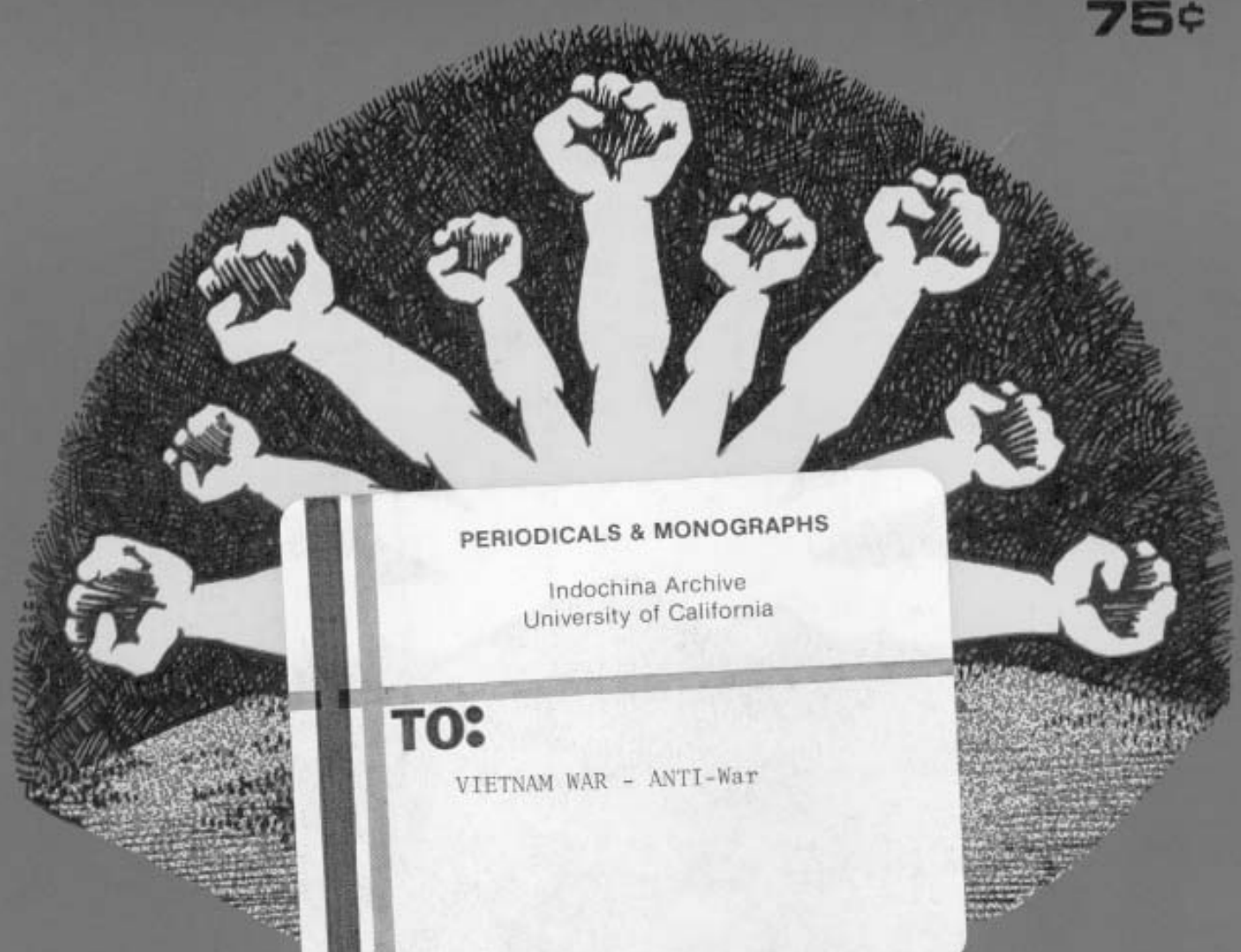


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VIETNAM WAR - ANTI-War

VIETNAM

A THOUSAND YEARS OF STRUGGLE

VIETNAM

A THOUSAND YEARS OF STRUGGLE

Text by Terry Cannon and members of the Peoples Press Collective.

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FIGHT AND LOSE AND FIGHT AGAIN: VIETNAMESE HEROES, FOREIGN INVADERS

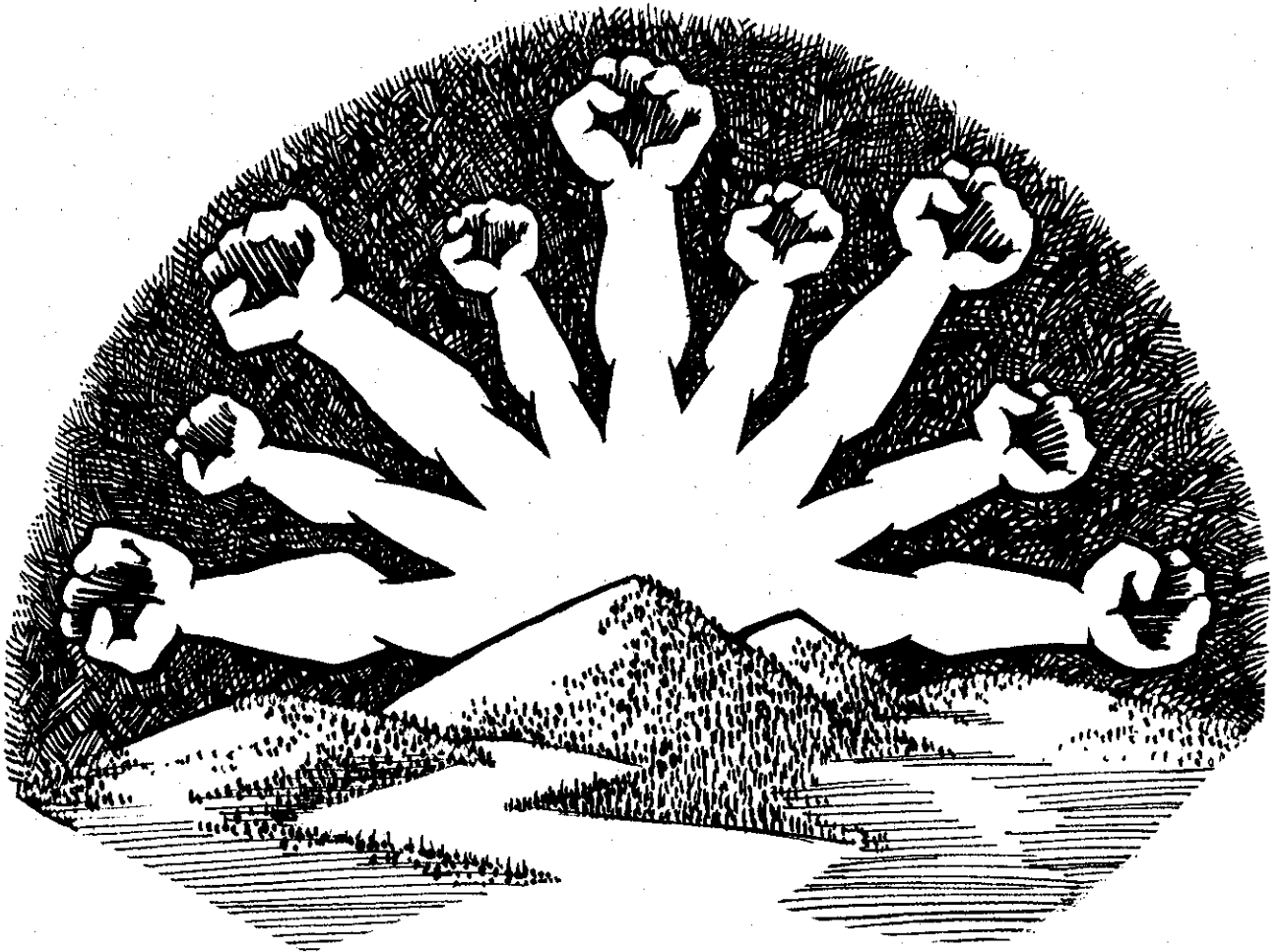
ONE AFTERNOON A thousand years ago a Chinese administrator named Cao Bien was sitting by the River Lo in Vietnam. He had been sent by the Emperor of China to conquer Vietnam and make it part of China.

As he sat there on that afternoon, 500 years before the first white man ever set foot in America, scheming of ways to get the riches of Vietnam back to China, he saw something huge and terrifying.

An enormous shape towered above him

over the river and the hills. "I am the spirit of this land," it announced. "You will never defeat me." Cao Bien had some reputation as a magician, but he was too scared. He kept quiet.

The next day he had several altars built to drive the spirit away. A storm came up that night and bolts of lightning bent the altars out of shape. Cao Bien sighed a deep sigh. "This country has a powerful spirit," he thought. "I won't be able to stay here."



China had tried to conquer Vietnam for a thousand years before Cao Bien arrived. China was a powerful empire, Vietnam a small scattered country. China had trained armies and gunpowder, the Vietnamese had bamboo sticks, spears and arrows. In the end, fifty years after Cao Bien saw the spirit, the Chinese were driven out.

In Europe, the Danes were invading England, Germany was not even a nation, Charlemagne was dead and France was in a state of anarchy. In Asia, the country of Vietnam was independent for the first time in a thousand years.

The Vietnamese fought long and hard for their independence. The Trung Sisters led the first revolt while Christ was still alive, and held out for three years against powerful Chinese armies. The Lady Trieu, riding on the back of an elephant, led her troops against the foreigners at the time the Roman Empire was declining.

Vietnam lived in peace for 300 years after Cao Bien was kicked out. Then the Mongolians decided to capture this jewel of Southeast Asia. Kubla Khan sent 500,000 soldiers—the same number of soldiers the United States has in Vietnam today—to conquer the country.

What was Vietnam to Kubla Khan? He had just conquered all of China. His armies had swept across Asia right into Europe and down to India. He was the ruler of most of the world. But the Vietnamese kicked him out!

How did they do it? The same way they are doing it today. *All* of the people, peasants, landlords, and noblemen united together. They fought guerrilla war against Kubla Khan, fighting many little battles and some big ones. They fought a long war of resistance, not trying for a quick victory.

They didn't draft people into an army, like we do today, and send them off to do the fighting. The professional armies of Kubla Khan, like China before him, were fighting for gold, glory and loot. The Vietnamese, like the Vietnamese of today, were fighting for independence and freedom. They weren't out to loot and kill, so they made better soldiers.

The peasants who fought against the for-



eigners wanted more than just political independence from foreign rulers—they wanted economic independence too. So when they kicked the invaders out, they didn't stop fighting.

The Vietnamese lived under feudalism, the same as in Europe during the Middle Ages. A king and a bunch of nobles ruled the country and made the peasants work for them. Working from dawn to night, the peasants had to grow rice, fish, and hunt animals for their families. On top of this they were forced to work for nothing for the rich nobles.

The nobles fought among themselves too. Each one wanted to be king. They didn't really care about the peasants, except when they needed them to fight foreign invaders. If the peasants wanted economic freedom, they had to fight for themselves.

And they did. Peasant revolts broke out all over. One peasant leader, Nguyen Huu Cau, was the "Robin Hood" of Vietnam. During the days when America was a colony of England, he led the peasants against the rich,

plundering their mansions and giving their wealth to the poor.

Vietnam was not completely re-unified until three brothers, the Taysons, organized the peasants to take over their own country. The Taysons began their fight the year of the Boston Massacre in America.

They had to fight many enemies. The rich nobles called for help from the King of Siam, who sent 50,000 troops. The peasants beat them. Then the Chinese figured this would be a good time to get Vietnam back. They sent 200,000 troops. The Vietnamese peasants marched 400 miles in a few weeks, surprised the Chinese near where Hanoi is today and smashed the Chinese armies.

In 1789, just as the infant United States was setting up its revolutionary government, the Taysons won back national independence from the feudal lords who had betrayed their people.

This was the Golden Age of Vietnam. Novels and poems were written in the Vietnamese language. Songs of romantic love, love based on choice, not social rules, were popular. Scientific culture arose. Men wrote books on medicine, geography and philosophy.

It did not last. Vietnam had not seen the end of foreigners. They could not have known then that the brave, new revolutionary government of America would some day send over as many soldiers as Kubla Khan to invade their country. But there was a new foreigner on the scene. A feudal lord named Gia Long hated the peasant revolt and decided to overthrow the Tayson government. He began to reconquer the country. This time he had help from a European country. His army was trained, his navy was equipped and his forts were constructed by a powerful ally—soldiers from France.

The peasants of Vietnam had a new enemy.



II

FRENCHMEN, GO HOME!

NO NATIVE-BORN WHITE American can know what it is to live under colonialism. Our own colonial struggle against England is deep in the past. Many people say "Things are different now" and they don't understand why the people living in Asia, Africa and Latin America fight against America with the same anger and passion that Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Tom Paine fought against Great Britain.

Vietnam is an old nation. 500 years before America was discovered the Vietnamese peasants and their lords and kings forced the Chinese to leave their little country. They wrote books, satires, and poems in their own language. They handed down from generation to generation the stories of their battles and their national heroes.

The soldiers who fought in these battles were peasants. They hoped that by kicking out the foreign rulers they would get freedom to own their own land and farm it, without paying high taxes or doing free work for a feudal lord. Again and again they were disappointed.

In 1802 the emperor Gia Long took power. He moved his capital from Hanoi, which was surrounded by militant peasant movements, to Hue, where he hoped to be safe. He brought back dictatorship and passed laws worse than those of 400 years earlier.

Foreigners appeared in the cities and towns of Vietnam. French traders and merchants came to buy goods. French priests and missionaries came to preach the word of a foreign gospel, Catholic Christianity.

The French knew nothing of Vietnamese life and culture. They looked on the people only as sources of wealth and labor and as possible converts to Catholicism. If the people could not be convinced to give up their wealth and their religion, the French were ready to force them to.

The Vietnamese emperor was more afraid

of his own people than of the French. He didn't like the French, especially when they argued against his religion, Confucianism. But he wanted money and power. The French were willing to give him money and he hoped



they would protect him against the peasants who would have overthrown his government if they could. So he let the French come in.

This wasn't enough for the foreigners.

In 1859 the French and Spanish used the death of several missionaries as an excuse to invade Vietnam. They landed soldiers and conquered Saigon. For 25 years they went on like this, conquering new territory and forcing the chicken-hearted emperor to sign treaties giving them the "legal" right to what they had conquered.

Finally they controlled all of Vietnam. Vietnamese independence came to an end. The people now served two masters: the Vietnamese lords and the French. But they did not quit fighting.

A Frenchman, who came to Vietnam in 1860, was impressed by the popular resistance to his country. He wrote:

The insurrection seemed to spring up from the soil. The fact was that the center of resistance was everywhere, subdivided almost as many times as there were Vietnamese. It would be more accurate to say that every peasant tying up a sheaf of rice was a center of resistance.

His report sounds familiar—like the stories American GI's tell of towns where women

and small children fight and die against the American army.

This resistance ebbed and flowed but was never crushed. The peasants had few weapons and they could not count on the lords or the emperor to lead them. So the resistance remained on the local level for a long time. World War I came and went. Still the spark of resistance to French rule smouldered deep in the Vietnamese soil.

Between 1919 and 1929 the spark grew into a fire as the Vietnamese learned new ways to struggle against their oppressors. New organizations were created. Petitions were circulated; meetings held. Strikes and demonstrations were called throughout the country. The French responded with repression: organizations were declared illegal and forced underground; newspapers were censored or closed down, and journalists imprisoned.

What was French colonialism like? Did it bring "civilization and modern living" to Vietnam like so many people think?

The French did not change the feudal structure of Vietnam, they just laid a foreign administration on top of it. Life got worse, not better. The economy was controlled by a few French companies and by their bank, the Bank of Indochina. They ran the mines, the rubber plantations and the industry. Poor harvests and famines forced many peasants to flee their villages and come to the cities to work as "coolies" for a few cents a day. The landlords grabbed their land away from them. They could not produce handicrafts themselves, because French goods were cheaper. Year by year, the people were driven into poverty and despair.

The industry and the roads built by the French did not benefit the peasants. Those who did get jobs were subjected to heavy fines and punishments. The Vietnamese were treated like foreigners in their own country. The courts and the schools were conducted in French. The government was run from the top down. People could not vote. The French administrators who ruled Vietnam were appointed in Paris.

A Vietnamese patriot, Nguyen Ai Quoc, who later was to organize his countrymen



against the French, described the condition of his people. He said:

As Vietnamese they are oppressed, as peasants they are robbed, plundered, expropriated and ruined. It is they who do all the hard labor. It is they who produce for the whole horde of parasites, loungers, civilizers and others. And it is they who live in poverty while their executioners live in plenty, and die of starvation when their crops fail.

One can see that behind a mask of democracy, French imperialism has transplanted in Vietnam the whole cursed medieval regime, and that the Vietnamese peasant is crucified on the bayonet of capitalist civilization and on the cross of prostituted Christianity.

He was angry and so were the peasants. From time to time, Vietnamese soldiers mutinied, and secret groups led uprisings, but they were always crushed.

The Vietnamese wanted to get the French out. They had the desire and lacked the leadership. The wealthy Vietnamese would not lead them and the tiny middle class could not.

If the people were to drive out the foreigners they had to organize a *national, democratic* movement that would do away with feudalism, and set up a government that was run by the Vietnamese people.

Who would lead this revolution?



III

THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY

"NGUYEN AI QUOC" (Nguyen the Patriot) was the alias chosen by a young Vietnamese man who left Vietnam when he was 21 as a cabin boy on a merchant ship. He travelled to New York and then to Paris where he lived for several years after World War I.

In Paris he tried to find people who sympathized with his desire to end the French rule of his homeland. He joined the French Socialist Party because several of its members showed sympathy for his cause, but, as he wrote later, "I understood neither what was a party, a trade-union, nor what was Socialism or Communism."

One day a friend gave him a book by

Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution. Nguyen Ai Quoc remembers this book well:

There were political terms difficult to understand in this thesis. But by dint of reading it again and again, finally I could grasp the main part of it. What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness, and confidence it instilled in me! I was overjoyed to tears. Though sitting alone in my room, I shouted aloud as if addressing large crowds: "Dear martyrs, compatriots! This is what we need, this is the path to our liberation!"

Several years later he returned to his country. Many other Vietnamese also believed that only socialism could solve the problems



of Vietnam, but they were divided and argued among themselves.

Nguyen convinced them to unite and form the Indochinese Communist Party (Indochina was the French word for what is now Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). He convinced them not just to talk among themselves but to go to their people, to form large organizations of everyone who wanted to free Vietnam from the French.

To a young peasant who had joined the Communist Party and was working in the mountain villages, he said:

A revolution cannot be made by a single man. A large force is needed, the entire people must participate. Our members must be kind-hearted, open-minded and sincere. They must help one another as comrades.

A man joins the revolution only when he understands that oppression is the cause of his sufferings. Therefore we cannot lie to the people. Before the people, a revolutionary has no right to assume a haughty and arrogant attitude, as if he were a feudal warlord. He must be modest.

Nguyen Ai Quoc knew his history very well. He knew that the peasants had driven the Chinese and the Mongolians out of Vietnam centuries before only to be betrayed by their own leaders, the rich lords. Under Socialism, this would be different. Those who led the revolution, the Communists, would not stay apart from the peasants, living in big houses and only trying to get rich themselves instead of sharing the wealth with foreign masters.

The Communist revolutionaries helped the peasants in their daily work: husking and milling rice, getting water and firewood, looking after the children, teaching the people to read and write. The Communists, who were peasants themselves, became known as "the people who get things done." They were the first to take risks, the last to back down. The French tried to destroy the Party, using torture and intimidation. If the revolutionaries had not been close to the people, the people would have turned them in to the French, but they did not.

Nguyen Ai Quoc also wrote poems which

were printed in the underground newspapers of the movement. During the Second World War he spent a year in prison. This is one of his poems:

MOONLIGHT

*For prisoners, there is no alcohol and
flowers,
But the night is so lovely, how can we
celebrate it?
I go to the air-hole and stare up at the
moon,
And through the air-hole the moon smiles
at the poet.*

Nguyen Ai Quoc was older than most of the revolutionaries, who were young men and women. His friends and followers called him "Uncle." Today he is known to the world as Ho Chi Minh.

Strikes and peasant insurrections once again broke out during the depression years of the 1930's. In several areas of Vietnam committees of poor peasants seized power and distributed the land owned by the rich landlords to the peasants. Thousands of Vietnamese were actively fighting the French. This movement for independence was made up of Socialists, Communists, liberals and many others.

All these political groups got together in 1939 to form the "Vietminh," which is short for Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh—the League for the Independence of Vietnam. A year later, the Japanese began to move into Vietnam. The attitude of the Vietminh was—"We don't want either the French or the Japanese as masters."

Faced with Japanese attack, the French acted the same way the cowardly Vietnamese lords did when the French attacked them. They were more afraid of the Vietnamese than the foreign invaders. When the Vietminh offered to join the French in fighting the Japanese, the French replied, "You want arms now to use against the Japanese. But later you will use them against us. Nothing doing!"

Vietnam fell to Japan. The only people fighting for Vietnam were the Vietminh. The French spent all their time fighting the Vietminh, killing and jailing thousands of people who wanted to defend their land against invasion.

The Vietminh, under the leadership of the Communist Party, formed the first guerrilla units, fighting underground against both the French and the Japanese.

The Japanese set up an army of Vietnamese who were supposed to fight for them. Many Vietnamese patriots joined the Japanese army, just to get their hands on a gun so they could split and join the Vietminh.

The American army supported the Vietminh. They parachuted guns, radios and supplies to the underground and even sent in American advisors to help Ho Chi Minh's troops.

When the war ended, Japan surrendered. The French, who had been beaten by the Japanese in Vietnam, were nowhere in sight. There was only one organization that had the support of the people, the only group that had fought against all foreign rulers. It was the Vietminh, organized and led by Vietnamese. It looked like the age-old dream of independence was finally to come true. A new flag was raised over Hanoi, the flag of the Democratic Republic, a yellow star on a red field.



IV

RED FLAG, YELLOW STAR: THE BIG POWERS BATTLE A FREE PEOPLE

HANOI WAS IN VIETNAMESE hands for the first time in 70 years. The Vietminh, who had led the resistance against the Japanese (with American help), formed a new government, elected Ho Chi Minh president, and announced the Republic of Vietnam. On September 2, 1945, they issued their Declaration of Independence.

Few people have read the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence. It begins with words that should be familiar to us:

All men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Those are the opening words of the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, and the

second sentence of our own. Ho Chi Minh hoped that America would continue to support the Vietnamese.

We are convinced that the Allied nations which at Tehran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam.

Once again, and many times more, they were to be cruelly disappointed.

At the same time the Vietnamese were taking control of their country, the "Big Three," Churchill, Truman and Stalin, were meeting in Potsdam, Germany. As the winners of World War II, they met to decide who controlled what. They decided that all of Southeast Asia should belong to England. Just like that, with the stroke of a pen, they decided the fate of Vietnam. One thing complicated this; they also owed China a debt for fighting against the Japanese. So with another stroke of the pen they cut Vietnam in half at the 16th parallel, north of Hue, pretty much where the "borderline" between North Vietnam and South Vietnam lies today.

North of that line the Chinese were to occupy the country; south of the line belonged to the British. The job of the Chinese and British was to "restore law and order." The Big Three paid little attention to the fact that there was a government there, supported by the people, that was already "restoring law and order." That did not concern them. They were big men with a world to carve up among themselves.

This was the beginning of the end of Vietnamese independence. China at that time was governed (at least in part) by Chiang Kai-Shek. He had no love for the French, who had tried to colonize his own country. He also



wanted some influence in Vietnam. So China immediately recognized the Vietminh government in Hanoi.

But not the British. They planned to overthrow the Vietnamese government in the South and restore the French to power. When the British officials arrived in Saigon, crowds of Vietnamese came out to welcome them, carrying Allied flags. Suddenly, shooting started. The British used this breakdown in "law and order" to declare martial law.

They refused to talk directly with the Vietminh government, insisting on going through the local Japanese military headquarters! They closed the Vietnamese newspapers, re-armed 5,000 French troops that had been captured by the Japanese, and ordered the Vietnamese militia and police to disarm.

A month after they arrived, a small group of 150 French commandos seized the government buildings, hauled down the Vietnamese flag, and hoisted the French tricolor. In the South, with British help, the French were back in power.

Soon the French were attacking the countryside around Saigon. Who did the fighting for them? Japanese troops! General Douglas MacArthur announced from Tokyo, which America had occupied, "If there is anything that makes my blood boil it is to see our allies in Indochina deploying Japanese troops to reconquer the little people we promised to liberate. It is the most ignoble kind of betrayal."

Betrayal was the name of the game. Vietnam is a country rich in minerals, rice and rubber. France was not about to let these riches go. Britain helped France, and America stood by. What about Russia, a communist nation, supposedly dedicated to the politics of Lenin, who supported the freedom of small nations? One Vietnamese patriot put it very well. "The Russians are nationalists for Russia first and above all. They would be interested in us only if we served some purpose of theirs." Russia was hoping to become an ally of France and if France wanted to keep Vietnam as a colony, that was o.k. with Stalin. He urged the Vietnamese to play along with the French and not fight back.

The struggling government of the Republic of Vietnam had no strong allies. "We apparently stand quite alone," Ho Chi Minh told an American professor, "We shall have to depend on ourselves."

Meanwhile a series of tricky negotiations were going on between various other Vietnamese and the French. The French knew they could not run Vietnam in the same obvious way they did before the war. Open warfare had broken out between the French and the Republic in the North. In November, 1946, the French bombarded Haiphong, a seaport near Hanoi, killing thousands of Vietnamese. In the South, 50,000 French troops were brought in to reconquer the countryside.

The French had to find a Vietnamese leader they could use to give the impression of national independence as a cover-up for French rule. They needed a puppet (this seems like a loaded term, but even such a respectable scholar as Ellen J. Hammer of Stanford University used this term to describe what the French wanted, and got.)

They got Bao Dai.

Bao Dai had been the "Emperor" of Vietnam under French colonialism. When the Vietminh established their government in 1945 he "wearily and gladly" gave up his throne. His abdication statement is surprisingly personal for a king. Referring to himself as the royal "we," he said,

We cannot but have a certain feeling of melancholy upon thinking of our glorious ancestors who fought without respite for 400 years to make our country great.

Despite this, and strong in our convictions, we have decided to abdicate and we transfer power to the democratic Republican Government . . .

Henceforth, we shall be happy to be a free citizen in an independent country . . .

Long live the independence of Vietnam!

Long live our Democratic Republic!

Bao Dai was a weak man. By 1947 he was living the life of a "playboy emperor" in Hong Kong. The French, who could find no one else to set up against Ho Chi Minh, settled on him. It took two years to convince

him, but finally the French had their way. Bao Dai returned to Vietnam, once again to be the puppet of the French.

Now, suddenly, the French recognized the "right" of Vietnam to be unified. They announced that Bao Dai was the head of state of *all* Vietnam, just as Ho Chi Minh was the head of all Vietnam (except that Ho had been chosen by Vietnamese, and Bao Dai by the French).

The French hoped that a civil war would develop between these two governments. This time they were the ones to be disappointed. The real battle was between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh, and the army of France. Bao Dai sat, as he always had, at the side.

The first Indochinese War was on.





V

HOW THE GRASSHOPPER DEFEATED THE ELEPHANT

ON DECEMBER 19, 1946, the French army attacked Hanoi. Ho Chi Minh appealed to all Vietnamese to wage a war of resistance against the French:

Compatriots all over the country!

As we desired peace, we made concessions. But the more we made concessions, the further the French colonialists went because they are resolved to invade our country once again.

No! We would rather sacrifice all than lose our country. We are determined not to be enslaved.

Ho and the government of the Democratic Republic moved their headquarters to the mountains. The people destroyed the highways and the railroads rather than let the French use them.

The French thought reconquering Vietnam would be easy. Someone described it as a war between a grasshopper and an elephant. The country was ruined by the Japanese during the War. Two million people starved to death in 1944 when floods and drought destroyed the crops. All their industrial goods, even their nails and needles, had to be bought from France.

In the countryside the peasants still used medieval wooden plows. Many were starving. The French controlled the rich rice fields of the South and the factories of the North.

The Vietnamese guerrillas were armed with bamboo sticks, obsolete rifles and other odds and ends. How could they fight an enemy that had an industrial economy, armored cars, artillery and airplanes?

There are two kinds of independence—political independence and economic independence. The Vietnamese had to fight for both.

In the Free Zones (the provinces controlled by the Vietminh resisters) the peasants strug-

gled to increase the production of rice. They knew that "Good food makes a good army." They issued their own money and refused to use any French "piastres." When the French drove them from a town, they carried piece by piece on their backs thousands of tons of machines to be put together in the mountains. They ripped up railroad tracks and carried them into the jungles to make weapons and bullets.

Slowly they cut the umbilical cord that tied them to France. They fasted once every ten days, so the starving could have food. All the government officials, including Ho, grew food on every patch of land available. They took away the land belonging to the French and the Vietnamese landlords who had joined the French and divided it among the poor peasants.

Four years later, the war of resistance took a new turn. In one campaign, the People's Army (the regular, full-time army of the Democratic Republic) destroyed a 7,000-man French army in the northern mountains and won control of the border between Vietnam and China. The French were uptight. Their "lightning war" ground to a halt in the northern and southern parts of the country.

The American government was also nervous. Like the Chinese emperors of a thousand years ago, American businessmen wanted the riches of Vietnam. Their president, Dwight Eisenhower, admitted this openly:

"Let us assume we lose Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia)," Eisenhower said in 1953. "The tin and tungsten that we so greatly value from that area would cease coming. So when the U.S. votes \$400 million to help that war, we are not voting a give-away program. We are voting for the cheapest way to prevent the occurrence of something that



would be of the most terrible significance to our power and ability to get certain things we need from the riches of Indochina."

The "cheapest way" to get their hands on the riches of Vietnam was to pay the French to kill the Vietnamese!

There was another reason why our money was used to pay for the French reconquering of Vietnam: China. The Chinese, led by Mao Tse Tung, were liberating their own country from foreign control. Mao and Ho were communists. To American businessmen that meant one thing—loss of profits. The tin, tungsten, rubber, and jute would be used to help the people of Vietnam and China instead of making super-profits for U.S. corporations.

That's where the bogeyman of "Communism" comes in. The American people were told that the Indochinese War was "holding the line against Communism," just as we're told today. If we had known it was a land grab, we might not have been so sympathetic.

By 1950 our money was paying for 85% of

the French war against Vietnam. Every time the Vietminh captured a supply depot or a military base they found most of the guns and supplies marked "Made in USA." Americans might not have known where their tax money was going, but the Vietnamese sure did: it was going to kill them.

Meanwhile, the Vietnamese were creating a new economy and a new kind of society in the areas they controlled. Thousands of illiterate peasants were taught to read. Labor laws were passed, rents and interest rates were lowered. The fight for economic independence was going on.

You can't ask peasants to fight in an army while at home their harvests go to rich landlords. You can't ask them to plant and harvest in the night time, carry their own rice to the soldiers at the front, organize guerrilla warfare and repair dikes without taking the burden of a backward economy off their backs. An economic revolution had to be won at the same time as the fight for independence from the French.



The new Vietnamese society was decentralized. Factories and schools were spread out all over the country. Since lines of communication were often cut and every person was "a center of resistance," a strong, centralized government was impossible. Each province was pretty much on its own.

Then suddenly, after eight years, the war against the French ended. It ended at Dienbienphu on May 7, 1954.

The French army took a gamble and lost. They were pretty much in the same situation the American army faced during the late 1960's. They controlled the cities. Most of the countryside was controlled by the Vietminh and the rest of it was shared: the French by day, the Vietminh by night.

General Navarre, the man in charge of the French forces, needed to defeat the regular army of the Vietnamese, now well equipped and trained and possessing American artillery which the Chinese had taken from Chiang Kai-Shek when they chased him out of China. Navarre, an old armored division officer, decided to lay a trap for the Vietminh.

He moved his best troops and artillery into a valley at Dienbienphu, built an airstrip and waited for the Vietnamese to attack. He figured once he got them all up in the hills around Dienbienphu he could wipe them out.

The scene was much like Khe Sanh which the American army occupied in 1968.

The Vietnamese, under General Vo Nguyen Giap, prepared well. There were no roads in the mountains around Dienbienphu, so they cut them in by hand. Without trucks, the

soldiers pushed their artillery up the mountainside. (The story is told of one Vietminh soldier who threw his body under the wheels of a cannon to keep it from rolling back down the hill.)

They brought in supplies on their backs and on bicycles. They dug tunnels in the mountains and even under the French base itself. They waited until they were ready and then they opened fire.

On the first day the Vietminh completely wiped out one French stronghold. The French artillery commander, watching this, knew the jig was up. He told his commanding officer that they were doomed, went back to his bunk, and killed himself with a hand grenade.

By the last day, the French base was reduced to the size of a baseball field. The French commander called his general in Saigon and told him it was all over. "Don't surrender," said the general in Saigon, even though he knew that it meant 5,000 severely wounded French soldiers might die. He didn't care.

By 5 p.m. the Vietminh had captured the base.

The war was over.

The Vietnamese people believed more than ever in the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. They had beaten the foreigners on their own terms.

The West betrayed the Vietnamese in 1869, when France attacked. They betrayed them in 1945. Once again, at fantastic sacrifice, the Vietnamese won their independence. Would they be betrayed again?

Yes.

VI

THE GENEVA AGREEMENTS: THE FREE ELECTION AMERICA PREVENTED

FOR MOST AMERICANS, Vietnamese history began with the Geneva Conference of 1954. It didn't really of course, it began thousands of years ago. For us, most arguments begin with Geneva, because that's where America got directly involved.

We almost got involved in a shooting war with the Vietnamese just before the Vietnamese won at Dienbienphu. This is a little-known part of our history. John Foster Dulles, the super-anti-communist Secretary of State, wanted to send in American bombers to bail the French out at Dienbienphu, but the Eng-

lish cooled him. They didn't want a bigger land war in Asia.

A lot of arguments have been made about what the Agreements at Geneva were, and a lot of untruths have been told about them. Lyndon Johnson said once in a speech that the Geneva Agreements "guaranteed the independence of South Vietnam."

That just isn't true. Rather than argue opinions here, though, we'll let the Geneva Agreements speak for themselves.

The nations taking part in the Conference were: Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of



Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh's government), France, Laos, China, the State of Vietnam (Bao Dai's government), Russia, England and the United States.

At the end of the conference France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam signed an Agreement. In ordinary words, the Agreement said:

A temporary dividing line between the northern and southern parts of Vietnam.

No more fighting.

General elections to unify Vietnam.

No revenge against people of the other side.

No more troops.

No more arms.

An International Committee to see that all this is done. The members of this Committee were selected from India, Canada and Poland.

A Joint Commission, made up of representatives from France and the Democratic Republic to actually carry out the Agreements.

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All the countries at the conference agreed that:

"The military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary."

That's why what Lyndon Johnson said was not the truth.

They also agreed that:

"General elections will be held in July,

1956, under the supervision of an international commission."

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The Vietnamese were overjoyed when they heard the results of the Conference. It wasn't all they wanted. It was a compromise. But it stopped the fighting; it took the battle against the foreigners off the battlefield and into politics. Since most Vietnamese looked to Ho Chi Minh as the father of their country, and the Vietminh as the heroes in the liberation struggle, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that a free election would mean that north and south alike would be unified under the government of the Democratic Republic. Even President Eisenhower thought so. "Had elections been held at the time of the fighting, possibly 80% of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader," he said.

The Vietnamese patiently waited for the free election to take place.

It never did.

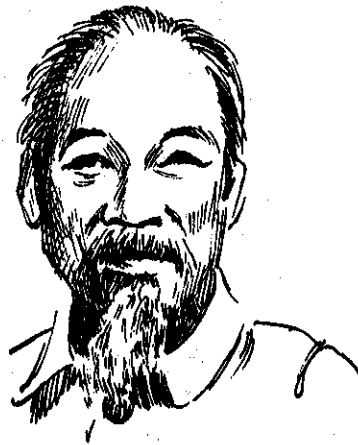
What went wrong?

International law is like all law. It doesn't mean two cents if powerful people don't like it and there's no one to enforce it.

The American government didn't like the Agreement. It promised to abide by it, and broke those promises. The International Control Commission (ICC), made up of people from India, Canada and Poland, could not enforce the Agreement. What were they going

VIETNAMESE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

All men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.



to do, wage war on America?

Bao Dai turned his puppet government in south Vietnam over to Ngo Dinh Diem (more about him later), who was almost completely a puppet of the American government. He refused to even meet with the Democratic Republic to talk about elections. In fact, when the ICC came to Saigon to talk about the elections, Diem staged an attack on the hotel where they were staying.

The American government was all hung up about communism. It said it believed in people making up their own minds, except when people made up their minds to elect a communist government.

The U.S. set up an operation called MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group) which shipped arms and advisors to Diem's regime. The Geneva Agreement said no more arms, no more soldiers. Too bad. The ICC members were not allowed to inspect MAAG planes landing in Saigon.

Who was going to enforce the Agreement? France had pulled out. The American government had moved in. Protests by the government of the Democratic Republic fell on deaf ears. It was like asking a cop to arrest himself for beating up a demonstrator.

A lot of people believe that the United States is upholding the Geneva Agreements and that we were invited to send troops to Vietnam by the "legal government" of that country.

A legal government is a government chosen and respected by its people. Between 1859, when the French conquered Saigon, and 1945, when the Vietnamese took their country back, there was no respected national government.

In 1945, when Vietnam became independent (for a few months), Bao Dai turned his government over to the Democratic Republic of Ho Chi Minh. That was the legal government of all Vietnam; its capital was Hanoi.

The British, French and Americans conquered the southern part of the country and took it away from its government. Today South Vietnam has a real government again, one that is chosen and respected by its people. It is *not* the Saigon regime. It did *not*

invite the Americans in. It is fighting to keep the Americans out.

Its name is the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG). The PRG was selected in June, 1969, by people in the Liberated Zones of the South, as well as many neutralists and sympathizers living in areas held by the Saigon regime.

The PRG includes many members of the NLF and other patriotic organizations. They are negotiating with the U.S. in Paris.

Ngo Dinh Diem, the "legal governor" of Vietnam, who invited the U.S. in, was a small-time dictator, hand-picked by the American government. As soon as he took office he made it clear he was not going to follow the Geneva Agreements. It didn't make much difference. The only government that respected the Agreements was the one in Hanoi.



VII

HOW AMERICA KILLED FREEDOM AND RESISTANCE WAS BORN

YOU DON'T HAVE to convince anybody these days that Ngo Dinh Diem, president of the "Republic of Vietnam" from 1954 to 1963, was a two-bit dictator with no support from his people. Even Wesley Fishel, the American professor who got Diem the job, admitted it after Diem was overthrown. Diem's philosophy, said Fishel, was "peasant-based, revolutionary fascism."

That's *not* what American politicians were saying in 1954:

The United States recognizes that the president of the Republic of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, is in the vanguard of those leaders who stand for freedom . . .

That's what Vice President Lyndon Johnson said, in 1954.

Diem was a nowhere man, a hanger-on in the French-run government of Vietnam. He retired in 1933. Twenty years later, President Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Cardinal Cushing and the CIA put him back in office. How did this nobody get such powerful friends?

Diem was rich; he was an anti-communist and he was willing to play ball with the U.S. politicians.

Remember how the French had fished around before for a Vietnamese "leader" they could use against Ho Chi Minh? They found Bao Dai, the old emperor. When the French were defeated and pulled out, the U.S. government tried to do the same thing. They came up with Diem. But even his supporters admitted he couldn't "win in a popularity contest with Ho Chi Minh."

The U.S. politicians were not interested in what happened to the Vietnamese people. They knew that if elections were held in Vietnam in 1954, the people would peacefully vote in Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh. The Pentagon and the "military-industrial com-

plex" that Eisenhower warned us about had a world strategy called Stopping Communism.

Since that's still the line we are handed about why Americans have to die in Vietnam, we should think carefully about it. It must have seemed strange to the 16 million people living in the north of Vietnam to hear Cardinal Spellman call them "Red rulers' godless goons."

That's familiar language to a lot of Americans. Many union organizers and students have been called "communist agitators" by politicians who want to put them down.

The U.S. politicians (including John F. Kennedy) did not want free elections to be



Diem

held in Vietnam. They wanted the southern part of the country to be a "bastion of the free world." In 1954 that meant putting in power a penny-ante fascist.

The first thing Diem set out to do was destroy the political power of two religious groups, the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, which had a total of two million members. Neither group was communist, and both had fought against the French. But Diem didn't want any competition, so he smashed them.

Then he turned on the rest of the people who had resisted the French. Everyone who had fought against the French, communists, socialists, liberals, even anti-communists, he called "Vietcong." (This is a term of insult, meaning "Viet commie.")

Diem's troops herded whole villages into concentration camps, killed and jailed tens of thousands of Vietnamese patriots. The same puppet troops who had been defeated in the war against the French, entered south Vietnamese towns as victors, massacring people, firing on peaceful demonstrations, and torturing "suspected Vietcong."

Famine set in. Young men in the villages were taken off to jail or killed. Land that had been taken away from the rich landlords by the Vietminh during the war, was returned to the rich landlords. Peasants were forced to pay rent on land which had been distributed to them during the war against France. People had to eat roots and bark for lack of rice.

Children of former resistance workers were banned from going to school. Wives of men who had gone North were forced to divorce them and remarry as evidence of "good faith."

In one mountain province, Quang Ngai, 2,000 people died in epidemics, 600 were killed in mass slaughters, 450 died in prison, 500 were liquidated by Diem's troops, and 500 died of starvation. In one year, 1955.

American politicians knew this was going on. A group of American professors at Michigan State University, headed by Wesley Fishel, were training Diem's police and sending them arms, which were channeled through the university. American taxes were paying for the troops and weapons used to slaughter

Vietnamese, communist and non-communist alike. All this was done in the name of "anti-communism."

This made no impression on the Vietnamese peasants. The only communists they knew were men and women from their villages who had fought bravely against the French. The only "terrorist" action they knew was the killing of their friends and relatives by the Diem government.

Repression breeds resistance. Many people wanted to resist Diem, but Ho Chi Minh and the leaders of the Vietminh urged their fellow countrymen in the south not to fight back. They still hoped that elections would be held and things could be settled peaceably. Years passed, repression and famine got worse.

People can't go on forever, watching their sons and daughters killed and jailed, or their parents herded into concentration camps. They respected Ho and the leaders of the DRV, but the murder had to stop. Village by village, province by province, the people of the south decided to fight back.

The villagers in a tiny village in Gia Dinh province had one weapon, an old U.S. army carbine. They carved wooden dummies to look like the carbine. Then they bought a lot of carbide for bicycle lamps and made carbide bombs out of bamboo tubes. One night when they were ready, they surrounded the military post at Phu My Hung. Exploding the bombs (no more than firecrackers), waving the dummy rifles, and firing a few shots from the real one, they announced on a megaphone that the garrison had better surrender or "be wiped out."

Terrified, Diem's troops filed out and surrendered their weapons. The village was armed.

That's how it started. In hundreds of villages, ignorant of what others were doing. We call it the "Vietnam War." They call it the Second Indochinese War. It began from the grass-roots, against the advice of the government in Hanoi. At the time you might have called it a civil war. Vietnamese were fighting Vietnamese. One side was set up and paid for by the U.S. government. The other side was made up of ordinary people.

A year or so later, in December, 1960, representatives from many communist, non-communist and nationalist organizations met in the jungle and organized the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam.

* * *

Nguyen Huu Tho, a lawyer from Saigon, was in jail while this historic meeting was taking place in the jungle. He was a leader of the Saigon Peace Movement, an organization set up in 1954 to support the Geneva Agreements. When he got out of prison in 1961, he joined the NLF and was elected its president.

American politicians and military men call the NLF "communist." It has many members of the Communist Party in it, who are widely respected, since they have led the struggle for

Vietnamese independence for the last 40 years. What is not publicized here is that most of the members and leaders of the NLF are not communists.

Buddhists and Catholics are members. There are even landlords in the organization. They all share one aim: to overthrow the Saigon regime, drive the occupying army of the United States out of their country, and set up an independent and democratic government.

An Australian journalist, Wilfred Burchett, asked Nguyen Huu Tho about the Front. "The Front," said Tho, "unites all political tendencies, all religions, all sections and classes of the population. We are in favor of land for the peasants, but not systematic confiscation; we are for reduction of rents but



Nguyen Huu Tho (second from left) talking with soldiers of the National Liberation Front.



for the maintenance of present property rights except in the case of traitors. Above all, the Front stands for democratic liberties, freedom of speech, assembly and movement, and in our liberated areas these freedoms do really exist."

* * *

The sparks of revolt against the Diem regime caught fire and swept through the plains and mountains of South Vietnam. Within two years the NLF governed most of the countryside! Today it controls all of the country except for American military bases, the larger cities and towns and some highways.

When the NLF was founded, the people had few weapons, so they made their own. They made guns out of metal tubes, filling

them with whatever was on hand. They sharpened bamboo spikes and set them in the ground for enemy feet. Small trees became spear-launchers. Some mountain tribesmen even trained bees to attack enemy soldiers!

These are still in use today. They are the weapons of poor people who must use what they have at hand to fight a far more powerful force, armed with the latest weapons turned out in American factories. But they have defeated technically superior foreign armies before: the Chinese, the Mongolians, and the French. They are not fighting for loot or privilege or abstract "anti-communism." They are fighting for their lives and their freedom.