

# Life in Da Nang Under Red Rule

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## Da Nang, South Vietnam

As the battle for Saigon rages 375 miles south of here, South Vietnam's second-largest city, Da Nang, presents a picture of calm behind a political facade that has changed radically in the last month.

For a reporter who visited the city often in recent years when it was the site of one of the largest air bases in the world, landing among a deserted tangle of runways and hangars provides a first shock.

A few Viet Cong soldiers move about among a small number of American C-123 and C-130 cargo planes. In the distance, a dozen helicopters are parked, out of service.

It seems difficult to believe that a short time ago visitors arrived here in a screeching beehive of military activity, with planes landing and taking off at the rate of one a minute.

Western journalists arriving from Hanoi Thursday were welcomed to Da Nang under a burning sun by two soldiers who examined their visas, issued by the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), and a young woman who

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*The writer of this dispatch reached Da Nang Thursday aboard a flight carrying French humanitarian aid by way of Vientiane and Hanoi. He was among the first Western journalists to visit the city since it fell to Communist forces on March 29.*

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checked their vaccination certificates.

A little farther along the runway, as a company of soldiers carrying their weapons and baggage descended from a four-engined plane nearby, the journalists were greeted by a delegation of city officials under a smiling portrait of the late North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi-minh.

Travelers arriving here from Hanoi in the past had to turn their watches back one hour. There is no need to reset watches now, since Da Nang has been placed on the same time as Hanoi.

There are still signs here of the events that took place in the last days of March, when soldiers and officers of an army in disarray fought their way through civilian refugees toward the last

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American civil aircraft to leave the city.

Reminders of those scenes line many secondary runways, abandoned vehicles of every description, scattered household utensils and furniture, looted huts and, everywhere, helmets, belts and uniforms apparently stripped off in haste by soldiers trying to pose as civilians in their attempt to escape from Da Nang.

The technical installations of the base appear to be intact, but the whole area seems immense for its new tenants.

The streets of the city are full of life.

The first weeks of contact between Da Nang's residents and the Communist forces seem to have reassured both sides.

The military presence is inconspicuous. Soldiers on patrol are indulgent, even after the 9 p.m. curfew, which is ignored by a few strollers and street merchants.



Location of Da Nang, captured on March 29

In the center of the city, which fell without resistance like the rest of Da Nang, a few signs of looting are visible. The former United States consulate was totally sacked, according to foreigners who remained in Da Nang after its fall.

Troops and officers of the South Vietnamese army were called on by loudspeaker to surrender to the Communist forces, and reportedly did so in a matter of days

without the slightest resistance.

Ordinary soldiers have been issued temporary papers and left free to go where they will.

Officers have been sent to "re-education" centers, where they along with officials and teachers from the previous administration will be trained in "revolutionary civics."

Schools, stores and markets have begun to open, a few at a time, in recent days.

Procurement of supplies, however, still poses some problems, as does medical organization, since some hospitals were said to have been looted by rampaging soldiers and civilians.

To establish order after the chaos of the last days of March, the first task for the city's new authorities was to clear it of tens of thousands of refugees from neighboring provinces.

Several sources said those refugees already have been sent back to their fields and villages under order of Da Nang officials.

In apparent confirmation of these reports, a tour of the city and visits to schools and religion centers that were packed with people at the end of March makes it clear that Da Nang's population now is smaller than it was a year ago.

Foreigners who stayed in Da Nang when it fell —

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some by choice and others because they had no choice — all affirm that the PRG took control of the city in a perfectly proper, dignified way.

Foreign residents were called to a government office and issued papers giving them freedom to move through the city.

Among them were 120 French citizens, some 50 Indians, Chinese — some of them flying Chinese flags over their homes — and Canadian and American Catholic priests.