

# The Marines Stand Fast



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## *The 'New Breed' Aids Vietnamization And Free Government*

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By LEWIS W. WALT

WASHINGTON—Marines are facing new challenges. Transition is the keyword, undiminished professionalism is the standard. For the marines and for the Corps, the commandant set a minimum requirement: lean, tough, professional, disciplined, fully combat-ready. In spite of troop withdrawals that have reduced the Marine Corps commitment from a 1968 high of 86,730 to the present strength of 24,800, the marines' pacification and Vietnamization efforts continue.

The over-all aim is to establish a strong, viable Vietnamese society which will withstand Vietcong and North Vietnamese aggression after the departure of United States forces. The marines continue to help the Vietnamese themselves to create the conditions for protecting and rebuilding their own nation.

Marines provided continuous training in various courses including leadership, artillery, engineering, and reconnaissance techniques to South Vietnamese units in the I Corps or northern area. They devoted thousands of man hours to humanitarian endeavors such as building and assisting schools, orphanages, and hospitals. As the marines continued putting pressure on the enemy, more and more Vietnamese voluntarily moved into areas under South Vietnamese Government control and away from Vietcong efforts to control and intimidate them.

posed by the Tet offensive. This did not occur and by the fall of 1969, 60,000 American troops were being withdrawn without any sign of South Vietnam falling apart.

With our help, the South Vietnamese Army has acquired new equipment, better training, and most important—increased confidence; the Vietnamese have pushed into the countryside. But the true meaning of their success is the skill and professionalism in the way they have broken the power of the Communists in the rural areas throughout the countryside. The dramatic upsurge in confidence and morale which became apparent after the Cambodian sanctuary operations has yet to be fully appreciated; it will be increasingly apparent in the future.

The Communists have for years been using Laos and Cambodia as sanctuaries to attack and kill Americans in South Vietnam. The situation grew worse and the Communist forces spread out from the base areas. The decision was made to enter Cambodia and destroy the enemy arms and ammunition stored there. As a result of the capture of over 2,500 crew-served weapons and over fourteen million rounds of ammunition, these weapons and arms can never be used against the American men left in Vietnam. Our enemies now have no safe sanctuaries. The forces of freedom in South Vietnam are stronger than they have ever been. Vietnamization is working and working well. We are going to gain the victory in South Vietnam.

Vietnamization is not just a matter of replacing American troops with Vietnamese troops in the war. It means a progressive buildup of South Vietnamese capability for their future defense and development so that they can stand on their own feet, resist outside interference and give their

For the last 22 months, the Commander in Chief has reduced troop levels in South Vietnam by 165,000 men. The American combat role has decreased. Vietnamization is alive and well in Vietnam. It is only necessary to look back to March of 1968 when 200,000 additional troops were requested to combat the threat im-

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people the opportunity to choose their own way of life.

In Vietnam, from the very start, marines found themselves fighting a war of contrasts. On the one hand, it was an extremely sophisticated war with complex weapons unlike even World War II or Korea. On the other hand, it was a return to medieval war pitting man against man on a battle ground where only the courageous could win. It had also been another kind of a war. One in which we were winning the hearts and minds of the people.

The servicemen committed to Vietnam have fulfilled the pledges expressed by three Presidents:

- Preserve the freedom of the people of South Vietnam.
- To prevent the imposition of any government by outside force or terror.
- Prevent the spread of Communism.

As for our marines' morale, no war in our history has been so beclouded by questions, doubts, and frustration, but one fact is indisputable. It comes through loud and clear. That is the performance of our young marines, and likewise that of our sister services. The actions of this new generation of young Americans in the heat of battle has been simply magnificent. I know the old breed in our midst will agree that today's combat marine has faced a more demanding situation than those who have preceded him into battle, yet he has never faltered.

Our marines have accomplished their assigned missions and are now being withdrawn in an orderly manner as they are replaced by Vietnamese. This could well be called a limited war but certainly not a holding action. The III Marine Amphibious Force is still actively engaged. It is my belief that the President is pulling our forces out as rapidly as the situation merits.

So, for the Marine Corps, I think you will agree that the challenge of Vietnamization is not going unmet. The Vietnamese are a proud, courageous and determined people. Their endurance in the face of hardship and deprivation is impossible to translate into terms of the American experience. The people of Vietnam will seize the opportunity and, as the masters of their own destiny, will emerge as a bastion of the free world in Southeast Asia.

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