

# Life Today In Vietnam

*By Ruthe Stein*

It has been one year to the day since the Communist takeover of South Vietnam, and that small Southeast Asian country which for many years dominated the news in this country has practically ceased to exist as far as most Americans are concerned.

Last month a delegation of Americans representing an organization called Friendshipment were in Vietnam for two weeks. They were the first Americans since the end of the Vietnam War to drive across the DMZ and to

visit Hue and Da Nang.

Friendshipment is a coalition of 40 peace and religious groups in the U.S. who have sent medical aid and clothes to Vietnam—despite the fact that the United States government has cut off all aid to that country since the fall of the Saigon government and imposed a trade embargo. (Each of the organization's shipments has thus far been licensed independently by the U.S. treasury Department.)

The six-person delegation traveled as guests of the Vietnamese government. Technically, the United States government was not aware that they were there, although it is no longer illegal for Americans to travel to countries where the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations.

"The purpose of our trip was to get a first-hand view of the war damage and reconstruction work underway, so we can discern future aid programs that Friendshipment will be involved with," explained Lowell Finley, a UC Santa Cruz instructor who was a member of the delegation.

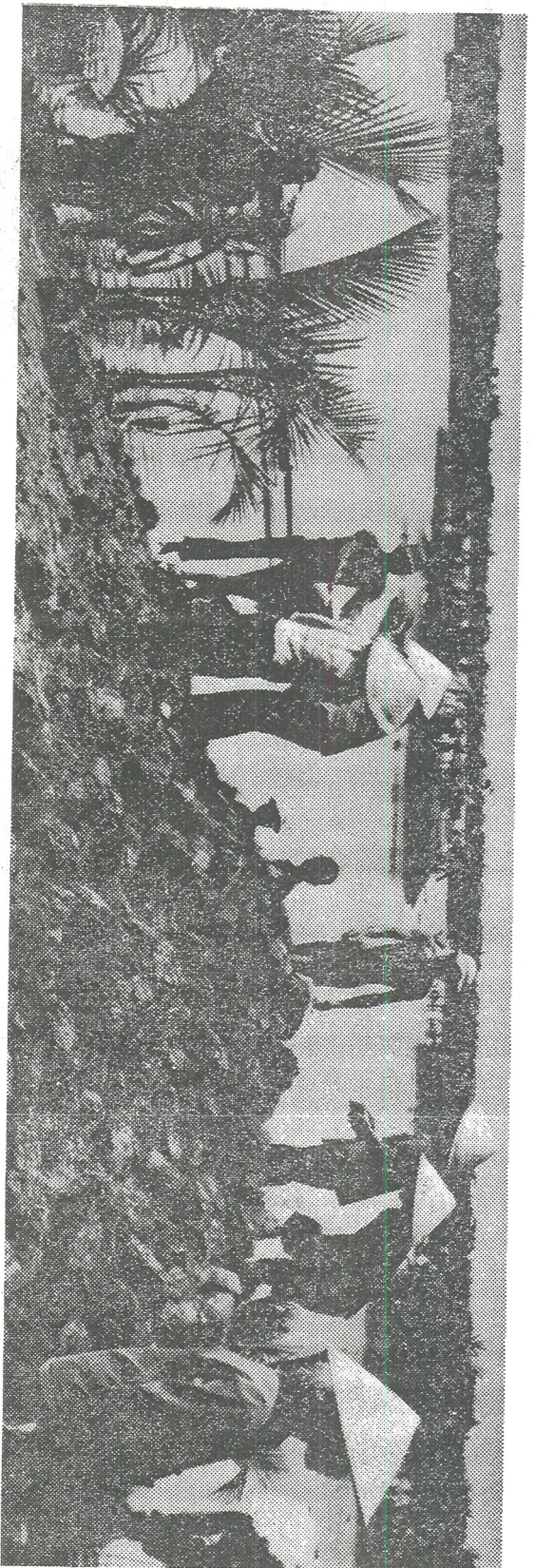
(Finley will speak at 7:30 tonight at Glide Memorial Church at a benefit for Vietnam.)

It was Finley's impression that while the destruction from the war has been massive, the Vietnamese people are setting about the task of rebuilding their country.



**Lowell Finley visited Vietnam as part of a delegation from Friendshipment**





**In Hoi An village about 2000 Vietnamese have been working to rebuild a seawall dike destroyed by U.S. planes**

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*Peasants  
are starting  
to return  
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### Life goes on in Hanoi, where some prefer bicycles to trolleys

This week they went to the polls to elect a single nationwide assembly, the final stage for the formal unification of North and South Vietnam.

One of "the most striking things" according to Finley, was the attitude towards Americans that he encountered. The Communist government has made an intensive propaganda effort to draw a distinction between the American government and the American people, many of whom, the Vietnamese are told, were against the war.

Finley was stopped several times by Vietnamese like the man in Hanoi who told him, "I know you were one of many people who supported us, and that it was the United States government that caused this suffering."

Finley was also told that the government has been attempting to reunite the children who were

forced to leave their homes during the height of the war with their families. Orphans are being put in government-run centers and communal living arrangements in the countryside, he said.

While Vietnamese officials told Finley that they consider that hundreds of children, many of whom have families in Vietnam, were "illegally abducted" during the famous babylifts last year and brought to the United States, they also conceded that any action to bring these children back to Vietnam "will have to await normalization of relationships with the United States government."

(President Ford in a statement last week said that "there is no prospect" of normalization with North Vietnam "and there is nothing that would convince me otherwise.")

Traveling in Vietnam, Finley was constantly reminded of the

war. He saw dikes and bridges that had been destroyed. But he also saw people at work rebuilding them.

He saw hundreds of bomb craters, that present a health hazard because "they breed mosquitos. But he also saw people using them as front lawns and planting flowers around them.

As for land mines left behind by the retreating armies, local people defuse them by walking along with long sticks and tapping the ground until they find one. Finley related walking in the fields and hearing a mine go off — and not being sure if it was being defused or if someone had accidentally stepped on it.

The district hospitals, according to Finley, are seeing dozens of people every day who have "lost an eye or had a hand or foot blown off." The government estimates it will take five years to eliminate all the mines, he said.