

Vietnam Riot: Anti-G.I. Feelings Boil Over

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QUINHON, South Vietnam, Dec. 13—To most Vietnamese in this crowded, ugly province capital on the South China Sea, the American soldier is a big foreigner who drives recklessly through town, yanks the hair of their daughters, knocks hats off old men, smokes marijuana constantly, calls them "Dinks" and sometimes kills innocent people.

To most of the American

soldiers stationed here, a Vietnamese is a "cowboy" who tries to steal his watch or wallet, a 14-year-old girl who sells pot and heroin outside the PX, a hard-faced shopkeeper who can't speak English, a "hootch maid" who shines his shoes and loses his laundry, a waitress who never gets the bar order right and a prostitute who works across the road where the sign says "The customer is always right."

Against this background of

deep misconceptions, Quinhon erupted last Monday after an American soldier shot and killed a 12-year-old student, Nguyen Van Minh, who was sitting on the fence at his high school waiting for class. American officials said the boy was killed accidentally after the soldier fired warning shots to frighten other boys trying to steal from an army truck parked near the school.

The Vietnamese reaction to the incident reflected a

growing resentment in this country against the behavior of numerous American soldiers. Worse incidents have occurred. The alleged massacre at Mylai in 1968 caused more excitement outside of Vietnam than in it. But, as one Vietnamese said, "It is easier to galvanize anger over one individual than it is over one hundred."

The fatal shooting here touched off two days of demonstrations and riots by high school students, who were later joined by adults long embittered by what they call the "bad Americans." For nine hours on Monday, the student's bloody body was carried around the city in a macabre procession.

Local officials tried to calm the swelling crowd and the police used tear gas. But tempers rose, and on Tuesday a crowd of up to 3,000 stoned some Americans,

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burned an Army jeep, damaged several trucks, shouted anti-American slogans and sacked Jimmy's American Bar. They also broke windows at a hotel occupied by American civilian contractors, three of whom were rescued from the hotel roof by helicopter.

By Wednesday, the city was under a 24-hour curfew as word came that South Korean soldiers had killed a school girl in a village 12 miles away. American soldiers were confined to their nearby base. American civilians fled to military quarters. And a small crowd attended the boy's funeral.

Compensation for Family

United States officials apologized for the shooting, paid the equivalent of \$170 for the funeral and \$340 in compensation to the boy's relatives. By Friday, the soldier who allegedly fired the fatal shot, Pfc. Yzaguirre Jr., of Brownsville, Tex., was charged with negligent homicide.

Many Vietnamese here offered the same analogy in explaining why this incident rather than others brought

the people into the streets with such banners as "Down With American Brutality."

"The killing" they said, "was like that last drop of water in a full glass that caused it to overflow."

Thich Tam Hoang, a leading Buddhist Monk in the militant anti-Government An Quang faction, said that many past incidents had occurred in the countryside where it was difficult for people to raise their voices without being labeled Communists. This time, he said, the students mobilized themselves easily and carried with them, not only the body of their colleague, but the sympathies of most of the 200,000 people in this city.

Like Stepped on Worms

"The people have been suffering in silence," he said. "The people were backed against the wall. We are like worms that have been stepped on. Somehow, we felt there should be a strong reaction. The resentment has accumulated for years."

"The students did what we could not do," a housewife said.

The outbursts here also reflect the political complexion and history in this area. Quinhon, about 250 miles northeast of Saigon, is the capital of Binh Dinh Province, one of the enclaves held by the Vietminh against the French.

When Vietnam was divided in 1954, the province was one of the regroupment areas where the Vietminh gathered, one group going North and the other remaining in the South to establish the foundation for the Vietcong. About 60 per cent of the people in the province are said to have close relatives connected with the Communists—brothers, fathers and sisters. The four nephews of the dead student's mother, herself once jailed as a Communist sympathizer, were killed by South Vietnamese troops.

"These are volatile, proud, embittered, aggressive people up here," said an American adviser. "They have a tradition of activism and he..."

across from the school, said that "Americans consider Vietnamese lives very lightly."

"The death of an innocent civilian really doesn't count much to them," he added.

"The Americans used to have fun by pulling our hats as they drove past," said Tran Quang Phuoc, a cyclo driver who pedals for a living over the potholes of the city's dirt roads. "We stopped wearing our hats. I was also stoned by them from time to time, but that did not hurt much. We are like mice and the Americans are like cats. We are their playthings."

American soldiers—some 10,000 support troops are stationed in the area — acknowledge that the Vietnamese have some legitimate complaints. But, in turn, they cite incidents of theft by many youngsters who reach into jeeps to try to steal watches or jump on the back of trucks to steal C rations. They also talk of the general revulsion they feel when they see "draft-dodging pimps riding around on Hondas while we make all the sacrifices."

Vicious Greed Prevalent

The incidence of crime in Quinhon is recognized by all. One Vietnamese newspaper this week said that "vicious greed is even more prevalent there than it is in Saigon."

"I think the root of the trouble is that we don't want to be here and they don't want us here," one corporal said.

Another view came from Maj. Ronald Copes of Hartford, a black adviser in a nearby district, who first served in Vietnam in an infantry division three years ago.

"On my first tour, I did not want any Vietnamese even coming close," he said. "I felt you didn't know friend from enemy. I would shy away from them all, including that girl in the mess hall.

"Now, as an adviser, I'm working with them. They trust me and I trust them. I eat their food in the villages and they seem surprised but delighted. And my view has changed. I

think differently now. They are a reserved, complicated people. But they are clever. They'll hold back until they know what your reaction will be. If it's friendly, they'll be friendly."

Apart from the civilians who work for private contractors, the only Americans that people in Quinhon see are those who drive through town in their jeeps and trucks on official business. The city itself has been off limits since the fall of 1969, not because of threats from the Vietcong, but because of a series of race riots among American troops fighting over bar girls.

The news of any incident involving an American and a local resident, however, travels fast no matter where it happens in the area.

In June, American soldiers killed a nearby hamlet chief with a grenade fired from a moving convoy. About a month ago, another convoy supplying units in the field apparently had some troubles with members of the unpaid local militia. One Vietnamese was shot in the foot. No matter what happened, the people here think the Americans did it deliberately.

Some Blame Withdrawal

Ironically, some Americans believe that the resentment here stems in part from anxiety over the visible evidence of the American withdrawal from Vietnam. They say those not sympathetic to the Communists worry about the future. They say others are worrying about their jobs.

The Fourth Division is now leaving the province. Trucks and jeeps are lined up on the docks waiting to be shipped out. The refuse of war—broken treads of tanks and armored carriers, rusty wheel rims and other scrap—is piled along the sea.

"When the Americans were doing all the fighting here and building up in force," said one American official, "there was a willingness among the Vietnamese to endure the occasional insult and unfortunate accident. Now that we are leaving, they are less willing to put up with it. Tensions have built up. I think it's best that we're going."