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Peace Marches Worry Vietnamese but Not GIs

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The anti-Viet Nam demonstrations in the United States, including the latest march on Washington, have worried the Vietnamese more than they have worried American troops or officials here.

The Americans are more inclined to dismiss the demonstrators and draft-card burners as "adolescents or idiots"—in the words of one major. Few see the anti-Viet Nam agitation as Communist influenced or inspired.

However, Vietnamese citizens, especially staunchly anti-Communist Roman Catholics—are more inclined to believe there is some Communist influence in both the anti-Viet Nam protests and the civil rights demonstrations because such tactics have been used by the Communists in Viet Nam.

Vietnamese who recall the French Indo-China war fear the demonstrators ultimately will force the Johnson administration to soften its stance here.

EXPLANATION

One Vietnamese explained: "Everyone knows that the French did not lose the war at Dien Bien Phu (the fortress overrun by the Communists in 1954 just before the French government agreed to the Geneva Convention ending the conflict). The French lost the war in Paris when the Paris government no longer supported the French Army and wouldn't send in more funds and troops. The French could easily have won the war after Dien Bien Phu if they had maintained the support of their government and people at home. The demonstrators in America may produce the same thing in the coming years."

The Vietnamese are more exposed to news about the anti-Viet Nam demonstrators because many consistently listen to the Hanoi radio, which broadcasts long editorial commentaries about "the great American people rising up against the Johnson clique." Vietnamese language newspapers in SAIGON were

heavily censored about the Nov. 27 march on Washington.

The American GI in combat areas, isolated from current newspapers and too busy to listen to the radio, is more affected by the floods of letters of support being received from Americans as part of the "Viet Nam mailcall" program. One box of 10,000 letters recently arrived at the 1st Cavalry Division headquarters at An Iche.

One official in an Allied embassy said:

"We in the diplomatic corps in Saigon are more concerned about American casualties here than we are about the anti-Viet Nam demonstrators in America. If the American casualties continue to rise as they have been lately, the American mothers and fathers who now support the war may reverse their viewpoint—something like happened during the Korea conflict."

One American official dismissed the importance in America or in South Viet Nam of the Anti-Viet Nam demonstrations, but was worried that "the demonstrations encourage Hanoi to continue the war. Hanoi sends in more men to stretch out the war, hoping the American public opinion will turn against the Johnson administration—especially at the ballot box."

HANOI

A recent traveler from Hanoi expressed the same viewpoint.

"The Hanoi officials think that if they keep pushing the war just a little longer pretty soon the American people will clamor for peace—on their terms," he said. "Radio Hanoi continuously blares out about this—it helps their morale in North Viet Nam and Hanoi hopes that it will gain support for them in South America, Africa and other underdeveloped countries."

The Sunday afternoon after the Nov. 27 demonstrations in Washington, a half-dozen GIs of the 1st Division sat in their steaming tent pitched in a dusty salt flat north of Saigon and mulled over the protests.

A sergeant from California said, "The most typical reaction to all this is: Let them demonstrate over her, on some long range patrols. These patrols are a lot tougher than demonstrations."

Another reaction was "We're not as worried about what's happening in Washington as what's happening in Lai Khe (a nearby town and scene of bloody fighting the day before)."

LETTER

Another, an officer, explained, "Some of us are disgusted with draft-card burners, but some of us also think they are more helpful than harmful. They have put more focus on the troops in Viet Nam and we're getting a lot of letters of support. One private called them 'draft-card burning punks' and that pretty well sums up the attitude of most of us."

He pulled out one letter, handwritten by Linda Tacorelli of Newton Square, Pa., which began, "Dear soldier—I don't know who you are, but that doesn't really matter. Thank you for being who you are and fighting for such a precious thing as peace . . . please don't ever lose (sic) faith in people and especially in God . . ."

An American civilian added the comment, "This encourages Hanoi—they think these demonstrators are a majority of the American people."

A sergeant chimed in: "When we get the newspapers—usually three days late—we read about the demonstrations and then we turn to the sports page. They're not a big thing. If there's any

talk about them among the troops it's as offhanded as 'Maybe it will rain today' or 'Maybe there will be another demonstration tomorrow.' Some of us have been bitter in the past—we can't understand why they are doing things like this."

Another added, "The demonstrations are not an alarming thing—mostly they're done by students, and institutions of higher learning have been doing things like this for a long time. But these young people are not Communist sympathizers."

BIG NAMES

After the Nov. 27 march one Vietnamese intellectual expressed amazement that "big names, like Arthur Miller," joined in. A refugee from North Viet Nam contended, "The Americans have too much democracy and so they allowed the peace-makers to do what they want. For instance, they carried the Viet Cong flags during the demonstrations. That is too much."

Agreeing in part was a Vietnamese officer who felt the marchers were a very small minority. But they consciously or unconsciously serve the Communist propaganda. The Vietnamese in Saigon are influenced by these marches, which are blown up by the Viet Cong."

A Vietnamese Army officer who recently returned from the United States felt Chinese Communists financed and sparked the demonstrations. Some Vietnamese were impressed by the intensity of reactions among some Americans.

A cyclo-driver asserted, "I'm not impressed much by the peace marchers, but the Americans who burn themselves really have the guts. Before I thought only the Japanese dare to commit hara-kiri, and then the Vietnamese Buddhists did it. I believed the Americans were only materialistic people who would not dare to do it. Anyway, I'm concerned only about the Vietnamese who are killed every day."