

Sir Robert's Role PWT 1/25/69

The argument you present in your editorial "Vietnam: A Winning Position" (Dec. 17) is clearly not the concern of an Englishman, but I would like to correct the misunderstanding here of the part Sir Robert Thompson played in the Malayan war.

Obviously he is a distinguished man, but he was not, as President Nixon would have it, one of the major architects of the victory in Malaya. They were in fact General Briggs and High Commissioner Gurney. Gurney was subsequently killed in a guerilla ambush.

The successful strategy in Malaya was known from the beginning as the Briggs Plan. Essentially it was a police action, and I do not believe that it has much relevance in Vietnam. I can remember discussing it with the late General de Lattre de Tassigny, the great French commander in Indo-China. He was an admirer of the British, and studied their action in Malaya. He was convinced that the two situations were too different to permit the wholesale adoption of the Briggs Plan.

I was southeast Asian correspondent of this newspaper from 1951 to 1953, during which period I spent many months covering the Malayan war. I had the pleasure of meeting Sir Robert, and as I recall he was for most of that period an assistant to the British Adviser in Johore. An important job, but not at the level where strategic decisions were made.

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