

Saigon, Vietnam

Oct. 13, 1954



Dear President Hannah:

I know that Dr. Weidner has reported to you officially, but I thought you might find a few random observations of interest.

The difficulties of the situation here were not exaggerated to us prior to departure. First, the political situation continues confused, and the bickering and bartering between the various factions keeps the Government from taking the vigorous actions the conditions demand. There is every indication that the Americans and the French are determined to keep this Government in power, so perhaps things will eventually be "arranged," as the French put it so delicately. Second, the appalling lack of personnel with more than the slightest degree of training, or know-how, creates a tremendous obstacle. It was admittedly a part of colonial policy to keep the Vietnamese here in Cochin-China from learning too much about handling affairs of state, and as a consequence they lack experience in making policy, making decisions, and taking action.

The feeling of nationalism is most intense; just now, most of the people do not want any part of anything French, and they are just awaiting the day when the last French official and soldier take their departure. And yet I suspect that as the years pass, we will find that there is a strong affinity for the French, particularly culture. Just now one of their main ambitions is for an all-Vietnamese University; for the next 18 months or so they are bound by agreement to have no more than mixed universities -- that is, with French and Vietnamese instructors. After that, they insist, there will be a new kind of higher education, and it would be a good thing, because their higher institutions to date have been very much on the French pattern. They recognize the need for technical and vocational training at the university level, and they will achieve such programs in time. They are turning more and more in the direction of an Asiatic equivalent of a land-grant college, and they should be encouraged. We from Michigan State have to be most circumspect in this area, for already the "four professors" are the subject of much agitated discussion in French official circles both here and in Paris, we are given to understand. But there is a promising area here in which to work, all the same, and we may be able to be of more help in due time.

Yesterday we visited Dalat, a mountain resort city about 200 miles upcountry, where the Government has a training school in the areas of public administration and foreign service. We were disappointed to find the facilities so poor; there simply is no possibility of establishing training schools there on the scale on which they are needed. And besides, the bulk of the population is in and near Saigon, and here is where we want to see the training done.

We are much reminded of Michigan, what with all the GM trucks and Willys jeeps being used by both the French and Vietnamese armies. The amount of money we have spread around the world!

We had a fine time in Manila with our ardent alumnus, Gov. Hirodosollo (that doesn't look just right.) First off, he opened up the finest restaurant there to have breakfast served to us. Then he hauled us downtown to buy fine Panama hats for us, and he conducted us on a long tour of the city and suburbs. On Saturday night, he gave a beautiful dinner for us and some of his friends -- and talked about MAC most of the time. He really is a fine person, and is highly respected in his country. The four of us agree unanimously that he is an outstanding candidate for an honorary degree from MSC next June. He is gradually retiring from all of his Government jobs, and is going to Spain for a vacation. We convinced him that he should stop off in East Lansing around commencement time -- and it was then that the idea of the honorary degree occurred to me. He is eminently qualified on all counts, I think.

Art sends his best -- and both of us are anxious to know what's wrong with the football team. Here it is Wednesday, and we do not have the Indiana score yet. And give my best, please, to McDonel, May, Combs, King, etc -- there simply is not time enough to write to everyone. We tackled a great deal for our two-week period, I fear.

*Reganda J.*