

Ambassador's Journal

A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years

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Mac about it with pleasure. He was furious at such ineptness, his fury including Rusk.

At the President's suggestion, I had a long talk last Tuesday with Bob McNamara.²⁸ I discovered that he is deeply sensitive to the dangers that I foresee in our involvement in Saigon. For the rest, he was glad to have some pressure from my side. I left the President with a memo on our policy on South Vietnam, which, however, added little that was new.



April 5, 1962

Dear Mr. President:

I have put in a lot of time the last three or four days on the scene of my well-known guerrilla activities, namely, South Vietnam. This included a long and most reassuring discussion with Bob McNamara. We are in basic agreement on most matters and for the rest I think Bob appreciated having some arguments from my side of the fence. I also had two or three long discussions with Averell and the attached memorandum, which is of no breathtaking novelty, comes close to reflecting our combined views. I think I can safely spare you another eloquent restatement of what you have already heard from me several times before. However, I do pray that in addition to reading the attached memorandum you see Governor Harriman at some early date.

I am leaving this afternoon for New York and tomorrow night for India. There are no pressing Indian issues I need to cover with you. Kashmir will continue to simmer. This is not the time for any brilliant initiatives and the best we can do is to press both sides to keep their behavior in low key and keep above the obscene politics ourselves. As I told you attitudes on the Hill toward India seem mellower than I had expected. I am coming back on a very brief private trip in early June to get an honorary degree and make a speech. I will try and give A.I.D. and India

²⁸ See page 1.

Minister had told me in Kalimpong — no post office, no city large enough to sustain more than one shop, no telephones but radios, details of the road-building program, the request for economic aid which we are clearing with the Indians. We were considerably worried about Angie who seemed to have some fever, a complicated form of dysentery and a state of general exhaustion.

Dinner was ceremonial. The Commissioner and I sat opposite each other and, after a formal discussion of Bhutan and its prospects, I thanked him for his hospitality and he responded. In the light of the flickering lamp and in the specially built state dining room of triangular lattice bamboo and cheesecloth, it was quite mysterious.

This morning, aided by the nine o'clock bedtime, we were up at five and Angie to our relief was quite recovered. We had a fine breakfast by courtesy of Lowrie Campbell's²⁴ cook, whom we hope to hire for the Residence. Prior to breakfast, we had accomplished a quick swim.

The trip down the river and back to Gauhati went quite rapidly and we were an hour or so ahead of our ferry. We made it across on a launch and after a good lunch took off for Jorhat. We dropped Angie in Gauhati for Calcutta, Bombay and Europe. She won everyone's heart with her good looks, high spirits and rugged delight in the experience. We were sorry to see her go.

May 1 — Jorhat-Imphal

We arrived in Jorhat late yesterday afternoon and embarked in cars for a long twilight ride to Khaziranga, the most famous game preserve in eastern India. Actually, as so often in India, it was more a matter of time than mileage. The latter was only about sixty miles but it took more than two wearing hours of continuous horn-screeching to make it. The road, through tea estates for much of

²⁴ A highly intelligent member of the Embassy staff and authority on the mountain peoples and their languages who had managed this part of the tour. We did not, in the end, steal his cook.

the way, is not unpleasant but it was dark well before we arrived. At the sanctuary, we were housed in an airy, two-story guesthouse — very comfortable. I was very weary and we went to bed directly from dinner in the room.

This morning, we got up at four-thirty and mounted eight elephants at the rate of three to a beast plus mahout. The animals were soon visible in abundance — single-horned rhinoceros, the leading exhibit, plus hog deer, swamp deer and wild buffalo. The rhinos are vast, heavily-armored, lumbering beasts and quite tame. One or two shamelessly mugged the camera. They were visible everywhere singly, in pairs or families of three or four. I am told that they are not very fierce. In the old days, they were tamed for plowing, and a few months ago an old bull developed the habit of following the elephants whenever they came out, giving the tourists a poor impression of his native savagery. One in the stockade was sold some time ago to the Paris Zoo for Rs. 20,000 (about \$4,000) — the price is now Rs. 40,000 (\$8,000). An elephant, incidentally, costs only about Rs. 4,000 (\$800).

May 2 — Imphal-Gaubati

At about eight yesterday morning, we returned from our safari and drove back to Jorhat and made a rough and bumpy flight to Imphal, capital of Manipur. Manipur is not a full state but a centrally administered territory under a Chief Commissioner reporting to the Home Ministry. There was some question about getting into the valley at Imphal and some question whether we might not come down before reaching it for we ran into a most violent thunderstorm en route. But with some shake-up, we got through the storm and when we arrived over the valley, it was clear.

Commissioner and Mrs. Raina,²⁵ a highly civilized couple from the United Provinces and originally from Kashmir, gave us a warm welcome and launched us on a major program of activities.

While Kitty went out to visit villages, I caught an hour's sleep

²⁵ J. M. N. Raina.