

'Journey for Peace'

By RONALD REAGAN

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—It is ironic that the man who has just completed the longest journey for peace in our nation's history should be blamed for a war which he did not begin—and a war which he more than any of his predecessors in the White House has worked so desperately to end.

But there are many ironies in the Vietnam situation. One is the strange logic of the few here at home who riot, bomb and burn to demonstrate their devotion to peace.

Another is the singular lack of historical knowledge of those who tell us that the best way to preserve peace and freedom is to throw away our weapons and turn our backs upon our armed aggressors.

And certainly one cannot escape the irony in the oratory of those who must bear their share of the responsibility for involvement in Vietnam, and ask the American people to forget the past and press them to lead us out of the conflict.

It is particularly disturbing to me that so many of our young people have been so tragically misinformed about Vietnam, its history, the events leading to our involvement there, and the efforts that President Nixon has made to end that involvement without abandoning our men, our allies and our national honor. They are unaware of the so-called "land reforms" during which the Communist slaughtered 50,000 peasants and imprisoned a half-million others in labor camps and of the Vietminh campaign of terror and murder to eliminate all political opposition.

They overlook or simply don't know that North Vietnam has blatantly violated the Geneva accords of 1945 and that the South Vietnamese and the United States refused to sign the agreements because the Reds would not allow free, internationally supervised elections.

I remember a conversation I had with one young man who was convinced that the United States was embarked on a path of world imperialism in Southeast Asia and that we, not the Reds, were the invaders. I asked him to suppose that the Soviets or Red Chinese had proposed a settlement with the following terms:

- The United States would provide Hanoi with a timetable for withdrawing all American forces in exchange for a cease-fire and prisoner exchange;

- The United States would call for Presidential elections within months after the cease-fire to be supervised by an independent international body,

and pledge that the leaders of South Vietnam would resign a month before the election and agree to adopt the nonalignment provisions of the Geneva accords.

- The United States would then participate in a massive reconstruction program to rebuild Southeast Asia as we did in Europe after World War II.

"What would you think of that?" I asked him. The young man responded with enthusiasm. It was, he said, a far more sensible proposal that couldn't help but bring peace.

He was completely unaware that this proposal had been placed before Hanoi's representatives at the Paris conferences months ago by the United States.

How did Hanoi respond? By launching a massive invasion of South Vietnam with its entire regular army whose members were equipped with the most sophisticated weapons its Red allies could supply.

When President Nixon began his long journey for peace, he discovered that there was no effective program to train the South Vietnamese to defend themselves.

He took the immediate steps to remedy the situation and at the same time he began the orderly withdrawal of American troops.

Since then more than a half million American servicemen have returned home and the withdrawal is continuing despite the invasion.

When Hanoi's army swarmed over the demilitarized zone in violation of every agreement made at Geneva and launched rocket and artillery attacks upon the cities of South Vietnam, the President acted swiftly and courageously.

I believe that the overwhelming majority of the American people who desire peace as greatly as he desires it and has worked for it will support him.

Upon his return from that "great national journey for peace," the President made it clear that the United States would not abandon its allies nor will it turn its back upon the small nations who look to the United States to maintain the peace that will allow them to prosper and survive. He more than any other man knows that freedom cannot exist anywhere in the world if the world's most powerful nation fails to protect its own men on a distant battlefield or if it disregards the sacrifices they have made so that others can live as free men.

Ronald Reagan is Governor of California.