'No army in the world can defeat an idea whose time has come'

Victor Hugo

Rec'd 11-27-70

Left

Why We Lost the War in Vietnam

J.C. PEELE, M.D.
KINSTON, N. C.

NORTH CAROLINA
HOOVER COLLECTION
J. C. PEELE, M.D.

The United States has been defeated in Vietnam. Like the Chinese, Mongols, Japanese and French before us, we are withdrawing from Vietnam.

Though the U.S. has poured over $100 billion into Vietnam in the last five years and dropped twice the bomb tonnage we did in WWII, the war is stalemated. This stalemate, in time, will lead to a Communist victory.

The clues to this failure of American military might lie in Vietnamese history-- in the heroic tradition of struggle against foreigners, in U.S. support for French colonialism, in the Communist-led victory over the French, and most recently in U.S. aid to the corrupt Saigon regime.

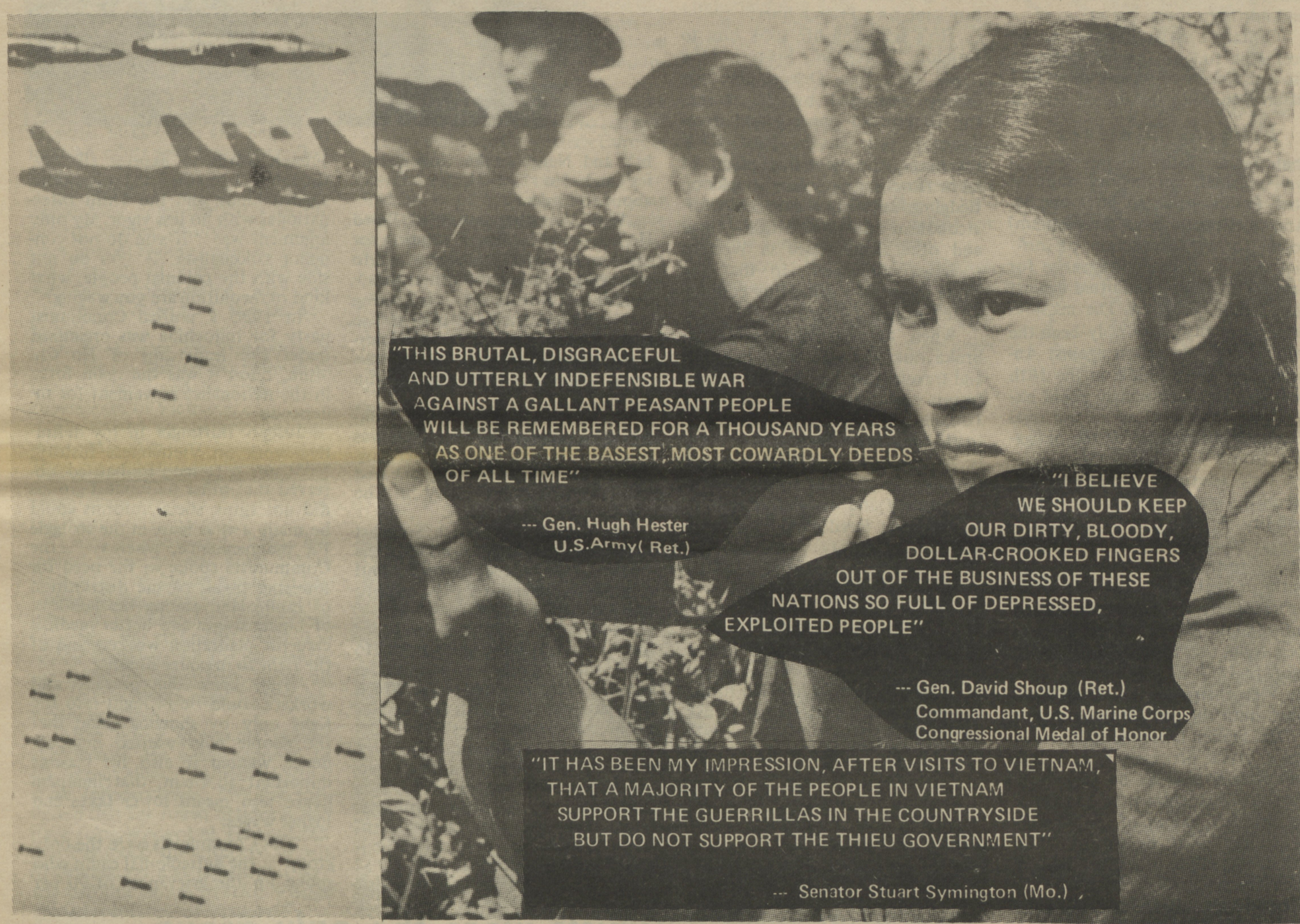
In effect, the U.S. has been fighting on the wrong side in a totally unjust war.

The Communist revolutionaries are winning because for the past 25 years they have championed the Vietnamese people's drive for independence and human rights.

We Americans are losing because our leaders- from Truman to Nixon- arrogantly believed that American technology and money were more powerful than the patriotic faith of Asian peasants.

The Vietnamese have proved our leaders wrong, and 50,000 Americans and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese have died because of that arrogance.

The day must come when the American people will call these leaders to account for having so grossly misled us.



Guerrilla war defeats Mongol invaders

"We have fought a thousand years" is the proud boast of Vietnamese patriots. "And we will fight another thousand if needed."

For the two thousand years Vietnam has existed, the Vietnamese have fought the Chinese, the Mongols, the Thais, the Japanese, and the French.

Today millions of Vietnamese are fighting against a huge American expeditionary force sent in 1965 and 1966 to suppress a popular peasant revolution.

Vietnam was a Chinese province from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D. when the Vietnamese successfully revolted. With the exception of a twenty year period in the 15th century, the Vietnamese were free from foreign rule until the French arrived.

Of all the stories of Vietnamese resistance to foreign intruders, few show the stubborn character of the Vietnamese people as well as their heroic fight against the Mongol hordes of Kublai Khan in 1284.

There were perhaps 300,000 Mongol troops arrayed against a Vietnamese population of about 1,000,000.

In this hour of need a great military thinker, General Dao, posed a a strategy of what we now call guerrilla warfare.

As Bernard Fall (a highly respected French scholar and reporter of Vietnamese affairs) has noted: "His principles could just as well have been written by Mao Tsetung or Dao's present day successor in Hanoi General Vo Nguyen Giap, the victor of Dien Bien Phu. 'The enemy must fight his battle far from his home base for a long time... We must further weaken him by drawing him into protracted campaigns. Once his initial dash is broken, it will be easy to destroy him.' "

Thus did the tiny Vietnamese nation force the mighty Mongol Empire (which had pushed all the way to the borders of Europe) to withdraw from Vietnam.

In 1615, the first Italian and Portuguese Jesuits arrived in Vietnam, opening up the country to Western influence.

The Vietnamese, understandably, resented the white priests with their missionary zeal. In 1833 the emperor issued a royal edict outlawing Christianity.

Twenty-five years later a joint French-Spanish fleet destroyed the Vietnamese navy near Danang in response to the deaths and persecutions of Catholic priests. This operation soon developed into a policy of conquering Vietnam for the

'I think the American people greatly underestimate the determination of the Vietnamese people.'

Ho Chi Minh

French empire.

By 1867, France had completed its conquest of the lower third of Vietnam, and by 1884, it had extended its control over the central and northern parts.

Captain Charles Cosselin, an officer who fought against Vietnamese resistance movements after 1883 offered this explanation of French

French Motives

that France came to intervene in well-informed on history suppose that France came to intervene in Annam (French name for Vietnam) solely for the protection of missionaries or to seek vengeance for acts of hostility committed against the Catholic religion. The missionaries, in reality, have only been the pretext for our action against Annam. The loss of India in the 18th century, the increasingly rapid extension in the Far East of our rival England, imposed on us the obligation to set foot in the China seas, the only alternative being our falling into a state of contemptible inferiority. Annam gave us the opportunity, the massacre of Frenchmen who were there as missionaries gave us the pretext."

Resistance to the French started immediately as the young emperor, Ham Nghi, fled to the mountains to fight. In 1888 he was betrayed, but the Vietnamese put up strong resistance until the end of the century.

The French takeover of Vietnam was a brutal process. One of the men France sent to be Governor-General of Indochina tried to reduce the people's hatred of the French by ending what he termed "the acts of incredible brutality" against the Vietnamese.

In 1894 he wrote: "It seemed to me that the burning of villages, the mass shootings, the bayonet slaughters, and the executions of notables should be replaced by other less violent procedures."

The anti-French resistance, by this time, had gone underground and spread its roots. There were abortive revolts (1888, 1908,1916, and 1930)with thousands of Vietnamese murdered and other thousands exiled. Secret societies mushroomed.

Ho Chi Minh is born

In 1890, a son was born to a member of one such society. The father, an ardent patriot, named the boy Nguyen (the family name) That Thanh (Who Will Be Victorious). He would grow up to lead his people's fight for independence. and take the name Ho Chi Minh.

At the age of 20, after leaving a prestigious French-Vietnamese high school in Hué, Ho became a teacher, then a baker's apprentice in Saigon. In 1912, he landed a messboy's job on a French liner.

Ho's seafaring life took him to London, Marseilles, Boston, New York, even New Orleans. He was deeply impressed by the racism, the widespread poverty and decadence he saw in the West. KKK lynchings, the wretched plight of labor (low wages, police attacks on fledgling unions), the excesses of alcoholism and prostitution– these and other weaknesses in Western societies convinced Ho that the white men who ruled his country were hardly a master race.

When the Russian Revolution broke out, Ho was living in Paris and traveling among the Vietnamese troops and factory workers (some 100,000) brought from the colony to aid the Allied cause.

At this point, Ho still believed that an appeal to the Western ideals of equality and self-determination would bring freedom for his country.

Ho at Versailles

The turning point in Ho's life came in 1919 when, armed with a modest 8-point program and wearing a pinstriped suit, he went to the Versailles Peace Conference to ask the Allies to support the Vietnamese cause in the post-war settlement.

Ho never got past the secretaries.

Bernard Fall describes the result: "Versailles held out the hope of not merely being another big-power palaver where the map of the world would be carved up by a few superpowers but–as America's President Wilson hoped–was to be the cradle of a just peace for all and bring the right of self-determination to nations yet unborn... The aspiring leaders of such nations, from the Balkans to the Caucasus, Eastern Europe and South Asia, hovered in the wings in the hope of finding a powerful champion for their causes...

"But this was still a white man's world: Nobody backed independence for any African or East Asian country–a lesson which the Gandhi's and Nehru's, the Haile-Selasies and Ho Chi Minh's weren't about to forget."

With Versailles, says Fall, "died Ho's hopes of a 'liberal' solution for his country, and he was also able to observe now what the other unsuccessful petitioners were muttering among themselves, the Irish in the lead: armed revolution was the answer, the road to power via the terrorist bomb and the guerrilla's gun barrel."

At that very moment, one country not present at Versailles was proving this very point–Soviet Russia. Her example was wildly debated by every Socialist party in the world.

Ho joined the French Socialist Party and soon found himself in the midst of a heated debate about whether the Socialist Party ought to join Lenin's Third International:

Ho has explained what happened then: "What I wanted most to know–and this precisely was not debated in the meetings–was: Which International sides with the peoples of the colonial countries?

"I raised this question–the most important in my opinion–in a meeting. Some comrades answered: It is the Third, not the Second International. And a comrade gave me Lenin's 'Thesis on the national and colonial questions' to read.

"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, clearsightedness, 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!"

"After that, I had entire confidence in Lenin, in the Third International...Though I was still lacking French words to express all my thoughts, I smashed the allegations against Lenin and the Third International with no less vigor. My only argument was: "If you do not condemn colonialism, if you do not side with the colonial people, what kind of revolution are you waging?"

In 1930 a unified Communist party for Indochina was organized under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. Soon it was the main force in the nationalist movement for independence.

Joseph Buttinger in his definitive work on Vietnamese history, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, observed that other nationalist groups did not think social reforms could be made a vital issue in the struggle for independence, whereas "...the Communists spoke of the need for lowering taxes, of the distribution of estate land among the landless, of higher wages and better medical care for plantation workers and of the right to organize unions.

"They knew that peasants and workers could be brought into the fight only by showing them that the people who wanted independence wanted it also for reasons important to them, that independence also meant lower taxes and higher wages.

"The Communists were the only group in the anticolonial camp who spoke for the grievances of 90 per cent of the people under the colonial regime.

"In contrast to the Communists the nationalists never gained, never even consistently sought any support among workers and peasants. It was their belief that only the 'advanced elements' of every class could participate in the anticolonial struggle.

"The Communists soon proved them wrong."

By the beginning of World War II the Communists were the only nationalist group with any nationwide

'The Communists were the only group who spoke for the grievances of 90 per cent of the people under colonial rule'

Joseph Buttinger

J.C. PEELE, M.D.
KINSTON, N. C.

'The case of Indochina is perfectly clear
France has milked it for one hundred years.
The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that.' FDR

U.S. backs French colonial war

organization.

The Japanese moved into Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) in 1940. In contrast to their policy elsewhere, they collaborated with the white European power instead of working with the native population.

Ho helps U.S. pilots

Ho Chi Minh was freely recognized by both the United States and Nationalist China as the leader of the Free Indochina movement during World War II. The Allies supplied Ho's forces with weapons and ammunition. His forces, in return, supplied intelligence and helped American pilots shot down over Vietnam.

In March 1945, the Japanese ended their collaboration with the French colonial government and set up a puppet regime under Bao Dai–the emperor of Vietnam who had previously collaborated with the French. On August 24, Bao Dai abdicated.

A week later on September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh spoke from a balcony in Hanoi and declared the independence of Vietnam.

He started by quoting this passage: "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."

Then he continued: "This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. Now if we enlarge the sphere of our thoughts, this statement conveys another meaning: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the people have a right to live, be happy and free."

After listing grievances against the French, Ho again appealed to his former allies to support Vietnamese Independence: "We are convinced that the Allied nations which have acknowledged at Teheran and San Francisco the principle of self-determination and equality of status will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam."

"A people that has courageously opposed French domination for more than 80 years, a people that has fought by the Allies' side these last years against the Fascists, such a people must be free, such a people must be independent."

British restore French rule

For the Allied nations September 1945 was a time of rejoicing because the last of the Fascist powers, Japan, had surrendered.

The Vietnamese were rejoicing too, for it looked as if the war was over and Vietnam once again was free.

But the Vietnamese were to be betrayed, by the U.S. among others, in their hopes that the Allies would support the Vietnamese desire for independence.

The British moved into Vietnam and began using defeated Japanese troops to restore French authority in Vietnam.

Commenting on this, General Douglas MacArthur said: "If there is anything that makes my blood boil, it is to see our Allies in Indochina and Java deploying troops to reconquer the little people we promised to liberate. It is the most ignoble kind of betrayal."

The British action was a blatant violation of the Potsdam Accords. But no country, not even the U.S. moved to block the British.

For those of a cynical turn of mind it is well to note that neither the Soviets nor the French Communists supported Ho Chi Minh.

Stalin was far more interested in befriending France so as to prevent the formation of a Western European military alliance.

The French Communist Party had hopes of remaining in the post war coalition government in France and the Communist cabinet members voted with the government in support of the war in Indochina. It was only after the political ambitions of the French Communists had been clipped that they began to call for a new policy in Indochina.

In August 1950 the United States began to help the French as they fought to reestablish their control in Indochina.

The first year U.S. aid amounted to only $850 million, but by 1954 the United States (or rather the American taxpayer) was underwriting 80 per cent of the cost of France's effort–in effect America was a partner in this attempt to revive Western imperialism in Asia.

By so underwriting the French war, the United States was betraying not only the Vietnamese people but also its own revolutionary past as the first colony to break away from European control.

In May 1954, the American-backed French effort in Indochina collapsed near the Laotian border at the battle of Dien Bien Phu.

It was a humiliating defeat for Western imperialism in Asia.

General Navarre, the French Commander, wanted to bait a trap to entice Vo Nguyen Giap (now Minister of Defense in North Vietnam) into throwing his main units into a set-piece battle.

In November 1953 Navarre began to send troops into Dien Bien Phu.

Giap accepted the gambit.

The fatal mistake of the French was in assuming that the Viet Minh would not be able to supply a massive assault.

After a secret buildup, the Viet Minh launched an attack on the artillery protecting the small airstrip used to supply Dien Bien Phu.

On March 27, the airstrip was destroyed, and on May 7, Dien Bien Phu fell.

As Bernard Fall remarked: "The Asians, after centuries of subjugation, had beaten the white man at his own game."

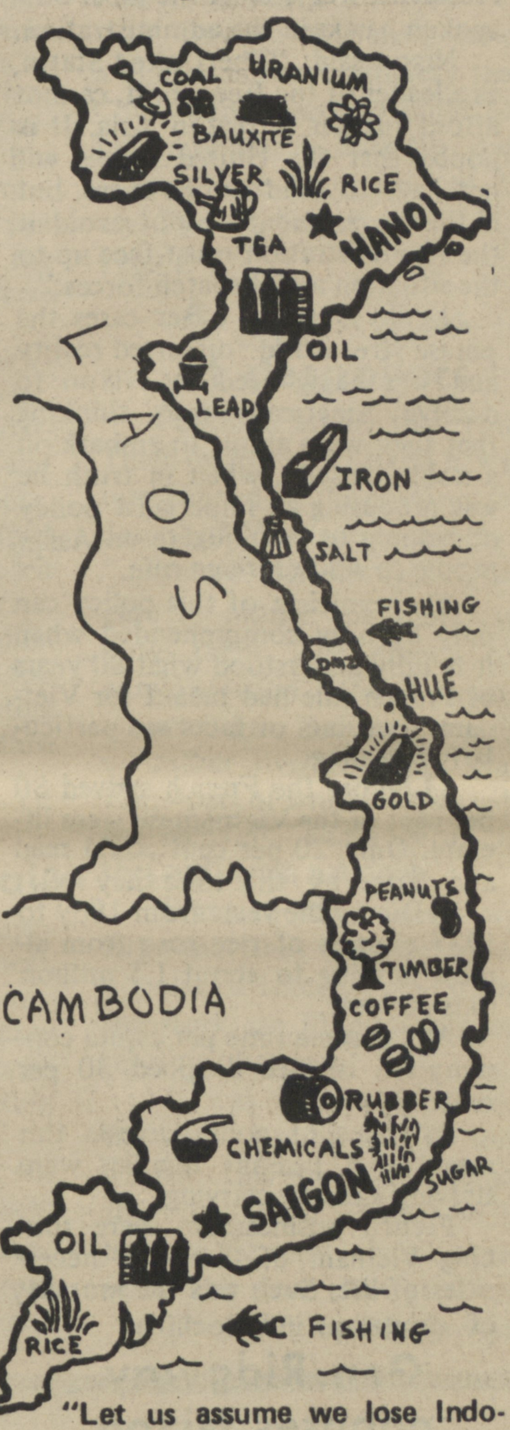
Dien Bien Phu falls

Asians beat the white man at his own game.

French General de Castries boasts "When the Viets come down from the hills, we'll slaughter them."

Ho Chi Minh's troops raise their flag over General de Castries bunker.

IKE admits U.S. has imperialist motives



"Let us assume we lose Indochina....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."

--- Eisenhower, 1953

17th parallel meant to be a temporary dividing line

A few weeks before the collapse at Dien Bien Phu, an effort was made to involve the U.S more directly with air and naval support and possibly troops and atomic weapons.

John Foster Dulles, who was then Secretary of State, sought British help, but the British–on Winston Churchill's advice–refused to intervene.

Richard Nixon, who was Vice President, was one of the most outspoken hawks in the administration.

Nixon said: "The United States, as a leader of the free world, cannot afford further retreat in Asia. It is hoped that the United States will not have to send troops there, but if this government cannot avoid it, the Administration must face up to the situation and dispatch forces."

As in so many other cases the phrase "free world" distorted reality and was being used by Nixon to deceive Americans into thinking that they were about to embark on a noble crusade, when in truth he was proposing an imperialist policy of helping to resubjugate an Asian people to white foreign rule.

The cynicism of this policy can only be fully comprehended when it is fully understood what 80 years of French rule had meant for Vietnam. Two sets of facts are particularly revealing.

1) Before the French arrived 80 per cent of the Vietnamese were literate. Only 20 per cent could read and write by the time they left.

2) During the years from 1869 to 1937 exports of rice rose from almost nothing to about 1.5 million tons per year.

At the same time per capita consumption of rice dropped 30 per cent.

In times of poor harvests this meant that peasant families were starving--literally starving.

French businessmen were robbing Vietnam of the basic necessities of life. Such was the morality of capitalism in Indochina.

Gen. Ridgway opposes Nixon

The Nixon view did not predominate – primarily for strategic reasons. General Matthew B. Ridgway, who along with General James Gavin opposed U.S. intervention in 1954, wrote this in his memoirs:

"When the day comes for me to face my Maker and account for my actions, the thing I would be most humbly proud of was the fact that I fought against and perhaps contributed to preventing the carrying out of some harebrained tactical schemes which would have cost the lives of thousands of men. To that list of tragic accidents that fortunately never happened, I would add the Indochina intervention."

In July, 1954, the Geneva Conference which had intended to focus essentially on the Korean truce began to consider a settlement in Indochina.

Ho Chi Minh's forces had won about ¾ of the land in Vietnam except for Hanoi and Haiphong, and about half of southern Vietnam including the Mekong and most of the area between the 13th and 17th parallel.

Because of pressure from Communist China and Russia the Viet-Minh agreed to accept the 17th parallel as a truce line.

The settlement which was finally worked out provided for 1) the cessation of hostilities, 2) regrouping of Viet Minh partisans north of the 17th parallel and French Union forces (including Vietnamese who fought for the French) south of the 17th parallel, 3) elections in 1956 to unify Vietnam.

These agreements have often been misrepresented by the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations to justify the war. It is important to know that the agreements explicitly stated that the 17th parallel was a "provisional" line of military demarcation and "should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary."

(In 1964 Lyndon Johnson was to say that these "agreements guaranteed the independence of South Vietnam." They did no such thing and anyone can confirm this for himself by reading the Final Declaration of Geneva in any of several books on Vietnam.)

The United States government did not particularly like the Geneva Agreements.

But in a separate statement the U.S. representative declared that his government would not use force or the threat of force to disrupt the Agreements.

The main effect of the Geneva Agreements was to move the struggle from the battlefield to the political arena, i.e., in the form of elections.

The Viet Minh were confident they could win on either level, and with good reason.

President Eisenhower, in his autobiography, attested to Ho Chi Minh's popularity, observing: "I never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that, had the elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80 per cent of the populace would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh rather than the Chief of State Bao Dai."

The Saigon regime obviously believed Ho Chi Minh would win in 1956, and it refused to even consult with Hanoi about elections.

Townsend Hoopes who was Under Secretary of the Air Force from 1967-69 explained what happened:

"In July 1955, the new government took, with U.S. encouragement, the next logical step; it rejected the North Vietnamese invitations to discuss elections...

"It is significant that these policies and actions were strongly supported by the American people; there was no dissent from within government, very little from Congress or the press, and nothing significant from scholars or other close observers of foreign affairs."

"As a nation we had very little perception that we might be frustrating a widely supported national independence movement by lending our aid and prestige to what were at best colonial puppets, who lacked an innate capacity to win over any sizable segment of the Vietnamese people to their side, and who as it turned out, could not govern at all without the direct presence and support of a very large U.S. expeditionary force."

U.S. backs Diem

Midway through the Geneva Conference a new man appeared on the scene to become Premier in the French puppet government of Bao Dai (Bao Dai was the ex-emperor who abdicated in 1945 but returned in 1948 to head a puppet government under the French). This man was Ngo Dinh Diem, and he was to play an important role in Vietnam for the next nine years.

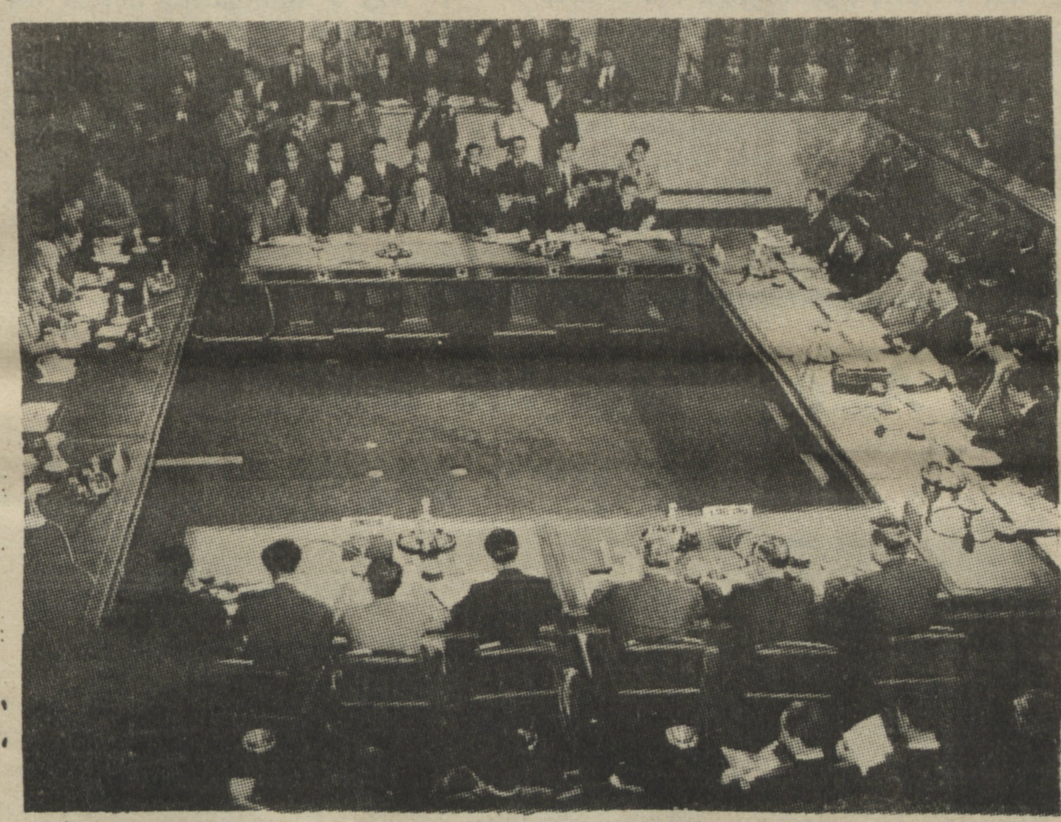
On January 1, 1955, the French handed the reins of government to Diem and Bao Dai. Near the end of 1955 Diem maneuvered Bao Dai out of power.

READ IT FOR YOURSELF

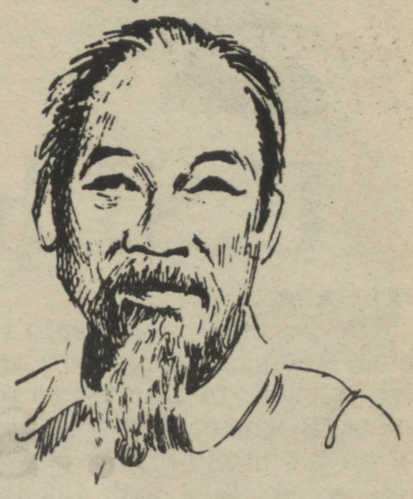
FINAL DECLARATION OF GENEVA TRUCE

ARTICLE 6:
The Conference recognizes that the essential purpose of the agreement relating to Vietnamis to settle military questions with a view to ending hostilities and that THE MILITARY DEMARCATION LINE IS PROVISIONAL AND SHOULD NOT IN ANY WAY BE INTERPRETED AS CONSTITUTING A POLITICAL OR TERRITORIAL BOUNDARY.

ARTICLE 7:
The Conference declares that, so far as Vietnam is concerned, the settlement of political problems, effected on the basis of RESPECT FOR THE PRINCIPLES OF INDEPENDENCE, UNITY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions established AS A RESULT OF FREE GENERAL ELECTIONS BY SECRET BALLOT. In order to ensure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made, and that all the necessary conditions obtain for free expression of the national will, GENERAL ELECTIONS SHALL BE HELD IN JULY, 1956 UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF AN INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION.



FINAL SESSION AT GENEVA: 1954



"I never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that, had the elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80 per cent of the populace would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh rather than the Chief of State Bao Dai."

--- President Eisenhower in Mandate for Change

"America was stepping into France's boots. Once more, the South was turned into a colonial base for a policy of 'pacification' and 'democracy' while the North, the bastion of national resistance, sought to negotiate rather than resume the conflict.

Would Vietnam ever cease to be the plaything and the prey of the great powers?"

--- Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture in End of a War Indochina, 1954

U.S. steps into France's boots

Diem was a nationalist and a Catholic. He had spent nearly two years in the early fifties in the United States in seminaries in New Jersey and New York. Though not known how much influence the U.S. exerted to move Diem into power in Vietnam, it is clear that a considerable amount of money and energy was expended to help him consolidate his power in the early years of his rule.

Diem's authority over the army was shaky. So the United States government let the commanding general know that if he attempted to move against Diem, dollar help would be cut off.

Diem began to assert the authority of his government over two large religious sects and one large bandit gang, using as much as 12 million American dollars to bribe sect leaders.

The U.S. assumed France's financial and training responsibilities for the Saigon Army and began to furnish a large amount of economic aid which would total over one and a half billion dollars before Diem was assassinated in 1963 by officers in the army.

In any revolution deep antagonisms are created and almost inevitably large minority groups leave. After the American Revolution about 100,000 American Tories left for Europe or Canada, which at the time was one of the largest exoduses in history.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some 900,000 Vietnamese took advantage of the provisions in the Geneva Accords to move south of the 17th parallel and about 100,000 went North.

The exodus to the south has been at the center of controversy ever since the mid-fifties. Some points deserve to be clarified.

Between 80 and 85 % were Vietnamese mercenaries who had fought for the French or worked in the French administration.

Bernard Fall observed: "The mass flight was admittedly the result of an extremely intensive, well-conducted and in terms of its objectives, very successful American psychological warfare operation."

"Propaganda slogans and leaflets appealed to the devout Catholics with such themes as "Christ has gone to the South" and the "Virgin Mary has departed from the North."

These refugees became the backbone of Diem's support but even as they helped secure support, they created tensions within South Vietnam. Vietnamese Catholics comprise about ten percent of the total population and relations between this minority and the rest of the largely Buddhist Vietnamese have not always been smooth.

Vietnamese Catholics were persecuted before the French took over. When the French were consolidating their control in the 1880's and 1890's the Vietnamese Catholics, through their collaboration, helped crush the resistance which was led by the emperor and high mandarins.

Diem himself was a Catholic, and many Catholics moved into top positions in his government creating resentment among the Buddhist population.

Dulles and Diem

Bad effects of French rule remain

The fact that France had physically left Vietnam did not mean that the bad effects of French misrule had ended. Diem's bureacracy was essentially the old colonial bureacracy minus the French (but plus the Catholic refugees).

Diem's army was essentially the mercenary army that had fought for the French. Even today, top officers of the Saigon army are men like Ky, a veteran of the Algerian war, who served the French.

French rule had created a Westernized elite in Vietnam which lived aloof from the mass of landless peasants. Vietnamese society urgently needed reforms to restore social justice, and many Americans hoped that Diem would press for these reforms. But this hope was naive because Diem was himself a part of this privileged elite, as were the officials of his government.

Over the years, this Catholic elite had given its allegiance, not to Vietnam, but to the West by sending their sons and daughters to expensive French schools and by stashing their profits in Swiss banks. (Pres. Thieu is reported to have more than $500,000 deposited in a Swiss account).

It was on this need to create a more democratic society that the Communists were to build a revolutionary base so solid that it would fight a huge American expeditionary force to a standstill in the 1960's.

A new class of despoilers

A Catholic intellectual, Ton That Thien (editor of a Saigon newspaper now banned by the government) has described Vietnamese society thus: "...France started training a new elite to induce the Vietnamese to serve them. The French colonial administration offered them special privileges, including a generous, or rather over-generous, grant of land– part of which was seized from the peasants– and a status close to that of French nationals.

"Some of the holdings were so large that they were referred to in popular parlance as "land over which the stork can fly endlessly without meeting obstacles."

"It was from this source that the new class derived its immense wealth. This inevitably alienated it from the rural population, partly because the rural inhabitants looked upon the new class as despoilers.

"To qualify for high government positions, new diplomas were required and these could be gained only through a long and expensive period of schooling obtainable only in the cities. The peasants were therefore excluded from the high as well as the middle positions."

"The fact is that Communism, in the dress of nationalism and in its advocacy of land to the peasants, represents a powerful force in South Vietnam, and one which receives widespread support from the peasant population."

-- Robert Scigliano in South Vietnam: Nation under Stress

Diem's failure

Ton That Thien's view was that the Americans were perpetuating this system and making it inevitable that the Viet Cong would keep control of the nationalist movement.

Diem failed to build a large political following because he failed to respond to the real social and economic problems that 80 years of French misrule had created.

The Viet Cong tells the peasants: 'You are oppressed by corrupt men.'

Land reform was and is the critical issue in a land where most of the people are peasants.

Before the French came every peasant had his own plot of land. But the French consolidated these holdings to turn rice growing into a profitable enterprise. As a result many Vietnamese families found themselves working as tenants or just laborers on their own ancestral lands.

During the struggle against the French, the Viet Minh took the land of landlords who were sitting out the war in Saigon or Paris. The Viet Minh then redistributed this land and issued new deeds to the peasants.

As the Diem regime asserted its control over the countryside, the absentee landlords returned, in some cases claiming 50% back rent for the eight years they had been gone.

The Viet Minh thus had little trouble persuading the peasants that the Saigon regime was corrupt and had to be overthrown.

Some Americans realized that the Communists were winning the peasants support largely because of the land issue. They pressured Diem to start land reform and dutifully land reform measures appeared on paper.

But in the end Diem's regime failed to distribute more than about 10% of the available land.

Two Americans who were very close to the agrarian problems of Vietnam have suggested that a basic conflict of interest was the cause of Diem's failure in land reform.

John Montgomery, a U.S. foreign aid expert, wrote: "The Vietnamese government, not wishing to disturb the strong landowning classes, resisted the proposed transfers of land and sharper rent controls."

J. Price Gittinger, an agricultural adviser, was more specific: "Government officials, beginning with the Minister for Agrarian Reform, have divided loyalties, being themselves landholders."

Gittinger added that the Minister of Agrarian Reform was reported as not having "signed leases with his tenants as provided for in the land reform decrees, and he is most certainly not interested in land distribution which would divest him of much of his property."

But the peasants' resentment of the Saigon regime goes deeper than the land issue.

Five years ago a French reporter tried to explain why the Viet Cong have popular support: "The Viet Cong tells the peasants, "You are oppressed by corrupt men representing a government which has sold out to a foreign country.'

"On hearing this the peasants look around. The chief of the province appointed by the Saigon regime lives in a big house, drives a Mercedes, and loads his wife with jewelry. The Governor is a man of importance who is approached with deference, protected by police, soldiers and assistants.

"His Viet Cong opposite number can be seen every day. He is out among the people. He is dressed like a peasant, in black calico and with sandals cut from an old tire. He makes his rounds in his district on foot, walking along the public roads. You can be sure of one thing: he is not getting rich on the backs of the people."

The Saigon elite has refused to identify itself with the aspirations of the peasants. For the young peasant, therefore, the Viet Cong offers the only outlet for his anger and his patriotism. That is why Viet Cong officers, unlike those in the ARVN who are drawn from the elite, come from peasant stock.

Unwilling to believe that the Communists have won their support because they champion a popular cause, Americans have accepted their leaders' lie that 'terrorism' is the real basis for Viet Cong success. The most frequently cited fact is the killing of government officials.

But these officials were appointed by Saigon, were corrupt and invariably outsiders to boot. A French reporter, Max Clos, noted: "When the Viet Cong began their revolution in 1959 and 1960 it was opened with a wave of terrorism.

"In isolated places, in hamlets then in villages and cities, officials and private persons loyal to Saigon were assassinated. Government propaganda strove mightily to exploit these facts to arouse popular indignation.

In a nation of Buddhist peasants, the Diem family were rich aristocrats and devout Catholics.

The Vietnamese are a tough, hard—working people whose life—style is more communal than individual—closer to communism than to capitalism.

"We must honestly face the fact that it was not Viet Cong terrorism that drove the refugees from their ancestral homes to the cities and towns-- though Viet Cong terrorism impressment of the men and taxation have increased. It was American and Vietnamese bombing and shelling."

-- Roger Hilsman, Asst. Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in Kennedy Administration

U.S. bombing

A nightmare world of flying metal and flaming napalm.

"This backfired. It was understood too late that in most cases the peasants had fearlessly helped in the brutal liquidation of the men on whose death the Saigon regime was basing its case. Instead of murderers, the terrorists were considered dispensers of justice."

Like the Thais and the Laotians, the Vietnamese traditionally had elected their own village officials. Neither the Mandarins nor the French had interfered with this practice. But in 1956 Diem abolished this village-level democracy and sent in appointees.

Americans have been brainwashed to believe that the South Vietnamese government is democratic. Yet Diem was ending an ancient democratic system in the villages. And because Diem was so dependent on U.S. aid to survive, the U.S. must also be held responsible for destroying real democracy in Vietnam!

Bernard Fall considered this to be Diem's worst mistake. He wrote that Diem's appointees, "...most of them outsiders, were met with open hostility by the villagers. Diem's men would have to go outside the village to the police post to sleep safely.

"Many of them were known to be gouging the villages. The hard fact is that when the Viet Cong assassinated these men, they were given a Robin Hood halo by the peasants."

Nothing belied the official government explanation that terrorism was the basis for Viet Cong success more than Douglas Pike's research.

Pike, a USIA official, has written the definitive study on the Viet Cong. Though sharply critical of the NLF policy of killing government officials, Pike concedes that "...the internal documents dealing with criticism and self-criticism of the violence program indicated a fairly widespread distaste for terror on the part of the NLF rank and file."

He also noted: "NLF cadres regarded the proper use of terror as terror applied judiciously, selectively and sparingly...in general, the NLF theoreticians considered terror to be the weapon of the weak, the desperate or the ineffectual guerrilla leader. They held that most objectives could be achieved without its use."

Though the U.S. tried to make the assassinations a major issue, this selective (limited) tactic of killing unpopular leaders was being taught in Special Forces training as an effective method of winning popular support when trying to foment a guerrilla war in an enemy country.

The simple truth is that the U.S. government has exaggerated the terrorism of the Viet Cong and distorted its effect on the general populace in an attempt to divert attention from the devastation caused by the American military.

Though the Vietnamese have known war for two thousand years, no other invader has come closer to destroying Vietnamese society than the United States military.

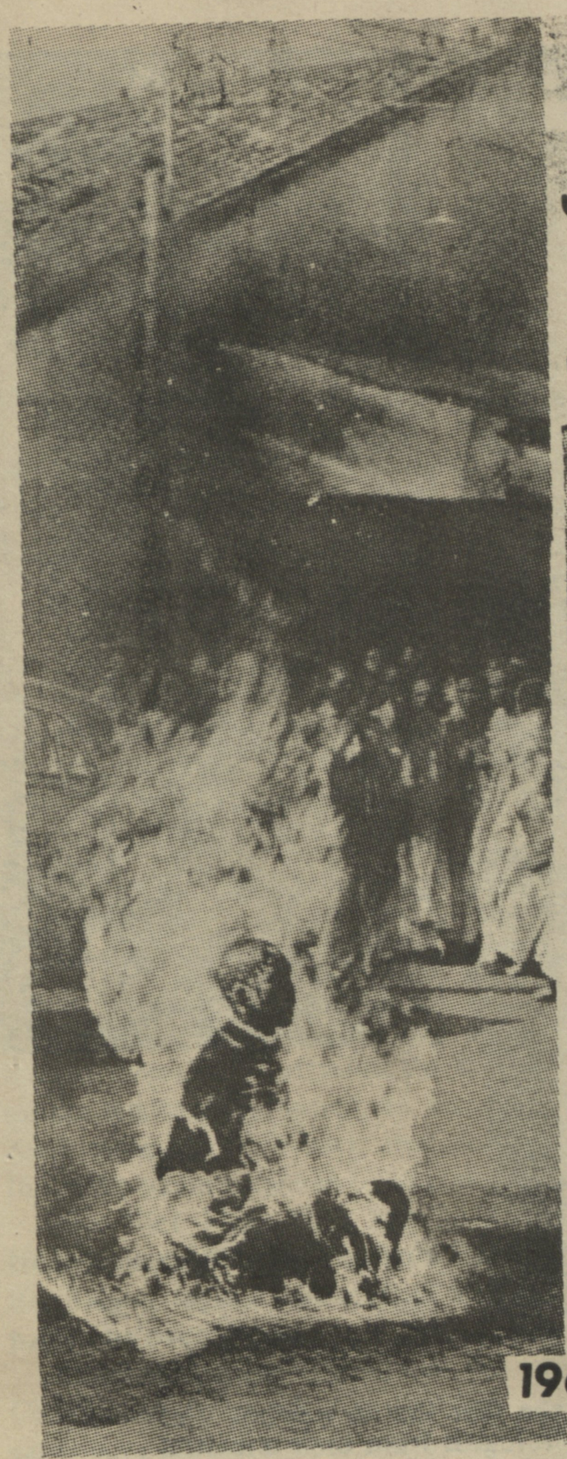
American bombing alone has killed literally hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese civilians and cratered the landscape. According to the Department of Defense, between Jan. 1965 and June 1970, the U.S. has dropped 5,172,823 tons of bombs on North and South Vietnam. This more than doubles the total tonnage for World War II in Europe and the Pacific (2,057,244)- in an area about the size of Iowa and Missouri combined!

The English language press in Saigon pleaded against the "wanton bombing and shelling of entire vil-

"Terror is an integral part of guerrilla warfare, and the Viet Cong fight with what they have. However, as applied by the Viet Cong, it is a terror the people can understand--- although cruel, it is more 'selective' than saturation bombing. Can you imagine the terror of waking up in the middle of the night to a nightmare world of flying metal and rivers of flaming napalm??"

** Donald Duncan, ex-Green Beret
in The New Legions

South Vietnam: A Police State



1963 Buddhist monk protests

1968 Instant justice

1970 Tiger cages

Diem's Repression Forces VC to Fight

lages...the merciless destruction of unharvested rice fields under a column of armored personnel carriers, or the scorched earth policy of napalm are examples of peasant grievances."

A quasi-police state

Quite early in his regime Diem began to repress those who had sympathized or supported the Viet Minh against the French.

A writer in Foreign Affairs, a scholarly journal dealing with U.S. foreign policy, wrote in late 1956: "South Vietnam is today a quasi-police state characterized by arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, strict censorship of the press, and the absence of an effective political opposition... All the techniques of political and psychological warfare, as well as pacification campaigns involving extensive military operations have been brought to bear against the underground."

This repression grew through 1958, and in 1959 Public Law 10/59 formalized Diem's police state.

All this posed a serious crisis for the Communist leadership in the South.

Most of them had not been happy with the 1954 Accords, feeling they should not have given up territory which they already controlled.

The old Viet Minh cadres followed the political line of the Party, but Diem's repression was making this no longer viable.

A high ranking party member who left the Front in 1965 because of ill health (he died in 1968) and disagreements with the Party leadership, had this to say about the origins of the armed uprising against Diem.

The end of 1959 was "the darkest period for the party in the South, when if you did not have a gun you could not keep your head on your shoulders.

"There was no place wheraParty members could find rest and security. Almost all were imprisoned or shot or were forced to surrender. Some village chapters which had four or five hundred members in 1954 were now reduced to ten members, and even those could not remain among the people but had to flee into the jungle to survive.

"In the face of such fierce activity by the Diem government the demand for armed security by Party members increased daily, particularly in the West and particularly after the proclamation of Law 10/59.

"Party members felt that it was no longer possible to talk of political struggle while looking down the gun barrels of the government."

"But despite the bitterness within the Party and the anger against the Central Committee, the Regional Committee, etc., Party members were unable to break out from the organization that was killing them.

"There were never clear factions or groups within the Party demanding armed activity which might have broken off from the Party Organization in the South or from the Central Committee in Hanoi–that could never happen.

"Nevertheless there were individuals–say draft age youths–who became so angry they took weapons which the Party had hidden and came out of the jungle to kill the officials who were making trouble for them or their families."

"They did this not because the Party had condemned these officials, but in order to preserve their own lives or to defend their families. Sometimes these individuals were so angry at the Party that they purposely allowed themselves to be captured afterwards–just to spite the Party.

This created a dilemma for the party leaders in the South who were exhorting cadres to continue with the political struggle at the same time they were pleading with the Northern leadership to renew the military struggle.

In May 1959 a new line was established: "political struggle mixed to the right degree with armed struggle."

> "We find ourselves supporting a government of mandarins with little basis of popular support fighting for an army that has little inclination to do its own fighting."
>
> Robert Sherrod in Life, Jan. 27, 1967

NLF quickly wins support

By the end of 1961 the NLF had extended its influence over four-fifths of South Vietnam.

Recognizing that its control was collapsing, the Saigon regime initiated a program of strategic hamlets.

This plan to fortify villages and thus to deny them to the Vietcong was acknowledged in September 1963 to be in a "rotten state" by the chief American adviser to the program, Rufus Phillips.

Systematic rape of the countryside

Lt. Col. William Corson (USMC ret.), who was deeply involved in pacification efforts in Vietnam, called strategic hamlets part of the "systematic rape of the countryside." He wrote of the forced resettlement, physical oppression, coercion and political persuasion by the club.

These measures naturally increased resentment among the peasants.

The theory of "strategic hamlets appealed to the 'progressive' policymakers in Washington. But it had to be abandoned as a major blunder when faced with the realities of

BLACK VIEWS ON THE WAR

Another question crucial to understanding the war is, to what extent are America's actions in Vietnam compromised by racism?

Some critics argue that the indiscriminate bombings, the "free-fire zones," and the ruthless "search and destroy" operations of American forces reveal an assumption of racial inferiority about the Vietnamese by Americans.

The GI's bitter contempt for the "gooks" ("gook," like "nigger," "wetback" or "kike" is clearly a racist hate-word) and their frequent abuse of the villagers' buffaloes, their paddies, their "hootches", (homes), their old men and young girls— all this only widened the credibility gap about America's true motives for being in Vietnam.

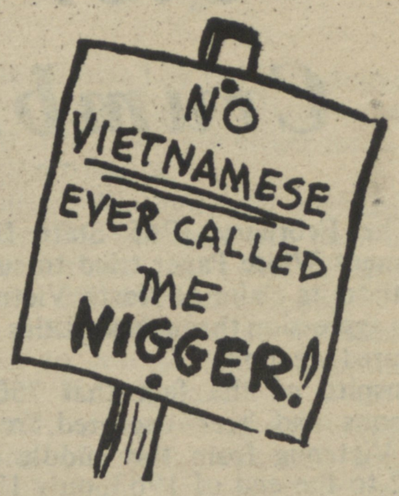
A 1967 poll taken by a Saigon newspaper showed that a majority of the Vietnamese polled believed that Americans treated them with scornful superiority.

As the war progressed, GI's returning from Vietnam confirmed the charge of racism with countless stories of individual atrocities against peasants, of rape and vandalism and outright murder.

At the same time, GI's often questioned the Pentagon's absurd rationale for why the VC and NVA troops were so dedicated and brave— that they were all brainwashed and doped out of their minds during battle.

The experience of "humping it" for a year through malaria-infested jungles had taught GI's that men do not lug cannons over mountains for twenty years, or march ten miles at night and keep fighting with five M-16 rounds in them, for such flimsy reasons.

Some dream, some anger had to be sustaining the guerrillas in their fight.



"Here lies a yellow man,
killed by a black man,
fighting for the white man,
who killed all the red men."
** Malcolm X, on seeing a photo of a VC soldier slain by a black GI, in The Autobiography of Malcolm X

Martin Luther King on Vietnam War

What do the peasants think as we ally ourselves with the landlords and as we refuse to put any action into our many words concerning land reform? What do they think as we test out our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe? Where are the roots of the independent Vietnam we claim to be building? Is it among these voiceless ones?

They watch as we poison their water, as we kill a million acres of their crops. They must weep as the bulldozers roar through their areas preparing to destroy the precious trees. They wander into the hospitals, with at least 20 casualties from American firepower for one Vietcong-inflicted injury. They wander into the towns and see thousands of the children, homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals. They see the children degraded by our soldiers as they beg for food. They see the children selling their sisters to our soldiers, soliciting for their mothers.

We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. We have cooperated in the crushing of the nation's only non-communist revolutionary political force—the Unified Buddhist Church. We have supported the enemies of the peasants of Saigon. We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men. What liberators!

Who is *really* the aggressor?

Vietnamese society.

Not only was the incompetence, corruption and brutality of the Saigon regime involved in the failure of strategic hamlets, but the army lacked the motivation to fight and the peasants would rarely betray the Viet Cong to the government - proof of where their true sympathies lay.

Diem ousted

In May 1963, a crisis broke out in Vietnam which ultimately led to the downfall of the Diem regime.

The Buddhists had long resented the Catholic influence in the government. In a parade on Buddha's birthday nine people were killed by Diem's police and this ignited the Buddhist revolt.

An old monk burned himself to death on June 11. The shock waves led to a reevaluation of American support for Diem and eventually President Kennedy let it be known that the U.S. would not oppose a coup to remove Diem.

There were plenty of people who were willing to overthrow Diem, and on November 1, 1963, Diem and his brother were assassinated by generals in the South Vietnamese Army.

The people of Saigon staged a wild, jubilant celebration, but the new generals in command had neither the vision nor the ability to deal with the problems of Vietnamese society.

The new police chief, for example, was arresting people only to let them go if they paid big bribes to him. Diem was gone, but a palace revolt was not going to alter the basic nature of the conflict in Vietnam.

The authority of the Saigon governments continued to slip and the Johnson administration decided to send large numbers of troops to Vietnam.

Tonkin incident

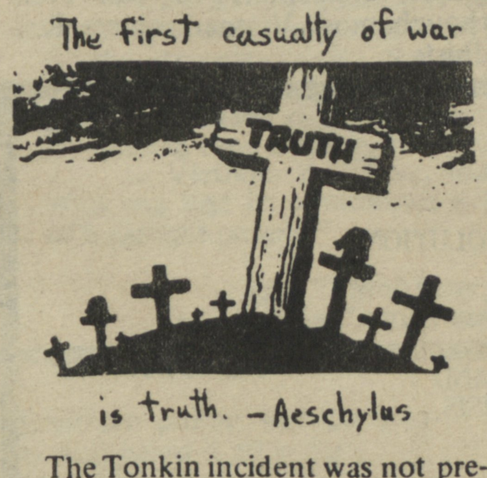
There is no quicker way to rally a country to war than to be able to claim that the country has been attacked. (Remember the Alamo! Remember the Maine!)

Lacking a Pearl Harbor, the Johnson administration settled on what was to be known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

In August 1964 the American government charged that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had attacked two heavily armed U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin.

President Johnson retaliated with the first bombing attacks on North Vietnam, and Congress hastily passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which Johnson later used as a blank check to expand U.S. involvement in the war.

Many prominent officials came to doubt that the Tonkin Incident was serious enough to warrant Johnson's reaction.



The Tonkin incident was not preceded by any significant naval action, nor did it herald the beginning of open aggression on the high seas against the United States.

Senator Wayne Morse, one of the two Senators to vote against this resolution, said that the destroyers were justified in returning the fire but that the bombing of North Vietnam constituted a serious violation of international law and a major escalation of the war.

Senator J. William Fulbright, head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has concluded that it is a possibility we provoked the attack in the act of supervising a raid by the South Vietnamese.

Considering that the United States did not go to war over the Pueblo incident or the shooting down of a spy plane near Korea, it is clear that the Gulf of Tonkin incident was merely a pretext for moving troops into South East Asia.

Later it became known in Washington that Johnson and some of his aides had carried drafts of the resolution around with them for weeks before the incident.

Contending that North Vietnam was committing aggression against South Vietnam, the United States began bombing North Vietnam on a continuing basis in February 1965.

This was the biggest myth of all in a war built on myths.

The Senate Majority Leader, Mike Mansfield, observed in 1966 that "when the sharp increase in the American military effort began in 1965, it was estimated that only about 400 North Vietnamese soldiers were among the enemy forces in the South which totaled 140,000 at the time."

It should be noted that at this time there were 23,000 American troops in Vietnam.

These uncomfortable facts raise the serious question of who was the real aggressor.

U.S. Moves in as Saigon Regime Crumbles before Peasant Revolution

The February 1965 State Department White Paper tried to substantiate its claim of North Vietnamese aggression through statistics of captured weapons.

Inspite of the fact that 7500 weapons had been captured from the Vietcong from the middle of 1962 to the end of 1963, only 179 were of foreign Communist manufacture.

Where were the rest of the weapons coming from?

Gen. Harkin's view

General Paul D. Harkins, who was in charge of American forces before Westmoreland, admitted in March 1963 that the guerrillas obviously were not being supplied from North Vietnam, China, or any place else. Most of the weapons were either captured or homemade.

A year later the State Department's Director of Intelligence candidly conceded that "by far the greater part of the Vietcong forces in South Vietnam are South Vietnamese, the preponderance of Vietcong weapons come not from Communist countries but from capture, purchase and local manufacture."

Captured weapons

Bernard Fall estimated that 90 per cent of the Vietcong weapons were captured American weapons.

Thus, in the early stages of the war, the American logistical system was supplying both sides of the conflict.

The other major point in the State Department's fabricated case was the claim that between 1959 and 1964, 37,000 southerners who had gone north with Ho Chi Minh in 1954 had returned to the south to provide leadership and technical advice for the guerrilla forces.

But these people had left the south in 1954 fully expecting to return in 1956 after the country was reunified by elections.

It was the Diem government's refusal to honor this essential provision of the Geneva truce that had stranded these people in the north.

Theodore Draper's appraisal seems accurate enough: "In manpower and in weapons, North Vietnam was not, at least until 1965, the main or even a significant provider. It is fair to conclude that until about 1960 the Vietcong was strictly a Southern enterprise, and until 1965 the Northern contribution was mainly limited to training."

The real reason the United States' government dispatched a huge expeditionary force to Vietnam in 1965 and 1966 was not because of the North Vietnamese but because the Saigon regime was falling apart.

This was happening in spite of the fact that U.S. assistance to that government had been massive and Hanoi's assistance to its Communist comrades in the south had only been minimal.

Sen. Mansfield's view

A commission report submitted by Mike Mansfield stated: "In short, a total collapse of the Saigon government's authority appeared imminent in the early months of 1965."

Thus, the decision to "Americanize the war was made because it was clear that U.S. attempts to keep an unpopular regime in power in South Vietnam would not be done indirectly."

As the U.S. began to move into Vietnam, a new man came to power in a military coup.

His name was Nguyen Cao Ky.

In time, charges that this new government was nothing but a military dictatorship began to embarrass President Johnson. So elections were set up in South Vietnam.

The story of these elections is the story of a fantastic charade, and it reflects little credit on the American public that they could not detect the hoax.

General Thieu and General Ky refused to allow anyone with Buddhist connections to run even though most Vietnamese are Buddhists.

They eliminated two of the most serious contenders - the popular General Minh who came to power when Diem was overthrown, and a brilliant economist, Au Truong Tranh, who had been a minister in Ky's cabinet.

No one who advocated a neutralist solution was allowed to be on the ballot, and Communists were excluded.

Four newspapers were shut down during the election.

In the delta province of Kien Hoa voter registration increased to 419,000 from 120,000 in one month. General Thieu even admitted that "Some soldiers have been given two cards."

Because no area under Vietcong control voted, only 56 per cent of the eligible populace took part.

Of this the Thieu-Ky ticket received just 35 per cent of the vote.

Because the rest of the vote had been split among nine slates of civilian candidates and because no majority was required, Thieu and Ky won.

A commission of the Constituent Assembly then voted 16-2 not to accept the results of the election because the defeated civilian candidates had been able to produce substantial evidence of fraud.

Even when the final vote was taken and Brig. Gen. Ngoc Loan (the dreaded head of the secret police) stood in the galleries, the full assembly voted by only a 57-44 margin to accept the results.

The only candidate who had dared run on a peace platform (after his place on the ballot had been assured) soon found himself in prison. Though he was charged with corruption, the real cause of his imprisonment was his peace platform.

The election had been a total fraud.

George Romney was to be ridiculed out of the 1968 U.S. Presidential election because he said he had been brainwashed about Vietnam.

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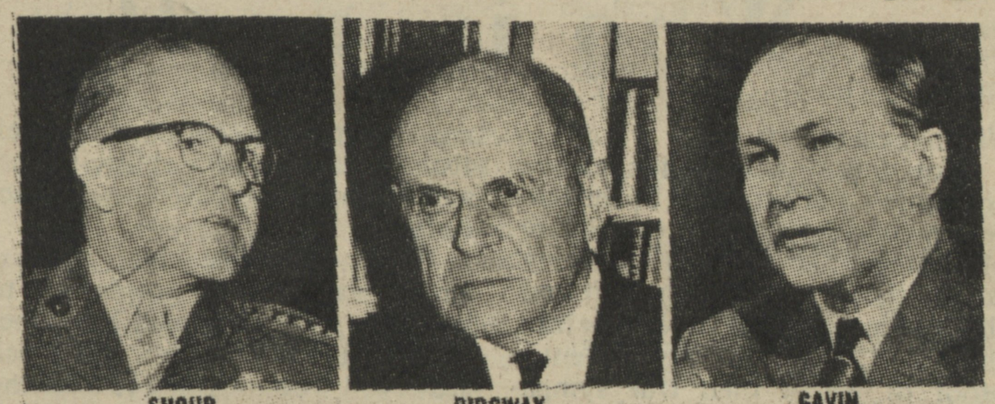

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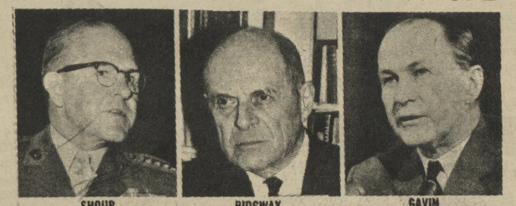

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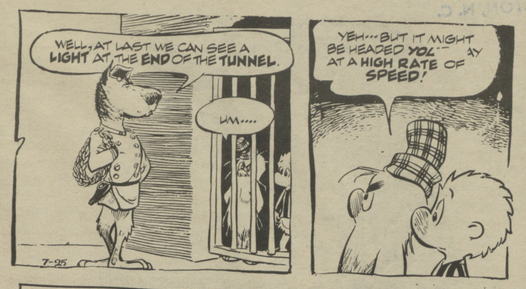


The Light at the End of the Tunnel

On January 2, 1954, General Navarre (French) told his French Union forces in Indo-China that he fully expected victory...after six more months of hard fighting.

On March 21, 1954, General Ely (French) said that the crushing Vietminh loss in the battle for Dien Bien Phu gave rise to a hope for a major French victory.

On March 23, 1954, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff said: "The French are going to win."

On April 5, 1954, Secretary of State Dulles declared that he did "not expect that there is going to be a Communist victory in Indo-China" and he praised the French Forces at Dien Bien Phu for "writing, in my opinion, a notable chapter in military history."

ON MAY 7, 1954, THE VIETMINH OVERRAN THE FORTRESS OF DIEN BIEN PHU. FRANCE QUICKLY SUED FOR PEACE.

In July 1959, Major General Sam Meyers (U.S.A.) said: "The guerrillas were gradually nibbled away until they ceased to be a [illegible]

In March 1963, Secretary of State Dean Rusk declared: "the strategic hamlet program is producing excellent results" and "morale in the countryside has begun to rise."

In May 1963, the Defense Department stated: "The corner has definitely been turned toward victory in Vietnam."

On November 1, 1963, General Paul Harkins, the senior U.S. Army officer in Vietnam said in STARS AND STRIPES: "Victory in the sense that would apply to this kind of war is just months away. I can safely say that the end of the war is in sight."

ON NOVEMBER 1, 1963, THE DIÉM DICTATORSHIP WAS OVERTHROWN. POLITICAL PRISONERS WERE RELEASED AND THERE WAS ECSTATIC CELEBRATING. THE OPTIMISTIC STATISTICS ON STRATEGIC HAMLETS WERE REVEALED TO BE FRAUDULENT AS ONLY 20% COULD BE REGARDED AS USABLE.

In February of 1964, Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara said: "The U.S. still hopes to withdraw most of its troops from South Vietnam before the end of 1965."

IN FEBRUARY 1965, PRESIDENT JOHNSON ANNOUNCED SENDING 50,000 TROOPS TO VIETNAM. THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF MAJOR U.S. INTERVENTION.

In October 1965, McNamara said we have stopped losing the war.

AT THE BEGINNING OF APRIL 1967, THE UNITED STATES WAS ABLE TO CLAIM CONTROL OVER FEWER VILLAGES THAN IN 1962.
--1967 Republican Senate Committee Report on Vietnam

TRUE PATRIOTISM

"My country, right or wrong.
When right, to be kept right.
When wrong, to be put right."

— Senator Carl Schurz

Tet Explodes Myths

Cong morale was low and desertions were high as contrasted with the Saigon army.

Claiming they could see 'the light at the end of the tunnel,' they said that the NLF was no longer capable of launching any major military action.

In the early days of February 1968, the Vietcong launched their Tet offensive.

Vietcong cadres penetrated Saigon and attacked the American embassy.

More than 800 planes had been damaged and 200 completely destroyed during the first hours.

In Huế, the old Imperial City, the Vietcong managed to hold out for four weeks.

American forces launched a barrage of firepower on Huế, and on March 23, 1968, Robert Shaplen reported for The New Yorker that: "Nearly four thousand civilians were killed in Huế, most of them by American air and artillery attacks."

In late 1969 after the story of the My Lai massacre was uncovered, high American officials including President Nixon tried to pin the blame for these deaths on the Vietcong.

This was perhaps a new story to the American public, but the Vietnamese had heard it all before.

When the French government was trying to inflame French public opinion in 1946 as well as distract from the November shelling of Haiphong (where according to French military estimates 6000 Vietnamese civilians were killed), they told stories of Viet Minh atrocities in Hanoi.

By 1949, Paul Mus, the most eminent French authority on Vietnam, wrote: "I am in a position to state and to prove that four-fifths of the stories or reports of awful atrocities inflicted by the Vietnamese on our compatriots in Hanoi, December 19, 1946, are either inventions or erroneous."

General Westmoreland claimed that the Tet offensive had been a setback for the NLF, but he also requested 200,000 more troops!

At this point Lyndon Johnson decided to reverse his course on the war. He replaced Gen. Westmoreland, announced an end to the bombing of North Vietnam, and said he would not run for re-election.

Clearly, as Robert Kennedy's victories in New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania and California showed, the American people were disillusioned with the war and wanted it ended.

When Richard Nixon became President, he announced that his policy for Vietnam would be "Vietnamization"– meaning that as the Saigon regime was more capable of standing on its own feet, U.S. troops would be withdrawn.

Yet the earlier attempt at "Vietnamization" had failed by 1965 when it was obvious that indirect American support would not prop up the corrupt Saigon regime. That failure led to the "Americanization" of the war.

Anyone who understands the flow of Vietnamese history knows that the Saigon elite- largely Catholic, French-trained and urban-oriented in a country where the majority are Buddhist peasants– will never be able to defeat the nationalist revolution in their midst.

The only realistic course left for the United States- and Americans pride themselves on being common sense realists- is to leave Vietnam as the Chinese, Mongols, Japanese and French have all done.

Only Communists represent change

"In Vietnam, only the Communists represent revolution and social change, for better or worse according to a man's politics. The Communist party is the one truly national organization that permeates both North and South Vietnam. The men who lead the party today, Ho Chi Minh and the other members of the Politburo in Hanoi, directed the struggle for independence from France and in the process captured much of the deeply felt nationalism of the Vietnamese people.

Perhaps because of this, the Communists, despite their brutality and deceit, remain the only Vietnamese capable of rallying millions of their countrymen to sacrifice and hardship in the name of the nation and the only group not dependent on foreign bayonets for survival."

-- Neil Sheehan
in The New York Times Magazine
October 9, 1966

The weakness of Western technology

"Despite the enormous scale of violence and the far-reaching changes in the country, the most important aspects of the struggle remain the same. Pro-Western governments are still trying to wrest control over the countryside away from rural-based revolutionaries who have developed power by relating their strategy to Vietnamese traditions.

In Vietnam therefore, the technological power of the West has had its weaknesses exposed by the political power of a peasant people."

-- John T. McAlister, Jr.
in The Vietnamese and Their Revolution

J.C. PEELE, M.D.
KINSTON, N. C.

"Which image do Americans prefer? Do they want the world to regard them as a nation with a revolutionary tradition, sympathetic to colonies in their struggles against their imperial rulers, tolerant of change and progress, and dedicated to the principle of equality?

Or do they prefer that other image which America's adversaries depict, that of a counter-revolutionary America, everywhere on the side of urban elites seeking to stamp out the ardor for change on the part of the peasantry, against all national movements which seem to have a socialist orientation, as a white supremacist power determined everywhere to put down wars of liberation started by the colored races?"

Richard B. Morris
in The Emerging Nations and
The American Revolution

lessons of vietnam

The philosopher Santayana once said that "those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

The world is full of poor, angry peoples who are ruled by corrupt, unrepresentative governments, and these peoples have in the past looked to the United States- the home of the first nationalist revolution of modern times- for inspiration in winning their independence and a better life.

Tragically, the United States has often betrayed these peoples' hopes by allying itself with their colonial masters (France, Britain, Portugal, The Netherlands, South Africa, etc.) and frequently sent American troops of Haiti, Panama, Bolivia, Guatemala, Lebanon, Okinawa, Greece and many other countries- Vietnam the latest example- show instances of American interventions and economic exploitations.

If the United States remains blind to the hard lessons of the Vietnam War, there will surely be other, bloodier "Vietnams" in Asia, Latin America and Africa, and Americans will be bitterly hated throughout the world.

To learn the lessons of Vietnam, Americans will have to give up our cherished belief that we are racially and culturally superior to everyone else- a belief that underlies our Vietnam involvement.

Americans will have to face the fact that our government has lied to us time and again and has tried to cloak an imperialistic policy in the noble rhetoric of "defending freedom."

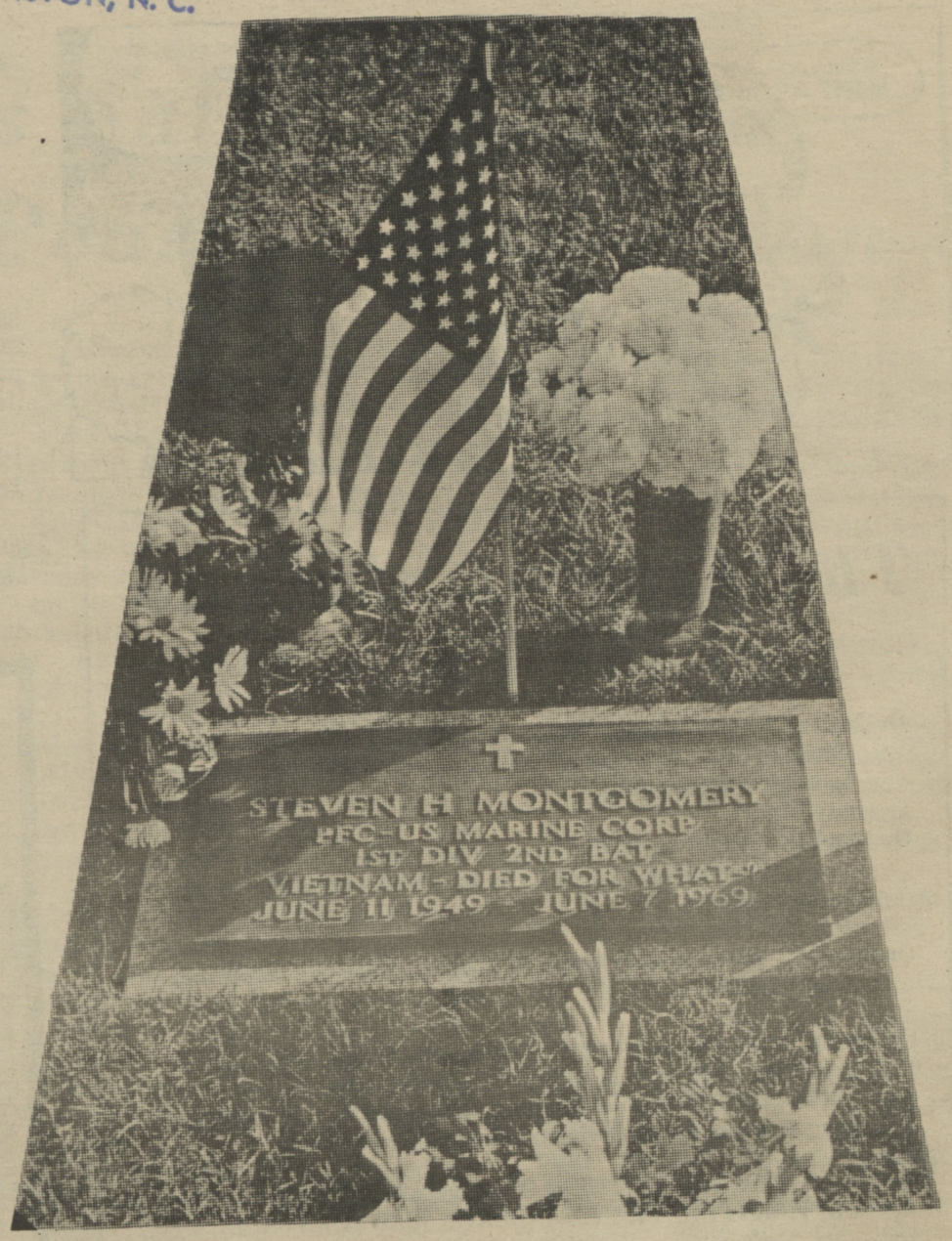
We will have to face the fact that Communists are quite capable of winning popular revolutions and that the U.S., in too many cases, is quite capable of supporting the most despicable tyrants.

It is past time for Americans to grow up and see that "Yankee ingenuity" and a "never-say-die" football spirit can NOT solve every problem in the world head-on!

It is past time for Americans to see that the President and the Generals are NOT always impartial, infallible men who "have all the facts" and act without ulterior motives in the best interests of all con- to see that other peoples do NOT hold OUR truths– progress, Christianity, mass production, etc.– " to be self-evident."

Finally, it is past time for Americans, in the words of poet Robert Burns, to "see ourselves as others see us" – all too often, as swaggering, red-faced, beef-fed men who arrogantly try to impress others with our size, power and wealth and who wrongly assume that a heavy dose of bombers, Bibles and bank accounts is the way to other people's hearts.

IF we can learn these lessons from our tragic adventure in Vietnam, then withdrawal will be more than a cure for one crisis but will lead to a way for America to live in a revolutionary world, true to the BEST side of the American character instead of the worst!

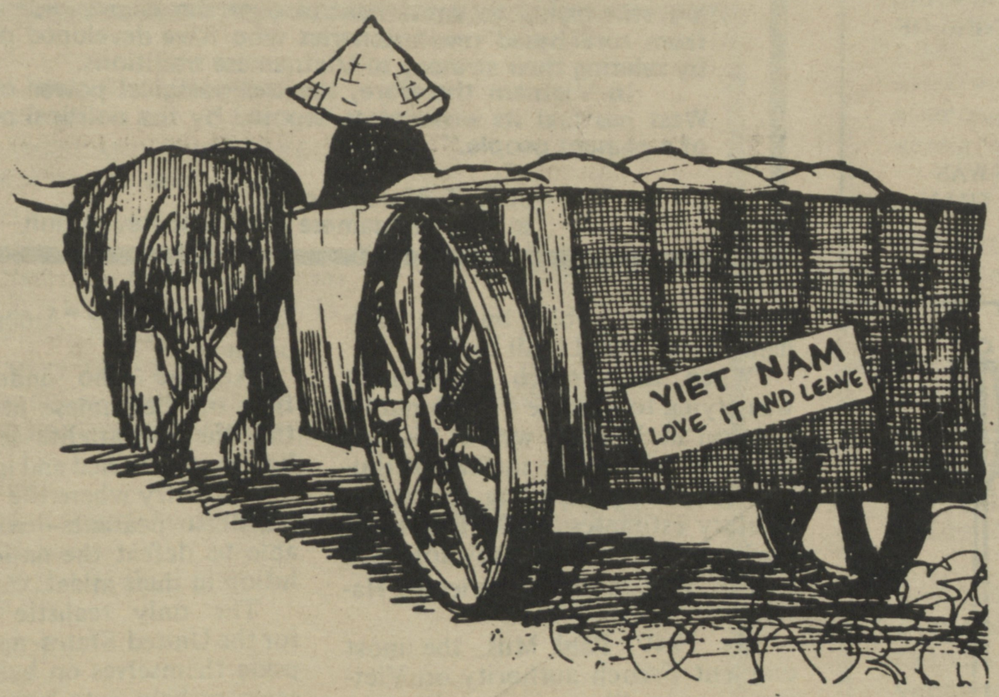


DIED FOR WHAT?

"These bitter words, in bronze, are on the East Bay grave of a 19-year old Marine who was killed in Vietnam. The question is his parents. The answers could be that he died to make the world safe for Ky and Thieu, to justify the wilfulness of the Sage of the Pedernales, to save the inscrutable Oriental face of Dean Rusk, to support the mistakes of computerized Pentagon minds, to defend a meaningless and temporary boundary line, to satisfy the blood lust of safe if not sane old men who watch the war on TV and say, "Go team, go!" as though it were a football game, and who glory in such dinner table jargon as "We oughta take Hanoi out with a nuke."

The 19-year old died because we intruded on a domestic fight. As the graffiti says, "How many Vietnamese fought in OUR civil war?" If there are no more Vietnams, perhaps the young man did not die in vain-- small comfort to his parents and the other parents of all the others.....

— Herb Caen
in the San Francisco Chronicle



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