

Well-Behaved Group of Soldiers

Saigon and Its Conquerors: They Smile and Wave at Each Other

By Martin Woollacott
Manchester Guardian

SAIGON—While the victorious Communist army is now as much a part of the scene in Saigon as was its predecessor, no one has ever seen such a well behaved group of soldiers.

There are thousands of soldiers in the city—at least one permanent division, with other units rotating, and still more arriving daily for a military version of a guided tour—yet no rape, theft, drunkenness, or accidental shootings have been reported.

The soldiers wander around with curiosity, peering into shops, eating ice cream at Tu Do street's French cafes, or poking around in the markets. They smile and wave, although those who have been here for some time are getting a little tired of this routine since the population of Saigon and the entire communist army walked around for two days with permanent grins and right arms working like pump handles.

The army is not alone. The navy and the air force are here too—the navy in the old South Vietnamese Navy Department building on the waterfront. The sail-

ors, wearing blue trousers and white tops with the traditional square striped kerchief, and with pith helmets, look like something off the Potemkin. The air force, out at Tan Sonnhut with the Russian-speaking officers, wear light blue trousers and silver badges.

One North Vietnamese officer approached me near the British embassy the day after the fall of Saigon and asked if I was English. He spoke excellent English, came from Saigon, and had just seen his mother after two and a half years. "I have been in the forest for all that time but that is nothing. Many have fought for 10 or more years," he said.

He hopes to return to a university to study engineering, a common ambition among young officers. But, like other soldiers, he was peculiarly unforthcoming about what life was like in his unit.

The senior officers are tough looking and carry leather map cases and leather holstered pistols. Many of them speak French. Much less in evidence than the North Vietnamese are the Vietcong—smaller in stature and not quite as friendly. By far the most striking group about town are the gangs of young boys with flared trousers, platform-soled shoes and black shirts.

The reaction of most of the citizens of Saigon is that the new authorities are not too bad. But some in the city are fearful still. One told me: "I get friends calling me up to ask for advice. Some weep into the tele-

phone, others are still trying to flee. I tell them to wait and see, resign themselves."

The cost of escape by boat now that the Americans have gone is rumored to be nearly \$25,000. At the French military hospital, designated as a zone of safety by the French during the fighting, there are still some frightened Vietnamese. One pursued us down a corridor weeping: "Save us, save us. You must write an article saying that the United Nations secretary general must send a plane for us. If we go out there we will be killed."

When we told him that there was absolutely no evidence that anybody at all had been killed, he obviously did not believe us.

Nobody knows what the future will bring, but until now there has been absolutely no retaliation. A number of Americans, apart from journalists, deliberately or otherwise, stayed behind in Saigon. They include the inevitable strays who failed to get to the evacuation planes. One was Cliff Randolph, aged 63, who was dirty and unshaven, and drinking whiskey on the terrace of the Continental Hotel two days after the fall of Saigon.

He spoke about Randy's Diner near Tansonhut: "You must know it that's my place at least it was before both sides got through looting it. There ain't a bottle or a bar stool left in the place. One of them held a pistol to my head." Randolph had walked in from Tansonhut and went off on our advice to register with

the Red Cross. But the Communists apparently have no intention of mistreating Americans.

There was one curious incident however when a lieutenant in a North Vietnamese army film unit attempted to confiscate CBS film and equipment. The CBS office is still staffed by an Englishman and an American who found themselves at gunpoint.

A senior North Vietnamese officer who was asked to intervene tore a long blistering strip off the lieutenant, who crept miserably out, and then explained that there had been a "misunderstanding." Asked if he wanted a drink he smiled, held up his hand and said: "Thank you not at this time. In future we will have many merry times."

Unoccupied American and other foreign property including the British Club is being taken over however. The only exceptions are diplomatic missions. These are under guard and have notices on them saying they are the property of countries friendly to the new government. On none of these—including the U.S. embassy—has the liberation flag been raised.

For many people the moment of realization dawned days after the actual vent of "liberation"; for some it was the appearance of North Vietnamese aircraft over Saigon. For me the moment I realized it had all really happened was when driving near Bienhoa we suddenly heard a strange yet familiar sound—lumbering over the fields at a low

Athens Strike Ends

ATHENS, May 14 (UPI)—journalists and publishers of Athens daily newspapers reached agreement today ending a two-week-long strike that had kept most Greek dailies off the newsstands.

height was a Soviet-made helicopter.

I doubt if I would have been more amazed if it had been a Martian flying machine. There in the sky which had been silent for three days was a North Vietnamese instead of an American helicopter.

Saigon's adjustment on the whole has been swift although perhaps superficial. Visiting the Cercle Sportif—the famous French sports club—two days after the fall we found the employees clustered in the sewing room where the old ladies were working at their machines producing a huge Vietcong flag.

Now the flags are everywhere; and Saigon has perhaps decided that after making a few such concessions everything will go on as normal. The real changes however are probably yet to come.
