A Marine's Guide To The REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

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INTRODUCTION

If you have just received orders assigning you to a Marine unit in Vietnam, many questions will undoubtedly come to mind: "What is it like down there?", "What will I be doing?", "Why are the Marines in Vietnam?", or, "What has changed since my last tour?".

To begin with, the Republic of Vietnam is located in Southeast Asia or what used to be French Indochina. It is bordered on the south and east by the South China Sea, on the west by Laos and Cambodia and on the north by Communist North Vietnam. South Vietnam is divided into four military corps zones as shown on the attached map but, at present, Marine Corps interest is centered in I Corps. A detailed description of I Corps is contained in later paragraphs. To possess a clearer understanding of the struggle in Vietnam, the reader must look back into the history of the area.

Much of Vietnam's history is the story of its relations with China, its vastly larger and more powerful neighbor to the north. The Vietnamese for many centuries have both admired China for her culture and feared her for her power. During the thousand years that the Vietnamese were ruled by China (second century BC to tenth century AD), they adopted much of the Chinese culture but were not absorbed into the Chinese race as were the people of the Canton area. Winning free of Chinese control in 1038 AD the Vietnamese maintained their independence for the next 800 years with the knowledge that it was held more or less at the whim of China. Varying degrees of Chinese influence prevailed throughout these years until the French military takeover which began in 1858. By 1900 the French had consolidated what are now North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia into French Indochina but armed insurrections by nationalist oriented Vietnamese prevented a real peace from settling over the new French colony.

During the years of French rule, many nationalist-inspired political groups formed which had one purpose in mind, the freedom of Vietnam. Hidden among these groups was the Communist inspired League of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth founded in Canton, China in 1926 by a man known today as Ho Chi Minh. For the next 20 years, considerable in-fighting occurred among the various political groups. Finally the upper hand was gained by the Communists. In 1940, the strategic control of Indochina was passed from the French. This was done by an agreement struck between Japan and the Vichy regime, a puppet government set up by the
Nazis to rule France during World War II.

The old saying that "War makes strange bedfellows" was never as true as during the Second World War. Ho Chi Minh offered to provide intelligence information from his sources in Vietnam on Japanese activities to the Allied forces in exchange for money and arms. This offer was accepted and the small amount of aid received from the U. S. and Nationalist China was used to mold and strengthen the Communist "Viet Minh" as it was now called. The Viet Minh began waging limited guerrilla warfare under the leadership of Vo Nguyen Giap against the Japanese. Increasing numbers of patriotic non-Communists joined or at least supported the Viet Minh as the true independence movement of Vietnam. Capitalizing on the anti-colonialist propaganda organized by Moscow, the Viet Minh claimed to be fighting only against economic misery and for national liberation. They were not recognized by the Vietnamese as representing an alien force.

When it became obvious in March of 1945 that they were losing the war, the Japanese interned all French officials and troops, bringing an abrupt end to French rule in Indochina. Following this, the Japanese set up a Vietnamese named Bao Dai as emperor of Vietnam. He proclaimed Vietnamese independence under Japanese "protection". Bao Dai failed to form an effective government as a result of differences of opinion among his subordinates and the outside pressure of the Viet Minh. Bao Dai felt that the only means of preventing the return of French control was a united and independent nation. Recognizing only the nationalistic character of the Viet Minh, he decided to abdicate in its favor and, on August 23, 1945, handed over his imperial seal and other symbols of office to Ho Chi Minh.

The French, however, had no intention of giving up Indochina and prevailed upon the Allies to allow their reoccupation of the former colony. In late September 1945, French troops landed in Saigon at about the same time Nationalist Chinese troops entered Vietnam from the north to disarm the Japanese. Vietnamese of every political persuasion rose up in defense of their newly won independence, but with British assistance, the French managed to gain control of all strategic points in the South. In the North, the Chinese were dealing directly with the provisional government which had been established by Ho Chi Minh in August of 1945. In February 1946, a Franco-Chinese agreement was concluded whereby China supported France's return to Indochina in exchange for the surrender
of all France's extra-territorial rights in China. Faced with the loss of Chinese support, the Viet Minh were forced to negotiate with the French. In March, 1946, French troops landed in the North. Immediately differences developed between the French and Viet Minh forces. Although an attempt was made to settle the difficulties that arose between the two forces, it was destined to fail as neither side was willing to submit to the other. Ho Chi Minh decided to risk a long war of liberation and on December 19, 1946, the Viet Minh launched the first attack. The war touched off by this attack lasted for eight years and caused the Vietnamese unending misery. It was financially disastrous to France, still suffering from the destruction of WW II, and cost her 35,000 killed and 48,000 wounded. The battle of Dien Bien Phu, at which the French suffered a heavy defeat both psychologically and militarily, brought an end to the fighting.

The cease fire negotiated at Geneva on 20 July 1954 ended the war and partitioned Vietnam at the 17th parallel, with the Communist Viet Minh in the north and the non-Communists in the south. It further provided for a total evacuation north of the 17th parallel by the forces of the French and the State of Vietnam (now the Republic of Vietnam), as well as the evacuation of the south by the Viet Minh. In addition, an understanding supplementing the conference agreements provided for free elections in 1956 to re-establish the unity of the country.

Final negotiations for the armistice were made directly between the French high command and the Viet Minh. The truce agreement was reached over the objections and without the concurrence of the State of Vietnam which advocated United Nations control until such time as free elections could be held. The United States refused to sign, but agreed to observe the substance of the agreement and stated that a grave view would be taken of any attempt to use force to upset it.

Despite the terms of the Geneva Agreement, the Viet Minh had other ideas for the newly established government of South Vietnam. Caches of arms and equipment and groups of the best guerrilla fighters (estimated at 2,500 men) were left behind in the remote jungles of the delta and in the highlands. When the State of Vietnam, which had signed none of the Geneva Agreements, objected to holding elections for unifying North and South in which more than half of the population would go to the polls subject to Communist coercion, Ho ordered these guerrillas into action. Propaganda and terrorist
campaigns began in late 1956 to persuade the people to oppose the government of the Republic of Vietnam. This marked the transition of the Viet Minh to the Viet Cong.

The Viet Cong - remaining Communist guerrillas, Party members, and their supporters - unlike the Viet Minh who had struggled to defeat a colonial power within its own boundaries, now launched a campaign to topple the government of a free nation. Open admission of Communist ties and acceptance of Communist aid from both China and the Soviet Union also marked this transition.

Viet Cong propaganda, terrorism and guerrilla activities increased in tempo throughout the late 50's, and by 1960, battalion size operations were being conducted. Infiltration of military reinforcements and materials from the north was stepped up and by 1962, the Viet Cong numbered about 25,000. Terrorism, sabotage and armed attacks reached new heights despite vigorous government efforts at control. Any official worker or establishment that represented a service to the people by the government in Saigon became fair game for the VC.

Between 1963 and 1965, internal political struggles in the government of the Republic of Vietnam gave the VC invaluable opportunities which they fully exploited. Their agents did all they could to encourage dissatisfaction and organised demonstrations in Saigon and elsewhere. In the countryside the VC consolidated their hold over some areas and enlarged their military and political apparatus by increased infiltration and penetration of other areas. They expanded their various campaigns against the people and the government.

Today the war in Vietnam has reached new proportions with the outright participation of thousands of North Vietnamese regular troops as well as weapons and equipment provided by Communist nations. Although the facade of nationalism remains in the Viet Cong insurgency, it is clearly being directed by Hanoi and Peiping. The tiny Republic of Vietnam has been publicly singled out by Communist leaders as the next to submit to them in their program of attempted world domination.

The United States has honored its commitments to support the Geneva Agreement and has aided the government of the Republic of Vietnam in its struggle to establish peace. However, to the Peiping leaders, a new dimension had been added to the conflict, that of
proving the United States a "Paper Tiger". It has been said in Peiping, that the objective in Vietnam is the capitulation of the United States. The United States is not going to capitulate and will continue to meet its commitment of assisting the government and people of the Republic of Vietnam in preserving their independence.

For this purpose, and this purpose alone, United States Marines were landed on the shores of Vietnam on 8 March 1965.
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM ARMED FORCES

THE GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION: Political power in the government of Vietnam (GVN) is concentrated at the national level; most important decisions and major programs originate and are directed from Saigon. The prime minister is the real head of the government and is assisted in the development of policies, decisions, and programs which are then passed to the lower echelons of the government - corps, province, district, village and hamlet - for execution.

The first command level of government below Saigon is the corps - each of the four corps commanders acts as the government representative in his Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). Not all instructions originating at the national level pass through the corps headquarters. Routine administrative instructions from the various ministers in Saigon normally go direct to the province chief, bypassing the corps and division headquarters which are primarily concerned with tactical operations. There are 44 provinces in the country. Below the provinces, the next subdivision of government is the district, which is similar to our county. Districts are divided into villages, with an average of 8 to 12 per district. Villages normally consist of 4 - 6 hamlets. Historically, the hamlet has been the most important organization to the Vietnamese peasant. The boundaries of a hamlet are not always clear; it may be compared to what we describe as a "neighborhood".

THE ARMED FORCES: The military power of the Republic of Vietnam is made up of the three main elements: Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, the Regional Forces and the Popular Forces, as well as elements of other militia or paramilitary organizations. Each of these elements has a specific role in the overall strategy for defeating the VC and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) main force units, the VC local force units and the guerrillas.

Army of the Republic of Vietnam: ARVN, the Vietnamese regular army, is primarily an infantry force, consisting of 10 infantry divisions plus separate infantry, airborne, ranger and armored units. ARVN units are often committed to securing areas where civilian police or pacification teams are operating and defending key installations or supply and communication routes. ARVN operations are closely coordinated with the local GVN province officials to insure that they support the local efforts and do not endanger local government forces.
MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) advisory teams work with all ARVN forces, normally down to battalion level, but in certain instances even at company level. These advisors provide a ready point of contact in coordinating combined operations.

The Vietnamese Air Force: The Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) includes four tactical wings; each is organized differently and may include any number of fighter, helicopter, and transport squadrons. Fighter squadrons can engage designated targets with a combination of general purpose, fragmentation, concussion, incendiary, delayed action and fire (Napalm) bombs, rockets and 20mm cannon fire. The transport squadrons provide a capability for air dropping troops, equipment and supplies, flare drops for illumination of target areas in support of offensive air strikes and ground operations, and for air movement of troops, equipment, supplies and officials. The liaison squadrons are capable of performing forward air control, visual reconnaissance and liaison operations. Helicopter squadrons, equipped with H-34 aircraft, furnish a limited capability for air movement of troops, equipment and supplies throughout RVN.

MACV advisors work with the VNAF at all echelons, often accompanying them on missions. They provide a ready point of contact for liaison or coordination.

Vietnamese Navy: The Vietnamese Navy (VNN) is primarily a defensive force, consisting of a small sea force for offshore counterinfiltration surveillance along the coast from the 17th parallel to the Cambodian border, a coastal force - - the junk fleet - - for patrolling of inshore coastal waterways, and a river force for inland waterway operations. The river force is organized into seven River Assault Groups (RAGs). Each RAG is capable of transporting by water a battalion of RVNAF and supporting them for 10 - 14 days. MACV advisors work with the VNN sea, coastal and river forces; they are a coordination contact for combined and joint operations.

Vietnamese Marine Corps: The Vietnamese Marine Corps consists of one brigade of six infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, and one amphibious support battalion. U. S. Marines attached to the Marine Advisory Group (a part of MACV) work with the Vietnamese Marines and accompany them on all operations. The brigade is stationed in the Saigon area and conducts operations in that area as well as special operations in other Corps Zones when required.
REGIONAL FORCES: The Regional Forces (RF) are a nationally administered military force assigned to and under the operational control of the sector commander (province chief). The basic combat unit of the RF is the light infantry company, though in certain provinces there are also a number of RF mechanized platoons, intelligence platoons and squads, and river patrol companies.

Normally RF units are recruited locally, placed under the operational control of the sub-sector commander (district chief), and habitually employed in the same general area. The primary missions given to RF units are to secure key installations and communication routes, to protect the local government officials and key people loyal to the government, and to provide a sub-sector reserve for assisting village or hamlet defense forces under attack. When ARVN or Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) units are operating in an area where RF are located, the RF can often contribute to the success of the operation through their detailed knowledge of the local terrain and people.

POPULAR FORCES: The Popular Forces (PF) are a nationally administered military force organized and operated at the village level and consisting of light infantry platoons. PF platoons are commanded by a PF platoon commander who is directly responsible to the district chief through the local village chief to whom the PF platoon is assigned. PF members are full time volunteers recruited within their native villages and hamlets to protect their own families and property. Though legally this force may be supplemented with draftees, its primary motivation stems from the fact that its members are recruited from the villages and hamlets in which they are stationed and in which their families live.

Because of their small size, light arms, and limited training, the combat capability of PF units is restricted to local defensive and counterattack operations. The basic concept of employment is for village platoons and hamlet squads to defend their own area with the inter-village platoons providing responsive reinforcement. Occasionally PF units may participate in operations with other forces. In such operations, which are normally undertaken to reinforce, support or relieve a village or hamlet under attack, the PF are employed to act as guides, lay ambushes, protect flanks, or provide a rear guard for the main body.

VIETNAMESE PARAMILITARY FORCES: The paramilitary
forces of the Republic of Vietnam include Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC), Armed Propaganda Teams (APT), National Police Forces (NPF), Police Field Forces (PFF), and Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG). Although each of these paramilitary organizations is different in composition and in its assigned responsibilities, their missions are all directed towards assisting both the Republic of Vietnam's civil and regular military forces in the prosecution of Revolutionary Development. The characteristics peculiar to each of these paramilitary organizations are as follows:

**Revolutionary Development Cadre:** The backbone of the Revolutionary Development program in the Republic of Vietnam is the RD cadre group. The cadre group possesses a limited defensive capability and is specifically trained in assisting villages and hamlets achieve the goals set by the national government's RD program. Within ICTZ, RD cadre groups are controlled and assigned by the province chief in accordance with the annual RD plan for the province. These 59-man RD cadre groups are assigned only to those villages/hamlets in which military forces are available to render protection, since RD cadre possess only a minimum defensive capability.

Upon entering a hamlet, the first order of business for the RD cadre is to take the census and interview the populace to determine their grievances and aspirations. The cadre determines the status of the local government officials and conducts a survey of the situation to determine needs. The remainder of the program builds on this base. The cadre continues to work with the local government, strengthening it and eventually sponsoring elections. The cadre also organizes self-help projects and obtains the material and funds necessary for their completion. The entire process can take up to one year or longer to complete in any village depending on the effectiveness of the cadre and the reception accorded them.

**Armed Propaganda Teams (APT):** The Armed Propaganda Teams are specially trained in psychological operations and propaganda warfare techniques to gain the support of the population for the GVN. These teams also have the capability of assisting village and hamlet chiefs in conducting census, gathering intelligence information and uncovering Viet Cong infrastructure within villages and hamlets. Although these teams have a minimum defensive capability, they are never employed without additional forces being provided.
National Police Forces (NPF): The National Police Forces are directed at the national level, with subordinate headquarters located in each province. National Police initiate and maintain population control and resources control, maintain law and order, prevent and control riots and sabotage of public security and, in conjunction with military forces and RD cadre, identify and eliminate VC infrastructure. National Police also augment PF and RD in their assigned missions.

Police Field Forces (PFF): The PFF are trained forces used to augment the National Police and free its technically skilled members for other more important duties consistent with their training.

Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG): The Civilian Irregular Defense Group is a local Vietnamese or ethnic paramilitary force that provides border security and surveillance primarily in the highland areas of South Vietnam. The CIDG is a nationally administered force advised by U. S. Army Special Forces personnel.

The Vietnamese have paid heavily in their long struggle against the Communist insurgents. Despite the costs, they retain their determination to be victorious. We are assisting them in all their efforts — militarily, economically, and politically — wherever we can, in the field, with the rural peoples, and at the governmental and military headquarters. Success will ultimately depend on the effectiveness of our joint and combined programs and operations.
THE COMBINED ACTION PROGRAM

The Combined Action program involves special units made up of both U. S. Marines and Popular Force personnel. The Combined Action concept was conceived to provide a sufficient force to occupy and control areas uncovered by the forward movement of the U. S. Marine and ARVN units and to assist in Revolutionary Development efforts within these areas. The primary mission of Combined Action organizations is local defense. In this connection, the Popular Force members of the Combined Action unit contribute to the combined effort by their knowledge of the local area, people, customs, government and Viet Cong activities. Marines contribute to the combined effort by training the PF and increasing the PF's combat effectiveness; the Marines are equipped with the necessary communications to call in artillery, air strikes, or reinforcements if required. Marine personnel are assigned to these units on a semi-permanent basis to permit sustained operations in a certain area and continued association with a particular group of people. The program is coordinated at all levels by Marine commanders and local Vietnamese officials.
The 1 Corps area as shown above is approximately 200 miles long and varies in width from 30 to 80 miles. The 1 Corps area can be divided into four geographic regions as follows: the coast, lowlands, piedmont and the jungle highlands.
The I Corps area, as is all of South Vietnam, is bounded on the east by the South China Sea. No general statement can be made to typify this coastal region as it varies considerably from place to place. In some locations, high cliffs rise up from the edge of the ocean while at others, low, sandy beaches extend inland to the area known as the lowland. For example, in the northern coastal region of I Corps, lagoons and tidal channels run parallel to the coast and are separated from the sea by a narrow sandy belt, while around the Danang area, mountain spurs from the highlands extend out to the sea giving a considerable variation in terrain over a short distance of coastline.

The beach extends inland for a considerable distance at Chu Lai.

In the flat areas along the coast, the beaches extend inland usually about 100 - 150 meters but can extend much further as is the case at Chu Lai where the soft sands reach inland some 4000 meters. Beyond these dune areas, one moves into the hinterland which is
actually the edge of the lowland areas. Generally the drainage is poor. Construction of dikes for rice raising has compounded the drainage problem. The various rice paddies in any given part of the coastal lowland region are flooded at different times; consequently there is no one period during which all of the land is dry and movement over land made easy. This surface water is either salty or contaminated by the fertilizer used in the fields.

Fishing is the main source of income for the people living on the coast, but most families have their own rice paddy. Numerous fishtraps, some quite elaborate, will be found throughout the bays, rivers, lagoons and canals of the coastal and lowlands areas. These should not be harmed if at all possible. The income of most of these coastal people is comparatively higher than the people of other regions. This fact, coupled with the need to have ports through which supplies from North Vietnam can be imported, makes the coastal area a desirable target for Viet Cong control.

THE LOWLANDS:

The lowland region of I Corps is made up of a narrow coastal plain stretching the entire length of the Corps area and of several valleys extending into the central highland. The region is quite fertile. Although it encompasses only about one-sixth of the total area of I Corps, virtually all of the crops are grown here. Rice is by far the principal crop encompassing 90% of the cultivated land. The remaining 10% is devoted mainly to the raising of tea, sugar cane, coffee, fruit trees, manioc, bananas and pineapples. The lowland region also contains the bulk (approximately 75%) of the I
Corps population which is estimated at over 2,200,000. Control of the lowlands would give the Viet Cong guerrilla the rice needed to sustain himself as well as considerable manpower to be forced into service as replacements.

Extensive rice fields exist in the lowland area.

It has been said of the lowlands region that if there is a piece of land that is not cultivated, it has a house built on it. This is not entirely true, however it is pretty close. Although there are some rain forests, most of the area has been turned into rice fields which are flooded throughout the northeast monsoon season (September through January). Rice fields are normally made up of a number of square paddies which, from the air look much like a checkerboard. They are constructed with dirt dikes separating each paddy so that they can be kept flooded. During the monsoon season, the paddies will usually have mud and water a foot to two feet deep making even foot movement quite difficult; however, troops must avoid being
canalized on the dikes. Moving across rice fields can be particularly critical operation, especially for a small unit on patrol such as a squad or platoon. When crossing, observe the basic principles of spreading out with a covering force in support. This will reduce the chances of an entire unit being pinned down in the open.

Besides the rice fields, sugar cane fields are in this area although not in such great numbers. When the cane is fully grown it offers excellent concealment of which the Viet Cong have often taken advantage. From a few feet inside a cane field, one can have excellent observation to the outside but cannot be observed himself. This is made to order for snipers and should be held in mind by Marines when operating in these areas.

Highway No. 1 and a railroad traverse the length of I Corps through the lowlands area. Highway No. 1 is the major artery of Vietnam linking the North to the South and is capable of supporting military vehicles the year round. However, it has been subjected to Viet Cong interdiction in the past and may not be open at any given time.

Marines cross flooded rice paddy.
The lowlands region is the strategic key to the control of I Corps. It is not large in comparison to the highland region, but it is agriculturally productive and contains the majority of the I Corps population. The individual rifleman can look to spending much time operating in this region.

THE PIEDMONT:

Piedmont is a term used to indicate the hilly terrain separating the jungle highlands from the lowlands. It is the narrow belt of foothills that fronts the highlands of the west. Stream activity in the Piedmont is similar to that in the jungle. Locating drinking water (all water must be purified) is no problem. The road system is limited, however, some dirt and rock surfaced roads do exist and are accessible to vehicles. The Piedmont is sparsely populated with the majority of the people living in the valleys between the hills.

This is typical of the terrain in the Piedmont region.

Most of the land in the hills is covered with a dense growth of trees that reach to height of 150 to 200 feet and form a dense canopy. Ordinarily, there is little undergrowth. Secondary growth which occupies abandoned fields and cutover land consists of very closely
spaced small trees together with vines and dense brush. Movement through the secondary growth is difficult and slow but by no means should it be avoided because movement through these areas cannot be readily observed and reduces the possibility of being ambushed.

THE JUNGLE HIGHLANDS:

This region, occupying about three-quarters of I Corps, consists of forested hills and mountains with deep, steep-sided valleys, rolling to hilly surfaces with grass and open forests, and numerous and sometimes marshy basins. Streams are plentiful and flow in all directions but eventually lead to a few large, shallow rivers which either flow into the China Sea to the east or the Mekong River in Laos to the west. All of the above streams can be forded in the dry season but during the rainy season the water level rises considerably and the current becomes quite strong making any fording attempts hazardous.

Typical terrain in the jungle highland of I Corps. Note the dense canopy formed by the trees in the lower right hand portion of the photo.
A storm at the source of a normally fordable stream can turn it into a raging river in a matter of hours. In Kontum Province (II Corps Area) in 1963, an entire Vietnamese Ranger platoon was drowned while attempting to ford a stream that they had crossed but a few hours previously.

Despite the high mountains and thick vegetation, the jungle is passable on foot with the exception of a few steep slopes. A road system for wheeled vehicles is almost non-existent with the exception of a few cart trails; however, there are many foot paths having been made by the native highlanders over the years in their normal daily traffic.

The population in this region is sparse, composed mainly of highlander tribesmen (Montagnards) living a simple life of hunting and slash and burn farming.

Combat village in the highlands formerly under Viet Cong control. Note the trench system.
The Montagnards know this rugged terrain well and move about it with ease. Montagnard villages are usually quite small with not more than twenty houses located close together. The houses are constructed of light materials and built on stilts.

In summary, due to the vastness of the highland area and the problems encountered in movement and observation, neither the government nor the Viet Cong maintain full military or political control of this region. The Montagnards themselves can be best described as politically non-committed. U. S. Special Forces personnel have worked with some Montagnard tribes for a few years and have achieved some success in developing their alignment with the RVN government. However, viewing the highlands as a region, it is still uncommitted. Although the Viet Cong lay claim to certain portions of the region, they by no means possess the hearts and minds of the people, thereby reducing their control to physical presence.

THE CLIMATE

The weather in Southeast Asia has a strong influence on military operations there. Of the two monsoons, the southwest has the greater effect on overall activity since it brings heavy rains to most of the country between May and September; one exception is the strip of land east of the coastal mountain range in Central Vietnam which remains dry. This particular strip of land includes I Corps.

The northeast monsoon rains, which affect I Corps, begin in September and last through January. The average rainfall per month is extremely heavy from September through November and then tapers off during the months of December and January. For example, Danang receives an average of 23 inches of rain each October and 15 inches each November. This period of heavy rainfall obviously affects all types of military operations, but the effect varies with the amount of mechanization of any given unit and its particular operating area. Motor transport and tracked vehicles will at times be limited to surfaced highways. There can be no mistaking that the heavy rains don't impose a handicap on movement of foot troops as well as
mechanized forces, because they most certainly do. However, the foot soldier can and will continue to operate.

Much has been said about the monsoon offensive of the Viet Cong. The monsoon season is supposed to bring stepped up activity by the Viet Cong against US and ARVN forces because of the reduced effectiveness of air and mechanized forces. Considering that observation from the air can be ruled out for a portion of the time and that vehicles are quite restricted in movement, it only seems reasonable that the Viet Cong would use the monsoon for their offensive. However, they have made one faulty assumption and that is that our forces are strictly tied to mechanization and air support. They are under the impression that Americans are fair weather fighters and that without mechanization and technology, which results in a greater degree of comfort than that experienced by the Viet Cong, the American would soon become demoralized and ineffective. They are being enlightened.

The monsoon, in that it imposes the greatest restrictions, received the majority of the attention devoted to climate and weather in Southeast Asia. However, the remainder of the year also brings to bear another difficulty: intense heat. During the dry season temperatures reach up to 100°F and temperatures up to 130°F have been recorded in the sandy coastal region. For a foot soldier to move, carry equipment and fight in an atmosphere of such intense heat requires that he be in outstanding physical condition. In such a situation no substitute exists.

THE PEOPLE

The Vietnamese appear at first glance to be quite different from us and in many instances their reasoning and actions do not appear "rational" to an American. However, the geographic, economic, cultural, religious, and political factors that determine how the Vietnamese think, act and live are vastly different from our own. We must be careful not to judge the Vietnamese by our own standards and way of life, but to respect them in their own cultural environment.
Many of the Vietnamese habits, customs and traditions are rooted in and conditioned by religious belief. Their culture was already middle-aged when Christ was born. It was a long time before any of the Vietnamese heard about that time-changing event ... and many of the Vietnamese still know little of the religious facts that have so influenced American culture.

There are certain areas in which mistakes have often been made by Americans that resulted, at best, in embarrassment. Here are some tips on how to get along with the Vietnamese as provided by long term residents of the country:

Basically, the American in Vietnam will usually find that his naturally forthright approach will have to be curbed if he is to make friends among the people he has come to help. The Vietnamese, in common with other Easterners, seem to us to often beat around the bush conversationally. Ask a direct question and you are likely to get either an evasive answer or the response it is assumed you want to hear whether it is correct or not. This is often the case when you request agreement and the other party is too polite to disagree directly. It is considered rude to make a request of an individual. Hint that you would like something done and let the Vietnamese volunteer to do it.
The American use of first names among people they have only recently met can cause resentment among Vietnamese, who are more reserved in their personal relations. Stick to Mr. and Mrs., and let the Vietnamese get on the first-name basis when they are ready. This same reserve applies to introductions. It is much better to arrange an introduction through a mutual acquaintance than to introduce yourself to a Vietnamese.

In conversation with a new Vietnamese acquaintance, stick to small talk. Do not discuss politics, and do not use the words "native", "Asiatic" or "Indochina".

Even when talking to Vietnamese whom you know fairly well, it is wise to avoid giving outright advice. Do not push your ideas; act on your ideas when possible, and let the Vietnamese observe the benefits to be derived by following your example.
Public displays of emotion are considered vulgar by Vietnamese. So control your anger, affection and other emotional impulses, and try to speak quietly at all times.

Do not pat a Vietnamese acquaintance on the back or on the head. In fact, "hands-off" is the rule, since such personal contact may be considered an affront to dignity.

If invited to eat in a Vietnamese home, let the older people begin the meal before you do. Eat every bit of food put on your plate — as a compliment to the hostess’s cooking, but do not clean the platter from which everyone is taking food since this would make your hostess feel she had not prepared enough food to satisfy you.

When visiting Vietnamese in their home, remember to keep your feet on the floor. Putting feet up on a table or chair is considered arrogant behavior, and pointing your feet at someone (such as sitting with an ankle on the opposite knee) is considered extremely insulting.

However much you may admire an object in the home, it is bad manners to ask what it costs or where it was purchased.

After a visit to a Vietnamese home, an American can repay the hospitality by inviting his friend to a restaurant — but make it an expensive restaurant, even though the food is better at a cheaper place. The knowledge that he is being entertained expensively will please a Vietnamese more than a good meal could.

Incidentally, the Vietnamese do not believe in "Dutch Treat". The older person is expected to pick up the tab after joining someone by chance in a restaurant.

When sending a gift to a family that has entertained you, send something for the children rather than to the wife, and avoid sending just one item since odd numbers are frowned upon. Send two inexpensive presents to a child rather than a costly one. This holds especially true for wedding gifts; one present is seen as an omen that the marriage will not last.

Observing social customs such as these even when they seem strange to Westerners goes a long way toward creating good relations with people of a different culture.

Also of importance is the willingness to learn at least the basics
of the Vietnamese language. It is a hard one, but learning enough to conduct simple conversations pays off in smoother work relationships.

Future friend or enemy, it all depends on you.

Among the Vietnamese peasantry, chronological time has little value. What may appear to the Americans as inertia or laziness may be due to their beliefs, as well as to an insufficient diet or disease. While the American places a premium on activity and "progress", the Vietnamese admire the passionless sage and grant him status superior to the scientist, statesman or warrior. Time-tables, appointments and schedules hold little interest for them. Getting the job done is of secondary importance; what matters most to them is to strive for perfection regardless of the amount of time required.

Unlike Americans, who have become known as people who change
the physical world to suit their needs and desires, Easterners believe that the world around them is their fate and that it is necessary to strive for harmony with their surroundings. Many try to reduce their needs to a minimum necessary to sustain life, and are amazed by the "needs" of Americans. Also, considering the fact that the average income of one Vietnamese peasant is slightly over $120 a year, it is hardly surprising that American needs are luxuries in their eyes.

Despite the signs of war, life goes on for the Vietnamese farmer.

A particular point for all to remember is that most Vietnamese are deeply motivated by their religion. A great significance is attached to religious places and things. Temples, shrines and religious artifacts should be accorded respect. A careless act on the part of a Marine can create considerable ill will that is most difficult to overcome. Ditto for the Vietnamese National Flag.

In regard to the oriental respect for the dead a reverence is shown for the burial sites. The Marine must pay particular
attention to insure that he does not violate this ground that the Vietnamese hold sacred. These grave sites are located all over the countryside and look as pictured below.

This grave site was fenced off by Marines to prevent disturbance.

Looking at the Vietnamese as a man we see him in a hamlet in the countryside supporting his family with what he can grow in his rice fields. His house is built for practical uses rather than beauty. He uses locally available materials such as bamboo, straw, mud and other products of the area. He extends the eaves well over the walls so that the heavy rains of the monsoons will not wash the walls away. He has very little formal education, but he is by no means stupid. His hamlet is run by the hamlet chief and in turn, depending upon the number of hamlets in the village, the hamlet chiefs are controlled by the village chief. When any problems arise the man seeks advice from his hamlet chief. This life, although humble, is extremely orderly. The Vietnamese people, much the same as the Marine Corps, have a chain of command. Before you have anything to do with the people, you must first contact the village and hamlet chiefs. They speak for their people and know all that occurs in their areas, and would be embarrassed and indignant if bypassed.

By our presence, daily contact, and association with the local population, we can foster friendship and restore the confidence and loyalty of the Vietnamese people toward their government, both local and national. This can be accomplished by two primary means. First is our rapport with the Vietnamese people. This includes developing an appreciation for their customs, traditions and history; treating the people as hosts, which they are, and respecting their religious beliefs, shrines, graves and other places of endearment. Secondly, we can assist the local government in gaining the support of the population. By working with and through local officials, and
providing material and technical assistance through them, we can build their prestige in the eyes of the people.

Medical corpsman talks to village chief through Vietnamese interpreter.

If these points are held in mind by the Marine, they will undoubtedly serve him well during his stay in Vietnam. They will help to make his job easier and most likely will lead to a more enjoyable tour.
INDIVIDUAL CONDUCT

The Viet Cong's objective is to seize control of the hamlets and villages by a combination of military action, terrorism, political action and subversion. Our objective is to resist this process, to reverse it. This means that the battle for Vietnam flows backward and forward across the homes and fields of the rice farmer and small town inhabitant. Whether, at any point in time, he lives in a Viet Cong or in a Government controlled hamlet, depends to a large extent on forces beyond his control.

The use of unnecessary force in areas temporarily controlled by the Viet Cong will embitter the population and drive them into the arms of the Viet Cong.

Because of the lack of well defined battle lines as in conventional warfare, contact with civilians will be frequent. We are of course anxious to win the hearts and minds of the people. Our conduct must therefore be such as to gain their cooperation, trust and confidence. It is not always easy to recognize friend from foe, but the distinction must be made at every encounter. We have every right, morally and legally, to destroy the enemy unless he surrenders. We have no right, however, to mistreat in any way a noncombatant civilian or prisoner of war. The same standards of conduct apply in Vietnam as apply to our own citizenry at home. Failure to adhere to those standards will result in disciplinary action.

THE VIETNAMESE COAT OF ARMS

The coat of arms of the Republic of Vietnam has as its central theme the flexible bamboo, symbolizing consistency, faithfulness, and vitality. The bamboo is flanked by a writing brush, symbol of culture, and a sword, representing strength and determination.

Bamboo is typical of the Vietnamese countryside. Thick hedges of the woody grass, growing profusely, form a protective wall around almost every village in the central coastal plains. Thus,
for many Vietnamese, bamboo is associated closely with their rural life, a happy image of home and traditions rooted in a time-honored past.

The inner strength of the bamboo, coupled with its flexibility and modest appearance, are considered as representing the virtues of a gentleman. An ancient proverb says, "the taller the bamboo grows, the lower it bends", meaning that a great man is humble, modest and tolerant. A fierce storm may uproot proud and stately and seemingly indestructable trees, but after the storm subsides, the flexible bamboo emerges as straight and as verdant as before. This reflects the Vietnamese approach to life.
The flag of the Republic of Vietnam consists of three red stripes on a field of gold. Gold is the ancient imperial symbol and red represents the blood streams of the people in North, Central and South Vietnam.
The Free World Flags in Vietnam:

United States

Australia

Philippines

New Zealand

South Korea

Thailand

The flags of nations which have committed troops to the struggle in Vietnam.
Buddhist Flag:

The Buddhist Flag in Vietnam is composed of six vertical stripes of equal width. To the Buddhist, each color signifies a different virtue, but there is no consensus about which color denotes which virtue.

Cao Dai Flag:

The Cao Dai Flag is composed of three horizontal stripes of equal width. The brilliant colors signify Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and symbolize authority, peace, and virtue.
Viet Cong Flags:

The Viet Cong have used all of the flags depicted above at one time or another. In each case the five pointed star is gold; the background color may be solid red, red and blue, or red, white and blue.