

deepe
saigon--1
july 1, 1965

SAIGON--Saigon is beginning to be a capital without a country.

It is beginning to suffer visibly from ~~economic~~
~~and political~~ strangulation in slow-motion--but it is not
~~begin~~ yet being ~~starg~~ starved to death.

"The viet Cong are putting the squeeze on Saigon," one Vietnamese intellectual who had once served with the Communists explained. "But they won't go to the breaking point to starve ~~the~~ Saigon--until they are ready to seize power. And that is several years away."

(More)

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saigon-2

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Saigon is the hub for five main road arteries plus the national railroad. Route No. 1 and the national railroad running northward for 400 miles has been cut for six months, as the Viet Cong and a devastating flood combined to sever the country, ~~SA~~ ^{A RUNAWAY} creating an inflation of prices in the northern provinces. A second road leading northwesterly ~~to~~ linking Vietnam with Cambodia has also been cut for months. A Third road linking Saigon to the sea and to the popular beaching resort of Cap St. Jacques is open only at the mercy of the Viet Cong, ^{which creates} ~~thus creating~~ a shortage of salt in the city by scissoring ~~the~~ the transportation means with the salt centers near the sea. High-class Vietnamese and French ex-colons complain bitterly when the viet Cong will not accept their road taxes so they can spend ~~the~~ ² a pleasant week-end on the refreshing beaches. A fourth road leading directly to the high ~~plate~~ plateau has been cut for months; it has been the scene of so many ambushes that American GI's call it "bloody route 14." A fifth leads ~~in~~ to the rich Mekong Delta region; the Viet Cong ~~tax products~~ places road taxes on rice, charcoal and fish coming into Saigon, but has yet to completely ~~severe~~ ² snip the roads, bridges and ferry ~~ce~~ crossings. That will come later; but at this time Saigon still survives on the charcoal and other produce the Viet Cong allow to ~~continue~~ ² flow.

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The ~~elctr~~² electric power lines leading from a newly-constructed multimillion-dollar ~~hydro~~² hydro-electric dam, ~~cons~~² built by the Japanese has as part of the war reparations program, has recently been ~~seas~~² cut by the Viet Cong; now ~~ex~~ electricity is virtually rationed in Saigon, with certain blocks being blacked out each night. The largest commercial companies ^{OR} to the ~~smallest~~² poorest families have stockpiled~~x~~ candles or ~~Kero~~² kerosene lamps; ~~resrau~~² restaurants are getting accustomed to serving dinners in ^{the} an eerie gaslight ~~as~~² atmosphere of the previous century.

There is a ghouliah air of fantasy and un-reality in Saigon. Saigon appears to be a seat of government; instead it is being governed. It has the aura of prosperity; yet a rice crisis ~~innummum~~ surfaces--and housewives and Chinese speculators hoard the previous white grain--once the Prime Minister mentions dropping the price. Saigon appears to be a center of anti-Communist resistance; yet in the invisible subversive war, the number and influence of the Communists is growing politically within the city. It is the anti-Communist families--and not the pro-neutralist or pro-Communist ones that are afraid of being kidnapped or assassinated.

"The Western idea is to have Saigon as the capital and use it to control the countryside," one Vietnamese intellectual explained.

"The Viet Cong idea is the opposite. They use the countryside to surround the towns and ultimately seize control of the towns--but Saigon is the last of the towns to be seized."

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saigon--4

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Under President Ngo Dinh Diem, who ruled from 1955 to ~~1953~~ 1963, power was centralized in Saigon--specifically in the Presidential Palace. Since his fall in November of 1963, however, power and leadership has fragmented and crumbled; the ministries in Saigon now longer are linked strongly to their provincial representatives.

"Never believe that these neon lights and pretty middle-class life is Vietnam," one high-ranking Western diplomat explained. "It is the little people wearing black ~~pjama~~ pjamas in the jungle that control the country and Saigon is simply reacting to these waves of pressure splashing in from the countryside."

Saigon is an upside-down city. American pilots, who risk death during their daytime flights, enjoy excellent French food and wines, while lovely Vietnamese singers harmonize in love songs. From the roof of Saigon's hotels, where businessmen met for cocktail parties and dinners, ~~rising~~ in the bright flashes of machinegun fire can be seen. It is a city of instant ~~sex~~ sex and sin; American and Vietnamese troops use it as a military rear base for relaxation and escaping from their day-time trials of the war; the Viet Cong, however, use Saigon as the economic and political front-line--to create political divisions among political leaders, to gain intelligence information for from Vietnamese colonels or bargirls, to buy their own drugs, or black material for uniforms.

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The city once known as "the Paris of the Orient" formerly sparkled with sidewalk cafes dotted ~~and~~ along the ~~tar~~ tamarind-lined streets. By ~~1962~~ 1952 195 1962, with the influx of American advisors, the sidewalk cafes disappeared; they were too good a target for a Viet Cong grenade. Bars and ~~rest~~ restaurants catering to Americans quickly grilled in all the windows, some hired private doormen armed with pistols, others completely screened in their building, giving the appearance of a miniature armed camp.

Since, the bombing of the American Embassy several months ago, ^{Automatically} a new security measure has appeared. The plate glass windows of large ~~common~~ commercial shops and Western embassies along Saigon's mainstreet have been crisscrossed with ~~large~~ huge strips of adhesive tape—to stop the glass from shattering.

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saigon--6

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Since then, the American Embassy, the United States Information Service office, have been ringed for half-blocks with white barricades, and cement drums. Vietnamese policemen stop Vietnamese cars from parking near the areas; the U. S. I. S. library for Vietnamese readers has been moved to a different location. Not many Vietnamese like to be walk near American installations; Vietnamese taxi drivers refuse to drop passengers near them; since various Viet Cong & terrorist bombings, Vietnamese have learned to stay away from places usually frequented by Americans.

Hence, as more and more Americans pour into the city, they become increasingly isolated from the Vietnamese people—which is what the Viet Cong had hoped would happen.

Yet, ~~dis~~ despite the tensions, terrorist incidents, small problems of rice, Saigon is a privileged city—and ~~and~~ considers itself such. The impact of real war ~~in~~ the countryside is noted only on the ~~page~~ obituary page, which daily lists the Vietnamese condolences to the victim's families. Or it is seen in a visit to the government-operated hospitals, where 11-year-old Nguyen Thi ~~in~~ ² Tiep (Little Helper Girl) lays with a broken thigh bone.

"A bomb came down out of the air and shattered our house," she explained. "I was seriously hurt and my little brother was hurt a little bit too."

But, not many Saigonese visit the war victims.