

The War We May Be Winning

By Joseph Alsop

WASHINGTON.

ALTHOUGH no one seems to pay much attention any longer, American troops are in daily combat in the war in South Viet Nam. What is more, there begins to be some hope of winning this war, which seemed so hopeless at the outset.

So far it is only a case of beginning to see a glimmer of light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. But even the most pessimistic officials at the State Department and Pentagon now admit that the glimmer is really there. Part of this better atmosphere is due to the recent Washington visit of the able Vietnamese Secretary of Defense, Nguyen Dinh Thuan.

The points that Secretary Thuan stressed as encouraging will seem a bit bewildering to anyone who is not familiar with the kind of guerrilla warfare that is going on in Viet Nam. To begin with, the price of rice has fallen sharply, and this is the first time in 15 years that the rice price has dropped at this season.

All over Viet Nam rice merchants have been hoarding their stocks, expecting prices to go higher because of the Communist policy of preventing rice deliveries from the countryside to the larger centers. The merchants are hastily unloading now, before the major rice harvest, because they have concluded that the Communists are losing their former power to disrupt the rice trade.

Books filled with military intelligence are less valuable than this kind of practical indicator of the course of the struggle. It is confirmed by other comparable indicators, all showing that

normal commerce is beginning to be re-established. And these, in turn, are reinforced by Secretary Thuan's report on an enormous increase in volunteers for the Vietnamese army's NCO and officers training schools.

The fact that the Vietnamese government can now pick and choose among several thousand volunteers, where candidates formerly had to be drafted, has two important meanings. The volunteers no longer seriously fear the brutal Communist reprisals against soldiers' families, which have long been standard practice. And in the volunteers' villages of origin, the people are beginning to expect the Communists to be beaten in the end.

In short, there is a favorable movement at the grass roots, with which the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem is always accused of not being in touch. The reason for this favorable movement is not far to seek, either.

The Diem government, which is also accused of "not trusting" the people, has in fact been organizing the villagers in semi-fortified "strategic hamlets," and has been giving arms to the village militias—which is not a usual sign of distrust. In the provinces where the strategic hamlet program is well advanced, the newly-armed villagers have been killing more Communists than the regular army. In sum, when given the means to defend themselves against the Communists, the Vietnamese people are doing just that.

None of this would be possible, of course, without the American aid program which Congress is now so anxious to hamstring. The strategic hamlets scheme would not even begin to work, either, without the parallel effort of the U. S. commander in Viet Nam, Gen.

Paul D. Harkins, to liberate the Vietnamese army from its old defensive positions and to take the offensive against the Communists wherever possible.

Interestingly enough, Gen. Harkins is more optimistic, if anything, than his Vietnamese co-workers. While here, Secretary Thuan gave the estimate that the Communist guerrilla movement in South Viet Nam could be decisively destroyed by two or three more years of hard work. At one of the recent Hawaii meetings of U. S. officials with responsibilities bearing on the Vietnamese war, Gen. Harkins said that job could be done "within one year after the army attains a fully offensive footing."

Maybe hopes are now running too high. The real situation in Viet Nam will be tested in October and November, when the weather will offer the Communists their best chance to stage major attacks, if they still have the capability. Furthermore, present hopes are based on the assumption that the Communist North Vietnamese will not raise the stakes in the game, by even more overt aggression against South Viet Nam.

All the same, this war is beginning to have a very faint, just barely detectable smell of the wars against Communist guerrillas in Greece and the Philippines. In the Greek and Philippine cases, a great many virtuous, woolly-minded persons kept loudly insisting, until the very moment of final victory, that victory was utterly impossible. The loudest voices now discussing South Viet Nam belong to persons of this sort, and some, indeed, belong to the very same persons.

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TAYLOR HOPEFUL ON VIETNAM FIGHT

Sees Need to Shift Later to Economic Problems

By DAVID HALBERSTAM
Special to The New York Times.

SAIGON, Vietnam, Sept. 13—Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor gave an optimistic report today on the military aspects of South Vietnam's fight against Communist guerrillas.

Once additional progress is made in the military area and more protection is offered to Vietnamese peasants, the general said, there must be a shift to economic and social problems where "there is a good deal of work to be done."

General Taylor, who will take over as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff next month, said he did not foresee any basic increase in American military assistance to the war effort here.

The general, who is on a tour of Asia, concluded a two-and-a-half-day visit to this country and left for Cambodia.

Studies U. S. Program

In Vietnam he inspected a program of American advisory and logistic support to the Government that to a large extent grew out of his own recommendations almost a year ago.

At a news conference today the general praised the Vietnamese effort and discredited reports that there had been frequent tension between the Vietnamese and their American advisers.

"One has to be here personally," he said, "to sense the growing national character, the resistance of the Vietnamese peo-

ple to the subversive insurgency threat. My over-all impression is of a great national movement, assisted to some extent, of course, by Americans, but essentially a movement by Vietnamese to defend Vietnam against a dangerous and cruel enemy."

He said he was particularly pleased with the progress in building "strategic hamlets" which are protected village areas to give peasants security against the Communist Vietcong.

"Beyond Our Hopes"

This plan, he said, "has grown far beyond our hopes of a few months ago." The general said he had been told that 5,000 hamlets either were fortified or were being fortified. He termed the figure "very impressive."

He appeared reluctant to answer questions on political progress in Vietnam. Critics of the President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime have charged that the Government is failing to win the allegiance of the peasants.

The Government position is that security must come first and that reform will follow.

In answer to a question he said:

"Once we get the hamlets well protected, then obviously there is a good deal of work to be done in the social and economic fields. I believe the emphasis will shift from military more to economic and social activities."

General Taylor said he was concerned over reports of the entry of Communist guerrillas into Vietnam from Laos. "That's a No. 1 question, the permeability and character of movements across that frontier." He said such movements were hard to detect "but we are watching very closely."

Vietnam Balance Sheet

Cautious Optimism Voiced by U. S. in War on Reds

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

United States spokesmen voiced cautious optimism about the course of the war in Vietnam last week. The optimism was based on some long-term appraisals and on a success in the field — a helicopter operation that resulted in lopsidedly heavy losses for the Communists. But the balance sheet in Vietnam contains a great many red-ink entries from the United States point of view and it is clear that the tide has not yet clearly turned against the Communists.

Roger Hilsman Jr., Director of Intelligence and Research for the State Department, has summarized the favorable indicators in Vietnam more completely and clearly than had any Government spokesman previously.

Mr. Hilsman, a former Army officer, fought as a guerrilla in Burma during World War II. Of the Administration's spokesmen he has been the most cogent and practical about counter-insurgency and guerrilla warfare. A talk he gave in Chicago emphasized, with cautious optimism, the gains made in South Vietnam and underscored the problems still to be solved.

He estimated that there were 15,000 to 20,000 "hard-core full-time Communist guerrillas in South Vietnam and many thousands more sympathizers, part-time Communist guerrillas and political and propaganda agents."

Accomplishments Listed

The positive accomplishments in the war against the Communist Vietcong he listed as follows:

¶Training and equipment "with modern weapons," of about 7,000 montagnards (the mountain peoples of South Vietnam) who had fled into the lowlands to escape the Vietcong; about 3,000 more montagnards are beginning the training course; 23,000 square miles of their own hill territory has been brought back "under the montagnards' protection," and in four months the total may be 40,000 square miles.

¶More than 2,000 "strategic hamlets," each with its own crude fortifications and self-defense forces, have been built—half of them now equipped with radios. None of these armed vil-

lages "has gone over" to the Communists; not one has sold its arms to the Communists. All of the armed villages so far attacked by the Communists have "fought well," and only "5 per cent of the village radios have been lost as a result of Vietcong action," a rate far lower than expected.

¶During one week in August, "over 600 Vietcong were killed as against less than 100 killed among the pro-Government forces," and two-thirds of the Communist losses were caused by "villagers armed through the strategic village program."

¶The defection rate of the Vietcong has risen and the recruitment rate has gone down.

¶In the last two months areas of South Vietnam have become safe that only last spring could not have been entered without a company of armed guards.

'A Long Way to Go'

Mr. Hilsman tempered these favorable indicators by stressing the difficulties peculiar to all guerrilla wars and by adding "there is a long way to go."

The other side of the coin supports the estimate that the conflict will be long and hard. The unfavorable factors follow:

¶South Vietnam, unlike Malaya, is contiguous to Commu-

or potential sanctuaries (or bases) for the Communists, secure against South Vietnamese or United States attack.

¶Communist supply lines — though difficult from the point of view of terrain—are many and have not been seriously interrupted. Men, arms and equipment cross the South Vietnamese frontiers from all directions — on land and by sea, along the deeply indented jungled coast and even across the Gulf of Thailand.

¶In the first six months of this year, semi-official figures indicate, the Vietcong captured, bought or procured in South Vietnam itself (exclusive of external supply) considerably more arms of all types than they lost.

¶The fortified hamlet, or strategic village, program has a long way to go before it can be effective. In Malaya only a very small fraction of the population—a clearly distinguishable ethnic minority, the Chinese — had to be regrouped and kept out of contact with the guerrillas. In South Vietnam, virtually the entire village population of a country of 14,000,000 people must be provided some protection.

¶The withdrawal of United States forces from Laos and the so-called neutralization of that country may lead to a very large transfer of Communist forces from Laos into South Vietnam. Indeed, many observers expect a marked strengthening and regrouping of the Communist effort in South Vietnam in the next few months.

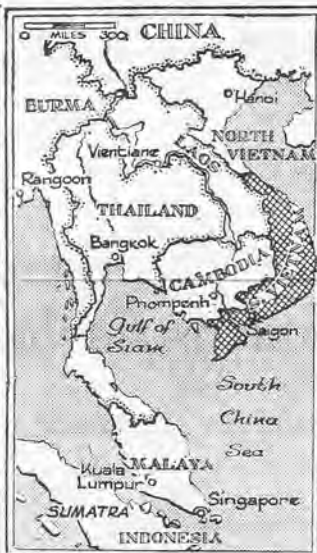
More Troops Needed

Col. Edwin F. Black, United States Army, now on duty in South Vietnam, points out in an article in the October issue of United States Naval Institute Proceedings, that all prior guerrilla experience since World War II has indicated the need for a numerical superiority on the part of the counterinsurgency forces of between 10 and 20 to 1. This superiority has not yet been achieved in Vietnam.

Colonel Black also states that "the problem of command and control at the Washington level of a counter-insurgency operation has never really been solved."

Finally, the political, psychological and social measures which are essential to win positive support for the Government from the people of South Vietnam have so far had some, but inconclusive, effects.

The Vietnam balance sheet today indicates a protracted conflict.



The New York Times Sept. 28, 1962
Embattled South Vietnam is shown by cross-hatching.

nist North Vietnam and to Cambodia and Laos. With the so-called neutralization of Laos, all of these areas are now actual

Prospects in Vietnam

As the tempo of the undeclared war in South Vietnam quickens, the American-aided forces seem to be fighting now with more effectiveness. Administrative improvements by the Saigon Government, an increasing number of strategic hamlets and an anti-Vietcong shift among the tribesmen of the northern plateau are among the other new factors in the struggle against the Vietcong.

A year ago there were strong indications the Communists expected soon to control a "liberated area" in South Vietnam large enough to give sanctuary to a jungle government that would spearhead North Vietnam's takeover of the South. The "liberated area" has not been achieved. Hanoi's propaganda has now changed from preoccupation with military victory to talk about ending the Vietnam war through international negotiations and the installation of a neutral, "independent" regime at Saigon.

None of these developments justifies the conclusion that the Vietcong are about to be defeated. Despite the battles they have lost, the Communists in South Vietnam are a bigger and better armed force than they were a year ago, dominating three-fifths of the land area and almost a third of the population of South Vietnam. They are capable of increasing their effectiveness by adjusting tactics and adding to their military capacity. The anti-Communist forces may have stopped losing the war; it is premature to say we have begun to win it.

Americans must continue to be prepared for deep and protracted involvement in South Vietnam. Ultimate victory will require more than technological effectiveness. The war, as President Ngo has told the South Vietnam National Assembly, is one in which "ideas play a role as decisive as arms." This means, for the Saigon Government, efforts to gain increased popular cooperation by good government, by demonstrating that a non-Communist way can be better than Communist regimentation. Such efforts are essential if this war ever is to be won.

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