

J. Cheney

THE VIETNAM

# OBSERVER

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TET AN CESTORS' ALTAR



## « XXth ANNIVERSARY OF UNESCO » POSTAGE STAMPS

*TO OUR READERS — Any new subscriber for one year to this magazine will receive free of charge the above-mentioned series of new stamps as a welcoming gift from THE VIETNAM OBSERVER.*

To commemorate the XXth Anniversary of UNESCO, on December 15, 1966, the General Post Office has issued a new series of postage stamps on the theme: «The collaboration among the Nations to promote peace and security through education, science and culture.»

The new stamps come in three denominations: VN\$1.00, VN\$3.00, VN\$7.00. with the same size of impression and composition i.e. 31mm x 41mm, 25 (5x5) per sheet. The three denominations present different designs engraved on back-gummed paper, and showing the emblem of UNESCO.

The one-piaster stamp, colored in lilac, brown and dark brown, is decorated with

a branch which symbolizes the growing world culture. Next to it is a western-styled house bearing the letters «UNESCO». This stamp is designed by Nguyen-Thiet-Nhi and printed by De la Rue Group. It was issued in 2,000,000 units.

The three-piaster stamp is printed in blue, dark blue and brown. Its main features are the globe with a tape around it, bearing the letters «UNESCO» and at its both sides, two laurel branches, the whole depicts the emblem of UNESCO.

This stamp is designed by Nguyen-Van-Ri and printed by Staderini Carte Valori. The quantity issued includes 2,000,000 stamps.

The seven-piaster stamp, colored in blue, grey and red, bears the design of a house of Asian style. The design symbolizes the site of the world culture confederation. It is the work of designer Tran-Thi-Hieu-Hanh and is printed by S.P.A. Rome. The number of its issues is 500,000 units.



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**FROM THE PUBLISHER**

You may or may not have had the opportunity to enjoy the Vietnamese TET festivities in Vietnam. You may or may not have acquired some understanding of the customs and traditions concerning this, our greatest annual celebration. In either case I hope this issue of Vietnam Observer may help give you a better knowledge of the Vietnamese New Year and with it bring a closer relationship to the Vietnamese people.

This year, TET, the Vietnamese New Lunar Year, officially falls on the 9th of February 1967, and as usual will continue for at least three more days. The word «TET» etymologically derives from «TIET» meaning «weather». TET NGUYEN DAN, or the Vietnamese New Lunar Year, constitutes a great opportunity for rejoicing. It announces the beginning of spring in our tropical country.

However, the Vietnamese people — like other Oriental peoples — adopt a synthetic concept of life and in this instance have enlarged the significance of TET to include many other aspects of life, including even the political. For this reason, the significance of TET implies new hopes for greater changes in the course of life.

For the Vietnamese people, Tet is the most appropriate occasion for rest and entertainment as compensation for a long year of hard work. So, the first verse of a well-known popular poem sings :

« January is the right month for entertainment and merry-making...

Tet is a time for family reunion for grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters, wives, husbands and children to meet together in an atmosphere of happiness. During the year, members of the family may have to work in far-away places to earn a living for the whole family. But they cannot miss the occasion of TET to get back to their families. In consideration of this custom, an old verse begins :

« Try to get back home to celebrate Tet's festivities...»

Tet also implies friendship and peace. As a long-standing tradition in Vietnam, Tet has provided opportunities for truce during war time. Indeed, VN history records only one exceptional case of fighting during Tet when Emperor QUANG TRUNG felt compelled to embattle the Chinese invaders of the Thanh's dynasty on the fourth of Ky-Dau New Year (1789). The practice of truce between North and South Vietnam in the present conflict therefore has deep roots in history.

As dictated by the spirit of the Vietnamese tradition, and on behalf of all the staff of THE VIETNAM OBSERVER, I would like to wish you perfect enjoyment of the FIVE HAPPINESSES : PHUC (Happiness) — LOC (Good Fortune) — THO (Longevity) — KHANG (Joy) — AN (Peace).

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COURT OF THE EMPEROR OF JADE

## THE GENIE OF

## REPORTS

## EMPEROR

**N**AM spent almost two hours to remove the ashes from the kitchen, which had been accumulated for a year. His face was black like that of a coal vendor because the ash stuck to his face, eyebrows, nose and hair.

The six old *bu rau* (kind of grill used to support cauldrons and pans while cooking) were thrown into a basket to be dumped into the pond. Nam carefully placed each new *bu rau* in the kitchen by groups of three forming a triangle.

After placing the *bu rau* in place Nam scratched each of them with his nail, feeling quite satisfied with his work.

Every year, on December 23 of the lunar calendar, Nam had to make the same change in the kitchen. He had to go to a place ten kilometers away from his house to get yellow clay. The clay was then mixed with husk and moulded into three *bu rau* to be dried afterward. When the clay was almost dry Nam scraped it with a knife and made a little decorative curve on the front side. Then the *bu rau* were exposed to the sun to bake dry.

While Nam was changing the *bu rau* in the kitchen, his father, already dressed up lay prostrated before the altar invoking the god of the kitchen in these terms :

«I respectfully invoke the spirits of Buddha. Today is December 23, this peasant by the name of Nguyen van Ly from the village of Thuy Phuong, Hoai Duc district, Ha Dong province, prostrated before the altar of the three spirits governing the land and the kitchen and asks them to judge my work and report to the Emperor of Jade exactly what I have done during the year and beseech him to favor the peasant in his work. To show his gratitude, the peasant offers you some hats, clothes, gold and silver and a carp to be used as a horse during your strip to the sky.»

After reciting this, old Ly struck a bell, then prostrated himself four more times.

The altar was well lighted with lamps and candles. Besides a large tray of food, there were a mandarin's hat, two man's shirts, a woman's blouse two pairs of high boots and a pair of woman's shoes, all made of paper. At

the side of the tray was a basin of water containing a swimming fish. Old Ly went to the kitchen to get the fragrant water prepared from five fragrant ingredients. He sprinkled the water on the *bu rau* and the four corners of the kitchen. The ceremony, wishing the god of the kitchen good luck during his trip to the sky, thus ended.

That traditional ceremony still exists in Vietnamese society. People believe that each house has a spirit of the kitchen, who is responsible to make a record of every happening in the house, both good and bad ones, and report to the Emperor of Jade on December 23 (lunar calendar) of the year.

Throughout the year, on the 1st and the 15th days of the month or whenever there is an anniversary of the death in the family the peasant always offers something to the genie of the kitchen to show respect to him. But on December 23, the peasant wants the genie of the kitchen to speak in his favor in his report to the Emperor of Jade, therefore he offers him money, clothes and a carp to be used as a vehicle during his trip to the sky

# THE KITCHEN

# TO THE

# OF JADE



(people believe that the fish can become a flying dragon during the trip).

According to an old legend the genie of the kitchen was one of two husbands with one wife. At the beginning a husband and his wife lived together for a long time but they did not have any children. The husband was called Trong Cao and his wife Thi Nhi. But they often quarrelled and even fought with each other, which caused Thi Nhi to leave the house. On the way Thi Nhi met a man by the name of Pham Lang and married him. Stung

by remorse Trong Cao set out in search of his wife. He soon spent all his money during the travel and had to beg for food. One day Trong Cao swooned in front of the house of Thi Nhi because of his long-endured starvation. Thi Nhi recognized him as her former husband and brought him home to give him some food. Pham Lang returned home while Trong Cao was eating. Thi Nhi told Trong Cao to hide himself in a stack of straw.

Unfortunately, Pham Lang needed ashes to fertilize his fields and set fire

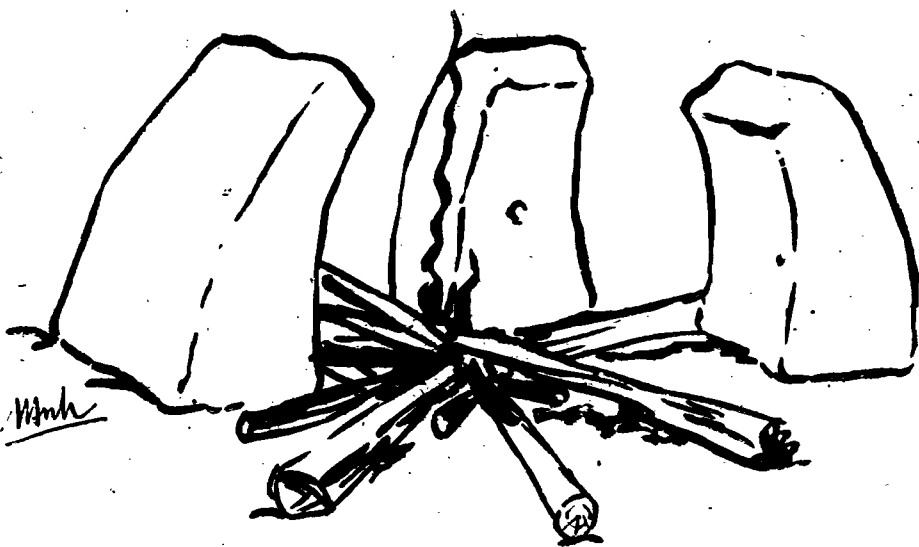
to the stack of straw. Trong Cao was burned to death. Thi Nhi jumped into the fire to save him and met with the same fate. Seeing that, Pham Lang also jumped into the fire to save them and all three were killed.

Moved by such a fatal love, the Emperor of Jade appointed them genii Pham Lang, genie of the kitchen, Trong Cao, Genie of the earth, in charge of supervising the household, and Thi Nhi genie in charge of recording the marketing and birth; etc. Therefore the people have made three *bu rau* in the kitchen. The *bu rau* in the middle is Thi Nhi.

The tradition of celebrating the departure of the three genii on December 23 is still popular, both in the city and in the countryside. But the people offers only fruit and bread instead of hats, clothes and a carp as before.

The tradition of replacing the three *bu rau* is still observed by the people in rural areas whereas the city folk usually use metal grills or stoves.

Although the process has been changed the belief is still strongly felt, especially in conservative families.



**F**IVE months ago Mau and I accepted an offer to teach at an elementary school in a remote district hidden in the Highlands. It was a private school set up through free contributions of the natives and under the sponsorship of the local authorities.

District residents lived all year on the rice they grew and from the products gathered from the mountain forests. Each month or so members of the families would make a trip down to the lowlands, bringing with them rice, areca nuts, tea, pepper and cinnamon to exchange for money with which to buy fish sauce, salt and dried fish at the lowland markets. Few families had any available cash.

We did try, but the pupils' reaction, already excited enough with the prospects of TET, was rather remote from the thought of their teachers' fees. As a matter of fact the reaction was quite as we should have anticipated — the reaction of nearly every boy anywhere to the unexpected news that school would be closed for an extra day or two!

When we realized our mistake, we tried to laugh it off but somehow our predicament seemed only worse. TET was a time to visit home, but how could we go without paying the landlady. Those days were spent trying to teach, while the excitement of TET began to compete

## *THE BASKET OF RICE*

In adjusting to these local conditions, we did not compel residents to cover school fees for their children with money. They could pay two thirds with rice. Also we could not require them to pay the school fee on a monthly basis. The few people with adequate financial means could pay every month but the large majority were poor people who could pay in two terms for each school year, once during each harvest.

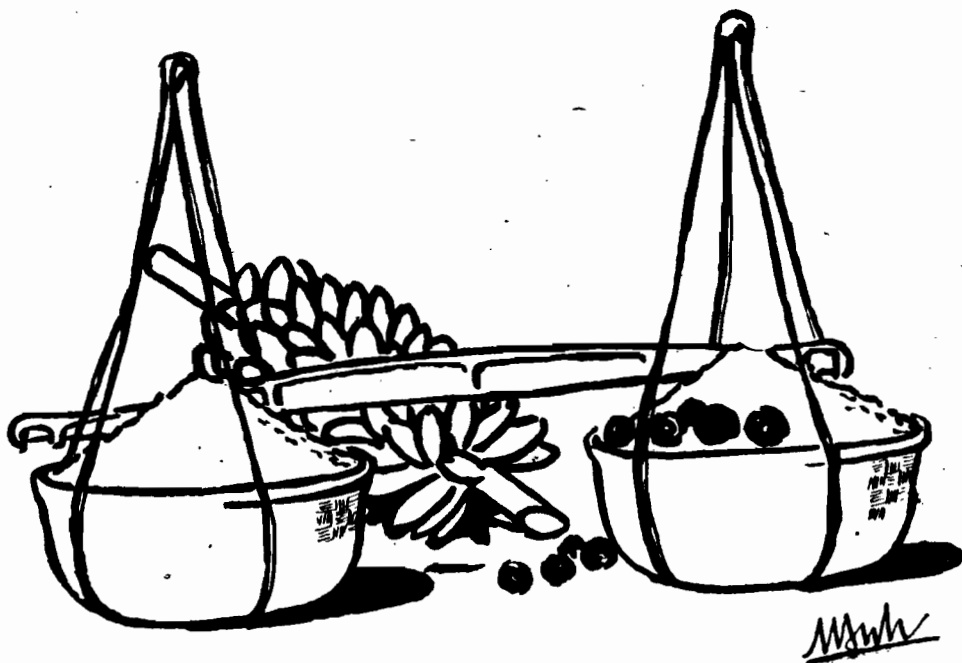
Due to this way of defraying school fees, Mau and I suddenly found ourselves approaching the end of the year without even a cent to settle the boarding expenses with our landlady. We both had expected to go home for TET, the Lunar New Year, and to settle our debt with the landlady according to the custom of paying debts before welcoming the New Year. We were very worried but neither of us wished to press the pupils to pay and each day we kept hoping either they or their parents would think of it.

It was now the 25th of December of the Lunar Calendar. About five days earlier as we sat one evening correcting homework by the flickering light of a peanut oil lamp, Mau suddenly asked: «What shall we do? Perhaps tomorrow we should declare that TET holidays will begin very early this year on the 25th of December? They should surely understand and bring us money for their fees». I laughed heartily and agreed that it may be worth a try.

for the attention of our pupils. After reviewing their written work, we shared restless sleep on the one plank bed made of jack-wood available to us. It was late winter and cold in the mountains, and with each approaching day of TET we seemed to talk longer and sleep less. Mau told me his wife was fattening some chickens but he did not know if she would wait for him to fix delicious chicken dishes in honor of the New Year, or if she was going to sell them for money to buy some clothing for the children. He has expected to have something to take home with him for his family — and now if he managed to get home at all he would have to go empty-handed.

Mau talked about his children, who were surely waiting for him to get home and weave them some bamboo strings and make lanterns for them. He boasted proudly of his youngest one being a living picture of himself, from his bright eyes and little mouth to his tiny ears and the folds of his neck.

And I added «at this moment, my mother and my younger brothers and sisters are surely stripping bamboo strings, cooking sticky rice and cleaning banana leaves to wrap around TET rice cakes. «I could see my mother as though she were in this Highland room, bending over a basket covered with banana leaves. She seemed to glance at the dark late night sky and then asked my sister if I had ever told her when I would get back for TET. Surely my sister would keep silent, and perhaps hold back a tear



feeling sorry for this brother always at grips with hard times.»

And then I confessed to Mau that I had told the pupils that to close school on the 25th would force us to drop part of the program so I had agreed to continue until the 29th or 30th. «But you should go to your wife and children,» I said, «it will be no great chore for me to take your teaching periods and I will stay here so the landlady will not think we intend to leave her before paying. When you get back January we will manage to settle our account with her».

The next day Mau packed up and went home. I went to the bus station with him but I was too homesick, myself, to make it a very joyous farewell. «Can I give your family a message?» «Yes, tell them I am in perfect health, better not to tell them more.»

On the 29th, my landlady confirmed my worries about her need for our rent when I overheard her talking with someone about her debts and hardships. Indeed I knew she was not exaggerating in the least.

The following day school let out. I expressed my greetings for a Happy New Year and sent my pupils home. One of the boys asked if I was not also going home for TET, and though I tried to answer rather casually that I would not be able to afford it this year, I realized that my expression must have portrayed something more, for the pupils seemed quite surprised and the cheer of the

farewell was suddenly dampened. But as many of the pupils had nearly a day's journey home, I hastened them on their way.

The next morning as I was resting in my boarding house, I suddenly caught sight of some pupils of mine hiding in the alley. They were obviously hesitant to come in and seemed to be afraid. Recognizing Loan in the group, I called to him. Then I heard a loud «yes sir» and Loan stepped in bravely. I knew that Loan's house was located a full day's walk from my boarding house, so I asked him why he had not yet gone back home for TET. Loan did not answer my question, but instead hesitated and then spoke shyly. «Master, the New Year is drawing near and my family could not manage to get some cash for you. But...»

Before I could respond, twenty pupils filed into my house with baskets full of rice carried on their heads or on their shoulders!

I suddenly had the strange impression of living in some distant past generation, in the times of old scholars with quill pens, chinese ink and rice paper. Yes, though these two times were separated by many years, I was quite sure that my feelings were not different from those of the old scholars from another place and century.

It was too late to go home for TET that year, but the story has warmed the spirit of TET in our home every year since.

## I. — ANOTHER STEP FORWARD

(From Chanh Dao daily)

**D**URING all the 20 years of fierce war only this year did the two parties agree on three truces that are not far away from one another. Regardless of their duration and purpose, the truces bear in themselves characteristics other than those of a normal holiday for relaxation.

Therefore from all over the world hope has been rising and recommendations have been made for both parties to be conscious of the meaningless act of war and to think of peace instead.

The three consecutive truces, either on ground of customs or traditions, have proved that in spite of the fierceness of the war and the difference of opinion or regime, people still can agree on certain points of view.

Both parties have agreed to a truce three times: one time on ground of traditions (Christmas) and 2 others for customs' sake (New Year and the Tet or Vietnamese New Year).

Those who have witnessed the atrocities of the war think that as both parties have been able to agree to two 48-hour truces and one 96-hour truce why could they not agree to one long continuous truce running through the whole period from the first to the third truce, i.e. from Christmas through the Dinh Mui Tet (Vietnamese New Year).

Pope Paul VI has made a proposal for a 45 or 50-day truce, and, more recently, U.S. senator Mansfield made on December 13, another one recommending the U.S. to call for a 45-day truce.

That is to prove the good will of the party which makes the proposal and to give the other party a chance to show its good will; to see how the people voice their hope for peace during the truce and to have time to regard the foolishness of a war where "no party can achieve success militarily".

It could also show how many lives of fighters and innocent people can be spared and how the man-power and facilities of both parties can comfort unfortunate people and ease their burden.

Both parties have made a move forward in their conscience, why did not they get together in a conference and talk business in order to enable the people which have lived through one hundred years of foreign

## EDITORIALS FROM VN NEWSPAPERS

(THE EDITORIALS DO NOT NECESSARILY  
REFLECT THE POLICY OF THE PUBLISHER)

domination and twenty years of war to live in peace?

Another page in history has been lifted, we wonder why it could not be a nice page?

## II. — VICTORY FIRST

(From Tien Tuyen daily)

In a lecture given at Vanderbilt university Mr. Robert Gordon Menzies, former Australian Prime Minister has made an excellent remark. He asked himself why people have been beseeching the enemy for a peace talk whereas Hanoi and Peking have been always stiff in their determination to carry on the war until final success. Usually, only the weak like to make arrangements to treat with the enemy. It is not the same in the case of Vietnam war. In Vietnam, North Vietnam is the aggressor and aggressors should be punished accordingly. We have not talked of punishment yet, we have only been considering self-defense. The V.C. have encountered many difficulties on all the battlefields. That does not mean we have explicitly won the war, but at least we are on the way to success. That is not the remark made by the writer of this article, but that of a prominent Australian political figure.

A ridiculous situation has developed however: the winning party has been trying by all means to ask for peace. Mr. Menzies is not the only one who troubles himself about this fact. All the Vietnamese patriots share his opinion in such an ironical situation. We have repeated again and again that no one wants war and peace is what mankind always longs for. A people that has been involved in war for a quarter of a century prizes peace more than any one else. We Vietnamese cannot help feeling sad at the thought of our war-torn country, whether the war-torn area lies in North or South Vietnam. We do not want our people to die of injustice, whether those dead lived on this side or on the other side of the 17th parallel. However, we are obliged

to accept the war to save our nation and ourselves. The Pope and many international famous officials have been constantly calling for a truce. However, all of them have looked just at one facet of the problem, the horrible sight of the war. This is not a meaningless war aiming at gaining supremacy. It is a war of self-defense to regain freedom, democracy and the most sacred values that ennoble man.

Of course any war may end with peace talks. However, we are of the same opinion as Mr. Menzies, "Victory first, Peace Talk afterwards". That is the only way to settle the Vietnam problem.

## III. — ARMY AND POLITICS

(From Tu-Do daily)

The Constituent Assembly has decided that the future constitution of the Republic of Vietnam will not permit in-service military personnel to go into politics or take part in the government.

Actually this provision of the constitution is not new because no constitution in the world allows active duty military men to go into politics or take part in the government.

The fact that some military personnel in our country went into politics under the Ngo dinh Diem regime was due to particular reasons. Under the Ngo dinh Diem regime, the Ngo family favored the military members of the Can Lao (Labor) Party in order to win the army over to its side.

Although members of the Can Lao party did not occupy any important positions in the army at that time they did take advantage of their political influence to maneuver the armed forces. Therefore the prestige of the armed forces suffered severely and the army had to cooperate with the people to overthrow the Ngo dinh Diem regime.

After the revolution a number of army men had to assume some political functions in order to insure and safeguard the achievements of the revolution in which they had taken part.

There were some military persons who believed that they were well versed in politics and tried by all means to remain in power; there were also others who were not familiar with politics and were exploited by political profiteers who sowed disturbance in the past three years.

The achievements of army men during the revolution have somewhat suffered from the manipulations of those army men who tried to cling to their positions. To give back to the army the prestige it has lost, the future constitution of Vietnam shall not allow military personnel to go into politics.

That does not mean that the military does not include able politicians or that they cannot take part in political activities. Political activities involve people of every walk of life. But one thing should be noted: political minded military personnel who want to go into politics must resign from the military. Thus the armed forces will be able to maintain their integrity and political leaders will not be under suspicion of having recourse to weapons to back up their political views.

#### IV. — STEINBECK'S VERDICT

(From The Saigon Post)

John Steinbeck, who came here three weeks ago to « feel and see » the war, came up last week with a denunciation of the Viet Cong's set of values which only a Nobel Prize winner may write — succinct and complete, direct and devastating, penetratingly accurate and undoubtedly courageous.

The author of « The Grapes of Wrath, » who cannot be easily dismissed as a *boi but* (literary mercenary) directed his ire at the Communists' many violations of the Christmas truce, nearly crying in anger: « they knew we would keep the truce and they knew they would not. » Then, turning his irate pen on this our side, the old fighter exploded: « And we observe this nonsense. And by observing it our so-called « image » get worse and worse. »

With all respect due an elder, we have to say that the agony of John Steinbeck, so very marvously expressed, is only a fraction of what the people in this land have had to endure during the last two decades. While we were assailed by a foe who did not stop at murders and crimes of all sorts to enslave us, the world looked at us and our unending tribulation with mocking eyes, advising us to better ourselves so that our enemy may some day emulate us. A single instance of misbe-

viour on the part of our valiant troops, in the eyes of the world's highbrows, was enough to exonerate our enemy of the systematic destruction of life he has made his instrument of conquest.

Why should that simple truth, which Steinbeck found out after only a three-week stay, escape the attention of the world? How should the unceasing miseries of the people of this nation be so totally misrepresented abroad? For what reasons does our foe succeed in misleading public opi-

nion in so many foreign lands?

The answers to these questions must be found and public opinion everywhere must be made to accept them before « honor and decency » shall be restored in international relations in this part of the world. Otherwise, Steinbeck's verdict would be only a fire of straw producing some timid light in the long dark night of human imbecility.

•••

# Commencing December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1966

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## AMERICAN PRESS IN VIETNAM

By HAROLD ELLITHORPE

# ADDING MORE FUEL TO A WARM FIRE

WHETHER S.L.A. Marshall, the noted U.S. military historian, is a courageous critic or a damned ass is likely to be the subject of conversation at any gathering of news correspondents these days in Vietnam. And the debate is often heated, usually exhausting, and inevitably futile.

Marshall deeply hurt the professional sensitivities of the better correspondents when he implied that they were cowards (which he has since clarified to mean only superficial writers). (See *New leader*, issue of October 10, 1966).

A squad of eight of the finer—and older — Vietnam hands rose in furious defence of the Vietnam press corps (*New leader*, November 21, 1966), charging that Marshall himself was too narrow in his insistence on fuller coverage of the purely military aspects of the war.

For the grosser points at issue, readers should refer to the published charges and counter-charges. The following summary would seem valid at this juncture:

First, the correspondents reporting the Vietnam war for American readers are not cowards. Seven killed and 87 wounded newsmen attest to the battlefield bravery of the press corps. Indeed, most reporters desire combat duty, and are hard put to be allowed to find it due to the complexities of the fluid fighting situation.

Second, there are in Vietnam a handful of professionally competent and dedicated journalists who have committed themselves to long tours of duty and to the noblest traditions of journalism. They have not been sedu-

ced on the one hand to the whims of the military leaders for exclusive promotion of military interests, nor on the other by the cynical abhorrence of America's role in this complicated struggle.

Third, there does, indeed, exist a lack of understanding, of clarity on the part of the America press. The war has not been adequately explained nor its course charted. The reasons are many and complex, but the fact remains. And here lies the vital sore that has so riled the press corps in Vietnam, for it exposes that irritation a conscientious journalist must feel when confronted with an assignment as difficult as Vietnam.

And, fourth, there exist in this war among the some 400 newsmen in country at anyone time, a vast percentage of pure incompetents. There were, as Dale Minor points out in his rebuttal to Marshall, some 1,100 newsmen accredited to Vietnam during the first six months of 1966, the vast majority of whom flitted in and out and wrote wrong stories about the wrong things.

Some newsmen are too young and inexperienced, although youth and inexperience are not necessarily synonymous with incompetence, as any aging reporter will tell you who has just had his ears boxed off by an aggressive and talented young cub.

Some are here for too short a time to grasp even the raw fundamentals of what is universally agreed to be a completed story to grasp. To spend a week or two weeks in Vietnam soaking up whatever falls at hand is like the ocean soaking up a cup of water.

Despite the shortcomings of the inadequate and the incompetent (shortcomings which exist in any metropolitan press corps in the United States, to make a valid comparison), one is still left with the deeper questions of the capability of today's press corps to meet the challenge of today's story in Vietnam.

It is invalid to say that the war is better covered in numbers than Korea or World War II, for that begs the question. What was done in the past is not a criterion for what should be done now. Journalism must advance in its abilities to render such things truthfully and intelligibly to its audience.

It is not my intention, in this all too brief essay, to compose a definitive analysis of press weaknesses. Nor do I wish to overemphasize weaknesses as against achievements. There has been some fine reporting accomplished under trying conditions, and in the proper place and time, those journalists who wrote such examples of great stories, should and will receive recognition. It is enough for most to know now that they have earned the respect and admiration of their fellow newsmen.

I emphasize the negative factors, for they form the core of this worthwhile debate about what journalism should be in Vietnam, not what it has been.

Let us begin with the story, with Vietnam. Newsmen are called upon to cover a complex story that had its roots in the decay of colonialism, in the rise of communism in Asia, complicated by diplomatic nuances that even today are unclear.

(Continued on page 26)

# VIETNAM'S INDUSTRY ROAD

By  
THANH-HIEP

**D**ESPITE war, and perhaps partly because of it, traditionally agricultural South Vietnam is opening its doors to industry. The most obvious sign in nearly every city and town is the vast amount of home and commercial construction. Except for very isolated areas there is virtually no unemployment of able bodied workers and even some industries have been built especially to employ the war wounded and injured.

One of the most dramatic recent developments as told in the story below is the construction of « Industry Road » — if one may apply that term to a fourteen meter wide highway with a capacity for 40,000 vehicles daily!



**L**EAVING the overpopulated, narrow and traffic choked streets of the capital city of Saigon is a difficult task, but after you finally cross the bridge to the northeast you will suddenly enter a new world, an immense world overflowing with thriving vitality — the world of « Industry Road » better known as the Bien-Hoa highway which just six years ago was hardly more than a rutted rural back road.

Bien-Hoa highway stretches thirty-one kilometers out from Saigon to the growing town of Bien-Hoa. Its fourteen meter wide smooth asphalt surface is capable of handling 40,000 vehicles daily. Its bridges, all of them ultra-modern and some very large are made to accommodate loaded trucks of over thirty tons.

The highway has already helped solve a congested traffic problem between Saigon and Bien-Hoa and has become the most important gateway to the capital city linking it with VUNG-TAU, a vital southern harbor, NHA TRANG, a central strategic port and DALAT, the mountain tourist resort and ancient capital of the South Vietnamese Highlands.

In fact, Bien Hoa highway is fast becoming the artery to all the eastern provinces of South Vietnam and it will have an economic effect on nearly all provinces in the country.

But perhaps even more significant is the effect of the highway on the development of industry. The opening of this broad stretch of road in formerly undeveloped land with the promise of coming excellent shipping facilities has stimulated industry to

invade almost the whole of its length. In the area about five kilometers from Saigon, newly mushroomed industrial installations of vital importance to the national economy can be found. The HA TIEN cement plant, the VIKIM-CO Steel Wire Factory, the Saigon Water Supply Service, the Vietnam Electric Power office and at least six others are already in operation. These firms in particular decorate the highway with a splendid collection of ultra-modern architectures.

The industrial zone of even greater importance is an area designated as the BIEN HOA INDUSTRIAL CENTER. This area along the East side of the highway from Dong Nai bridge to the Bien Hoa Vung Tau crossroad, is bordered on the south and southwest by the Dong Nai and Song Cai (Mother rivers). The industrial complex includes the two villages of Tam Hiep and Long Binh Tau in the Duc Tu District of Bien Hoa Province approximately 30 kilometers from Saigon.

In this area nine industrial enterprises have already been completed and are now producing products which formerly had to be imported such as car batteries, panels, pipes, plastic hose, sodium silicate, etc... Among this first group of completed factories are three firms of special importance.

The COGIDO Paper Factory has an annual production of 8,000 tons of finished paper including Bristol, duplicating paper, white paper and color printing paper.

The DUTACO Tyre Factory produces each year some 500,000 tyres and inner tubes for bicycles and motorbikes.

The COBOGIDO plant manufactures 8,500 tons of paper powder annually made from megasses to supply the paper factory.



*The water power control tower at Thu Duc, 185 feet high*

In this same area twelve other modern factory are under construction and will produce ceramics, corks, cement, electric wire, wire cables, concrete works, electric poles and pharmaceuticals. Of those now under construction the three largest include:

**VIETNAMESE SUGAR COMPANY** operating with a capital amounting to 175 million piasters. It expects to process one third the needs in sugar of Vietnam.

**DONG NAI BRICK AND TILE COMPANY** providing a wide variety of bricks and tiles: paving bricks, floor bricks, perforated bricks, wall bricks, ornamental bricks, brick powder and various kinds of tile.

**CRYSTAL TUBES COMPANY** will be a glass factory.

Construction plans now on the drafting boards but not yet started are an automobile tyre factory (**VINARUBIN COMPANY**), a rubber products factory (**HONG PHAT COMPANY**) and a luxury ceramic industry (**KIM THAI COMPANY**).

#### **OTHER USES OF "INDUSTRY ROAD"**

The Bien Hoa highway is also

helping to some degree to ease the population congestion of Saigon. The **THU DUC INFANTRY SCHOOL**, located about 3 kilometers from the Bien Hoa — Thu Duc crossroad has become the largest and second most important officers military training academy, taking second place only to the Dalat National Military Academy. Another construction already completed is the University Village near Thu Duc. It is a rather large area not far from the Infantry School constructed to house our "meritorious" educators (University professors) who have always enjoyed traditional respect and gratitude from the Vietnamese people.

Along the highway, just four kilometers from Saigon is the prominent military harbor under construction by the international **RMK-BRJ Company**. Upon its completion around in a few months, this harbor of enormous capacity will share the burden now handled entirely by the Saigon Port, thus solving a thorny problem which has been seriously affecting the national economy throughout the past 18 months when military and domestic shipping has had to compete for the same space.

The view of the Bien Hoa Highway suggests to our imagination the picture of a gigantic centipede crawling upward: its two lines of innumerable feet representing industrial enterprises, administrative installations, homes and military bases.

Indeed, Bien Hoa Highway, besides its vital importance to transportation, and economic development has unexpectedly turned out to be a recreation park attraction to thousands of people from Saigon, Cholon (Saigon's sister town) and the province of Gia Dinh, one of the most crowded in Vietnam. Weary of their restricted crowded life, many people have found the Bien Hoa highway an ideal spot for rest, recreation and sightseeing. Particularly on holidays people and

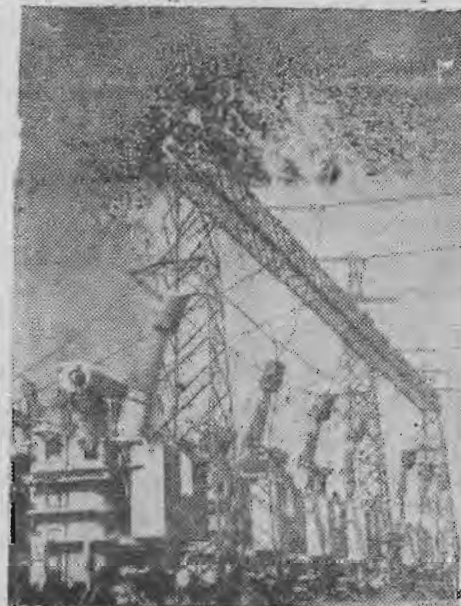
vehicles swarm in on both sides of the highway giving it the appearance of a summer beach resort filled with happy and merry making people.

But nothing is quite perfect in this world. Among all of the beautiful and valuable features of "Industry Road" there is one most unfortunate fact. The traffic congestion in Saigon prevents speeds above 25 kilometers an hour. Adventurers in search of the strange feeling of high speed take their vehicles to Industry Road to make their dangerous experiments and there have unfortunately been many and serious accidents resulting from high speed driving. But except for that one sad note the highway has opened an extremely important development to help improve the life of the Vietnamese people.

Indeed, at the present time, when we cast a look at Bien Hoa Highway, we should recognize the powerful determination to pierce mountains and pulverize rocks of a hardworking and patient nation, resolute in its will for steady advancement.

Completed in 1960 at a high cost mostly defrayed by foreign assistance, Bien Hoa Highway demonstrates a most picturesque gesture of mutual friendship in the Free World, and constitutes an eloquent proof of friendship between two nations.

*Set of Seven huge transformers, Danhim Project, Saigon Sub-Station, 8 miles from Saigon.*



**A**LL country have had their prophets and sages. Nostradamus comes to mind as one well regarded in Europe. We have ours prophets too, of whom Trang Trinh is the greatest. The stories of his prophecies are known by old and young alike throughout the entire country.

Now our skeptical European friends complain that many of the prophecies of Trang Trinh are so obscure that their interpretation is only possible after the prophecy is fulfilled. «What good is a prophecy that cannot be interpreted in advance?» they ask. «Is it not like the Chinese fortune cookies which apply so broadly to human nature that each person can see in them some identity of their own situation?»

Ah, the impatience of the 20th century mind! «Perhaps you are right», we say «but perhaps...» Well, we still believe in our Trang Trinh's and we invite our readers to judge for themselves the prophecies concerning current history which Trang Trinh made nearly five hundred years ago. R.S.V.P.

**F**OR over a century, natural disasters and war calamities have poured down on the Vietnamese nation: almost a hundred years of French colonial domination, ten years of guerilla resistance against the second aggression of the French colonists; and then over ten more years of tough struggle against aggression from the North.

Many people believe that fate has been too hard on the Vietnamese nation, alleging that, some five centuries ago, TRANG TRINH forecast the ups and downs of the Vietnamese nation, and events have proved him right.

In fact, five centuries ago, TRANG TRINH did foresee the collapse of the NGUYEN dynasty and the beginning of French domination toward the end of the 19th century. (Vietnam was ruled by the Nguyen line when the French colonists invaded this country a hundred years ago). He wrote:

— «As soon as lotus flowers surge from the Eastern sea, the members of the NGUYEN families will move away.»

This prophecy seemed very very strange: lotus flowers grow in mud; how could they surge from the sea? But such a strange prediction came true. When the first European merchant ships anchored in Vietnamese harbors, they brought in a kind of Japanese sea-weed which the local inhabitants called the «Japanese lotus flower» because of its resemblance to the lotus. This new type of «lotus» has had a long life. It has drifted along streams and currents and been scattered over rivers and seas.

It was at the time of the appearance of the «Japanese lotus» that the Court of the Nguyen dynasty began to feel the first sign of collapse. Finally the entire Vietnamese nation fell into the hands of the French colonists. Many kings and high magistrates of the NGUYEN families saw their days end in violent death or sad exile.

oOo

Indeed, stern fate has weighed heavily on various generations of the Vietnamese nation. But it could not allow the French colonists to subdue the Vietnamese people forever. TRANG TRINH predicted this also:

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO:

## TRANG TRINH Forecasted Present Vietnam Situation

— «As soon as ears of rice spring up from lead and elephants march on paper the French will go back to France.»

Such a statement is really confusing: it might be believable that elephants could march on paper, but it is absolutely absurd that rice should spring up from lead. In spite of all our judgements, the forecast came true.

In the year 1941, French authorities put into circulation a series of 10-cent, 20-cent and 1-piaster coins bearing the design in relief of a sheaf of rice. Later, in 1944, they put into circulation another kind of 100-piaster note bearing the picture of an elephant.

Just as predicted, after the circulation of lead coins bearing the image of rice ears, the French lost their authority over Vietnam following the Japanese invasion of 1939 — 1940. And when banknotes with elephants printed on them began to circulate, the French colonists were forced out of Indochina, following the Japanese «coup d'etat» and the Viet Minh Revolution in 1945.

The prophecy continued:

«The Nguyen's left to return soon.

But the enemy would scamper away as soon as they reach the Bo De tree.»

The first part of the prophecy was very clear. It meant that Bao Dai, a francophile offspring of the Nguyens who had been dismissed when the Viet Minh seized the Government, would return.

Actually, two years after the French returned to Vietnam in 1946

to disarm the defeated Japanese, they brought Bao Dai back to be Vietnam's Chief of State.

The second part of the prophecy needs explanation:

«The enemy would scamper away...», who is that enemy? — He was believed to be Ngo Dinh Diem, Bao Dai's Prime Minister, who overthrew Bao Dai in 1955 to become President of the Republic of Vietnam.

«... as soon as they reach the Bo De tree.»

«Bo De tree» is the sacred Buddhist tree. Here it means the Buddhists in general. Thus the second part of the prophecy meant that Ngo Dinh Diem, Bao Dai's enemy, would collapse when he clashed with the Buddhists.

This also has come true!

As to the collapse of the Diem regime, TRANG TRINH was even more accurate by foretelling the exact date, month and year, five centuries before the event. He stated:

«When three full lunar months (30 days each) follow one another, King and magistrates of the regime will be ousted and their currency turned to ashes.»

Indeed, in the year 1963, or QUY MAO, the Year of the Cat, three months, the 9th, 10th and 11th proved to be three consecutive full months of 30 days — a very exceptional case in the lunar calendar. As a result, it fulfilled the prophecy of the total collapse of a strong regime on Nov. 1, 1963 and most of the Vietnamese currency bearing the image of President Ngo Dinh Diem was burned or destroyed.

### WHO WAS TRANG TRINH ?

TRANG TRINH came into the world with the given name of Nguyen Binh Khiem. He later acquired the title of BACH VAN CU SY (the scholar of the White Clouds Temple).

He was born in the Tan Hoi lunar year (1491) which was the 22nd year of the Le monarchy. His father

was a great duke, and his mother was the daughter of his Excellency NHU VAN IAN, a minister at King MAC's Court.

In the prime of his youth he was sent to study under a famous mandarin, Doctor LUONG DAC BANG, and learned thoroughly the erudite contents of THAI AT THAN KINH, a well-known book on astrophysics.

He won the first prize of the royal competition at age 44. This prize gave him the title of TRANG (Ph. D.) along with a high position at King Mac's court. After serving as a great mandarin at the royal court for eight years he resigned from his glamorous career to seclude himself, far from court affairs, in a small temple called BACH VAN (The White Clouds Temple.)

Proficiency in astrology as well as in astrophysics gave TRANG TRINH a very clear view of events in the future as well as in the past. Therefore, during the term of his office at court he was well aware that the Mac dynasty would know only a short period of prosperity and the LE would soon enjoy a thriving restoration. So, he made up his

mind to seek contemplative pleasures in a quiet and secluded life and avoided any contact with the contemporary authorities.

He wrote many beautiful verses and poems to extol the happiness of the secluded life. He also wrote many verses foretelling the events which would happen during his lifetime. However, his works concealed a very mysterious and profound significance; only clear-sighted and perspicacious scholars could penetrate all the beauty of the verses and understand their meaning for the future.

Still unresolved is his prophecy:

«HO an ly son MAO tan bach»

— The hidden fox leaves the mountains, its hair turning grey,

«Kinh Thon hai lang huyet luu hong»

— The whale emerges from water its blood reddening a whole sea area.

(Ho = fox; mao = hair.)

If you are a «perspicacious scholar» please tell us its meaning, if you know, or must we wait another five hundred years?

RSVP: THE VIETNAM OBSERVER

241, Hai Ba Trung Street  
SAIGON — VIETNAM.

The coins were dated 1940, 1941 and 1945; the banknote was printed before 1945



# THE CRISIS

## IN

# VIETNAMESE EDUCATION

**A**DJUSTMENTS to a long heritage of French as the vehicle language of Vietnamese education are currently receiving the attention of the public and private teachers and professors, students and public.

During the period of French occupation, the vehicle language for education was French.

All Vietnamese schools were in the French language until the end of World War II. In 1945 the French language was replaced in the majority of schools with "Quoc Ngu", or the Vietnamese language written with Latin transcription. In 1949 France imposed the position that it would be « free to maintain primary and secondary public and private schools in Vietnam using the French language with the curriculum in force in France. » Two exceptions were a required course on the history of Vietnamese civilization and a course in Vietnamese language.

After the conclusion of the Geneva conference, France continued to maintain its influence in South Vietnam as well as its educational system. Later when Francophile Emperor Bao Dai was replaced the young government had extensive problems in all fields of which education was only one and it was never faced squarely. The complexity of the education problem included the fact that Viet-

namese universities were small and few thus necessitating study abroad for many students. Further, virtually all text books at university level would require rewriting and translation into Vietnamese. The most complex aspect of the problem centered on the fact that the growth of the Vietnamese vocabulary had been frozen since the arrival of the French, thus spanning the entire period of the industrial revolution and modern technology. French had been the language vehicle for all technical and scientific training during this critical period.

It may be objectively observed that French policies actively discouraged the development of the Vietnamese language in technical and scientific fields. With the exceptions to be noted below, this situation has continued to the present time.

The University vehicular language is still primarily French. France continues to run some French primary and secondary schools. A certain sentiment among many of the university professors has resulted in an lack of serious effort on the part of many of them to develop the required technical vocabulary for the Vietnamese language. This sentiment stems from several reasons of which perhaps the most significant is the fact that many of the older professors hold themselves as a class apart from the people, thus being satisfied with a language

apart. As scholars have always traditionally been held in high regard by the people, popular pressure for changes in the educational system has found expression only in most recent times.

Thus parents desiring to afford their children a university education have tried to make sure their children could attend the French administered elementary and middle schools, that they may become facile in the French language before entering University. This problem has brought with it in the past two or three years a most vulgar blackmarket in education. Unless afforded certain protection by nature of position or productive francophile sentiment, parents have to pay as much as five taels of gold bribe (each tael costs now eleven thousand piasters) just to get their children enrolled in French primary and middle schools. Thereafter, an enormously lucrative « tutoring » business has been imposed whereby the large majority of students are « recommended » to stay after school for one hour of « private » instruction. Although the tutoring is not private but rather like an hour added to the classroom day, parents must pay the teachers personally up to 5000 piasters in elementary school and as much as 7,000 piasters in middle school. 5,000 piasters is a good wage for a laborer or office secretary. That amount multiplied by the large number of students involved

enables a teacher to earn a return for group tutoring many times greater than his teacher's salary. In the most recent years, many parents have also felt it necessary to give very expensive Christmas and Tet presents to the teachers such as silverware and fine linens or even family heirlooms, if they lack further means to purchase presents. This situation has no doubt enlisted additional supporters demanding Vietnamese language education. Most parents of children in French schools would prefer Vietnamese as the primary language for their children's education, provided it should not prevent them from being able to complete university studies.

Among the other factors contributing to the current movement to make Vietnamese the vehicular language for all levels of education is the dramatic increase in university enrollment and the resultant increase in students from Vietnamese lower schools who, for lack of language fluency, often fail to complete their university studies in most faculties.

The solutions to the problem are not easy and will require a carefully planned transition to avoid severe disruption to the education process and to students currently enrolled.

The following report by Ng.-Duy-Trinh, a student in the Faculty of Letters, provides a summary description of the

current vehicle language situation at the University of Saigon.

In the Faculty of Letters the vehicle language problem is minimal because each student has large choice of languages and can devote himself to the study of the language of his own choice.

In other faculties however, language is not an aim but a means to help each student understand their branch of study. Therefore while any language they are familiar with will help them in their study, Vietnamese of course is the language they are most qualified to use.

In certain faculties a few subjects have been taught in Vietnamese. However Vietnamese is used only in the preparatory year after which the student must use French. For the MGP (Mathematics General and Physics) certificate, every subject is taught in French, even in the first year. In technical colleges and the Animal Husbandry School, French language still plays the dominant role. Especially in the Faculty of Medicine every subject is taught in French except in the preparatory year. Therefore students must spend much valuable time to improve their knowledge of French while carrying the heavy medical studies program. Primarily for this reason, only 20% of students in the first year are admitted to the second year.

The Medical Faculty has recently run a special class using English as the vehicle language. While this help some students whose fluency in English may be greater than in French, the essential problem is not resolved.

The vehicle language plays a decisive role in the study of university students. Yet, students from Vietnamese high schools majoring in mathematics and applied sciences have been taught just 4 hours of foreign language a week, even in the 3rd, 2nd and 1st forms which prepare them for their entrance to university. The number of hours are so few and their study requirements such that some even have to sacrifice a few of

these hours of foreign language to study other subjects.

Vietnamese has been long considered a beautiful language capable of expressing faithfully all human feelings. In some respects, Vietnamese is clearer and more precise than other languages which often need many words to say something which requires only a short sentence in Vietnamese. Specialized and technical vocabularies have an international character and could be incorporated or converted to a phonetic transcription in Vietnamese. Through this process the lack of scientific terms need no longer be a problem.

Why is Vietnamese still not

used as vehicle language in universities?

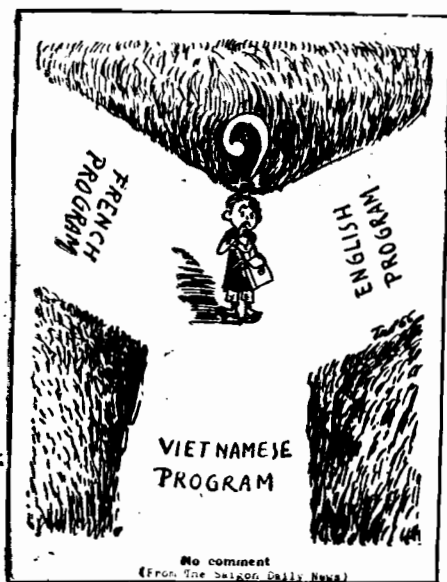
Firstly, Vietnamese teachers with their own training in foreign language have found it easy to teach in this language rather even than their mother tongue.

Secondly, scientific and technical branches in Vietnamese universities still require the help of foreign teachers.

Thirdly 80% of text-books are written in foreign languages.

However, the vehicle language problem need not be a difficult one. With sufficient effort and enthusiasm by Vietnamese teachers and education officials the problem could be solved in the near future.

As far as students are concerned their requirement for the use of Vietnamese as the vehicle language does not mean they wish to give up studying foreign languages. On the contrary, they will increasingly need foreign languages to improve their knowledge and to always be able to further their study through text-books of other countries in the world. But Vietnam's need for specialists is much too large to allow a situation to prevail where otherwise qualified students of medicine and the sciences must discontinue their studies for want of a very high level of foreign language skills.



No comment  
(From The Saigon Daily News)



**TO SUBSCRIBE**

**PLEASE FILL FORM ON PAGE 30**

# SPLITTING HAIRS OVER A FEW PIASTERS

★ By HAROLD ELLITHORPE

FOR the past nine months — with a single excellent exception in the delta town of Can-Tho — I have been getting my monthly haircut at the best barbershop in Saigon, on Tu-Do Street a block up from the central Lam-Son square.

When I arrived the price was 30 piasters and it soon went to 40. This past fall the cost of a hair trim soared to 60 piasters, but I still consider this a bargain for the quality of work and the inevitable cheerfulness of the barber and his manicurist cohorts.

But a week ago, I noticed a small shop about a block from my residence. Only two chairs, somewhat grimy in appearance. Why not I asked myself, try a trim there.

After all, I reasoned, most Vietnamese appear to have quite acceptable hair, although their natural black, thick coiffures were undoubtedly more amenable than my thin, balding brown wisps. And it was near my monthly cutting time announced by a distinct curling of wild hairs on my neck.

I entered the small shop. Two chairs, two barbers, one obviously an elder master and the other a younger man, perhaps an apprentice.

I sat in the apprentice's chair. Children squealed at me and pointed from the doorway. The youthful barber overflowed with good humor. I was, perhaps the first and only American to grace their backstreet parlor.

He clipped away earnestly with hand snippers, using a bent oil piece of yellowed comb with a crudely taped handle. He thinned out the back (I need no thinning on the front, unfortunately) and chopped off a little of the excess length on top.

Sharpening his straight-edge razor with his hand as a strop, he shaved the loose ends around my ears and down the nape of my neck.

He looked proud and intent. A craftsman, I mused, a craftsman intent with a prime customer whom he wishes to please. I was pleased.

I resolved in the chair to give him an extra 20 piasters, a honorarium with which to purchase a new comb. A craftsman, I told myself, should have fine tools.

When he finished and I had reviewed the result in double mirrors, I arose from the straight-backed chair.



"How much?" I asked.

The older barber muttered something from where he had been idling on the adjoining chair. He leapt up and searched through a collection of odd junk in a drawer underneath the crude board counter that held the implements of the barbering trade.

"100 piasters", he intoned. He fished out a small, red plastic notebook and quickly turned its pages. He held it up to my nose as if to say "see, there it is black and white."

"A hundred piasters". I screamed, but I regretted the outburst.

I paid with a shrug, a small boy making change for the barber from a 200 piasters note. I handed the young barber 20 piasters and told him to "buy a No. 1 comb."

Next month I shall go back to the fancy shop on Tu Do street and pay 60 piasters to sit in air-conditioned comfort while a master barber skilled at his ability to shape one's head in the latest of fashion labors over me.

For the little barber on the backstreet, I feel sorry. He has yet to learn a lesson about me.

I only get trimmed once.

•••

As a mixture of religious cult and pagan rites, Tet is all at once and the same time an All Souls' day, a family celebration, a festival in expectation of Spring, a national tradition, and an essence of a civilization, or, at least its most typical manifestation. Therefore, a foreigner cannot have an insight into the soul of the Vietnamese people if he has not fully understood the importance and the nature of this festival.

Tet is of Chinese origin. But some rites predate Chinese influence and others have been subject to successive changes which mark it with a national character, to such an extent that, Tet shows only a certain resemblance to the Chinese festival.

Confucius included Tet among the festivals whose periodical celebration was compulsory. Its importance was such that if a sovereign failed to celebrate it properly, the kingdom would be threatened with dreadful calamities. However, there is no information which enables us to determine even approximately the date when the feast of the first day of the lunar year was imported from China.

In default of reliable historical data, let us content ourselves with considering what Tet is for Vietnam nowadays:

First of all, Tet is a calendar date, the first day of the lunar year. Each year counts in principle 354 days distributed among 12 months. The first, fourth, fifth, seventh, ninth and eleventh months only have 29 days; the six others have 30 days. Every three years, an intercalary month is included between the third and the eighth month.

But Tet may not be defined by comparing it to the western New Year Day. Indeed, there is a fundamental difference. In the gregorian calendar, the year begins in the middle of winter, during nature's big sleep. On the contrary, in Vietnam Tet is the beginning of the spring equinox which marks the transition between two years. For an exclusively agricultural people, as Viet-Nam was until recently the succession of the seasons is a principal phenomenon by which life is regulated. In the cosmogonical system of the ancients, the renewal

of living creatures ought to correspond to that of nature. The arrival of spring is therefore the signal of a general enthusiasm. In the same way as the trees adorn themselves with budlets after getting rid of their dry foliage, man, in order to develop a new soul, ought to throw aside his worries, his griefs, his hatred and rancours. In order for that great common joy to be complete, even the dead are invited to share it during the few days when gaiety is incumbent upon all. The transition from one year to another thus takes on a religious character which implies the forgetting of past mistakes, but also the pardon of insults and offenses. When New Year comes, one should no longer have enemies.

If it's prescribed to be friendly to everybody, one should also be careful not to give way to grudge, envy and malice. This explains why for instance one is enjoined to pay one's debts



*Ancestors, Altar*



before the first day of the New Year, because the creditor may have vis-a-vis his debtor such feelings which are quite foreign to the universal and fraternal love which ought to unite all men.

By getting rid of all thoughts of revenge, hatred and grudge, by forcing himself to foster only cheerful thoughts, to say only courteous words to have only kind feelings, man contributes to the general concord of the universe, and at the same time takes his share of happiness from the community.

### THE PART OF REMEMBRANCE

**T**HAT general joy of a people sharing the hope for better days to come is one of the poles of the festival; the pagan pole, so to speak, since that notion of man's dependence vis-a-vis nature is the very substance of paganism. But there is also another pole which gives the festival its august character.

While linking himself with nature, man shows his superiority through the trait of memory. The tree which lifts its proud top towards the sky forgets the seed it came from, and does not know it has to die. Man at least has that derisory knowledge which is actually his only certitude. Nevertheless, that certitude gives him his greatness because it infuses into him the respect for those who preceded him in the mystery of another existence. That is why he feels the need of linking himself to them and Tet is the opportunity for it. Between the living and the dead and for a few days, an atmosphere of the supernatural is established which gives Tet a meaning imbued with an extraordinary grandeur.

In the Vietnamese traditions concerning Tet, anything which is connected with the cult of the ancestors concurs to sanctify the feast as well as to exalt the family-religion.

# TET : CUSTOMS and LEGENDS



ABOVE : First Handwriting  
(Story on back cover)

BELOW : Visiting pagoda



If it is true that the symbol of fatherland is based on the remembrance of the dead as well as of the effort of the living, there is no moment when the spirit of the national community is more strongly manifest than during those days during which the presence of the revered ancestors is felt in each home. That is chiefly the reason why Tet is the symbol of the Community of souls of which the family is only the fundamental cell.

During three days, the deceased partake in the life of their descendants. On Tet-eve, they are invited, through a ceremony of sacrifice, to come back to the family and have their share of the general joy. They are invoked twice a day, at meal-time. In their honour, the ancestors' altar is covered with the offerings brought in by all the members of the family. Even the visitors do not fail to pay their respects to them before giving salutations to the living. Finally, at the end of the third day of Tet, another ceremony is celebrated to honour them at the time of their return to another world. After staying three days with the living, they bestow blessings and protection upon the latter, and ultimate presents are offered as a token of the gratitude of those who remain.

### AN AUSPICIOUS PERIOD

THE return of Spring symbolic in Tet is of course an auspicious period beyond all others, signifying as it does the understanding that one should not, through improper behavior, interfere with the natural course of events and break the general harmony. Thus, within the period of Tet, a shocking word, an insult, a manifestation of bad-temper, a discourteous gesture are not only contrary to seemliness which is required then more than at any other time, but they will also amount to a betrayal against nature and may bring ill-luck to him who transgresses the



TET greetings

rule. The significance of this is enhanced by popular superstition and special attention is paid to all supernatural signs perceived during those three days.

On the morning of New Year's first day, each family is concerned about who is going to be the first visitor because the latter may affect the fate of all the family members for the whole year. If the first visitor is a happy man, happiness is assured until next Tet. An unhappy man will bring malediction for twelve months. And a lot of other factors are taken into consideration to determine the character of that messenger of fate: his social status, his parentage, his wealth, the number of children he has, his frame of mind, his luck. A person with a recent bereavement or having had financial disappointments, unfortunate law-suits, serious diseases, family worries, will avoid going out early in the morning for there is a chance of being the first person to visit a friend's home where he would bring nothing but desolation. But such a misfortune very rarely happens. To be sure to avoid it, people prefer not to leave it to chance and the first visits are carefully scheduled ahead of time. Among relatives and friends,

the one who is considered as the happiest is selected and asked to come as early as possible on that day.

### THE « CAY NEU »

AMONG the most ancient Tet customs, the most significant is « cay neu ». It is the name given to a bamboo pole, about 10 meters long, stripped of its leaves except a small tuft at its smaller end. The cay neu is set-up in front of each house on the last day of the lunar year. Various items are hung on its top where a piece of red paper bearing an eight-sign inscription, or « bua bat quai » is usually attached. A small basket also hanging on top of the « cay neu » contains betel and areca nuts. Certain instruments are added which, in the breeze, will jingle or produce melodious sounds. Above the basket, a small square of woven bamboo represents roughly the barrier which is supposed to stop the evil spirits. Finally, to give the whole thing an attractive appearance appropriate for those feast-days, the « cay neu » is crowned with multicoloured cock feathers. While the symbolical barrier keeps the evil spirits from entering the home, the offerings placed in the bas-

ket are intended for the bountiful genii of whom one wishes to win the good-will. The cay neu will stay planted seven days in front of the home of which it assumes the protection. This custom, still popular in North and Central Vietnam, is now somewhat forsaken in the South.

### AGAINST PLAGUE.

ACCORDING to another legend, there are certain genii that the cay neu is unable to keep away and against whom other protective measures are required. That is the reason why when Tet comes, each Vietnamese will scatter lime-powder around his house and draw, with lime also, a bow and an arrow in front of the threshold. In this connection, the legend says that after subduing all the feudal lords and pacifying Viet-Nam, Emperor Dinh-Tien-Hoang had to face

a still more dreadful enemy. Plague was then devastating the country and striking numerous victims. The pious monarch realized that his army was powerless against such an adversary. Therefore he implored help from Heaven. A genius appeared then and ordered him to have lime spread around every house within the kingdom. In addition, the genius prescribed that a bow and arrow be drawn in front of each threshold to exorcise the evil spirits, and assure that the calamities which were devastating the population would thus be averted. The Emperor ordered immediately that the instructions from the messenger of Heaven be complied with everywhere. The measures prescribed were carried out and plague was subdued. A custom was established which has been kept until these days.

### THE LEGEND OF THE APRICOT TREE

THE apricot tree has now a very important place in all the ceremonies of Tet.

The legend says that our ancestors, aware of the demon's fear of the sight of an apricot tree, decided to put apricot branches in front of their home.

The custom of using apricot branches during Tet is maintained, but this tradition has now lost its old mystical character. Art has gained what superstition has lost.

The Vietnamese nowadays no longer believe much in the genii who haunted the universe of their remote ancestors. But they have preserved a very sharp sense of beauty and a taste for decoration. Many of the old people, in North Viet-Nam in particular, trim carefully the apricot branches during the days preceding Tet so that their blossoming will coincide exactly with the beginning of the New Year.

This visible manifestation of Spring at the very time of its coming is said to be an auspicious sign and the prospect of greatest prosperities extend to the whole family throughout the year.

### THE NARCISSUS

LIKE the apricot blossoms, the narcissus plays an important part at Tet. These flowers with their snow white petals and subtle fragrance come from a kind of tuberoses similar to the tulip bulb. When they bloom in the morning of New Year's first day, the narcissi are also a promise of

(Continued on page 29)

*Narcissus*

*Apricot Flowers*





# THE ELDEST SON IN V. N. FAMILY

By VAN-NGAN

**A** Vietnamese coming from Hanoi might well be familiar with the story about a local district chief named Thanh. His name has become synonymous with the strict rules that guide the up-bringing of children in the Vietnamese family. These traditional customs differ in one major respect from Western ideas of child-rearing — they make no bones about using the rod.

Thanh, being the eldest son became the head of the family of five after both his parents died. None of them gave him trouble except one — the youngest brother — who showed all signs of turning out to be a wastrel. Rather than studying or helping in chores around the house, he'd spend his time on pleasurable pursuits, gambling and drinking. Thanh did his best to « straighten him out » but advice proved fruitless and he resorted to the last stratagem in the arsenal of Vietnamese education : a family council to decide what to do with the wayward youngster.

All relatives came to the meeting, which started with offerings to Thanh's deceased parents and ended with his asking permission to punish the spendthrift who was bringing disgrace on all of them by his dissolute ways. Permission was granted, and the youngest brother was told to kneel in front of the ancestral altar. Thanh Sr. then recited his brother's wrong-doings, striking him three times with the rod upon his bent back. At the same time he warned him that if he wouldn't mend his ways, the family would disown him.

According to Vietnamese tradition, Thanh Sr. was perfectly within his rights to appropriate the role of judge. Upon the death of his father, he had automatically become the head of the family with the tacit understanding that he would be responsible for protecting its name and reputation for the sake of the living as well as the dead.

(Continued on page 21)

**F**OR all of the thrills of Hui and its traditional use, until recently there was little other choice for the small « investor » and only the most frightening choice for the borrower in need. Banks have hardly concerned themselves with either the small investor or borrower. There was, and remains largely today a service for industry and commerce.

Quite recently a gratifying small man's investment and borrowing system, the common western credit union has been introduced to South Vietnam. Though still in its infancy, this system is becoming increasingly popular, for the simple reason that it provides much greater security to the « investor » and, for the borrower, lower interest and a more personalized repayment plan related to his income and monthly expenses.

The credit union is a most welcome addition, yet no doubt Hui will live for many years to come — if only for the sport of the game (Ed.)

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**W**HEN people in Western countries need a lot of cash quick, they can borrow it from a bank of finance company, but to the majority of Vietnamese there exists a far more exciting way.

## THE ELDEST SON...

So great is the respect traditionally reserved for the eldest son that people usually avoid calling him by his last name, preferring to use « Master Ca » (1). His education has prepared him for this revered position. Not unlike the former British system of primogeniture, in which the eldest heir received the family's estate and title, the Vietnamese family accords special privileges upon its senior child, often to the neglect of the younger children. The education of the eldest son focuses largely on the study of Chinese characters which enables him to study law and enter the patronymic in the family register.

After his parents' death, the eldest son falls heir to two important tasks — 1) the establishment and maintenance of the altar and tomb, and 2) the up-bringing of the younger children. Most of the estate will fall to him as will the responsibility to protect the family's integrity. If, for instance, the family's honor is slighted, it's up to him to avenge it.

If the deceased parents happen to have been of small means, the burden on the eldest son is so much the greater. He'll be faced with the difficult decision as to which one of his brothers and sisters will go on to higher education and which ones will be tasked to help provide for the family. Although neither custom nor law prevents him from getting married, his improvident circumstances often delay him from stepping into the matrimonial boat.

# THE

By DOAN-BICH

# « HUI »

# BOOM

(From SAIGON  
IN THE FLESH)

Do you need money to pay off a debt, build a house, marry off a daughter or just to set up a «V-2» (1)? You only have to join a «Hui» — an ingenious combination of a credit company, poker and Russian roulette. ●●●●●

(From page 20)

The same sacrifice is often made by the younger brother who, having finished his studies, devotes his time and earnings to the well-being of his relatives.

Like his eldest benefactor, the favored youngster would not infrequently remain unmarried since the concerns of wedded bliss might interfere with the duties to his family. An ancient Vietnamese proverb sums it up: «The most terrible thing for a newly wed girl are her husband's sisters.»

Today, however, many of the traditional values that used to appoint the roles of each member of the family, are being steadily eroded. The war is one of the causes, breaking up families whose sons march to battlefields and whose other members often become refugees widely separated from one another. Social changes are another reason. The spread of Western technology has introduced a whole new concept of life. The bonds of kinship are easily broken when a member of the family finds his material advancement hamstrung by the ancient family customs he has been taught to observe.

But customs that have persisted through for thousands of years cannot be wiped out overnight. The role of the eldest son is still a sacred concept and much of family life in Vietnam still revolves around the traditional values that to this day are the fibre of the Vietnamese nation.

(1) Mr. Eldest. ●●●●●

Though an ancient 'banking' system in Vietnam, right now the Hui (whose) movement is booming across the land like never before. 'Join a Hui' is heard on all sides — from businessmen, laborers, government workers and military men. This particularly popular get-rich quick system has reached such a state, a government executive told us the other day, that his two secretaries — both women — were so busy with their 'Hui' that they completely neglected their office work!

But if a Hui often helps people out of a financial jam, it sometimes makes them go bankrupt very quickly too. The case of an engineer's wife — a renown Hui 'banker' Saigon — who ran away with more than one million piastres is still fresh in everybody's mind.

The Vietnamese word 'Hui' comes from 'Hoi' which means an assembly or gathering. In fact, to form a 'Hui' requires a group of persons who fall in two categories. First — those who need money urgently but want to borrow it at low interest; second — rich people who want high profits without bothering to work for them.

To explain a Hui in detail is no easy matter, but in general it usually operates like this:

A group of persons set up a Hui for various reasons — some to borrow money, others to make profit — and agree on the amount to be put in the Hui 'kitty' as well as the length of time the Hui will run. This capital is composed of equal shares paid in by all the participants. The man who most wants to borrow this money offers the highest interest which is then paid from the total he receives and divided among the other investors. The borrower then drops out of the Hui, and from then only continues to pay back the loan in installments. These payments go into the kitty, from which other loans are made to other participants.

But suppose everybody wants to borrow at the same time? This introduces the special feature of the Hui — the 'investors' get together — say once a month — and all submit bids to borrow the whole amount in the kitty. The one who bids the highest interest rate gets the loan.

The same procedure is repeated until all the needy participants get a loan. But whether you get a loan early or near the end of the Hui's deadline, you must pay it back before the Hui ends.

This shows two main aspects of the Hui. In the first place, needy people who join a Hui can borrow money at a relatively low interest and pay back the capital in installments. If you try to borrow from a money lender in Viet Nam, the interest may be ten per cent a month, or even double. To get a bank loan

requires collateral — but to join a Hui, and get a chance at a big loan, all you need is a few hundred or few thousand piastres to 'invest'.

Moreover, you can join as many different Hui as you want without being compelled to put up any guarantees.

The other side concerns the wealthy people who regard a Hui as a kind of lucrative business. In fact it is the best way of lending money — it is like being a partner in a finance company.

You do not give the whole loan yourself, or even all at once, because you 'invest' a small sum every month in the Hui kitty along with all the other members. Thus the risk is shared, as well as the profit. And when the Hui time limit runs out, you always get a fair 'dividend' — that is if you never got a loan from the Hui.

Let's see how a typical Hui operates:

On the invitation of a 'banker' — who may be someone in urgent need of money or a professional — ten or more persons (including the banker) get together to agree on the Hui time and starting capital, say ten months and 12,000 piasters. A date is then set for the monthly bidding, say the fifth of each month. As a usual rule, there is no bidding in the first month but all 'investors' must pay the banker their full monthly share in the Hui VN\$ 1,200 each. The banker holds on to this first installment until the end of the Hui.

Starting from the second month on the fifth day, all participants once again gather at the banker's home to bid for a loan. Each writes down his name and the interest he offers to pay in order to get the loan. The person who offers the highest interest is awarded the loan.

If the highest interest offered is 200 piasters per share for example, then each 'investor' pays the borrower VN\$ 1,000, having already deducted the interest.

It goes without saying that if many persons are in urgent need of money they bid high, and the loan, consequently, becomes very thin. And the man who deliberately bids too low in the monthly meetings makes the greatest profit because he is getting, not paying, interest.

According to the law, participants in a Hui generally receive a contract form duly signed by the 'banker' in which he declares his responsibility and lists the main clauses agreed upon by the whole group. The Hui is so popular you can buy those printed contract forms at the market.

One usual clause stipulates that participants may mail their written bids to the banker instead of attending in person. In case

(1) an abbreviation of Vo Hai meaning 'Wife Number 2'.

(Continued on page 30)

## SAIGON IN THE FLESH

...DOAN-BICH and LE-TRANG have successfully captured in this book just what it presents  
• SAIGON IN THE FLESH...

NGUYEN-NGOC-LINH

ON SALE AT ALL SAIGON NEWSTANDS

# PURSUIT OF PASSION USUALLY LEADS TO A CUP OF COLD TEA

By  
HAROLD ELLITHORPE

**T**HE subject today is 'brothelization'; that is, the process of creating a brothel. Now a brothel, for those whose puritanical backgrounds preclude knowledge of such things, is a house of ill repute in which women serve men.

It is outside the sanctity of marriage and the warmth of the home. As such, a brothel is a coldly commercial enterprise designed to make money out of the sensual needs of men, and somewhat resembles the tavern or the movie house or the golf course in that regard.

Now the charge has been made that Americans are creating a brothel out of the City of Saigon. Discounting the obvious question of sheer volume of such a project with 60,000 American men and a resident population of 2,500,000 Vietnamese, the charge deserves consideration.

Consider the sequential question: Is it the Americans who are making a brothel out of Saigon, or the Saigonese who are brothelizing Americans? The lure of free enterprise is such that many Vietnamese are drawn naturally to what is obviously a source of great riches that can be enticed with the proper kind of advertising.

Concubines and mandarins gave way under the French colonials to mistresses and masters. When the French troops fought their war here, the brothel PER SE became a popular institution and one still hears of these plush houses about Saigon and out in the larger provincial towns.

With the American Way of Life, however, one finds something unique. One does not go to a brothel PER SE but rather to the local tavern where one meets a pretty young Vietnamese

hawking Saigon Tea at 100 piasters per glass. And Vietnamese women are among the most naturally beautiful in the world: petite, coy, sensual in their native 'AO DAI' dresses and alluring in the now popular split-leg Chinese fashions.

As with any roadhouse in the U.S., the night's arrangement is bargained over the bar with passion becoming badly mixed with beer.

The difficulty here is that there is no Vietnamese equivalent for a motel. Hotets are over-crowded with two or

three men sharing a room. Country lanes are patrolled by Viet Cong and Army troops pursuing each other around the outskirts of Saigon with vengeful ardor.

The result is that the 11:30 curfew finds a great recap of Saigon Tea sold, but little love being made.

And so, the brothelization is more intent and imagination than reality. Americans are just not brothel-oriented, and therein lies their frustration.

Saigon would be a great place to own a motel.

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**R**ECENT statements by Soviet and East European leaders as well as the tenor of inspired articles in the official press have convinced many observers that the Soviet Union and its allies are now cautiously groping towards a peace settlement in Vietnam.

But each step they take in this direction is carefully camouflaged so as to deny their Chinese Communist rivals any excuse for denouncing them for allegedly appeasing American imperialism.

The mounting criticism of China in the Party press apparent in the entire Soviet bloc is seen to be part of this smokescreen; the aim seems to be to place the blame for Hanoi's failure to win the war squarely on the shoulders of Peking.

The keynote of the criticism is that by disrupting Communist unity China has destroyed the essential condition for a Communist victory in Vietnam, and that by obstructing overland aid shipments to North Vietnam from Soviet territory, China is preventing other Communist countries from giving Hanoi effective military support.

And to make the last point more telling to ordinary readers behind the iron curtain, the Soviet bloc press is now stressing, apparently for the first time, that China is the only Communist country which has a common frontier with Vietnam.

The Polish Communist Party organ, *Trybuła Ludu*, put these points clearly in a recent article (October 29) entitled «Victory Depends on Unity».

Declaring that «unity of action» of the Communist states was an «indispensable condition» for victory in Vietnam, the paper argued:

«The key to this unity is in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party. Its hands also hold the key to equipping the Democratic Republic of Vietnam with the most effective

forms of assistance from the united camp of the socialist states, for Vietnam borders on one Socialist state only — on the Chinese People's Republic».

Taken a step further the logic of these arguments would seem to imply that if Peking has made a Communist victory in Vietnam impossible then some other way out of the costly deadlock must be found, presumably by way of peaceful negotiations.

Probably Leonid Brezhnev, General-Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, had some such idea in his mind when he spoke recently (in Tblisi, capital of Soviet Georgia, on 1 November) in favour of «cooperation in the interest of peace and international security... With those Western Governments and political figures who look soberly on the international situation...»

Officials from non-aligned countries have in private conversations with Soviet bloc representatives heard these arguments being used: neither East, West nor the non-aligned world can benefit from what is happening in China today; China is expansionist, coveting various territories beyond her borders to the North and South, among them Viet-Nam itself; the more things deteriorate in Vietnam the better pleased is Peking.

It is therefore of paramount importance for everyone including the Chinese people themselves to bring about a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem as soon as possible.

But it seems that President Ho Chi Minh has at any rate up until now turned a deaf ear to advice along these

## MOVING TOWARDS PEACE IN VIETNAM

From  
LION FEATURES

At about the same time East European sources let it be known, informally, that at the nine-country Communist summit meeting held on October 22 in Moscow, a far more conciliatory view was taken of the Vietnam situation than was publicly admitted. Indeed one such source has suggested that the meeting agreed that there was a need to coax Hanoi into taking a softer stand on peace terms.

An authoritative Polish Communist source is on record as even admitting that the Soviet bloc is tired of the Vietnam war because of the mounting costs and would be glad if it could bring Hanoi to the negotiating table. The hope is that the massive aid from Eastern Europe used as a lever would gradually bring President Ho Chi Minh to listen to sensible advice.

lines offered by his Soviet and East European allies. This is the interpretation placed on his reference, in a recent press interview, to the advice by «some people of good will» to Hanoi to end the war at all costs — advice which he indicated he was not inclined to take.

Significantly this passage was left out of the account of the interview published by the official Soviet news agency, Tass. Seen against the background of Soviet reluctance to give any publicity of their peace moves for fear of provoking Chinese criticism, this omission appears as a confirmation that the Soviet bloc was meant when President Ho referred to «some people of good will».



**TET'S  
TASTY  
TREATS**

**T**HE dishes described below are the most popular and typical to be found on Vietnamese tables during Tet.

**STEWED CHICKENS**

This dish is served in big plates.

The chickens are stuffed with mushrooms, lotus seeds, dried Chinese plums, and shredded fish fins and then stitched up with silk thread and stewed for two hours, either alone or with other supplementary food items like potatoes, beans, and vegetables.

According to a Vietnamese custom, during the solemn days of the New Year, the head of the chicken is always served to the chief of the family, since his title is «THU-TICH» (meaning the head of the family). In some exceptional cases only it may be served to another person.

Even if invited to serve himself, a guest at the Tet table will usually wait for the head of the family to serve him some food first according to custom.

**STICKY RICE CAKES**

Sticky rice cakes are square packages of sticky rice wrapped in banana leaves. The central part consists of well-pounded green peas and some pieces of pork coarsely sliced.

The preparation of sticky rice cakes is quite simple except for the job of wrapping it in the banana leaf. It may not be either too tight or too loose.

At first, some carefully-washed raw sticky rice is spread on a portion of banana leaf. Then, a layer of

finely pounded and well cooked green peas along with two pieces of raw pork as big as two fingers are put in with another layer of sticky rice on top.

Then the cake is wrapped in a perfectly square shape and tightened moderately. If tied either too tightly or too loosely, much flavour will be lost and the central part with the green peas and pork may spoil quickly. Once the cakes are wrapped they are boiled for six or more hours.

Sticky rice cakes are generally served along with cod fish cooked in fish sauce nuoc mam and salted onions. The most delicious is fresh cod first grilled between two bamboo strips, and then simmered with a good quality fish sauce.

Sticky rice cakes may be served in another way: they may be fried until dark brown on both sides. This dish, if served hot and along with fresh cod cooked with fish sauce and salted onions, provides an aromatic, crisp, soft and fat flavor. The slightly sour taste of the salted onions adds a unique touch.

**PIG'S HEAD PIE**

This is a meat pie made up of finely shredded pork mixed with slices of pig's head and cooked pig skin. It is tied in banana leaves to form a large package before being cooked in water for four hours.

The secret to making a tasty pig's head pies depends on the seasoning, especially pepper, and the addition of

(Continued on page 28)

# American Press

(From page 8)

America's commitment to the struggle has, from the first, been confused, switching from advisory aid to support, to full-scale war action. In the political and economic fields, the situation remains confused and unuse although America's resolve to see the tasks started through to completion has been made abundantly clear.

The Vietnamese are struggling toward independence and democracy and internal freedom and social justice, and each of these struggles is important and complex and vital to the outcome of the war.

Communications are poor, transportation weak. The physical problems of getting a story are compounded by official secretiveness and, in too many instances, open distrust of correspondents.

In this war there is no censorship of American correspondents, and that is important, for censorship would make reporting ridiculous in light of the confusions that already exist. (There still exists censorship of Vietnamese press which has rebounded often to the detriment of the Vietnamese government. Only recently the Vietnamese Army began training information officers to try to overcome the lack of attention given to Vietnamese efforts by the foreign press corps.)

While the official policy is one of open information within the limits of generally agreed demands for military security, one finds a deeply entrenched barrier in the minds of officers and officials from the U.S. Embassy down to the lowliest private.

I was once told by a press officer that a three-star general could not comment on questions of strategy in the air war, and that I should take them to higher authority. I computed

that there were only five persons in the world over him in the chain of command — and none of them in Vietnam!

I have often asked battalion and company-level officers about actions occurring nearby within their units. With a few exceptions, I was treated as though I had asked for the secret code.

Often there is amazing candor about some thing coupled side-by-side by a secretiveness that is hard to comprehend. Good journalists know that these barriers of the mind can be broken down with time and friendship, but that is aggravating when time is precious.

It is widely known, and perhaps valid, that a select few journalists are accorded confidences with top officials that are denied the others. When these confidences are shared on the basis of the competence of the journalist to handle them with responsibility, the procedure is valid. But one suspects too often that the size and political punch of the newspaper or network or service has more to do with the selection than professional integrity.

Certainly, this is the case with visiting publishers and editors who junket periodically through Vietnam and are accorded VIP treatment.

Too often, officials here are less interested in putting the truth before the American people than they are in making policy or personal points in Washington. It is disgusting but not impossible to work with such people as sources of news, for the type is familiar to any experienced reporter.

The public information effort in the American sector is massive, and — considering its size and the rank of personnel manning the system—it is inept. The daily briefings show (with some thankful exceptions) a lack of simple reporting fundamentals.

Much of the fault lies with the inadequacy of field reports but the

internal discussions of what is wise to reveal and what is not that take place daily at top command headquarters deeply influences the resulting releases of information to the press.

When cornered, information officers often will reveal that they have not released vital information because they did not believe that "the general would like this to be bandied around," or some other such petty barrier. In one instance, it was rumored that a general's wife objected to certain pictures, and therefore information officers made sure that no official photographs were released of the objectionable type.

It should be a rule of American officials, civilian and military, that their judgments about whether information should or should not be released must not supplant those of trained journalists. Only the most vital of reasons should interfere with the free flow of information.

In Vietnam, often the pettiest of reasons suffices.

In essence, the official voices within Vietnam have not become reliable, conscientious, open sources of information. Again, this complicates the true picture being presented in the United States, if for no other reason than it makes every reporter suspicious of any and all official statements.

It is admitted by all that the complexities of Vietnam demand more journalistic effort in sheer man-hours of work for a smaller product in words written or photographs taken than any war in recent times. Yet the manpower committed to the effort has not been adequate.

It is true that the wire services and the television networks and a couple of news magazines have made at least an effort to man their Saigon bureaus.

By their own admission, they are under-staffed in covering the nation as it must be covered. A large staff,

in this situation, is not an adequate staff. The fact that a correspondent may spend days without achieving results is hardly justification for failing to have him on the scene.

The question reverts to an older issue in American journalism: the over-emphasis put on wordage production rather than on the necessities of the story. In Vietnam, the necessities are that many men are needed even though they may individually produce less.

At what point it becomes no longer feasible to employ additional reporters is a subjective evaluation to be made by the news directors involved in light of budgets, availability, service requirements, and the interest of the readers. It would seem clear that the point has not yet been reached.

In physical capability to carry out their tasks, news shops have not shown daring innovation. In a war of mobility and fluidity, the news services remain bound to the military for every kind of air and sea and land transport. Field equipment, especially for television crews, is rugged but outdated, heavy, cumbersome, and often inadequate for the job.

More seriously, newsmen remain in many instances too strongly tied to the massive corps of information officers fielded by every branch of the service and agency of government and even private companies operating in South Vietnam.

The official listing carried monthly by the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) — itself a monster that should be more closely examined as to its portent for the future — shows 194 high ranking civilians and officers directly involved in handling "the press". Of these, half are field grade officers (seven full colonels, 28 lieutenant colonels or Navy commanders, 52 majors or Navy lieutenant commanders).

When one adds the vast array of

combat correspondents, photographers, editors and writers of unit and agency house organs, enlisted "press escorts," the whole complex of persons dealing in the public information field, it would be safe to say that there is one such agent for every free correspondent and photographer.

Unfortunately, the primary value of this assemblage is to arrange transportation. Severely circumscribed by dictum from command authorities, the helpless PIOs seldom can offer more than "puff article" suggestions.

It must be said that the PIOs are friendly, attempt to help in the onerous problems of moving around and communicating in this war, and many are well qualified. So long as the official line is to "handle the press" rather than reveal truth to them, the PIO effort will remain semi-useless.

And it must be noted that the military PIO structure is more friendly, cooperative, open and helpful than the comparative civilian agency information officers who mostly "can" releases rather than work with correspondents whom they seem to fear as a group.

A key question, of course, is the caliber of correspondent chosen to work in Vietnam. Correspondents come in all shapes and sizes and dimensions. Any mass evaluations are tricky. But one can make a few generalizations.

The major services have chosen to man their Saigon bureaus with a minimum of their top people, leaving the bulk of their staffing in relatively minor, often inexperienced personnel. A typical news bureau here, covering the most important story in the world at this point in time, resembles the same service's bureau in any of the larger centers of the United States. It has much the same mix of talent, and that in itself is not in keeping with the demands of the war.

The better manning, if that be the proper term, is done by a few servi-

ces, including Time-Life News' Newsweek, New York Times. The major wire services are undistinguished with a few notable and exemplary personal exceptions such as Peter Arnett and Horst Faas of Associated Press.

Individual reporters covering for specific newspapers or syndicates are excellent, and one can mention quickly Keenan of the Baltimore Sun, Foisie of the Los Angeles Times (now in Bangkok for another long tour in Southeast Asia), Jim Lucas of Scripps Howard.

The failure is not with those assigned here, for I know of no correspondent (with only two possible exceptions, both out of the main stream of press work here) who is not eager and willing, even at great personal risk, to do a fine job.

The fault lies with the managers in the United States who select correspondents for Vietnam duty. There seems to exist no criteria for selection other than willingness to travel and possibly be shot. In one instance, a major service hopes to hire in the Orient in order to cut down the costs of assigning a perhaps more qualified man from the States.

In Vietnam, a reporter needs background. Before assignment he should be qualified in the nuances of diplomatic life, the disciplines of military action, an appreciation of the times and the people he must work with and write about. The better reporters have acquired this qualifying background *after* arriving here and struggling many months.

The poorer choices treat Vietnam like any news beat in the States hoping that personal friendships with "good sources" will overcome their own inadequacies.

The bulk of reporters — and editors, unfortunately — come out of the metropolitan daily tradition in the United States which panders to what

(Continued on page 31)

# A VISITOR ANTICIPATED TET

By ROBERT H. GERE

(From HOC BAO Weekly)

AS I write everyone is waiting for Tet. In offices the tempo of work in early January has slackened perceptibly. In shops and on the streets, women finger the wares, narrow their eyes and debate, walking away to price and taste the quality of other wares in other stores. The children are wearing out their old clothes and old playthings. But now and then in their play, they pause and look into the distance, dreaming of things to come at Tet. One senses an air of expectancy everywhere. Everyone is waiting.

But for what, exactly, are they waiting? We are uncertain, my family and I. A few months ago a great aircraft stopped on the runway in Saigon, strangely silent after the long flight, and we walked down the stairs into a new world, a world of language we do not understand, of signs we cannot read, and of customs with which we are not familiar. This is a world, we later learned, in which there is a supremely important group of days called Tet. And now, with the rest of Viet-Nam, we are waiting for Tet, our first Tet.

Of course, we heard about Tet in short order from others who have lived longer in the city. It is a time (our friends told us) when gifts are given, greetings exchanged. Your servants, if you have any, will not come to work, and you are to pay them extra wages, for some reason unexplained. There is a great deal of activity in the streets — crowds, parades, flowers — and you must be sure to have color film.

It is a time of deep religious significance, one thoughtful and well-read friend told us during which the honored dead are remembered. It is a time for which one prepares by regularizing his affairs, a Vietnamese friend said, and we understood him to mean one's business affairs and social relationships as well. It's like a big party, a teen-aged boy told my son.

If we could trust the net impression provided us by our witnesses, we might conclude that Tet will be very much like any three-day weekend at home; a Saturday parade up the main street of our town, religious

services on Sunday, friends dropping in, and a pleasant idle Monday with the grandparents perhaps including a visit to the graves of loved ones to put down a flower in remembrance.

But, we have doubts about this image. Tet cannot be merely this! How can we explain the bright-eyed, hopeful looks of children, if Tet is only a holiday? Why do we sense an undercurrent of excitement in all the people we meet? And above all, who are we, ourselves, caught up uncomprehending in anticipation?

If we cannot accept that our witnesses have given us a full understanding of Tet, what then do we expect beyond what they have told us? Perhaps, we hope to identify some aspect of Tet with our own culture and calendar of feasts.

It is well known, that in the west, we celebrate the feast of the New Year with gaiety, foolish paper hats, and sometimes indecorous behavior. Underlying this feast is a sense of things ending and beginning. It gives reality, to the feeling that it is somehow good to stop the endless change of successive days, and sum up or evaluate for a moment the passing year. It is the bookkeeping time both of the soul and of the material world around us, at the end of one unit of time and the beginning of another. As for the odd behavior of western men at this feast, it occurs perhaps because we sense somehow that a man should rid himself of the follies and shortcomings of one year in order to meet the new year purged of the past, resolved to embark on a new effort.

We rather expect and hope to sense something like this sentiment for renewal and rededication in the feast of Têt. Beyond the sounds of street music and the wanderings of paper dragons, beyond the happy shouts, the noise-makers, we anticipate that we will feel, somehow, a kinship through experience in common with people whose languages we have not yet learned, whose culture is otherwise strange to us, and whose wishing children are so like our own.

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## Têt's Tasty Treats

(from page 25)

the right quantity of a sodium chemical which bonds the various kinds of meat together and also acts as a preservative. The pie is served in slices to be eaten along with a non-pork type of rice cake.

### LOTUS SEED SWEET-MEAT

This delicacy is made of dried boiled lotus seeds with their bitter green cores removed. A sweet solution with one liter of water for three kilograms of sugar is then boiled. The lotus seeds may be added when the sugar solution will form fine strings from a chopstick dipped in to test its concentration. The fire is then reduced until

the solution reaches the point of producing extendable fibers.

Clever confectioner can make transparent sugar coatings for the lotus seeds. The result provides a very particular flavor, sweet yet fragrant and meaty.

Lotus seed sweet meat is used as a side-dish during the TET festivities. Epicures generally take lotus seed sweet meat with strong tea for dessert or for moments of calm leisure.

In the list of delicacies the Vietnamese people reserve to welcome the New Year, there are many other dishes, but those mentioned above are the most common dishes for Tet that most every Vietnamese family can afford.

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happiness. Therefore, they share with the apricot branches the care given by old people anxious to bring about auspicious omens.

The narcissus has always been the symbol of success and prosperity.

## THE COMING OF TET

THE first ceremonies of Tet begin during the night between the 29th and 30th days of the ending-year. As a matter of fact, the preparation of the feast already begins many days in advance and provisions are made to adorn the house properly, to have a supply of firecrackers, to have new clothes made.

One must be at home, before the Ancestors' altar when the first hour of the New Year will strike. All of a sudden the city has become a desert and will remain so during three days.

During three days with the stores shut, the taxicabs in the garages, the pedicabs put up, the empty roadway is yielded to the few strollers inaugurating their new clothes.

Tet actually begins with the Giao Thua which marks the transition from one year to another and is celebrated beginning from midnight. But in the previous afternoon has taken place the "Tât Niên" or End of the Year ceremony which is a sacrifice offered to the deceased who are thus invited to come for a few days and share with the living members of the family the joys of that auspicious period.

The Giao Thua is celebrated simultaneously in the families and in the pagodas. Each year the Emperor of Jade will assign to each home a new genie who has the mission of looking after the family. The Giao Thua has the double purpose of thanking the genie who goes away to submit his report to the Heavenly Authority and of welcoming his successor.

In the morning of the first day of Tet everybody gets up early. Dishes are prepared which will be the first

# TET CUSTOMS

(From page 19)

offerings of the year to the Ancestors who are back. The same ceremony will be repeated morning and evening at the time of the principal meals for the first three days of the New Year. And like everywhere in the world on the occasion of a New Year, wishes of happiness are exchanged with every person, friend or foe, that one meets. When the children offer their New Year wishes to the grown-ups, the latter, by way of thanks, give them red paper envelopes — red is the colour of luck — containing small sums of money. The amount of money varies, of course, with the degree of fortune of the giver and also with the degree of kinship or closeness which binds him to each child.

The first ceremony in front of the Ancestors' altar is followed by a consultation of oracles. Depending on each area the latter may be of various kinds. Here a soothsayer is consulted, there, chicken legs are examined. More usually people read the characters of an almanac where are mentioned auspicious and ill-fated signs, favourable dates for travel and business, auspicious numbers and colors, the direction for orientation of a new building etc... One still finds in the almanac the indication of the morning hours of Tet when it is recommended to go out in such and such direction.

Tet involves a lot taboos whose superstitious origin dates back to the remotest times and whose enumeration alone would be tedious. Moreover, who among the Vietnamese of the present generations can pride himself on knowing them all.

In view of the pleasant legend connected with it, let us mention only the interdiction of cleaning or sweeping the house on the first day of Tet.

## FIRE - CRACKERS.

TET would not be celebrated pro-

perly if the coming of New Year was not greeted by countless fire-crackers. The latter express in their own manner the joy which should be the joy of things as well as of people when Nature adorns herself with her new attire. The early crackers were mere hollow bamboos loaded with some powder. When fired they exploded with a violent detonation. Many a youngster nowadays still puts several crackers inside a bamboo to produce as much noise as possible. With these hard times, crackers like other things have much increased in price, but any poor beggar would voluntarily deprive himself of a little comfort to buy his ration of noise and merriment. May be the merchants of crackers are the only ones who have no crackers to fire since their stock is sold out. They may cheer up by counting their earnings. For them, Tet is always a highly profitable period.

There is no Tet without crackers or without presents. Among the population, presents given to friends. Likewise, the children offer their elders wishes for a happy year and a long life. In return, they received presents in cash. The custom of giving cash is called Li Xi. But nowadays parents frequently also give toys to their younger children and useful things to their older ones. Of course such gifts do not eliminate the obligation of giving a new suit to each of them on the first day of Tet. The fact of wearing on the morning of Tet the same clothes as the previous day is considered a sign of poverty to which no one would resign himself without feeling strongly humiliated.

The fourth day marks the end of Tet. It is the day when the Ancestors return to their Heavenly Abode. The stores reopen one after the other. The streets recover their animation little by little. Life resumes its usual course. People go and visit the graves on that day, which is a way of accompanying the deceased back home; the cemeteries assume a festive air. Finally, on the seventh day of the first month the "cay neu" is removed. It has become useless since the protecting genii have returned to their posts. Even the divinities resume their occupation. Tet is over... but it has brought with it remembrance of the past, joy and goodwill in the present, and a hope and faith in the future.

# The «Hui» Boom

(From page 22)

two participants bid the same rate of interest, they can make a deal between themselves and split the loan, or one may give up the right to the other.

Another clause says if a participant dies after getting a loan his nearest relatives must pay back for him. If a participant dies before getting a loan, then his relatives have the right to take his place in the Hui.

An « investor » who for any reason refuses to pay his share may lose all the money he put in earlier, pending an amicable deal with the banker.

The most important clause of the contract concerns the banker's responsibility : he must pay the borrower of the entire amount due him, even if one or more previous borrowers refuse to pay their loan instalment. If the banker dies or is absent his next of kin must take over and manage the Hui.

In exchange for this responsibility, the banker has the right to borrow the whole amount in the kitty in the first month, without paying an interest (as shown in the above example). Or he can take commission, usually 30 per cent, of the monthly interest paid to the non-borrowing participants.

Despite these strict regulations, enforced by law, many swindles occur. Thus, a wise Hui banker always seeks reliable

participants and, inversely, anyone who wishes to join a Hui also looks for only a well reputed banker.

In a Chinese Hui, on the contrary, there is no banker at all. Each participant has the whole group. A Hui, Cholon style, generally is like this :

At a fixed day, all the participants gather at a restaurant to eat and drink. The bidding proceeds exactly like in the Vietnamese Hui. The person who offers the highest interest is entitled to get the loan on the spot. The borrower gives each of the participants a receipt, and at the same time has to pay the restaurant bill.

For a large majority of Vietnamese, the Hui is thus an effective way to get out of a financial deadlock, start a business or simply earn dividends. Unfortunately, in many cases, the borrower uses his loan to gamble and then cannot pay it back.

More blamable still, Hui swindling has become more frequent, and the culprits — mostly the bankers — usually are found among the wealthy.

Anyhow, the Hui plays an important role in the economic life of the people, possibly because it surpasses all the thrills of poker, roulette, and their stakes as well.

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## AMERICAN PRESS (From page 27)

the readers want.» A story, to be valid, must be dramatic, flashy, rifled to the hearts of the readers rather than their minds!

This has led to countless variations on the Ernie Pyle style of front line reporting in which the name, age, and hometown of the fighting and dying GI are more important than the truth about what he is doing.

One must respect the logic that this kind of reporting is read by more readers and, thus, has greater impact in the long run. «It brings this war down to a level the average reader can understand and appreciate», is the common way the theory is put.

The error is not in writing about real people in vital situations, but in failing to put that people and the situations into a truthful context. I have read glowing reports of personal heroism in actions which neglected to mention that the heroism was for naught and that the whole story was the result of a tragic bungling, often on the part of the alleged hero.

There is much talk among correspondents about «getting the truth» about this war. But this is usually taken to mean that one wishes for factual accuracy. Missing is any concept of contextual truth.

A story must not only be factually accurate but must be true in that it accurately reflects true conditions beyond the narrow confines of the story itself.

It is this lack of contextual truth which leads to confusing and dilettante writing. And a sophomoric reporter cannot yet handle such larger issues.

Vietnam is undoubtedly the most photographed war in history, and has offered television its first great opportunity to develop new techniques and skills for the enlightenment of man.

But it has also brought its own limitations. Television news reporting is often stymied by lack of dramatic things to photograph. Many a valid story idea has been rejected simply because the newsmen conclude: «I don't think this story will swing, photographically.»

Unfortunately, this has not been accepted as a challenge, but as a boundary (with a few, fleeting excep-

tions). Accepting the challenge of a visual medium demands creative talent far above routine documentary production.

Perhaps more of this challenge could be met if networks would put complete production units in Saigon so that all of the art of the medium could be creatively experimented on the scene. This would mean less promotional-type exposure for the big rating newsmen in New York and Washington, but we are not discussing the problem of inter-network preening but the validity of reporting to the public.

In many respects, the Vietnam war has been a «let's let George do it» thing for editors and publishers. Only a handful of the major daily newspapers are directly represented by their own correspondents in Vietnam. Most prefer to snatch copy off the wire service machines and run it without further ado.

From a spot news standpoint, wire services offer valid and needed flows of good copy. But this is only a portion of the total story that newspapers should be bringing to their readers.

It is disgusting, for example, to watch a harried correspondent for a major New York City daily scurrying around getting «hometowners» from second-rate participants in the Saigon «war front.»

Many newspapers have bravely sent a reporter (usually an editor) junketing into Vietnam for a week or two. A few newspapers have even boldly allowed a three-month stay for reporters, hoping to win a little back-home esteem at minimum cost.

This is a long, complicated, serious war, and it is treated frivolously by publishers who should be ashamed of their role in American journalism.

As a sub-note, one must deplore the equivocal role of magazines in completing the press coverage of Vietnam. The news magazines excepted (Time, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report), the general attitude of magazines has been sloppy, haphazard and mostly disinterested. An exception is the New Yorker.

Yet, Vietnam is the kind of war in which the depth perspective and superior photographic techniques

available today fit so perfectly the magazine format. Only a few magazines have correspondents, and then only as a part-time stringer kind of arrangement. Two major news magazines do not even employ fulltime photographers and another has only a contractual setup.

For a responsible, informative, rounded, balanced report of what is going on in Vietnam, one must read extremely selectively: The New York Times, New Yorker, Time, Newsweek a few of the more carefully thought-out television documentaries, and I would personally advise some Los Angeles Times-Washington Post reports and Keenan's Baltimore Sun items.

Good reporting will often appear elsewhere, but not consistently enough for sustained intelligence of the situation. Wire service spot news is adequate.

For a nation that prides itself on freedom of the press and on the viability of free journalism, the showing is not superior.

There are good, capable reporters doing a good, often superb job. All are courageous, eager and energetic. But the few are not sufficient for the task at hand.

Nor is the American officialdom sufficiently aware of their great responsibilities, as sacred a duty as any they are entrusted with in their other tasks of this war. When Defense Department press boss Arthur Sylvester claims he does not know what «managed news» is, he is naive. One need only examine the Vietnam information program in action to see its debilitating results.

Higher standards must be set and met for correspondents. Editors should be willing to recruit, train and support better men in Saigon, and not depend on one or two «stars» to carry the burden of mediocre staffs.

Broader concepts of the purpose of correspondents must be developed. The «hometown» and the «I saw him killed» stories are not adequate. Reporters should be told to get the complete story and to write with as much skill and comprehension of the total situation as they can muster. They should not be bogged down with demands for trivial or flashy copy.

*(Continued on page 32)*

## DEC. 1

**NEW DOCK AT QUI-NHON** — An iron dock completed by a U.S. logistics team after four months of construction was dedicated at Qui-Nhon port. It can receive 10,000-ton ships.

## DEC. 2

**UNIVERSITIES' VEHICLE LANGUAGE** — Prime Minister Nguyen-Cao-Ky asked the Education Minister to promote Vietnamese as vehicle language in the faculties of medicine throughout the country starting Jan. 1, 1967. Up until recently, French and English had been used in the medical faculties.

## DEC. 3

**TAN-SON-NHUT ATTACKED** — Under cover of fire from two mortar sites, communist suicide guerillas attempted a ground assault against the vital airfield of Tan-Son-Nhut. 18 of them were killed and 6 captured. Friendly losses, both men and aircraft, were light.

## DEC. 4

**U.S. TO MOVE IN DELTA** — American troops are to move into the Delta said Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky. Until now, the only Americans in this rice-basket of the country largely under VC control, have been advisers to the Vietnamese military units.

## DEC. 7

**MR. TRAN-VAN-VAN GUNNED DOWN** — Two VC on a Honda motorbike shot and killed Mr. Tran-Van-Van, a leading member of the Constituent Assembly. One of them was caught by chasing policemen. The other terrorist escaped.

## AMERICAN PRESS (From page 31)

"We can't all be like the New York Times, is the usual rejoinder."

And that is true. But I think it might be wise to look at the better reporting from Vietnam and do a little deep thinking about it. If the press fails in Vietnam then it destroys itself. The credibility gap of the nation's journalists is too wide now. Failure to close it, rapidly and with creative vitality, could mar the prestige and sap the vigor of future journalism.

For all his unfortunate implications, S.L.A. Marshall has jabbed an accurate finger in the sore wounds of the press effort in Vietnam.

Let us hope that the irritant leads to a search for a cure rather than mere anger at the prober.

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# CHRONOLOGY

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## DEC. 8

**V.N. AND U.S. MILITARY POLICE'S JURISDICTION DEFINED** — General Nguyen-Ngoc-Loan, Director general of National police defined the jurisdiction limits of VN police and US MPs as follows: « Only Vietnamese police can arrest Vietnamese civilians and check papers of Vietnamese militarymen. The Vietnamese police can also interrogate or arrest US civilians. The US military police can only question and arrest US militarymen. »

**NINH HOA — CAM RANH HIGHWAY REOPENED** — The 160 miles road linking Ninh Hoa to Cam Ranh returned to public use after the South Korean Army wrestled it from Communist control and repaired it.

## DEC. 11

**HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND** — Mr. Nguyen-xuan-Phong, Social Welfare Secretary, laid the cornerstone for the construction of a secondary school for the blind in Saigon, the Lasan school. Formerly this school provided only primary education to blind children. The school also plans to open vocational training courses for blind children to form interpreters, telephonists and clerks.

**NEW WATER SUPPLY OPENS** — The inauguration of the US\$27.5 million Saigon metropolitan water supply system took place at the recently completed treatment complex in Thu Duc, 10 miles from Saigon.

When the entire system is completed, estimated by the end of 1967, the Saigon-Cholon-Gia-Dinh area will be reached by potable water. The system will provide 127.5 million gallons per day — about 47 gallons per person per day — for the area's 2.7 million people.

## DEC. 16

**PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM FOR VN** — The Constituent Assembly decided that the next year's civilian government will have a President, a Vice President and a Prime Minister. The President will have the power to appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.

## DEC. 20

**PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS TO BE ELECTED** — The Constituent Assembly in one of its most lively sessions with 104 deputies present, approved the drafting committee's proposal for election of hamlet, district and province chiefs and mayors, in an overwhelming vote of 102 to two. At present these officials are appointed by the central government.

## DEC. 21

**VIETNAM-ROK AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION** — Sources from the Agriculture Department said that the Vietnamese and the ROK's governments will sign an agreement according to which the Korean government will send agricultural experts to assist Vietnam.

## DEC. 23

**EDUCATION BUDGET** — Premier Nguyen Cao Ky disclosed that the budget for national education will rise from 2.7 billion in 1966 to 5.3 billion piasters in 1967, of which the United States will shoulder 1.3 billion. The statement was made at the National Assembly.

## DEC. 25

**AIR DISASTER IN DANANG** — A four-engine flying Tiger airline cargo plane, trying to land by radar in fog and rain crashed in a heavily-populated area near Danang city, killing at least 129 persons and injuring 42 others. It is the worst air disaster of the Vietnam war and the worst such tragedy in the history of aviation.

**'TERRE DES HOMMES' TAKES SICK VN CHILDREN TO EUROPE** — « Terre des Hommes » foundation sent 26 more Vietnamese children with heart conditions, serious burns or polio to Switzerland for medical treatment. This is the fourth contingent of sick Vietnamese children going to Switzerland. A total of 108 children have been treated there.

## DEC. 28

**VETO POWER MAINTAINED** — The Vietnam National leadership Committee decided to maintain its veto power over the Constitution being drafted by the Constituent Assembly. Decree Law No 21 on Elections stipulated that the National Leadership Committee has the right to amend the future Constitution.

**2 — PARTY SYSTEM APPROVED** — The Constituent Assembly approved a two-party system for Vietnam.

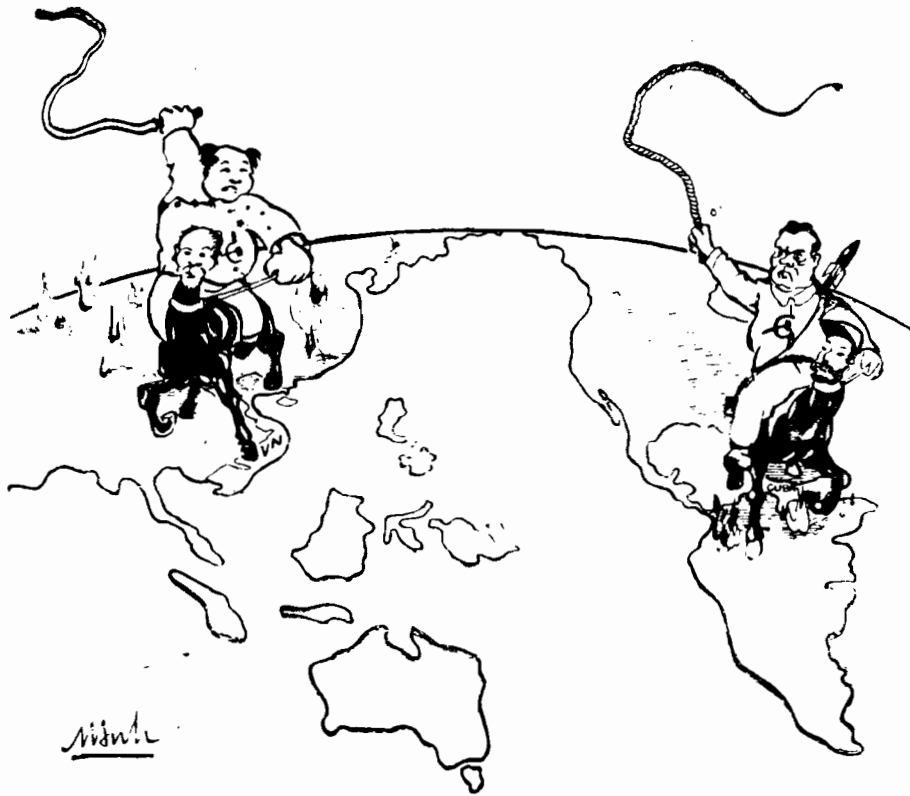
## DEC. 29

**THAI TROOPS TO SOUTH VIETNAM** — Reliable Thai Source said a Thai battalion of about 800 men would come to Vietnam. So far, Thailand has only sent supporting units consisting of transport aircraft and two naval vessels.

## DEC. 30

**PORT STRIKE SETTLED** — American military authorities in Saigon and striking dockworkers at the port of Saigon reached an agreement. The dockers dismissed were guaranteed new jobs. The agreement settled a five-day strike.

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## INTRODUCING VIETNAMESE CULTURE

# FIRST HANDWRITING

### Of The New Year

In Vietnamese folklore there is an old proverb, "Senseful ideas, beautiful handwriting." A person reveals in his writing the quality of his mind and purity of his behavior. It was believed that literature symbolized the moral worth of the writer while the quality of individual letters symbolized the exterior appearance of the penman.

Thus, a tradition arose about the First Writing of the New Year, a practice that has survived for thousands of years. The First Writing combines the love of literary expression and word playing of the Chinese with a divination of the chances and risks of the coming year. It is a cross between scholarly achievement and fortune telling.

The First Handwriting is started in the morning of the New Year's first day, as Confucianists believe that everyone has a fate which is destined by God. Each year is a circle of Destiny. Last year, there may have been luck in the earning of money but, this year, the earning of money might be weak. These good and bad things start on the first day of the New Year and end on the last day of the year.

People can discover either the good or the bad that they must bear in the First Writing of the New Year.

Prior to the invention of the Vietnamese national language the educated classes used the Chinese language with its complicated letter constructions and tonal pronunciations. Later a demotic script developed employing Chinese letters but with Vietnamese pronunciations. Handwriting was considered as a drawing art as well as a method of communication. A writer was cautioned to make his work beautiful, well-proportioned, a creation in which all of his heart and ideas are offered by the beautiful stroke of his pen.

Therefore the First Writing of the New Year is an elegant and noble pleasure for Vietnamese Confucianists, for it is like creating a painting or a beautiful scroll.

Before the day of the First Writing, the Writer must keep himself pure, do nothing of cruelty, and must not frequent prostitutes.

He must buy the necessary materials: Red paper (cây Hoa Tien Hong) or the kind of red paper once called Hong Dieu which was a special symbol for luck and cheerfulness; a writing brush of good quality which must be new, symbolizing cleanliness and purity; and stark black ink which symbolized stability.

When the First Writing is to begin, a fire of aloë wood is started to create a perfume, a "chasing of wicked atmosphere." The writer must wash his hands in "five-stated" perfume water.

Thus readied, the First Writing may begin.

There is no rule which obliges the writer to follow the form of a poem. He may write only a single word, such as "fortune" (Phuc), or two words, such as "Fortune Longevity" (Phuc Tho), or three, as "Five Happiness Reaching Home" (which means that five happinesses have come to one's home: richness, nobility, longevity, health and safety.)

The form may be any variety of poetry or prose, such as this pair of verses by the famed Vietnamese female poet, Ho Xuan Huong.

"On the night of the 30th of December, doors should be closed tightly or Satan will bring up his devils."

(Which means on that night the doors of all homes should be closed to avoid the pestering of devils, but also the verse contains the figurative meaning that a girl is not to make love that night.)

"On the First Day of the New Year, Creator opens widely the door for the Lady to welcome Spring."

(Meaning that on that day, all homes welcome spring cheerfully, with the figurative permission for love making.)

Or a Ducng poem with eight lines of verse and seven words, as the following poem by Sir Phan Dinh Phung when he was a teacher at Thach That Village in Son Tay Province in 1888:

« Oriole sings melodiously in the yard,  
Flowers warn that spring be back but friend is not back yet,

Ngu Mountain stays in the shadow for a hundred thousand years,

Hong River still be covered by cloud forever,  
Loyal and pious pattern is often kept by me,  
Even going away from home still not be a matter,  
Gorgeous spring makes everybody cheerful,  
Only I myself feel really sad. »

While New Year's Day is a cheerful day, birds and trees and everybody are happy, only Sir Phan Dinh Phung was sad. Such an omen was indicative of bad for the coming year.

It is not only interesting thoughts that must be written, but equally the penmanship should be well and lively. Comma-like strokes should be straight as though drawn by a ruler; slant strokes to the right should be sharp as a knife; points round and neat; and accent marks shall be pointed and neat, and so on.

Confucianists believe that if the First Writing in the New Year contains correct words and meaningful thoughts which relate to the writer and his situation, including beautiful handwriting, the writer is sure that the earnings of their living throughout the year will be prosperous.

There is, therefore, another proverb:

« The writing is started in the New Year, the writing brush is in bloom. »

Today only a few people know the Chinese language and vulgar script, so the tradition of writing in the New Year is a pleasure of word-playing for a small number of Confucianists who are already old, and a few Monks who follow Buddhism, and sorcerers and priests.

But even today, a few Vietnamese who have been educated in the western mode still keep the tradition of First Writing by going to pagodas or temples on the First Day of the New Year.

There an old scholar-teacher writes large words on boards which are purchased and carried home to be displayed on a wall.

After the writing, the old scholar-teachers are given a present of money as a gift for the Beginning of Spring. Most of their writings are general, meaning Happy New Year, Houses are fulfilled with Happiness and Good Fortune.

For those who still perform the ancient ritual of First Writing in the home, the writing contains a deep, often symbolic forecast of their Fate for the coming year, their annual Destiny neatly, beautifully spelled out on red paper in jet black ink

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