

# City Of Contrasts: Saigon Rots But Still Has Cultural Identity *Cease-Fire Set; U.S. Bombs Hanoi*

**Editor's Note:** The following is an installment of a series on the Vietnam war written by Howard Moffett, former editor of the Yale Daily News. Moffett is a fulltime correspondent for the Collegiate Press Service and is presently working in Saigon.

SAIGON—Saigon is a jaded city. There are no innocents here, not even little kids. Everything happens in the streets, and a ten-year-old Vietnamese girl is likely to know more about the way adults behave in the dark or under stress than a 20-year-old American college boy.

Layers of dust give busy streets the same dull yellow look as the stucco walls around French villas and office buildings.

For lack of private toilet facilities, many urinate or defecate in alleys and streets. A year ago piles of garbage lay rotting on Saigon's main boulevards, and even now in some places the trucks can't cart it away fast enough.

On Tu Do (Freedom) Street, once a fashionable office and shopping district, scores of bars now cater to American GIs. The dull, inevitable pump of Nancy Sinatra or the Beatles lasts from three in the afternoon to eleven at night, when military police move through to hustle lingerers home before curfew.

Inside, a young air cavalryman down from An Khe tells a sad-looking girl the same war story he told another girl last night, and wishes he were telling it to the girl back home.

For her part, the bar girl tells him in broken English about her divided family—maybe the same story she told last night, maybe not—and wonders if he will take her home. She made more money last week than her father did last year. Prices are higher now though.

Outside, teen-age boys peddle pornography and young men with motor scooters and old men with pedicabs offer a ride home,

and a "nice young girl—cheap."

Students dodging the draft buy forged credentials, and money changers—who often turn out to be sleight of hand artists or secret police agents—promise double the official rate for greenbacks.

The refugees and the poor live in their alleys on the perimeter of the middle-class city. These thoroughfares, some of them all of three feet wide, wind in interminable mazes wherever there is ground to build a house.

Despite the weariness, the closeness and the heat, Saigon's culture has a spontaneity that twenty years of war has not stamped out.

Delta hospitality is famous throughout Southeast Asia; any guest is given the best in the house.

Night life is tinny, but those who frequent the city's clubs give it a pulsing rhythm of its own. Any soldier lives close to the surface, and the Vietnamese Infantryman tends to be more fatalistic than most. A terrorist grenade or a drunken officer's pistol shot could end it any time. Private dance parties require a permit, but many young hosts and hostesses take their chances and often wind up with the police as uninvited guests.

French influence is still evident everywhere. Those city boys who have managed to avoid the draft often affect French styles in dress, haircuts, and speech.

Well-stocked French bookstores bear testimony to a large class of people who continue to enjoy literature for its own sake. At this moment, controversy rages over whether to permit the French to maintain their prestigious lycées, and whether or not to substitute Vietnamese—or English—for French as the language of instruction in the universities.

The performing arts have been hit hard by the war, but every week or so a concert or recital is announced,

and Vietnamese plays draw large audiences.

Buddhist activity has waned considerably since Prime Minister Ky's successful crackdown on the Struggle Movement in Hue last spring. Still the pagodas are filled with saffron-clad monks trying to patch up or widen further the rift in the Buddhist Unified Church. Buddhists and confucian funerals periodically fill the streets with color.

The newspapers are still subject to government censorship but political discussions in restaurants and cafes are often heated and free. Unlike the last days under Diem, students now do not hesitate to criticize the regime, and charges of corruption and/or incompetence are regularly if quietly flung at some of the Directory's leading generals.

But political discussions, even those involving the new Constituent Assembly, inevitably smack of resignation. South Viet Nam is at war against itself, Saigon is under siege and even the most hopeful know that as long as this goes on, and may be longer, the generals will wield effective power.

Two major news stories have come out of Vietnam in past weeks. The first important development concerned a Christmas cease-fire. The truce, proposed by the neutralist countries and by Pope Paul, will halt military operations for two 24-hour periods during Christmas and New Years. A similar truce last year was violated by the Viet Cong, and several Americans were killed in sneak attacks during the supposed "cease fire."

Many war observers, including Dr. Peter Cheng, assistant professor of political science, think that because of the tenuous Viet Cong line of communication, many of the guerrillas simply failed to get word of the truce.

Cheng added that the VC have agreed to the truce because many of their members are Catholic. Cheng even suggested that many of the Viet Cong fighting men requested the truce, and Hanoi had little choice but to agree.

"It's a good idea, but last year a lot of guys were killed in the same kind of truce. This year we'll be ready." Even high-ranking American officers agree that Christmas in Vietnam this year will be a gun-in-one-hand, turkey-in-the-other affair.

The second news development is the U.S. bombing in or near Hanoi. United States officials have yet to deliver an official pronouncement concerning this new turn of American war

policy. Western news papers are depending on Radio Hanoi for details.

But the Christmas truce has produced substantiation for a new political analysis of the Vietnam war.

The war in Vietnam has produced theories, demonstrations, and explosive political campaigns. Theodore Sorenson, a former Kennedy advisor refuses to say anything about how JFK would have handled the war.

The New Left claims that the United States has no

business in Vietnam. Many of our "allies", notably France, have refused to endorse the United States war position. To the Administration, the war is a United States attempt to give democracy to a country long ruled by dictators, to the Right the United States is stemming the Red Tide.

The policies of that Allies (the U.S., Korea, Australia and South Vietnam) has produced virtually hundreds of interpretations. But recently political analysts

have started wondering about the feelings of the Communist bloc toward Vietnam.

Victor Zorza, an English analyst of the Vietnam war, maintains (in the Dec. 27th Issues of Look) that the Communist bloc is almost as divided on Vietnam as the West.

Zorza's thesis is that Hanoi war leaders are divided into "hawks" and "doves", every bit as much as the West. ("Hawk" is the term applied to a hard-

line, get-tough advocate, "Dove" indicates a softer position spokesman.)

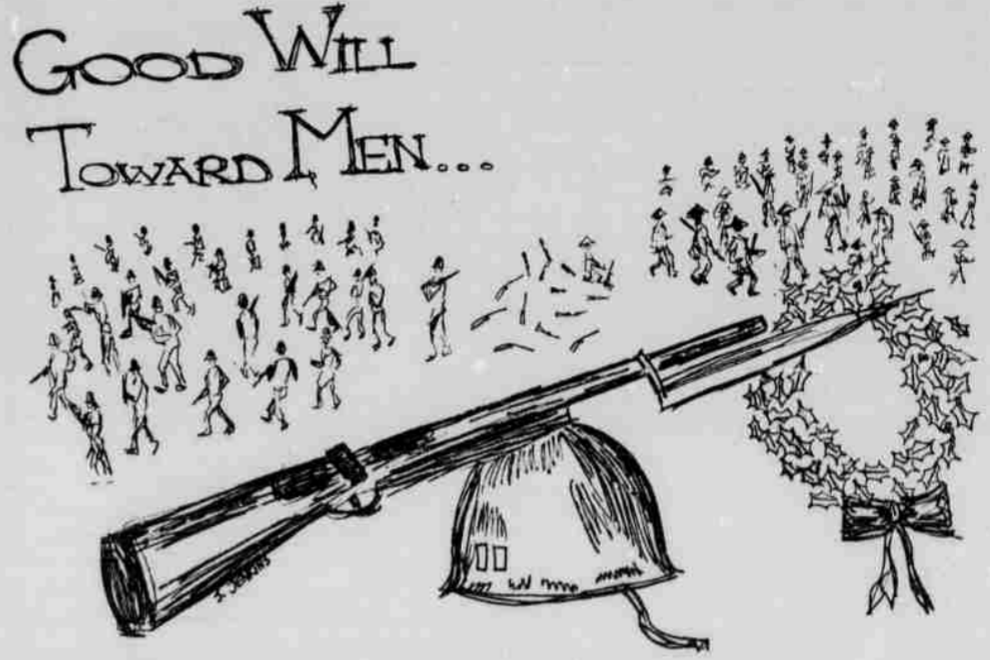
Certain members of the Hanoi regime, according to Zorza believe that "the Vietnamese Communists should give up for the time being their unrealistic attempt to defeat, single-handedly, the whole power and might of the U.S."

Hanoi, consequently, is looking to the United States for a softening of the U.S. war position. Zorza contends. (This article was written before the United States bombings near Hanoi.)

Zorza thinks that the Christmas truce, and another cessation of Air Force bombing, would provide the doves with concrete proof for their position.

The RAND Corporation, (a "think factory" of brilliant political and economic analysts), corroborated Zorza's thesis. They also recognize the need, according to Zorza, for a softening of United States policy to support the doves.

Zorza accuses the United States of refusal to recognize the Communist schism. Robert J. McCloskey, a State Department spokesman, did in fact, refuse to acknowledge the validity of Zorza's thesis.



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