

Beverly Ann Depe
38, Vo Tanh
Saigon, Vietnam

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SAIGON—It was mid-morning on April when the words were received here of President Lyndon Johnson's speech reducing the bombing over North Vietnam, thus setting the initial stage for the bilateral Paris peace talks. Shortly after the news broke, I stopped in ~~the kitchen~~ a kitchen to inform a Vietnamese maid working for an American of the developments, ~~expressing~~ expostulating that maybe peace would come to Vietnam. The maid stopped mopping the kitchen floor to listen—and then her face brightened into the most exquisite expression of joy and hope I had ever seen during my six years in Vietnam. Her mouth blossomed into a full smile, but her eyes drew tears; her lips moved but no words jumped out. In her ~~hands, and her~~ gnarled hands, the mop hand became a momentary crutch. Her speechless moments finally passed and she muttered in scissored English, "fini ~~boom boom boom~~ boom boom—very very good. I have three brothers and my husband in the army." For a fleeting moment, her face was a political cameo expressing more of the hopes of the Vietnamese people than all the words of ~~Vietnamese~~ government communiques, international platitudes and ~~debates~~ ^{official} over rejected and projected peace plans.

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This momentous period of hope for peace is certinally a fragment of the mood-mosaic of Saigon; captured Communist documents, revealing even more intensive and extensive indoctrination sessions, inci indicates that perhaps even "the other side" is having difficulty among its own troops in of squashing the magic and passion of peace and keep of keeping the war in motion.

Yet, in Saigon, these hopes for peace among the people are not great—it is just that these hopes never existed before April 1, except in dreams and propaganda speeches.

One Saigon laborer explained this week:

"The little people without much money talk about peace every day. We know there's been more than ten ses i sessions of talks in Paris--and that not onl one forward step has been made. We all watched carefully when President ~~Nguye~~ (Nguyen Van) ~~threw Thieu fley~~ to flew to Honolulu (to meet President Johnson on July 18) July 19). We though maybe they would do something about peace—but again not one forward step was made. Now we just wait and listen."/>

He seemed on the one hand pleased that anyone should have asked Humble Consequential his political viewpoint, yet afraid of expressing the true depths of that sentiment, which ran counter to the current Vietnamese government's policy. But, he buckled up and continued:

"Most of the working people just want peace. They no longer want to be caught in the crossfire between the government and the Communists. They want just one government to them it doesn't ~~mean~~ matter much which one. If the Communists take-over, it won't make much difference to the working people--we still have to work hard for a living no matter who is in power. Of course, the people with plenty of money don't want the Communists in power because they'd lose their businesses and their money and they'd have to go to France to stay alive." A deeply religious religious person, the laborer always dutifully prayed during ancestral anniversaries and arranged special offerings for in his home; he said, of course, the Communists regarded this as ~~superstitious~~ superstition and would not ~~teena~~ tolerate these practices if they assumed power. But, somehow, even the threat of losing any freedom to worship in this traditional manner paled in significance to ^{the} day-to-day agonizing uncertainties of the present time.

These little people are what the Communists call "the mass;" what the Americans call "the majority" and what the Vietnamese elite call "the black people." These lilliputians, as ~~antennae~~ well as some of the elite, watch this mutual "fighting while ~~neg~~ negotiating" stage of the current period and they clearly anticipate more fighting than negotiating. Their hopes for peace are distinctly ~~overshaw~~ overshadowed by--in fact, nearly undated by--the hopelessness and concern of threats of more fighting near or in Saigon.

In this sense, never in the eight-year history of the war has the mood of the Saigonese reached such depths of emotional despair, depression anguish and sometimes bitterness. For the American, Vietnamese government and Communist war machines, this represents a potential political dynamite. This mood is quite explainable; not until this year had Saigon itself become a military battleground. Before, it had been an island unto itself, detached from the bloodbath in the countryside, susceptible only to the pressures and repercussions of the war without witnessing or feeling the war itself.

With the Communist Tet offensive in January this year, and the mini-Tet of May, Saigon itself has become a battleground--perhaps the main and final one. This escalation in war misery has counter-escalated a war weariness and pleas for peace. But, the current black cloud of despair engulfing the capital is based ~~not~~ simply on the memories of these traumatic shocks, but also on the prevailing expectations of more fighting. The resulting fright and agonizing uncertainties of family and personal survival ~~pro~~ predominate ~~almost every~~ the thinking of almost all Saigonese most of the time. Whether all these fears are justified is often debated, ^{GET THIS Question} but is generally considered irrelevant. The state of Saigon's ~~psychologi~~ psychological mood may be different from the realities around it; the "hard" facts of the situation may be different from what the Saigonese believe to be the facts. The gloom and doom of Saigon is a prevailing mood, whether this mood is justified or whatever its causes.

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Every day now, the Saigon newspapers carry half-page headlines predicting another Communist offensive in or near the capital; these or American predictions are ~~made~~ made either by Vietnamese officials or military commanders, or, in the latest case, by President Lyndon Johnson himself. The people expectations of new fighting, however, does not stem solely from the fact that the officialdoms have forecast it. ~~The~~ Many Saigonese only half-listen to the government's announcements and accept them only when they jibe with their own prejudices or viewpoints. Rather their ~~is~~ fears of another offensive seem to rest more on the fact that the common Vietnamese man in the street--and even many Vietnamese officials--believe the Communists are already in and around Saigon, and hence that the ~~Allied~~ eight Allied divisions poised around the capital may well prevent a main-force assault, but ~~hav~~ they have not alleviated ~~the~~ the fear of, nor eliminated the presence of, the Communists already around the town. Whether these Communists are newly infiltrated, or ones that have lived here for years and have now emerged, or whether they are recent converts is in some cases fairly discernible--and in most cases irrelevant--to them.

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The presence of the Communists, pro-Communists and neutralists is clearly felt in Saigon and, like a heavy river-bottom fog, seems to be rising from the level level of the "masses" upwards to enshroud the towers of ~~national~~^{central} government strength.

No Saigonese is thus surprised that he receives a lecture-ette from a Chinese waiter while his breakfast is being served. *in a downtown Restaurant* The waiter tells matter-of-factly about Communist troops movements near the Cambodian border; he tells of a super-duper new Communist automatic weapon which can fire 6 100 rounds at a whack and he relates his version of the great agony of the war and the desire of "the people" to have the war over--no matter who wins. If the Communists win, he will have to work just like before, he concludes; only the rich will be inconvenienced. Clearly, the waiter has "connections with the other side," the Vietnamese concluded while munching his breakfast; clearly too the Communists are on the political ~~inst~~ initiative in Saigon--having captured the great appeal of peace by word-of-mouth propaganda, having captured ~~the~~ in Saigon the peace offensive the Allies themselves themselves created and launched and maintained in the world outside of Vietnam.

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And, likewise, no Vietnamese army officer is surprised when "Communist agents" are uncovered in the Vietnamese army, including several ~~at~~ at the High Command Command; he matter-of-factly announces that seven or eight were picked up recently. Nor was a Vietnamese airborne officer ~~supri~~ surprised that the Communists consistently evaded his hard-charging unit on a sweep in Hoc Monh district outside of Saigon. "The Viet Cong have told their troops not to fight the Vietnamese," he explains. "They are to fight only the Americans. The Viet Cong have circulated leaflets outside the little government outposts, saying the popular forces can go anywhere outside the post, even in uniform, if they leave their weapons behind--and the Viet Cong will not shoot them. And, so the popula_r forces not longer fight the Viet Cong. When the paratroopers come in, we know they there are lots of V. C. all around. But, they just fade away and won't fight us. They just wait for the Americans."

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Even senior Vietnamese officers and government officials are known to be receiving personal visits from Communist sympathizers, attempting to convince them of either changing sides or giving up the fight right now. One senior government official was recently visited by an long-time friend--a friend who had actively supported Prime Minister Tran Van Huong as a candidate during the 1967 President election. Now ^{HOWEVER,} the friend voiced a sermonette in favor of the allegedly pro-Communist Alliance ~~forum~~ ~~Forum, Democratic and Peace Forces~~ of National, Democratic and Peace Forces. And, young university students, who, in 1964 favored American bombing of North Vietnam, ^{FND} who, in 1965, actively supported the anti-government Buddhist monks, have now turned active advocates of the same pro-Communist Alliance; they use the classrooms as conspiracy halls.

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Even Americans officials and officers, without benefit of knowing the local ~~the~~ language, discuss this nebulous Communist presence in the city--
~~and the ramifications of it.~~ ^{or outwards evidences} One official still can not forget ~~he~~ heard that during the Tet offensive, he heard the C Viet Cong troops loading their mortar tubes under his window--and he suspects they are still in his neighborhood. A British journalist recalls a similar incident. One visitor from Washington remarked how much closer the American artillery rounds now seem to be around the city. In fact, ~~he was told, America~~ ^{4/} a Vietnamese artillery batter and two cub tigers captured in battle are add recent additions to the Saigon zoo right next door to the Prime Minister's office.

One American officer, who had ~~never~~ ^{first} served in Vietnam during the dark days of 1964, remarked recently: "The B-52 raids are so close to Saigon I can feel my billet sway from the shock waves. I live on the seventh floor and the other night I was writing a letter to my wife and drinking a coke. A B-52 raid came along and I could see the coke wafting back and forth in the glass--that's how much the building was swaying. You know how fragile these Vietnamese buildings are made--ten parts sand and one part cement. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the B-52 raids didn't cause these crackerboxes to come tumbling down."

Many Vietnamese families have taken ^{all} the preparations possible to protect themselves against any future fighting in their area--knowing that no preparations can fully guarantee their lives. Many of the elected Senators and Assemblymen now sleep in the home of a different friend each night, hoping to evade assassination squads. Others live in their own home^s, protected by several government troops and a high wall of concrete around ~~their~~ their yards. Since the rocketing attacks in mid-June, many Saigonese have built sandbagged bunkers in their homes or yards. One upper-class housewife, who spend ^{the equivalent of} more than \$1000 equiv^{al} equivalent for sandbags in her air-conditioned living room, now must endure the complaints of her husband, who maintains the bunker "makes me sick to look at whenever I come home." ^{For quick evacuations,} Almost every family has packed a small suitcase of the most necessary items: all their legal papers, high school and college certificates, marriage license, family lists and individual identity papers--those which are ~~irreplace~~ difficult to replace. Sometimes family squabbles result over things to be put in the suitcase; one housewife wanted to take her modest collection of jewelry, but the husband argued it was better to ^{RISK} ~~let people~~ looters steal ^{it from their homes} ~~it~~ than to have a soldier or bandit shoot her to snatch the suitcase. A few clothes for the children and milk is generally packed too. Middle-class housewives ^{BEFORE HAD EXCLUSIVELY} who ~~only~~ worn ~~all~~ the silken flowing ~~so dais~~ have now had tailored the pajama-styled ba-bas of the poorer class so that they will become less conspicuous in a crowd. In many cases, the Saigon ~~busea~~ beauty shops are unique now unique gossiping places where housewives swap suggestions on how to prepare keep their family together best prepared for the offensive.

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Moved

Many families have ~~slip up~~ items of special ~~item~~ interest--milk
Valuables *into* *Several of*
for the children or gold leaf--among the homes of their closest friends
and relatives who live in different sections of the city, on the assumption
not all that at least a portion of their valuables and necessities can
During Fighting or Rocketing.
be salvaged from any offensive.

As one Saigonese housewife explained: "Almost everyone family
~~has~~ has two mental thoughts. First, we want the whole family
to live together or to die together; we don't want some to live, some
to die and some to be wounded. Second, we think that ~~tomorrow~~ we don't
tomorrow,
know if we will live or we will die, so it is best just to think about
today. "