

20,000 Civilians for Viet Adviser Jobs



Jack Anderson

AN ESTIMATED 20,000 civilian experts are quietly replacing the military advisers who are coming home from Vietnam. Indeed, knowledgeable sources tell us the figure eventually may be higher.

We wrote last December about secret Pentagon plans to keep military advisers, posing as civilians, in South Vietnam after the cease-fire. Now we have obtained additional details from internal Pentagon memos.

Most of the new advisers will be recruited from the armed forces but will go to Saigon as employees of such corporations as ITT, Sperry-Rand, Lear-Siegler, Northrop and NHA, Inc. Some advisers, however, will actually remain on the Pentagon payroll.

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THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT is actively recruiting civilians from its ranks to spend a year in Vietnam. In a typical memo, the Defense Electronics Supply Center offers higher pay — “there is a 25 per cent differential” — and promises “re-employment rights” after the experts return.

The “positive recruiting lists” show “large numbers” of openings, the memo urges, for “military components,” adding: “A high priority, urgent requirement exists to fill these positions in the shortest possible time.”

A Navy memo explains more cautiously that civilians are being recruited “to

assist in winding down the U.S. involvement in South Vietnam” — as if sending more Americans to Vietnam will somehow decrease the “involvement.”

The Navy’s idea of “winding down” the U.S. role, according to the memo, is to recruit civilians to assist the Vietnamese to run their navy, handle their military supplies and equip their warships. As an inducement, the Navy offers: “Return rights will be granted to eligible DOD employees . . . Separate maintenance allowance of \$1350 to \$4300 per year is authorized.”

An Air Force memo appeals for civilian volunteers to go to Vietnam as “ammunition” experts, “Military personnel” managers and aircraft specialists.

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SINCE MANY of these military specialists in civilian clothes will be working near Viet Cong areas, any resumption of fighting could result in their capture. One of the American prisoners just released in Hanoi was a civilian employee of Lear, Siegler, captured in 1969.

We asked officials whether the agony over our POWs might be repeated all over again if civilians on the Pentagon payroll should be captured. Our answer was a shrug, a smile and the assurance: “Well, this time, they are all volunteers.”

The memos in our possession, however, show that the volunteers are getting a lot of Pentagon pressure.