State Central Decimal Files (Record Group 59) is a valuable source for understanding the diplomatic relationship between Ngo Dinh Diem and Reinhardt during the ambassador's time in Vietnam. Each document in the series is stamped with a multi-alpha-numeric code. The first number in the code refers to the primary classification of the document. For this manuscript, classification code 6 (Political relations of states) and code 7 (Internal Politics and National Defense Affairs) is used. The next set of alpha-numeric numbers refers to the country code. The Republic of Vietnam's code is 51K while the Indochina code is 51G. Following this data is a subject code. The following codes are used in this manuscript:

- .00 (Political Affairs – General)
- .00(W) (Political Affairs: Weeka Reports [Weekly reports on South Vietnamese political, military, and economic affairs.])
- .001 (Political Affairs: Communism)
- .022 (Political Affairs: Government – Territory)
- .11 (Political Affairs: Executive Branch of Government—Chief Executive)
- .13 (Political Affairs: Executive Branch of Government--Cabinet; Ministry)
- .3 (Political Affairs: Judicial Branch of Government)
- .34 (Political Affairs: Judicial Branch of Government--Laws; Statutes)
- .5 (National Defense Affairs – General)
- .5 MSP (National Defense Affairs: Mutual Security Program)
- .521 (National Defense Affairs: Intelligence Activities—Biographical Data)
- .54 (National Defense Affairs: Maneuvers; Troop Movements)
- .5511 (National Defense Affairs: Organization--Personnel: Conscription)
- .58 (National Defense Affairs: Missions)
- .5811 (National Defense Affairs: Missions--U.S.)

The date, which is preceded by a “/”, is the final number. Thus, a document stamped 751K.00/11-1554 was one that was filed in the Internal Politics and National Defense Affairs classification for Vietnam under the general subject category of Political Affairs and is dated November 15, 1954. This book also uses material from Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State and the Foreign Broadcast

Information Service (FBIS) files located in Record Group 263: Records of the Central Intelligence Agency. These documents consist of translated abstracts and full stories from Vietnamese language sources. When used, the documents are cited by indicating the date of the actual publication and then the date listed in the FBIS. The page number citations with the FBIS, which use a triple letter format, have also been modified to a single letter.

PREFACE

In my previous work on the third American ambassador to Vietnam, Elbridge Durbrow, one of the things that struck me as significant was the degree to which he and his embassy shaped the debate on the United States policy in that country. Their perception of the Republic of Vietnam president Ngo Dinh Diem was informed by how they reported events and selected information to provide to Washington. After writing *Vietnam's Year of the Rat: Elbridge Durbrow, Ngô Đình Diệm and the Turn in U.S. Relations, 1959-1960* (McFarland, 2014) and *Elbridge Durbrow's War in Vietnam: The Ambassador's Influence on American Involvement, 1957-1961* (McFarland, 2019), I reconsidered how I viewed American foreign policy towards Vietnam during the war. By examining the time period of the primary American representative that supplied information to Washington, a different perspective of American foreign policy emerges and allows for a greater examination of the history of the period. It is easier to see the disconnect that developed between some Americans in Vietnam and the Vietnamese in power. While Durbrow represented a case study of how that reporting negatively affected American-Vietnamese relations, the tenure of Frederick Reinhardt offered a different narrative.

As the newly accredited second United States Ambassador to Vietnam, Reinhardt arrived at a critical time in the relationship between the two countries. Vietnam had been without an American ambassador since the departure of Donald Heath in November 1954, while American interests were being handled by General J. Lawton Collins, who accepted the position of Special Representative at President Dwight D. Eisenhower's request. Collins had a difficult relationship with Ngo Dinh Diem, one that was marred by his intrigue with the French and his tendency to place the Vietnamese in a secondary position, even when he had their best interests in mind.

Reinhardt had to not only repair the fragile relationship but also oversee American interests in Vietnam during a period of several significant events. These included the removal of the French Expeditionary Corps from Vietnam, continued French intrigue as that country tried to reconcile its colonial past with the realities of Vietnam's new future, a referendum to depose Bao Dai, the creation of a Vietnamese Constitution, and Vietnam's first national election. It was Reinhardt's temperament and professionalism

that allowed Ngo Dinh Diem to regain trust in the United States as the two countries continued to work towards the common goal of Vietnamese independence in a Communist-Free Republic.

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INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN COLLINS AND REINHARDT

On May 13, George Frederick Reinhardt received his initial instructions as he began his ambassadorship to the State of Vietnam, though his appointment had been made, earlier, on April 20.¹ He would have nearly two weeks to absorb and prepare for this newest assignment to become the second ambassador to the State of Vietnam, succeeding Donald Heath who had left in November 1954 and General J. Lawton Collins who served as a Special Representative for the United States to Vietnam at the request of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the interim. The time between these instructions and his appointment was marked by a period of intense activity in Vietnam, as elements of the Binh Xuyen, an organization that controlled the national police, and Sûreté Saigon, battled with the Vietnamese National Army for control of the capital and the future of Vietnam. The Vietnamese troops proved to be successful and while that victory earned the Vietnam's Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem credibility both at home and abroad, it offered Reinhardt a series of challenges that he would need to face during his nearly two years in Vietnam.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles instructed Reinhardt to continue to provide support for Ngo Dinh Diem and his government, which the United States considered the sovereign body for the State of Vietnam. Dulles called for the strengthening of the Saigon government, which had been a constant objective since mid-1954, but argued that the United States did not have the right to dictate the nature or form of that government. Instead, Reinhardt was to offer his counsel, with Dulles' backing, if an opportunity arose to work with Ngo Dinh Diem to improve upon the personalities already in the Saigon cabinet. While Dulles' instructions acknowledged that the United States did not expect those whose loyalties were questionable to be included, he did want to see a broader representation of individuals who had technical competence. Dulles also enumerated upon

¹ Paris (Dulles) to the Department of State, SECTO 46, May 13, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-955, Box 3334, RG 59, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland. Hereafter referred to as NARA.

some basic American points, as they related to Vietnam, that would guide Reinhardt. He argued that the Saigon government should have the loyalty of both the Vietnamese army and the national police, and that the Binh Xuyen needed to be disbanded. Ngo Dinh Diem had nearly accomplished the latter with the recent Battle for Saigon that pushed the Binh Xuyen out of Saigon and Cholon. Dulles instructed Reinhardt to encourage the formation of an electoral system to promote Vietnamese democracy and work to mitigate the anti-French feeling that had heightened during the recent Sect Crisis and Battle for Saigon. He also stressed the United States position on the 1956 national elections as established by the 1954 Geneva Agreements. The United States wanted Ngo Dinh Diem to proceed with the election process. He also informed Reinhardt of the French decision to begin reducing the French Expeditionary Corps in Vietnam, which would put an added strain on the Vietnamese National Army. Dulles concluded that he believed Ngo Dinh Diem was in a position, with French and American support and the elimination of the Binh Xuyen threat, to make positive gains in his country. Reinhardt was to work with Ngo Dinh Diem to ensure that these improvements were realized and work against the possible Viet Minh threat that promised to do all in its power to limit Ngo Dinh Diem and his government.

In turn, General Paul Ely, the French Commissioner-General and Commander of the French Forces in Indochina, also received a set of instructions that included supporting Ngo Dinh Diem and working to strengthen his rule through policies designed to improve the situation and relationship between the Vietnamese, French, and Saigon government.² Ely was to focus on eliminating the propaganda originating from Saigon against the French, maintaining the French Expeditionary Corps in Vietnam, and working with the Vietnamese towards national elections. Ely had been in a state of high emotion and anxiety in the last days of the Collins' mission and had worked, and failed, to convince the Americans to abandon Ngo Dinh Diem. His instructions were an indication that the French, and Ely, had failed in this endeavor, while Ely had informed Collins before he left Vietnam that he too would be leaving either by resigning or being reassigned. Despite the similarity of instructions, it was clear that the United States and France had provided separate directives to their principal

² Paris (Dillon) to the Department of State, telegram 4982, May 16, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-1455, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA. See also Saigon to the Department of State, telegram 5453, May 24, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

representatives in Saigon rather than a joint declaration.³

Reinhardt had his work cut out for him. He would face a difficult two years in Saigon before he handed the position of America's primary diplomat in Vietnam to Elbridge Durbrow. During this time, the country would transform into the Republic of Vietnam, the Vietnamese would choose not to participate in the national elections scheduled by the 1954 Geneva Agreements, would battle an increasingly organized and committed insurgency, and work with Ngo Dinh Diem as he navigated his way through the challenges and obstacles facing the newly independent country.

One of the early issues that Reinhardt faced was the relationship between the French and Americans on the Vietnam issue. His instructions were relayed to the French by the United States Ambassador to France, C. Douglas Dillon and the Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Kenneth Young, who met with French Secretary of State for the Associated States Henri La Forest, Armand Berard, and the Deputy Director General of Political Affairs in the French Foreign Ministry Jacques Roux on May 14.⁴ The French were pleased by the instructions though there was concern about a lack of reference to Chief of State and former Emperor Bao Dai and his legitimacy to rule. The French wanted to make it clear that they wished to keep Bao Dai in a position of influence so that he could aid in both countries' goals for Vietnam. They also were concerned about American support for Ngo Dinh Diem. They did not want to see it continued indefinitely if Ngo Dinh Diem proved himself incapable of ruling the country. These two issues had served as a source of contention between the United States and France during Collins' special mission which had just completed and would occupy much of Reinhardt's time early in his ambassadorship.

When Randolph Kidder, the Charge d'affaires of the United States embassy in Saigon, provided Ely with a copy of Reinhardt's instructions, he did not offer a comment specifically to them, but he did discuss the deterioration of Franco-American relations as it related to Vietnam, which had transpired over the past few months and were a direct result of the

³ Department of State to Saigon, circular telegram 664, May 20, 1955, Folder 611.51G/2-255, Box 2510, RG 59, NARA.

⁴ Paris (Dillon) to the Department of State, telegram 4966, May 14, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-1455, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA. Armand Berard served as the Director of Edgar Faure's Private Office at Foreign Affairs. Young served as the Chairman of the Operations Coordinating Board's Special Working Group on Indochina and Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs within the Department of State.

difference of opinion of how, and if, Ngo Dinh Diem should be supported.⁵ He was also concerned by the anti-Bao Dai feeling in Vietnam and Washington as he believed the former Emperor provided the last chance to save Vietnam from the Viet Minh.⁶ Ely also confirmed that he was leaving Vietnam, which meant that the institutional knowledge he and Collins shared would not be readily available for Reinhardt.

The two also discussed the status of former Chief of Staff of the Army, General Nguyen Van Hinh, who had been at the center of the November 1954 crisis that brought Collins to Vietnam but was also threatening to renew his brand of instability by returning to Vietnam. Nguyen Van Hinh had been warned not to return and ordered by Bao Dai to return to France after he was thwarted from entering Vietnam and stuck in Cambodia. Ely reported that Nguyen Van Hinh was in Vietnam and believed to be with the Hoa Hao General Ba Cut (also known as General Le Quang Vinh), who had been at odds with Ngo Dinh Diem. Ely informed Kidder that he was attempting to contact the former Vietnamese general to get him to comply with Bao Dai's order. Both Nguyen Van Hinh and former Inspector General of the Vietnamese National Army, Nguyen Van Vy, who was also dismissed from Vietnam but had returned, represented a real source of instability for Ngo Dinh Diem. In fact, the *Vietnam Press Agency* reported that Nguyen Van Vy was to be tried for treason along with General Nguyen Van Than for deserting to the rebels and Le Van Vien (known more commonly as Bay Vien) for his role in encouraging the Binh Xuyen to resist.⁷ Ely ended the conversation with a reaffirmation of his position regarding Ngo Dinh Diem. He maintained that retaining Ngo Dinh Diem would be a "catastrophic decision," even though both the French and

⁵ Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, telegram 5402, May 21, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

⁶ The term Viet Minh was used by the United States, incorrectly, during this time period. During the First Indochina War, the Lien Viet (Vietnamese National Popular Front) replaced the Viet Minh with most of the Viet Minh leadership joining the Lao Dong (Vietnamese Workers' Party) in 1951. The use of the term Viet Minh here refers to the southern insurgents unless otherwise indicated.

⁷ Also included in the list provided by the Assistant Minister for National Defense Tran Trung Dung was Lai Huu Tai, a political advisor to the Binh Xuyen, and former Chief of the National Police and Sûreté, and member of the Binh Xuyen Lai Van Sang. See *Vietnam Press Agency*, "General Vien, Vy to be Tried for Treason," May 21, 1955, E6, FBIS, May 23, 1955; and, *Vietnam Press Agency*, "Foreigners with Rebels to be Prosecuted," May 25, 1955, E7-E8, FBIS, May 26, 1955. All FBIS documents are located in Entry 24, Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Reports, 1941-1959 within Record Group 263: Records of the Central Intelligence Agency, NARA.

American instructions called for continued support to his rule.⁸

After meeting with Ely, Kidder provided Ngo Dinh Diem with a copy of Reinhardt's instructions.⁹ Ngo Dinh Diem seemed pleased by them, though he did feel skeptical regarding the sincerity of the French to support him. He cited examples of the French providing dissident Hoa Hao troops under General Tran Van Soai with armaments including two batteries of 120-mm mortars. Ngo Dinh Diem also confirmed that Nguyen Van Hinh was in South Vietnam though he believed him to be with Tran Van Soai rather than Ba Cut. The United States had evidence that the Hoa Hao were forming a new anti-Saigon government faction.¹⁰ Regardless, Ngo Dinh Diem had not forgiven the French for their actions leading up to and during the earlier Sect Crisis; he was not alone. Washington was also concerned about Nguyen Van Hinh, who it believed offered only instability. Robert Hoey, a member of the Department Political Section in the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs within the Department of State and Young, drafted a telegram for Kidder and Dillon requesting that they use Nguyen Van Hinh's status as an officer in the French Air Force to get Ely to order the former Vietnamese Chief of Staff to leave Vietnam.¹¹

The anti-Bao Dai and anti-French feeling in Saigon was strong in May 1955. A newly formed Revolutionary Committee had placed much of the blame for the earlier Sect Crisis on the French, whom it believed had supported and encouraged the Binh Xuyen to resist Ngo Dinh Diem's rule. On May 15, the Revolutionary Committee organized a demonstration in Saigon against Bao Dai and the French which started with speeches in the Central Market Square.¹² Approximately 5,000 participants listened to anti-Bao Dai and anti-French rhetoric in an orderly and disciplined fashion as

⁸ Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, telegram 5402, May 21, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

⁹ Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, telegram 5403, May 21, 1955 (in two sections), Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

¹⁰ ALUSNA Saigon to the Department of State, Joint Weeka 21, May 28, 1955, Folder 751G.00(W)/5-855, Box 3343, RG 59, NARA.

¹¹ Department of State to Saigon, telegram 5218, May 24, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA. See also "Nguyen Van Hinh," May 25, 1955, E6, FBIS, May 25, 1955.

¹² Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, telegram 5305, May 16, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-1455, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA. See *Vietnam Press Agency*, "Anti-Bao Dai Demonstration Supported," May 15, 1955, E7-E10, FBIS, May 17, 1955. The *Vietnam Press Agency* provided transcripts of the major speeches as well. See also *Ngon Luan*, "Anti-French Campaign Receives Comment," May 24, 1955, E4-E5, FBIS, May 25, 1955; and, ALUSNA Saigon to the Department of State, Joint Weeka 21, May 28, 1955, Folder 751G.00(W)/5-855, Box 3343, RG 59, NARA.

they waved flags and banners and were acknowledged by Ngo Dinh Diem from the balcony of the presidential palace.

Another issue that was pressing in the interim between Collins' departure and Reinhardt's arrival was a recent reorganization of Ngo Dinh Diem's cabinet. Collins and Ely had pressed the prime minister to broaden the representation in his government and Ngo Dinh Diem's response, in this reorganization, failed to satisfy everyone. Kidder reported that Vietnamese intellectuals in Saigon had criticized the move as simply adding relatives, friends, and unknowns to the governing group.¹³ In part, Kidder agreed that the new cabinet was artificial in its creation and unconvincing in terms of addressing the issues that had bothered the Americans and French previously.

The interim period also saw the Vietnamese National Army conducting mopping up operations after the Battle of Saigon. The Binh Xuyen, who had been forced from Saigon and Cholon, were located in three areas: south of the Kinh Doi canal, along the Bien Hoa-Baria axis in Phu My, and in the Sac forest, south of Saigon.¹⁴ The Vietnamese National Army sent three companies to the Phu My area and retook three posts from the Binh Xuyen with thirty troops surrendering and fifteen killed. It was estimated that 1,000 Binh Xuyen troops remained in the Sac forest. Reinhardt would have to deal with the aftermath of the Sect Crisis, the Battle for Saigon, and the activities of the Binh Xuyen and Vietnamese army as he settled into the ambassadorship. Also, during this time, Ngo Dinh Diem integrated Bao Dai's Imperial Guard into the Vietnamese National Army, which signaled another split between the Vietnamese Premier and the Chief of State.¹⁵

Reinhardt started his travel to Vietnam on May 20, and crossed paths with Collins in Hawaii. During their meeting, Collins provided Reinhardt with an in-depth analysis of his and Ely's seven-point plan and the status of each of the points.¹⁶ Collins expressed his frustration that the plan had not evolved far beyond the paper concept due, in his mind, to the failure of Ngo Dinh Diem to organize an effective cabinet and allow a decentralized group to operate efficiently. Collins recommended that

¹³ Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, telegram 5258, May 14, 1955, Folder 751G.12/12-2855, Box 3337, RG 59, NARA.

¹⁴ "Radio France-Asie, "National Army Activities Described," May 13, 1955, E1-E2, FBIS, May 17, 1955.

¹⁵ *Vietnam Press Agency*, "Premier's Speech on the Integration of the Imperial Guard into the National Army," May 17, 1955, E1-E2, FBIS, May 18, 1955.

¹⁶ John Kelly, executive to Collins, to Young, June 2, 1955, Folder 751G.00/6-1055, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA. Attached to the cover letter is a May 20 memorandum for Reinhardt, "Status of Ely-Collins Point Program."

Reinhardt apply pressure on Ngo Dinh Diem to implement the program before it became too late. The seven points – the Armed Forces, resettlement of refugees, agrarian reform, the formation of a National Assembly, Vietnam's financial and economic status, its education and cultural assistance program, and the reorganization and increased effectiveness of the Vietnamese government, would be key points of interest for Reinhardt once he arrived in Saigon and became acclimated.

Reinhardt's departure for Vietnam also prompted Young to request that the embassy provide a current assessment of the situation in the country for his and the Department of State's guidance.¹⁷ The study needed to determine if any new ministers needed to be brought into the cabinet and create a list of who was preferred, a plan for dealing with the impending national election, a determination of the state of anti-Bao Dai feeling in Vietnam, and the future of Ngo Dinh Diem. As it related to the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, the embassy needed to determine if it accepted the plan that Collins and Ely had formed to move Vietnam along. Other issues included refugee resettlement, land reform, Vietnam's economy, the status of the army, and the formation of a National Assembly. Some of these issues had already taken center-stage, such as the future of Bao Dai and Ngo Dinh Diem, while others would challenge Reinhardt in the months to come.

While all of these issues would come with time, a more immediate concern was a proposed four-power meeting to be held in Saigon between the Vietnamese, Americans, French, and British. The impetus for this meeting came as a result of an earlier tri-partite conference on Indochina that had excluded the Vietnamese. Ngo Dinh Diem believed that discussions related to his country required a Vietnamese voice. The Americans in Saigon discovered what the Vietnamese expected from the meeting from Ngo Dinh Nhu, brother of Ngo Dinh Diem, through *New York Times* representative Tillman Durdin.¹⁸ Durdin learned that Ngo Dinh Nhu wished the conference to be at a high-level with Dulles presiding for the United States, though he would accept an undersecretary if that were the only option. The Vietnamese wished to discuss the 1956 national election, provisions for Vietnam if the election did not occur, which was likely at that point, and Vietnamese security when the French Expeditionary Corps withdrew.¹⁹ Ngo Dinh Luyen, another brother of Ngo Dinh Diem, had a

¹⁷ Department of State to Saigon, telegram 5137, May 19, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-1455, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

¹⁸ Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, telegram 5377, May 20, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-1455, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

¹⁹ Bernard provided Dillon with information on the repatriation of the French Expeditionary Corps on May 26. Dillon expressed surprise by his statement that the

similar conversation with Dillon on May 19.²⁰ He emphasized the need for the participants at the foreign minister level for the conference to have value. While the issues were important, the desire to see high-level participants coming to Saigon to discuss mutual concerns was significant for the prestige of Ngo Dinh Diem and vital to his continued rule.²¹

Kidder pieced together more information about the Vietnamese intentions during his conversation with Nguyen Huu Chau, who served as Secretary of State for the Presidency, on May 23.²² The Vietnamese wished to cover several issues of common concern, including its policy against the Viet Minh, clarification of its attitude towards the 1956 national elections, its military relationship with the French and Americans, and the future for Bao Dai, as well as other issues associated with Vietnam's future economic status and internal security. In addressing this list of subjects, Young responded to Kidder, copying Dillon, to remind the two that the United States did not want to agree to anything before the conference began. He also advised Reinhardt to emphasize to Ngo Dinh Diem, when they had their first real meeting, the need to address the Viet Minh threat. Reinhardt was to make sure that Ngo Dinh Diem understood that the United States was conducting an independent policy in Vietnam rather than a joint policy with the French. He was to also request that Ngo Dinh Diem delay any policy change towards Bao Dai until Ely's replacement arrived. It was Washington's position that talks in Vietnam could occur at the ambassadorial level after the National Assembly met. While this might have satisfied the Americans and French in terms of clarifying their roles in Vietnam, it was less than what Ngo Dinh Diem wanted or needed after being embattled with the Binh Xuyen and Hoa Hao for so many months. There was a movement to depose Bao Dai that had started during the Sect Crisis and continued to maintain momentum.²³

French were ready for preparatory talks on its withdrawal as the United States had not been informed about those talks until their meeting. See Paris (Dillon) to the Department of State, telegram 5209, May 26, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

²⁰ Paris (Dillon) to the Department of State, telegram 5078, May 20, 1954, Folder 751G.00/5-1455, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

²¹ The Vietnamese press, especially the Saigon dailies, reaffirmed the necessity of a meeting at the foreign minister level. See Editor's Note, "Saigon Papers Carry Conference Slogans," May 26, 1955, E12, FBIS, May 26, 1955.

²² Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, telegram 5428, May 23, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA. See also *Vietnam Press Agency*, "Quadrupartite Conference Discussed," May 21, 1955, E2-E3, FBIS, May 24, 1955.

²³ *Vietnam Press Agency*, "Telegrams Announce Bao Dai's Deposition," May 23, 1955, E10, FBIS, May 23, 1955.

In the meantime, Kidder had to deal with Ngo Dinh Diem's decision to approve a High Council to oversee the elections for the National Assembly. He learned from Minister of Interior Bui Van Thinh that he was planning to organize a census before the elections that would delay them until October 1955.²⁴ This delay justified the need for a High Council to advise Ngo Dinh Diem on election procedures and other consideration. However, the worry was that the Revolutionary Committee that had been instrumental in the latter stages of the Sect Crisis would move into the High Council positions, which was a problem for the French and Americans who distrusted the committee's membership. The process of developing a National Assembly was critical to the success of a Free Vietnam and the continued rule of Ngo Dinh Diem, who needed the body to legitimize his position and consolidate his rule. Both the United States and French embassies in Saigon were adamant that individuals should not influence Ngo Dinh Diem, such as those in the Revolutionary Committee, who were anti-French, anti-Bao Dai, and sometimes leery of the United States. There was reason to be concerned about the Revolutionary Committee. It had already orchestrated demonstrations and attempted to influence Ngo Dinh Diem, but it also had arrested Former Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam, Tran Van Huu, who it claimed was preparing to go to France to seek Bao Dai's approval for a new government with him in the premiership. The group had also urged the arrest of Nguyen Van Tam, who had formerly been Prime Minister.²⁵ Such was the worry from the Americans that the Department of State decided to send Paul Kattenburg, an Intelligence Research Specialists in the Division of Research for Far East of the Office of Intelligence Research in the Department of State, to Saigon for sixty days to deal specifically with election matters.²⁶

While the National Assembly situation would dominate long-term interests in Saigon, the proposed quadripartite conference in Saigon was of a more immediate concern. Ngo Dinh Diem wanted to have a high-level representative meeting though the United States saw something less prominent. The French voiced their concern as well on May 25 when Berard and Roux informed Dillon that, while they believed the conference was a

²⁴ Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, telegram 5452, May 24, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

²⁵ *Dan Den*, "Tran Van Huu's Machinations Described," May 26, 1955, E5-E6, FBIS, May 27, 1955; and, *Dan Den*, "Tan's Arrest Urged," May 27, 1955, E9, FBIS, May 27, 1955.

²⁶ Department of State to Saigon, telegram 5266, May 25, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

good idea, it could not be at the foreign minister level.²⁷ Like the Americans, an ambassadorial-level conference seemed more appropriate. While this satisfied the Western allies, it was less than what Ngo Dinh Diem wanted or needed. With Collins gone, Reinhardt not yet in place, and Ely resigning and soon to be gone without a definite replacement ready, Ngo Dinh Diem needed reassurance that the French and Americans were truly with him.

Reinhardt arrived at Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon on May 27 with some fanfare in the Vietnamese newspapers. In his brief remarks upon arrival, he declared that he would be a friend to Vietnam and look forward to learning more about the significant issues facing the country as he contributed to solving them.²⁸ *Ngon Luan* reported his comments concerning the threat of the Viet Minh to the future survival of a Free Vietnam and indicated that Reinhardt had brought with him more knowledge on the workings of the Communists than any other diplomatic corps member in Saigon. It maintained that unlike Collins, who was a military man, Reinhardt was well versed in politics and hoped that he would devote his time there. What *Ngon Luan* did not appreciate, as Collins had and Reinhardt would learn, was that the convergences of politics and the military in the State of Vietnam was present in nearly all of the outstanding issues and obstacles confronting the newly formed country. Reinhardt would not present his credentials until the following day, an expedited process so that he could attend in an official capacity the ceremonies marking Ely's departure and would not have his first meeting with Ngo Dinh Diem until later in the week as the Premier was visiting Qui Nhon and Binh Dinh provinces in an effort to tour the country and get a better sense of his people's needs.²⁹

It is interesting to note that when Reinhardt's credentials were provided, they were addressed to the Chief of State rather than to his

²⁷ Paris (Dillon) to the Department of State, telegram 5174, May 25, 1955, Folder 751G.00/5-2155, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

²⁸ *Ngon Luan*, "U.S. Ambassador's Arrival Draws Comment," May 27, 1955, E1, FBIS, May 27, 1955.

²⁹ Saigon (Kidder) to the Department of State, despatch 434, "Visit of President Diem to Qui Nhon and Binh Dinh," May 31, 1955, Folder 751G.1/7-855, Box 3346, RG 59, NARA; and, Kidder to Young, May 31, 1955, Folder 12 "Vietnamese Correspondence 1955," Box 4, Entry 1211-1213 Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Correspondence File, 1949-1955, Miscellaneous File, 1950-1956, RG 59, NARA. Ngo Dinh Diem's speeches are located in *Vietnam Press Agency*, "Premier Visit Qui Nhon and Binh Dinh," E5-E8, May 28, 1955, FBIS, May 31, 1955.

Majesty Bao Dai.³⁰ While the Vietnamese press would make this fact a feature of the papers following the presentation, what was not known was that it was at the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than an American initiated move. Rather than an acceptance to depose Bao Dai, as the press reported, it was a move designed to ensure Reinhardt's smooth transition into Saigon. Regardless of the reason, Hanoi radio greeted Reinhardt's accreditation by welcoming the "new American spy" to Vietnam. With Reinhardt in Vietnam, the interim between he and Collins was at an end. Reinhardt would now seek to continue Collin's work but, at the same time, navigate the intrigue of Saigon and the force of Ngo Dinh Diem, the new unnamed French diplomats for Vietnam, and the various personalities who wished to either replace Ngo Dinh Diem or influence him towards their vision of the future that would be sometimes at odds with the United States. In short, Reinhardt had his work cut out for himself.

³⁰ Saigon (Reinhardt) to the Department of State, Weeka 22, June 5, 1955, Folder 751G.00(W)/5-855, RG 59, NARA.

CHAPTER 1

VIETNAM HONEYMOON

On June 2, Young forwarded a letter to Reinhardt in which he outlined what he believed to be the major issues confronting the United States and Vietnam.¹ The issues as he saw it were the status of the French Expeditionary Corps, the impending 1956 national elections, the election of a National Assembly in the State of Vietnam, control over a Free Vietnam, military force levels, the need for periodic evaluations, and personnel needs within the Embassy. Reinhardt would confront each of these concerns as well as the idea for a four-power conference in Saigon during the early period of his tenure. He would learn, as had his predecessors and would his successors, that each issue was both independent of each other but also dependent on the solutions provided for other items. This contradictory environment would cause frustration as the Americans navigated their way through Vietnam.

The French had a vested interest in the four-power conference proposed by Ngo Dinh Diem. Dillon learned that they wanted to have a pre-conference between the United States, Britain, and France before meeting with the Vietnamese, which highlighted what Ngo Dinh Diem had feared was happening.² The main reason for this earlier meeting was to discuss and agree upon a course to take as it related to the national elections scheduled for 1956. There was a concern that the International Control Commission (ICC), which was established as a result of the 1954 Geneva Agreements, was preparing to hold a session between the Viet Minh and State of Vietnam to mediate a process for elections. The French were worried about this possibility, which would lose them the initiative in the process, but also expressed concern that if Ngo Dinh Diem balked at elections, it would

¹ Young to Reinhardt, June 2, 1955, Folder 12 "Vietnamese Correspondence 1955," Box 4, Entry 1211-1213 Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Correspondence File, 1949-1955, Miscellaneous File, 1950-1956, RG 59, NARA.

² Paris (Dillon) to the Department of State, telegram 5275, June 1, 1955, Folder 751G.00/6-1055, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

provide the Viet Minh an excuse to change tactics and pursue a more aggressive strategy in the south. For his part, Dillon warned that a tripartite meeting that established a joint position before attending the Vietnamese-sponsored conference would result in the Vietnamese perception that the Western powers were attempting to dictate what should be done rather than working in tandem. While both the French and Americans had similar goals for Vietnam, the means by which they were accomplished differed. Reinhardt would learn that this path was one that threatened to offend the Vietnamese or the French depending upon the course he recommended.

The concerns regarding the four-power conference received a reprieve when Dillon learned that Ngo Dinh Diem was not pushing for the meeting with the same intensity in early June as he had been before.³ The French suspected that Ngo Dinh Diem wanted to have the Sect problem completely resolved before any conference convened. Even though the Binh Xuyen had been thoroughly routed, dissident Hoa Hao forces were actively engaged in skirmishes with the Vietnamese National Army. The army had been engaged against Hoa Hao forces during the first week of June, which emphasized the threat and Ngo Dinh Diem's need to neutralize it.

The Saigon government would have preferred a peaceful settlement with the dissident Hoa Hao forces and seemed to be making progress with Hoa Hao General Lam Thanh Nguyen who commanded 3,000 troops and had quarreled with the other Hoa Hao leaders, such as Tran Van Soai, Ba Cut, and Nguyen Van Hinh. There was a general belief within American circles that Lam Thanh Nguyen realized that he was on his last chance to rally to the government while Ba Cut and Tran Van Soai continued to play games with the concept. Ngo Dinh Diem had passed the stage of growing weary and was determined to eliminate threats against his consolidation so that he could focus on the Viet Minh and North Vietnam.⁴ The two sides had experienced a series of minor clashes during the first week of June in the Can Tho-Long Xuyen-Vinh Long region of Vietnam, which was to the south of Saigon. Ba Cut was estimated to have 3,000 men under arms and was confronted by thirty Vietnamese battalions numbering approximately 21,000 men. Both Ba Cut and Tran Van Soai appeared to be on the defensive with American estimates suggesting that the Vietnamese

³ Paris (Dillon) to the Department of State, telegram 5283, June 2, 1955, Folder 751G.00/6-1055, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

⁴ Saigon (Reinhardt) to the Department of State, Weeka 22, June 5, 1955, Folder 751G.00(W)/5-855, RG 59, NARA. See also ALUSNA Saigon to the Department of State, Weeka 23, June 12, 1955, Folder 751G.00(W)/5-5855, RG 59, NARA; and, Saigon (Reinhardt) to the Department of State, telegram 5828, June 15, 1955, Folder 751G.00/6-1055, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

army was on the verge of inflicting significant casualties on the Hoa Hao which would reduce their threat to the nuisance level. However, all realized that Ngo Dinh Diem would achieve a greater victory were he to convince the dissident Hoa Hao to actually, and permanently, rally to the government side.



Figure 1-1: Ngo Dinh Diem visits Qui Nhon to celebrate the success of Operation Giai Phong, May 1955. (VA066503, Rufus Phillips Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University).



Figure 1-2: Ngo Dinh Diem visits Qui Nhon to celebrate the success of Operation Giai Phong, May 1955. (VA066505, Rufus Phillips Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University).

The question of Bao Dai would also occupy much of Reinhardt's time in the first few months of his ambassadorship. The Vietnamese press was engaged in a campaign to disparage the former Emperor and separate him from Vietnam. The *Vietnam Press Agency* listed several of the resolutions that had surfaced after a May 23 appeal by Ngo Dinh Diem for support. Many of these affirmations not only supported Ngo Dinh Diem, but they also condemned Bao Dai.⁵ *Buoi Sang* connected Bao Dai with French colonialism in a May 27 article suggesting that Bao Dai's form of independence was nothing more than a dependency upon the French.⁶ It was also reported that Bao Dai's office in Hue was closed by the People's Revolutionary Committee on May 30 during a brief ceremony which saw the group offer speeches in support of the action and the confiscation of Bao

⁵ *Vietnam Press Agency*, "People's Resolutions Disavow Bao Dai," May 31, 1955, E7-E8, FBIS, June 1, 1955.

⁶ *Buoi Sang*, "Revolutionists Urged to Greater Deeds," May 27, 1955, E8-E9, FBIS, June 1, 1955.

Dai's imperial seal.⁷ *Quoc Gia* called for Bao Dai's removal while the Vietnamese Press renewed its position for some type of action.⁸ There seemed to be little question of Bao Dai's fate after the failures of the Binh Xuyen to hold Saigon, force a successful confrontation with Ngo Dinh Diem, and the inability of the Hoa Hao dissidents to organize a strong enough resistance after the Battle of Saigon to threaten Ngo Dinh Diem's consolidation.

On May 31, Do Vang Ly, an officer in the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, approached a member of the American staff in the embassy in Saigon to ask for information about the Egyptian precedent for removing a member of a royal family from power.⁹ Specifically, Do Vang Ly wanted a copy of the note sent to Colonel Mohamed Naguib by the Americans after he led the Free Officers Movement in a coup d'état against King Farouk. While the embassy did not have the note, the idea of providing it to the Vietnamese would only encourage further thinking into how Bao Dai might be deposed with American consent. The United States was not going to provide guidelines that would in some way link the events and American actions between them.

Reinhardt met with Ngo Dinh Diem on June 4 for their first real discussion of substance since the American ambassador's arrival in Saigon.¹⁰ He assessed the prime minister as being anti-French but was also impressed by his focus. Ngo Dinh Diem was bothered by French actions in Vietnam though he understood and valued the American position. He reaffirmed that he was not going to press for a four-power conference though Reinhardt believed that Ngo Dinh Diem would still use such a conference as leverage against the French in determining the status of the French Expeditionary Corps and assess the commitment of the Manila Pact (Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty) members to defend Vietnam against the Viet Minh. The regularization of the responsibilities and relationship of the French Expeditionary Corps, as Reinhardt determined,

⁷ *Vietnam Press Agency*, "Bao Dai's Office in Hue Palace Closed," June 1, E10-E11, FBIS, June 1, 1955.

⁸ *Quoc Gia*, "The Government Must Have a Firm Attitude Toward Bao Dai," June 7, 1955, E6-E7, FBIS, June 8, 1955.

⁹ Saigon (Reinhardt) to the Department of State, despatch 433, "Egyptian Precedent in Vietnamese Revolution," June 2, 1955, Folder 751G.00/6-1055, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA.

¹⁰ Saigon (Reinhardt) to the Department of State, telegram 5643, June 4, 1955, Folder 751G.00/6-1055, Box 3334, RG 59, NARA. See also Saigon (Reinhardt) to the Department of State, Weeka 22, June 5, 1955, Folder 751G.00(W)/5-855, RG 59, NARA.