

VIII

WE INTERRUPT OUR STORY . . .

OUR STORY HAS COME a long way, from the year 1 A.D. to 1960. The Vietnamese have fought and defeated many enemies. Now they are about to fight the most powerful nation in world history: America. They are going to defeat this enemy also. Their victory is one of the most amazing events of the 20th Century.

Wars are won and lost by people. This chapter is about the people of Vietnam (and America). It gives some clues about what made this victory possible.

The Mountain People:

America is a "multi-national" country: Irish, English, German, Dutch, black people, Indians, Chinese, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans—all are American citizens. They all have the same rights on paper, but not in practice.



Generally speaking, the whites, no matter what their nation, have privileges that are denied people who are black, brown, red or yellow. Non-whites used to be called "minorities," which isn't really true. Their numbers may be in the minority inside the boundaries of the United States, but if you take all the black, brown, yellow and red people who live on the planet, they are in the vast majority.

Vietnam too is a multi-national country. All Vietnamese are Asians, but they do not all speak the same language or have the same customs. The majority people are the Viets, who have lived in the river deltas and on the plains for thousands of years. They are 87% of the population.

The other 13% of Vietnamese belong to 60 different groups. They live in the mountain regions, the largest part of Vietnam. Some live by growing rice, others by hunting, fishing and gathering wild foods. Like the Chinese, black, Latin and Indian people in the U.S., each ethnic group has its own rich folklore, music, songs, arts and literature.

There is one big difference between the minority people of Vietnam and those of America. The minorities in Vietnam have lived there thousands of years. They did not come over in boats, like American whites, or slave ships, like American blacks. Nor were they imported to build railroads, like the Chinese. When the first Europeans came to our country and took the land away from the American Indians, the Vietnamese, Northerners and Southerners, plains people and mountain people, majority and minority were fighting together to keep the Chinese invaders out. The American Indians fought to keep the foreigners out of their country too, but they were defeated.

You hear a lot these days about the "montagnards," the name the newspapers give the mountain people. The papers say that the

minority people in the mountains hate the "Vietnamese" and have joined the Saigon Army to fight the NLF.

Like most things you read in the papers, this is a mixture of truth and lies. The tribesmen of the mountains and the Viets of the plains are Vietnamese first. When their country is invaded, they stick together and fight. Things haven't always been that chummy.

Peasants were always on the bottom of the heap, landlords on the top. The mountain people, who were poorer than the peasants of the plains, were on the bottom of the bottom.

The French deliberately increased the hatreds and rivalries of the poor mountain people against the poor Viets. Their policy was "divide and conquer." They figured if the Vietnamese kept fighting one another, they wouldn't have any time left to fight their real enemy, the French.

The French, the rich Vietnamese and the "city slickers" treated the mountain people like savages. The communists did just the opposite. As soon as the Communist Party of Vietnam was formed they said clearly what they wanted: "the unity of all nationalities on a basis of equality and mutual assistance with a view to winning together independence, freedom and happiness."

And they meant it. The mountains north of Hanoi were the cradle of the fight against the French. Many resistance leaders came from here. The mountain people joined the revolution first and fought hard because they were the most messed over by the foreigners.

One of the minority people to join the revolution was Le Quang Ba. Today he is commander-in-chief of the armed forces in Hanoi. He tells his own story:

"We were only ordinary Tay peasants. My mother told me, 'Misery and ignorance have been our lot. The village notables bully us, everybody looks down on us. Study hard, son, so that you may keep your head high.'

"Long before the new harvest was brought in, we had to sell our chickens one after another, in order to get something to eat. After the New Year festival, the only food we had was wild plants and roots if we did not want to borrow rice from the rich at a 100% interest rate.

"Towards 1926, Hoang Ding Rong, the first man in our province to become a communist, began his activities in our region. He first set about winning my friend Quoc Van over to the revolutionary cause.

"Early in 1930, one day when we were returning from the market, Quoc Van told me, 'Our sufferings are caused by the occupation of our country by the French who oppress and pillage our people. In China, the Communist Party is leading the people in a revolution to free the poor. We must do the same in our country, drive out the French, overthrow the landowners and work for the people's happiness.'

"We were much moved by these words . . ."

Le Quang Ba joined the Revolutionary Youth League when he was 19. He and his schoolmates went out on strike against the



harsh treatment by their teachers. After the strike he was kicked out of school.

When he was 26 he was told that "Uncle" was coming to the town he was in.

"We were overjoyed. Since the first days of my revolutionary activities, I had heard of our leader Nguyen Ai Quoc, the first Vietnamese Communist.

"We came into the room. Uncle was sitting on a bed, waiting for us. Although the light was dim, we could see him clearly enough. We were struck by his broad forehead, his sparkling eyes and his features which bespoke great kindness. He invited us to sit down, then poured each of us a cup of tea.

"We are revolutionaries," said he. "We must win the people's affection and confidence; it is in their interest that we are struggling. We must educate them politically. We must respect them."

Catholics and Buddhists:

Catholic Vietnamese are a by-product of French colonial rule. Protected by French armies, Catholic missionaries set up churches in Vietnam to "save the souls" of the people who lived there. Most Vietnamese didn't think anyone had to save their souls. They were religious, not "heathens"; they believed in Buddha.

The priests managed to convert about 1/10th of the people to Catholicism. The Church ended up owning one-quarter of the crop land in southern Vietnam. It gobbled up the land of peasants too poor to pay the rent, forced people to cultivate wasteland and then took it away from them, became powerful in politics, and made itself generally unpopular.

When Vietnam was divided in 1955, almost a million people left North Vietnam and went to the South. American politicians and newspapers played this up, saying that this showed that the Vietnamese hated communism and were fleeing to freedom.

Two kinds of people left the North for the South: Catholics and members of the families of soldiers in the native colonial army.

Catholic priests spread the rumor that "the Virgin Mary has gone South" and that Catholic Vietnamese should follow her, because the

"infidels" who stayed would be wiped out with atom bombs. Also, Vietnamese Catholics were given a lot of privileges over Buddhists and had fought against the Vietnamese liberation movement. They were afraid their status would be taken away. When they got South, many Catholics learned they had been tricked and wanted to go back, but the Diem government shot and jailed these "ungrateful" people.

Diem was a Catholic. He put into power many Catholic politicians, more than Buddhists. This didn't go over well—a Catholic government in a Buddhist country, just like an all-Buddhist government wouldn't go over in this country. The Saigon "government" that invited the U.S. in, was made of Diem's cronies and yes-men who had served the French and now were serving American politicians and themselves.

The Buddhist leaders didn't go for this at all. They were religious men, not into politics, and tended to be anti-communist, so they had not joined the NLF. Finally things got too bad to stand aside and be neutral.

Americans first learned about Buddhist unrest in June, 1963, when an old Buddhist priest sat down crosslegged in a major Saigon intersection, poured gasoline over himself and lit a match. Buddhists took to the streets in Saigon and Hue. The U.S. government tried to get Diem to cool things and settle with the Buddhists. They were very embarrassed because the revolt proved that the Saigon government was hated by people who were not in alliance with the communists.

Instead, the Saigon regime sent troops to attack the Buddhist pagodas. That's when the U.S. knew its puppet had to go. The world knew him for what he was, a small-time dictator who didn't even know enough to be a good puppet. Within a few weeks, the CIA engineered an overthrow of Diem. Diem and his brother, the husband of the famous Madame Nhu, were killed by the Saigon army, and several generals took his place.

The long line of Saigon rulers since then haven't been a dime's worth of difference from Diem. Some of them have been worse. General Ky, as everybody knows, said that



The Diem family: They were in power to serve America, not the common people of their own country.

Hitler was his hero. That's the kind of government we've been spending millions of dollars every day to keep "free."

Saigon kept on messing over the Buddhists. Three years later, in 1966, they revolted again. Buddhist students slugged it out in the streets of Hue with Saigon's crack troops. Saigon sent airplanes in to bomb their own city of Da Nang to put down Buddhist demonstrations.

This time, the Buddhists learned that they couldn't go it alone. The U.S. and Saigon beat them by dividing and conquering. Since then, many rank-and-file Buddhists have joined the NLF, whose policy is "unite and win."

Without this unity, the NLF would not have been able to defeat the armed forces of the U.S.

Now back to our story.

IX

SPECIAL WAR VS. PEOPLE'S WAR

IN 1961 THE POLITICIANS in Washington were nervous. Reports from Saigon told them Diem was losing. Local uprisings, demonstrations, riots and strikes were spreading all over South Vietnam. The National Liberation Front, only a year old, was liberating big sections of the country.

The politicians wanted to turn South Vietnam into a new-type colony and military base, but no one knew how to fight against guerrillas. A general, Maxwell Taylor, and a professor, Eugene Staley, came up with a plan.

The Taylor-Staley Plan began what's called the "Special War," which lasted from 1961 to 1965 when it was defeated by the Vietnamese. It called for:

Beefing up the Saigon army, doubling the police force, moving everyone into "strategic

hamlets" in the South, and sending commandos on sabotage raids into the North.

That's when American "advisors" started pouring into Vietnam, along with helicopters, bombers, defoliation chemicals, rockets, and guns.

By June, 1961, half a million people had been herded out of their villages and into "strategic hamlets." The hamlets were simply concentration camps, surrounded by trenches, barbed wire and bamboo stakes, overlooked by blockhouses and watchtowers. Each person was given a plastic identity card and allowed to enter and leave only at certain times.

Saigon troops, armed with all the latest American weapons, electronic devices, helicopters and amphibious vehicles, swept through the countryside, burning houses, shipping the peasants off to concentration



camp, arresting and torturing "Vietcong suspects." The Vietnamese in the Saigon army did the fighting, the American advisors did the planning and supplying. The American generals were using Vietnam as an experiment in anti-guerrilla warfare. They tried out massive bombing raids, defoliation of trees, destruction of crops, napalm and poison gas.

The American planners figured it would take three years to pacify South Vietnam. Then they could move into North Vietnam and mop that up.

Three years later the Taylor-Staley plan was dead as last year's newspapers. All their ideas backfired.

Everything America has done in Vietnam has backfired. Why?

The Vietnamese call the kind of war they are fighting "People's War." This is more than just words. The Vietnamese are a fighting people, proud, sophisticated and tough. The American invasion was no new thing to them, just the last in a long line of foreign invasions. The napalm, helicopters and fancy weapons were new, but they turned out to be no more effective than Kubla Khan's gunpowder.

The real secret of People's War is that *everybody* fights: men, women and children, the old and the young, in whatever way they can.

They fight with arms,

They fight with demonstrations and political action,

They fight by talking with and winning over the enemy soldiers.

To the Vietnamese, fighting with guns is only a part of political action. Here is an example:

Dawn, in the morning mist of January. On the river, thousands of little bamboo boats heading toward the provincial capital of Cao Lanh. In the boats, mostly women and old people. They are shouting, "Yankee, go home!" "Stop bombing our villages!"

Police hiding beside the river open fire. Some people, shot, fall out of the boats. Thousands more on the land run toward the river. The police, outnumbered, flee.

Saigon soldiers, many of them sons of the demonstrators, help pull the bodies out of the

river. They are confused, they don't want to shoot their own people.

Three planes appear and drop hand grenades on the crowd, now moving toward the town. The people keep on going. At the gate of the town they are stopped by a wall of bayonets. A young man steps forward from the crowd and tries to persuade the troops not to shoot. Shots ring out. He falls.

A young woman steps forward. She is shot. The crowd picks up the two bodies and surges forward toward the troops. The soldiers are petrified. Ten thousand peasants push their way through the soldiers and occupy the center of town.

The province chief is forced to talk to the crowd. He promises to stop the bombing of the villages. The people fill the streets, talking to the Saigon soldiers, explaining to them the policies of the NLF, persuading them to stop being puppets of the foreigners. Finally they march back to their villages.

The Vietnamese call this kind of demonstrators the "long-haired army," because they are mostly women. They have seen their brothers, fathers and sisters in the Liberation



Army killed, their children napalmed. They are an efficient "mass political army." They have come bare-handed and lain down in the road to stop armored tanks. They come by the hundreds and thousands to the home of a provincial chief, carrying their dead children or branches of defoliated trees in their hands.

While the men (and many women too) fight in the regular Liberation Army, the old people, women and children at home, carry on this political fight. If you counted them all up, in all the years of fighting the Americans, they would amount to millions.

* * *

South Vietnam is honeycombed with tunnels, dug by the people of the villages. Deep tunnels run for miles between villages. Villagers and NLF troops can live in them for days, under heavy bombing and then come out ready to fight the enemy.

The battle of Apbac in January 1963 was the turning point of the Special War. Saigon sent out 2,000 troops to fight 200 NLF guerrillas. The town was plastered with bombs for

days before. When everything had been flattened and nothing moved, the 2000 troops moved in.

Suddenly they met intense fire from the edge of the village. The 200 NLF troops had come up from their tunnels. The battle lasted for six hours. 450 Saigon troops were put out of action, an American major was abandoned to his fate in a swamp, six helicopters were shot down.

American newspapers reported, "Governmental forces have suffered the most shameful defeat so far, facing guerrilla forces many times smaller."

Meanwhile, the "strategic hamlet" program was disintegrating. The people just took over the hamlets and turned them into resistance bases. Once the Saigon army was kicked out, the concentration camps made nice well-fortified bases for the NLF. Sometimes the people just tore down the camp and went home.

Vietnamese soldiers in the Saigon army were deserting in droves. Every time they went on leave to their villages, the people talked to them and convinced them they shouldn't let themselves be used to fight their own families.

The Saigon government drafted thousands of young men into the puppet army, so an anti-draft movement got started, just like the one in America. People in Saigon and in the smaller towns hid deserters from the army. Thousands split with their shiny new American M-16 rifles and went to join the NLF.

By 1965 the Special War was dead. People's War had defeated it. It wasn't just the fighting skill of the NLF that defeated the Saigon army. It was the fact that in every part of South Vietnam there was a seething mass of people, politically hip and sophisticated, who demonstrated in the streets, faced machine-guns unarmed, went out on strike, and talked constantly with the puppet troops: the "long-haired" army.



There was practically no government in Saigon. After Diem was kicked out the Saigon "government" was overthrown 13 times in 20 months, replaced each time, as a Vietnamese student put it, by "a gathering of secret agents, drunkards and former accomplices of Diem."

The bigwigs in Washington stopped being nervous and started getting desperate. That's

when the bombing of North Vietnam began, in August 1964.

There was only one way out the bigwigs could see: abandon the Saigon army and send American soldiers in to fight a land war in Asia.

The advisors left, the GI's came in. A new phase was starting: the American War.



X

THE AMERICAN WAR: HOW THE U.S. DROPPED THE OFFENSIVE AND THE NLF PICKED IT UP

THE AMERICAN GENERALS tried, from 1961 to 1965, to get the Saigon Army to do the dirty work for them, and fell flat on their faces. The Saigon soldiers looked around them and saw that they were hired by foreigners to fight their own people. Their bosses squabbled among themselves over who would get what office in Saigon. Tens of thousands of Saigon soldiers deserted and went over to the NLF or just went home.

It got so bad that American advisors couldn't plan a military action without the NLF finding out before it happened. Who told them? Saigon soldiers (and officers too). Nothing was working out.

What does a big bully do when he tries to get a little bully to beat someone up and instead the little bully gets whipped? He either gives up or takes on the job himself.

General Maxwell Taylor, who planned the Special War against the Vietnamese, was fired and called back to Washington. The "American War" began. The Saigon Army was pushed aside and replaced by American GI's, who came in to save the Saigon Army from disaster.

The mightiest army in the world landed in Vietnam equipped with the latest weapons, planes, helicopters, and electronic computers. One-third of the U.S. tactical air force was



"The spirit of the people is greater than the Man's technology."

sent to Vietnam. Thirty billion dollars a year was taken from American taxpayers to pay for this gigantic effort. Surely America could not lose.

But from the word Go it started losing. The grand strategy of American War lost for the same reason the Special War lost: neither can win against People's War. As Huey Newton once said, "The spirit of the people is greater than the Man's technology." Nowhere is this more true than in Vietnam.

When American GI's arrived in Vietnam, the morale of the Saigon troops got even lower. They saw Americans everywhere get the best houses, cars and girls. Prices skyrocketed. American GI's lived in air-conditioned houses, ate good food, drank the best booze. Saigon soldiers were called "gooks" and treated as if they were the enemy. No wonder desertions increased—113,000 in 1965, 180,000 in 1966.

Some Saigon soldiers mutinied, killing American and Vietnamese officers. In March, 1966, the 1st Armoured Regiment at Phu Cuong revolted. Helped by the local population and a NLF unit, the Saigon soldiers captured armored cars, wiped out the Regimental Headquarters, knocked out a squadron of American tanks, blew up an ammunition dump and went off to join the NLF. This was just one of hundreds of Saigon troop rebellions.

One Saigon officer ordered his men to shoot down American defoliation airplanes that were spreading chemicals over the fields where the families of his soldiers lived!

The powerful American army was like an elephant trapped in a swamp. If the generals ordered the GI's to go out in the countryside and fight, the Vietnamese attacked the base. If they stayed on their base, they lost the countryside. General Westmoreland called for more and more troops, 200,000, then 300,000, then half a million. Still he didn't have enough.

The American army depended on planes, tanks and trucks. It could move fast, but this often meant it moved fast into a trap! It had tremendous firepower, but that didn't help. The NLF soldiers are masters at close fighting.



They stay in tunnels until the Americans are very close, then jump out, cut the enemy to ribbons and disappear. When this happened, the American generals couldn't call in air attacks—they'd kill their own men.

So despite the massive bombings, it was left up to the GI's to fight the war, slogging through swamps in unknown territory, mosquito-bitten, tormented by heat and leeches, walking along paths full of mines and traps. The soldiers felt lost. They had been trained to depend on machines and the machines were no use.

Also, the American GI isn't fighting a war he really believes in. When you get right down to it, beliefs make a soldier. When Americans were fighting fascism in World War II, they believed in their cause and were good soldiers.

That's why the Vietnamese soldiers in the NLF are such good fighters. They know they are fighting for their country, for independence and freedom. They know there will be no freedom and no future for them and their people as long as Vietnam is occupied by foreigners.

American GI's fight only because they are ordered to. Some believe they are fighting communism, but when they get to Vietnam and see that their "enemy" is *everybody*, men, women and children, they get disillusioned.

By 1971 morale among the American troops had reached the lowest point in

history. Desertions and drug use soared. Whole platoons refused to move into NLF territory. Some GI's left to fight with the NLF or to live with the Vietnamese in Saigon. Officers became so fearful of assassination that units not in combat were forced to turn in their weapons!

The American "offensive" ended two years after it began in a little province called Tay-nin on the Cambodian border. This was the scene of America's biggest military operation, Operation Junction City.

It began on February 2, 1967, with bombing: napalm, cluster bombs (bombs that break open and shoot out thousands of little steel pellets that shred the flesh of anyone they hit), gas bombs and defoliation gas. In one day, American planes dropped 1,000 tons of bombs on this little province. That's the same amount of bombs dropped on Dresden, Germany, during World War II, destroying the city and killing more people than the atom bomb we dropped on Hiroshima.

The American generals thought they could trap and destroy the regular armies of the NLF. As soon as the bombing stopped, thousands of men were parachuted in, armored cars smashed into the province, troops sealed off the entire area.

But they couldn't find any NLF armies! Guerrillas, not members of the regular army, cut them off as they attacked.

Vietnamese soldiers appeared from nowhere, blasting the armored columns and the paratroopers and then disappearing. Slowly, day by day, week by week, the American army was harassed, beaten and turned back.

By the end of Junction City, 10,000 troops, mostly Americans, had been killed and wounded, 1,000 military vehicles destroyed and 100 aircraft knocked out of the air.

That was pretty much the end of the American War. American troops who retreated to Bien Hoa airbase, a few miles north of Saigon, were attacked there just as they arrived. 8,000 napalm bombs and 25,000 gallons of gasoline were destroyed. There was no rest for the defeated Americans.

After that, Westmoreland gave up his grand plans for offensive action against the NLF.

American strategy was now called "Clear and Hold." That's a fancy name for making the best of a bad scene. American troops stayed on their bases, making them as safe as possible and rarely going out into the countryside.

The Americans went on the defensive and the NLF took the offensive. In the early weeks of 1968, during the Tet holiday (the Vietnamese New Year), the war turned around.

This amazing offensive, unparalleled in military history, changed the war. The NLF in a few days attacked and mostly seized 140 towns from the far north of South Vietnam to the far south, including 37 of South Vietnam's 40 provincial capitals.

As Wilfred Burchett reported: "In complete secrecy, under the noses of the most sophisticated military machine that has ever taken the field, the NLF attacked the heart of every major military and administrative installation in South Vietnam . . . all four zonal headquarters of the Saigon army, 8 out of 11 divisional headquarters and two American army field headquarters . . .

"Among 18 major targets attacked in Saigon itself were the U.S. Embassy, the U.S.-Saigon armed forces headquarters, the South Vietnam naval headquarters and the Saigon radio station (which was completely destroyed). Thirty airfields were attacked with the destruction of 1,500 planes and helicopters."

There is no doubt that the Vietnamese are able to beat the American and Saigon armies on the battlefield. They could, if they decided to, push both their enemies into the sea. But this would cost them many lives. Already at least a million South Vietnamese have died in the war.

They would rather negotiate a peaceful settlement than cause any more deaths; that's why they are in Paris today. While they *negotiate* for peace, they continue to *fight* for independence and freedom.

While the fighting goes on, the Vietnamese are doing more than fighting. In the liberated zones of South Vietnam and in the whole of North Vietnam the Vietnamese are building a new society.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF PEOPLE'S WAR

WHAT IS LIFE in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) like? The best reports come from people who have been there. Julius Lester, writer and photographer, visited the DRV in 1967. This is what he wrote when he returned to the U.S.:

It was Easter Sunday, 1967, when I first heard bombing. It was a clear, hot Vietnamese day and I had spent the morning watching peasants working the rice fields a few hundred yards behind the bamboo guest house where I was staying. Around noon they left the fields and a half hour later it started.

WOOM! WOOM!

It sounded like muffled thunder, but I was in North Vietnam and there, all that sounds like thunder may not be thunder.

WOOM! WOOM!

Sometimes it was close enough to shake the ground where I stood. Other times, it was far away. Always it was there.

WOOM! WOOM!

The Vietnamese didn't seem to notice. The woman and little girl picking flowers a few feet away never paused or looked around, even when the three U.S. jets streaked over the trees a short distance away.

It was typical Vietnamese behavior. In Hanoi one could always see lines of people at the flower stands in the evening buying flowers to take home. In the parks there would be couples holding hands. On the sidewalks, children playing. And everywhere, incredibly beautiful women. Often I wanted to





scream, "Hey! Don't y'all know there's a war going on? I mean, come on! Be serious, will ya?" In the evening Hanoi's beer parlors were crowded; theatres packed and the movie house (where a Russian murder flick was playing) was always filled.

LIVE AT NIGHT

After midnight the streets really came alive as anti-aircraft guns were moved around and supply trucks sped through the streets. I never got a good night's sleep during the month I was there, but awakened each morning with the feeling that half the country had been moved around during the night. This was partially true. Anti-aircraft guns seldom remain in the same place two days in a row. Factories have been decentralized. Hospitals are portable and can be dismantled with all equipment, medicine and patients evacuated in a few hours time.

There is a war going on, but for the Vietnamese, it just seems to be part of a day's

work. They have integrated the war into their lives and are using it as an instrument to accelerate the growth of their country. Production is increasing in all areas—agricultural and industrial. Not that there is much industry. It is still an agrarian country with the work done by people, not machines. In many instances peasants point to new iron plows, harrows and rakes with pride. Wooden farm tools are still common.

LITTLE AID

As a people, the Vietnamese are very reserved, proud, independent and nationalistic. They receive little aid from China and Russia and don't want much. They defeated the French by themselves. They will defeat the Americans by themselves. They are very proud of the fact that although Kubla Khan conquered China, he was defeated when he invaded Vietnam. "We have a long history of defeating aggressors," I was told often.

To see the Vietnamese is to know that

machines and technology cannot defeat people with the correct political understanding. (And we must recognize that there is such a thing as "correct political understanding" and recognizing this, begin to attain it.) I met no Vietnamese who did not know who he was fighting and why. The more political spoke in Marxist terminology, but I remember best the words of one old man in Thanh Hoa Province: "Under the French, we had nothing. Now we have everything. The Americans will have to kill all of us to get it."

BOMBS INEFFECTIVE

The bombing of North Vietnam has been singularly ineffective. Of course, there has been loss of life and destruction of hospitals, schools, churches, villages, cities, highways, railroads and bridges. These have been systematically destroyed, because in the kind of war being waged on North Vietnam a military target is defined for its psycho-social content. Destruction of these institutions is supposed to lower the morale of the people, so the Pentagon postulates. It is a despicable war, one in which ten-year-old boys minding water buffalo in the fields are picked as targets, where dikes are systematically attacked, where night raids were ordered against the populous workers' quarters in Nam Dinh, where roads and schools are bombed at school-opening time. Johnson has said that the targets in North Vietnam are "steel and concrete." This overlooks one simple fact: there isn't much steel and concrete in the country. What little there was is no more. The United States is using weapons against the will of a people. It's a losing battle.

The best evidence of the will of the people can be seen in the small numbers of deaths. This is due to the defense system of North Vietnam, which ranges from missiles to anti-aircraft guns, to teenage girls with rifles to trenches in schools, around hospitals, houses and even underneath beds. The second reason the war of genocide has failed is due to the attitude of the Vietnamese. The U.S. forgets that it was the Vietnamese who learned how to carry a half-ton of supplies on a bicycle during the war against the French. And those

bicycles are once more on the roads, loaded with bricks, coal and everything else imaginable. (The Vietnamese don't have many trucks.) These are the people who, when a bridge is knocked out, build a pontoon bridge every evening and dismantle it every morning. These are the people who fill in the bomb craters on Highway 1 after each day's attack and despite McNamara's claim that the flow supplies has been seriously impeded on Highway 1, it is not true. It is true that the supply trucks and jeeps move slowly, but it's only because there are so many trucks and jeeps on the road. The same is true of the railroad. Lying in ditches alongside the railroad are spare rails and cross-ties. After each bombing new track and cross-ties have replaced the destroyed ones in a matter of hours. Perhaps the Pentagon should send their press releases to the Vietnamese, because they don't seem to understand that the railroad has been made inoperative.



INGENUITY

Because of their pride, their almost fanatical nationalism, the Vietnamese are almost entirely self-reliant. They trust no one completely who is not Vietnamese. Their self-reliance gives them more ingenuity than Johnson has lies. Often they will fill the twenty-foot bomb craters with water, stock the "pond" with fish and a village that had never thought of breeding fish boosts the economy of the country. The scrap metal from planes shot down over the country is used to make medical tools, rings and vases. Bomb canisters are filled with dirt and flowers planted in them.

There is no aspect of the country's life that has not been affected by the war, but an adjustment has been made so that the war becomes as normal as rice-planting. North Vietnam is perhaps best symbolized by the scenes of beautiful, graceful young girls working the rice fields with rifles on their backs. Or the common sight in Hanoi's streets of a man pedalling his bicycle with a baby in a bamboo

chair on the fender, a rifle on the man's back and in his hand, long-stemmed red, blue and white flowers.

There is a war going on in Vietnam and they are using it to their advantage, which is the only way. It would seem that we, living under much less arduous conditions, could use this war to our revolutionary advantage, also. Too, it would be good practice for what is to come.

(Reprinted from The Movement newspaper)

The Vietnamese in the northern part of their country have freed themselves from 2,000 years of foreign oppression, under the heaviest bombing ever rained upon a people on the face of the earth.

They are building socialism in their country. Many countries call themselves "socialist." What it means depends on what country you're talking about. When a friend complains to you about how terrible socialism is, show him this chapter. To millions of people in the world, socialism means simply "freedom."



XII

LIBERATED ARMY, LIBERATED LIVES

THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT has liberated most of South Vietnam; more and more every day. Roughly speaking, they govern at least two-thirds of the country and at least one-half of the population.

Even that doesn't give a real picture. The so-called Saigon-held or "contested" zones are open territory for the NLF. In most contested areas the U.S.-Saigon forces control the area by day, the NLF by night. There (and in the heart of American territory, Saigon itself), the NLF has set up "shadow" governments, often by democratic election of the people in the area. These governments are directing the struggle and only waiting for liberation to come out in the open.

The NLF moves freely in and out of Saigon. Rice is brought from the Mekong Delta, sold in Saigon and the money used to buy American guns on the black market, which are then sent back to the liberated zones. When I met young members of the NLF in 1968 I asked one of them how he got in and out of Saigon.

"Usually," he said, "I wear the uniform of a puppet (Saigon) soldier. Sometimes we just go up to the guard post and say 'We're from the NLF, let us in,' and the guard says, 'Sure, go on in, go on in.'"

What is life like in the liberated zones? Most Americans assume that the NLF has some kind of terrorist dictatorship there that forces the local people to support them. Think about this. When the Saigon government used terror to control the peasants, the peasants revolted. Terror never kept them down. Why don't they revolt against the NLF?

An American AP reporter was mystified when he reported on a battle the NLF had just won:

"According to later intelligence," he said, "only about 200 of the guerrillas were armed, regular Viet Cong troops. The rest were

peasant youths living in the area, pressed into service by the fighters to serve as coolies in digging foxholes and mine emplacements and to carry off equipment and bodies. But none of these 'extras' turned traitor to their bosses, and all of them worked with the same courage and discipline as the regulars."

If the local people were "pressed" into service, you'd think they would run off to Saigon and be free. But they don't.

They support the NLF.

There are two kinds of fighters in the Liberated Zones: the regular army of the NLF and the "self-defense" groups. The peasant youths the AP reporter talked about were actually members of the self-defense group for that area.

One of the few non-Vietnamese to travel in Liberated Zones is the Australian writer Wilfred Burchett:



"In Cu Chi District, virtually all hamlets were interconnected with such a tunnel system into which the self-defense forces could withdraw in case of overwhelming force and within which they could maneuver to outflank the enemy, striking from the least expected places at the most unexpected times, to disappear underground again to explode electrically controlled mines or ambush from underground firepoints within the maze of tunnels and communications trenches of which they were the undisputed masters.

"The self-defense units set up during the campaigns to destroy the 'strategic hamlets' had these immediate aims: to use the guns to defend the new, free life; the fight to live in their former villages, cultivate their old fields and protect the new ones received under land reform; freedom to practice the cult of their ancestors; to resist the tax collectors and landlords' agents and to resist at all costs being herded back into concentration type hamlets."

The first thing the NLF does when it liberates an area is to take land away from the landlords and give it to the poor and landless

peasants. Liberation is not an abstract thing to the peasants. The first thing the Saigon government did when it took over was to take land *away* from the peasants and give it to the landlords. Which would you choose if you were a Vietnamese peasant?

Burchett asked an NLF organizer why the people supported them. This was his answer:

"We help them to start up their vegetable gardens and orchards again, help them to dig fish ponds, plant bamboo and trees, build pigsties and chicken coops. The new administration immediately forms committees for education, public health, economic affairs, defense and security, and people really feel they are running their own lives."

The American army doesn't do that, even in America. What does the American army do for us, except get us killed? The Vietnamese support their liberation army more than we support the American army. Does the American army make you feel you are running your own life? Do you *ever* feel you are running your own life?

Let's compare the Liberation Army of South Vietnam with the American Army.



That'll give you a good idea of life in the Liberated Zones.

The American army is not democratic, to say the least. They'll bust you for handing out a leaflet in the barracks.

The Liberation Army combines democracy and leadership. Before every battle, the officers and men meet in small groups and discuss what is going to happen. As long as any rank-and-file soldier has a question about the battle, they keep talking until all are satisfied.

During the battle, each does exactly what is agreed. Afterwards they meet again and criticize what happened. Sometimes if a commander messes up, his men choose another man to be commander.

In the American army the brass decides who the officers will be.

The soldiers of the Liberation Army *elect* their officers!

American army officers go to academies and West Point and ROTC.

Officers of the Liberation Army rise from the ranks of the people. They have no more money than the footsoldiers. Their parents and congressman didn't send them to any West Point.

The American army has officers' clubs, officers' housing, different food, different recreation, different uniforms.

Officers and men of the Liberation Army dress alike, eat the same food, sleep in the same hammocks, share the same bamboo huts.

Last, and maybe most important of all, every soldier in the Liberation Army knows what he is fighting for. They don't get confused and cynical like American soldiers when they find out what the fight in Vietnam is really like, compared to what they were told during Basic Training.

Which kind of army would you rather be in?

The Vietnamese aren't in this thing for a one-year tour of duty. They're in it for the rest of their lives. Some of them have been fighting in the same area for 20 years. Vietnam is a small country; they could easily walk out of the Liberated Zones. But they don't.

The American army and air force can bomb

villages off the map, destroy crops and slaughter civilians. They can obliterate whole sections of the country. But the people stay and fight.

That's what life is like in the Liberated Zones.



XIII

LAOS, CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM: AN INDOCHINA WAR

Richard Nixon, like three presidents before him, refuses to accept the facts of life in Vietnam:

- Vietnam is one nation.

- The political coalition that now governs most of South Vietnam is not President Thieu and his friends, but the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) which was organized after the Tet offensive in 1968. It consists of communists and non-communists, the National Liberation Front, catholics and buddhists.

- The people of Vietnam overwhelmingly support the PRG. It is them. It is the natural result of 1000 years of proud struggle against foreign invaders.

- If the US left Vietnam today, tomorrow the people of South Vietnam would elect the PRG as its democratic government. The war would be over. The people of Vietnam would have peace, independence and sovereignty — the goal they have suffered a thousand years to win.

The businessmen, generals, and politicians who run America still hope for a "Korean solution", a divided Vietnam ruled in the south by a puppet "free world" regime, an American-ruled outpost in Asia.

That's what Nixon's position at the Paris peace talks is about. Nothing else.

Since the negotiations started, what has the United States been doing in Indochina? The US has intensified and broadened the war. It is more intense because there is more destruction from bombing in Indochina today than ever before. And the war is wider because the US, defeated by people's war in Vietnam, has escalated its secret military operations in Laos and Cambodia into an all-out war. The struggle is now an all-Indochinese one. The invasions of Cambodia and Laos, as well as

the "Vietnamization" of the war, reflects Nixon's frantic search for a new way to fight and win a war he can't win.

* * *

We've heard a lot about Vietnam in the last few years and almost nothing about Laos. Laos, located to the west of North Vietnam, has been the victim of US special war since 1961. Special war means that the American people don't get to hear or see much about what the US does when it makes war. Laotian cities are now bloated with refugees fleeing from the countryside, which has been the most heavily bombed area in world history. Whole villages, farms and factories, schools and hospitals, have been destroyed in eastern Laos. The CIA is using the traditional divisions among the people to its own advantage, training the Meo hill people to fight their plain-dwelling neighbors.

The people of Laos, like their Vietnamese neighbors, have been fighting for decades. They are led by the Pathet Lao or the Neo Lao Hak Xat which means Laotian Patriotic Front. They have adapted new ways to adjust to the daily massive bombing of their land. People live underground and in caves while planes streak overhead. Despite these handicaps, the Pathet Lao and the people of Laos defeated CIA troops in 1970 and took back the Plain of Jars, an important strategic area in Laos. Recently, the CIA's Meo camp at Long Chen was destroyed by the Pathet Lao.

The Laotians, like the Vietnamese, are fighting and winning people's war.

In February, 1971, Laos was invaded by a combined force of South Vietnamese (ARVN) and American troops. Nixon declared the purpose of this invasion was to cut



the flow of supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail going to South Vietnam from North Vietnam. What he didn't say to us was that he thought the CIA and the pro-American Royal Laotian Army needed some help controlling the successful Laotian struggle for independence. Originally the invasion was to last through May, but by the middle of March it was clear the ARVN could not hold its own on Laotian soil, even with American support. The area was remote, without roads and supplies necessary for a regular army. The South Vietnamese army was entirely dependent upon American helicopters for food and ammunition. When the Laotian people fought back against the troops and helicopters, the ARVN was forced into an unexpected and disorderly retreat. ARVN troops left Laos clinging to the running boards of helicopters; those who couldn't get on just dropped their weapons and ran back across the border.

* * *

The Cambodian people joined the Laotians and Vietnamese in the spring of 1970 in the struggle for independence.

For almost 20 years, since Cambodia gained its independence from the French, Prince Norodom Sihanouk had led his coun-

try down the narrowing path of neutrality. Sihanouk, who was a descendent of the ancient Khmer (Cambodian) kings, had the prestige and dedication to keep his country neutral and independent while warfare raged in neighboring Laos and Vietnam. He accepted US aid, but allowed NLF forces to pass through Cambodia's thinly-populated border zones.

The US government realized the threat these NLF supply trails in Cambodia posed to the war effort in South Vietnam. In an effort to close off these trails, the US began military raids in Cambodian territory. The Cambodian government responded by allying itself with the liberation forces in Vietnam and, in 1965, broke off relations with the US.

This move changed the political situation within Cambodia. The wealthy elite could no longer depend on the Sihanouk regime to supply them with American money. So they turned against Sihanouk, staging a coup with the help of the US against his government in 1970. Since then Lon Nol and his friends have been the "official" government of Cambodia. Lon Nol does not represent anyone but a small group of very rich pro-American Cambodians living in the cities. The peasants of Cambodia who have never received the benefits of American aid, have remained loyal to



Sihanouk.

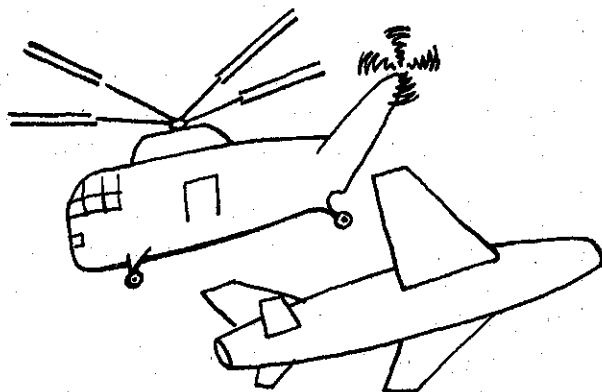
For a long time Nixon and before him, Lyndon Johnson, had sought a friendly government in Cambodia so that the US could send in troops to occupy the border zones next to South Vietnam. When Lon Nol took power Nixon had his chance. Lon Nol was not going to say no to American and ARVN troops going into Cambodia. So US armies, escorted by waves of planes, drove into Cambodia. Weeks of burning and looting followed. People were driven from their homes and villages.

The Cambodian invasion came to an abrupt halt, however, because of the resistance of the Cambodian peasants and the liberation forces allied with them from North and South Vietnam. The American people, too, refused to accept the decision to expand the war into Cambodia. Massive demonstrations inside the US helped convince Nixon that he could not afford to stay in Cambodia. The invasion was finally called off and the troops returned to Vietnam.

Neither the Laos nor the Cambodia operations helped the American strategy for winning in Indochina. But Nixon's actions did help unite the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia against US presence in Southeast Asia. A united front of Indochinese peoples

was created bringing together the liberation forces of North and South Vietnam with the Laotians and Cambodians.

In the face of these defeats in Indochina



from 1969 to 1971 and the growing anti-war movement in the US, Nixon had to take steps to disguise the war. He publicized the withdrawal of US forces and his "Vietnamization" plan. In effect the change in policy was a re-run of the special war strategy the US employed in Vietnam from 1961 to 1965, with the addition of more modern technology. It is a brutal policy of training Asians to fight Asians, thus lowering the costs of the war both in American money and in American lives.

Meanwhile for the Vietnamese, the war goes on and on. To them "Vietnamization" simply means they pay more with their lives and their land. Vietnamese men of the South, uprooted by the relocation of their families and the destruction of their farmland, are forced to join the ARVN to provide for their families. There is no other way to earn money in South Vietnam. The Vietnamese are forced by threats from the generals to vote in rigged elections, to act against their respect and admiration of the Vietnamese leaders of the North and their love of their own country. What the Vietnamese really want is to see their country reunited and its damaged resources rebuilt.

This is not just a problem for the young men who are drafted into the ARVN. The whole countryside and the entire population is threatened by elaborate new developments in technological and psychological warfare. Helicopters carry loudspeakers which tell everyone in a given area to leave or be considered Viet Cong suspects. Computerized

planes then bomb the area, making no distinction among targets. Pilots don't even know what they are hitting. Bombs are dropped on anything—schools, hospitals, houses.

To the Vietnamese, this is the meaning of Vietnamization.

But Vietnamization, like earlier policies, is not working. The Vietnamese continue to fight back, with all the spirit they have gained from years of struggle.

The current offensive in South Vietnam, begun in April, 1972, has routed ARVN troops from hundreds of villages and fire-bases. Whole provinces have been liberated. Nixon says this is an "invasion from the North" but what we are really seeing is people's war at work. The offensive has been successful because the people of Vietnam are fighting to regain their land and their liberty. As long as American guns remain on Vietnamese soil, the Vietnamese will fight.

And the Vietnamese can wait. Their patience has lasted through defeat and betrayal. They are on the verge of victory. They have the solution for economic and political independence at hand.

They will not give this up at a negotiation table, in a rigged election, or on the battlefield. They will not be fooled by newspaper reports of Nixon's peace offers.

A thousand years ago, Cao Bien had the good sense to get out when he knew he was beaten. The spirit figure that visited him on the banks of the River Lo must visit the White House too, these years, haunting Nixon's dreams.

It is the power of the people.

XIV

THE WAR IS NOT A MISTAKE

You've read this book. You know the war is not a mistake; it's a result of a whole system that's built on the principle of making a few men richer, at the expense of the people of the world.

That system is imperialism. It is built on the desire for profits and power for the rulers of a few countries, like the US, Japan and West Germany. The US is the world leader of this imperialist system. The "Free World" is nothing but sweet talk for what is the US empire.

The name of their game is money and power. Power over people is power to make money — not the kind of money we make, our wages, scholarships and salaries. Big money, profits off the work of others.

And big money and power rely on racism, the exploitation of people of color based on the idea that they are inferior to white people. That means that Third World people, here and the world over, Blacks, Browns, Asians, get it the worst.

When an American businessman looks at a map of Southeast Asia, he doesn't see people — he sees minerals, oil, rubber, rice. Where do the Asians come in? They're supposed to dig for the minerals and the oil, tap the rubber trees, grow the rice and hand it over. As long as they work hard and cooperate they are all right; but if they resist, as the Vietnamese have done, then they are "commie-gooks" threatening to take over the whole world. The same thing happens here when Third World people resist.

Most people here spend their whole lives making other people rich. We work eight, nine, ten hours a day at a job which is boring and dull. We are insulted and abused by the hot-air freaks in Washington. They tell us we

should be loyal Americans and pay our taxes, support government policies no matter how many lies are told to us. In other words, work hard and keep your mouth shut.

And our bosses lie to us and try to tell us we are happy.

They send us 6,000 miles to fight peasants who want to be free. And we get killed because we, too, are victims of the imperialists, the same ones we pay taxes to—money we never see again because it gets dropped in the jungles and shot and left on the moon and wasted and turned into bombs.

That's what we and the Vietnamese have in common: the generals, politicians and the men who run the companies make profits off both of us, and neither of us is free. They want to control our lives so they can remain in power.

The Vietnamese have a head start on us in winning their freedom. They're not going to work for bosses: they're going to work for themselves. The word they use to describe that goal is "socialism."

We have begun to fight too. Look at what's happening in the prisons, or in the Brown, Black, Red and Asian communities. Look at GI's, women, young people in schools, workers in factories. People have begun to stir and say "Enough!"

We can learn some lessons from the Vietnamese:

The Vietnamese are winning their struggle for freedom, a small nation without advanced technology, winning over the most powerful nation on earth. It's taking them a long time. But they're winning. And we are beginning to realize that as they win, that means we are winning too; and that if they can win, we can too.

FURTHER READING

Books by and about Vietnamese are hard to come by in this country. The ones in this list are available from China Books and Periodicals, with stores at:

2929 24th St., San Francisco, CA 94110

95 5th Ave., New York, NY 10003

900 West Armitage, Chicago, IL 60614

Vietnam Studies is a magazine published in Hanoi. Each issue deals with a particular area of Vietnamese life.

No. 12 Fundamental Problems - history of Vietnam and the war 1.00

No. 14 Literature and National Liberation in South Vietnam 1.00

No. 23 South Vietnam: From the NLF to the Provisional Revolutionary Government 2.00

No. 25 Twenty-five years of Health Work 1.50

No. 30 General Education in the D.R.V.N. 1.50

From Khe Sanh to Chepone: Invasion of Laos Feb. 1971. Published in Hanoi, 75 cents

The Indochinese People Will Win. Summit

Conference of the Indochinese Peoples, 1970. Published in Hanoi. 75 cents

Our President Ho Chi Minh, An official biography published in Hanoi. \$1.50

South Vietnam National Front For Liberation - Documents. Contains the program of the NLF. 75 cents

Ho Chi Minh's Prison Diary is a collection of Ho's poems. Published in Hanoi. \$2.00

Vietnam Will Win! by Wilfred Burchett. The author, who spent years with the Liberation Forces in South Vietnam, tells how they beat the forces of the US and the Saigon regime. 1970. \$2.95

The Peasants of North Vietnam by Gerard Chaliand. \$1.65

The Enemy by Felix Greene, isn't just about Vietnam, but is about imperialism and revolution all over the world. \$1.95

Laos: War and Revolution. About the land, the people and their struggle, the US role, etc. Edited by Nina Adams and Alfred McCoy. \$4.75



