

South Viets Identify GIs With Colonialism

This is the second of a series of four articles reviewing the war in Viet Nam during 1965 and assessing the prospects in 1966.

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SAIGON.

The buildup of American combat troops in Viet Nam during 1965 produced a visible buildup in anti-Americanism among the Vietnamese population.

A significant date between the Feb. 7 bombing of North Viet Nam and the March 8 arrival of the first American combat units was the Feb. 20 mutiny against commander-in-chief Gen. Nguyen Khanh by his generals. The net effect of Gen. Khanh's overthrow was to fragment the anti-Communist power in Saigon, while the Viet Cong had seized partial control of the country at the village level.

As commander-in-chief, a more important post in war time than that of prime minister, Gen. Khanh had dominated the anti-Communist scene—and had been acclaimed by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara as America's strongman for Viet Nam. But by late 1964, Gen. Khanh grew bitter toward U. S. Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, who demanded political stability, while Gen. Khanh, was aspiring to the Presidency.

FALSE COUP

Twelve days after the bombing of North Viet Nam, a false coup was led by Col. Pham Ngoc Thao, who was openly acknowledged to be associated with the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency. The next day the generals forced Gen. Khanh out of the country. The 600,000-man Vietnamese Armed Forces were turned over to a weak commander-in-chief. Finally, the post was abolished, leaving the armed forces virtually leaderless.

Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat ran into trouble. After three months in office he called for support from the Vietnamese generals, who promptly tossed him out of office. A Vietnamese military junta again took on the job of governing the country while attempting to defeat an enemy.

Amid instability on the anti-Communist side, the Reds could exploit the first American combat units—who arrived without solid political, economic, or social battle plans. The instincts of the Vietnamese, traditionally xen-

troops would have eased the situation considerably.

It was widely known in Saigon that the Vietnamese—including Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat—learned of the date of the arrival of the first Marines in March from foreign press announcements made in Saigon and Washington. The Vietnamese feared they might win the war but lose their country. Outbursts from officers, students and intellectuals charged that "the Americans were running the whole show."

THE DOLLAR

No sooner did the American troops land in the northern provinces than the medium of exchange became the U.S. dollar rather than the piastre. With no restrictions on the amount of available dollars, an American private had purchasing power once held only by Vietnamese generals. Cokes, beers and wash basins were purchased in villages with nickels, dimes and quarters. In at least one instance, a Vietnamese village chief, backed up by his popular force platoons, attempted to invade the village of another chief and to seize the villagers American dollars at an unfair rate of exchange. Six months after the arrival of the first American unit, American officials abolished the use of dollars in Viet Nam. Replacing them was military scrip, which now has be-

come items in Viet Nam. Women. Few Vietnamese appreciated the loss of their women—or the fact that illiterate females could earn ten times a man's pay. Gradually, in any city or village bordering American units, drugstores, villas, and furniture stores quickly gave way to bars and brothels.

WAGES

The build up of American forces also brought demands for more housing, runways, offices and other facilities. Wages for skilled labor, and cost of building materials and transportation brought inflation. "The Vietnamese economy is in horrific shape. This could ruin the whole campaign against the Viet Cong," one Western diplomat said recently.

The Viet Cong sabotage of roads had also produced inflation on items such as rice, charcoal and fish sauce. The American economic mission reacted by importing consumer goods to sop up the excess purchasing power—and financed the emergency import of 250,000 tons of rice. While the Saigon price of rice dropped, in the provinces rich merchants continued to charge what the traffic would bear.

The Vietnamese hurt most by the inflation were not the Communists, but the government's own officials and troops, paid mostly on fixed salaries

shoeshine boy on the street and asked to have their photograph taken together. The little boy barked an obscenity at the fatigue-clad Senator and added: "Go home!" An American official with Jackson blanched and said: "Well, that's pretty much the feeling around here."

In the city of Da Nang, an average of three or four fist-fights a week break out between GIs and teenage Vietnamese gangs, popularly known as "cowboys." One American service man was beaten up and lay in a back alley for two days. Though Vietnamese shopkeepers saw the body, they did not report it to police. The American military police finally located it.

By the beginning of 1966, it became apparent that the Buddhist bonzes, as well as the Viet Cong, could easily exploit Vietnamese nationalism and anti-Americanism.

One incident used by the Buddhists occurred when the American Marines fired two tank rifles rounds into a pagoda from which they claimed a sniper was firing at them. The word immediately spread among Vietnamese peasants

that the Marines had maliciously fired into the pagoda. The Marines also were accused of having deliberately broken a Buddhist statue and strewn human excrement around the pagoda.

The Buddhists, widely considered to include neutralists and pro-Communists, previously had successfully toppled two administrations in Viet Nam: President Ngo Dinh Diem in November, 1963, and Gen. Khanh in August, 1964.

"If the Buddhist priests do turn anti-American, the war will change into a new dimension which we can't even yet imagine," one source said, looking forward to 1966.

At the beginning of the year, rural Viet Nam was half-conquered by the Viet Cong, and the urban portion was in a state of semi-insurrection. As more American troops arrived, resulting anti-Americanism vastly complicated the prospects for economic and political stability.

The next article in the series will deal with the problems of pacification of the countryside, and the military role in the process of seeking stable local institutions.