

NYTimes Saigon Exists Somberly, Many Activities Normal

By GEORGE ESPEY MAY 21 1975

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 20—Nearly three weeks after Communist forces took over Saigon with almost no bloodshed, there is still no sign of a civilian government for the city.

Markets and shops are open and looting has been reduced, but the banks are still closed and many residents and businesses are hard-pressed for money.

International airline schedules have not been restored. Telephone and Telex circuits abroad are still cut, although there is cable traffic to Hong Kong and, via Hanoi, to Paris.

The Communists' presence appears minimal. It is said that they do not yet have enough people on hand to undertake

the management of a city of 3.5 million.

There is talk of quick reunification with North Vietnam, perhaps within the year. Mail and telegraph service between North and South has resumed for the first time since the country was partitioned by the 1954 Geneva agreements.

Most of the undetermined

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number of troops in Saigon—perhaps 90 per cent—are North Vietnamese. They hold all of the vital positions, including the Tan Son Nhut air base, and have scores of tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces, anti-aircraft guns and surface-to-air missiles defending the city.

Ostensibly the city is being run by the Provisional Revolutionary Government's Military Administrative Committee, headed by Lieut. Gen. Tran Van Tra. Asked at his first news conference, on May 8, when the transition to a civilian government might take place, he said:

"We cannot tell you. There has never been a city so large liberated so quickly, and there are many problems to be solved. The reason for the organization of the Military Administrative Committee is to restore normal life to restore security and many other matters.

Tranquil on the Surface

"We intend the Military Administration Committee to expire as soon as possible. How long this period will be depends on the practical situation. We are in control of the practical situation, but have not seen all the questions of the future. We are concentrating all efforts on normalizing the life of the people."

Many of the North Vietnamese soldiers in Saigon have found relatives they have not seen since 1954. An artilleryman met his sister on a bus when they struck up a conversation.

Another North Vietnamese soldier, asked when he would return home, replied: "I will

wait for further orders. I do not know if we will be returning."

On the surface Saigon is tranquil, but there is underlying sadness, as well as fear of what lies ahead, particularly regimentation.

"Study-practice" political meetings are being held; usually one member from each household is required to attend. Students, women's groups and block committees are being organized, but in an uneven fashion.

There have been no visible signs or reports of reprisals.

Members of the National Assembly under the Government of Nguyen Van Thieu have been required to register along with military men. At least two dozen generals, most of them retired, have registered. What will happen to them is not known. Some lower-ranking members of the South Vietnamese Army say they have been told they will eventually undergo political indoctrination, but they no longer fear harsh penalties.

It is speculated that high-ranking officials of the former Government will eventually be questioned and perhaps be made to face people's courts.

Some Suicides Reported

Duong Van Minh, who surrendered the city less than 40 hours after being sworn in as President, is free but stays in his house and doesn't see newsmen.

Neutralist leaders who opposed President Thieu were invited to a gala party on the first night of the victory celebration last week.

Other leaders did not fare so well. Some generals reportedly committed suicide in the final hours of the Thieu

Government. The commander of the air force, Tran Van Minh, was reported killed when his plane was shot down as he tried to escape.

As for the Saigones in general, they are still doing most of the day-to-day work that keeps the city going. The same people who served under Mr. Thieu are operating the postal, telegraph and telephone services, but they have been reduced to technicians with no authority to make decisions. A caller asking an official when telephone circuits will be restored is told: "We are awaiting orders."

The black markets, French restaurants, hotels and shops are operating. Vietnamese are

still permitted to work for Western news agencies.

There is little public social life and nightclubs have been closed. Maxim's, the biggest in Saigon, where the elite went to watch Vietnamese chorus girls and singers, is now a police precinct.

With the countryside reported quiet, there appears to be no food shortage. Strawberries are flowing in from the farms around Da Lat.

While Saigon bustles with activity—though there is less noise and smoke because of the gasoline shortage—the old spirit is gone. The melancholy of defeat hangs over the city, reflecting shattered hopes, lost pride, shame and regret.