

A POCKET GUIDE TO
VIETNAM

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NAVMC 2593A



ARMY UNIFORMS OF VIETNAM

OFFICERS



CAPTAIN



GENERAL



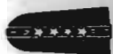
MAJOR
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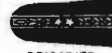
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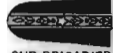
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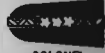
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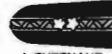
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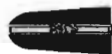
LIEUTENANT
COLONEL



MAJOR



CAPTAIN



LIEUTENANT



SECOND
LIEUTENANT



ASPIRANT



WARRANT OFFICER

OTHER ARMY RANKS



SERGEANT



CAP INSIGNIA



MASTER SERGEANT



SERGEANT
FIRST CLASS



SERGEANT



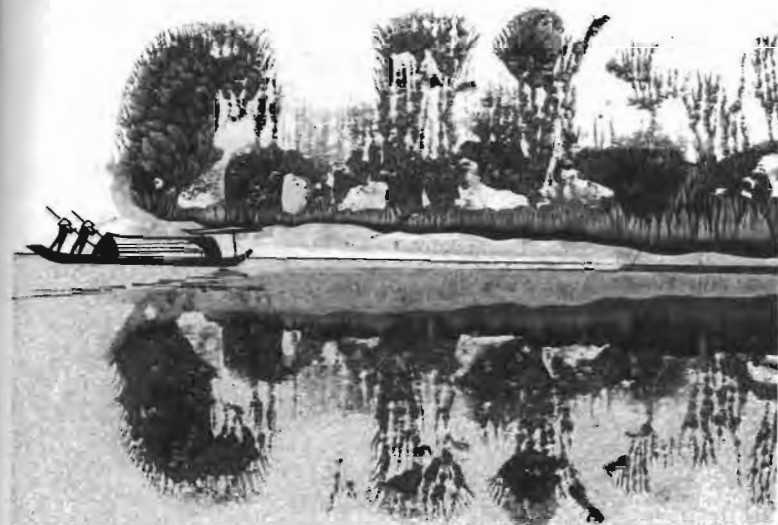
CORPORAL
FIRST CLASS



CORPORAL



PRIVATE
FIRST CLASS



ARMED FORCES INFORMATION AND EDUCATION • DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

VIETNAM



HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT VIETNAM?

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Why is it often difficult to tell a Viet Cong from a loyal South Vietnamese?

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Is *nuoc mam* something to wear, something to eat, or the name of an organization?

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Why would a South Vietnamese be puzzled or offended if you used the American gesture for beckoning him to come to you?

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Who is Ho Chi Minh?

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NINE RULES

For Personnel of U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

The Vietnamese have paid a heavy price in suffering for their long fight against the Communists. We military men are in Vietnam now because their government has asked us to help its soldiers and people in winning their struggle. The Viet Cong will attempt to turn the Vietnamese people against you. You can defeat them at every turn by the strength, understanding, and generosity you display with the people. Here are the nine simple rules:

"Remember we are special guests here; we make no demands and seek no special treatment.

"Join with the people! Understand their life, use phrases from their language, and honor their customs and laws.

"Treat women with politeness and respect.

"Make personal friends among the soldiers and common people.

"Always give the Vietnamese the right of way.

"Be alert to security and ready to react with your military skill.

"Don't attract attention by loud, rude, or unusual behavior.

"Avoid separating yourself from the people by a display of wealth or privilege.

"Above all else you are members of the U.S. military forces on a difficult mission, responsible for all your official and personal actions. Reflect honor upon yourself and the United States of America."



*DoD PG - 21A
 *DA Pam 360 - 411
 *NAVPERS 93135A
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*Supersedes DoD PG-21/DA Pam 20-198/NAVPERS 93135/AFP 190-4-3/
 NAVMC 2593/6, December 1962.

For Sale by Superintendent of Documents



Variety of vehicles spices Saigon traffic.



Farmers plant rice in Vietnam's lowlands.

OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE

If you are bound for Vietnam, it is for the deeply serious business of helping a brave nation repel Communist aggression. This is your official job and it is a vital one, not only for the preservation of freedom in this one country but for the survival of freedom everywhere.

Vietnam is a major testing ground for the Communists' theories of "wars of national liberation," and upon our success there depends peace in many other free countries of the world.

The growing American commitment in Vietnam makes it even more important for us to maintain the good relations that exist between Americans and the Vietnamese people. Wherever you go, remember that Vietnam is a land of dignity and reserve. Your good manners, thoughtfulness, and restrained behavior will be appreciated by the Vietnamese. You will benefit, as will the country you represent, in terms of the job you are there to do and in terms of friendship built on a solid foundation of mutual respect.

You can learn a great deal from the Vietnamese, who have been fighting for their country for many years, and you will find, as have

many other Americans, that you will become greatly attached to them as individuals and as a people.

THE COUNTRY

When you reach South Vietnam you will be in a land with a civilization that predates the birth of Christ but which, since 1954, has been divided like Korea. North of the 17th parallel and Ben Hai River lies Communist North Vietnam and south is the free Republic of Vietnam.

The Republic of Vietnam is less than half the size of California and long and narrow like that State. It occupies the eastern and southern part of the Indochinese Peninsula in Southeast Asia, and borders the South China Sea and the Gulf of Siam. Near neighbors to the west are Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. Beyond Communist Vietnam to the north stretches the vast territory of Red China.

The southern section of the rugged Annamite mountains forms a spine down to the Mekong Delta region around Saigon. In places, mountain spurs jut out to the sea, dividing the coastal plain into sections. Sand dunes 10 to 60 feet high are common along the long coastline.

The country is narrow up near Hué (pronounced whey)—so narrow that only a 30- to 50-mile strip lies between Laos and the South China Sea. Here the coastal rice fields very quickly give way to the uncultivated foothills of the mountains. In the past, lowland Vietnamese preferred to leave the mountains to tribespeople, wild animals, and evil spirits.

Southward from Hué toward the beach resort of Nha Trang, the country widens to make room for high plateaus, 1,000 to 3,000 feet above sea level. In the southern part of the country—around the Saigon-Cholon area—the many mouths of the Mekong River join a dense canal network to fan out across delta plains and nourish the fertile paddies of a bountiful “rice basket.”

South Vietnam has a typically tropical climate of two seasons: hot and dry and hot and rainy.

In the southern delta region, the rains usually begin in late May and continue through September. April and early May are the hottest and most humid months of the year.

Along the central coast, the rainy season begins in October, causes periodic floods through November and December, and continues with drizzles from January to March. July and August are the months when heat and humidity reach their peak. In pleasant contrast, the highlands are usually cool at night regardless of the season.

Like other tropical countries, Vietnam has the usual variety of bugs, flies, mosquitos, and other insects. It's S.O.P. to sleep under a mosquito net.

Rice in the Deltas

This is an agricultural country with a soil-and-climate combination ideal for growing rice. With U.S. help, the South Vietnamese have greatly increased their rice production since 1954. You will find the paddies mainly in the Mekong River Delta and lowland areas of central Vietnam.



Farm family prepares tobacco for market.

Fisherman mends his giant net.



Muscle-powered sampans are typical of Mekong Delta.

Its abundant rice crop, locally-grown vegetables, and fish from the richly-stocked seas at its door make the country largely self-sustaining in food.

A major export is rubber. Although the war ravaged the large rubber plantations and some of this acreage has not been reclaimed, rubber is still a very important product.

Lacquer from Vietnam has always been highly prized on the foreign market. It is used for mixing with other lacquers to improve their quality. The trees cultivated for extraction of lacquer are called *cay son*. Previously grown only in the north, the trees are being successfully experimented with in the southern highlands.

Relatively new as commercial products are palm oil from the plant formerly regarded by the Vietnamese as ornamental rather than useful, and peanuts which had been grown for home consumption but now are being exported in quantity both whole and as oil.

Tea, coffee, and quinine are grown in the high plateaus, which also produce cinnamon, timber, raw silk, vegetables, and vegetable dyes. Other Vietnamese products are corn, sugar cane, copra, tobacco, and mint oil.

The country has some cattle but more pigs and poultry. Water buffalo are used primarily as draft animals, especially in the rice paddies, and only occasionally for meat.

No scene is more typical of rural Vietnam than a farmer and his water buffalo at work in a rice paddy. Water buffaloes are the indispensable work animals of the country.

Mineral resources are few: a coal-bearing region near the city of Da Nang (Tourane), south of Hué; a small gold mine, and scattered deposits of molybdenum and phosphate.

Industry is steadily expanding, though its scope is limited at present. New enterprises such as textile mills, cement plants, electronics, fish processing, and pharmaceuticals and plastics manufacture have been added to the traditional rice milling, lumber production, and manufacture of salt, beverages, soap, matches, and cigarettes.

Many free-world nations besides the United States are contributing economic assistance to help South Vietnam's agriculture and industry grow.

Picture the People

The population of the Republic of Vietnam is about 15.5 million, four-fifths of them farmers. (North Vietnam has an estimated 17 million people.) The majority of the people of South Vietnam are ethnic Vietnamese. There are almost 800,000 tribal people; close to one million Chinese (most of whom now hold Vietnamese citizenship); just under half a million ethnic Cambodians, and a few thousand each of French, Indians, and Pakistanis.

Compared with most Asian nations, South Vietnam is uncrowded. The population density varies from 19 per square mile throughout the six high plateau provinces to 43,100 people per square mile in Saigon, the capital. Saigon-Cholon is the largest city, with about two million people. Da Nang runs a distant second with about 130,000.

The Vietnamese are small and well-proportioned people, with dark, almond-shaped eyes and black hair. The slender, small-boned women move gracefully in their national dress of long trousers under a long-sleeved tunic slit from hem to waist.

Most non-laboring Vietnamese men wear Western clothing on the street, but you will occasionally see traditional Chinese Mandarin robes. Workmen and peasants dress in loose black trousers and short black or white jackets. Their black jackets and trousers are similar to the black "pajama" uniforms worn by some of the Viet Cong and some Government paramilitary personnel.

Somewhat reserved and very polite, the Vietnamese are warm and friendly with people they like, and they are very cooperative and helpful. They have great respect for virtue and knowledge and honor older people. Many of their customs are conditioned by religious beliefs.

In the urban areas, French and English are second languages. Children study one or the other in school and increasingly English is their choice. But when you leave the cities, you may encounter even telephone operators who speak only Vietnamese.

2,000 YEARS OF HISTORY

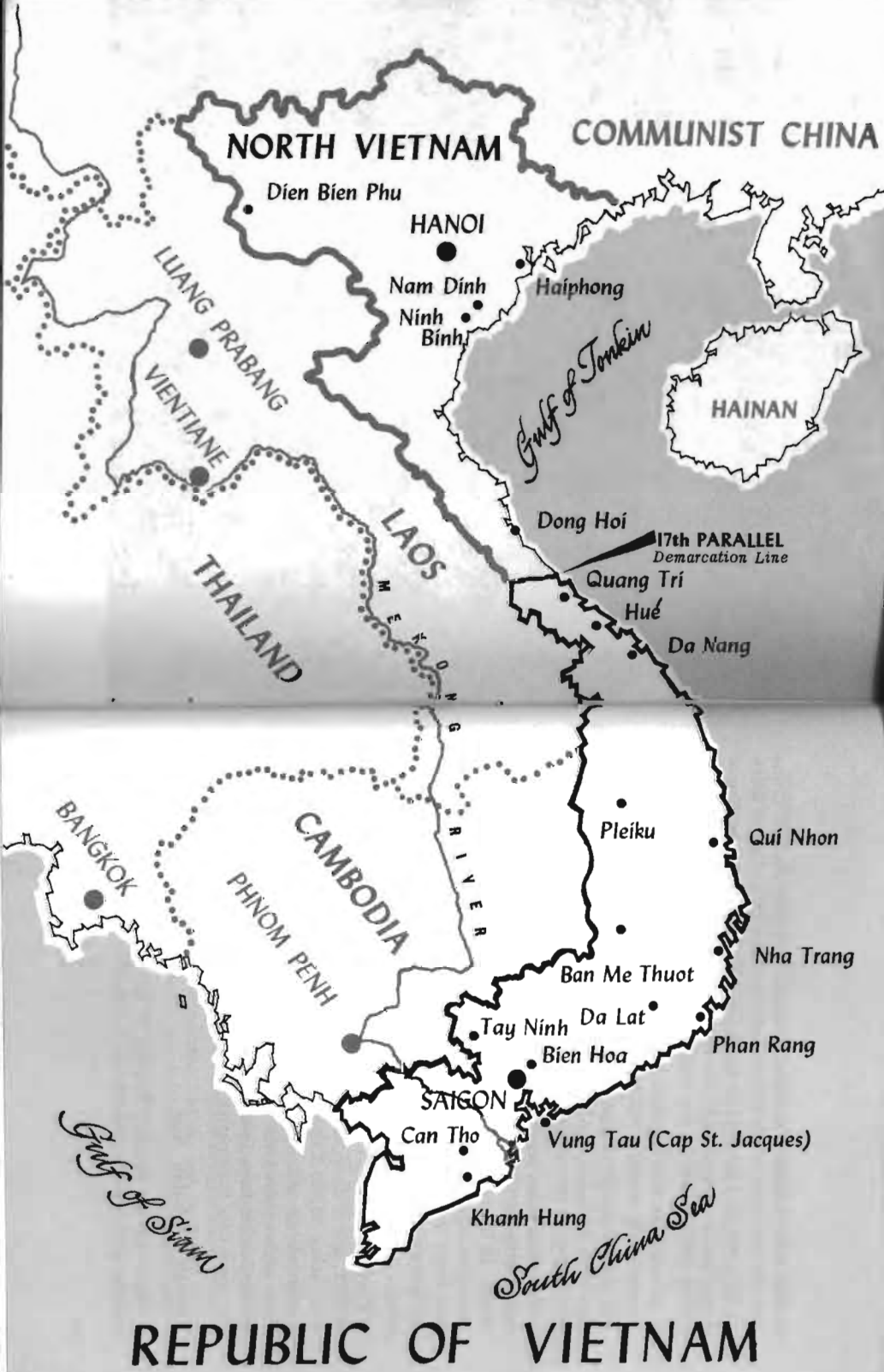
A Dragon and a Goddess

Vietnam has one of the world's oldest living civilizations. It dates back to hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, with roots in Asian religions and philosophies.

Legend has it that from the union of a dragon and a goddess came the hundred venerable ancestors of all Vietnamese. Belief in their common origin united the people and gave them a symbol around which to rally in the face of foreign invasion. Until 1955, the Vietnam coat-of-arms displayed a dragon carrying the country on its back. The coat-of-arms now features the bamboo plant.



Wisdom comes with age in Vietnam.



The Viets originally occupied southern and southeastern China and the east coast of the Indochinese peninsula almost as far south as Hué, the old capital of Vietnam. In 111 B.C., their kingdom of Nam Viet was conquered by the Chinese, who controlled the country almost continuously for the next thousand years.

At times the Viet rebelled—usually unsuccessfully. A revolt led by the Trung sisters in 43 A.D. drove out the Chinese for a time. But the Chinese were vanquished only temporarily. In a few years they came back and the Trung sisters committed suicide by throwing themselves into the river.

The Viets made another courageous stand for survival as a free nation when, in 1284, they repulsed the Mongolian hordes of Kublai Khan. In the next century they pushed southward to conquer the once-great kingdom of Champa which occupied as much of what is now South Vietnam. They also met the Khmers (Cambodians) on the field of battle and forced them to retreat to their present boundaries.

Champa never recovered from its defeat by the Viets in Vijaya in 1471, and it disappeared from history during the 1700's. However, about 25,000 Chams who have never been assimilated into Vietnamese life still cluster in their own villages near Phan Rang, about midway down the coast. They follow a way of life scarcely distinguishable from that of unadvanced tribespeople in the area, and speak only their native Cham language.

Vietnam's Golden Age

Under the Le dynasty founded in the 15th century, Vietnam enjoyed a period of brilliant progress. Arts, crafts, agriculture, and

commerce flourished. The code of laws developed during this time remained in effect until almost modern times.

The Le dynasty went through periods of strength and weakness. Two powerful families, the Trinh and the Nguyen, finally reduced the Le regime to puppet status and divided the country between themselves. The Trinh controlled the northern region, and the Nguyen controlled the central and southern regions of Vietnam.

In 1802 the last scion of the original Nguyen family—Gia Long—managed to gain the throne and unite all Vietnam under a single government administration and set of laws. In this enlightened era, there were schools in most villages, and foreign trade was encouraged and carried on through settlements of Dutch, Portuguese, French, and Japanese merchants in several towns.

The French Take Over

The French assumed control over the province of Cochin China in 1863. Before another decade has passed, the other two regions, Tonkin and Annam, also went under French rule. From that time until World War II, the country was part of French Indochina. The other two parts were Cambodia and Laos.

After the fall of France in 1940, the Japanese occupied French Indochina. This occupation continued until 1945 when Japan granted Vietnam independence under a puppet emperor, Bao Dai.

Meanwhile, by the time of the Japanese occupation, a group of expatriate, anti-French Vietnamese had formed in South China. One of these was Ho Chi Minh, a dedicated Communist, who entered Hanoi secretly in 1944. A year later, after Japan's surrender to the Allies, Ho's forces became the "Vietnam Liberation Army" and the

shadow government of Emperor Bao Dai set up by Japan soon fell before the Communist leader's well-organized onslaught. The emperor abdicated, handing over his powers to Ho Chi Minh. At the same time, a "Provisional Executive Committee for South Vietnam," with seven Communists among its nine members, took control of Saigon.

Communists Show Their Hand

Like many other colonial people, the Vietnamese wanted national independence above all. That is why many followed Ho Chi Minh and the Communist-directed Viet Minh, which pretended to be a non-Communist league for the country's independence.

When the French tried to regain a foothold in Vietnam in 1946, Viet Minh forces attacked them on a wide front, supported by many people who had only one purpose—national independence. So began the costly 8-year Indochina war that ended with the division of Vietnam at a Geneva conference table in July 1954. The southern part of the country struck out as a free nation—the Republic of Vietnam—under the leadership of Ngo dinh Diem, with Saigon as its capital. The northern part of the country became the Communist-ruled Democratic Republic of Vietnam, with Hanoi as its capital.

THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

A referendum in October 1955 offered the people of South Vietnam a choice between Emperor Bao Dai as chief of a state patterned on the old regime, and Ngo dinh Diem as chief of state of a republic.

The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of the latter, and the Republic was proclaimed with Ngo dinh Diem as President.

The Republic of Vietnam has been recognized diplomatically by most of the free nations of the world. While not a member of the United Nations, it is represented on several specialized agencies of that body and regularly sends observers to U. N. meetings and to meetings of the Colombo Plan nations. It also participated officially in the Bandung Conference in 1955. Though not a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, South Vietnam is regarded as within the treaty area and its security is a direct concern of SEATO.

A constitutional assembly was elected in March 1956, and on July 7 a national constitution was adopted, making a good start toward showing what a determined nation can accomplish under dedicated leadership.

The war-ravaged country faced staggering problems—a ruined economy, an influx of 900,000 refugees from Communist North Vietnam, the rivalries of political factions, and the anti-Government activities of the Viet Cong, a subversive network the North Vietnamese had left in the South after the country was divided.

But through their own efforts, and with economic aid from the United States and other free-world countries, the South Vietnamese people began to prosper. By 1960, South Vietnam had made significant progress in agriculture, industry, health, education, and other fields. Rice and rubber production exceeded prewar production, the transportation system was largely rebuilt, and new industries were started. The number of primary school teachers tripled and school enrollment soared. Three thousand medical aid stations and maternity clinics were established throughout the country.



Timber is trimmed in Vietnamese sawmill.

A village elder samples water from a new well.



Schoolbooks capture the attention of young students.

Increasing Viet Cong Activity

South Vietnam's progress stood in marked contrast to development in North Vietnam. The Communists in Hanoi had expected South Vietnam to collapse and fall into their hands like ripe fruit. Frustrated by its growing prosperity, the Communists in 1959 launched the Viet Cong guerrillas on an intensified campaign of guerrilla warfare and terrorist activities in the South. The following year, the Communist (Lao Dong) Party of North Vietnam organized the "National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam," which it tried to disguise as a purely South Vietnamese nationalist organization.

Arms and men especially trained for sabotage and guerrilla warfare were infiltrated into the South. In the beginning, the cadres infiltrated were largely drawn from the 90,000 South Vietnamese who had gone North in 1954. Supported and directed by Hanoi, and actively encouraged with arms and aid from Communist China, the Viet Cong guerrillas attacked hamlets and villages; torturing, killing, or kidnapping the inhabitants who refused to cooperate with them. The Viet Cong murdered thousands of local officials, teachers, and health workers. Crowded trains and buses were bombed, roads destroyed, bridges and schools burned.

Help for a Sister Republic

After the Geneva accords of 1954 divided Vietnam, a U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) became the only outside source of military aid for South Vietnam. Its mission was to improve the military effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces.

But as the Viet Cong stepped up their terrorist and guerrilla campaign, it became clear that more help was needed, and President Diem appealed to the United States for increased assistance. Beginning in 1962, when the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was established, the United States has greatly increased both its military and economic aid and is prepared to do all that is necessary to help South Vietnam preserve its independence. We are not alone in giving this assistance. Thirty-six other free-world countries are also providing economic or military aid or both to South Vietnam, or have agreed to do so. And despite the increased tempo of the war, the economic aid programs in food, health, education, housing, and industry continue.

The Government

From 1956 to 1963 South Vietnam was governed under a constitution modeled in many respects on those of the United States and the Philippines, which provided for a strong executive, a unicameral National Assembly, and a judicial system. The Diem government, however, became increasingly personal and dictatorial. Opposition was suppressed; there were charges of injustice and corruption against members of his family, particularly his brother, Ngo dinh Nhu; and President Diem lost in part the confidence and loyalty of the people. In 1963 serious political conflicts arose between the Government and the Buddhists, the largest single religious group in the country. Other non-Communist oppositionists to Diem made common cause with the Buddhists, and, on 1 November, 1963, the Diem government was overthrown by a military *coup d'etat*. Diem and his brother, Ngo dinh Nhu, who exercised great power in the regime, were killed.

Since then there has been considerable political instability in South Vietnam and a series of changes of government. In this connection, two things should be kept in mind: one, that the Vietnamese had little preparation for self-government and are struggling to develop unity and stability during a very dangerous internal security crisis caused by Communist aggression; and two, that not one of the groups competing for political power is in favor of accommodation with the Viet Cong.

Political activity has been confined chiefly to the cities and has had little impact on the great bulk of the population living in the countryside. These people—the villagers, the rice farmers, the rubber plantation workers—have had little feeling of identification with either the Viet Cong or the central Government. The Vietnamese



Viet Cong hideout is captured by Vietnamese troops.

farmer lives in a small world limited by the bamboo hedge around his village. His loyalties are to his family, his land, and his spiritual world. The Viet Cong have neutralized the people's support for the Government in some rural areas by a combination of terror and political action. One of the continuing programs of the central Government has been to provide better security and living conditions to convince the villagers that the Government the Communists seek to destroy is *their* Government.

Provinces and Districts

South Vietnam has 43 mainland provinces and five chartered cities—Saigon, Hué, Dalat, Da Nang, and Vung Tau (Cap St. Jacques). Within the provinces are districts made up of a number of villages called *lang* in central Vietnam and *xa* in the south. The villages are made up of hamlets (*ap*), which may be from a hundred yards to several miles apart. To at least eight of every 10 Vietnamese, "the Government" is the administrative group that runs his village.

NEW RURAL LIFE HAMLETS

The new Rural Life Hamlet program, part of the Rural Reconstruction or Pacification program, is designed to provide physical safety, effective local government, and a better life for the rural population. A typical hamlet has rudimentary fortifications and warning systems. The inhabitants are trained and armed to protect themselves against Viet Cong attack until reinforcements arrive. As security improves, Government services in such fields as health, education, and agriculture are provided, in many cases with U. S. assistance. Local officials, who are trained and paid by the Government and administer the hamlet, are usually chosen in hamlet elections. The program is designed to provide the improved security and economic conditions that encourage loyalty to the central Government.



Vietnamese is decorated for defending his village.



Determined-looking troops of Vietnamese Army.

The Armed Forces

The Vietnamese have a long history of successful fighting against stronger and better equipped forces. They drove the Chinese from their land several times, repelled three Mongol invasions, and reduced the once powerful Champa Kingdom to nothing but a memory. One of their most famous generals, Tran Hung Dao, wrote a manual on military doctrine which has been a national classic on warfare for 600 years.

Under proper leadership, today's Vietnamese soldier is a tough brave fighting man who has stood up to 20 years of violence. He is worthy of your respect. Since 1960, some 30,000 members of the South Vietnamese armed forces have been killed and over 51,000 wounded in battle for their country. In proportion to population, these losses are 10 times as great as those suffered by Americans in the Korean war, and larger than our losses in World War II.

Today the military power of the Republic of Vietnam is made up of three elements: the Regular Armed Forces (RVNAF), the Regional Force (formerly known as the Civil Guard), and the Popular Force (the former Self-Defense Corps), as well as elements of other militia or paramilitary organizations.

The Regular Armed Forces consist of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, with the Army by far the largest. Of the other elements, often referred to as "paramilitary," the Regional Force most nearly approaches the Army in strength and capabilities. Its units, which do not exceed battalion strength, are usually stationed in the province in which organized.

The Popular Force is a regularly constituted militia composed



Montagnard "Strike Force" was trained by Americans.

largely of villagers who live and serve near their homes. Together with the Regional Force, they bear the brunt of the day-to-day fighting against the Viet Cong. In many ways these and other paramilitary groups could be compared to American minutemen during the Revolutionary War. They are being supplied with up-to-date weapons and field radios. The radios have filled a big communications gap. With them, help can be summoned fast or news of an impending attack flashed to the critical area.

The Army. The South Vietnamese Regular Army and paramilitary forces number more than 500,000 men. All physically fit young men of 20 and 21 are normally required to perform two years of military service. This requirement is altered to include additional



A Vietnamese Navy Junk Force patrol.

age groups as the military situation dictates.

The Navy. Operating forces of the Navy consist of three major commands: the Sea Forces; the River Forces operating in the Mekong Delta Region; and the Marine Corps Group. A part of the shore establishment is the Junk Force organized as a paramilitary force and an inshore patrol force. It is manned in part by naval personnel, with Vietnamese fishermen providing the bulk of the force. Though small, the Navy is developing into a highly efficient organization.

The Air Force. About 12,000 officers and men—all volunteers—staff the Air Force. The force consists of transport, fighter, helicopter, and liaison squadrons, with necessary supporting units.



Armor protects Vietnamese Navy supply convoy.

Your Legal Status

All official United States personnel are accorded diplomatic immunity by special concession of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. Since military personnel are subject to U. S. military law, any local incident involving our military people is reported to the Commander, U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) for appropriate disciplinary action. This arrangement has worked out very well. Vietnamese Government officials have expressed their satisfaction with the prompt and fair way such incidents as have occurred have been handled.

AT HOME WITH THE VIETNAMESE

You will find many areas of common interest with the Vietnamese: their regard for their families . . . their historic struggle for national independence . . . their wish to allow people individual freedom within the framework of laws made for the good of all.

But there are many differences between their culture and customs and our own and you must be prepared to deal with them in a way that will make you an acceptable friend of the Vietnamese.

Some of the differences are small things, like the way a Vietnamese seems to be waving goodbye when he is actually beckoning you to come toward him. You should not use typical American motions to beckon Vietnamese as they use such gestures only for animals. Also do not slap a man on the back unless you know him very well.

More important differences are attitudes toward older people, manual labor, display of emotion, and time. For instance, the average Vietnamese is less compulsive about time than the American, so you should not consider it a personal affront if people arrive late for an appointment or even if they don't arrive at all.

Moderation should be practiced in all things and the moral code of the people you are among strictly observed. Knowing that trouble breeds in situations where a person has one drink too many or forgets to show the utmost respect and courtesy toward women, you should make it a special point to avoid getting even close to the fringes of this sort of trouble. Never interfere in an argument among Vietnamese. A good general rule is to avoid all incidents that do not concern you directly.

Family Loyalty

The Vietnamese are justifiably proud of their culture and national identity, but their primary social outlook revolves around their family and village. These claim first allegiance. Members of a family, for instance, have an absolute obligation—to be violated only at the risk of serious dishonor—to care for their relatives and to prevent any of them from being in want. Even after a girl marries, her love and respect for her parents traditionally continue to overshadow her love and respect for her husband.

The traditional family unit includes living and dead members and members not yet born. On festival days and in family ceremonies the ancestors are revered, and at all times there is thought of the grandsons and great-grandsons yet to be born who will carry



Portrait of a Vietnamese farmer and his family.

on the family name. A family without male heirs is assumed to have disappeared.

The importance of family is evident in the many terms used to denote family relationships. In addition to the usual ones like father, mother, brother, sister, the Vietnamese have terms to show relative age, the father's side of the family versus the mother's, and other niceties of relationship. In keeping with the lesser importance of younger people, there is only one term for a younger brother or sister. Either is *em*. But *anh* means elder brother and *chi*, elder sister.

Older people with their accumulation of a lifetime of experience are considered the wisest members of society and therefore are accorded the highest standing. If you are invited to a Vietnamese home for a meal, be sure to let the older people begin eating before you do. Be solicitous about helping them to things on the table. Older Vietnamese, by the way, will usually not shake hands but will greet you by joining their hands in front of them and inclining their heads very slightly. Responding with the same gesture will show them that you know and appreciate this respectful custom.

Woman's Place Is at Home

Since the purpose of marriage is to continue the family line, the parents believe that the selection of a proper wife for their son is their personal responsibility, a duty they owe both to their ancestors and to their son and his future children. Usually with the help of a "go-between," they search for a girl who is skillful at housework and who will be a good mother to many children. Beauty is not as desirable as good character. In fact, beauty is sometimes considered



Young faces of Vietnam.

a disadvantage because the Vietnamese believe that fate seldom is kind to beautiful women.

The traditional position of women is totally subordinate to men and their social life is limited. At the same time, wives often exercise a great deal of influence in the family, particularly in connection with financial affairs and, of course, in selecting marriage partners for their sons and daughters.

People of upper-class families, as well as people living in villages removed from big city and Western influences, continue to follow time-honored traditions and customs. Among others, the customs have been considerably modified. Women are assuming a new and important position in the life of the nation, and young men and

women are breaking away from tradition to choose their own marriage partners.

The Professional Man

The Vietnamese have always felt that a deep division exists between manual and "intellectual" labor. Traditionally Vietnamese who have achieved positions with the Government as a result of long and patient study, or who have become doctors, teachers, and so on, avoid using their hands for tasks they feel they have graduated beyond. It would be unusual, for example, to see such a person washing his car, helping his wife clear the table, or working in the garden.

Another thing, a Vietnamese might avoid looking a superior in the eye when talking to him. This does not mean the man cannot be trusted. It means he is being polite by not "staring" at a person of greater standing.

At your first meeting with a Vietnamese he might ask: "How much money do you make?" This is a natural question in the sequence of "Are you married?" and "How many children do you have?" It simply expresses polite interest. If you feel uncomfortable about replying, you can avoid a direct answer by stating that you are paid in American dollars and don't know what the equivalent would be in Vietnamese currency. Your indirect reply lets the other person know you do not want to answer and have told him so politely. The matter is thus dropped without embarrassing anybody.

If you want to ask a favor, you should remember that hinting

and indirection are preferable to making an outright request. Also avoid launching too quickly into a new topic or disagreeing too vehemently. Exercise moderation in your conversation. At a first meeting, it is often best to stay on safe topics like families or the weather.

Politeness and Restraint

Even among the most sophisticated Vietnamese, manners have not become lax or social customs unrestrained. Manners are conditioned by age-old religious teachings and are deeply ingrained in the life of the people.

Public display of emotion is almost always considered in bad taste. Raising the voice, shouting, or gesturing wildly are most impolite. Tied in with the view that marriage is primarily for continuance of the family line is a feeling that display of affection should be confined to the privacy of the home—and even there, not practiced before guests.

The Vietnamese regard men and women who walk arm-in-arm as vulgar. But you may occasionally see two boys or men walking down the street hand-in-hand. This is an ordinary mark of friendship common to many Asian and other countries.

If you follow the general practices of good manners and courtesy, and observe those that are particularly important to your Vietnamese hosts, you will be a welcome guest in Vietnam. This is vital to your mission there. You will fulfill your duty as a responsible representative of the United States best by remembering at all times that you are in a land where dignity, restraint, and politeness are highly regarded.

Town and Country

The architecture of homes in the cities and towns shows French and other Western influence, and decoration and furnishings also have a decidedly Western touch. But in the rural districts and mountain villages you will find thatched roofs, mud walls, pounded dirt floors, and little furniture. Some of the more pretentious rural houses have tile roofs, wooden walls, and floors of tile or flat brick squares set in mortar.

A feature of most homes is the family altar containing a tablet bearing the names of the family's ancestors going back at least to the great-grandfather. Veneration for the family's ancestors is perpetuated through the eldest son who is expected to succeed his father in caring for the altar. The altar may take up as much as one-sixth of the entire floor space of the house, excluding the kitchen. The kitchen is customarily built adjoining but separate from the living quarters.

Another interesting feature of a Vietnamese home is the plank bed. Often made of costly wood with inlaid mother-of-pearl, the bed may be as large as eight by five feet. Except for a mosquito net there is generally no bedding. The Vietnamese feel that in their hot climate it is more comfortable to sleep without bedding.

Village Life

The Vietnamese village, *lang* and *xa*, is an administrative unit rather like a county in the United States. It is made up of a number of scattered hamlets or *ap*, each set against a backdrop of bamboo thickets and groves of areca (betel nut) and coconut palms. Located at the village seat of government are a school, athletic or parade



Army officer jokes with school children.

field, and a meeting hall. Some villages also have a dispensary and a maternity building containing a couple of beds and staffed by a trained midwife.

An "information" booth displays Government notices. Saigon newspapers may be kept here for public reference. The *dinh*, or village communal temple, houses a decree naming the village guardian spirit.



People of four mountain tribes live in this village.

There is also a village market. On market day, which is once or twice a week, people file out of the hamlets to follow the narrow paths or rice paddy banks to the marketplace. They come to sell, to buy, or just to gossip. Some balance baskets of fresh fruits and vegetables on their heads.

A shopper can buy live chickens or duck eggs, conical hats to ward off the sun and plastic coats to keep away the rain, or Chinese herbs and Western aspirin, and even a brightly colored scarf in which to carry purchases.

A popular feature at the market is the man with a portable stove-and-bakery suspended from the ends of a bamboo pole balanced across his shoulders. From this ingenious double-duty device the merchant offers noodle soup on one side, papaya and red peppers on the other.

What's for Supper?

The average Vietnamese consumes less than two-thirds the calories the average American puts away every day. Starvation is extremely rare, but the basically vegetarian diet sometimes lacks proteins, vitamins, and minerals.

Most middle-class families have ample meals consisting of four types of foods: one salted, one fried or roasted, a vegetable soup, and rice. The soup (*canh*) is an important part of the meal and may contain bits of fish or meat along with the vegetables.

Rice is the staple food and its preparation is a grave responsibility for the women of the household. All girls are supposed to learn to cook as an essential part of their education. During the Moon Festival they prepare their best dishes so that the eligible bachelors may see how well they can cook—particularly *banh trung thu*—the special Moon Festival Cakes.

Fruits and Vegetables

The fruits and vegetables of Vietnam include many kinds familiar to you and others you may not know much about. Bananas, apples, pears, plums, oranges are among the familiar fruits; pomegranates and papayas, among the more exotic. Here you find the jujube—a sort of thorn tree with a fruit that flavors some of our candies—and the litchi, which is a fruit known in its dried form as “litchi



Vietnamese food delights both eye and palate.

nut." Among the vegetables are common ones like potatoes, turnips, carrots, onions, and beans; eggplant disguised under the name *aubergine*, and water bindweed, an herb that comes from the same family as our morning-glory flower.

Avoid eating raw vegetables or unpeeled fruit and drinking water that is not boiled or otherwise purified.

The Fish Is Good

When the meal extends beyond vegetable and rice dishes, fish is generally served. More than 300 edible fish come from the sea and the inland waterways of Vietnam. Sole, mackerel, anchovy, tuna, squid, sardine, crab, and lobster are only a few. The tiny shrimp and oysters from the China Sea are particularly luscious, as are soups prepared from turtles caught on the beaches and in coastal waters.

The Vietnamese excel at preparing fish. Sometimes the fish is sautéed with onions, mushrooms, and vermicelli; or it may be slowly cooked with tomatoes, salted bamboo shoots, carrots, and leeks. Carp are often fried with celery. Eels make a banquet dish when sautéed in a sauce made of sugar, vinegar, rice flour, and sour-and-sweet soybean sauce. Another specialty is eel wrapped in aromatic leaves and grilled over charcoal, or boiled with green bananas, vegetables, saffron, and onions.

A fermented sauce made of fish and salt—*nuoc mam*—is almost as much a staple of diet as rice. It is served almost everywhere and with almost every meal. Many Westerners develop quite a taste for it.