

# Flashback

## Tet offensive a reality of war

# Thunder of war welcomes Tet

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WASHINGTON (CUP-CPS)— When the \$2,639,000 bomb-proof, shatter proof U.S. Embassy in Saigon was dedicated last September to replace the old one which had been bombed March 1965, a Vietnamese journalist friend of mine wrote me in obvious sadness that "the sun will never set on the American Empire in South East Asia".

Indeed with the imposing pentagon East, the expanding bases at Cam Ranh, Da Nang, Bien Hoa, just to cite a few huge and permanent installations, it seemed to some Vietnamese who have forgotten the durable spirit of resistance of the Vietnamese people, that the U.S. power cannot be touched, let alone attacked. At any rate, the U.S. Embassy (with reinforced concrete construction surrounded by a terra-cotta faced sunscreen that also served as a blast shield, protected by an eight-foot high wall, a helicopter pad on the roof) was until January 30, 1968, the symbol of American power, the power to stay, to destroy, to change culture and the power to dispose and propose.

Then at 3 a.m. on January

30, on the occasion of TET (Vietnamese Lunar New Year, the Year of the Monkey), the citadel of American power was assaulted by a squad of bare-footed, peasant-dressed members of the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam (NLF, called by the Western press, Viet Cong). The siege lasted six hours and the Embassy was rescued by a detachment of the 101st Airborne Division which landed on the helicopter pad on the top of the chancery. When the battle ended, 19 NLF bodies were found in the compound. Six U.S. servicemen were killed and five wounded.

The representative of U.S. power in Viet Nam, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, who lives nearby and who had been earlier whisked away to a safer place, told the press in Saigon the evening of January 31 that "the attack on the Embassy failed because they were never able to enter the chancery building." Anyone who watched the Huntley Brinkley show on January 31 could judge by himself and see by himself what actually did happen. Of course, Ambassador Bunker cannot admit that the members of the NLF forces have penetrated the Embassy: no Emperor can say that his throne is touched by the commoners,

and by "rebels" at that.

The attack on the U.S. Embassy was part of a simultaneous assault on the South Viet Nam presidency, the Pentagon East, the South Viet Nam Army General Staff, and the South Viet Nam government radio (which was blown up in shambles.) President Thieu had to use the master's voice, the U.S. Army Radio to announce Martial Law (not against the NLF but against neutralists and people who talk about peace) and the suspension of a Constitution which has never been implemented. Thieu also called on the people "to evacuate areas infiltrated by the Viet Cong" so that the U.S. Air Force could bomb the NLF strong-holds around the city.

If Thieu meant what he said, he should start by evacuating his own office to Honolulu or Washington, D.C., or have it bombed. Thieu should be intelligent enough to know that his office as well as all agencies of the Saigon regime are penetrated by the NLF.

The attacks in Saigon signaled the assault and occupation of more than half of the 44 provincial capitals and the shelling of at least 25 airfields. In the old imperial city of Hue, the third largest city in South Viet Nam, the NLF flag was flying on the traditional flagpole. Once in 1945 (August) the yellow flag of the Vietnamese monarchy was lowered and replaced, at the same flagpole by the Red background, yellow star flag of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. Several big cities (until February 2nd, time of this writing) such as Pleiku, Kontoum, Quang Tri, Qui Nhon are still being held by the NLF. In Saigon itself, small groups of NLF soldiers were still attacking police stations.

For at least six hours on the New Year of the Monkey (1968) South Viet Nam was in fact liberated. The American power crumbled, the South Vietnamese regime vanished. The bourgeois-gentlemen of Saigon, for some time tranquilized and corrupted by U.S. power and money, woke up with the

New Year to the realities of their country. They saw for the first time the face of the liberators, the peasants of Viet Nam.

This not the first time in the history of Viet Nam that the Vietnamese witnessed a TET when the thunder of war muted the firecrackers in their nation's capital. In 1789, Emperor Quang Trung, who united Viet Nam after a short but successful peasant-supported revolution, liberated Thang Long (Ascending Dragon, Hanoi's ancient name) during the New Year and chased away the Nanchou forces from the Vietnamese territory.

Both Hanoi and the Liberation Radio of the NLF attributed the attacks to the cancellation of the TET Lunar New Year Truce. The Liberation Radio noted that Saigon first cut its truce 8 hours to 36 and then cancelled it entirely. The Central Committee of the NLF was quoted as saying that the cancellation angered the Vietnamese people so it ordered political cadres and front line troops to "stand side-by-side with our people and stand up to the invading Americans and the servant government by killing them". One must remember that TET is the most important festival for the Vietnamese and that the NLF had proposed since November 17, 1967, a one week truce.

Some people may say that the NLF must have prepared all these attacks months ahead, that such an offensive could not have been mounted so quickly. To say this is to suppose that the cities in South Viet Nam are completely under the control of the U.S. and the Thieu-Ky regime. But everyone who is familiar with this war knows that the NLF has always maintained a very strong political and military apparatus in all cities. In Saigon, the famed "Trung Doan Thu Do" (Capital Regiment) and the CIO Sapper Battalion are not very far from the U.S. Embassy, and their members are among the three million inhabitants of the city. Most of these three million citizens live in

poverty besides the luxurious villas of the U.S. and Vietnamese generals.

Now that President Thieu has declared martial law, he will use it against the Buddhists, the students, the Vietnamese shot by the Saigon police will be a "Viet Cong terrorist".

The Saigon Post on January 27 printed a story titled "The Viet Cong flag flying at American headquarters" which reads: "Passersby along Nguyen Du and Truong Cong Kinh Wednesday (January 24) spotted a Viet Cong flag flying high upon a residential house. Judiciary police, alerted, subsequently arrived to investigate. Three Americans flatly refused to let the lawmen take down the flag. They were identified as SS/4 Hussey TP Hqs., SS/4 Hollar TP Hqs., and HP L.T. Humber. Later the cops with the help of a Joint Patrol Chief succeeded in bringing down the Viet Cong flags."

Maybe the three U.S. servicemen were rehearsing a future scene, maybe they were joking at the whole situation. Joke or no joke, the situation in South Viet Nam after the New Year of the Monkey will not be the same. This is high time for the U.S. to recognize that the war in Viet Nam cannot be won. As columnist Joseph Kraft wrote in the Washington Post of February 1:

"The war in Viet Nam is unwinnable and the longer it goes on, the more the Americans, already badly over-exposed, will be subjected to losses and humiliations, even in places of maximum security. That is the message the other side is trying to get across by the wave of assaults on the Saigon Embassy and other places in South Viet Nam. And because the message so obviously serves the adversary, it is tempting to dismiss it as propaganda."

Optimistic statements are pouring out of Saigon, but the realities are there for everyone to see. The sooner Washington sees them, the better for the U.S. and for Viet Nam as well.

### Flashback

#### —A glance into the past

Flashback is a continuing series in which we reproduce stories printed in past issues of the Brunswickan. The stories chosen are stories we feel are relevant to today's issues. Although the Vietnam war is long since over, similar conflicts occur today — the Americans could turn Nicaragua into another Vietnam and the Soviets have encountered a similar situation in Afghanistan. In short, what we are trying to communicate is that the human race seems to change little in its attitudes — either in the short run or the long run.