

center. The Khmer Krom are also alleged on occasion to eat their victims' livers. With such worthies on his side, In Tam—one of the few Cambodian military commanders who customarily moves forward instead of backward—has cleared large portions of Routes 6 and 7, two other vital roads to Phnom Penh.

As a result, the capital itself seems less nervous than it did earlier this year. Then, the Communists not only had a stranglehold on all the major highways leading to the capital but raided Phnom Penh airport and caused considerable damage. Last week, by comparison, as Cambodians celebrated their New Year, the city seemed far removed from the chaos of the countryside. Children played games in the wide streets and pleasant parks. Stores and embassies were closed. Many residents had left the city for their favorite recreation spots. Altogether, for a visitor from Saigon, it was an idyl of quiet, almost bucolic, charm. The only nasty moment came when hundreds of troops on guard in the city began to fire their weapons in carefree celebration of the holiday, waking everyone up and leading some to believe that the capital was under attack.

**Well-Fed:** The consensus, in fact, is that Phnom Penh has more to fear from economic and political instability than from the North Vietnamese. While a good rice harvest has kept the population generally well-fed, inflation and a sagging economy constitute major causes for concern. Moreover, corruption in the army and a continued dragging of heels in the formulation of a new, democratic constitution have already proven to be cause for covert protest on the part of students and intellectuals. As yet, the discontent is not a serious problem, but Lon Nol—or someone else—will have to take concrete measures to head it off.

Whether Lon Nol is the man to act boldly remains open to question. In his absence, Acting Premier Sirik Matak appears to have ingratiated himself with the Americans by making a few reforms in the military establishment and by proving to be a bit more malleable than Lon Nol. "I think he did an excellent job," a top-level U.S. official told me. "He brought a considerable amount of order into a somewhat disorderly situation."

In his absence, however, Lon Nol seems to have lost none of his considerable popularity with the middle class, the young people and the army. Though he seems colorless to most Westerners, Cambodians see him as the quintessential Khmer and revere him for his role in ousting Sihanouk. But Lon Nol has not entirely recovered from his stroke, and there has been some talk that he might become a figurehead Chief of State while Sirik Matak actually runs the country. It is an interesting notion, but such practical solutions are not always easy to attain in Indochina. And so it is equally likely that the leaders of Cambodia will be content to continue muddling through.

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## Off and Running

For months, Nguyen Cao Ky had managed to suppress his natural talent for shooting from the lip. But last week, the South Vietnamese Vice President could contain himself no longer, and he suddenly opened up with a verbal fusillade against his nominal boss, President Nguyen Van Thieu. By the time he had stopped talking, the campaign for next fall's Presidential election in South Vietnam was in full swing—and Ky had catapulted himself into the position of being the chief rival for Thieu's job.

Asked by a reporter during an impromptu press conference whether he intended to be a candidate, Ky replied: "It is possible." Then, without actually naming Thieu, the 40-year-old Vice President went on to leave little doubt about his designs on the Presidency. Ridiculing Thieu's claim to victory in the recent Laotian invasion, Ky declared: "You asked why did we not have a victory parade after our successful campaign in Cambodia last year? We did not have to, you know, because it was a real victory. As to why we had a victory parade in Hué for the recent campaign in lower Laos, I think you should ask the President."

**'Secret Agent':** Trading on a growing anti-Americanism, Ky also had some barbed remarks for the U.S. He warned Washington to keep "hands off" the Presidential election and complained about the "obsolete equipment" the U.S. was supplying the South Vietnamese Air Force. "We have only the old trainer, the A-37. This is for women. This is not a fighter plane. We cannot fight North Vietnam with its MIG-21s." Then Ky turned his rhetorical shotgun on Sen. George McGovern, with whom he is conducting a long-distance feud. Recently, McGovern implied that Ky was involved in smuggling opium. Hotly denying the charge, Ky retaliated by branding McGovern "a secret agent of international Communism." Added Ky: "The day he comes here, I will kick him out personally. He has no proof that I am involved in smuggling, but we all have the proof that he is a Communist."

In the view of most observers, Ky's blasts at Thieu and the U.S. were part of an attempt to impress the South Vietnamese electorate with his fearless independence. For some time, most experts have believed that the major political threat to Thieu would come from Duong Van (Big) Minh, a popular ex-general who has been expected to run as a peace candidate. But since last week, they haven't been so sure. For Ky, who has built his reputation as one of South Vietnam's leading hawks, was obviously bent on stealing some of Big Minh's thunder. "The first thing we should try to achieve is to find ways to stop the fighting," he uncharacteristically declared. "There



Ky and wife: Shooting from the lip

is only one way—a political solution."

Reaction to Ky's sallies was mixed. "We all know that Ky is the Martha Mitchell of Vietnam," commented one American, and a U.S. Embassy official in Saigon dismissed Ky's verbiage as "politics, pure politics." But there seemed to be little doubt that Ky had gotten a serious hearing in at least one quarter: Doc Lap Palace, the residence of President Thieu. "In the past," said one knowledgeable Vietnamese, "Thieu dismissed the threat of Ky and considered General Minh as his strongest possible challenger. Now he is beginning to realize that his own Vice President is the main worry in the October elections."

## Departing Words

A quiet, scholarly-looking man, Gerald Hickey arrived in Saigon fifteen years ago. Since then, he has come to be regarded as one of the most thoughtful and informed U.S. observers of the Vietnam scene. First as an academic (his "Village in Vietnam" was a landmark study) and now as a researcher for the Rand Corp. think tank, the 45-year-old Hickey has gained a depth and duration of experience in Vietnam matched by few Americans. Now, after all these years, Hickey is preparing to return home, and last week he reviewed his years in Vietnam with *Newsweek's* Kevin Buckley in his book-lined apartment in Saigon. Below, excerpts:

These books are haunting. You look at the old books and magazines and read about the so-called new strategies. One has [French Gen. Jacques] Leclerc saying that he is building a new

Vietnamese Army, and there are pictures of people training in Da Lat and in Hanoi. The sense of *déjà vu* is overwhelming. It's the same war, the same old war.

The French fought and left. And the Americans fought and are leaving—but the war goes on. The French had their pacification programs, and we have had our pacification programs. But the Viet Cong infrastructure is still there, and [the Communists] show all the signs of being capable of reviving themselves. Through the years, the same strategies have been used with different names but the same old mistakes have been made.

**Turnover:** Why have these mistakes been repeated? For one thing, there is a lack of institutional memory in the American organization in Vietnam. Any lessons learned here have not been transmitted to people who followed the people who learned the lessons. This is due primarily to the short tours of duty, the rapid turnover of people. The one-year tour—especially for people in command jobs or running programs—has been disastrous. A person comes in, works hard for a year and then leaves, giving the job to someone else with no experience. Most Americans come to Vietnam with no firsthand experience here and want to do a good job. They set about inventing fire and inventing the wheel and making all sorts of new discoveries. By the time they have learned enough to do some good, it is time to leave.

Another major reason for the repeated mistakes is a built-in proclivity, almost determination, to emphasize the positive no matter how bad the news. I can't think of any time it has been admitted that something went wrong. This is due in large part to the official reporting system. The reports are called progress reports. So you report progress. Part of the style of the whole American effort here has been to have an optimistic posture. The result is that you do not admit that a program is floundering. What happens is that people get rewarded for not telling the truth.

**Mendicant:** The resettlement of the montagnards is a classic example of a program that has failed before: the forced relocation of people into larger settlements without regard for the wants and desires of the people themselves. Somehow there is a notion that this is a good thing—to put people under government control. But this view ignores the social disruption, the demoralization of the people and creation of a listless, mendicant mentality. If this plan continues, the montagnards will end up as an impoverished people living on the fringe of Vietnamese society—like some of the worst examples of American Indians.

As for Vietnamization, it is specious to argue one side or the other. There is evidence on both sides. We will not know if it can work until the Vietnamese military looks over its shoulder and sees no Americans there. When there are no Americans here, then we will know if Vietnamization can work.