

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

AAAS HERBICIDE ASSESSMENT COMMISSION
BOTANICAL MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138, U.S.A.

MATTHEW S. MESELSON, CHAIRMAN
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12 November 1970

General Creighton Abrams
Commanding General, MACV
Headquarters MACV
APO San Francisco, California 96222

Dear General Abrams,

Following our discussion of September 3 concerning Montagnards and the impact upon them of the chemical crop destruction program, I enclose a copy of a report prepared for Ambassador Bunker.

After only a few weeks in Vietnam we certainly cannot claim to be experts on these questions. Nevertheless I think we were able to come away with an overall perspective that may be broader than can be acquired by operational personnel assigned to highly specific duties.

Some of what is written in the report I told you during our meeting. However in the weeks since our return to the United States we have been able to connect some of the different pieces of information that we had gathered. An example of this which may particularly interest you, as I recall our conversation, is the effect of Montagnard folk tradition as it combines with the effects of the crop destruction program. According to anthropologists, poison occupies a prominent place in the religious beliefs of many of the highland peoples. They believe that evil spirits live in poison and manifest themselves through its effects. We met refugees from one valley who had sacrificed all their water buffalos, their most prized possessions, before leaving their land, because the animals as well as the valley had become "evil" as a result of the "poison from the sky." Perhaps your son who works among the Montagnards could provide more direct knowledge of how their traditions affect their perception of the use of herbicides.

I very much value the discussion we had, and appreciate your having given me so amply of your time.

With best regards,

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Meselson

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