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VIETNAM, 1968, IS TIME FOR ANGER

(NOTE.—Michael D. Roberts, Plain Dealer correspondent, sums up in this dispatch the overall conclusions he has drawn from nearly a year's service in Vietnam.)

(By Michael D. Roberts)

SAIGON.—It is difficult to feel sadness on leaving Vietnam. All the sadness you could muster has long been expended—uselessly, you might add.

The thing you can do is lament the dead and those who are going to die in this place of confused torment.

The feeling most prevalent, though, is anger—not an anger derived from a political philosophy or a fervid moral movement, but an anger based on realism.

This anger is directed at the Vietnamese and American governments and those who represent each in their particular endeavors in the orchestrated mess called the Vietnam war.

And the others—the Vietnamese people and the American soldiers—well, they really have no control over what happens to them, and need an element of luck to duck at the right moment. You can sympathize with them, admire them and wish them luck. After they are dead you may lament them.

A new president will now confront the cursed ways of this war, and if he is not deceived perhaps he can help bring peace to the countryside and joy to the people.

But to do this he must be tough and wise and stop playing "let's pretend" with the South Vietnamese Government (GVN) and recognize what it is and what it has not done.

In many ways the GVN, masked behind its democratic drapery, is as much of a hindrance as the Viet Cong when it comes to joy and freedom for the people.

It is neither responsive to the people it represents nor viable enough to stand on its own. Directed largely by military personalities, the GVN goes its own way and in a carefully masked drama gives us the impression of being democratic. It is a hollow impression.

Most knowledgeable Vietnamese who care enough to be interested will tell you about the great election we forced the GVN to hold in the fall of 1967.

"The election was the biggest fraud," said one student. "It is common knowledge among the people that many soldiers voted twice. That many people long dead had cast ballots is quite amusing to many of us."

But since the election and the writing of a constitution, Americans here have looked upon the evolution of democracy in almost a reverent manner.

"Why, I'm not worried about a coup," said an American adviser in Vung Tau. "They have a constitution now. After the election why should there be a coup? It is a practicing, living democracy now."

The fact that the GVN is a thinly disguised tyranny that closes newspapers with flimsy explanations, harasses those who would dare to speak out in public, and takes from the people in the form of corruption is usually overlooked.

Outwardly, the GVN appears to be laboring to develop a war-torn nation, but inwardly its officials, products of a system that has become part of this nation's blood, continue to grow wealthy from the ways of war, corruption and the American dollar.

LEAVING VIETNAM, GRIEF IS SPENT—ANGER REMAINS

Given peace tomorrow, the GVN would only have to face another armed group preparing to rid the land of oppression.

The oppression comes first, rebellion follows and the Communists fill the vacuum and assume an armed spirit, eventually taking the leadership of the entire movement and making it theirs. This is a possible pattern of insurrection.

As long as the GVN continues to treat the

people in the present manner communism will always have a point from which to commence.

Legions of naive, ambitious and plainly stupid Americans have unwittingly aided the GVN. Our government attempted a revolution here which was of such magnitude that it became an impossibility from the start because of the character of the people and the nature of the GVN.

Our government, under the impression that American money and men could eventually transform this land into a democratic society, gave the GVN its head. Because of the United States the GVN had power and we really had no control over this power, which, of course, was ours from the beginning.

Never before has our government fought such a war. In response, it has sent American civilians and leaders of such naive quality that one's teeth grate in frustration.

U.S. AID employes, people who are asked to function in important jobs—jobs that require immense skill and understanding—arrive daily to collect substantial salaries and live in air-conditioned comfort. They arrive without skill or understanding.

Some go to the district and provincial capitals to serve in various advisory roles. Many who are sent to advise are recent college graduates who previously never held jobs and are avoiding military service. Others are former military men, usually retired, who were passed over on the promotion lists.

This is not to say that the civilians who serve as advisers are all inadequate, for there are some outstanding people here, but even they are stymied by the atmosphere and events that take place around them.

One adviser, a young man who is capable and knowledgeable, blames the military for many ills and refuses to mingle with the rest of the men on the advisory team who are all military.

His attitude is one of disgust toward the Army—disgust because the Army seems indifferent toward the Vietnamese people.

"I have as little as possible to do with the military," this adviser explained.

Whether he knows it or not, this adviser is dulling the effectiveness of his particular team. True enough, the military does not exhibit the same zeal as the young adviser, but he refuses to see reality and try to make the team work.

On the other hand, the military often manifests contempt for the civilians, who are sometimes viewed as "do-gooders" with no business to be cluttering up a war zone.

Since the job of fighting this type of struggle is complex, the experience and knowledge of those who have mastered a small part of it is invaluable. But by and large, many of these people give up in disgust at the leadership, which tends to give in to the Vietnamese pressures at nearly every turn.

The matter of corruption alone is of such staggering magnitude that the mind reels when it confronts only a small part of it.

And the Vietnamese people laugh—oh, how they laugh!—at the Americans who are innocent of the corruption that surrounds them. The Vietnamese people know all and see all. They are the last to be fooled by the stories of improvement and progress that we praise the GVN for making. Obviously, we are the first to be fooled.

We have done so much for the Vietnamese that they have simply stopped functioning. We advise on everything, we finance most things and we do the heaviest fighting. The Vietnamese government spends its time talking about how it is not going to talk to the National Liberation Front, a confrontation that will have to take place if there is to be peace.

While South Vietnam's large and respectable army moves about the countryside deploying in maneuvers of eluding and engaging, our military is expected to do more than fight.

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ROBERTS IN VIETNAM

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, for almost a year, Michael D. Roberts was in Vietnam as the correspondent of the Plain Dealer. At the end of his assignment Mr. Roberts summed up his conclusions in an article entitled "Vietnam, 1968, Is a Time for Anger."

In blunt language, Mr. Roberts sets forth the reasons for his anger. In brief, his article tells of the futility and frustration of the many in the pursuit of impossible dreams of the few. It is a story of an immense effort on the part of military and civilian agents of this Nation in Vietnam which, despite highlights of gallantry and noble purpose, has not been able to emerge from the quicksands of self-delusion and deception in Saigon.

The year 1968 is, indeed, a time for anger. It is a time that is also tinged with sadness, for the tens of thousands of American and Vietnamese lives which have been forfeited in this barbarous war. In retrospect, so too was 1967 a time for anger and regret, and 1966 and 1965.

What appalls most, Mr. President, is that what Mr. Roberts has concluded at the end of 1968 was concluded in substance by predecessor correspondents in Saigon in preceding years. Indeed, if there is a reassuring link to reason in this sorry situation, it has been the essential accuracy with which a long line of resident American correspondents have perceived the actual state of affairs in Vietnam over the years. One can only hope that Mr. Roberts will be read with greater care and attention than his predecessors.

I ask unanimous consent that the summary article on Vietnam by Michael D. Roberts be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the article is ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

March 4, 1969

The truth is that the military has been asked to do too much in Vietnam. Soldiers are expected to be politicians, good humor men, development specialists, doctors, psychologists and just about everything short of the good fairy.

If you have ever had anything to do with an infantry unit that has seen combat day in and day out, you can understand the ridiculousness of this. Men tense and tired from combat are apt to look upon any Vietnamese with suspicion and ill feeling.

However, the military in Vietnam cannot go uncriticized. Gen. William C. Westmoreland with his vocal optimism, his search-and-destroy methods and his massive use of firepower left the military effort open to the attacks of skeptics.

But in many ways the military has done its primary job in Vietnam. It has killed Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers. It is even getting better at the job. What else does a military do?

The longer you are here, however, and the more closely you examine the enemy and the politics, it becomes increasingly evident that the military operations are superfluous because the "other war" is being fought like a delay-and-withdraw action. Because of the ineptness of the GVN, Viet Cong are manufactured daily.

Our participation in the "other war" has been less than brilliant.

Men were assigned to Vietnam as leaders in this program and came to build personal empires of such bureaucratic magnitude that it took elaborate charts to find out who was responsible for what.

Robert W. Komer, now U.S. ambassador to Turkey and a former Central Intelligence Agency man, came to head up our efforts in this area.

On paper, the way Komer likes things, he had great qualifications. He had good schools behind him, good experience and was generally considered a good administrator. Fine. But Komer did not listen to his people in the field, many of whom he classified as malcontents when they complained of failures. He would urge them to "get on the team."

A cheery, ebullient sort, Komer told his people to listen to the GVN and do it their way. After all, it was their country.

Komer was fair game for the press which constantly attempted to put him on the defensive at his news briefings. These were almost always concerned with his evaluation system for pacification, a computerized system that analyzed security in the countryside.

"It is the only measurement," he would say in defense. Yes, it was the only measurement that could be worked out on the computer, but there was always the feeling that advisers' reports never quite made it to the final input. Things may not be so good out in the districts, yet by the time Saigon produced the final reports they looked good on paper.

And what about the U.S. advisory system, which has worked so long and so hard with the Vietnamese military and civilian forces?

Despite all the cheering and applause from many American advisers, who must rely upon good efficiency reports for promotion, progress among the Vietnamese armed forces is largely hope and a supply of better American arms.

Since almost all advisers, be they civilian or military, have rather limited tours of duty in specific assignments, their Vietnamese counterparts have gone through a dozen or so.

In many instances the adviser does not advise at all. He sometimes asks, sometimes begs, sometimes cons and most times functions as a line of supply or a communications clerk.

Many Vietnamese commanders, district chiefs and province chiefs have served in the environment of war for so long that it seems impossible that an American officer

with no command of the language or, in many cases, no previous combat experience is really going to advise them.

Advisers do not even have the power to control American goods and materials that are sent to help the war-stricken people.

The advisory effort in name has dwindled to the static stage. Vietnamese counterparts have learned to rely too much on U.S. support as provided by an adviser who thinks that he is doing his job by making the aid available. Vietnamese leadership, as bad as it generally is, needs to regain personal initiative.

No one fools the Vietnamese people. When they are helped they know where the help comes from, and our help does not make them view their government with any more respect.

The advisory program needs re-evaluation. It would be the first step in making the Vietnamese realize that the "other war" must be fought by themselves for it is a war in which we are altogether too ineffective.

The problem of the South Vietnamese military is one that will tax the minds of our leadership for some time. The Vietnamese soldier sees how the American fights. He sees the artillery, air strikes and massive helicopter support. He is not interested in fighting without these and where, after we withdraw, is he going to get them?

Westmoreland tried to make the war as easy as possible on the GI. He always said let machines do the job to save men's lives, which was admirable enough. But the South Vietnamese are men, too. Where does their future lie?

The naive Americans are perhaps the most dangerous. They truly believe because they cannot see. The adviser in one seacoast town was oblivious of the fact that the yearly budget was being held back and lent out at a high rate of interest and then, suddenly, spent at a terrific pace at the end of the fiscal year.

"I don't know why they've spent only 20% of the budget in 10 months," he explained to a reporter. "I think it's because they have been having a difficult time getting the books straightened out."

His assistant, younger and more alert, explained later: "It is being lent out at as much as 50% interest on a loan that has to be paid back in 10 months."

"Why didn't you tell your boss?" "I've told him a couple of times and he refuses to believe me. He says we have to listen to the Vietnamese."

A Saigon official laughed over the lending incident. "At least they are not stealing it," he said.

Americans are naive in other ways. In a province west of Saigon, an area heavily infested with Viet Cong, the American advisers are quick to extol the virtues of the province chief, who is better than most but still is not beyond applying the con.

Several nights a month, the province chief, buttoned up in his armored car, travels with a musical band to a hamlet where the people are brought together to listen to entertainment and a speech from their leader.

The American leadership views this as quite wholesome. It is just the kind of thing Bob Komer would have in his backyard. The province chief gains prestige through this action because the Americans like it and in turn the GVN is impressed because the United States is much easier to deal with in this particular province.

So on the face of it the rice paddy variety shows are very good. The province chief displays his contempt for the VC by spending the night in the village. On paper it is a brave and bold gesture.

Since most Americans cannot speak Vietnamese, however, they do not realize one thing. The people in that particular hamlet are terrified.

Even though the province chief, who appears to be quite unconcerned about the VC, has set up night ambushes and defensive positions around the hamlet with nearly a battalion, the people fear that his foolishness is simply inviting a Viet Cong attack.

"I have talked with some people from one hamlet," a Vietnamese friend said. "The mothers fear for their babies when the musical show comes. All the people are cold with fright. They wish the colonel would stop trying to impress the Americans."

If you are sitting in Saigon reading reports and evaluating this activity, all would appear quite progressive. The province chief is attempting to pacify his province; he is out showing the flag and he is working. His counterpart seems to be doing well, too.

No one evaluates the people's feelings. Did you ever have a good time while waiting for a mortar attack? This never occurs to the Saigon officials, whose secretaries often enjoy salaries and benefits equal to those of a company commander.

The game goes on. Most Americans in Vietnam see our effort for what it is, most recognize the GVN as despotic. To discuss this with them in Saigon is old hat; you give an example and they can give you two back.

Westmoreland could never understand the press in Vietnam. He tried to be friends, tried to use public relations to win their understanding.

Westmoreland did not lie. But what he faced in the press corps was an independent agency that could go anywhere in the country and see anything it wanted to and talk to anyone who cared to comment.

The difference between the press and the government was that the press listened to what everyone had to say. It was not that U.S. officials did not tell the truth. It was just that they did not know any differently themselves so they took the word of the GVN or of whoever could identify progress.

But when these same people who talked to the press tried to talk with the government, people like Bob Komer did not always have time to listen. Ambassador Komer wanted to listen only to those things that told of progress. To speak otherwise meant that you were not doing your job.

Barry Zorthian, the former leader of the Joint U.S. Press Mission, another bureaucratic empire of questionable worth, returned home after a long tour in Vietnam and criticized the irresponsibility of the press.

To a degree Zorthian was right. Some poor reporting is coming out of Vietnam. But the U.S. Government accredits as a journalist just about anyone who would like to attend a war.

These persons flock in without any previous journalistic experience. They are accredited as free-lancers.

"Oh, this is my first writing effort," a young man said the other day. "I'm just here to make some money and see a little war."

A beautiful school operator came over to film a documentary. Red Cross girls return to become journalists and even a matronly woman with nothing other to do was accredited. She asked meekly:

"Please can you tell me when the tour is going out to the war?"

And strangely enough, when the free-lancers find out, as most eventually do, that a war does not necessarily make you an Ernest Hemingway and that it takes money to live even in Saigon they can get an assignment from our government that will pay them a few hundred dollars.

They are paid well to write insipid feature stories that neither will see print nor represent good propaganda. Our conception of propaganda is air-dropped leaflets that the Vietnamese use for toilet paper or peanut wrappers.

Yes, Barry Zorthian is right. There is a problem with the press, largely because the

March 4, 1969

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government was too timid to keep Vietnam from being a playground for would-be writers.

A lot of good is to be found in Vietnam, mostly good people. Outstanding Americans and equally outstanding Vietnamese labor daily together, endure the hardships and dangers and build binding friendships and mutual respect through their toils.

The men who extend for more duty deserve credit for they discount the odds that are made by the Viet Cong and the politicians. Not enough can ever be said about these people.

Often it is best not to mention the good Vietnamese for their government does not like to hear what they have to say. But they are the victims of politics and the times and they are the ones who suffer the most.

Both governments, reigned over by the single-mindedness of their leaderships, struggle on. The Americans look for progress during their tour so they can come home to a promotion while the GVN leaders immerse themselves in the joys of new-found power, unwilling to face reality.

That the writer has been unfair in his portrayal is acknowledged. He is unfair because he does not have the answers to these agonies, but apparently neither does any of those in power.

But first we have to acknowledge our mistakes before we can correct them. The question is whether our leadership is ready to do so.

That is why anger overcomes sadness in Vietnam.

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