

Dear Jim,

5/31/76

Under the head "Saigon's Secrets Siezed" there is a Don Oberdorfer story in today's WxPost that lays out quite a case against the CIA's intelligence judgements in VN, especially in the closing days. It draws upon Gen. Van Tien Dung's "book length memoir recently published" in VN and a confirming interview with retired-spook Frank W. Snapp.

With it I'm be starting a file I should have begun long ago, angled for FOIA uses but not limited to that. I'll have to conceive some cross-referencing because I anticipate other uses in the future.

I haven't begin to make a dent in the stack of CIA documents I have. I've been reading them while travelling for efficiency and so that when home I could spend the time of work of more immediate importance. This has restricted my notes to what I could write in longhand and have not had time to transcribe. However, there has already emerged what to me is a simply incredible story. In its secrecy is a mask for elementary political incompetence, not just the embarrassing. This incompetence seems to have its roots in political preconceptions. That, of course, comes for the early-day Cold War selections, particularly of the Colby, Angleton, Helms type.

This mentality is not just of the Cold War. It is also of a domestic authoritarian bent.

It includes both stupidity on the one extreme and sinister deceptions on the other. A case in point is the Mexico City cables files in what CIA gave the Rockefeller Commission and since released. Others have, apparently, missed all of this in the items numbered to 106 in the CIA's inventory. (I just got his from a box into a file last night, after perhaps two months!) It is also really Strangelovian - an almost neutrally unhidden attempt to launch an attack on Cuba under the pretense that Castro offed JFK, based on an obvious fabrication. Long after the names were public the CIA still masked them in what it released.

After reading only a small fraction of these CIA files I began reading the Church Committee's Volume 4, "Mail Opening." The intent of the committee not to go too far or probe too deeply is apparent. It was content to make a case, not expose. But there is enough in its inadequate inquiry to establish more on this mentality and the authoritarian intent of the spooks going back to the earliest CIA days. I've just begun to read the appended documents, from their content far from all there should have been. This was an Angleton-Helms project pretendedly for the USSR people. It yielded nothing of real intelligence value re USSR but an enormous list of Americans in contact with the USSR and the nature of the correspondence, all put into a IBM-carded index. For five years the FBI didn't tumble to this. To keep it more secret it was hidden from the internal CIA budget by assigning people from other work. Long after the yield was clearly nothing the project was extended, made more inclusive, with special technical services added.

In its political ramifications this is not the garbage-in, garbage-out concept alone or mostly. It is a built-in means of controlling national policy, not providing national leadership with necessary intelligence. All the output is colored by the Angleton tinting through which it is seen after coloring. Here an example is the Rocca memo so long after the fact for the Rockefeller Commission. It actually credits what it has to admit is a fabrication. This is the Angleton/Rocca thinking - it has to be true because they believe and want it to be. Fact becomes irrelevant. The lingering effects are daily headlined and currently influence even the Congress. Most recent of the major press corruptions from it is the Szulc/New Republic piece that was bannered across the WxStar's front page 5/28. It amounts to an Ameriform variant of what was consistent in the captured Nazi documents I reviewed in WW II. Then nobody dared say other than Hitler wanted, regardless of fact. Here, thanks to this kind of CIA thought control nobody can. All who count were blinders and tinted lenses. That it hasn't started another war is a miracle. If we ever learn the real VN origins, this may be it.