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A Town Talk News Analysis

An Old Asia Hand for Viet Nam

The new Lodge team in Viet Nam figures to benefit considerably by the return of a real letter man. He is Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, Ret., who is to join the new ambassador shortly as head of a group of a dozen or more civilians who will attempt to bring a new approach to the war.

Gen. Lansdale is supposed to be the prototype of the colorful Col. Hillandale in "The Ugly American." His nickname, "Over Hill and Lansdale," lends support to the general belief.

As a colonel, Gen. Lansdale made his reputation as an old Asia hand as adviser—and close friend—to Ramon Magsaysay, the Philippine national leader who rallied his people against the communist Huks as defense secretary and went on to the presidency. The American colonel was officially a member of the Joint U. S. Military Advisory Group in the Philippines.

Gen. Lansdale went on to become an adviser—and a much prized one—to President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1954-65, in the shaky early days of the fated Diem regime. Subsequently he returned to spend unhappy days at a Pentagon desk as deputy special assistant on counter-insurgency to Secretary of De-

fense Robert S. McNamara.

In his remarkably frank "Mission in Torment," John M. Mecklin, the veteran correspondent who was U.S. public affairs officer in Viet Nam before and during Diem's downfall, says that Washington for "fuzzy reasons" vetoed suggestions by Ambassador Frederick E. Nolting Jr. and others that Lansdale be returned to Viet Nam. "High officials in Defense and CIA," writes Mr. Mecklin, "were down on Lansdale, one of the United States' ablest experts on counter-guerrilla operations, because of his tendency to break bureaucratic crockery to get things done."

As articulate as he is reticent, Gen. Lansdale spelled out some of his ideas for Viet Nam in a recent issue of Foreign Affairs. He proposed—greatly to simplify—a long and patient process of "American help in banding the leaders, the military, the civil servants and the people of Viet Nam into a united force for freedom."

Gen. Lansdale asserts that what the South Viet Namese need is a "great cause" such as the spirit of the British Magna Carta, the French "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite," and our own Declaration of Independence. And he suggests that Americans help the people find that cause.

"The utmost urgent military need," wrote Gen. Lansdale, is "To make the number one priority for the military to protect and help the people." He pointed out that the communist Viet Cong practice military action with severe penalties for misbehavior as part of their military oath of honor, adopted from the "Three Rules and Eight Remarks" of Mao Tse-tung's Eighth Route Army. (When the Viet Cong actually encounters resistance, however, it is capable of the greatest cruelty against citizens as well as its military foes.)

Popularizing the war among the Vietnamese people would take much patience, much re-orientation of the Viet Nam military—who have fired on civilians without cause—and much re-thinking by American military and civilian advisers. It could go a long way, however, toward remarrying by tales of burned villages and indifference to the fate of the people who live in them.

And the reward could be great. As Gen. Lansdale put it 10 months ago, a "revolutionary appeal" might eventually "spread to the people of North Viet Nam, wounding communism at its most vital point—communism's control of the masses."