

This Is Indochina (1)

People in Hanoi Are Used to War

By OLEN CLEMENTS AND MAX CLOS

Hanoi — (AP) — Every night church bells beckon the faithful in misty old Hanoi. Heavy guns rumble on the city's outskirts. The devout go to worship. The others—French, German, Arab, Moroccan and Vietnamese soldiers and civilians—flock to the cafes, the tea houses, the taxi dance halls.

The Indo-China War is in its eighth year and the people in Hanoi are used to it. This city is a center of the French Union forces, including French colonial soldiers, the heavily German foreign legion, and Vietnamese troops that can call this land their own. They are at war with forces which are led by a Communist but backed by many non-Communists. These forces are known as the Vietminh. Some civilians say there are so many Vietminh sympathizers in Hanoi that Moscow-trained Ho Chi Minh would never attack the city—he would endanger too many of his friends.

Just now a sort of red haze blows down through the river delta and from Communist China, 90 miles to the north. Millions of mosquitoes buzz in and out of the separate night clubs of the Arabs, the German Legionnaires, the French and the Vietnamese.

French Union troops patrol the countryside and fight along the wet roads.

A thousand miles to the south is hot Saigon, where shops display Paris gowns and good food abounds. It, too, is under control of the French Union forces. All through that southern area watchtowers manned by four to six men keep an eye on roads that may be mined.

The civil population is more or less indifferent. Vietnamese and Chinese carpenters work all day building hundreds of new homes and apartments for people who apparently never give a thought to the war or to the prospect that artillery or planes might knock down some of these new buildings some day.

The indifference to the war has created a grotesque riddle for all of southeast Asia—Indo-China, Malaya, Burma, Thailand and Indonesia. The indifference and weariness of the war extend to many places in Vietnam, and the associated kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia.

Many now believe a military victory by either side is an impossibility unless far more troops and supplies are poured into the fight. They hope the Big Five conference in Geneva in April and the conference of prime ministers of Southern Asia in Ceylon in May will help to solve the riddle.

Gen. Henri Navarre, commander in chief of French Union forces, says:

"We have here a politico-military war. It is only when the Vietnamese government will have won the approval of the population that a victory will be possible."

Since 1949 chief of state Bao Dai has been trying to set up a national front without success. Probably almost half of the 12



HOW INDOCHINA SIZE COMPARES WITH TEXAS—Outline of Lone Star state is superimposed over this map of Indochina. Country at war is 5,000 square miles larger than our largest state. (AP Wirephoto.)

million Vietnamese living in the zone controlled by Bao Dai's government are directly aiding the Vietminh or indirectly supporting them out of sympathy for Ho Chi Minh. But only a fraction of the population is really Communist. Most are just anti-French. Many are anti-Communist.

The Nationalists, who for five years have been refusing to support Bao Dai effectively, give two reasons:

1. Bao Dai has not obtained independence for Vietnam. The ex-emperor signed a 1949 treaty with France which gave his country semi-independence within the framework of the French Union, but France retained actual political control.

2. The Nationalists are critical of the system of personal power established by Bao Dai and of the corruption of his regime. The 40-year-old ex-emperor holds all the executive and legislative powers.

The new government formed in January by Prince Buu Loc persuaded Bao Dai to announce a program seeking to give satisfaction to the Nationalists' aspirations. Buu Loc has promised general elections for a national assembly "within as short a time as possible." He also has demanded total independence from France to be guaranteed by the United Nations and has denounced the 1949 treaty. The new premier and members of his cabinet are to go to France at the end of this month to negotiate a 'treaty of association to establish a union between two partners equal in rights and duties.'

Two factors menace the program. To gain Vietnamese ap-

proval, Bao Dai must take a firm attitude toward France.

But until Vietnam's fledgling army is a great deal bigger and better trained, French forces are still the only protection against the Vietminh, and Bao Dai cannot remain in power without them.

He must take care to avoid risking a bad reaction from the French public, which seemingly has begun to doubt that there is any point in pushing the war against the Vietminh. It thinks France is going to be pushed out even in case of victory by the nationalists.

If Buu Loc is too adamant in the Paris conference, the French may demand an immediate end of the war. Foreseeing such a possibility, Buu Loc has given assurance that Vietnam will not nationalize any French properties and will give France important economic privileges.

Vietnamese leaders believe that within two or three years it will be possible to create a united nationalist front capable of effectively opposing the Vietminh. They question whether any peace

or armistice ought to be accepted earlier.

Meantime there is an Alice in Wonderland aspect to the situation. The forces on both sides cannot go any where militarily because it takes all their strength to stay where they are.

Next: Larry Allen describes the way the war is fought—and the prospects.



STRONG MEN OF INDOCHINA—These three men try to solidify Indochina against the Communists. From left: Gen. Henri Navarre, French commander; Bao Dai, chief of state; Prince Buu Loc, who demands total independence. (AP Wirephoto.)

This Is Indochina (2)

Foe Stalks Jungle, ---Always at Night!

By LARRY ALLEN

Hanoi —(AP)— The Vietminh forces generally attack at night. They come out of the jungle with mortars, rifles, pistols, grenades, knives and razor-sharp bamboo spears.

Against this kind of foe the French Union forces, even with their American-supplied fire power, never have been able to land a crushing blow.

The average soldier on the French-Vietnamese side is dead tired of the shadowy war fought in jungle, rice fields and on forest-covered mountains. He is dead tired, but goes on fighting—usually against overwhelming numbers.

Indochina is half again as big as France, and has 25 million inhabitants. Viet Nam, with 20 millions, is the largest state. About 8 million of the Vietnamese live in the areas controlled by Communist Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh forces. The other 12 million live in the zone of the Bao Dai government. The French-Vietnamese forces hold most of the richer areas, principally the deltas of the Red and Mekong rivers.

The conflict that has marred this land for more than seven years is basically a civil war. To millions of Vietnamese, Ho Chi Minh is the symbol of a fight for independence and an end to the remnants of French colonialism. Many of them dislike communism but still admire Ho Chi Minh.

The French count upon the increased zeal of loyal Vietnamese as the hope of an eventual military victory.

French admit there is much to be achieved before the Vietnamese become a first class fighting force—and before the people as a whole realize there is a war on.

Overall casualties top one million killed, wounded, captured or missing. The conflict has cost France and the Indochinese about 10 billion dollars. Two million vietnamese have been uprooted from their homes.

The United States government regards the war as a struggle against the spread of communism into Southeast Asia and hence affecting the security of the United States. It has cost the United States half a billion dollars annually in war equipment supplied since 1950. This year America will pay about 800 million dollars to support the anti-Communist struggle.

Red China is supplying the Vietminh with 3,000 tons of war equipment monthly. If it decided to throw in regular or "volunteer" troops to help Ho Chi Minh, the situation obviously would change.

Currently, one hope for ending the war lies in the April conference at Geneva, where Indochina as well as Korea is to be discussed. While some leaders of the Vietnamese government say the time is not ripe to discuss peace, there is an underlying eagerness for peace among French Union forces (including the fledgling armies of Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos) and among those Vietnamese aligned with Ho Chi Minh. France also is eager for peace.

Viet Nam's premier Prince Buu Loc says Viet Nam wants a peace that guarantees "individual liberties, respects the government of the Viet Nam and the continuation of the Viet Nam nation." These will be guiding

principles for the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian delegations at Geneva.

On the other side, Ho Chi Minh in unofficial peace feelers has demanded independence for the Viet Nam he professes to head and recognition of his "democratic government."

How far Ho Chi Minh's demands may be pressed probably will rest in the hands of Red China.

The fighting is in the final eight weeks of the Winter, before the start of the seasonal rains which always bog down military operations.

The only place a battle seems likely in the near future is at the French Union fortress of Dien Bien Phu in Northwestern Indochina, 80 miles west of Hanoi. There the Chinese-trained and equipped "elite" Vietminh divisions encircled the fortress. French Union troops have been stabbing out from the fortress in groups of 4,000-5,000 men in an effort to draw the Vietminh into a showdown battle.

If the French Union forces finally succeed and knock out of action the bulk of the 36,000 rebel troops, they will have scored the first major victory of this long war.

Elsewhere there does not appear to be any chance for a victory. The Vietminh have their 308th Division deep in Northern Laos pointed at Luang Prabang. Gen. Henri Navarre, French commander-in-chief, says there is no chance of the Vietminh's taking Luang Prabang.

The French express optimism that the coming months will bring a favorable turn, particularly with the more effective help of the expanding Vietnamese army.

But as the situation stands now there is nothing to indicate where, when or how that favorable turn might come.

(Next: John Roderick discusses the part that American aid plays in the Indochina war.)

'If It Hadn't Been for American Aid War Would Have Been Lost in 1951'

Third in a Series

By JOHN RODERICK

Saigon — (AP) — "If it hadn't been for American aid, the Indochina war would have been lost three years ago."

This statement was made by a responsible American official here recently. He would have had little difficulty getting the French and the Indochinese to agree.

Since 1951 the United States has been pouring an ever swelling torrent of money, material and munitions into Indochina to help hold back the hordes of Moscow-trained Ho-Chi Minh.

By last Jan. 31 400 American or French ships sailing from San Francisco had disgorged in Indochina's ports a veritable mountain of the weapons, explosives, guns, airplanes, ships and other material required for modern warfare. The list:

260,000 million rounds of small arms ammunition.

21,000 transport vehicles and trailers.

1,400 combat vehicles.

360 military aircraft.

390 naval vessels.

17,000 radio sets.

175,000 small arms and automatic weapons.

Huge amounts of mines, rockets, mortar and artillery shells, hospital supplies, engineering and technical equipment.

In all, the American taxpayer will pay nearly a billion dollars this year to help fight a war some 10,000 miles from his own shores. He will foot three-fifths of the money cost of a fight whose causes and motives remain even more obscure to him than did the battle for Korea.

But in helping the French and Indochinese to fight Ho Chi Minh, the U. S. Government feels it is getting its money's worth. It sees these alternatives: The loss of Southeast Asia to world communism, or personal involvement of more Americans in another Korea-type war.

While the United States is aiding the French and the established governments of Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos on the one hand, the Chinese Communists are doing the same for Communist Ho Chi Minh. Over about 18 highway routes the Reds from safe bases along the border are shuttling an average of some 3,000 tons of war material a month to the Vietminh. Without this kind of propping up, they too would have collapsed long ago.



HEADS U. S. AID GROUP— Maj. Gen. John Trappell, Bataan death march veteran, heads staff of U. S. military assistance advisory group in Indochina. (AP Wirephoto.)

Though American aid is broken down into military and technical programs, all of it is channeled into one stream—a massive war effort which may subdue the Vietminh in a war now in its eighth year.

Four hundred million dollars of the near-billion America has allotted to Indochina for 1954 goes to purchase arms and munitions. Of the rest, 385 millions go for "soft" goods—uniforms, food and other services; 25 millions for economic, technical and refugee aid; 30 millions for harbor improvements, roads, reservoirs and other projects which are militarily important now but can be converted to civilian use.

The American military advisory assistance group handles the huge supply job involved in the aid program. It is housed in the nearby Chinese city of Cholon. Its staff of some 100 officers and men is headed by Maj. Gen. John Trappell, lean West Pointer who survived the Bataan death march, two sinkings of Japanese death ships and three years in a Japanese prisoner of war camp.

A sport-loving 51-year-old cavalryman who turned paratrooper, he won the distinguished service medal by personally setting fire to a tank which blew up a bridge the Japanese wanted very much to cross.

Trappell is due to wind up a two year tour here in a few months. Already there is much talk of replacing him with Lt. Gen. John W. O'Daniel.

Americans in the know here say that Trappell's departure would be little short of catastrophic. For one thing, he is tremendously popular with Gen. Henri Navarre, the French commander in chief. For another, he is getting a tough job done fast and efficiently.

Big blunt "Iron Mike" O'Daniel would be likely to run into difficulties with the French chiefly because he has been touted as a man who could train Viet Nam troops. Gen. Navarre said the other day that for an American to train the Vietnamese was "unthinkable." That is a job Navarre has cut out for himself.

The American mission so far has been confined almost entirely to aid, not training.

The 200 air technicians in Indochina are an exception. They will teach French ground crews the skill needed to maintain 10 U. S. B26 light bombers America recently has provided. In three to four months they will pull out.

This is a far cry from training the Vietnamese national army of 250,000 men how to fight, as some elements in the United States wish to do. The French view is that they are doing fine, and that American experience in Korea is not applicable to the jungle and rice field war here.

Head of the economic and technical assistance program is former Brig. Gen. Wilbur R. McReynolds, an old China hand who did the same sort of job in Nanking before the Communists took over. The smaller civilian program has tackled an ambitious job not least of which is placing some of the half million refugees of the war in new homes. It is building highways and bridges, giving a job to the coal, rubber, textile, lumber and tobacco industries and helping to boost the production of rice.

Its big problem is getting people to come out to this tropical country where disease, the high cost of living and a war are some of the disadvantages of the daily job.